



Legal Dimensions of Political Communication in the 2024 DPD Election: Ensuring Democratic and Electoral Integrity in Southwest Papua

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Article	Abstract
Keywords: Political Communication; Electoral Law; Electoral Integrity; Constitutional Democracy; DPD Election; Southwest Papua How to cite: Wetaku, J., Banggu, M., & Kelibay, I. (2026). Legal Dimensions of Political Communication in the 2024 DPD Election: Ensuring Democratic and Electoral Integrity in Southwest Papua. <i>Adil Ka'Talino: Jurnal Hukum dan Wacana Keadilan</i>, 2, no. 1 (2026): 61–73.	Political communication has traditionally been examined from the perspectives of communication science and political science, emphasizing campaign strategies, political branding, and voter persuasion. However, contemporary democratic elections require political communication to be evaluated not only for its effectiveness but also for its compliance with electoral law, constitutional democracy, and the principles of electoral integrity. This study examines the political communication of Paul Finsen, the Mayor, during the 2024 Regional Representative Council (DPD RI) election in Southwest Papua from a legal perspective. Employing an empirical legal (socio-legal) approach, the research combines legal analysis of Indonesian electoral regulations with qualitative field data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study examines whether political communication practices reflect the principles of legal certainty, equality, transparency, fairness, and democratic participation as guaranteed by Indonesian electoral law. The findings demonstrate that political communication significantly enhanced public political participation through persuasive, culturally adaptive, and issue-oriented approaches that emphasized indigenous rights, education, healthcare, and regional development. More importantly, these communication practices remained consistent with the principles of electoral integrity by avoiding practices that undermine electoral fairness and constitutional rights. The study argues that political communication should no longer be perceived merely as an electoral strategy but rather as a legal instrument supporting democratic legitimacy and constitutional governance. This research contributes to the development of electoral law by integrating political communication theory with constitutional and electoral legal principles, thereby offering a broader framework for evaluating campaign practices in democratic elections.



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INTRODUCTION

Democratic elections are among the most fundamental manifestations of popular sovereignty in constitutional states (Bulman-Pozen & Seifter, 2021). Within democratic governance, elections function not merely as political contests but also as constitutional mechanisms through which citizens exercise their political rights and determine the legitimacy of government. Consequently, every electoral process must be organized in accordance with legal principles that guarantee fairness, transparency, equality, accountability, and legal certainty (Jürgen, 2017). These principles collectively form the foundation of what scholars describe as electoral integrity.

Indonesia has experienced a significant democratic transformation following the constitutional amendments of 1998. The transition from centralized governance to constitutional democracy has strengthened the institutionalization of direct elections at both national and regional levels (Sistyawan et al., 2025). Electoral reform has also expanded opportunities for public participation while reinforcing legal protections for political rights. As stipulated in *Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2017 tentang Pemilihan Umum*, elections must be conducted based on the principles of direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair elections while simultaneously ensuring legal certainty, transparency, professionalism, effectiveness, and accountability (Zarkasi et al., 2025).

Within this constitutional framework, political communication occupies a strategic position. Political communication is no longer merely a medium through which candidates introduce themselves to voters (Davis, 2023). Rather, it has become an essential legal component of democratic elections because campaign activities, dissemination of political information, public debates, political advertisements, and digital campaigns are all regulated by electoral legislation. Accordingly, political communication operates within legal boundaries established to ensure equal competition among candidates while protecting voters from misinformation, manipulation, intimidation, and discriminatory campaign practices (Doublet, 2022).

Traditional studies concerning political communication primarily focus on persuasion, campaign strategy, media utilization, political marketing, leadership image, and voter behavior (Perloff, 2021). Such perspectives generally evaluate communication effectiveness according to electoral outcomes or voting behavior. While these studies provide valuable insights into political competition, they often overlook the legal dimensions governing political communication. Consequently, political communication is understood merely as an instrument for winning elections rather than as an activity subject to constitutional norms and electoral regulations.

