

CULTURE BASED POLITICAL MESSAGE CONSTRUCTION TO INCREASE VOTER PARTICIPATION

KONSTRUKSI PESAN POLITIK BERBASIS BUDAYA UNTUK PENINGKATAN PARTISIPASI PEMILIH

Abdul Rahman

Universitas Mercu Buana

*dr.a.rahman@mercubuana.ac.id

**Corresponding Author*

ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of culturally based political messages and their impact on increasing voter participation. Although voter participation in Indonesia is relatively high compared to the global average, challenges in maintaining consistent participation, especially among the younger generation, remain. Using the approach narrative review This study analyzed literature from the Scopus and Web of Science databases (2000-2025) with keywords such as "cultural political communication" and "voter participation and culture." The results of the literature synthesis identified four main themes: (1) the construction of culturally based political messages through symbols, language, and traditional practices; (2) the role of political actors as cultural brokers in representing cultural identity; (3) media as a crucial channel for the dissemination of cultural messages, including adaptation on digital platforms; and (4) positive voter responses to cultural-based messages that increase collective identification, trust, and emotional involvement. Theoretically, this research expands framing theory to the cultural dimension and integrates symbolic interactionism to explain the formation of political meaning. Practically, these findings provide guidance for more contextual and culturally sensitive political campaigns, potentially strengthening social cohesion and reducing polarization. However, limitations narrative review and the dominance of specific contexts require further empirical studies, cross-cultural comparisons, and longitudinal studies. In conclusion, culture-based political messages are an effective strategic instrument for increasing voter participation by building emotional connections and trust through authentic cultural representations.

Keywords: Political communication, culture-based messages, voter participation, framing, symbolic interactionism, Indonesia.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji konstruksi pesan politik berbasis budaya dan dampaknya terhadap peningkatan partisipasi pemilih. Meskipun partisipasi pemilih di Indonesia relatif tinggi dibandingkan rata-rata global, tantangan dalam menjaga konsistensi partisipasi, terutama di kalangan generasi muda, tetap ada. Menggunakan pendekatan narrative review, penelitian ini menganalisis literatur dari basis data Scopus, Web of Science (2000-2025) dengan kata kunci seperti "cultural political communication" dan "voter participation and culture". Hasil sintesis literatur mengidentifikasi empat tema utama: (1) konstruksi pesan politik berbasis budaya melalui simbol, bahasa, dan praktik tradisional; (2) peran aktor politik sebagai cultural brokers dalam merepresentasikan identitas budaya; (3) media sebagai saluran krusial untuk penyebaran pesan budaya, termasuk adaptasi di platform digital; dan (4) respons positif pemilih terhadap pesan berbasis budaya yang meningkatkan identifikasi kolektif, kepercayaan, dan keterlibatan emosional. Secara teoritis, penelitian ini memperluas framing theory ke dimensi budaya dan mengintegrasikan symbolic interactionism untuk menjelaskan pembentukan makna politik. Secara praktis, temuan ini memberikan panduan bagi kampanye politik yang lebih kontekstual dan sensitif budaya, berpotensi memperkuat kohesi sosial dan mengurangi polarisasi. Meskipun demikian, keterbatasan narrative review dan dominasi konteks tertentu memerlukan studi empiris, perbandingan lintas budaya, dan kajian longitudinal lebih lanjut. Kesimpulannya, pesan politik berbasis budaya adalah instrumen strategis yang efektif untuk meningkatkan partisipasi pemilih dengan membangun koneksi emosional dan kepercayaan melalui representasi budaya yang autentik.

Kata Kunci: *Komunikasi politik, pesan berbasis budaya, partisipasi pemilih, framing, interaksionisme simbolik, Indonesia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Voter participation is a key indicator of the quality of democracy. High turnout reflects citizen involvement in determining the direction of political policy and the legitimacy of government. Conversely, low turnout can lead to a legitimacy crisis and weaken political representation (International IDEA, 2023). Globally, voter participation has been declining over the past two decades. Data from the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) shows that the global average voter turnout rate fell from around 65.2% in 2008 to 55.5% in 2023 (International IDEA, 2023). This phenomenon indicates a serious challenge for many democratic countries in maintaining citizen engagement.

