

CAMPAIGN UNIFORMS & PERSONALIZATION OF PARTY LEADERS AS A STRATEGY TO WIN REGIONAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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Abstract

Indonesia's political landscape has become significantly more open in recent decades, reflecting a maturing democratic system. Electoral competition among political actors is a logical consequence of democracy, and therefore, requires effective strategies to secure political victories. This descriptive qualitative study seeks to examine two key issues: (1) What political imagery is embedded in the use of campaign uniforms? and (2) What image is constructed through the continuous display of a party leader's photograph during election campaigns? The study is based on recent and relevant secondary data that align with contemporary electoral phenomena. Findings suggest that in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections, Joko Widodo (Jokowi) successfully employed a symbolic strategy through the use of campaign uniforms, which functioned as political attire throughout the campaign period. These uniforms carry significant semiotic value, symbolizing unity, multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and egalitarianism. Through this imagery, Jokowi cultivated a public persona as a democratic and inclusive leader. This visual strategy was further reinforced by the consistent display of the photograph of the PDIP chairperson, who was portrayed as both a unifying force within the party and a transformative figure in national politics. The presence of the party leader served as a political magnet within campaign communication, emphasizing both ideological and constitutional ties between the candidate and the party. The novelty of this study lies in the argument that political parties, beyond merely constructing a strong brand image, must also maintain voter brand loyalty in order to remain competitive in future elections.

Keywords: campaign uniform, personalization, political competition.

Introduction

Since the 1999 reform era, political parties have become the backbone of democratic processes in Indonesia. No longer merely puppets or extensions of state power as they were during the New Order regime, political parties now play a central role in nearly all aspects of political life. They serve as the sole political vehicles for legislative and presidential elections, and are also the official sponsors of candidates in regional elections (Firmanzah, 2012). Political parties are vital to the functioning of democracy in Indonesia, as their role in legislative institutions, government, and other state bodies is inseparable from the democratic process itself (Efriza, 2019).

Nevertheless, political parties in Indonesia continue to rely heavily on political elites, allowing the phenomenon of political personalization to persist (Budiatri et al., 2018). In the post-reform era, the identity of elite individuals has become deeply embedded within political parties. For instance, mentioning names such as Megawati, Prabowo, Gus Dur,

SBY, or Surya Paloh instantly evokes associations with specific political parties in the minds of the public.

Similarly, referring to the "checkered shirt" immediately reminds people of the campaign uniform worn by Jokowi and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) during the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election, characterized by a red-and-black checkered motif. In the 2014 presidential campaign, Jokowi wore a small checkered shirt with red, white, and blue tones, while his vice-presidential running mate, Jusuf Kalla, wore a plain white shirt. In the 2019 presidential campaign, both Jokowi and his running mate Ma'ruf Amin adopted a simple white shirt as their campaign uniform.

According to research by Rahmawati (2020), fashion specifically clothing can function as a medium of political communication during campaigns. Clothing affects a person's physical appearance and can be strategically used to attract public support. This is particularly evident when the outfit communicates a message or meaning that influences how the public perceives the candidate during interactions.

In various campaign activities, political uniforms are often accompanied by images of party leaders, who serve as personifications of the party itself. For example, the image of Megawati is commonly used to emphasize the candidate's identity as a party cadre and to represent a distinct source of political magnetism.

Methodology

The President, as part of the political superstructure in Indonesia, plays a significant role in shaping the dynamics of governmental political life. Consequently, the presidential election serves as a crucial element of the democratic political system, as it functions as a mechanism of popular sovereignty allowing citizens to elect their representatives and leaders to govern. To run for president, a candidate must be supported or nominated by a political party or a coalition of political parties. The ideological relationship between the candidate and the supporting party must remain intact and continuous.

