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Understanding Political Party Images: Impact on Loyalty and Solidarity among Party Members for the 2024 Election

Muhammad Khairil, Raisa Alatas, Dyah Fitria Kartika Sari

Department of Communication Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tadulako University Palu, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: muh khairil02@yahoo.com

Abstract

This study discusses the construction of the image of political parties in increasing the loyalty and solidarity of cadres for the 2024 election. Solidarity from political party cadres describes the organizational system of political parties and also as part of party credibility. This study employed a descriptive-qualitative approach with a case study method. This study concludes that cadres who are well-known in the community became a benchmark for the existence of political parties, but not all of them have a positive impact. In Central Sulawesi, cadres are often a disgrace to political parties by being involved in scandals and corruption cases or sudden transfers between political parties. The method of a political education by political parties is considered very conceptual. In addition to the electability of cadres and legislative candidates, the technique of visiting large organizations is recognized as being able to help build the image of political parties as a political marketing technique.

Keywords: Political Communication; political marketing; Image; Loyalty; Election

Introduction

The 2024 elections in Indonesia are one of many *stages* for the actualization and verification of political parties (Nurkinan, 2018; Sanopaka, 2021; Ufen, 2008). The solidarity of each political party's cadres is crucial, not only as a description of the organizational system of the political party itself but also as part of the overall credibility of the political party (Siagian, 2012). Political parties themselves are interpreted as organized groups that have members who have the same orientation, values and ideals. Thus, the purpose of a political party is to gain political power and seize a political position (Budiardjo, 2015). Political parties in Indonesia have rapid progression annually as new political parties emerge almost every year as political rights obtained by every citizen can be actualized by the existence of political parties. Thus, political parties are a means for citizens to participate in the management of the state.

The history of the presence and existence of political parties can be traced to the colonial era which adopted a multi-party system that is carried over to the present date. As such, the existence and evolution of political parties in Indonesia have grown into an interesting case study. The major parties of Indonesia such as Golongan Karya (GOLKAR), Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P), Partai Nasional Demokrat (NasDem), Partai Demokrat, Partai Hati Nurani Rakyat (Hanura), Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB), and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS) have been embedded in the minds of the community (Bone, 1954; Lev, 1967).

The image of political parties cannot be separated from the presence of cadres of said parties (Guzmán & Sierra, 2009). Political party cadres are not only required to maintain organizational stability but also loyalty and solidarity as an inseparable part of the image of the political party (Gordon, 1972; Guzmán & Sierra, 2009). In many ways, the image of a political party is a measure of its credibility. Image is everything that a person

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has learned which is relevant to the situation and to the actions that can occur in it. The image always changes along with changes in experience (Nimmo, 2011). The image is formed from public opinion that assesses and sees how political parties perform and how the cadres are. The problem that arises is how the cadres of political parties tarnish the image of the political parties themselves (Eryanto et al., 2022), where several cases of, for example, corruption committed by cadres of political parties (Aminuddin & Attamimi, 2019).

One of the cases that have been in the spotlight occurred in the Central Sulawesi Province of Indonesia. There was a case of Hanura Party cadre named H. Hasbie Dg. Sitaba is suspected of corruption. H. Hasbie Dg. Sitaba who was a member of the Parigi DPRD from 2009 - 2014 was arrested for mismanaging financial aid funds for Political Parties from the Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (*Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah*, or APBD) of the 2009-2016 fiscal year in Parigi that caused a loss of Rp140 million on state finances (Al Ayyubi, 2018). Said case is one of many examples that must be handled by political parties to restore a positive image in the community as part of a political strategy for the upcoming 2024 elections.

The existence of cadres in a political party becomes a crucial part of the political strategy for the 2024 elections. Cadres who are positively well-known in the community are a benchmark for the existence of political parties themselves as not all cadres give a positive impact on political parties (Hermanto et al., 2020). In Central Sulawesi, for example, the presence of cadres in political parties is often a scourge against political parties. On one hand, scandals and corruption cases are a concern while on the other hand cadres are also switching and transferring between political parties. Although this is a common thing within the scope of political parties, there is always something fundamental about the movement of political party cadres (Aprimayanti & Pasha, 2021; Buehler & Nataatmadja, 2021; Ufen, 2008).

In a study conducted by Saputro regarding the role of political parties in providing political education to the younger generation in the city of Malang, he explained that the role of political parties in providing political education to cadres and the community was still low. The methods and materials for political education carried out by political parties were still very conceptual and less applicable. The evaluation method in providing political education did not work effectively. Thus, the role of political parties in providing awareness to the public about their rights and obligations as citizens was low. In addition, it resulted in the low quality of political party cadres, let alone encouraging the improvement of people's lives (Saputro, 2015).