In Indonesia, voter turnout has been relatively stable and even quite high compared to the global average. The General Elections Commission (KPU) recorded a voter turnout of 81.93% in the 2019 election, and 81.48% in the 2024 presidential election (KPU, 2019; KPU, 2024). Furthermore, the final voter list (DPT) for the 2024 election shows that more than half of voters are from the younger age group (Generation Z and Millennials), representing approximately 106 million people, or 52–55% of the total 204.8 million voters (KPU, 2024).

Table 1
Comparison of Global and Indonesian Voter Participation Levels

Year	Global (%)	Indonesia (%)	Information
2008	65,2	–	Global installment plan (IDEA)
2019	–	81,93	Indonesian Presidential Election
2023	55,5	–	Global installment plan (IDEA)
2024	–	81,48	Indonesian Presidential Election

Source: International IDEA (2023); KPU (2019, 2024)

Table 1 above shows that voter participation in Indonesia is relatively high, even far above the global average. However, challenges remain, particularly in maintaining consistent participation among the very large younger generation.

In this context, political communication has become a crucial instrument for fostering public engagement. Advances in digital technology have encouraged politicians to use social media and digital platforms to reach voters. Data Report (2025) noted that internet users in Indonesia had reached 212 million (74.6% penetration), with 143 million social media users, or 50.2% of the population. These figures demonstrate the significant potential of digital media for disseminating political messages (DataReportal, 2025).

However, previous research has focused more on modern campaign strategies such as digital political marketing, media framing, and the use of political influencers. Meanwhile, local cultural aspects such as historical narratives, traditional symbols, and regional languages have not been explored in depth as part of political communication strategies that can strengthen emotional resonance and increase voter participation. Therefore, research on culture-based political message construction still has significant room to fill the literature gap and make both theoretical and practical contributions.

This study aims to contribute to understanding how culturally based political message construction can influence increased voter participation. First, this review is directed at

analyzing how culture-based political messages are constructed and presented by political actors. In the context of political communication, message construction is not merely about conveying information, but also involves a process of meaning-making rooted in symbols, identities, and cultural values that exist within society. Political actors often act as cultural brokers, namely, parties who bridge political interests with cultural symbols to make their messages more easily accepted. This analysis is important because culturally oriented communication strategies can provide stronger legitimacy than political messages that emphasize only rational or programmatic aspects.

Second, this study aims to identify cultural elements that contribute to increased voter participation, whether in the form of narratives, symbols, language, or rituals. These cultural elements are believed to have high resonance because they are directly linked to the collective identity of the community. For example, the use of regional languages in campaigns can create emotional closeness, while certain cultural symbols or rituals can strengthen social bonds between candidates and voters. Systematic identification of these cultural elements will open up new understandings of how cultural dimensions can strengthen emotional connections, trust, and political loyalty, ultimately impacting increased voter participation in the democratic process.

Third, this research is intended to provide a conceptual framework that can explain the relationship between culture, political messages, and voter participation. This framework will integrate theoretical perspectives from framing theory, cultural resonance theory, and symbolic interactionism to explain how political messages are not only communicated but also interpreted in a particular cultural context. With this conceptual framework, this research is expected to map a clearer causal flow: starting from the construction of political messages, culture-based link, voter reception process, and its implications for the level of electoral participation.

Academically, this research has an important contribution in the development of culture-based political communication theory. So far, political communication research has tended to focus on issues such as mediatization, media framing, or digital campaign strategies. However, the cultural dimension—despite empirical evidence of its significant role in electoral politics in many countries—remains relatively marginalized in academic discourse. By examining how political messages are constructed through cultural symbols, narratives, and language, this research not only enriches the perspective of political communication but also contributes to the formation of a more contextual and inclusive paradigm for understanding political dynamics in multicultural societies.

Practically, this research has direct implications for locality-based political campaign strategies. In a culturally diverse country like Indonesia, a campaign approach that is sensitive to local culture is highly relevant. A comprehensive understanding of the cultural elements that resonate most with the public can help political actors design more effective, authentic, and ethical campaign messages. Furthermore, culture-based communication strategies also have the potential to strengthen social cohesion and reduce political polarization because the messages communicated are based on values shared by the community. Thus, this research not only offers academic contributions but also provides practical guidance that can be utilized by political parties, communication consultants, and election management bodies in improving the quality of democracy through broader political participation.