This research is situated within the field of government studies, which is eclectic in nature and closely linked to political science. It employs a descriptive qualitative approach under the title Campaign Uniforms and the Personalization of Political Elites as a Strategy to Win the Presidential Election. The study aims to address two primary research questions: (1) What political image lies behind a piece of campaign uniform? and (2) What image is conveyed when electoral candidates consistently display the photograph of the party chairperson during campaigns?

The scope of the research focuses on examining the symbolism of Jokowi's campaign uniforms and the role of the PDIP chairperson during the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial

election and the 2019 presidential election. The study prioritizes the use of recent and relevant secondary data that reflect the electoral phenomenon.

Discussion

1. Political Attire During Campaigns as a Semiotic Contest of Meaning

Fashion, including clothing and attire, has become deeply integrated into social communication processes. In contemporary contexts, clothing is no longer seen merely as a means of protection or bodily covering, but rather as a symbol used to convey meaning and project a particular image. During political campaigns, candidates often wear campaign uniforms as a political strategy to attract public sympathy. Image-building has become an integral component of political strategy (Pratomo, 2013). According to Roland Barthes (1983), fashion can be interpreted as a system of signs that communicates identity. His semiotic theory suggests that fashion is a system of communication in which clothing becomes a message, allowing the embedded meaning of an object to be deciphered.

So, what kind of attire is typically worn during political campaigns? Zetter (2008) explains that the use of uniforms during campaigns serves two primary functions. First, it signals to voters that the candidate is active, present, serious about the campaign, and supported by a grassroots base a team ready to mobilize. Second, the uniform functions as a symbol of unity, visually marking the campaign team as a cohesive unit.

Reflecting Zetter's view, the use of campaign uniforms gained national prominence in Indonesia during the 2012 Jakarta gubernatorial election, when Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (Ahok) campaigned wearing checkered shirts in red, blue, and white. With sleeves rolled up, their attire symbolized a readiness to work and engage directly with the public. The choice of red, blue, and white colors represented the pluralistic and diverse nature of Jakarta's population in terms of ethnicity, religion, and cultural background.

This continued in the 2014 presidential election, where Jokowi wore a small checkered shirt while his vice presidential running mate wore a plain white shirt visually reinforcing the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity). The choice of a collared shirt was deliberate, as the shirt is commonly associated with workers and conveys a readiness to take action and implement development programs.

The use of checkered shirts or plain white shirts functioned as a form of political branding a technique employed by candidates to shape public perception and enhance electability. Campaign attire serves as a tool for self-representation and as a form of political communication. A single article of clothing can communicate a set of

values that are promoted or projected through appearance. For instance, the checkered shirt became symbolic of populism, simplicity, democratic leadership, and optimism. During campaigns, such imagery carried connotative meanings of togetherness, multiculturalism, multiethnicity, and egalitarianism. Thus, clothing became a powerful vehicle for articulating non-verbal political messages, ultimately integrating itself into the discourse of political affiliation.

To this day, the image of the checkered shirt remains closely associated with Jokowi. This simple collared shirt became a strong branding symbol and even a fashion trend among his supporters. As Eco (1979) stated, clothing functions as a semiotic tool a communication machine. It is no surprise, then, that Jokowi's supporters often wore checkered shirts during campaigns. The shirt became the most recognizable symbol of support for his candidacy.



Figure 1: "Checkered" Campaign Uniform

Accessed by the researcher on September 25, 2023, at 6:00 PM (WIB).

The checkered shirt worn by Jokowi became a medium of semiotic contest of meaning based on Roland Barthes' theory (1988), amidst various political attributes promoted by his competitors. Connotatively, the message intended to be conveyed was one of solidarity, multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and egalitarianism. The image projected was that of a democratic and people-oriented leader, which was positively received by the public. These two aspects have the potential to influence voters in choosing a presidential candidate, as in a presidential contest, the electorate tends to favor figures who are down to earth, honest, modest, charismatic, and responsible.

2. Personalization of Party Chairpersons.

Iconic political figures such as Megawati, Prabowo, Gus Dur, SBY, and Surya Paloh are associated with symbolic character traits, which relate to the portrayal of their personal characteristics (Alfian, 2009), as each political actor has their own unique persona.

