

Designing Vision and Local Development Policies for the Mayoral Election Campaign of the “Surat Progressive Team” in Surat Thani Municipality

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Abstract

This research aimed to study the design of the vision and local development policies for the mayoral election campaign in Surat Thani Municipality by the “Surat Progressive Team.” The study focuses on three aspects: (1) the conceptual foundation of designing, (2) the strategies used to design, and (3) the use of words and phrases in communicating. This qualitative research employed content analysis of campaign-related policy documents from the Surat Progressive Team, the electoral winner in 2025, Data collection along with in-depth interviews with key informants directly involved in the vision and policies design process. Data were analyzed through interpretive conclusion. The research findings reveal that: (1) The conceptual foundation emphasizes a “people-centered” approach that links local governance with the Sustainable Development Goals. The policies aim to enhance economic growth, social equity, environmental balance, and citizens’ well-being, while reflecting the city’s capacity and local identity. (2) The strategies focus on addressing local problems precisely by connecting existing challenges with realistic and innovative development solutions. Evidence-based information and citizen participation serve as the foundation for designing “three missions and nine core policies,” enabling practical implementation and tangible outcomes. (3) The communication of the vision and policies uses positive and empowering language to build hope, collective motivation, and a clear picture of future transformation, through messages such as “Surat Thani Must Be Better” and “A City That Leaves No One Behind.” Additionally, identity-driven slogans such as “Gastronomic City, Attractive Destination” reinforced public acceptance and confidence in the winning candidate and the proposed policies.

Keywords: designing vision and policies, local development, election campaign, mayor, Surat Progressive Team

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Introduction

Local elections serve as a crucial arena that reflects the management of spatial problems and the determination of local development directions closely tied to citizens' livelihoods and community well-being. Vision statements and campaign policies function as instruments to establish governance frameworks, prioritize development agendas, and shape public expectations, ultimately fostering trust and electoral support for municipal leadership. Therefore, local political communication must analyze both policy content and communicative strategies to ensure that visions and development policies are transformed into credibility, leading to electoral success. Moreover, the design of vision and local development policies for local election campaigns stimulates citizen participation in politics through voting and contributes to broader political engagement at the national level.

This study focuses on the design process of vision and local development policies by the Surat Progressive Team in the context of the mayoral election in Surat Thani Municipality. It aims to understand the conceptual foundations, strategic approaches, and communicative methods employed in presenting policy proposals to the public. The research highlights the symbolic construction of policies and the framing of political proposals at the local level, which are often overlooked compared to national politics. Practically, the findings can serve as guidelines for candidates, campaign teams, and community organizations in designing visions aligned with local contexts, clarifying policies, and enhancing communication to build trust and citizen participation. Additionally, analyzing the use of words and phrases in communication is essential to understanding how messages connect with local identity, welfare expectations, and citizens' concerns regarding environmental or economic issues. Studying linguistic patterns in campaigns reveals communicative strategies that influence voter perception and decision-making, thereby contributing to the advancement of vision and policy design in Thailand's local political context. Importantly, this research not only analyzes campaign documents but also incorporates in-depth interviews with stakeholders of the Surat Progressive Team and findings from studies on supporter networks, thereby reflecting authentic perspectives and the structural dynamics of local politics.

Research Objectives

- 1) To examine the conceptual foundations underlying the design of vision and local development policies for the mayoral election campaign of the Surat Progressive Team in Surat Thani Municipality.
- 2) To investigate the strategies employed in designing vision and local development policies for the mayoral election campaign of the Surat Progressive Team.
- 3) To analyze the use of words and phrases in communicating vision and local development policies during the mayoral election campaign of the Surat Progressive Team.

Scope of the Study

The scope of this research encompasses the study of content related to the design of vision and local development policies for the Surat Progressive Team in the context of the mayoral election campaign in Surat Thani Municipality. The study analyzes campaign documents, public statements, and policies disseminated through mass media, as well as examples of communication in both textual and visual formats. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with campaign team members and local stakeholders to gain comprehensive

insights into the conceptual foundations and communication strategies. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative approach, primarily qualitative content analysis, to explain the phenomena and to interpret the design of vision and local development policies, the strategies employed, and the linguistic choices used in communicating these policies during the campaign.

Literature Review

The literature review encompasses concepts, theories, and prior studies relevant to the design of vision and local development policies for electoral campaigning. These theoretical perspectives serve as the foundational knowledge base for constructing the conceptual framework of this research.