This limitation becomes increasingly significant in modern democratic systems characterized by rapid technological development, expanding digital platforms, and growing concerns regarding electoral integrity. Contemporary elections require communication practices that not only persuade voters but also comply with constitutional principles guaranteeing political equality, freedom of expression, legal certainty, and electoral justice (Mokhonchuk & Romaniuk, 2019). Therefore, examining political communication exclusively through communication

theory is insufficient for understanding its broader implications within democratic governance.

From the perspective of electoral law, political communication is a regulated activity that involves the rights and obligations of electoral participants, political institutions, election management bodies, media organizations, and citizens. Electoral regulations establish legal standards governing campaign periods, campaign financing, political advertising, public information dissemination, and equal access to communication channels (Tan, 2020). These legal standards are designed to preserve democratic competition while preventing unfair electoral practices that could undermine constitutional legitimacy.

The concept of electoral integrity provides an appropriate analytical framework for examining political communication from this broader legal perspective. Electoral integrity emphasizes that every stage of elections, including political campaigns, must conform to internationally recognized democratic principles and domestic constitutional norms. Electoral integrity extends beyond preventing electoral fraud; it also encompasses equal political participation, transparency, accountability, respect for human rights, and compliance with the rule of law (Tan, 2020). Consequently, political communication should strengthen democratic legitimacy rather than merely maximize electoral support.

This perspective is particularly relevant in Indonesia's Regional Representative Council (DPD RI) elections. Unlike elections for members of political parties, DPD candidates compete as independent regional representatives without formal party affiliations. Consequently, political communication becomes one of the most decisive factors influencing electoral success. Nevertheless, such communication remains legally constrained by electoral regulations intended to maintain fairness among candidates and protect citizens' constitutional rights. The 2024 DPD election in Southwest Papua presents an interesting context for examining these issues. Southwest Papua represents Indonesia's newest province, characterized by complex social diversity, indigenous communities, multicultural identities, and unique political dynamics (Purnomo et al., 2025). Electoral competition in this context requires communication strategies that accommodate local cultural values while complying with national electoral regulations. Political communication, therefore, becomes inseparable from broader questions concerning democratic participation, constitutional equality, indigenous representation, and legal legitimacy.

Among the successful candidates in the 2024 election was Paul Finsen, the Mayor, who secured the most votes in Southwest Papua (Brata et al., 2026). His electoral success attracted considerable public attention because he successfully outperformed several experienced candidates despite entering the contest as a relatively new figure in electoral politics. In line with the research background, his communication emphasized indigenous Papuan identity, education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and the protection of community rights, while relying heavily on interpersonal interaction and culturally adaptive communication. Previous

studies have generally analyzed political communication in terms of campaign strategies, political branding, social media utilization, or voter persuasion. Although these studies contribute significantly to communication scholarship, they rarely examine political communication through the lens of electoral law and constitutional democracy. Consequently, important legal questions remain insufficiently explored. For example, to what extent does political communication comply with principles of legal certainty? How does communication contribute to electoral integrity? Can persuasive communication strengthen democratic legitimacy without violating constitutional equality? These questions illustrate an important research gap within contemporary electoral studies.

Accordingly, this research departs from existing literature by positioning political communication as an object of legal analysis rather than merely a communication phenomenon. The study integrates theories of political communication with constitutional democracy, legal certainty, and electoral integrity to construct a comprehensive legal framework for evaluating campaign practices in democratic elections. Such integration is expected to enrich the interdisciplinary development of electoral law and socio-legal scholarship.