In the current reform era, these political figures are competing to personify themselves as heroes in the public's perception. Alfian (2009) further explains that personification can lead to the neglect of institutionalized politics. In the logic of direct democracy, personification of these figures has become a necessity. This is evident in political advertisements, which tend to emphasize the individual figure rather than the political party itself. Along the same lines, Budiatri (2018) notes that the association of figures with their respective parties is very clear, as seen in the phenomenon of political figures appearing alongside party logos in campaign materials leading up to elections.

Political figures and parties are competing to establish their positioning, differentiate their strategies, and build their own brands. Elite figures have become the identity of their respective parties, simultaneously acting as magnets for voter support during elections.

Table 1 below illustrates how major political parties in the reform era have become closely associated with the identities of specific party chairpersons. These chairpersons also hold strong positions within party leadership, often for extended periods, such as:

Table 1:
Association of Political Parties with the Personalities of Party Chairpersons

No	Political Party	Party Figure	Position within the Party
1	Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP)	Megawati Soekarnoputri	Founder of the Party Chairperson of PDIP since 1999- Present
2	Partai Demokrat (PD)	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono	Founder of the Party Chairperson of PD 2013-2015 Chairperson of the PD High Council
3	Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN)	Amien Rais	Founder of PAN Chairperson of PD 2013-2015 Chairperson of the PD High Council
4	Partai Gerakan Indonesia Raya (GERINDRA)	Prabowo Subianto	Founder of Gerindra Chairperson of Gerindra's Advisory Board
5	Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat (HANURA)	Wiranto	<i>Founder of Hanura</i> <i>Chairperson of Hanura 2006-2016</i>
6	Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB)	Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur)	Founder of PKB

			Chairperson of the PKB's Shura Council
7	Partai Nasional Demokrat (NASDEM)	Surya Paloh	Founder of Nasdem Chairperson of the Nasdem High Council Chairperson of Nasdem

Source : Aisah Putri Budiatri, 2018.

The attachment of party chairpersons to the identity of political parties, as seen in Table 1, is reflected in popular political slogans such as “Partai Bu Mega” to refer to the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), or “Partai Demokrat, Partainya SBY” linking Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) to the Democratic Party. These individual identities have been attached to their respective political parties since their inception. Beyond identity, the individuals listed in Table 1 also wield significant influence within their parties, not only as founders or initiators, like SBY, but also through their central roles in party leadership, giving them the authority to shape major policies.

In addition to their influence within the party, many of these individuals have also been nominated as presidential candidates by their parties, indicating that political parties often serve as vehicles for personal candidacy in presidential elections. For example, PDIP nominated Megawati Soekarnoputri three consecutive times in the 1999, 2004, and 2009 elections. She eventually served as the 5th President of Indonesia in 2001. The Democratic Party nominated SBY, who was successfully elected President in both 2004 and 2009. The National Mandate Party (PAN) nominated Amien Rais in 2004, although he did not win, while Gerindra nominated Prabowo Subianto in 2014 and 2019, with similar results.

Leon Dion, as cited in Budiatri (2018), outlines four essential leadership traits for political party leaders: transformative leadership, transactional leadership, administrative leadership, and leadership capable of building solidarity. Transformative leaders inspire and are admired by constituents, elevating their influence. Transactional leaders maintain support through exchanges with their base. Administrative leaders gain influence through effective organizational management. Lastly, leaders who foster solidarity are seen as unifying figures capable of increasing public support for the party.

Why does this personalization of party leaders occur? Rhodes and Hart (2003) explain that political personalization results from several factors: first, voters' loyalty to political parties, especially toward individual leaders; second, increased elite mediation and lobbying within party activities; third, globalization, which enhances

the central role of political figures in government; and fourth, the open, direct electoral system that allows voters to elect individuals rather than just parties. This public attention towards individual leaders ultimately amplifies their personal identity over the collective identity of the party.

