FROM RIVALRY TO RITUAL: *SUNGKEMAN* AS A STRATEGIC POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TOOL IN INDONESIAN POLITICS

Fitra Hadi Khaz [1], Erinaldi Erinaldi[2], Refdi Refdi [3], Dede Mirza[4] and Trio Saputra*[5]
[1234]Program Studi Administrasi Publik, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Administrasi
Lancang Kuning Dumai, Riau, Indonesia
[5]Porgam Studi Magister Kebijakan Publik, Sekolah Pascasarjana,
Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia
Corresponding Author Email: trio_saputra@unilak.ac.id

ABSTRAK. This study explores the overlooked phenomenon of "political *sungkeman* " as a culturally rooted yet politically strategic gesture performed by Prabowo Subianto toward Joko Widodo (Jokowi) during Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. While symbolic gestures have been widely studied in global political communication, limited attention has been paid to how localized traditions like *sungkeman* are adapted to mitigate polarization and influence public perception in highly mediated electoral contexts. Utilizing a qualitative literature review combined with political discourse and media framing analysis, this study investigates the role of *sungkeman* through five analytical dimensions: political reconciliation, cultural symbolism, image strategy, public response, and media narrative. The findings reveal that *sungkeman* is employed as a calculated political communication tool that evokes familiarity, fosters reconciliation at the elite level, and helps craft a respectful public image. However, public reactions remain divided along cultural, social, and political lines, reflecting tensions between perceived sincerity and performative intent. The widespread use of digital platforms and entertainment politics further amplifies or challenges the authenticity of this gesture. This research contributes to the theoretical development of political semiotics by providing a culturally specific case from the Global South, demonstrating how traditional practices are repurposed for modern political goals. The implications extend to the broader discourse on democracy, suggesting that culturally resonant communication can foster national unity, but only when grounded in genuine accountability and transparent leadership.

Keywords: Political sungkeman; Political Reconciliation; Cultural Symbolism; Political Communication; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

In an era where political communication increasingly relies on symbolic gestures to bridge divides and cultivate public trust, the Javanese tradition of *sungkeman* has emerged as a compelling tool in Indonesia's political landscape. *sungkeman*, a profound act of bowing to express humility, respect, and reconciliation, is deeply rooted in cultural values. Yet, it also serves as a strategic communication device that politicians leverage to navigate polarization, forge alliances, and reshape public perception (Hariyanto et al., 2024). The term sungkeman in this study is used symbolically rather than literally. According to the Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI), sungkem refers to kneeling and bowing as a gesture of respect, while sungkeman refers to the ceremonial act of performing sungkem. Although Prabowo did not kneel before Jokowi, his act of bowing in a formal political context constitutes what we interpret as a political sungkeman a modern, symbolic adaptation of the traditional gesture. This reflects how cultural symbols evolve and acquire new meanings in political performance. This practice, while uniquely Javanese, aligns with global phenomena where symbolic acts, such as Japan's *ojigi* or India's *pranāma*, function as political instruments to convey solidarity or penitence (Wibowo et al., 2024; Y.R. Zayats, 2012).

However, *sungkeman* raises a critical question: Is it a genuine gesture of unity or a calculated performance for electoral gain?

While this study focuses on *sungkeman* as a Javanese political gesture, we recognize that Indonesia is home to a wide range of cultural expressions used in political settings. Various ethnic groups possess their own symbolic forms of respect and leadership communication, such as *mangulosi* (Batak), *tabe* (Bugis), or *sembah* (Balinese). These diverse practices highlight the plurality of political expression in Indonesia's democracy. Furthermore, comparative global cases such as Japan's *ojigi*, India's *pranāma*, and South Africa's reconciliatory body language further illustrate that political gestures are widely used by leaders around the world to express humility, heal division, and win public trust.

The intersection of tradition and political strategy is particularly significant in Indonesia, where cultural norms heavily influence public discourse. Traditionally, *sungkeman* is a familial act of seeking blessings from elders. In politics, however, it has been repurposed to signal deference to authority figures, solicit support, or mend post-election rifts (Fatianda & Nur, 2024). Its effectiveness depends on perceived sincerity; when perceived as mere optics, it risks backlash for manipulative intent (Ana et al., 2023). This duality highlights a broader tension in political

communication: Can culturally rooted gestures sustain democratic trust amid rising skepticism? The 2019 and 2024 Indonesian presidential elections, marked by Prabowo Subianto's strategic use of *sungkeman* toward Joko Widodo (Jokowi), provide a valuable case study to explore this dynamic.