This study, therefore, addresses two principal research questions. First, how was Paul Finsen's political communication implemented within the legal framework governing the 2024 DPD election in Southwest Papua? Second, to what extent did such political communication reflect the principles of electoral integrity, legal certainty, and constitutional democracy under Indonesian electoral law?. The study aims to analyze political communication from a legal perspective by examining its conformity with electoral regulations and constitutional principles governing democratic elections. Beyond explaining campaign effectiveness, this research seeks to demonstrate that political communication serves as a legal mechanism that supports democratic legitimacy, public participation, and constitutional governance. Through this approach, the study contributes to the theoretical integration of political communication and electoral law while offering practical recommendations to strengthen democratic elections in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employs empirical legal research (socio-legal research) to examine political communication as a legal phenomenon within Indonesia's electoral system (Qosim et al., 2025). Unlike conventional communication studies that primarily assess campaign effectiveness, this research positions political communication as an activity regulated by constitutional norms and electoral legislation (Hasen, 2019). Accordingly, the analysis integrates doctrinal legal interpretation with empirical findings obtained from field research. The normative component analyzes Indonesia's legal framework governing electoral communication, particularly the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Undang-Undang Nomor 7 Tahun 2017 tentang Pemilihan Umum, regulations issued by the General Elections Commission (KPU), and relevant legal doctrines concerning constitutional

democracy, electoral justice, legal certainty, and electoral integrity. These legal materials are interpreted systematically to determine the standards governing campaign activities, political participation, equality among candidates, transparency, and protection of citizens' political rights.

The empirical component relies on qualitative data collected during field research conducted in Sorong City, Southwest Papua, where the political communication of Paul Finsen Mayor was observed and analyzed. The research utilizes interviews with key informants, including the elected DPD member, campaign team members, community leaders, election organizers, and eligible voters. Documentary evidence, official electoral reports, campaign materials, and publicly available electoral documents are also examined to triangulate empirical findings. The research location and qualitative design follow the field study presented in the original research.

Data analysis follows an interactive qualitative model involving data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Monaro et al., 2022). Legal interpretation is subsequently employed to evaluate whether the identified communication practices satisfy constitutional principles of equality, fairness, transparency, legal certainty, and democratic participation. This integrated socio-legal approach enables the study to bridge empirical realities with normative legal standards, thereby producing a comprehensive legal assessment of political communication within democratic elections.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Communication within the Framework of Indonesian Electoral Law

Political communication has conventionally been understood as a process through which political actors influence public opinion, disseminate policy preferences, and mobilize electoral support (López-García & Pavía, 2019). Such an understanding, however, remains incomplete when examined from the perspective of electoral law. Democratic elections are fundamentally legal institutions governed by constitutional principles and statutory regulations (Suparto et al., 2024). Consequently, every campaign activity, political message, media utilization, and interaction between candidates and voters constitutes not merely political behavior but also legally regulated conduct. Within Indonesia's constitutional order, elections represent the institutional realization of popular sovereignty. Article 1 paragraph (2) of the Constitution affirms that sovereignty belongs to the people and shall be exercised according to the Constitution. Elections therefore function as constitutional mechanisms ensuring the peaceful transfer of political authority while safeguarding citizens' political rights (Tătar & Moiși, 2022). Accordingly, political communication cannot be separated from constitutional obligations requiring electoral competition to remain fair, equal, transparent, and accountable.

The enactment of the Election Law transformed political communication into a legally regulated process rather than an unrestricted campaign activity.

Electoral legislation establishes detailed provisions concerning campaign periods, campaign methods, political advertisements, campaign finance, dissemination of electoral information, and sanctions for violations (Tan, 2020). These regulations are intended to guarantee equal opportunities among candidates while preventing practices capable of distorting democratic competition.

From this perspective, political communication serves two interconnected legal functions.

First, political communication functions as an instrument for protecting constitutional rights. Every citizen possesses the constitutional right to receive accurate political information before exercising electoral choice. Likewise, every candidate possesses equal legal rights to communicate political programs without discrimination. Consequently, political communication contributes directly to realizing constitutional guarantees concerning political participation, equality before the law, and freedom of expression. *Second*, political communication functions as an instrument of legal accountability. Candidates remain legally responsible for every political statement disseminated throughout campaign periods. False information, hate speech, discriminatory narratives, identity-based provocation, vote buying, and misleading campaign promises may violate electoral legislation or other applicable legal norms. Therefore, campaign communication operates under continuous legal supervision conducted by electoral management bodies and election supervisory institutions.