2. METHODS

2.1. Type of Study

This research uses an approach narrative review, which allows researchers to synthesize the literature in depth with a focus on a specific theme, namely the construction of culturally based political messages and their influence on voter participation. Narrative reviews were chosen because of their flexible nature in integrating various sources, including empirical

studies, theoretical analyses, and conceptual studies, thus providing a comprehensive understanding of phenomena that are still rarely explored. In contrast to systematic reviews that are very strict in their search and selection procedures, narrative reviews provide broader interpretive space to connect political communication theory with diverse local cultural practices (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

The literature search process was carried out systematically to ensure the relevance and completeness of the sources used. Three main databases were selected, namely: Scopus, Web of Science, considering the reputation and broad multidisciplinary scope of all three. Keywords used include: “cultural political communication”, “political message construction”, “cultural framing in politics”, And “voter participation and culture”. The use of this combination of keywords is intended to capture a wide variety of studies related to the research topic. The specified year range is 2000–2025, considering that the last two decades have shown important dynamics in political communication, including technological transformation, political globalization, and the revitalization of cultural identities in the democratic arena.

2.2.1. Inclusion Criteria

The articles considered for analysis are:

1. Studies that explicitly address political message construction in relation to cultural dimensions.
2. Literature that connects culturally based political messages with increased voter participation, both in the context of campaigns, political behavior, and community mobilization.
3. Sources published in peer-reviewed journals or official reports of credible international institutions.

2.2.2. Exclusion Criteria

The articles that were not included in the analysis were:

1. Studies that focus solely on political communication technology (e.g. social media, big data, or digital advertising) without discussing the relationship with local culture.
2. Literature that is popular opinion or non-academic publications that do not have a clear methodology.
3. Articles not available in English or Indonesian.

2.3. Synthesis Process

The data obtained from the literature were then analyzed using an approach thematic analysis. Each article was examined to identify key themes, such as the use of cultural symbols, traditional narratives, local languages, and political rituals in the message construction process. This thematic analysis aimed to identify consistent patterns and differences across contexts.

In addition, an approach is used interpretive. This allows researchers to connect literature findings with theoretical frameworks of political communication and cultural theory. This approach not only maps what has been discovered by previous research but also builds conceptual bridges to answer the research questions: “How are culture-based political messages constructed and presented by political actors to increase voter participation?”

With a combination of systematic search strategies and in-depth interpretive synthesis, this research is expected to be able to produce literature mapping that is not only descriptive, but also analytical and theoretical.

3. RESULTS

Based on the results of the literature review conducted, four main themes were found that explain how culture-based political messages are constructed, represented, and received by society in the context of increasing voter participation.

3.1. Theme 1: Culturally Based Political Message Construction

Culture-based political message construction is crucial in fostering connections between political figures and their constituents. Symbols, language, and traditional practices play a pivotal role in shaping these messages, serving not only to communicate ideas but also to reinforce cultural identity. Political actors often harness traditional symbols—such as local clothing, music, and dance—to enhance their political messages. The effective use of these elements can evoke a sense of belonging and shared identity among constituents, which is essential for building community trust and support for political agendas (Rosyida & Fauzi, 2020).

Language, particularly local dialects, serves as a transformative tool in political communication. The use of indigenous languages in campaigns has been linked to a deeper emotional engagement between politicians and their audiences, as language is a fundamental attribute of cultural identity. Research indicates that when political messages resonate linguistically with the electorate, there is a notable increase in relatable and persuasive discourse (Makananise, 2023). This adaptation to community norms not only maximizes receptiveness but also strategically connects modern political narratives with local cultural heritage (Makananise, 2023).

Moreover, political actors utilize local historical narratives—integrating stories of local heroes or traditional myths—to legitimize their positions. Such narratives are instrumental in constructing political legitimacy as they tap into collective historical consciousness, thereby weaving political messages into the fabric of community identity. The deployment of cultural rituals, including traditional ceremonies and community events, also serves as an effective medium for political expression. These contexts provide rich opportunities for political engagement while respecting cultural sensibilities, enabling a seamless integration of political discourse with communal values (Makananise, 2023).