Existing research on symbolic political gestures reveals diverse applications across different cultural contexts. In Japan, the practice of *ojigi*, which involves bows ranging from 15 to 45 degrees, reflects hierarchical respect and is often used by politicians to publicly atone for scandals (Stewart, 2014). Similarly, in Korea, leaders employ deep bows to restore social harmony, reinforcing Confucian values of hierarchy (Yang & Chuenterawong, 2025). In contrast, the United States emphasizes verbal and visual reconciliation, as demonstrated by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton's 2008 joint campaign, which prioritized unity over ritual (Twali et al., 2024). Meanwhile, post-apartheid South Africa employed symbolic gestures, such as Nelson Mandela's inclusive governance, blending cultural recognition with institutional reform (Buheji & Mushimiyimana, 2025). Despite these studies, a gap remains in understanding how localized traditions like *sungkeman* function in hyper-polarized democracies, particularly where digital media amplifies or distorts their impact.

Further studies on Indonesian politics have examined *sungkeman's* role in religious settings, such as *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), where clerics' blessings legitimize political candidates (Ridho & Hariyadi, 2021). However, little attention has been paid to its secular-political adaptations, especially in elections where cultural symbolism intersects with digital campaigning. Prabowo's 2024 victory, partly attributed to his rebranding through platforms like Instagram (Wijanarko et al., 2025), suggests that *sungkeman* has evolved into a modern political tool. This gap calls for a nuanced analysis of how traditional gestures are repurposed for contemporary political goals, balancing cultural resonance against accusations of performativity.

Table 1. Valid Vote Acquisition of Prabowo Subianto in Presidential Elections 2009-2024

| Election Year	Candidate Pair	Total Votes
2009	Megawati - Prabowo Subianto	32,548,105
2014	Prabowo Subianto - Hatta Rajasa	62,576,444
2019	Prabowo Subianto - Sandiaga Uno	68,650,239
2024	Prabowo Subianto - Gibran Raka-buming Raka	96,214,691

(Source: Central Statistics Agency, 2025)

While Indonesia is a richly diverse nation with hundreds of ethnic cultures, this study focuses specifically on Javanese cultural symbolism due to its central role in shaping national political narratives. The symbolic act of *sungkeman* is deeply rooted in Javanese traditions of respect and reconciliation, and has been repeatedly employed by political actors, particularly those with Javanese heritage, such as Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo. This cultural reference is not only personal but also strategic, leveraging Javanese values that are widely recognized across the archipelago. However, this focus also raises important questions about cultural hegemony in Indonesian politics, which the study reflects upon in the conclusion.

This study addresses these gaps by analyzing *sungkeman politik* through political, cultural, and social lenses during Indonesia's 2024 election. Its novelty lies in three key contributions. First, it reveals how *sungkeman* transitioned from a reconciliatory act after the 2019 election to a strategic tool for Prabowo's 2024 coalition-building. Second, it examines public reception across demographic divides, exposing tensions between cultural pride and political cynicism. Third, it explores the role of digital media in amplifying or undermining *sungkeman's* authenticity. By doing so, the study advances theoretical frameworks on symbolic communication, offering a Global South perspective to complement Western-centric models.

The significance of this research extends beyond academia. As Indonesia navigates challenges of democratic backsliding and elite fragmentation, understanding *sungkeman's* dual potential to heal or manipulate, can inform strategies for fostering genuine political dialogue. The study aims to achieve three objectives. First, it decodes *sungkeman's* political semiotics in the context of Prabowo-Jokowi dynamics. Second, it assesses its impact on voter behavior and media narratives. Third, it evaluates its effectiveness as a reconciliation mechanism in divided societies. These objectives respond to pressing debates about the commodification of culture in politics and the ethical boundaries of tradition-based campaigning.

