



THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL BACKGROUND ON LEGISLATIVE CANDIDATES' ELECTABILITY: THE MODERATING ROLE OF PUBLIC TRUST

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Abstract

This study examines the extent to which candidates' political background influence their electability in local legislative elections, specifically within the context of the 2024 elections in Banggai Regency, Indonesia. The study further investigates how public trust moderates this relationship, offering insight into interplay between candidate characteristic and voter perceptions. This study employs a quantitative approach using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the relationship among political background, public trust, and candidate electability. The analysis of data from 100 respondents using PLS-SEM reveals that political background has a significant positive effect on candidate electability ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), while public trust also exerts a direct and significant influence ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$). Furthermore, public trust significantly moderates the relationship between political background and electability ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$), suggesting that candidates with strong political credentials receive greater electoral support when they are perceived as trustworthy. The model explains 56% of the variance in electability. $R^2 = 0.56$, with all constructs meeting the thresholds for reliability and validity. The findings of this study offer several practical implications for political actors, campaign strategists, and political parties operating within local electoral contexts. This study offers a significant contribution to the literature on electoral behaviour and political marketing by elucidating the interactive influence of structural attributes (political background) and perceptual dimensions (public trust) on candidate electability.

Keywords: Electoral behaviour; Candidate electability; Political background; Public trust; Local Elections; Political Marketing.

Introduction

Understanding the determinants of candidate electability (Peacock *et al.*, 2021) has become a critical area (Minozzi and Woon, 2023) of inquiry in political science (Vandeleene and van Haute, 2021), particularly within the context of electoral competition in emerging democracies (Syam, Firdaus, Lubis, Sahrudin, Rahmanillah, 2020). As democratic process deepen (Simon, 2022) in countries such as Indonesia, voters are increasingly influenced (Farhan and Omar, 2023) by both structural (Azzollini, 2021) and perceptual factors when evaluating legislative candidates (Hassell and Visalvanich, 2024a). Political background (Ashenfelter, Eisenberg and Schwab, 2020) encompassing prior political experience (Syam, Firdaus, Lubis, Sahrudin, Rahmanillah, 2020), party affiliation (Van Trappen, Devroe and Wauters, 2023), and organizational leadership (Vandeleene, no date) has traditionally been viewed as a key indicator of a candidate's capability (Yehezkiel, 2022) and political capital (Donal, 2023). However, the mere presence of such credentials (Carnes and Lupu, 2023) does not automatically translate into voter support (Hassell and Visalvanich, 2024b).

Recent developments (Garzia and Ferreira da Silva, 2022) in electoral behaviour studies highlight the growing significance of public trust (Kerr and Wahman, 2020) in shaping electoral (Simon, 2022) outcomes. Voters often consider not only a candidate's qualifications but also their perceived integrity (Hoyt and DeShields, 2021), transparency (Downe *et al.*, 2013), and competence (Mosier and Pietri, 2021). The interaction between political background and public trust (Coleman, Anthony and Morrison, 2009) thus presents an important, yet underexplored, dynamic in understanding electability (Britzman and Mehić-Parker, 2023), especially in local level elections (Zeng, He and Lu, 2024) where reputational considerations are more pronounced (Elsässer and Schäfer, 2023).

Despite a growing interest in the interplay of candidate (Schmitt *et al.*, 2020) characteristics and voter perception (Mosier and Pietri, 2021), empirical research examining how public trust moderates the impact of political background on electability (Farazian and Paskarina, 2021) remains limited, particularly in the context of Indonesia's local legislative elections (Sofyan *et al.*, 2023). This study seeks to address this gap by analysing voter preference in the 2024 legislative (Hidayat, 2024) election in Banggai Regency, Indonesia. Using partial Least Squares Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this research investigates the extent to which political background influence electability and how public trust moderates this relationship.

By situating the analysis within a context characterised by political decentralisation (Massey, 1991) and evolving democratic norms (Priambodo, 2023), this study not only contributes to the theoretical discourse on electoral behaviour (Elcock, 2025) but also provides practical (Braun and Schmitt, 2020)

insight for political actors seeking to enhance their strategic positioning (Anderson *et al.*, 2022) in competitive local elections (Rivai, 2020).