These legal characteristics distinguish democratic political communication from unrestricted political persuasion. Electoral law does not prohibit persuasive communication; rather, it regulates persuasion to ensure that democratic competition remains consistent with constitutional values (Bhat, 2021). The legal regulation of campaign communication also reflects the broader concept of the rule of law. Democratic elections require certainty regarding permissible campaign activities because legal uncertainty may produce unequal treatment among electoral contestants. Consequently, campaign regulations establish objective standards governing campaign schedules, campaign media, financing mechanisms, public debates, political advertisements, and public access to electoral information. Such legal certainty strengthens public trust in electoral institutions while minimizing opportunities for arbitrary administrative decisions.

The significance of legal regulation becomes particularly apparent in elections involving independent candidates for the Regional Representative Council (DPD). Unlike candidates nominated by political parties, DPD candidates rely primarily upon personal credibility, community networks, and public communication. Because institutional party machinery is absent, political communication assumes a substantially greater role in influencing voter preferences. Nevertheless, communication practices remain subject to identical constitutional limitations applicable to all electoral participants.

The empirical findings demonstrate that Paul Finsen Mayor's political communication emphasized direct interaction with communities rather than

excessive dependence upon mass media or political advertising. Campaign communication relied significantly on interpersonal engagement, dialogue with indigenous communities, and discussion of substantive regional issues, including education, healthcare, employment opportunities, indigenous identity, and equitable regional development. These communication patterns correspond closely with the empirical findings contained in the original field research. From the standpoint of electoral law, such communication possesses important legal implications. First, issue-based communication contributes positively to voters' constitutional right to receive meaningful electoral information. Second, interpersonal communication encourages political participation without necessarily creating unequal electoral opportunities. Third, substantive communication reduces the likelihood of campaigns relying upon misinformation or identity-based polarization capable of undermining democratic legitimacy.

Accordingly, political communication should be interpreted not merely as a campaign strategy but as an essential legal mechanism through which constitutional democracy operates. Democratic elections cannot achieve substantive legitimacy solely through procedural compliance. Instead, democratic legitimacy requires communication practices that enable voters to make informed, independent, and rational political choices under conditions protected by law. The Indonesian electoral framework therefore demonstrates that communication and law are mutually reinforcing institutions (Bhat, 2021). Electoral law establishes normative boundaries for political communication, while political communication operationalizes constitutional democracy by facilitating informed public participation. The interaction between these two dimensions ultimately determines the overall integrity of democratic elections.

Electoral Integrity in the 2024 DPD Election: A Legal Assessment of Political Communication

Electoral integrity has emerged as one of the most influential concepts in contemporary electoral law and democratic governance (Norris & Nai, 2017). Rather than limiting electoral assessment to the absence of fraud, electoral integrity evaluates whether every stage of the electoral process complies with constitutional principles, statutory regulations, international democratic standards, and fundamental political rights. Consequently, campaign communication constitutes an essential component of electoral integrity because it directly affects citizens' ability to make informed political decisions.

According to Norris, electoral integrity encompasses legality, transparency, equality, accountability, inclusiveness, and public trust throughout the electoral cycle. These principles require not only electoral management bodies but also electoral contestants to conduct their political activities consistently with democratic norms. Political communication, therefore, cannot be assessed solely by electoral success but must also be evaluated in accordance with constitutional and legal standards. Within the Indonesian electoral system, electoral integrity is reflected in the principles

governing elections, as stipulated in the Election Law: direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair elections (LUBER and JURDIL) (Raden, 2024). These principles establish legal obligations for candidates, electoral institutions, political organizations, and citizens alike. Consequently, every campaign activity—including political speeches, public meetings, media appearances, digital campaigns, and interpersonal communication—must support democratic participation rather than manipulate electoral preferences through unlawful means.

The empirical findings indicate that Paul Finsen's campaign relied predominantly upon issue-oriented communication rather than confrontational political narratives. Campaign messages consistently emphasized educational improvement, healthcare accessibility, employment opportunities, indigenous empowerment, and regional development, rather than negative campaigns against political competitors, and communication strategies focused on introducing policy priorities considered relevant to the social conditions of Southwest Papua.

From the perspective of electoral integrity, such communication demonstrates several important legal characteristics.