Strategic Vision Theory

Strategic Vision Theory emphasizes the design of visions that reflect desirable futures for citizens and communities. Such visions must be clear, concise, and easily communicable, while remaining feasible and inspirational. In electoral campaigns, visions function as “political promises” presented to the electorate. For Surat Thani Municipality, future-oriented images such as a livable city, a creative economy hub, or an environmentally sustainable city align with this theory. Strategic Vision Theory thus provides a systematic framework for designing visions that inspire hope and confidence among voters.

Political Communication Theory

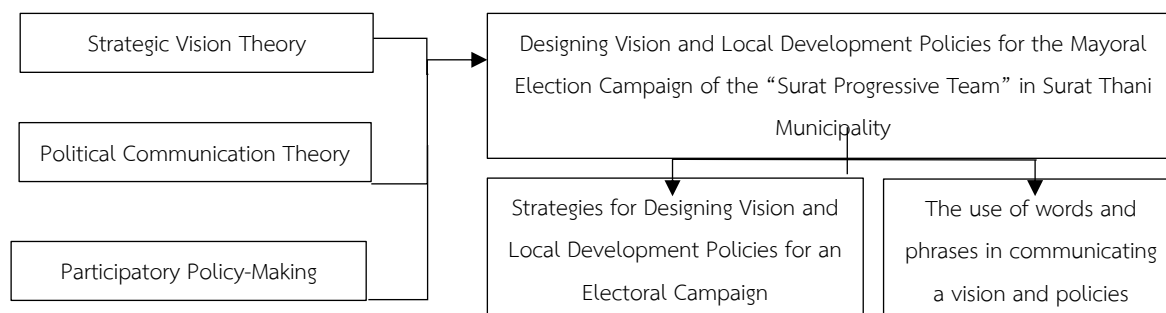
Political Communication Theory highlights the importance of communicating policies and visions through accessible language, emotional resonance, and persuasive messaging. The use of keywords and slogans significantly influences public perception and trust. Effective political communication integrates both substantive policy content and candidate image. Beyond traditional campaign methods such as posters and rallies, social media platforms have become crucial in shaping awareness. For instance, the Surat Progressive Team employed concise slogans such as “Surat Progressive Team: City of Opportunity” and “Progressive, Transparent, Caring for Citizens,” which enhanced memorability and reinforced policy credibility. This aligns with the theory’s assertion that language plays a pivotal role in persuasion and voter decision-making.

Participatory Policy-Making

Participatory Policy-Making underscores the necessity of citizen involvement in policy design to ensure alignment with local needs. Participation enhances legitimacy and sustainability of policies through mechanisms such as community forums, surveys, and in-depth interviews. Policies derived from participatory processes more accurately reflect local problems and expectations. For political campaigns, participatory approaches strengthen relationships and trust between candidates and citizens. The Surat Progressive Team incorporated participatory tools to design policies that resonate with community realities, thereby reinforcing both credibility and acceptance.

Conceptual Framework of the Research

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Based on the conceptual framework, this study investigates the ideas and strategies underlying the design of vision and local development policies, as well as the use of words and phrases in communicating such vision and local development policies during the mayoral election campaign of the Surat Progressive Team in Surat Thani Municipality. To achieve electoral success, the process requires systematic planning that incorporates a strategic vision, emphasizes effective political communication, and integrates participatory policy-making. These elements serve as analytical tools to explain the significance of designing vision and local development policies for electoral campaigning. Ultimately, they contribute to the development of a campaign plan that is clear, credible, and widely accepted by citizens.

Research Methodology

Population and Informants The population and key informants of this study consist of two groups: 1) Executive members of the Surat Progressive Team (2 persons) – individuals who play significant roles in the administrative and strategic decision-making processes of the campaign. And 2) Campaign assistants or team members (3 persons) – individuals directly involved in operational activities and communication tasks during the electoral campaign.

These informants provide insights into several critical aspects:

- The design of vision and local development policies for electoral campaigning.
- The strategies employed in policy design and prioritization.
- The linguistic choices—words and phrases—used in communicating vision and local development policies.
- The challenges and obstacles encountered during the campaign.
- Recommendations for improving future electoral strategies in the mayoral election of Surat Thani Municipality.

By engaging both executive leaders and campaign staff, the study captures perspectives from strategic planning to practical implementation, thereby offering a comprehensive understanding of the communication processes and policy design strategies adopted by the Surat Progressive Team.

Research Instruments

- 1) **Documentary and Secondary Sources** Relevant documents and prior studies concerning the design of vision and local development policies were collected to

provide foundational knowledge. These included academic articles, journals, theses, and online sources related to local election campaigns and policy design.

- 2) **Semi-Structured Interviews** Semi-structured interview guides were employed to conduct in-depth interviews with key administrative members, operational-level campaign staff, and assistants of the Surat Progressive Team. This allowed for flexibility in exploring specific themes while ensuring consistency across interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered from both documentary sources and interviews with key informants. The analysis employed qualitative content analysis, focusing on interpretation and categorization within the conceptual framework.

