



Peace-Oriented Electoral Campaigns and Political Victory: Evidence from Three Local Elections in Post-Conflict Mamasa

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Abstract

This article explores the impact of peace-oriented electoral campaigns on the attainment of political victories in post-conflict regions, drawing upon empirical evidence from three local elections in Mamasa, Eastern Indonesia. In the early 2000s, Mamasa experienced a period of significant communal and religious tensions, which led to the emergence of a contested arena where reconciliation narratives, tolerance politics, and cultural traditions intersected with electoral competition. Prior studies on post-conflict elections in Indonesia have predominantly focused on institutional reforms or power-sharing mechanisms. Conversely, there has been limited attention paid to campaign discourses as instruments of peacebuilding and political legitimacy. The present study employs a qualitative case study design, conducting in-depth interviews with political elites, religious leaders, and community representatives. This approach is complemented by a thorough document analysis of campaign materials and electoral data. The findings indicate that candidates who consistently framed their campaigns around reconciliation, interfaith solidarity, and inclusive development were more likely to secure broad-based support across religious and ethnic lines. The analysis demonstrates that peace-oriented narratives functioned as symbolic capital, reducing residual distrust and legitimizing leadership in a fragile political landscape. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the dynamic interaction between local cultural institutions, religious authorities, and electoral strategies in sustaining post-conflict stability. This research contributes to broader debates on the nexus between peacebuilding and democratization, offering insights into how political campaigns can move beyond identity-based competition toward inclusive governance.

Keywords

Regional Head Election; Reconciliation; Post-conflict; Inclusive Campaigns; Mamasa

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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji dampak kampanye pemilu berorientasi perdamaian terhadap pencapaian kemenangan politik di wilayah pascakonflik, dengan menggunakan bukti empiris dari tiga pemilihan kepala daerah di Mamasa, Indonesia Timur. Pada awal tahun 2000-an, Mamasa mengalami periode ketegangan komunal dan agama yang signifikan, yang menyebabkan munculnya arena yang diperebutkan di mana narasi rekonsiliasi, politik toleransi, dan tradisi budaya bersinggungan dengan persaingan elektoral. Studi-studi sebelumnya tentang pemilu pascakonflik di Indonesia sebagian besar berfokus pada reformasi kelembagaan atau mekanisme pembagian kekuasaan. Sebaliknya, perhatian terhadap wacana kampanye sebagai instrumen pembangunan perdamaian dan legitimasi politik masih terbatas. Studi ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif, dengan melakukan wawancara mendalam dengan elit politik, tokoh agama, dan perwakilan masyarakat. Pendekatan ini dilengkapi dengan analisis dokumen yang menyeluruh terhadap materi kampanye dan data pemilu. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kandidat yang secara konsisten membingkai kampanye mereka seputar rekonsiliasi, solidaritas antaragama, dan pembangunan inklusif lebih mungkin mendapatkan dukungan luas lintas agama dan etnis. Analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa narasi yang berorientasi perdamaian berfungsi sebagai modal simbolis, mengurangi ketidakpercayaan yang tersisa dan melegitimasi kepemimpinan dalam lanskap politik yang rapuh. Lebih lanjut, studi ini menekankan interaksi dinamis antara lembaga budaya lokal, otoritas keagamaan, dan strategi elektoral dalam menjaga stabilitas pascakonflik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada perdebatan yang lebih luas tentang hubungan antara pembangunan perdamaian dan demokratisasi, menawarkan wawasan tentang bagaimana kampanye politik dapat bergerak melampaui persaingan berbasis identitas menuju tata kelola yang inklusif.

Kata Kunci

Pilkada; Rekonsiliasi; Pasca Konflik; Kampanye Inklusif; Mamasa

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Introduction

Post-conflict elections have long attracted sustained scholarly attention within political science and peace studies, as they represent a critical juncture in societies transitioning from violent conflict to fragile peace (Atabay et al., 2024; Karić et al., 2024; Diprose, 2008). Far from being routine democratic exercises, elections in post-conflict settings function as pivotal arenas in which the trajectory of reconciliation is either consolidated or destabilized. In contexts marked by institutional fragility, social mistrust, and unresolved grievances, the electoral process can significantly influence whether peacebuilding efforts are deepened or undermined through renewed polarization (Sawani, 2024).

The literature identifies a dual and often contradictory dynamic inherent in post-conflict elections. On the one hand, they may contribute to institutional stabilization by fostering inclusive political participation and legitimizing emergent democratic frameworks (Graham et al., 2017). On the other hand, electoral competition can reactivate entrenched cleavages, particularly when political actors mobilize voters along ethnic, religious, or sectarian lines (Mochtak et al., 2021). This ambivalence underscores the necessity of moving beyond normative assumptions about elections as inherently democratizing instruments.

