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Radical Changes in Political Campaign Strategy Prabowo Subianto's in the 2024 Presidential Election Indonesia

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Abstract - The 2024 Indonesian presidential election marked a significant transformation in Prabowo Subianto's political campaign strategy, representing a radical departure from his previous populist and militaristic persona. This study examines how Prabowo's campaign rebranded his public image through digital platforms by adopting emotionally driven, symbolic, and media-friendly tactics that resonated with younger voters. Employing a qualitative interpretative method and a case study design, this research analyses campaign materials disseminated via TikTok, Instagram, and other social media platforms, as well as televised appearances and online news coverage. The analysis identifies three key strategic shifts: (1) a narrative transition from the theme of "change" to "continuity," positioning the candidate in alignment with the incumbent administration's popular legacy; (2) the calculated use of gimmick-based imagery and performances—most notably the viral "*gemoy*" persona—to craft a softer and more approachable image; and (3) the strategic reframing or omission of Prabowo's controversial past, particularly concerning human rights allegations. Findings suggest that this comprehensive transformation in tone, symbolism, and media engagement constituted a deliberate repositioning strategy. By embedding entertainment-driven and emotionally resonant content into the campaign, Prabowo successfully enhanced his appeal among Generation Z and millennial voters. This strategic shift ultimately contributed to his electoral success and signals a broader evolution in political communication within Indonesia's digital democracy.

Keywords: Political Communication, Campaign Strategy, Image Transformation, Gimmick Politics, Digital Media

Introduction

The simultaneous general elections in Indonesia were held on 14 February 2024. This nationwide electoral event determined the President, Vice President, and members of national, provincial, and municipal legislative bodies. Three pairs of presidential and vice-presidential candidates contested the election: Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and Ganjar Pranowo–Mahfud MD. Unlike previous elections, the 2024 contest marked a significant transition of leadership, as the incumbent President did not seek re-election.

According to the General Election Commission (KPU), the final voter list (DPT) included 204,807,222 registered voters. Notably, the majority of these voters came from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts. Specifically, 66,822,389 voters (33.60%) were Millennials, while 46,800,161 voters (22.85%) were Generation Z. Combined, they represented over 113 million people, accounting for 56.45% of the total electorate.

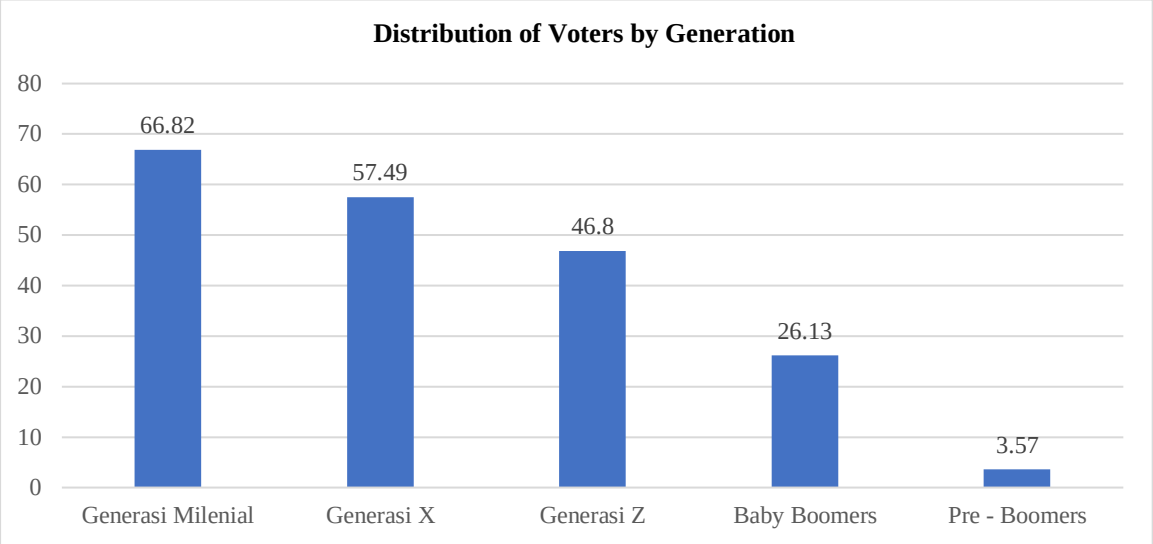


Figure 1. Distribution of voters by generation in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election.
Source: Katadata.co.id, 2023