Theoretical framework and Empirical model

1. Political Background and electability

Political background has long been acknowledge as a critical determinant of a candidate's electability (Murray, 2015). This concept encompasses previous political parties, and leadership roles in civic or professional organisations (Carnes and Lupu, 2023). Such attributes often indicate political competence, accumulated capital, and institutional familiarity, which enhance voter recognition and the perception of readiness to govern (Yusnita Mahardini and Setiawan, 2022). In the Indonesian(Sunarso *et al.*, 2022) context where personalistic politics coexist with party based affiliations political background frequently serves as heuristic for voters to evaluate candidate's credibility and alignment with their interest (Wahidin *et al.*, 2020)

2. Public Trust in Political Candidates

Public trust (Kerr and Lührmann, 2017) represents a foundational element of democratic legitimacy(Stewart, 2022) and plays a pivotal role in shaping electoral behaviour (Kim, 2010)At the micro level, voter trust in individual candidates is influenced by perceived integrity, transparency, and the congruence of values between candidates and the electorate(Andrei, 2018) . Empirical evidence suggest (Cunningham-Burley, 2006) that higher levels of trust positively affect voting intentions and electoral participation (Siegrist and Zingg, 2014). In Transitional democracies such as Indonesia, Characterised by volatile party systems and legitimacy deficits in formal institutions, trust in individual candidates may override partisan considerations (Zhu *et al.*, 2018).

3. The Moderating Role of Public Trust

The moderating role of public trust implies that the impact of a candidate's political background on electability is not consistent across all voter segments (Bodet *et al.*, 2024). Trust functions as a cognitive lens through which voters interpret a candidate's qualifications (Mendiburo-Seguel *et al.*, 2024) Consequently, candidates with substantial political experience but low perceived trustworthiness may struggle to convert their credential into electoral support. In contrast, candidates with limited institutional experience may successfully mobilise voter support by leveraging reputational capital and public trust (Amitai, 2024). This interaction underscores the contingent nature of electoral success, particularly in politically dynamic societies (Emanuele, Marino and Diodati, 2023).

4. Empirical model, hypothesis development and proposed model

To examine the influence of political background on candidate electability and the moderating role of public trust, this study adopts an empirical model grounded in the structural equation modeling (SEM) framework using Partial Least Squares (PLS-SEM). PLS-SEM is particularly well-suited for exploratory research involving complex relationship among latent constructs and is effective in estimating reflective measurement models, especially with small to medium sample sizes (Manento and Testa, 2022)

The model comprises three key constructs: political background (PB), Public trust (PT), and electability (EL). Political background and public trust are conceptualised as exogenous variables, while electability serves as the endogenous variable. Public trust is also modelled as a moderating variable that interacts with political background in influencing electability.

Prior studies have demonstrated that a candidate's political background, including prior political experience, party affiliation, and leadership roles, enhances voter perceptions of competence and credibility, thereby increasing the likelihood of electoral success (Sadeh *et al.*, 2024). Based on this, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

- H1: Political background has a positive and significant effect on candidate electability.

Furthermore, public trust has been shown to independently influence electoral preferences, particularly in political context where institutional trust is limited. Trust in candidates, reflected in perceptions of integrity, transparency, and competence serves as a critical heuristic in voter decision-making (Bush and Zetterberg, 2021). Accordingly, the second hypothesis is formulated as follow:

- H2: Public Trust has a positive and significant effect on candidate electability.

In addition, when voters perceive a candidate as trustworthy, they are more likely to attribute positive value to other candidate characteristics, such as political experience. This dynamic suggest a moderating role for public trust in strengthening the relationship between political background and electability:

- H3: Public trust positively moderates the relationship between political background and electability, such that the relationship is stronger when public trust is high.

The proposed research model is depicted in Figure 1. It outline the direct of political background and public trust on electability, as well as the moderating effect of public trust on the relationship between political background and electability.

Figure 1 :Proposed Research Model

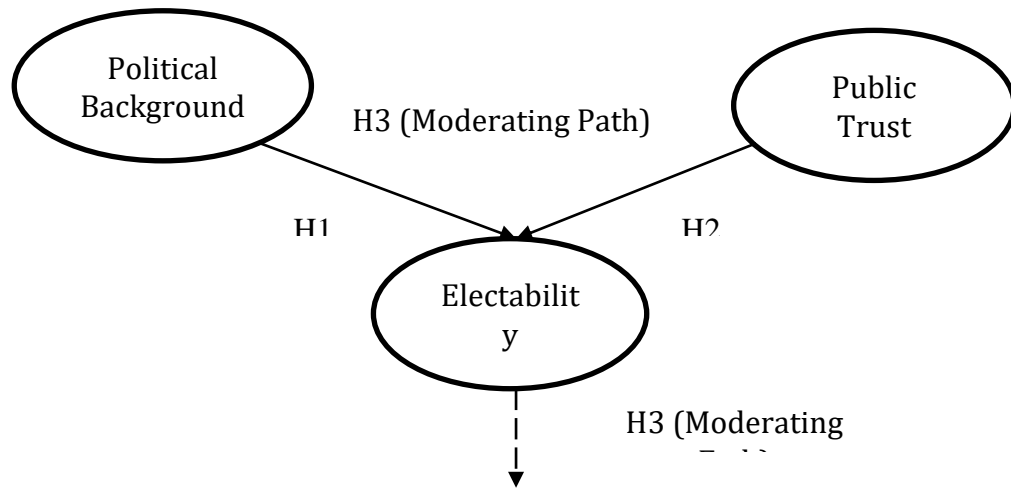


Table 1: Description of Respondents (N = 100)