Scholarship on post-conflict electoral dynamics in conflict-prone societies, including Indonesia, identifies at least two dominant explanatory frameworks. The first emphasizes institutional engineering, particularly the design and implementation of power-sharing arrangements, electoral system configurations, and decentralization policies (Wahyuningroem, 2021; Beha, 2019; Arraiyah, 2018; Hughes & Kostovicova, 2018). These institutional reforms are widely regarded as preventive mechanisms intended to mitigate the risk of renewed violence by accommodating competing political interests within formal structures. The second strand of literature highlights elite bargaining processes and the role of international intervention in securing short-term stability during transitional periods (Viviano, 2024; Keethaponcalan, 2019; Russell, 2019; Matanock, 2017). While these approaches have significantly advanced the study of post-conflict democratization, comparatively less attention has been devoted to political campaigning as a potential arena of peacebuilding. Campaign narratives, slogans, and strategic framing are not merely instruments of voter mobilization; they can also function as discursive mechanisms that reshape collective memory, reduce intergroup distrust, and construct symbolic bridges across formerly antagonistic communities.

The case of Mamasa offers a compelling empirical setting to examine this neglected dimension. Across three consecutive local elections, interfaith candidate pairs—most notably Muslim–Christian coalitions—have secured broad-based electoral support (Mahyuddin & Febry, 2023). This recurring pattern raises a critical theoretical question: to what extent do peace-oriented political narratives contribute to electoral success in post-conflict regions? Mamasa’s establishment as a new administrative region in the early 2000s was marked by communal tensions between Christian and Muslim communities, intertwined with ethnic contestation and debates over regional autonomy (Arsyad & Sari, 2020; Subhan, 2023; Abdullah, 2016). Despite this fragile post-conflict context, the region has experienced three successive local elections in which campaigns foregrounding religious diversity, reconciliation, and inclusive governance played a decisive role in shaping electoral results (Juli et al., 2022; Maryanah, 2013). The consistent electoral success of candidates promoting reconciliation and interfaith cooperation suggests that peace-oriented campaigning may operate as a strategic and normative resource in post-conflict politics. Consequently, Mamasa constitutes a significant yet underexplored case in comparative analyses of post-conflict elections, offering new insights into

the intersection between electoral strategy, narrative construction, and conflict transformation.

The significance of the Mamasa case extends beyond its local specificity; it contributes to broader theoretical debates concerning the relationship between peacebuilding and electoral politics. While studies in other post-conflict settings underscore the persistent risks of ethnic outbidding and majoritarian domination (Begum, 2016; Lee, 2014), Mamasa presents an alternative trajectory in which peace-oriented discourse operates as a form of political capital (Allolayuk et al., 2024). By strategically aligning electoral competition with narratives of reconciliation, interfaith cooperation, and shared civic identity, political actors have transformed tolerance into a viable and legitimate resource for mobilization. In this sense, electoral campaigns function not merely as arenas of contestation but also as discursive spaces through which intergroup relations are normalized and mutual trust is gradually institutionalized.

Examining inclusive campaign strategies is therefore essential for expanding theoretical understandings of how democratic processes interact with post-conflict stabilization. The Mamasa experience demonstrates that reconciliatory narratives and cross-religious political alliances can reconfigure local elections from potential flashpoints of renewed tension into mechanisms of social repair. Building on this empirical foundation, the present study investigates the relationship between peace-oriented electoral strategies and political victory in three consecutive regional head elections in Mamasa. By exploring the dynamics between democratic competition and respect for diversity, the study seeks to provide evidence that democratic competition, when rooted in inclusivity, can reinforce rather than destabilize post-conflict societies. This study explores the extent to which peace-oriented election campaigns influenced the outcomes of three regional head elections in Mamasa. This approach contributes to the broader body of literature on post-conflict democratization by offering novel insights into the transformation of local peace strategies into electoral and governance legitimacy.

Method

This study employs a qualitative case study design to explore how peace-oriented electoral campaigns contributed to political victory in post-conflict Mamasa by focusing on three consecutive local elections. The case study approach is appropriate for capturing the complexity of social and political dynamics in a localized context (Arifianto, 2018; Yin, 2017), especially when the historical legacy of religious conflicts intersects with democratic practices in several regions in Eastern Indonesia post-reform. The research was conducted in Mamasa Regency, West Sulawesi, a region that experienced communal and religious tensions in the early 2000s during its administrative separation from Polewali Mamasa. Since then, Mamasa has become a site of both political contestation and peacebuilding, where Christian and Muslim communities coexist alongside diverse ethnic groups. The district provides

a strategic context for analyzing the interplay between electoral politics and reconciliation efforts, as local elections became a key arena for negotiating intergroup relations.