Following the tabulation of results, the KPU declared Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the winners of the presidential race in a publicly broadcast press conference held in Jakarta. Despite the official outcome, numerous academics expressed concern, describing this election as the most problematic since the post-Reformasi democratic transition. Allegations of abuse of power surfaced, ranging from a controversial Constitutional Court ruling to politicised social assistance programmes and suspected coercion involving local officials.

In the Indonesian context, political communication typically operates through three dimensions. First, it is used by the government to convey public policy, fulfilling the public's right to information. Second, it serves political actors during campaigns to promote their platforms and cultivate support. Third, political experts and commentators use communication as a tool to mediate discourse, especially in televised debates. However, during electoral periods, political communication rarely facilitates critical scrutiny of the government. Instead, academics, democracy advocates, and NGOs often fill this void by raising issues and concerns that the mainstream media or campaign actors overlook (Ardiyanto, 2023).

Social media has become a dominant channel for political communication in Indonesia, particularly among younger voters. It enables rapid dissemination of political messages and the construction of new public personas through viral content and gimmickry (Permana, 2022). Nevertheless, this trend also marginalises more critical voices and can shift public discourse away from substantive political issues.

Indonesia ranks as the fourth-largest internet user in the world, with over 212.9 million internet users as of 2022—approximately 77% of the population. This figure highlights the increasing relevance of social media in shaping political opinion and electoral behaviour. While this connectivity allows for rapid branding shifts and engagement strategies, it also raises concerns about the superficiality of campaign content and the prioritisation of virality over meaningful policy discussion.

In response to this media environment, Prabowo Subianto enacted a radical shift in his 2024 presidential campaign strategy. Known in past elections for his assertive and militaristic persona, he rebranded himself as a more affable, humorous, and emotionally engaging figure. His previous image—often associated with authoritarian rhetoric—was replaced with the viral appeal of "*gemoy*" (adorably silly) antics, such as dancing and interacting playfully with youth. This strategic shift helped attract the attention and support of millions of young, first-time voters, many of whom were

unfamiliar with his past controversies or ideological history. Moreover, the campaign effectively displaced discussions on substantive political platforms, sidelining the programmes of rival candidates.

This study investigates the dramatic shift in Prabowo Subianto's political communication strategy in the 2024 presidential election. The research focuses on three main aspects: (1) the strategic shift from a "change" narrative to one of "continuity"; (2) the use of gimmick-based communication strategies; and (3) the reframing of historical narratives and political records, including alliances with former opponents and the selective forgetting of past controversies.

Theoretical Framework

Political campaigns serve as critical arenas for politicians seeking office, providing primary platforms through which candidates construct narratives, communicate their visions, and persuade the public. Within Indonesia's democratic system, elections over the past two decades have demonstrated that political actors across party lines view campaign strategy as a decisive factor in determining electoral outcomes. Candidates typically allocate significant intellectual, physical, and financial resources to political campaigns in an effort to shape public opinion and garner voter support (Schmitt & David, 2002).

In the Indonesian context, political campaigns function not only as vehicles for disseminating policy platforms but also as instruments for building public personas and influencing voter perceptions of both candidates and parties. Effective campaign strategies include leveraging mass media, organising face-to-face engagements, and utilising information and communication technologies—particularly social media—to reach broader and more diverse electorates. Moreover, campaigns offer candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to addressing pressing societal issues such as economic inequality, education, public health, and environmental sustainability. Thus, political campaigns are not merely about securing votes, but also about articulating a public commitment to governance and social responsibility.