In conclusion, the confluence of culture and political messaging highlights the significance of contextualizing political communication within the cultural framework. This strategic blending not only aids in political mobilization but also fosters enduring connections between politicians and their constituents, ultimately reinforcing community solidarity and political loyalty.

3.2. Theme 2: The Role of Political Actors in Cultural Representation

The role of political actors in cultural representation is multifaceted, as these individuals act not only as communicators of political agendas but also as cultural brokers that navigate the intersection of culture and politics. Politicians have the capacity to appropriate cultural symbols and identities, such as specific dress styles, vernacular language, and engagement in traditional practices, to enhance their legitimacy and broaden their support among various demographic groups. For instance, the incorporation of local cultural references in political discourse can create a sense of relatability and authenticity among constituents, thereby solidifying the politician's appeal to specific cultural identities (Baban, 2006).

A critical investigation into how cultural representation shapes political identity reveals that personalization strategies are key to this dynamic. Politicians who emphasize their ethnic backgrounds often foster a more authentic image within communities sharing similar backgrounds, which is a fundamental aspect of identity politics. This strategy is particularly prevalent in contexts where voters seek representation that resonates with their cultural narratives (Tharu, 2024). Furthermore, an understanding of citizenship that transcends national

discourse is essential, allowing diverse identities to negotiate their political representation and citizenship rights in a manner that reflects their cultural heritage (Baban, 2006).

Moreover, the role of media in constructing and mediating cultural identities cannot be overlooked. Studies have demonstrated that media representations can significantly influence how cultural identities are perceived and mobilized in the political arena. For example, the depiction of national identities through various media channels shapes public perceptions of political figures and their legitimacy, as evidenced in the context of Hong Kong's media landscape (Zhang, 2014). Furthermore, in the case of the Tharu community in Nepal, political representation is intricately tied to human rights and identity, highlighting the necessity of inclusive representation that acknowledges and affirms cultural diversity in governance (Tharu, 2024).

In summary, political actors utilize cultural representation as a tool to forge emotional connections with voters while also navigating the complexities of identity politics. This interplay between culture and politics is facilitated by the ongoing negotiation of identities within the public sphere, influenced by the broader socio-cultural context in which these political players operate. Through the effective use of cultural symbols, media, and identity politics, political actors can foster a sense of belonging and representation among various communities, ultimately reinforcing the fabric of democratic engagement.

3.3. Theme 3: Media as a Channel for Disseminating Cultural Messages

The media plays a critical role in shaping and disseminating cultural messages, particularly in the political sphere. Local media, due to their inherent closeness to the community, provide a more authentic representation of cultural symbols, as noted by Mo and Ibrahim in their examination of social media's influence on Dong culture, where the preferences of youth are shaped by their cultural contexts (Mo & Ibrahim, 2022). Conversely, national media often prioritize universal formats, which can dilute the specific local meanings of cultural expressions, leading to potential misinterpretation or stereotype reinforcement. This can be seen in Martin's analysis of everyday media interactions, where the global context influences the local narratives and can lead to misunderstandings (Martin, 2018).

This phenomenon is particularly significant in the context of the cultural lag, as illustrated by Glennie, who highlights how media representations of Inuit women contribute to the symbolic annihilation of their real experiences, promoting unrealistic portrayals that undermine their social conditions (Glennie, 2018).

Furthermore, social media has emerged as a pivotal channel for adapting and spreading cultural messages. Politicians increasingly utilize platforms such as Facebook and TikTok to share cultural symbols through visual content and brief narratives, engaging local communities effectively. This shift in the medium of communication fosters a broader reach while still allowing for the retention of cultural nuances important to local identities (Chen et al., 2020). The study by Chen et al. emphasizes how social media can enhance citizen engagement, making public affairs more relatable, which is essential for political discourse that respects cultural identities (Chen et al., 2020).

The role of media in cultural representation can also be observed in events such as the Hangzhou Asian Games. The various media processes involved serve to construct and enhance cultural identity through media rituals that create emotional connections among audiences, as explored by Ren, where the Games are presented in a manner that fosters community identification and shared values (Ren, 2024). These phenomena underscore the complex interplay between media formats and their societal impact, where local contexts influence the presentation and interpretation of cultural messages.