The 2024 elections which will be held simultaneously will be one of the political battles for political parties and the wider community. Solidarity and loyalty of political party cadres are important things that must be a concern. Political parties as an organizational system must also be able to facilitate the interests of cadres who are part of the party organizational system. Therefore, the construction of the image of political parties in increasing the loyalty and solidarity of cadres for the 2024 elections will be a strategic step in gaining sympathy within the community.

Methods

The main problem posed in this study concerns the construction of the image of political parties in increasing the loyalty and solidarity of cadres for the 2024 general election. Under the formulation of the problem and the objectives to be achieved, we formed this study using a descriptive-qualitative research approach with a case study method. We used a case study as our approach because we examined real-life cases through detailed and in-depth data collection involving various sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual materials and documents from various reports (Cresswell, 2015; Yin, 2014). The object of this study is the regional party offices in Palu, Central Sulawesi which include GOLKAR, NasDem, PDI-P and PKB. GOLKAR, NasDem, PDI-P and PKB were our main focus in studying the construction of the image of political parties. We used qualitative data analysis which begins with preparing and organizing data (transcripts and

recording) as analysis material, condensing data into themes and presenting data in the form of discussions (Bryman & Burgess, 2002). The last step is conclusion drawing which at this stage we tried to draw conclusions or verification based on field data by describing the focal points of the research results (Bryman & Burgess, 2002; Cresswell, 2015).

Results & Discussion

Constructing the Image of Political Parties and Increasing Cadre Loyalty

Political communication aims to create a positive image in society. A political image emerges based on information received directly or through media, including mass media that work to convey general and current political messages (Ahmad & Popa, 2014; Briandana, 2019). In the early days of President Joko Widodo or also known as Jokowi administration the word *image* suddenly became very popular. President Jokowi's political style a la *blusukan* (direct field observations into the less exposed area by himself and a small team) was widely reported in the media and it became a hot topic on mainstream television. It is not uncommon for this to be controversial as in its development, Jokowi's *blusukan* style is often at a certain level implied as a political image strategy.

Becoming a cadre of a political party makes the candidate cadres prefer exactly which party can build their image or brand. Thus, they can appear positive in the community and can be elected (Gordon, 1972). By spending a substantial amount of funds, most of these cadres prefer parties that can promise and guarantee them to be elected. Several cadres have gone through ups and downs with their party since the beginning, but some parties have the concept of looking for cadres who have built a positive image in the community and then are recruited to become members.

For parties that are relatively settled such as PDI-P, GOLKAR and PKB, their members tend to have characteristics or symbolize the party. While newer parties such as NasDem were formed after by the old members or cadres of PDI-P, GOLKAR and PKB. The Governor of Central Sulawesi, H. Rusdi Mastura is a candidate for governor promoted through NasDem. But, Rusdi Mastura was an old cadre of the GOLKAR party. Such dynamics cannot be separated from political lobbies.

In the current era of politics, we have found cadres who choose their nomination party based on the ideology of that party. Some see which party has the strength and opportunity that can make these cadres elected in the community. PDI-P for example, have their cadres based on party ideology by following the cadre process and instilling party ideologies in them.

Chandra Ilyas as part of the NasDem general election considered that their party already has a clear goal, to be a restoration party that provides change, restores and maintains for the better. Without a dowry means no charge has to be paid to the party for the process of becoming a legislative candidate. As such no registration is needed. Chandra also emphasized that anyone can become a legislative candidate, but NasDem consider sociological aspects, popularity and electability of cadres. In short, parties are considered people who have a chance to win, have quality and integrity, are intelligent and can also be loyal to the party. This of course refers to the NasDem slogan as "politics without dowry".

GOLKAR sees electability from a different angle. If popularity is included in NasDem's point of view, GOLKAR looks for: first, it comes from community leaders or female leaders and second, knowing about GOLKAR. So according to Handayani, before the implementation of the nomination, GOLKAR carried out a missionary orientation to increase the knowledge of each candidate about GOLKAR and its program. Thus, they could bring the party's program to the community. Age is also adjusted to the constituency. The GOLKAR Party looks at its cadres more as those who have influence and are aware of the party's goals.

