

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,