Historically, political campaigns were primarily arenas for tactical manoeuvring aimed at attracting the maximum number of votes, often through populist or unrealistic promises. As Firmanzah (2008) observed, post-election outcomes frequently diverged from campaign rhetoric, with elected officials tending to neglect their earlier commitments in favour of personal or factional interests.

During the general elections of 1999 and 2004, Indonesian political campaigns relied heavily on physical materials such as billboards, posters, and banners displayed in public spaces. Television advertisements also played a central role in expanding political visibility. However, with the rapid development of information and communication technologies, campaign strategies have shifted significantly—particularly with the advent of social media. Social media platforms now constitute a dynamic and continuously evolving domain of political communication, shaped by digital innovation and shifting user behaviours.

A study by Vergeer and Hermans (2013) on the 2010 general elections in the Netherlands demonstrated the significant role of social media and online networks in shaping political strategy. The intensive use of social media by candidates and parties enables them to promote their image, disseminate messages, and interact directly with voters—thereby influencing public opinion more immediately. Through social media, candidates bypass traditional media gatekeepers, fostering direct engagement with constituents. Messaging strategies and framing techniques are employed to highlight selected issues and influence public perceptions of specific candidates or parties (Vergeer & Hermans, 2013).

A relevant case is the 2022 Philippine presidential election, analysed in the literature "Continuity, History, and Identity: Why Bongbong Marcos Won the 2022 Philippine Presidential Election." This study examined how Marcos Jr. capitalised on his father's legacy to construct a political narrative of continuity. Through strategic control of historical discourse and digital packaging of controversial themes, Marcos reframed the past and resonated with younger voters, particularly those unfamiliar with the original context (Dulay et al., 2023).

These studies from the Netherlands and the Philippines underscore how digital tools can shape campaigns and influence political behaviour, particularly among young voters. Similar trends have emerged in Indonesia, where the 2024 presidential election reflected the ascendancy of digital

campaigning. Prabowo Subianto's campaign adeptly utilised social media to reach and engage the electorate. His strategy included the deployment of political gimmicks, symbolic gestures, and the slogan "continuity", which signalled alignment with President Joko Widodo's legacy. Additionally, his team was able to soften or reframe public concerns surrounding Prabowo's controversial past—an issue that had previously hampered his electability.

Material and Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach, grounded in the understanding that political communication is not merely about message transmission, but about the construction of public meaning through symbols, narratives, and mediated performances (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It seeks to explore how Prabowo Subianto's 2024 presidential campaign represented a radical transformation in both tone and style, reshaping his public image through a combination of digital strategies, symbolic gestures, and narrative shifts.

The research employs a case study design, focusing specifically on the social media-based campaign environment constructed around Prabowo's candidacy. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and affiliated online media were selected for analysis, as they served as the primary vehicles for disseminating campaign messages and engaging with the youth electorate during the official campaign period (October 2023 to February 2024).

Data were collected through documentary analysis, comprising campaign speeches, visual materials, political memes, social media content, influencer videos, and online commentaries. These data sources were selected purposively to investigate three key aspects of the campaign strategy: (1) The shift from a reformist "change" discourse to a "sustainability" narrative aligned with the incumbent government; (2) The strategic use of political gimmicks and personalisation to construct a more relatable public persona (e.g., the "gemoy" branding and viral performances); and (3) The reframing or softening of Prabowo's controversial past, particularly concerning human rights allegations and prior public perceptions.

The interpretative analysis focuses on how language, visual cues, humour, and symbolic actions were employed to project a new identity, neutralise criticism, and emotionally resonate with Generation Z and millennial voters. Patterns of rhetorical construction, aesthetic choices, and digital interactivity were examined to reveal how the campaign built narrative authority and redefined Prabowo's political identity.

This transformation is framed as a radical change, not merely in stylistic terms, but as a comprehensive strategic repositioning. Prabowo's 2024 campaign decisively broke away from his previous image rooted in military populism and adopted a lighter, media-savvy, and emotionally engaging approach—one that embraced continuity rather than disruption.