Data were derived from multiple sources to ensure methodological triangulation. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 12 participants, including political elites, elected regents, campaign team members, religious leaders, and community representatives. These perspectives were complemented by secondary sources such as local government reports, electoral commission data, campaign materials (posters, manifestos, and speeches), and relevant media coverage. The combination of elite interviews and documentary evidence provided both narrative and empirical insights into the role of peace campaigns in Mamasa's elections. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, recorded with informed consent, and transcribed for analysis. Document analysis was carried out by systematically coding campaign materials for references to peace, reconciliation, interfaith tolerance, and inclusive development. Archival sources, such as past election reports from the Regional General Election Commission (KPUD), were also consulted to triangulate findings.

The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) see also (Terry et al., 2017). The analysis proceeded through systematic stages of data familiarization, inductive coding, theme construction, and theme refinement before being theoretically interpreted within frameworks of post-conflict elections, peacebuilding, and electoral strategy. Initial codes were generated inductively from interviews and campaign materials and subsequently organized into broader themes such as *reconciliation narratives*, *religious inclusivity*, and *peace as political capital*. A cross-case comparative analysis across three election periods enabled the identification of both continuities and shifts in campaign discourse and their electoral implications. To ensure methodological rigor, the study applied data triangulation across interviews, campaign documents, and official electoral records, complemented by member checking with selected participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the host institution, and strict measures were taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and participant well-being given the sensitivity of discussing past conflict.

Discussion

Reconciliation as Political Capital in Mamasa

Mamasa, a region in West Sulawesi specifically in three main locations, namely Aralle, Tabulahan and Mambi (ATM), has been afflicted by social conflict since the reform era. The advent of regional expansion in this region gave rise to religiously tinged social conflict (Hasanuddin, 2005; Subhan, 2023). Following the cessation of protracted conflict and the subsequent establishment of social integration, the narrative of reconciliation was systematically employed in regional head elections. However, a salient feature of the electoral process in Mamasa is the recurrent pat-

tern of interfaith victors in each electoral cycle. These candidates adopt a political campaign strategy that places significant emphasis on themes of unity and the necessity of transcending historical divisions. This discourse finds resonance with communities that still bear the scars of the tensions that characterized the early 2000s (Hidayat, 2024). It positions reconciliation not only as a moral imperative but also as a political resource or political capital.

The concept of political capital refers to the symbolic, relational, and institutional resources possessed by political actors to acquire, maintain, and consolidate power within a social structure (Ocasio et al., 2020). As articulated by Pierre Bourdieu (1991), political capital is a derivative of social capital and symbolic capital that functions within the domain of power through legitimacy, networks, and public trust (Dreher, 2016). In both democratic and traditional societies, the concept of political capital is derived not solely from formal positions within state institutions, but also from the ability of actors to establish trust, solidarity, and representation of collective identity (French, 2011).

In Mamasa, *reconciliation is employed as a political strategy manifesting through public campaigns and social movements that advocate for interfaith harmony* (IL, Interview, 14 April 2024). These initiatives, frequently spearheaded by local leaders and endorsed by faith-based organizations, transform reconciliation into a form of political capital that reinforces legitimacy and moral authority in the public sphere. The promotion of coexistence between Muslim and Christian communities serves as a strategic medium for building trust, demonstrating inclusivity, and re-defining leadership credibility beyond sectarian boundaries. In this sense, reconciliation functions not only as a moral discourse but also as a political asset that reshapes power relations. In this regard, leaders and communities gain influence through their capacity to sustain dialogue, prevent polarization, and embody the ideals of pluralism in everyday life.

The initial regional election period that was the focus of this study was the 2013 regional election. The winning pair of regent candidates from Mamasa, H. Ramlan Badawi and Victor Paotongan, led the political campaign by employing a strategy of multi-party representation. This strategy was implemented to ensure that sensitive issues, such as religious differences, could be circumvented. The interfaith nature of the pair, in conjunction with their campaign slogans, served to suppress rumors and slander that typically fuel interfaith suspicion. In the end, the H. Ramlan Badawi-Victor Paotongan pair prevailed in the Mamasa regional election, thwarting the aspirations of six other pairs. They achieved a resounding victory percentage of over 40%, significantly surpassing the other seven pairs (Taufik, 2013).

The political slogan "For All Groups" employed by the ticket H. Ramlan Badawi and Victor Paotonan in the Mamasa regional election conveys a robust inclusive sentiment. This message explicitly extends an invitation to all levels of society in every in Mamasa, irrespective of religious affiliation, ethnicity, or social group, to feel a sense of representation. *Moreover, the Mamasa community still has strong*

cultural traditions that unite them (BM, Interview, 2 August, 2025). In the pluralistic context of Mamasa, this slogan functions as an affirmation that the leadership they are promoting does not align with a particular majority or minority group, but rather stands for the common good. This kind of slogan has been demonstrated to be effective in the mitigation of the potential for religious-based identity politics.

Figure 1. Slogan of Hope for all groups of winners of the 2013 Mamasa Pilkada



Source: Taken from national online news (*kompasiana.com*).