Structurally, this paper begins by situating *sungkeman* within Javanese philosophy and global political gestures, followed by a methodological outline combining qualitative discourse analysis and survey data. Subsequent sections analyze *sungkeman* across five dimensions: reconciliation, cultural symbolism, image-building, public response, and media framing, drawing on case studies from 2019 to 2024. The conclusion reflects

on the implications for Indonesia's democratic health, questioning whether such rituals can sustain unity amid deepening ideological divides. The framework of this study, as illustrated in Figure 1.1, examines *sungkeman politik* through five interconnected dimensions: political reconciliation, cultural symbolism, image strategy, public response, and media narratives. This multidimensional approach reveals how a single cultural practice can simultaneously serve as a bridge across political divides, a branding tool, and a lightning rod for public debate. The figure's visual representation underscores the complex interplay between these factors in shaping political outcomes.
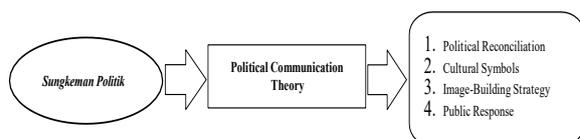
Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework

The study's framework (Figure 1) offers a model for analyzing similar phenomena in other cultural contexts where tradition and modernity intersect in the political sphere. Ultimately, this study challenges simplistic views of *sungkeman* as mere political theater. By tracing its evolution from a familial custom to a geopolitical instrument, it reveals the enduring power of cultural symbols in shaping political outcomes. At the same time, it cautions against their misuse in an age of disinformation. The findings urge policymakers to harness the unifying potential of tradition while ensuring that gestures of humility remain grounded in genuine accountability. In doing so, they can help preserve public trust in an increasingly fragmented political landscape.

The five analytical dimensions political reconciliation, cultural symbolism, image strategy, public response, and media narrative are conceptually drawn from an interdisciplinary synthesis of theories in political communication (McNair, 2011; McQuail, 2010), symbolic interactionism (Goffman, 1974), and media framing theory (Entman, 1993). This theoretical integration enables a multidimensional analysis of sungkeman politik not only as a cultural gesture but also as a strategic performance, media event, and public symbol within contemporary Indonesian political communication.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative literature review methodology to systematically investigate the phenomenon of *sungkeman politik* in Indonesian political communication. The approach combines systematic document analysis with interpretive political discourse analysis, allowing for comprehensive examination of cultural symbolism, media framing, and public reception (Muhtadi & Muslim, 2023; Wijanarko et al., 2025). By employing multiple data sources and analytical lenses, this methodology provides nuanced insights into how traditional Javanese gestures are appropriated for contemporary political purposes.

This study employs a literature review methodology, which is deemed appropriate for analyzing and addressing the research problem concerning the phenomenon of political *sungkeman*. The research is descriptive-analytical in nature, meaning that the data collected will be systematically described, analyzed, and explained to enhance understanding of the gathered information.

Data Collection

The researcher undertakes a comprehensive literature review by gathering, classifying, and examining various documents relevant to the study. These documents include books, journal articles, news reports, websites, and other pertinent sources of information. The data in this study were collected from multiple secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications (such as BPS electoral data), credible news media, social media content (especially Instagram campaign materials), and relevant books and theoretical texts. This multi-source approach ensures a comprehensive and contextual analysis of the political *sungkeman* phenomenon. A total of 40 literature sources were analyzed in this study. These included 20 peer-reviewed journal articles, 10 academic books and theoretical texts, and 10 relevant documents such as official election results, political speeches, and media/social media coverage related to *sungkeman* in the 2019 and 2024 Indonesian presidential elections. The selection was based on purposeful sampling criteria: thematic relevance, scholarly credibility, and temporal proximity to the events under study (2019–2025). The objective of this data collection process is to answer the research questions by analyzing and elucidating the data obtained. This approach allows for a thorough exploration of the political, cultural, and social dimensions of political *sungkeman* in Indonesia.

Data Analysis

The analysis is conducted through qualitative methods, focusing on the interpretation and synthesis of the collected data. The researcher employs a qualitative literature review framework

to draw conclusions regarding the role of political *sungkeman* and its implications for political communication in Indonesia. This analysis is informed by various theoretical perspectives, including political communication theories, which provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the phenomenon of political *sungkeman*.