The process involved:

- Collecting and synthesizing campaign-related documents and interview data.
- Interpreting meanings to derive conclusions under predefined categories.
- Presenting findings in descriptive form to explain phenomena related to vision and policy design, strategic approaches, and linguistic choices in communication.

The analyzed data were then consolidated to generate communicative strategies that influence voter perception and decision-making. The findings contribute to advancing the design of vision and local development policies in Thailand's local political context, while also offering practical recommendations for future campaigns.

Research Findings

Conceptual Foundations of Vision and Policy Design

The findings reveal that the Surat Progressive Team anchored its campaign vision in the slogan "Transform Surat towards progress, govern with transparency, and place citizens at the heart." The team targeted younger generations and working-age groups, emphasizing transparency and participation through the guiding principles of 3P: Citizen Participation, Performance & Transparency, and Progressive Innovation.

The campaign strategy sought to establish brand awareness within the first three months, aiming for at least 80% of residents in Surat Thani Municipality to recognize the team and its candidates through integrated on-ground and online media. Community networks were mobilized by creating "Progressive Volunteers" across 70–80 neighborhoods to serve as grassroots informants feeding real-time data into the team's system.

Short-term goals included:

1. **Big Cleaning & Lighting:** improving street lighting in crime-prone areas and addressing waste accumulation within the first 100 days.
2. **Open Government:** launching an online grievance channel with real-time tracking to demonstrate transparency and responsiveness.

Long-term goals focused on structural transformation and sustainability:

1. Converting voters into long-term allies and supporters.
2. Establishing a model of local governance that could be scaled nationally.
3. Developing Smart Infrastructure through sensor-based flood management systems.

4. Creating an Economic Hub along the Tapi River and revitalizing the old town as a community landmark.
5. Enhancing Quality of Life by building pocket parks within a 15-minute walking radius.

The vision and policies were informed by spatial data, demographic analysis, and lessons from other cities:

- Spatial Data: GIS flood mapping, urban mobility analysis, and green space gap assessments guided policies on flood management, micro-transit, and pocket parks.
- Demographic Data: Awareness of an aging society, floating populations (students, patients, temporary residents), and youth migration patterns informed policies on universal design, waste management, and creative hubs.
- Best Practices: Adaptations from Singapore's water management, Khon Kaen's infrastructure funding model, and Yala's city branding provided comparative insights.

The team's design framework emphasized 3P principles:

1. Citizen Participation: shifting from top-down governance to participatory budgeting and digital democracy.
2. Performance & Transparency: measurable KPIs and open contracting systems.
3. Progressive Innovation: leveraging AI, mobile applications, and digital platforms to streamline governance.

Strategic Approaches to Vision and Policy Design

The team employed three major strategies:

1. Design Process Transformation: shifting from consultant-driven policies to co-creation process through neighborhood-level Civic Design Labs. This approach fostered citizen ownership and reduced resistance during implementation.
2. Communication Strategy: moving from broadcasting to narrative-based communication strategy. Technical jargon was replaced with relatable case studies, such as describing flood management in terms of real-time alerts for local vendors. Narrative-Based Communication Strategy enhanced emotional resonance and made policies more tangible to voters.
3. Real-time Feedback Loop: employing social listening and sentiment analysis to capture emerging issues and adjust communication strategies dynamically. This ensured responsiveness in a rapidly changing political environment.

The team also tested its vision and policies through innovative methodologies:

- Focus Groups segmented by generation (e.g., market vendors, university students, retirees).
- A/B Testing of online campaign graphics to measure click-through rates and emotional impact.
- Shadowing & Deep Listening in informal community spaces to capture local vocabulary and perceptions.

These strategies emphasized evidence-based, participatory, and emotionally resonant communication, ensuring that policies were both feasible and relatable across diverse voter groups.