Such inclusive political messaging operates as a strategic form of *symbolic reconciliation*, transforming electoral discourse into an arena for social integration. By emphasizing unity over division, the slogan “For All Groups” serves not only as a campaign narrative but also as a performative act of peacebuilding that appeals to collective identity rather than sectarian loyalty. In a region like Mamasa—historically shaped by interfaith coexistence and occasional tension—this approach repositions political legitimacy within the framework of inclusivity and mutual recognition. Consequently, the slogan functions as political capital, enabling candidates to mobilize broad-based support while simultaneously reinforcing the normative value of harmony as an essential element of local democratic culture.

The 2013 Mamasa local election, which featured a cross-religious candidate pairing, marked a foundational moment in the institutionalization of inclusive electoral politics in the district. Presenting Muslim and Christian leaders, the campaign symbolically embodied interfaith cooperation within the formal structure of democratic competition. This pairing did not merely signal political pragmatism; it functioned as a public affirmation of coexistence in a region previously affected by communal tensions. The electoral success of this interreligious coalition demonstrated that voters were receptive to integrative leadership models that transcended sectarian boundaries. In this sense, the 2013 election established an early precedent for peace-oriented political strategy in Mamasa, showing that cross-

faith representation could serve both as a mechanism of conflict mitigation and as a viable pathway to electoral legitimacy.

During the 2018 regional elections in the second period, in which H. Ramlan Badawi returned to lead Mamasa for a second term, the peaceful political campaign slogan "Mamasa Harmonis" was utilized. The incumbent Mamasa regent once again emphasized that the public narrative in the Mamasa regional elections was not merely a forum for contesting ideas, let alone sharpening religious differences. *This strategy effectively suppressed the potential for identity-based mass mobilization* (MT, Interview, 2 August, 2025). The billboards of H. Ramlan Badawi and Marthinus Tiranda, which conveyed a message of peaceful politics, featured the slogan "Continue Development for All Groups" and the title "Mamasa Harmonis." The term "harmonis" underscores the imperative of preserving harmony and social cohesion within the diverse religious, ethnic, and cultural landscape of the Mamasa community. This narrative suggested that their leadership was an inclusive platform that embraced all groups without discrimination.

Figure 2. The slogan "continue development for all groups" of the winners of the 2018 kiMamasa Pilkada



Source: data taken from the campaign calendar of regent candidates during field interviews.

The 2018 election illustrates how peace-oriented campaigning operated as a deliberate strategy of incumbency consolidation in a post-conflict political landscape. By foregrounding the slogan "Mamasa Harmonis," the campaign reframed electoral competition as a continuation of reconciliation rather than a reopening of sectarian divisions. The emphasis on harmony and inclusive development positioned the incumbent leadership as the guarantor of social stability, implicitly contrasting it with the risks of polarization. In a district historically shaped by religious and communal tensions, this discursive strategy resonated strongly with voters seeking predictability and cohesion. Thus, the 2018 electoral victory was not merely a function of incumbency advantage, but of successfully institutionalizing peace as

a unifying political narrative—transforming reconciliation from a post-conflict necessity into an electoral asset.

In the 2018 regional elections, H. Ramlan Badawi once again selected a Christian figure to be his running mate. The presence of candidates from diverse religious backgrounds, including both Muslim and Christian individuals, symbolically represents a practical manifestation of peaceful politics. Mamasa, a locale with the potential for religion-based identity politics—the campaign strategy that led H. Ramlan Badawi to his two-term regency—minimized sectarian divisions and sent the message that diversity is not a barrier to unity in development goals. Concurrently, the slogan "for all groups" served to reinforce the notion that the programs and policies in effect would not favor either the majority or minority groups, but rather accommodate all interests for the sake of social stability and shared progress.

The above illustration indicates that candidates who incorporate messages of peace into their campaign rhetoric are perceived as leaders who possess the capacity to transcend partisan divisions. A review of interviews with religious leaders and community elders reveals that voters prioritize candidates' ability to "speak for all groups" over a single religious or ethnic identity. This pattern suggests that reconciliation functions as a form of symbolic capital, thereby legitimizing political authority in a fragile context.

These findings are in alignment with Lederach's (1997) peacebuilding framework, which places significant emphasis on the concept of reconciliation as a cultural and relational process, rather than a purely institutional one (Lederach, 1997). In Mamasa, the discourse of reconciliation functioned as a symbolic bridge, thereby enabling political actors to mobilize support across Christian and Muslim constituencies. Contrary to the documented cases of ethnic rivalry in other post-conflict societies (Glaurdić et al., 2021), Mamasa exemplifies the efficacy of peace-oriented appeals in subverting the prevailing logic of division.

The role of reconciliation as political capital also reflects Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power, which states that legitimacy derives from the recognition of shared values. By employing the language of reconciliation consistently, candidates can accumulate symbolic capital that supersedes material patronage politics. This finding suggests that peace narratives may have the potential to compete with established clientelistic practices in influencing voter behavior, particularly in post-conflict contexts where social trust is still developing.