This study is informed by the interpretative principles articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), who emphasise the centrality of meaning-making in qualitative research. Additionally, the document-based method is guided by Moleong's (2021) methodological framework, which supports the systematic use of textual and visual sources in Indonesian qualitative inquiry.

Result and Discussion

Political Campaign Strategy from "Change" to "Sustainability" Prabowo Subianto

In the context of presidential elections, political communicators emerge as crucial actors who shape the tone, content, and public reception of campaign messages. These individuals are instrumental in influencing public opinion and shaping societal perceptions of political candidates. While political communicators rarely operate in isolation, they typically function within teams comprising strategists, media advisors, and policy experts who design holistic campaign strategies.

Two general approaches can be identified within political communication strategies. When a candidate possesses strong personal appeal and enjoys broad societal support, the campaign often focuses on amplifying these attributes. In contrast, when a candidate lacks a favourable public image or struggles with low acceptance, alternative strategies are employed to enhance their visibility and likability. These strategies often involve rebranding, symbolic messaging, and digital engagement.

Prabowo Subianto, a former high-ranking military officer and current Chairman of the Gerindra Party, is recognised as a prominent political communicator known for his assertive and often emotive style during campaigns and public engagements (Hidayanti, 2015). Frequently characterised

as a populist and nationalist figure, Prabowo has been a recurring candidate in presidential elections since 2009. He initially ran as Megawati Sukarnoputri's vice-presidential candidate, before contesting the presidency independently in 2014 (with Hatta Rajasa) and 2019 (with Sandiaga Uno) (Maqfirah et al., 2025). Despite three consecutive defeats, his political presence remained significant.

The 2024 presidential election marked a strategic departure for Prabowo. Under the guidance of a new campaign team, he rebranded his image from a firm, temperamental leader to a composed and media-friendly figure. Unlike the 2019 campaign, which was characterised by populist and oppositional slogans such as "The people want change" and "Indonesia is rich but the people are poor," the 2024 campaign adopted a narrative of continuity and stability. This transformation was partly a response to the failure of aggressive rhetoric in previous contests, which had exacerbated political polarisation and social tension, even resulting in fatalities during post-election unrest.

After joining President Joko Widodo's cabinet as Minister of Defence, Prabowo gained access to political capital and public platforms that enabled him to strengthen his appeal. By closely aligning himself with President Jokowi during official visits and public events, Prabowo fostered an image of partnership rather than rivalry. This proximity conveyed a message of unity and policy continuity, particularly appealing to voters who supported Jokowi's programmes. The 2024 campaign thus repositioned Prabowo as the logical successor to Jokowi, pledging to continue major initiatives such as the relocation of Indonesia's capital city (IKN), despite criticism from academics regarding environmental and fiscal concerns.

Jokowi's strategy of political inclusion also played a role in consolidating support. By inviting former opposition figures and parties into his administration, he weakened the opposition bloc, marginalising groups such as the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). Despite controversies surrounding potential efforts to extend his term and accusations of dynastic politics, Jokowi maintained high approval ratings. According to survey data from Indikator Politik, 76.6% of respondents expressed satisfaction with his leadership (Sucipto, 2023).

A prominent example of dynastic politics emerged with Jokowi's encouragement of his son Gibran Rakabuming Raka and son-in-law Bobby Nasution to run for mayoral positions in Solo and Medan, respectively. He successfully secured their nominations through the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), even at the expense of sidelining more senior party figures. PDI-P Secretary General Hasto Kristiyanto later acknowledged this as a political misjudgement.

Controversy deepened when Jokowi's youngest son, Kaesang Pangarep, entered politics by becoming Chairman of the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) merely three days after joining. This move was widely criticised as an example of nepotism and elite capture within party structures, bypassing established mechanisms for political recruitment and advancement (Kompas, 2024).