It is important to distinguish personalization from flattery inflation or cult of personality, often associated with authoritarian leaders. In Indonesia, this was evident during the Suharto era, where the leader dubbed “the smiling general” was glorified through films and music. The General Elections Commission Regulation (PKPU) No. 4 of 2017 prohibits political parties from using images or names of former presidents, vice presidents, or other national figures who are not current party officials on campaign materials. As such, figures like Soekarno, Suharto, and BJ Habibie cannot appear in campaign designs. However, images of Megawati Soekarnoputri and SBY may still be legally used because of their formal positions within their parties.

This legal allowance contributes to further personalization, where the individual identity of the leader becomes synonymous with the party itself due to long-standing influence. Thus, party chairpersons act as symbolic leaders capable of building solidarity and attracting electoral support (Budiatri, 2018; Rhodes & Hart, 2003). To this day, Megawati remains the most influential figure in the growth and strength of PDIP, with her popularity clearly reflected in the infographic presented below.

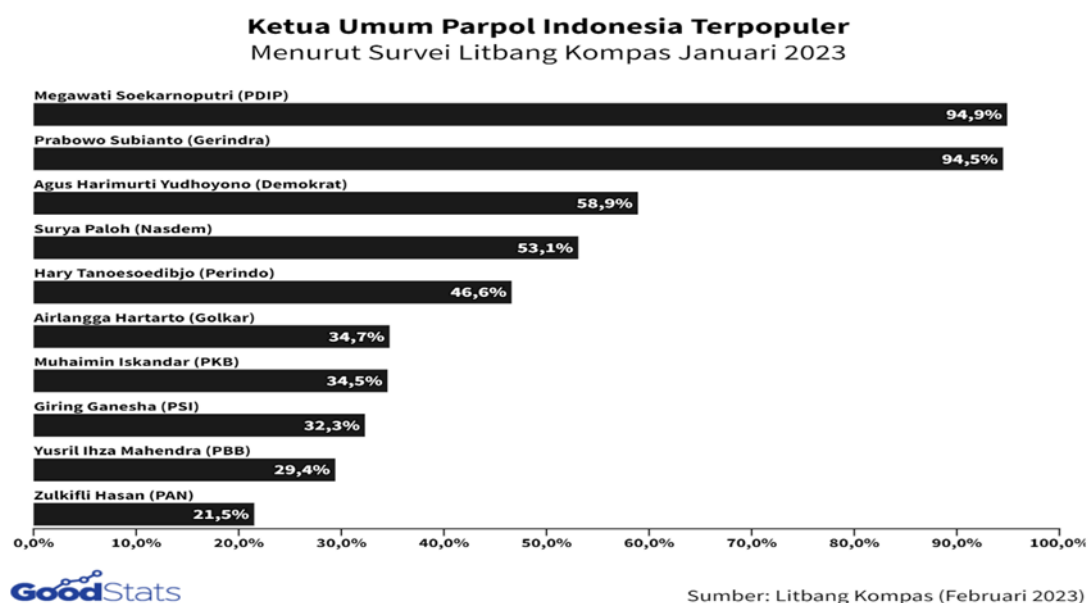
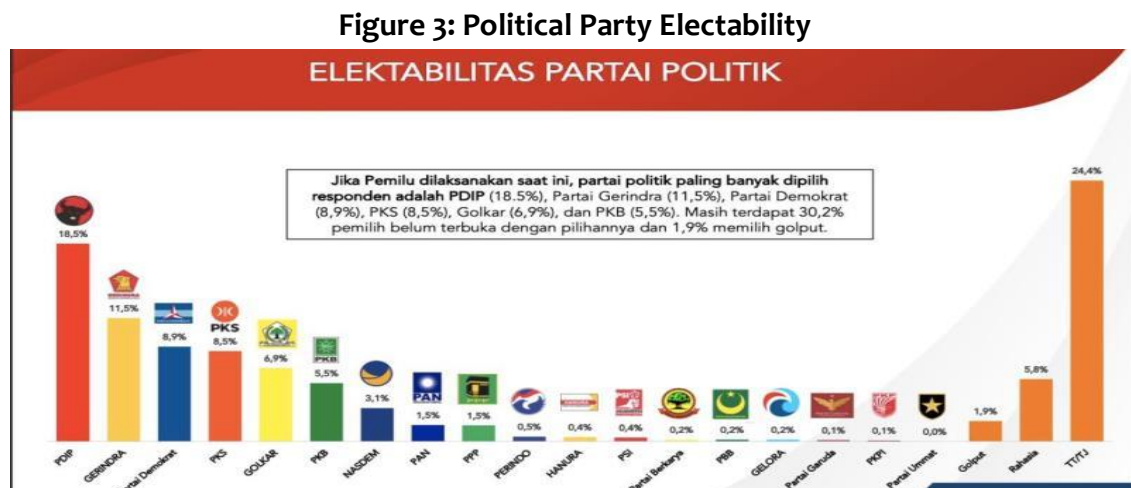