Conclusion and Discussion

Summary of Findings

The study on the design of vision and local development policies for the mayoral election campaign of Surat Thani Municipality by the Surat Progressive Team reveals three major findings:

1. **Conceptual Design of Vision and Policies** The team articulated its central vision as “Transform Surat towards progress, govern with transparency, and place citizens at the heart.” This vision targeted younger generations and working-age groups, emphasizing transparency and participation while aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)). Short-term policies included improving public lighting and waste management within the first 100 days, and establishing an online grievance channel with real-time tracking. Long-term policies aimed to convert voters into long-term allies, create a model of local politics at the national level, develop Smart Infrastructure (e.g., sensor-based drainage systems), and establish an economic hub along the Tapi River. These policies were designed to reflect citizen participation and local needs.
2. **Strategic Approaches** The team shifted from consultant-driven policies to co-creation process through neighborhood-level Civic Design Labs, fostering ownership among citizens. Communication strategies relied on narrative-based communication strategy and tangible case examples rather than technical jargon, supported by real-time feedback mechanisms using social listening and sentiment analysis. Policy selection was guided by a weighted filter: Impact & Inclusion (40%), Financial Feasibility (25%), Technical & Legal (20%), and Time-to-Value (15%). This ensured that policies were both practical and responsive to local challenges.
3. **Linguistic Choices in Communication** Technical terms were translated into accessible language, with words chosen to build identity and memorability, such as “transform,” “advance,” and “elevate.” The term “progressive” was adopted as the team’s brand to convey modernity and change. Messages were designed to highlight tangible results, thereby enhancing voter satisfaction and motivation.

Overall, the findings confirm that the team’s vision and policy design integrated data science, citizen participation, and creative communication, serving as a prototype for campaign policy design that combines vision, policy, and supporter networks.

Discussion

The Surat Progressive Team demonstrated a comprehensive framework for designing vision and local development policies that incorporated spatial data, demographic information, and citizen participation, grounded in transparency, efficiency, and innovation. The study highlights that communication emphasizing tangible outcomes, continuous participatory mechanisms, and clear policy filters were critical to ensuring feasibility and public acceptance.

The vision and policies were consistent with both theoretical and practical dimensions, combining strategic visioning with political communication techniques. Strategic visioning provided clear and inspiring future scenarios, while communication strategies employed accessible language and narrative-based communication strategy to resonate across age groups. Participatory policy-making further enhanced legitimacy, feasibility, and cost-

effectiveness, producing short-term and long-term outcomes that citizens could perceive directly.

Importantly, the integration of scientific data (GIS, IoT, sentiment analysis), participatory mechanisms (budgeting forums, town halls), and supporter networks strengthened the legitimacy, feasibility, and electoral base of the campaign.

Communicative Strategies and Implications

The communicative strategies that influenced voter perception and decision-making, and that hold broader implications for local political development in Thailand, can be summarized as follows:

1. Enhancing legitimacy through citizen participation, reducing political resistance.
2. Aligning local goals with United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and national policy frameworks, facilitating resource mobilization from central government.
3. Designing spatially targeted policies using GIS and demographic data to address flooding, green space deficits, and mobility challenges.
4. Delivering short-term deliverables through short-term plans to build immediate trust, while laying foundations for long-term sustainability.
5. Promoting transparency and accountability by opening budget and contract data, thereby reducing corruption and increasing trust.
6. Tailoring communication to diverse age groups through message testing and narrative-based communication strategy, bridging linguistic and generational gaps.
7. Building multi-sectoral collaboration, with participatory and partnership-based policies creating technical and financial support networks.
8. Designing both offline and digital communication channels to mitigate inequalities in information access.

Recommendations

Policy Recommendations

To enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of policies, greater emphasis should be placed on fostering community ownership. This approach increases the likelihood of practical implementation and reduces local resistance. A balance should be maintained between short-term deliverables and long-term strategic projects. The use of Time-to-Value criteria and a structured Policy Filter enables systematic prioritization between short-term measures and long-term infrastructure initiatives. Financial feasibility and innovative funding mechanisms are also critical, ensuring that large-scale projects do not rely solely on central government budgets.

Furthermore, communication strategies should be tailored to specific target groups. Message testing techniques—including A/B testing and focus groups—can improve effectiveness by aligning language with the values and comprehension levels of different demographics. Importantly, reliance on digital platforms alone may exclude vulnerable groups or the elderly; therefore, offline communication channels must be integrated to ensure inclusivity.

Practical Recommendations

In designing vision and local development policies for electoral campaigns, the following practices are recommended:

1. **Policy Phasing and Prioritization:** Policies should be clearly phased into short-term and long-term initiatives, allowing voters to perceive readiness and feasibility if the candidate is elected.
2. **Hybrid Participation Mechanisms:** Citizen participation should be established prior to candidate registration. This includes mobilizing Progressive Change Makers to report problems, monitor solutions, and provide feedback. Participation must be facilitated through both offline and digital channels. Public forums such as Surat Town Hall and community listening posts should be organized to ensure accessibility for elderly citizens and those with limited internet access.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies should explore additional factors influencing policy acceptance, such as identifying messages and communication styles that resonate across different age groups and occupations. Moreover, research should examine innovative funding models—such as municipal development funds—that are tailored to the socio-economic context of Surat Thani Province.

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