A comparable phenomenon has been documented in Aceh, where former combatants have strategically redefined their legitimacy in accordance with a peace agreement, leveraging it to secure electoral victories at the local level (Sustikarini, 2019). However, a notable distinction emerged in the case of Mamasa, where the candidates did not hail from a background of conflict actors. Instead, these individuals were community leaders and technocrats who self-positioned as mediators. This observation underscores the capacity of the reconciliation narrative to adapt to a variety of post-conflict electoral contexts.

The process of reconciliation in the Mamasa elections cannot be considered a passive outcome; rather, it was an active campaign strategy. By incorporating the concept of peace into their electoral identities, the candidates transformed reconciliation into a politically advantageous form of capital, with the potential to resonate socially and electorally. This challenges the prevailing assumption that appeals based on identity invariably lead to polarization. Instead, it demonstrates that reconciliation can be strategically mobilized to secure legitimacy and victory.

Inclusive Campaigns and Interfaith Solidarity

Inclusive campaigns and interfaith solidarity in the Mamasa regional elections exemplify how political participation can transcend sectarian boundaries and foster collective unity. Candidates strategically employ inclusive narratives such as emphasizing cooperation between Muslim and Christian communities based on local culture where the Mamasa community still emphasizes local wisdom as a strengthening of togetherness (Rosdiana, 2018; Sapriallah & Idham, 2015). This approach not only mitigates the risk of religious polarization but also strengthens public trust in democratic institutions. By foregrounding values of equality, coexistence, and mutual respect, political actors in Mamasa transform electoral competition into a platform for sustaining interfaith harmony.

In the three regional head elections in Mamasa, candidates consistently assembled campaign teams from representative groups to reflect religious and ethnic diversity, appointing Christian and Muslim figures to leadership positions. This symbolic inclusivity served to reinforce the perception that the candidates were seeking to represent all communities. The campaign materials placed significant emphasis on the concepts of development, interfaith harmony, and the pursuit of a peaceful path. Document analysis revealed a consistent pattern of "Mamasa for all" chants, signaling inclusivity as a key electoral message. These strategies were instrumental in mitigating concerns regarding the domination of the field by a specific group.

This finding aligns with consociationalism theory which emphasizes elite cooperation across societal divisions as a foundation for stability (Lijphart, 2017; Lustick, 1997). However, the Mamasa case demonstrates that beyond institutional arrangements, inclusivity was actively pursued in electoral campaigns. This perspective aligns with (Brubaker, 2002) argument that identities are not inherently fixed but rather constructed and mobilized in specific situations. The candidates effectively reframed religious diversity from a source of conflict to a shared political asset.

In the 2024 Mamasa Regional Election, the winning political contest was once again an interfaith pair, but this time the Regent was Mr. Welem Sambolangi (WS), a Christian political figure, and his running mate, H. Sudriman (HADIR), a Muslim. The WS-HADIR pair also campaigned for peace in Mamasa city with the main slogan "*Mamasa Towards Mamase*". The slogan was strategically placed by WS-HADIR in various public spaces, including city corners and streets. This approach appeared

to underscore the significance of peace education in the Mamasa region, with the objective of countering provocative narratives. This was achieved by employing the local term "Mamase," which translates to "affection" (Manase, 2019). This message is of paramount importance, as evidenced by the recent regional election, which exhibited an escalating degree of political discord, particularly within the domain of digital media during the campaign season. This has the potential to act as a conduit for the propagation of misinformation if it is not counterbalanced by a positive narrative.

Figure 3. The Mamasa Regent Pair who won the 2024 Pilkada with the slogan Mamasa towards Mamase



Source: Data was taken from the banner of the winning regent of the 2024 Pilkada Mamasa.

The slogan "Mamasa Towards Mamase" possesses a profound symbolic value that is deeply rooted in the cultural values of the local community. The term "Mamase" in the language and understanding of the Mamasa people signifies "full of love" or "valley full of love." This slogan is not merely a play on words; it also revives the philosophical essence of the region's name. In this context, the objective of WS-HADIR is to establish a connection between the government's vision and the concept of love. This slogan encourages residents to conceptualize development not only in material terms, but also in terms of a harmonious social atmosphere, mutual respect, and care among residents.

For the Regent and Vice Regent pair of different religions, such as Welem Sambolangi and H. Sudirman, this slogan serves as a powerful political statement of peace. The notion of "full of love" in this context signifies a dedication to the prioritization of humanitarian values over distinctions in identity. In the pluralistic social context of Mamasa, this slogan serves to bind residents with a shared narrative that emphasizes the imperative of compassion in both social interactions and the state.