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	percentage
Gender	Male	52	52.0
	Female	48	48.0
Age	17-25 years	24	24.0
	26-35 years	28	28.0
	36-45 years	26	26.0
	> 45 years	22	22.0
Education Level	Junior High School or Less	10	10.0
	Senior High School	35	35.0
	Diploma/Bachelor's Degree	44	44.0
	Postgraduate	11	11.0
Voting Experience	First-time Voter	23	23.0
	Voted Before	77	77.0

Methodolgy

1. Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to investigate the influence of political background on candidate electability, with public trust serving as a moderating variable. The research adopt an explanatory approach, aiming to test theoretical relationship among latent construct through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This analytical method is well suited

for evaluating complex models involving multiple constructs and robust in handling non-normal data distributions (Nofrizal *et al.*, 2024)

2. Population and Sample

The study’s target population registered voters in Banggai Regency, Indonesia, who participated in the 2024 legislative elections. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed to recruit 100 respondents, ensuring diversity in gender, age, education level, and voting experience to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

3. Data Collection Procedure

The data for this study were collected through a structured survey administrative to a representative sample of registered voters in Banggai Regency during the period of August to October 2024, coinciding with the local legislative election cycle. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across key demographic variables, including age, gender, education level, and employment status. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot group of 30 respondents to assess clarity, reliability, and content validity. Necessary adjustment were made based on feedback.

The final survey instrument comprised closed-ended items measured on a five point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree), covering constructs related to political background, public trust, and candidate electability. Data were collected through both face to face interviews and online form, enhancing accessibility and response rates. Respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and informed consent was obtained in compliance with ethical research standards. A total of 100 valid responses were retained for analysis after data cleaning and screening for missing values and outliers.

4. Measurement items and scales

Each construct in the study was operationalized as a reflective latent variable, measured through multiple observed indicators derived from theoretical and empirical literature. All items were measured on a five point likert scale.

Table 2: Measurement Items and Scales

Construct	Item code	item statement	Source/adapted from
Political background	PB1	The candidate has prior experience in political office	(Murray, 2013)
	PB2	The candidate is affiliated with a well known political party	
	PB3	The candidate has held leadership roles in political or social	

		organizations	
Public Trust	PT1	The candidate is honest and transparent in communication	(Sadeh <i>et al.</i> , 2024)
	PT2	The Candidate is competent in handling public responsibilities	
	PT3	The candidate is perceived as having integrity and ethical behaviour	
Electability	EL1	I would likely vote for this candidate in the upcoming election	Self constructed, validated
	EL2	The candidate is the best choice among available options	
	EL3	The candidate represents my political and social values	

To assess the measurement model, outer loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and Composite Reliability (CR) were evaluated. All constructs met the threshold values: outer loadings > 0.17, AVE > 0.5, and CR > 0.7, confirming convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. Discriminant validity was established using the Fornell-Lacker criterion. The data were analyzed using SmartPLS.4.0 the analysis included both the measurement model (for reliability and validity) and the structural model (for hypothesis testing). Bootstrapping (5,000 resample) was employed to assess the significance of path coefficients. Model fit was evaluated using R² and effect sizes (f²).

Table 3. Measurement Model Summary (Validity and Reliability)

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Political Background	PB1	0.802	0.648	0.844	0.762
	PB2	0.791			
	PB3	0.812			
Public Trust	PT1	0.843	0.710	0.883	0.822
	PT2	0.856			
	PT3	0.841			
Electability	EL1	0.862	0.694	0.871	0.799
	EL2	0.854			
	EL3	0.781			

Notes:

- All outer loading exceed yhe 0.70 threshold, confirming indicator reliability.
- All AVE values axceed 0.50, supporting convergent validity.
- CR and Cronbach's Alpha exceed 0.70, indicating intxernal consistency reliability.
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Result and Discussion

1. Structural Model

The analysis of data from respondents using PLS-SEM provides empirical support for all proposed hypotheses. The structural model demonstrates satisfactory explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.56 for the electability construct, indicating that political background and public trust together explain 56% of the variance in candidate electability.

H1, which posits a direct effect of political background on electability, is supported ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$). this finding aligns with previous studies suggesting that political credentials, such as party affiliation and leadership experience, enhance candidate credibility and perceived competence(Radojevic, 2023).