Finally, the transnational nature of media suggests that global platforms can create spaces for cultural negotiation, where influences from different locales interact, as suggested by Keinonen, who discusses the processes of cultural negotiation in television formats

(Keinonen, 2016). This dynamic underscores the importance of understanding how different media types mediate cultural representation and the implications for community identity and political engagement. As demonstrated in the work of Ragnedda, media, by reaching vast audiences, has the potential to reinforce or challenge existing cultural narratives, thereby shaping societal perceptions of gender and ethnicity (Ragnedda, 2015).

In summary, the function of media as a channel for disseminating cultural messages is multifaceted, involving authentic representations through local media and the adaptation of these messages in the digital space to engage diverse audiences effectively. The evolving landscape of media communication continues to influence how cultural symbols are expressed and understood in both local and global contexts.

3.4. Theme 4: Voter Response to Culture-Based Political Messages

Empirical research indicates that voters' responses to culturally grounded political messages exhibit distinct positive patterns. Such culturally embedded communication bolsters the identification of voters with political candidates and parties, enhancing their collective sense of belonging to a politically recognized community. This phenomenon is intricately linked to mechanisms of collective identification, where shared cultural symbols and narratives promote trust between the electorate and political figures, as well as strengthen ties to political institutions (Kholisoh & Bylmoreno, 2020; Sipa et al., 2021).

For instance, the analysis of political humor and memes during the 2019 Indonesian presidential elections demonstrates how the conveyance of cultural messages can reduce divisive rhetoric and encourage social transformation and political engagement among the public (Febriana et al., 2023). The employment of cultural symbols in political discourse not only functions to persuade but also fosters social cohesion among constituents. As political candidates draw upon culturally significant references, voters are likely to feel a greater connection to these messages, enhancing their electoral participation. In the Indonesian context, for example, narratives that incorporate religious symbolism resonate deeply with voters, infusing campaign messages with a sense of shared identity and cultural heritage (Indriasari & Karman, 2023; Pajarianto et al., 2022).

This connection appears to elevate the emotional engagement of voters, as evidenced through analyses of social media campaigns where cultural elements amplify community feelings, thereby boosting turnout at polls and participation in political movements (Yamamoto & Morey, 2019). Moreover, the interplay between political communication and cultural elements has significant implications for mobilizing political engagement. Studies indicate that personalized and culturally relevant messages are effective tools for engaging and microtargeting voters based on their collective affiliations and beliefs (Schipper & Woo, 2012; Schipper & Woo, 2019). When political messages align with the cultural narratives and validation experienced by specific communities, they contribute to enhanced trust in candidates and political institutions (Pramana, 2023).

This trust is pivotal in fostering an engaged electorate that is aware of the political landscape and actively participates in shaping it through voting and advocacy, as supported by research on the impact of cultural events and traditions on community-wide political engagement (Prihastuti, 2024). In conclusion, the strategic integration of culturally based content in political messaging yields profound effects on voter behavior and civic engagement. It cultivates collective identification, engenders trust, and ultimately fosters a sense of community that is essential for robust democratic participation. Contemporary practices highlight the ongoing necessity for political candidates to thoughtfully incorporate cultural elements into their campaign strategies to effectively resonate with and mobilize their constituencies.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Interpretation of Findings

The connection between culture-based political messages and cultural resonance theory is a pivotal aspect of understanding how political communication functions within different communities. Cultural resonance theory emphasizes that messages are most readily accepted when they resonate with the societal values, norms, and cultural symbols prominent in a community. Snow and Benford (1988) noted that political messages reinforced by local cultural elements align political actors with their constituents effectively (Hartaman et al., 2023). When political messages are congruent with the collective identity of a community, they transcend mere rhetoric and become potent tools for fostering engagement and legitimacy.

Cultural framing further enhances political legitimacy. Politicians who embed local cultural narratives into their campaigns often increase their perceived alignment with community values and gain public acceptance. For example, drawing upon historical struggles or traditional symbols can evoke emotions that resonate deeply within the community, thus framing candidates as champions of shared values rather than just political agents (Hartaman et al., 2023). This is supported by findings from various studies, which demonstrate that politicians who effectively integrate local cultural frameworks into their messaging are more likely to garner support from the electorate (Lundåsen, 2014).