From a sociological perspective, the slogan can be interpreted as a political strategy rooted in local wisdom, with the objective of strengthening social legitimacy. The leadership pair's initiative to restore the original significance of "Ma-

mase" aims to foster an emotional connection with the residents, while concurrently conveying a message that development must be aligned with established values that promote peace. This message aligns with the theory of social integration, which posits that cultural values act as a cohesive force that mitigates the likelihood of conflict and fosters community cohesion. Consequently, the slogan "Mamasa Towards Mamase" is not merely a rhetorical device, but rather, it serves as a comprehensive governance framework that places a high priority on compassion and collective action.

Substantively, the interfaith winning pairs in the three Mamasa regional elections over the past decade served as an early warning system for signs of social division. The utilization of political slogans by the competing parties facilitated the identification of sensitive issues prior to their escalation. Notwithstanding the intense electoral competition, the candidates reached a consensus to abstain from the use of religion as a political instrument, opting instead for a peaceful political discourse. This consensus was formalized in their shared political slogan, which emphasized the preference for peaceful means in the pursuit of political goals. In this particular context, this phenomenon can be regarded as a "sustainable peace strategy" that has emerged from the historical experience of past conflicts.

Interfaith Couple and Peace Narratives as Winning Strategies Across Three Elections

This study finds that the consistent pairing of interfaith candidates alongside the strategic deployment of peace-oriented narratives constituted a decisive electoral formula across three local elections in post-conflict Mamasa. A longitudinal analysis of three regional head elections in Mamasa reveals that the peace narrative is not merely a temporary tactic, but rather a sustainable strategy that consistently contributes to electoral victories. In the initial electoral contest, the candidates placed significant emphasis on the concept of reconciliation, viewing it as a means to address the lingering memories of the conflict. In the subsequent electoral cycle, the concept of peace underwent a semantic shift, being reconceptualized as a foundational element for development. In the third election, peace was linked to the principles of inclusive governance and the pursuit of progress.

Interfaith engagement can serve as a transformative social process that brings individuals and communities from different religious traditions into sustained and meaningful dialogue. This pattern creates opportunities for mutual recognition, trust-building, and the reduction of prejudice, thereby strengthening the foundations of peaceful coexistence within plural societies (Younas et al., 2023). The interfaith candidate pairing of regional head elections in Mamasa functioned as a powerful symbolic representation of social reconciliation. The 2013 regional head election established this pattern as a viable model of integrative leadership, demonstrating that cross-religious representation could generate trust among a plural electorate. There were six candidates contesting the Mamasa regent election, including two ticket composed of a Christian–Christian pair (Ahmad, 2013). Considering that the majority of voters in Mamasa are Christian, this configuration held po-

tential electoral advantages in terms of demographic alignment. However, the presence of a same-religion did not automatically translate into electoral dominance, as broader considerations of interfaith balance and inclusive representation continued to shape voter preferences within the district's plural political landscape.

Furthermore, the sustained use of peace narratives during the 2018 regional elections—such as “Mamasa Harmonis” and inclusive slogans emphasizing development “for all groups”—consolidated this symbolic integration into a broader political strategy. In the 2018 regional election, Ramlan Badawi and Martinus Tiranda (Ramlan–Martinus) were re-elected as the sole candidate pair for Regent and Vice Regent of Mamasa (Ronalyw, 2018). Competing against the “empty column” option, they secured victory based on the official vote count released by the General Elections Commission (KPU). Notably, the pair represented an interfaith ticket, further reinforcing the pattern of cross-religious leadership in Mamasa's electoral politics.

In the 2023 regional election in Mamasa, the winning of regent was Welem Sambolangi and H. Sudirman. Three candidate pairs contested the election: two represented Christian–Muslim interfaith combinations, while one ticket consisted of a Christian–Christian pair. Once again, the victorious candidates were from an interfaith pairing, reinforcing the established electoral pattern in the district. Their campaign was anchored in the slogan “*Mamasa Menuju Mamase.*” The term *Mamase* carries a philosophical meaning that refers to a person who is caring, generous, attentive, empathetic, and willing to help others (Anonim, 2025). By invoking this culturally resonant concept, the campaign framed leadership not merely as administrative authority but as moral stewardship rooted in compassion and social solidarity. This narrative further consolidated peace-oriented and inclusive political messaging as a winning strategy in Mamasa's democratic contestation.

This phenomenon demonstrates that the winning candidates, both of whom were interfaith, demonstrated a consistent commitment to integrating peace issues into various policy agendas, thereby ensuring the sustained resonance of peace-oriented calls. This adaptability is indicative of the dynamic interaction between political discourse and social memory in a post-conflict context.

Table 1. Winning Regent Pairs of Different Religions in Three Regional Elections in Mamasa

No.	Regent	Vice-regent	Regional election period	Pair combination
1.	H. Ramlan Badawi	Victor Paotonan	2013-2018	Islam-Christian
2.	H. Ramlan	Bonggalangi ⁵		Islam-Christian

⁵ In the middle of Ramlan Badawi's leadership, Victor Paotonan died and there was a replacement for the deputy regent named Bonggalangi, who was also Christian.