In summary, this study utilizes a literature review approach to collect and analyze data, ensuring a robust examination of the political, cultural, and social aspects of political *sungkeman* in Indonesia. The findings aim to contribute to the understanding of how cultural values can be leveraged in political communication strategies.

The selection of the five dimensions of analysis is grounded in existing theoretical frameworks. *Political reconciliation* draws from conflict resolution and elite political studies; *cultural symbolism* from symbolic interactionism; *image strategy* from political branding theory; *public response* from audience and reception theories; and *media narrative* from framing theory. These interconnected perspectives offer a rich analytical foundation to understand the symbolic and strategic functions of *sungkeman* in political contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study builds upon previous literature in political communication and symbolic interactionism, while focusing specifically on how traditional gestures like *sungkeman* are strategically adapted in modern political contexts.

Although there is no specific theory on political *sungkeman*, political communication theories provide a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon. Utilizing existing theories in political communication allows researchers to analyze how *sungkeman* is employed as a political communication tool, how its messages are framed by the media, and how the public responds to this gesture. Such research not only offers insights into political *sungkeman* but also enriches our understanding of the dynamics of political communication in Indonesia, particularly in the context of using cultural values to achieve political objectives.

Political *sungkeman* and political communication are two distinct concepts, although they can be interconnected within the context of political strategy. Political *sungkeman* refers to the use of the *sungkeman* tradition, a Javanese cultural ritual symbolizing humility, respect, and requests for forgiveness or blessings in a political context. It is a symbolic gesture performed by a political figure to convey a specific message to the public or political opponents.

Table 2. Key Differences Between Political *sungkeman* and Political Communication

No.	Aspect	Political *sungkeman*	Political Communication
1	Definition	A political act performed by an individual or group symbolizing humility, respect, and requests for forgiveness or blessings in a political context	The process of conveying political messages by political actors (such as politicians, political parties, or governments) to the public or specific groups
2	Form	Culturally-based symbolic gesture	Various forms (speeches, media, etc.)
3	Purpose	To build a positive image through symbolism and gain advantages (support, positions, or influence)	To influence public opinion, build support, and achieve political goals (policies)
4	Context	Typically used at specific moments	Conducted continuously
5	Nature	Symbolic	Strategic
6	Medium	Physical actions (*sungkeman*)	Various mediums (verbal, written, visual)
7	Basis	Local cultural values	Political strategies and audience analysis
8	Method	Declaration of support, use of symbols, participation in political events	Speeches, debates, advertisements, social media
9	Actors	Politicians or political actors gaining political advantages	Can be performed by anyone

Source: Data Processed by Researchers, 2025

Despite their differences, political *sungkeman* can be part of a broader political communication strategy. Media and political communication teams frame *sungkeman* as evidence of maturity and willingness to reconcile, thereby reinforcing the intended narrative. Political *sungkeman* serves as a symbolic gesture that utilizes cultural values to convey political messages, while political communication encompasses a broader and more strategic process aimed at influencing public opinion. Political *sungkeman* can be an effective tool in political communication, especially in societies that value tradition and cultural symbolism. However, its success depends on the extent to which the messages conveyed through *sungkeman* align with the actual actions and policies of the political figures involved.

The research findings regarding "Political *sungkeman* " by Prabowo Subianto to Joko Widodo

(Jokowi) can be analyzed from various perspectives, including political, cultural, and social dimensions. *sungkeman*, as a Javanese tradition of respect and apology, becomes particularly symbolic when Prabowo performed this gesture towards Jokowi following the 2019 presidential election. Below are several key points that may be identified in the related research:

Political Reconciliation

Strong leadership communication ensures that an organization's mission and goals are clearly articulated, motivating stakeholders and fostering collaboration. A leader's ability to communicate effectively can significantly impact program implementation, funding acquisition, and policy influence. This study concludes that strategic leadership communication is crucial for the success of rural development initiatives. By combining a humble, service-oriented, and adaptive leadership style, Desamind creates a robust and dynamic leadership framework aligned with its mission to cultivate local leaders in rural development in Indonesia (Dhian et al., 2025).