It is different from PDI-P which prohibits parties from only campaigning for themselves and encourages more to campaign the contents of the party. According to Muharram, some have priority rights and cannot be shifted, namely the chairman, secretary and treasurer. Then the next order in scoring, in terms of education, but the greatest value

is the length of service of the cadre. Then it is accumulated and political mapping is carried out.

How political parties construct their image is also tied to the evolution of media. For example, the evolution of mass media and the presence of social media has formed a new way of constructing image by using advertising channels in various lines of mass media which has become a public trend for current campaigning figures (Anwar et al., 2019; Baihaqi et al., 2022; Jandevi, 2019; Juditha & Darmawan, 2018). Talking about the popularity of cadres in the era of technology 4.0 where everything is known more quickly through social media, many cadres prefer to choose the short way through image construction via social media and we know interesting content in the eyes of voters gains popularity through social media (Ahmad & Popa, 2014; Anwar et al., 2019; Baihaqi et al., 2022; Jandevi, 2019). Sometimes some act according to the party's values and some even abandon the ideological values of the party for the sake of image and viral status. This requires special supervision from the implementers in the party, as Mutmainah explained, that is those who managed related matters in the cadres' social media within NasDem.

On average, all parties use all media in conducting campaigns by adjusting to the electoral district or the political mapping of the cadres. As explained by Chandra Ilyas from NasDem that NasDem uses all media without exception from printed mass media to social media such as Facebook, YouTube and WhatsApp. Apart from the media, NasDem also uses the power of large organizations such as the Christian Church of Central Sulawesi (*Gereja Kristen Sulawesi Tengah* or GKST) and the mosque council (Fossati et al., 2020; Prihatini, 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020).

Nahrudin sees that apart from social media, visiting large organizations is one of the campaign strategies which is called *sowan*. According to Nahrudin from PKB, he felt that it's okay for anyone to build friendships or relationships to attract sympathy and support from the other groups because the groups represent the aspirations of the people. PKB already has characteristics like NU as their initial founder, but they do not rule out the possibility to join other organizations while supporting the aspirations of the people. Muharram from the PDI-P also said that the term *sowan* between parties was not taboo. PDI-P even has a special department for handling the aforementioned matter.

PDI-P has the means to measure the power that will be obtained by the party. PDI-P has tested, evaluated and made improvements and modifications in the course of political parties and evaluated campaign models that were in line with the times to determine an effective campaign strategy and formed a winning strategy. For example, Muharram associates the millennial generation with creative content on social media, while PDI-P will use Baitul Muslimin to penetrate the Islamic fanatic groups.

Building a political image or image is not an easy task. That image cannot be formed in a short time without continuity. For this reason, political communication is necessary and building interactive relationships with the people. According to NasDem, there must be at least one candidate who takes the *sowan* path. Legislative candidates will try to get in touch with community leaders, organizations and communities as parties and candidates need to build good relationships with such high-impact people to spread wider in the community. Some parties even take care of several activities related to the youth community and even the women of the Koran (Fossati, 2019; Nur Wardhani, 2018; Prihatini, 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020).

The campaign strategy depends on each cadre who becomes legislative candidates. Sometimes the candidates have their strategy to win the people's vote in the election. Candidates form their *winning team* or are formed by the party election-winning body. PDI-P regulates its cadres by not only campaigning for themselves but also having to campaign for PDI=P and other cadres of PDI-P. Based on cooperation, the principle is applied to cadres.

Building cadre loyalty following party ideology is not an easy thing to do. Sometimes parties will find some cadres who are not able to follow party rules and their loyalty is questioned because they prefer a party that can quickly increase their prestige. The PDI-P chose a cadre who could follow the rules perpendicular to its leader, Megawati Soekarno

Putri (Kristiyanto et al., 2022; Mukti & Rodiyah, 2020). According to Muharram, to build cadre loyalty frequent interaction is a must. PDI-P rules with an iron fist that cadres who cannot be fostered will be removed. If any cadre wants to move or leave the PDI-P, they will be immediately removed from membership.

Meanwhile, GOLKAR continues to recruit from the provincial to village levels to build the loyalty of the cadres. But GOLKAR will also take firm action if there are cadres who deviate or suddenly move to another party, as they must carry out an administrative process for quitting (Suparto, 2022). NasDem also has a party court to process problems with cadres, which will then be decided through stages of a structured process, not immediately revoking their membership. So far, NasDem has not found cases where cadres want to move to other parties. Because they view it as the better their performance, the greater their loyalty. But Chandra does not deny that it often happens to lead to those cases.