	Badawi			
3.	H. Ramlan Badwai	Marthinus Tiranda	2018-2023	Islam-Christian
4.	Welem Sambolangi	H. Sudirman	2024-2029	Christian-Islam

Source: Processed by researchers from various sources, 2025.

As shown in Table 1, electoral outcomes in Mamasa consistently demonstrate the victory of interfaith candidate pairs across three consecutive regional elections. The 2013–2018 administration of H. Ramlan Badawi and Victor Paotonan (Islam–Christian) was followed by the 2018–2023 leadership of Ramlan Badawi and Marthinus Tiranda (Islam–Christian), and most recently the 2024–2029 pairing of Welem Sambolangi and H. Sudirman (Christian–Islam). Despite variations in individual candidates and political dynamics, each successful ticket maintained a cross-religious composition. This pattern indicates that interfaith pairing has become a stable electoral formula rather than a temporary political arrangement.

The repetition of this configuration across three electoral cycles suggests a broader structural shift in local political expectations. Religious balance in executive leadership appears to function as a normative requirement for legitimacy, signaling fairness, mutual recognition, and protection of minority interests. In a district shaped by interreligious coexistence and past tensions, voters have consistently endorsed integrative leadership models over sectarian consolidation. Consequently, the sustained success of interfaith tickets reinforces the argument that inclusive representation has evolved into an institutionalized democratic norm in Mamasa, embedding reconciliation directly within the mechanics of electoral competition.

This phenomenon exemplifies a notable degree of political maturity and acceptance among Mamasa's electorate in the context of religious diversity management. The repeated election of Muslim–Christian combinations indicates that voters tend to prioritize leadership competence, track record, and inclusive vision over shared religious affiliation or group identity. This pattern further suggests that pluralism is not perceived as a political barrier but rather as a social asset that reinforces stability and communal cohesion. Moreover, the success of interfaith leadership pairs in three consecutive elections indicates the emergence of a political culture of inclusion in Mamasa, where social and political reconciliation is manifested in electoral practice. *Cross-religious collaboration in regional leadership functions as a symbol of integration and fair representation for all citizens* (SHD, Interview, 7 October, 2024). In this regard, interfaith leadership partnerships are not merely electoral strategies but tangible expressions of reconciliation-based political capital. These partnerships reaffirm the values of tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity as the foundation for peaceful and inclusive local governance.

The persistence of the peace narrative across three election cycles also underscores its institutionalization in Mamasa's political culture. This dynamic has con-

tributed to the formation of an unwritten social contract, whereby regional heads are consistently paired with individuals of different religious affiliations in Mamasa. A number of religious and civil society figures have posited that "interfaith pairings" represent the optimal approach to circumvent the perils associated with extreme identity politics in the preceding three years. This suggests that the peace narrative that is currently emerging is indeed a peace narrative and has become embedded in local political norms.

The extant evidence from Mamasa indicates that peace-oriented electoral campaigns are not only effective in securing immediate electoral victories but also in shaping the trajectory of democratic consolidation. By consistently framing peace as the foundation of governance, candidates contributed to embedding reconciliation in Mamasa's political culture. This suggests that electoral campaigns have the capacity to effect meaningful change, potentially serving as a catalyst for political success and the establishment of sustainable peace.

Conflict Reconciliation Strategy: Lessons Learnt from Mamasa

The findings of this study indicate that peace-oriented campaigns played a pivotal role in the electoral success of the candidates in Mamasa's three local elections. Candidates who placed significant emphasis on the principles of reconciliation, tolerance, and inclusivity were able to transform post-conflict divisions into opportunities for building broad-based support. These narratives addressed lingering distrust from the early 2000s and functioned as a political resource, legitimizing candidates as unifying figures capable of governing diverse constituencies.

Furthermore, an analysis of the data indicates that peace narratives have evolved over time, adapting to shifting voter priorities. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, the concept of peace was predominantly associated with the processes of reconciliation and healing. However, in subsequent electoral cycles, the notion of peace began to be linked more closely with the domains of development and governance. The continuity and transformation observed across three election cycles indicate that peace discourse has been institutionalized within Mamasa's political culture, thereby influencing both electoral competition and the trajectory of local democracy.

These findings are consistent with Lederach's (1997) conceptualization of peacebuilding as a relational and cultural process, wherein reconciliation necessitates the consistent implementation of practices that promote dialogue and inclusivity. In Mamasa, electoral campaigns functioned as venues for the execution of reconciliation, thereby substantiating Brubaker's (2002) assertion that identities are situational in nature and can be redefined through discourse. The consistent use of peace language by candidates demonstrates how electoral politics can serve as a medium for reconstituting collective memory and promoting coexistence.