Prabowo's *sungkeman* to Jokowi is viewed as a political reconciliation effort following the intense rivalry in the 2019 presidential election. The election was marked by sharp polarization between the Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin and Prabowo-Sandiaga Uno camps. This polarization extended beyond the political elite to the general public, creating two opposing factions with strong sentiments. Prabowo, who lost the 2019 election, initially rejected the election results, claiming systematic, structured, and massive fraud (TSM). His camp filed a lawsuit with the Constitutional Court (MK), which was ultimately rejected, further escalating the political situation. The polarization and post-election tensions triggered massive demonstrations in Jakarta, culminating in riots on May 21-22, 2019 (https://www.cnnindonesia.com). These riots resulted in several fatalities and numerous injuries, raising concerns about political and social destabilization in Indonesia. In this context, the *sungkeman* served to alleviate social tensions following the 2019 election, particularly after the May riots.

This gesture conveyed that Prabowo was ready to reconcile and acknowledge Jokowi's government legitimacy. It was not merely a cultural gesture but also a political move to heal post-election wounds and prevent deeper societal fragmentation. The *sungkeman* successfully became a symbol of reconciliation at the elite political level after the highly polarized 2019 election. Following the *sungkeman*,

the Gerindra Party joined the government coalition, and Prabowo was appointed Minister of Defense. This instance of *sungkeman* as reconciliation underscores the significant role of symbolism and culture in resolving political conflicts.

Cultural Symbols

A classic example of terrorist strategy, as described by Schmid and de Graaf in Adesoji (2010), involves political communication through acts of violence. While the importance of violent rebellion was once localized, in today's globalized world, the significance of political communication through violent spectacles poses one of the greatest challenges for policymakers in the 21st century (Onyejelem et al., 2025).

The connection between political *sungkeman* and terrorist strategies, as described by Schmid and de Graaf, lies in their shared reliance on symbolism and dramatic actions to express political messages. Although these two practices serve entirely different purposes and operate through contrasting means, one emphasizing peace and cultural tradition while the other employs violence, both can be understood within the context of political communication. Each seeks to shape public opinion and pursue political objectives. Political *sungkeman* conveys meaning through cultural values and peaceful gestures, whereas terrorist strategies rely on fear and acts of violence to achieve their aims.

In a globalized world, both phenomena highlight the importance of symbolic communication in politics and the challenges policymakers face in responding to them. Prabowo's *sungkeman* to Jokowi after the announcement of the 2024 presidential election results garnered significant attention, as such traditions are rare in global politics. According to Liputan6.com, after greeting the leaders of the MPR, Prabowo displayed a respectful demeanor, bowing twice, once forward and once to the right as a sign of courtesy to the attending dignitaries.

Furthermore, before shaking hands with President Jokowi, who was officially concluding his term, Prabowo bowed again as a form of respect. Only then did he warmly greet Jokowi. This behavior reflects a respectful and humble attitude, even during a sacred moment like the presidential inauguration. It is also seen as a symbol of respect for previous leaders and the international guests present. In various countries, especially in political contexts, post-election meetings typically occur in the form of congratulations, press conferences, or official gatherings without such strong cultural symbolism. Thus, Prabowo's *sungkeman* to Jokowi is unique

in the global political context, demonstrating how deeply cultural values, particularly Javanese traditions, can be leveraged in political settings.

Image Strategy

Bryson et al. (2015) emphasize that effective collaboration requires transparent communication, shared goals, and mutual trust among stakeholders. Similarly, Emerson et al. (2012) highlight the importance of building trust through consistent and open communication, as well as involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, which is crucial for successful collaborative governance. Theories of collaboration and collaborative governance provide a relevant framework for understanding how political *sungkeman* can be utilized as a tool to achieve these objectives. Further, Some analysts view Prabowo Subianto's *sungkeman* tradition as part of a clever image strategy, particularly in demonstrating sportsmanship and political maturity. By performing the *sungkeman*, Prabowo not only presents himself as a figure who respects Javanese culture but also as a humble individual ready to reconcile with his political opponent, Jokowi, and his supporters. This attitude can be seen as an effort to embrace Jokowi's supporters, especially in Java, which is a significant political base.