Further concerns over the integrity of democratic processes arose from the Constitutional Court's decision to modify the eligibility criteria for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. The decision, delivered under the leadership of Anwar Usman—Jokowi's brother-in-law—allowed candidates under 40 years old to run if they had previously held an elected position. This ruling, later condemned as an ethical violation by the Constitutional Court's Honorary Council (MKMK), effectively cleared the path for Gibran to join the 2024 presidential race as Prabowo's running mate (BBC, 2024).

The resulting alliance between Prabowo and Gibran exemplifies a convergence of strategic interests: one aimed at attaining executive power, and the other at preserving political influence through familial succession. Such developments have prompted concerns about the erosion of democratic norms. As Suryatwan (2021) argues, dynastic politics undermines the principle of equal opportunity in democratic systems by privileging access based on familial networks rather than merit. These dynamics suggest a broader trend of democratic regression masked by populist rhetoric and performative inclusivity.

Prabowo Subianto's "Gimmick Gemoy" Superficial Political Campaign Strategy

In theatrical contexts, the term "gimmick" typically refers to a deliberately staged element designed to capture audience attention. Similarly, in television production, gimmicks are often employed as creative devices to re-engage viewers, particularly when the content is perceived as dull or lacking excitement. In the realm of advertising, a gimmick denotes a promotional tactic or device used by entrepreneurs to enhance product visibility and stimulate consumer interest—ultimately

aimed at driving profit. While such promotional efforts often promise ideal outcomes aligned with consumer desires, they frequently diverge from reality. In politics, gimmicks are similarly utilised to attract public attention through controversial, dramatic, or superficial means (Scalmer, 2002).

The campaign strategy implemented by Prabowo Subianto's team exemplified a gimmick-based approach during the 2024 election. Central to this strategy was the popularisation of the term "gemoy," which became associated with Prabowo himself. Previously characterised by a stern and militaristic image, Prabowo was rebranded through a gimmicky campaign that highlighted his participation in dances and light-hearted interactions. The term *"gemoy"*—a slang expression used by Indonesian youth to describe someone adorable or charming—was leveraged to portray a softer, more approachable image of the candidate.

The word *"gemoy"* first gained public traction during Prabowo's interaction with PSI party cadres, where the audience chanted the term. Initially, Prabowo misunderstood it as a conventional greeting, but it quickly gained momentum on social media and sparked a broader political movement. The emergence of the *"gemoy"* dance campaign generated polarised responses among intellectuals: while some criticised it for distracting from substantive policy discourse, others defended it as a legitimate popularity tactic. Nonetheless, it raised questions among the public about its true political message and broader significance. Ultimately, the viral spread of the term shifted online political discourse, foregrounding Prabowo's brand while marginalising his programmematic agenda.

As a high-profile political figure, Prabowo was bound to attract sustained media attention. His campaign team capitalised on this by deliberately promoting the *"gemoy"* dance across digital platforms to engage young voters. The widespread appeal of these performances, amplified through likes, comments, and shares, suggests the effective transmission and reception of the campaign's core message by the public.

Beyond its digital popularity, the *"gemoy"* dance evolved into a grassroots movement featuring flash mobs and choreographed performances incorporating traditional dances. These were prominently showcased during Car Free Day (CFD) events organised by PAN cadres and replicated in various cities such as Brebes, Blitar, Bekasi, and Bogor.

The campaign's appeal to Gen Z voters—who are constantly exposed to political content via TikTok—lies in its departure from conventional, formal politics. The *"gemoy"* dance humanised Prabowo, enabling him to be perceived as an affable and humorous grandfather figure. This shift significantly broadened his appeal, even winning over sceptics previously critical of his past, including his military history linked to alleged human rights violations.



Figure 2. Visual representation of the *"Gemoy"* campaign strategy
Sources: TV One broadcast and KompasTV TikTok content, edited for illustrative purposes

At one of the General Election Commission's campaign events, broadcast across major national TV stations, Prabowo performed the *"gemoy"* dance, waving and gyrating enthusiastically to engage his supporters. These moments were widely recorded and circulated on TikTok, further amplifying the campaign's digital footprint.