Concurrently, the evidence from Mamasa challenges the ethnic outbidding thesis (Horowitz, 2000), which predicts that identity-based appeals in divided societies lead to escalating polarization. In contrast to the exacerbation of existing di-

visions, electoral competition in Mamasa gave rise to a phenomenon that can be termed "peace bidding," wherein candidates vied to present themselves as more credible advocates of reconciliation. This suggests that under certain conditions, post-conflict elections can subvert the logic of outbidding and produce inclusive political dynamics.

The case further contributes to ongoing debates on consociationalism (Lijphart, 2017) and electoral engineering (Reilly, 2001). While these institutionalist approaches emphasize structural mechanisms for managing diversity, Mamasa illustrates that campaign discourse itself can operate as a stabilizing factor. The presence of inclusive campaign teams and interfaith symbolism served to reinforce elite cooperation. However, it is crucial to note that these phenomena also resonated at the grassroots level, thereby generating what Putnam (Putnam, 2021) describes as "bridging social capital." Consequently, these campaigns not only reflect existing institutional arrangements but also actively influence social trust.

In the Indonesian context, previous studies have predominantly examined post-conflict elections in Aceh, Maluku, and Poso (Ansori et al., 2015); Tomsa, 2009), with a focus on peace agreements, elite bargains, or decentralization. However, Mamasa demonstrates that peace-oriented campaigns can contribute to stability without the need for formal power-sharing accords or substantial external intervention. This pattern took place through the strong embeddedness of local customary and religious institutions in Mamasa's political life, which functioned as informal guardians of social cohesion. Unlike post-conflict regions such as Aceh, Maluku, and Poso—where peace consolidation relied heavily on formal agreements, elite power-sharing arrangements, or substantial external facilitation—Mamasa's stability was sustained through culturally rooted mechanisms of reconciliation. Indigenous institutions such as the *Pitu Ulunna Salu* customary confederation have long reinforced inter-clan solidarity and collective responsibility, providing a moral framework that discourages sectarian mobilization (Mahyuddin et al., 2025). Religious leaders likewise played an active role in promoting restraint and framing elections as civic processes rather than arenas of identity contestation (Bakri, Muhiddin, Mahyuddin & Ariadin, 2024). As a result, peace-oriented campaigns in Mamasa were not externally engineered interventions but extensions of an already institutionalized culture of interfaith coexistence and adat-based fraternity. This locally anchored normative order reduced the necessity for external mediation and enabled electoral competition to unfold within socially accepted boundaries of harmony and mutual recognition.

This finding contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's democratic resilience by underscoring the agency of local actors in fostering peace within electoral practices. Peace-oriented campaigns in Mamasa signify a substantial theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of post-conflict democratization. Candidates illustrated the potential for transforming elections from potential sources of conflict into instruments of healing and legitimacy.

The experience from three local elections in post-conflict Mamasa demonstrates that post-conflict democratization does not always depend on formal power-sharing frameworks or externally brokered settlements; it can also emerge from culturally embedded norms, interreligious cooperation, and the strategic agency of local elites. By institutionalizing inclusive narratives across successive elections, political actors in Mamasa gradually normalized peace as an expected standard of democratic competition. This case thus refines prevailing theories of post-conflict elections by showing that electoral arenas, when anchored in strong customary and religious institutions, can consolidate reconciliation rather than destabilize it. In this respect, Mamasa offers an alternative model of democratic resilience—one rooted not in elite pact-making alone, but in the sustained alignment between local cultural institutions, civic discourse, and electoral strategy.

Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that peace-oriented electoral campaigns played a decisive role in shaping political victories across three consecutive local elections in post-conflict Mamasa. By incorporating reconciliation, inclusivity, and tolerance into their campaign strategies, candidates were able to transcend historical divisions and garner broad-based support. The analysis demonstrates how reconciliation narratives transitioned from serving as a form of immediate post-conflict healing to becoming an institutionalized element of Mamasa's political culture. The findings contribute to the broader literature on post-conflict democratization by showing that electoral campaigns can function as instruments of peace-building, not merely mechanisms of competition. This contributes to the expansion of theoretical understandings of how identity politics can be reconfigured to yield inclusive outcomes. In practice, the study underscores the importance of designing campaign strategies that actively promote interfaith solidarity and inclusive governance. In the context of post-conflict societies, political actors can derive valuable insights from the case of Mamasa. There, the presence of symbolic representation, the employment of reconciliation rhetoric, and the integration of inclusive team structures contributed to the attainment of electoral success and the establishment of long-term stability. These strategies illustrate that peace can function not only as a moral value but also as a form of political capital that resonates with voters.

Author Contributions

Mahyuddin: *Writing-original draft, Investigation, Methodology.*

Mohd Azmir Bin Mohd Nizah: *Conceptualization, Supervision, Validation.*

Mohd Ramli Bin Mohad: *Review & Supervision.*

Abd. Rasyid: *Investigation, Collecting Data.*

Authenticity Statement

Hereby, we declare that this article is an original work that is free from plagiarism, and all references used have been cited within the article. This article has not been previously published nor is it under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Biography

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