By exhibiting maturity and sportsmanship, Prabowo has the potential to enhance his popularity among the public, including those who may have previously opposed him. This is evident as Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka won the 2024 presidential election in a single round but lost in two provinces, namely West Sumatra and Aceh. The national victory in one round indicates strong overall support, while the losses in West Sumatra and Aceh suggest specific local, cultural, and political factors at play. Thus, winning in one round can serve as a strong foundation for building an inclusive and responsive government that addresses the needs of all regions. The *sungkeman* and reconciliation demonstrate that Prabowo was elected President in 2024 with the highest vote count.

By showing respect for local traditions like *sungkeman*, Prabowo successfully garnered sympathy from the majority of the Javanese population, who may have previously been hesitant or even opposed to him, as evidenced by the results across Indonesia's 38 provinces, winning in 36 provinces and losing in 2. The *sungkeman* helped Prabowo build an image as a sportsmanlike politician who prioritizes national interests. However, it is essential to remember that the success of this strategy does not solely rely on symbolism. The public will observe whether Prabowo's subsequent actions align with the messages conveyed through the *sungkeman*. Will he genuinely collaborate with all parties to foster unity, or is this merely a tactical move to gain short-term support?

In the long run, the effectiveness of this strategy will be measured by how well Prabowo can demonstrate that the sportsmanship and political maturity exhibited through the *sungkeman* are reflected in his policies and actions as a leader. If successful, this could serve as an example of how local cultural values can be positively leveraged to build an image and connect with the public while strengthening national unity.

Public Response

Effective leadership communication strategies are crucial for aligning stakeholder goals and ensuring program success. According to Men (2014), effective communication enhances organizational commitment and performance by fostering trust and collaboration. Barrett (2006) also emphasizes the importance of strategic communication in inspiring and motivating teams. Both theories highlight the significance of effective communication in building trust, collaboration, and commitment, as well as in inspiring and motivating stakeholders. In the political context, *sungkeman* can serve as a powerful tool for improving communication with the public, strengthening collaboration, and creating political stability. Public responses to Prabowo Subianto's *sungkeman* have indeed varied, reflecting the complexity and diversity of perceptions within Indonesian society. Some members of the public praise Prabowo's gesture, viewing it as a sign of humility, political maturity, and respect for Javanese cultural values. For them, the *sungkeman* is a sincere gesture worthy of appreciation, especially in the context of reducing political polarization and fostering national reconciliation.

On the other hand, some critics perceive the *sungkeman* as a purely political maneuver aimed at enhancing Prabowo's image and garnering public support, particularly from Jokowi's base. These critics may view it as part of an image strategy designed to strengthen Prabowo's political position and that of his party, Gerindra, within the government coalition. This divergence in perception is likely influenced by respondents' social, cultural, and political backgrounds. The cultural background of the Javanese community, which is familiar with the *sungkeman* tradition, may lead them to view this gesture positively as a form of respect for local values. In contrast, individuals from other regions

who are less familiar with this tradition may be more skeptical or perceive it as excessive or irrelevant. Politically, loyal supporters of Prabowo may see the *sungkeman* as evidence of his maturity and willingness to reconcile with political opponents. Conversely, Jokowi's supporters or opposition groups may interpret it as a political tactic to gain sympathy and legitimacy.

Socio-economic backgrounds also play a role; more traditional or rural communities may value symbolic gestures like *sungkeman* more highly, while urban populations, who tend to be more critical, may view it through a pragmatic and political lens. Additionally, older generations, who may appreciate tradition and cultural values, might respond more positively to the *sungkeman*, while younger generations, exposed to more information and political analysis, may be more critical and question the motives behind it.

Media and Narrative

The victory of Prabowo-Gibran in the 2024 presidential election represents the largest vote share for Prabowo compared to previous elections. Moreover, traditionally, Prabowo-Gibran won in areas dominated by opposition forces, although Jokowi's influence as President cannot be overlooked (Kuipers et al., 2024). However, the political marketing strategy employed by Prabowo-Gibran undoubtedly played a significant role in their success in the 2024 presidential election, particularly through political entertainment strategies that combine politics and entertainment to maximize electoral support from voters (Satriawan et al., 2024).