According to data from Netray Media Monitoring, between 24 November and 4 December 2023, the keyword *"gemoy"* appeared in 1,070 social media posts, garnering 57.3 million views and 2.6 million reactions. This data underscores Prabowo's successful utilisation of TikTok, where he enjoyed a 54% support rate—surpassing other vice-presidential contenders (Arimbi, 2024).

In addition to dancing, Prabowo cultivated an image of affection and empathy through his portrayal as an animal lover. A video posted on Instagram, showing him gently holding and kissing his cat, Bobby the Cat, drew massive public attention. The cat's official Instagram account, @bobbythekat, now has over 69,000 followers and features hundreds of uploads, becoming a subtle but effective platform for bolstering Prabowo's image among pet-loving youth.

In short order, the *"gemoy"* campaign successfully recast Prabowo's previously severe persona into that of a light-hearted and amiable figure. Facing criticisms that the dance was superficial or a distraction, Prabowo defended it as an unplanned expression rooted in his military experiences. His campaign team further reframed the dance as an embodiment of "joyful politics" aligned with youthful energy and unity. By interpreting critiques as personal attacks, the campaign shielded Prabowo from accountability and deep policy scrutiny.

Following the presidential debate, many political commentators concluded that Prabowo underperformed—particularly on topics like global peace indices, procurement of used defence equipment, rising national debt, and unmet housing needs for the military. His refusal to disclose state data further intensified criticism. Nevertheless, public sympathy appeared to grow rather than diminish, with supporters focusing on emotional rather than rational responses. The campaign tactically leveraged this sentiment online to drown out analytical discourse.

From a communication theory standpoint, the concept of two-way interaction emphasised by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) values reciprocal exchange between communicators and audiences. However, during the pre-election period, Prabowo and Gibran largely adopted a top-down, authoritarian communication style, avoiding public engagement and shunning debate invitations from universities and civil society institutions. This approach contrasted sharply with rival candidates who embraced such platforms.

Instead, Prabowo's team promoted populist pledges such as a free lunch programme, aimed particularly at working-class voters, many of whom had only completed junior high school (BPS, 2023). The campaign skirted scrutiny by focusing on emotional messaging while avoiding policy discussions. According to TKN, the programme would cost IDR 120 trillion in its first year, funded in part by the state budget (APBN), with total implementation costs projected to reach IDR 450 trillion annually (CNN Indonesia, 2024).

Controversy erupted over this proposal, particularly concerning its financing via reallocated fuel subsidies amidst an existing budget deficit. The proposal sparked significant public backlash, especially since the General Election Commission had not yet officially announced the election results. Critics, including academics, argued that leveraging state resources for campaign promises compromised public ethics and reflected abuses of power. The Minister of Agrarian Affairs, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono, later confirmed the programme, reinforcing suspicions of institutional complicity (Detik.com, 2024).

Political Campaign Strategy "Distorting" History and Track Records

Prabowo Subianto was born on 17 October 1951 in Jakarta. His father, Sumitro Djojohadikusumo, was a prominent economist during the Old Order era and came from an elite Indonesian family. Prabowo spent much of his childhood abroad, enabling him to become fluent in Dutch, English, French, and German. Upon returning to Indonesia, he pursued his education at the Indonesian Military Academy and graduated in 1974. He joined the Kopassus elite military unit and later became its commander in 1995. His military career continued to rise, positioning him as a formidable presidential contender in the 2024 election. Preliminary data from the General Election Commission (KPU) indicates that approximately 70% of Generation Z voters favoured the Prabowo–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket.

Despite the cheerful *"gemoy* dance" and "joyful politics" image crafted during the 2024 campaign, Prabowo's track record from previous elections has long been a subject of public debate. A former Special Forces general and son-in-law of the late President Suharto, Prabowo has consistently faced allegations of involvement in the abduction and torture of pro-democracy activists in 1997–1998.