First, issue-based political communication enhances voters' constitutional right to receive substantive political information. Democratic elections require citizens to evaluate competing candidates based on policy alternatives rather than emotional polarization or misinformation. When campaign communication prioritizes public policy issues affecting citizens' daily lives, electoral competition becomes more consistent with constitutional democracy because voters are enabled to exercise informed political choice. *Second*, culturally adaptive communication contributes positively to democratic inclusion. Southwest Papua possesses considerable ethnic diversity and strong indigenous traditions. Political communication recognizing local cultural identities while respecting constitutional equality strengthens democratic participation among historically underrepresented communities. Such communication reflects substantive equality because it accommodates cultural diversity without undermining national constitutional principles. *Third*, interpersonal communication contributes significantly to electoral transparency. Unlike anonymous digital campaigns that frequently facilitate misinformation, direct interaction between candidates and citizens enables immediate clarification, reciprocal dialogue, and public accountability. Candidates become directly responsible for the political promises they communicate to voters, thereby strengthening democratic legitimacy.

These findings demonstrate that political communication can serve as an instrument reinforcing electoral integrity when it remains transparent, issue-based, respectful, and legally compliant. Nevertheless, electoral integrity requires continuous legal supervision. Modern electoral competition increasingly depends upon digital media platforms capable of disseminating misinformation, hate speech, identity politics, and manipulated political narratives within relatively short periods. Consequently, election supervisory institutions bear a constitutional responsibility to ensure that campaign communication remains consistent with electoral legislation.

Legal supervision should therefore extend beyond procedural compliance. Electoral management institutions should evaluate whether campaign communication genuinely promotes informed political participation or instead encourages manipulation that undermines democratic legitimacy (Gorton, 2016). Such evaluation requires balancing constitutional guarantees concerning freedom of expression with constitutional obligations to preserve fair electoral competition. Consequently, electoral integrity should not merely be understood as preventing fraud during vote counting. Instead, integrity begins from the earliest stages of political communication because citizens' political preferences are significantly shaped by campaign information received before election day. Accordingly, lawful, transparent, and accountable political communication becomes one of the principal indicators of democratic electoral quality.

The empirical evidence presented in this study suggests that the communication model implemented by Paul Finsen Mayor largely satisfies these democratic standards. Campaign communication prioritized substantive policy discussions, encouraged direct engagement with communities, respected local cultural identities, and avoided communication practices that potentially violated electoral fairness. Such findings indicate that effective political communication and electoral integrity are not contradictory objectives; rather, they reinforce one another when political actors remain committed to constitutional norms and legal obligations.

Legal Certainty and Constitutional Democracy in Political Communication

Legal certainty constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of constitutional states governed by the rule of law. In democratic elections, legal certainty guarantees that all electoral participants compete under identical legal standards and ensures equal protection of political rights. Political communication, therefore, operates not within unlimited political freedom but within clearly defined constitutional and statutory boundaries established to protect democratic competition (Wahdini, 2022). The Indonesian constitutional system recognizes elections as constitutional mechanisms through which popular sovereignty is exercised in accordance with legal procedures. Consequently, every electoral participant enjoys equal legal opportunities while simultaneously bearing equal legal responsibilities. Campaign communication represents one of the principal manifestations of this constitutional balance between political freedom and legal accountability.

From a constitutional perspective, freedom of political expression represents an indispensable democratic right. Candidates must possess sufficient freedom to communicate political ideas, criticize governmental policies, introduce policy alternatives, and persuade citizens regarding their political programs (Denton Jr et al., 2023). Without such freedom, democratic elections would lose their substantive meaning because electoral competition depends fundamentally upon open public deliberation. However, constitutional freedom is not absolute. Electoral legislation establishes limitations designed to protect competing constitutional values, including

equality, fairness, public order, national unity, and the constitutional rights of other electoral participants. Consequently, political communication becomes constitutionally legitimate only when freedom of expression remains compatible with legal certainty and democratic equality.