Social media has a substantial impact across various aspects of societal life, with political communication and democracy being the most affected areas. Given the view that modern democracy is not functioning well, with citizens increasingly disengaging from civil life and political participation, democracy requires an information-rich environment so that citizens can be informed about current important issues and have space for strong critical-rational discussions on matters of concern. Both are essential for shaping public opinion. Social media, such as the internet, offers hope and vital pathways for the prospects of democracy (Aondover et al., 2024).

The victory of Prabowo-Gibran in the 2024 presidential election is the result of a combination of clever political marketing strategies, Jokowi's support, and the effective use of social media as a political communication tool. The political entertainment strategy successfully attracted interest and support from voters, particularly the younger generation, while social media played a crucial role in shaping public opinion and increasing political participation. However, this victory also highlights challenges for modern democracy, such as the risks of shallow politicization and the spread of misinformation. Moving forward, it is essential to ensure that social media and political communication strategies are used responsibly to strengthen democracy rather than undermine it. Thus, Prabowo-Gibran's victory not only reflects the success of their campaign strategy but also the dynamics of Indonesian democracy in the digital era.

The media plays an essential role in framing political events such as *sungkeman*, a traditional Indonesian gesture that carries significant cultural and political weight. Framing theory posits that media selects certain aspects of reality, which ultimately shapes public narratives and influences perceptions. This process is particularly evident in how different media outlets portray events like *sungkeman*, revealing the ideological leanings and agenda-setting motives behind their coverage (Jha & Kumar, 2023; Saeed, 2012).

The concept of framing in media is not merely about the information presented but also about the contextual interpretation that is emphasized or downplayed. For instance, different media outlets might present *sungkeman* as a critical moment of political unity or as a mere ceremonial formality lacking real substance, depending on their political affiliations and objectives (Khan, 2021; Anshori et al., 2022). Comparative analyses illustrate how linguistic and rhetorical devices used in media can amplify certain narratives while minimizing alternatives, further illustrating how public opinion can be orchestrated through selective representations (Jha & Kumar, 2023; Miller, 2014).

In political contexts, the framing effects seen around *sungkeman* can mobilize individuals or shift political dynamics. This was similarly observed during significant political events in various countries, where media framing diverged dramatically based on ideological perspectives. For example, studies have demonstrated that media in different contexts, such as in Egypt, often highlight narratives that align with either state interests or social movements, affecting audience sentiments and understandings (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012; Che et al., 2021). The power of such framing is amplified during politically charged events where the implications of representation can significantly influence public perception and reaction.

Moreover, the influence of framing extends to public discourse, where media narratives can override

citizens' interpretations of events. By focusing on specific frames, media can contribute to a polarized environment where public perception is aligned with particular political agendas, as highlighted in recent analyses of media strategies in various political campaigns (Fuhat & Wahab, 2024; Hänggli, 2011). This underscores the urgent need for media literacy and critical engagement among audiences to navigate the complexities of political communication effectively. Yet, examining how *sungkeman* is framed by various media outlets provides insight into the broader dynamics of political communication in Indonesia. By delving into the methodologies employed in media analysis, researchers can better appreciate the implications of framing on public perception and political engagement within culturally significant events.

CONCLUSION

This study employs a qualitative literature review methodology to explore the political *sungkeman* between Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo (Jokowi), aiming to understand its role as a culturally and politically rich symbolic gesture in the reconciliation process following the highly polarized 2019 presidential election. The findings reveal that this Javanese tradition not only embodies values of humility and respect but also functions as an effective political communication strategy to foster a positive image, embrace the supporters of opponents, and strengthen government coalitions. Public responses to the *sungkeman* are diverse, shaped by varying social, cultural, and political backgrounds, highlighting the complexity of political symbolism in contemporary Indonesia. Furthermore, the media and social media significantly influence the framing of narratives and public opinion, while political entertainment strategies and social media utilization were pivotal in Prabowo-Gibran's victory in the 2024 presidential election. The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of how traditional cultural practices can be repurposed for modern political objectives, emphasizing the interplay between culture and politics in a digital age. Future research could delve deeper into the implications of cultural symbolism in political communication across different regions in Indonesia, as well as examine the long-term effects of such gestures on political trust and public engagement in democratic processes.

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