During his service in Kopassus, Prabowo was also implicated in several military operations, including the invasion of East Timor and the suppression of separatist movements in Papua. In August 1998, an Honourable Council of Officers found him guilty of involvement in the kidnapping of nine

democracy activists, which led to his dismissal from the military, though Prabowo has persistently denied these allegations. Additionally, he was banned from entering the United States for several years due to accusations of human rights violations—a ban that was lifted upon his appointment as Minister of Defence in 2019 (Ratcliffe, 2024).

In an attempt to reframe these past allegations, Prabowo adopted a new political communication strategy during the 2024 campaign. He forged alliances with former opponents, including notable 1998 activists. One prominent example is Budiman Sudjatmiko, former chairperson of the People's Democratic Party (PRD), who later founded the *'Prabu Volunteers'* (Prabowo–Budiman) in Semarang. Budiman's public endorsement was soon followed by support from other former activists such as Andi Arif (Democratic Party), Agus Jabo (Partai Prima), Irma Hutabarat (anti-corruption activist), Natalius Pigai (human rights activist), and Rachland Nashidik (NGO figure) (Naibaho, 2024).

These figures were subsequently incorporated into the Prabowo–Gibran 2024 National Campaign Team (TKN). Many became official campaign spokespeople tasked with addressing Prabowo's human rights record. Their shift in stance—once critical, now supportive—was instrumental in deflecting scrutiny and reshaping public narratives. This development drew criticism from victims' families and civil society groups, who saw the move as a betrayal of past democratic struggles.

Despite persistent protests by democracy and human rights advocates, including weekly demonstrations in front of the Presidential Palace, the public discourse surrounding the 2024 election did not significantly prioritise Prabowo's controversial past. Hashtags like #AsalBukanPrabowo ("Anyone but Prabowo") circulated on social media, yet failed to gain substantial traction or shift public sentiment.

The diminishing concern over historical injustices among the younger generation is partly attributed to structural educational issues. The industrialisation of education, marginalisation of history subjects, and low literacy levels have contributed to limited political awareness. Data from BPS (2023) based on the March 2023 Susenas shows that only around 6–10% of Indonesians have attained higher education. This indicates a broader problem of civic disengagement and weak democratic culture among the youth.

Despite President Jokowi's commitment to human capital development, his second-term policies suggest otherwise. Accusations of pork barrel politics emerged as his administration expanded social assistance programmes during the campaign period—allegedly to bolster support for Prabowo–Gibran's candidacy. This strategy raised concerns about electoral fairness and abuse of state resources.

Unlike the 2019 election—which was marked by stark political polarisation and declining public trust in mainstream media—the 2024 election was defined by influencer-driven campaigns. Influencers, with massive digital followings, became instrumental in shaping voter behaviour and perceptions, especially among first-time voters and digitally native demographics.

These influencers often masked political endorsements as personal opinion, effectively commodifying political content. While their reach is undeniable, concerns persist about their accountability. In an environment of low political literacy, particularly among Gen Z, influencers can manipulate narratives without critical oversight.

Prabowo's team strategically employed popular influencers, including Raffi Ahmad, Nagita Slavina, Deddy Corbuzier, Atta Halilintar, Ria Ricis, Desta, Andre Taulany, Awkarin, and Rachel Vennya. According to Kompas.com (2024), these figures actively promoted the Gemoy campaign on TikTok and Instagram, increasing Prabowo's visibility and relatability. Their playful content reinforced a "one of us" persona, appealing to youth voters.

Data from Netray (2023) demonstrates the campaign's effectiveness. Between 24 November and 4 December 2023, TikTok content featuring the keyword "gemoy" generated over 57.3 million views, 2.5 million likes, 85,000 comments, and 75,500 shares across 1,070 posts by 822 unique users. While this strategy boosted engagement, the authenticity of the influencers' motives remains in question. Most observers argue their support was likely driven by political-economic incentives rather than ideological alignment.

At the same time, university academics and public intellectuals attempted to intervene in the democratic discourse. Through forums, op-eds, and open letters, they warned of growing authoritarian

tendencies and the decline of substantive democratic engagement. Unfortunately, these efforts were largely overlooked or dismissed by younger voters. In some instances, these academics were accused of harbouring political biases (Farisa, 2024).