Figure 2: The Popularity Level of Megawati Soekarnoputri
Accessed by the researcher on September 25, 2023, at 6:40 PM WIB.

The release by Litbang Kompas on February 21, 2023, at 14:35 WIB, as illustrated in Figure 2 above, states that Megawati Soekarnoputri is currently the most popular party leader compared to other chairpersons. According to Litbang Kompas, Megawati holds a popularity rating of 94.9 percent. Figure 2 reinforces this argument.

Research by Amalia Syauket and Dede Rukmayadi (2023) also indicates that the leadership factor of political parties is a strong driver influencing coalition formation.

Meanwhile, Figure 3 below shows the electability of political parties based on a survey conducted by the Indostrategic Survey Institute. The survey was held from March 23 to June 1, 2021, under the theme "Measuring the Electability of Potential Presidential Candidates, Political Parties, and Aspirations for Changes in the 2024 Electoral System."



Accessed by the researcher on September 25, 2023, at 6:45 PM WIB.

From the two images above, Figure 2 and Figure 3, it is evident that there is a linear relationship between Megawati Soekarnoputri's popularity and the high level of electability of the political party she leads. The attachment between the leader's identity and the image of the political party is so strong that the leader's identity is inseparable from the party's identity. In this context, the political party leader becomes the central figure, overshadowing other elements of the party's organizational structure (Jean-Benoit and William Cross, 2011). The public may choose a political party simply because they choose the leader of the party. Karp et al. (2002) emphasized the importance of a party leader's role, stating that a leader can provide a brief image and indication of the party's quality. Therefore, Megawati's leadership as the Chairperson of PDIP plays a significant role as an electoral lever in elections.

3. Political Competition is Political Image Competition

The 2024 general election in Indonesia will be a crucial and defining moment in the country's political history. The presidential and legislative elections will determine the political and economic direction of Indonesia for the coming years. Several key aspects will shape the political competition in 2024, such as the certainty of presidential candidates and the competition between political parties. Some political parties, such as PDI Perjuangan, Gerindra, Golkar, and the Democratic Party, have significant electoral support, while new parties like PSI (Indonesian Solidarity Party) have

emerged in recent years. These newer parties could influence the dynamics of the competition with established political parties.

The political world consists of producers and consumers. Political parties or individual candidates act as producers, creating political products, while the public is the consumer of politics, deciding which political party and political products to support. Each party works to maximize its own interests, aiming to gather as much electoral support as possible and win the election. On the other hand, the public seeks immediate solutions to the problems they face (Firmanzah, 2012).

The public will evaluate which political parties are most capable of understanding their problems and offering solutions. To comprehend the public's issues, political parties must see the public as partners in developing work programs. Only through dialogue and communication with the public will a political party know whether its programs align with the public's expectations.