H2, is also supported, with public trust showing a strong positive relationship with electability ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.001$). this result corroborates earlier findings that trust in political figures reflected in perceptions of integrity and transparency is a critical determinant of voter preferences, especially in emerging democracies where institutional trust may be low (Darr and Stiles, 2022)

Notably, **H3** which posits the public trust moderates the relationship between political background and electability is confirmed ($\beta = 0.19, p < 0.001$). this interaction effect suggeststhat political background alone is insufficient to maximize electability unless it is accompanied by high levels of public trust. In other words, voters are more responsive to political credentials when candidates are also seen as trustworthy.

The model's goodness of fit and diagnostic indicators (including SRMR < 0.08 and satisfactory VIF values) further confirm the robustness of the findings. All measurement items met the thresholds for reliability and validity, as reported in the previous section.

The model explains 56% of the variance in electability ($R^2 = 0.56$), indicating a substantial level explanatory power according to (Gunawan *et al.*, 2022)classification.

The analysis of effect size reveals the following:

Table 4: Path Coefficients and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-Value	Result
H1	Political Background → Electability	0.38	7.92	< 0.001	Supported
H2	Public Trust → Electability	0.44	9.34	< 0.001	Supported
H3	PB x PT → Electability (moderation)	0.19	4.15	< 0.001	Supported

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination and Effect Size

Dependent Variable	R ²	Effect Source	f ²	Effect Size
Electability	0.56	Political Background (PB)	0.17	Moderate
		Public Trust (PT)	0.26	Moderate
		PB x PT (interaction/moderate)	0.06	Small to Moderate

Table 6: Model fit and Predictive Relevance

Fit Statistic	Value	Threshold	Interpretation
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.068	< 0.08	Good Fit
Q ² Predictive Relevance (Electability)	0.41	> 0	Satisfactory Predictive Accuracy

2. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on electoral behaviour and political marketing by empirically validating the interactive effect between structural and perceptual determinants of electability. While prior studies have established the independent significance of political experience (Murray, 2013) and public trust (Sadeh *et al.*, 2024) this research offers a novel contribution by demonstrating the moderating role of public trust. The finding that trust amplifies the effect of political background on electability enriches theoretical understanding of how voters synthesize candidate attributes when making decisions. Moreover, the use of PLS-SEM in a local electoral context broadens

methodological approaches in political science, particularly for emerging democracies with decentralized political systems.

3. Managerial Implication

From a practical perspective, the results have direct implications for political practitioners, campaign managers, and party strategist. First, while a candidate's political background remains a key asset, it does not function optimally in the absence of public trust. Therefore, building and maintaining trust should be central to campaign strategies, especially in regions where political skepticism is prevalent. Parties should prioritize not only experienced candidates but also those with reputations for integrity and community responsiveness. Campaign teams are advised to invest in transparency driven communication, community engagement, and ethical political branding to enhance voter confidence, in sum, the findings suggest that successful political marketing must integrate both competence and character to appeal to a more discerning electorate.

4. Limitations and Future Research

Despite the robust findings, this study is not without limitations. First, the research is geographically confined to Banggai Regency, Indonesia, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other regions with different political, culture, or socio economic context. Future study could expand the scope to include multiple district or provinces to enhance external validity.

Second, this study relies on self reported survey data, which may be subject to social desirability bias and respondent subjectivity. Although anonymity was maintained to reduce bias, alternative data collection methods such as experimental designs or behavioral tracking could provide complementary insights.

Third, while the constructs of political background and public trust were operationalized based on prior literature, other potentially influential factors such as media exposure, candidate personality traits, or party branding were not included in the model. Future research could incorporate these variables to develop a more comprehensive understanding of electability.

Lastly, the uses PLS-SEM, while appropriate for the study's objectives, primarily focuses on linear relationships. Future research may explore non-linear models or longitudinal approaches to assess how voter perceptions evolve over time and across electoral cycles.

By addressing these limitations, subsequent studies can build upon the current findings to advance theory and improve strategic practices in political campaigns, particularly within the context of emerging democracies.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between political background and candidate electability, as well as the moderating role of public trust, within the context of the 2024 local legislative elections in Banggai Regency, Indonesia. Utilizing PLS-SEM analysis on data from 100 respondents, the findings confirmed that both political background and public trust significantly influence electability, with trust also amplifying the positive effect of political experience. These results underscore the importance of considering both structural qualifications and perceptual legitimacy when evaluating candidate viability.

This study contributes theoretically by integrating trust as a moderating perceptual factor in models of electoral behavior, and methodologically by applying a robust SEM approach in localized democratic context. Practically, the findings offer actionable insight for political stakeholders seeking to enhance voter appeal: experience must be complemented by trustworthiness to achieve electoral success.

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