This reflects a deeper issue in Indonesian political communication—the prioritisation of spectacle over substance. As influencers shaped electoral narratives, critical academic perspectives were marginalised. This dynamic reinforces the dominance of populist emotionalism in digital campaign strategies over reasoned democratic debate.

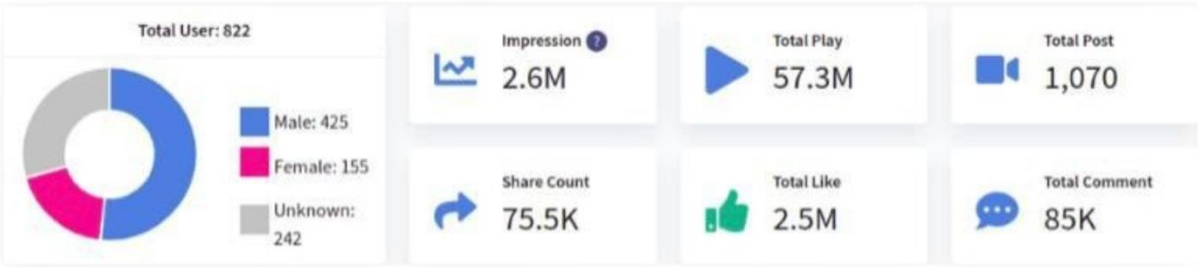


Figure 3. TikTok content statistics related to the keyword *"gemoy"* monitored
Source: Netray (Nov 24–Dec 4, 2023)

While influencers crafted persuasive, relatable narratives, their engagement lacked ideological depth or responsibility. This contrasted sharply with the critical discourses produced by academics and civil society groups, which failed to gain the same level of attention or virality. The result was a public sphere dominated by performative populism and sentiment-driven support (Wawan, 2024).

Ultimately, the 2024 election highlights the shifting terrain of political legitimacy in Indonesia, where emotional appeal, digital virality, and symbolic branding often outweigh historical accountability and policy platforms. Prabowo's campaign illustrates how strategic image rebranding—powered by digital culture—can effectively override critical civic discourse and reshape democratic contestation.

Table 2. Strategy Political Communications Prabowo Subianto

2014	**2019**	**2024**
Patriotic and Nationalistic	'The people want change,	Political Sustainability Jokowi
A firm figure	'I would rather be destroyed than see the people suffer,'	Political Dancing
Intelligent Figure	'Indonesia is rich but the people are poor	Avoid media news interviews
The Country's wealth is leaking	Supporting Identity Politics	Hire influencers to create campaign
Create Political Polarizations	'State power is controlled by one percent of the elite,	Collaboration with activist 98

Source: Processed from research data

Conclusions

The radical transformation in political campaign strategy—from confrontational populism to a more playful and emotionally resonant narrative—was pivotal in securing the electoral success of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka in the 2024 presidential election, as announced by the General Election Commission. The widespread deployment of the "Gemoy" dance gimmick, amplified through influencer-driven campaigns and social media platforms, effectively rebranded Prabowo's public image, especially among Generation Z voters. By strategically incorporating former 1998 activists into his campaign narrative, Prabowo was able to deflect longstanding criticisms related to his human rights record.

Furthermore, shifting voter demographics—most notably the predominance of those under 40, who comprised approximately 52% of the electorate—enhanced his resonance with younger voters. For many in this demographic, who are often detached from historical political narratives and display limited political engagement, Prabowo became identified not by his contentious past but by his viral dance performances, affectionate public demeanour, and digital charisma. These findings highlight the growing efficacy of image-centric, gimmick-laden, and influencer-supported campaign strategies in constructing political legitimacy within a mediatized democratic environment. It may thus be concluded that the 2024 Prabowo campaign represents a paradigmatic shift in Indonesia's political communication, signalling the ascendancy of symbolic engagement over ideological substance.

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