The empirical findings illustrate that communication conducted throughout Paul Finsen's campaign remained largely consistent with these constitutional principles. Political messages focused primarily on policy proposals rather than personal attacks against competing candidates. Communication emphasized public interests affecting indigenous communities, regional welfare, educational development, healthcare services, employment opportunities, and regional representation. Such communication patterns demonstrate that persuasive political communication need not rely on constitutional violations to obtain electoral support. Moreover, legal certainty contributes significantly to public confidence in electoral institutions. Citizens are more likely to trust election outcomes when campaign activities occur under transparent legal rules applied equally to every candidate. Conversely, inconsistent legal enforcement may generate public perceptions of institutional bias, thereby undermining democratic legitimacy regardless of actual electoral outcomes.

This relationship between legal certainty and political communication becomes increasingly significant in digital electoral environments. Contemporary political communication extends beyond traditional public meetings toward social media platforms, online discussions, and digital campaign advertisements. Although digital communication broadens democratic participation, it simultaneously increases legal challenges associated with misinformation, anonymous political propaganda, hate speech, cyber manipulation, and foreign interference. Consequently, legal certainty requires adaptive electoral regulations that respond to technological developments without unnecessarily restricting constitutional freedoms. Electoral institutions should therefore continue developing regulatory frameworks that ensure transparency in digital political communication while preserving freedom of political expression, as guaranteed under constitutional democracy.

The present findings further indicate that communication emphasizing policy substance rather than political hostility contributes positively to constitutional democracy. Democratic elections should encourage rational public deliberation rather than emotional polarization. Candidates capable of presenting coherent policy alternatives while respecting legal limitations strengthen not only their own electoral legitimacy but also the legitimacy of democratic institutions themselves. Accordingly, constitutional democracy should evaluate campaign communication on the basis of both procedural legality and substantive democratic values. Legally compliant communication that simultaneously promotes political participation, transparency, equality, accountability, and informed public deliberation represents an essential foundation for democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Political communication in democratic elections should not be understood solely as a campaign strategy aimed at maximizing electoral support. From the perspective of electoral law, political communication constitutes a legally regulated activity that must operate within the constitutional principles of democracy, equality, legal certainty, and electoral integrity. Consequently, the legitimacy of political communication is determined not only by its effectiveness in attracting voters but also by its compliance with the legal framework governing democratic elections.

This study demonstrates that the political communication implemented by Paul Finsen Mayor during the 2024 DPD election in Southwest Papua reflected communication practices that were predominantly issue-oriented, participatory, and culturally adaptive. Campaign messages focused on public interests, including education, healthcare, indigenous rights, employment opportunities, and regional development—rather than relying upon confrontational or divisive political narratives. Such communication contributed to strengthening citizens' access to political information and encouraged broader democratic participation. These findings are consistent with the empirical data presented in the original research concerning the communication patterns adopted during the campaign.

From a legal perspective, these communication practices are consistent with the principles underlying Indonesian electoral law, particularly the protection of constitutional political rights, equal electoral competition, transparency, and accountability. The study further indicates that political communication may serve as an important legal instrument for safeguarding electoral integrity when candidates prioritize substantive policy issues, respect constitutional norms, and avoid communication practices that undermine democratic fairness. Accordingly, electoral integrity should be understood as extending beyond vote counting and electoral administration to encompass the quality, legality, and accountability of political communication throughout the electoral process.

This research contributes to electoral law scholarship by integrating political communication theory with the concepts of constitutional democracy, legal certainty, and electoral integrity within a socio-legal framework. Unlike previous studies that predominantly evaluate communication from political or communication science perspectives, this study positions political communication as an object of legal analysis. Such an approach broadens the scope of electoral law by demonstrating that campaign communication represents an integral component of constitutional governance and democratic legitimacy. Future studies are encouraged to expand this socio-legal approach by examining political communication across different electoral contexts, particularly in relation to digital campaigning, social media regulation, artificial intelligence, electoral misinformation, and the evolving legal challenges of democratic elections. Such research will further strengthen the development of Indonesian electoral law while contributing to comparative discussions on constitutional democracy and electoral integrity in emerging democracies..

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