Nahrudin also added that PKB recruits and provides organizational content and struggles, so cadres can understand and explore what PKB is and what the true goals of PKB are. The importance of instilling party values and ideology, according to him, can select which cadres are serious in the party and which ones just want to experiment. According to Mutmainah, this will be trimmed by itself. However, this can also affect the image of cadres and the party itself.

Political Marketing as a Communication Strategy

Political marketing requires an organized marketing approach to support politicians. Political parties are becoming increasingly efficient and effective in building two-way relationships with voters and the general public. It is generally defined as some form of physical contact while indirect communication will be done through the mass media during the campaign period. This is where political marketing is seen from the cooperation between cadres, parties and voters.

Push political marketing is defined as the direct marketing of political products to prospective voters. The main focus of this strategy is more on issues that are important (political products) for voters and not just selling candidates or parties. Political products try to get support through stimulants in the form of several rational and emotional reasons to move the masses to support candidates (Barus et al., 2019). Political products are conveyed to constituents through the media (print, electronic and online) and influencer groups as message distributors (Bailusy et al., 2017; Sutrisno et al., 2018).

Each party structurally provide a winning team, some even provide facilities for making an individual winning team. Chandra Ilyas as vice chairman of the general election field explained that NasDem provides all kinds of facilities and nominates people at 3 levels: City Districts, Provinces and the House of Representatives. The legislative candidates can make their teams and strategies. The party has only reached the stage of recruiting legislative candidates and entering them into the stage. NasDem always gives early warnings to legislative candidates that there are regulations that prohibit blaspheming or vilifying opponents and black campaigns, but negative campaigns where the intended negative campaign is criticizing the performance of others can be done.

In the process of formulating strategies to win people's votes, each internal party has its strategy. NasDem as the winning party in Central Sulawesi by occupying the seat of the Governor of Central Sulawesi and also the Chairman of the House of Representatives of Central Sulawesi used a negative campaign trick by criticizing the opponent's performance by re-adjusting to the constituency of its cadres according to Chandra Ilyas. The cadre branding process is carried out by the NasDem by adjusting the electoral district.

As a political campaign strategy, push political marketing is used in the arena of political battles for victory. This is done in the form of a push political marketing strategy by shaping and influencing public opinion through electability surveys and vision and mission preferences as political products (Baihaqi et al., 2022; Ghifary, 2020). As such party ideology is important considering that party ideology and values embedded in the cadre are one thing that is lacking in current cadres because parties are more concerned with winning without maintaining party ideology in cadres to become the hallmark of candidates as there

are many cases of cadres that can reduce the party's electability, such as corruption cases and other viral cases (Fossati, 2019; Prihatini, 2020).

Pass Political Marketing is the way to market political products through influential people or groups who can influence voters' opinions (Gordon, 1972; Hendrayana, 2019; Patrisia & Yuliani, 2020; Sutrisno et al., 2018). The 4 major parties, PDI-P, NasDem, PKB and GOLKAR, have important figures in boosting the party image. For example, NasDem has big names such as Surya Paloh and Ahmad Ali in Central Sulawesi as the vice chairman of NasDem and also the one who won the seat of the governor of Central Sulawesi, Rusdi Mastura. PDI-P is also the winning party with Jokowi as the president of the Republic of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarno Putri and the Chair of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia, Puan Maharani. PKB is currently under the name of Cak Imin and GOLKAR is under the leadership of Airlangga Hartarto. In addition to having prominent figures, these parties also have the technique of dealing with large organizations in influencing voter votes.

Pull Marketing is defined as a way for marketing political products through mass media which focuses on the image of the political product (Guzmán & Sierra, 2009; Hendrayana, 2019) as building the image to become a party with the pure vote of the people is not an easy choice (Patrisia & Yuliani, 2020). Politicians will never be separated from the public spotlight. As such, political parties often build certain jargon to set their image such as NasDem with their "politics without dowry", PDI-P with their "the party of the people", GOLKAR with their "we work for Indonesia" and PKB with their "Caring the Ummah, Serving the People".

Conclusion

Many cadres have *fame* as a benchmark for the existence of political parties, but not all of them have a positive impact. In Central Sulawesi specifically, cadres of political parties are often a disgrace to the political parties themselves, such as being involved in scandals and corruption cases to the frequent transfers between political parties. The method for political education of political parties is considered to be very conceptual. In addition to the electability of cadres and legislative candidates, the *sowan* technique was seen as an effective method to build the image of political parties as a political marketing technique.

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