Thus, in the 2024 election, the competition among candidates and political parties will be a contest of ideas and national development programs aimed at improving the welfare of the people. In today's democratic era, the relationship between candidates and voters is unstable due to increasing public criticism and the erosion of traditional and primordial ties. Candidates cannot win political competition without support from voters.

Brennan and Lomasky (1977) argue that voting decisions during elections are expressive behaviors. Voter behavior is heavily influenced by loyalty and ideology. The decision to support a party or candidate cannot happen without sufficient voter loyalty to their chosen political party. A political party with a strong image will have a positive impact on voters, encouraging them to cast their votes. Therefore, the public must have a positive impression and perception of the political parties and candidates individually. The better the public's perception, the stronger the political image.

In this competitive environment, each political party strives to create a positive image for the public. Through communication and interaction, political parties are essentially engaging in a dialogue about symbols, signs, and meanings. Research by Fajar Febriansyah et al. (2021) shows that trust in political parties, or brand trust, influences brand loyalty, as trust encourages voters to remain consistent with their party choices in subsequent elections.

In this article, the image created by the "checkered shirts" symbolizes a connection to the people, multiculturalism, ethnic diversity, and egalitarianism. It also communicates a readiness to work according to the programs promised during the campaign.

Meanwhile, the image of PDIP is that of a party for the common people (wong cilik), prioritizing the interests of the public. The semiotic meaning built by both images is the same: to achieve the welfare of the people.



Figure 3

Accessed by the researcher on September 26, 2023, at 21:25 WIB

According to Nila Sastrawati (2015), symbols and politics are two inseparable entities. The instruments used in politics, particularly political parties, are closely linked to symbols that carry meanings agreed upon as encompassing the symbol's intended message. Symbols appear and emerge on their own, but they are portrayed as extraordinary entities capable of attracting attention to achieve the political party's goals. In political communication, political symbols function to build political image and encourage political participation.

Thus, a synthesis can be drawn from Roland Barthes' analysis, where the use of campaign uniforms represents a form of symbol-meaning that the candidates, in this case, Jokowi, aim to communicate as their political tool. Meanwhile, the presence of photos of figures in the background of PDIP's campaign activities is a sign of the moral strength of the personification of the party's elite.

Conclusion

In winning the 2014 DKI Jakarta Gubernatorial Election and the 2019 Presidential Election, Joko Widodo used a strategic approach that included the use of campaign uniforms, which served as political attire during the campaign. Along with other advantages, the use of these uniforms carried significant semiotic meaning in the context of Roland Barthes' theory, distinguishing him from his competitors. Connotatively, the message conveyed was one of togetherness, multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, and egalitarianism, with the image of a democratic leader being built. This strategy was reinforced by the appearance of the photo of the Chairperson of the PDIP, Megawati Soekarnoputri, who played a role as a leader capable of building party solidarity and also as a transformative leader, making her a political magnet in communication. The meaning here is that the public may choose a political party based on the individual leader, whose image is deeply meaningful. The constitutional and ideological relationship between them must be strong and unbreakable to secure victory in the election. This relationship can be likened to the bond between mother and child, which in essence represents a constitutional statement in the context of Indonesia's governance.

Although the personification may seem positive, it is, in fact, superficial and short-lived. Moving forward, it is hoped that future leaders of political parties will be strong and significant not because they dominate their parties, but because they are seen as the most capable individuals in understanding their party's ideology. This would pave the way for the emergence of true statesmen in Indonesia's future.

Acknowledgments

This article, titled Campaign Uniforms & Personalization of Party Chairpersons as a Strategy to Win the Presidential Election, was written by Tyastuti Sri Lestari, Amalia Syauket, Bambang Karsono, and Ismaniah, all of whom come from the field of Public Administration. As academics, we have a deep interest in the rising tensions and excitement surrounding the upcoming 2024 General Election. We are grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the discourse surrounding the strategies and dynamics of political campaigns in Indonesia.

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