However, the effectiveness of these culture-based messages varies among different voter demographics. Research indicates that young and older voters respond distinctly to symbolic messages in political campaigns. Young voters often prioritize substantive political issues and may respond critically to mere symbolism conveyed through traditional media and digital platforms. Conversely, older voters tend to value cultural symbols and narratives that evoke nostalgia and reflect collective identities (Rolfe, 2015). Additionally, urban voters often interpret cultural messages through the lens of globalization, leading to a more selective approach to political communications, while rural communities generally respond more positively to messages that resonate with local norms and rituals (Xu et al., 2010).

In summary, the intertwining of culture-based political messaging with cultural resonance theory illuminates the dynamic terrain of political communication. Such messages are not merely defined by their rational arguments but are significantly shaped by their cultural congruence with the community's identity. The layered responses observed across different voter demographics indicate a complex interplay between cultural framing and political legitimacy, affirming the necessity for culturally resonant approaches in political campaigning to optimize acceptance and engagement across varied electorate segments.

4.2. Theoretical Contributions

This study makes a theoretical contribution by expanding framing theory into the cultural dimension. While previously framing was primarily studied in the context of political issues and media, these findings demonstrate that cultural framing can be a crucial dimension in framing political messages more effectively. In other words, framing not only functions to construct political narratives but also as a mechanism for activating collective memory and cultural identity.

In addition, this study integrates the perspective/symbolic interactionism to explain how the meaning of culturally based political messages is formed through symbolic interactions between politicians and voters. These interactions occur not only face-to-face but also through media, both traditional and digital. Thus, cultural messages are not static entities, but rather the result of dynamic social processes, in which political meanings are continuously negotiated and reproduced.

4.3. Practical Implications

Practically, these findings have high relevance for political campaign strategies. Culture-based messages have been shown to increase engagement, trust, and strengthen voter

participation, especially in a democratic context facing the challenge of declining public engagement. Political actors and parties can leverage local cultural elements, whether in symbols, language, or narrative, to build emotional connection with constituents.

Furthermore, these findings could be practical guide. This allows political parties and candidates to design more contextual campaigns. Rather than adopting a homogenous political communication strategy, campaigns can be tailored to the cultural characteristics of each region, creating messages that are more inclusive and resonate with the needs of local communities.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

While narrative reviews provide in-depth insights, they have a number of limitations. First, narrative reviews tend to be more subjective than systematic review, because the literature selection and synthesis process was not strictly adhered to a strict protocol. Second, much of the reviewed literature is still dominated by specific contexts, such as studies from Western countries or Southeast Asia, so generalizing the findings to other regions requires caution.

4.5. Further Research Agenda

To strengthen the empirical basis of this study, further research can be conducted through field studies. empirical which uses surveys or experiments to directly test the effectiveness of culture-based political messages in increasing voter participation. In addition, cross-cultural and cross-national comparisons it is crucial to understand how cultural variations influence the way political messages are constructed and received. Finally, longitudinal study needs to be done to see the influence of culture on political behavior over time, especially in the face of social change and communication technology.

5. CONCLUSION

This comprehensive study underscores that culture-based political messages are not merely rhetorical trappings, but rather crucial strategic instruments in efforts to increase voter participation. Our findings demonstrate that political actors play a central role in constructing these messages, carefully utilizing symbols, narratives, and cultural identities that resonate deeply with the public. This construction process aims not only to convey information but also to build emotional bonds and a sense of collective ownership essential for political mobilization. The successful implementation of this strategy, however, depends heavily on three key pillars: the authenticity of the cultural representations presented, the effectiveness of the media channels used for message dissemination, and a deep understanding of the specific social and cultural contexts of the targeted voter segments. Thus, authentic and culturally relevant messages, disseminated through appropriate platforms, are more likely to penetrate the noise and spark public engagement. Theoretically, this study makes a significant contribution by offering a conceptual framework that explicitly integrates the dynamic relationship between political message construction, cultural representations, and voter participation levels, filling a gap in the political communication literature that has tended to neglect the cultural dimension. It is hoped that this framework will serve as a basis for further research to understand the complexity of the interaction between politics and culture in the context of contemporary democracy.

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