



COMPARISON OF THE STRENGTH OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATION OF THREE PAIRS IN THE 2024 INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION: A QUALITATIVE REVIEW OF THE BANDWAGON EFFECT, EXPECTED UTILITY, AND SIMPLE CANDIDATE PREFERENCE MODELS

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election demonstrated the imbalance in political communication power between the three candidate pairs: Prabowo–Gibran (PRAGIB), Anies–Muhaimin (AMIN), and Ganjar–Mahfud (GAMA). This imbalance is evident in each pair's ability to leverage voter behavior through three models: the bandwagon effect, expected utility, and simple candidate preference as proposed by Abramowitz (1989). This study aims to compare the political communication power of the three candidate pairs in implementing these three models of voter behavior in the 2024 Presidential Election. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a focus on the political communication strategies of the three candidate pairs. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with two key informants involved in national political surveys and campaign political communications. Analysis was conducted using comparative analysis techniques to identify patterns of intensity and effectiveness of each pair's communication strategies. The results show that PRAGIB is the most dominant pair in the three models of voter behavior. They succeeded in maximizing the bandwagon effect through mass mobilization, media support, and digital campaigns. In the expected utility model, PRAGIB stands out through concrete program promises that are easily understood by the public. In simple candidate preference, Prabowo's personal image and Gibran's association with President Jokowi generated a simple but highly effective preference. AMIN held a middle ground, with strength in the urban-educated segment but limited grassroots reach. GAMA held the weakest position in all three models due to its inconsistent narrative, image, and mobilization strategy. This research confirms that the dominance of political communication was a key factor in PRAGIB's electoral success in the 2024 presidential election.

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1. INTRODUCTION

An interesting aspect of the power struggle between the three pairs in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election is the imbalance in political communication power. There is a striking disparity between the power of Prabowo

Subianto Djojohadikusumo-Gibran Rakabuming Raka (PRAGIB) and that of Anies Rasyid Baswedan-Abdul Muhaimin Iskandar (AMIN) and Ganjar Pranowo-Prof. Dr. Machfud MD (GAMA).

In the context of political communication in presidential elections, political power is the capacity of political actors to control the flow of information, shape public perceptions, and influence voter choices through the management of messages and media. This is emphasized by McNair (2011) through control over campaign messages and issue framing, Nimmo (2000) through the use of symbols, images, and rhetoric that influence public opinion, and McQuail (2010) through the use of media and communication technology to build electoral support—all of which demonstrate that a candidate's success in a presidential election is largely determined by their effectiveness in managing the political communication process.

The disparity in political communication power between the three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs is evident in how each pair utilizes voter behavior. Abramowitz (1989), in his research on the US presidential election, analyzed this using three types of voter behavior: the bandwagon effect, the expected utility model, and the simple candidate preference model.

The bandwagon effect model is simply defined as the bandwagon effect. The bandwagon effect means the effect or impact of following the crowd. This model suggests that opinions about a candidate's chances of nomination directly influence voter preferences. Voters tend to favor the candidate most likely to win the contest, because being on the winning side is more enjoyable than being on the losing side (Abramowitz, 1989).

The second model is the expected utility model. This model is more suited to rational voters. This model states that primary voters consider electability and their assessment of the candidate in making their choice. The underlying assumption of this model is that primary voters are rational actors who seek to maximize their expected utility. Candidate evaluation, in this model, represents voters' assessment of the benefits they will receive if the candidate is elected president (Aldrich, 1980, cited in Abramowitz, 1989).

The third model used as a basis for voters' decisions in choosing politicians is the simple candidate preference model. According to this model, opinions regarding a candidate's chances of nomination and electability do not influence voter preferences. Candidates are selected based on their evaluations of the most positive candidates. Voters also assume that the best candidate is likely to win the nomination and electability. In this model, the results of previous primaries and caucuses, as well as media coverage of those results, are only important if they influence voters' evaluations of the candidates (Abramowitz, 1989).

In this study, it is assumed that these three types of communicator behaviors are used as material or issues in the political messages of the three presidential/vice-presidential candidate pairs in the 2024 presidential election. Communicators use these communicator behaviors as issues/material in their political messages to ensure their communication is effective, resulting in the communicators ultimately deciding to vote for the presidential/vice-presidential candidate pair they nominate/support. In relation to the 2024 presidential election, these three voter behavior models are being used as part of political communication strategies.

The purpose of this study is to compare the political communication strengths of these three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs using the bandwagon effect, expected utility, and simple candidate preference models.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research approach is descriptive qualitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The perspective used in this study is the power of political communication, using three models of voter behavior proposed by Abramowitz (1989): the bandwagon effect, expected utility, and the simple candidate preference model. The study focuses on three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs (PRAGIB, AMIN, and GAMA) in the 2024 presidential election.

The type of data in this study is qualitative. The data collection technique was through in-depth interviews. The two main sources in this study are: (1) Much Adam Kamil (45 years old), Director of Research for Indonesian Political Indicators. Previously (2005-2013) he was a statistician at the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI). Both national-level survey institutions play a role in conducting surveys related to, among others, the 2024 presidential election. (2) Mustofa Faruq (27 years old), Head of the Millennial Communications Bureau at the Central Executive Board of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). He also serves as the General Chair of the Garuda Keadilan Party's wing organization. He was also entrusted with serving as a spokesperson for Team Amin (Anies Muhaimin) and, more specifically, as one of the founders and initiators of the "Change Together Movement."

The data analysis technique is qualitative analysis with an emphasis on comparison. Comparative analysis in qualitative research is a systematic approach that compares several cases, actors, or phenomena to identify similarities, differences, and patterns that explain variations in specific behaviors or strategies. In the context of the presidential election, comparative analysis is used to assess how each presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair builds political communication power through campaign messages, media use, image building, mobilization strategies, and influence on public perception. This method allows researchers to understand the factors that make one actor more

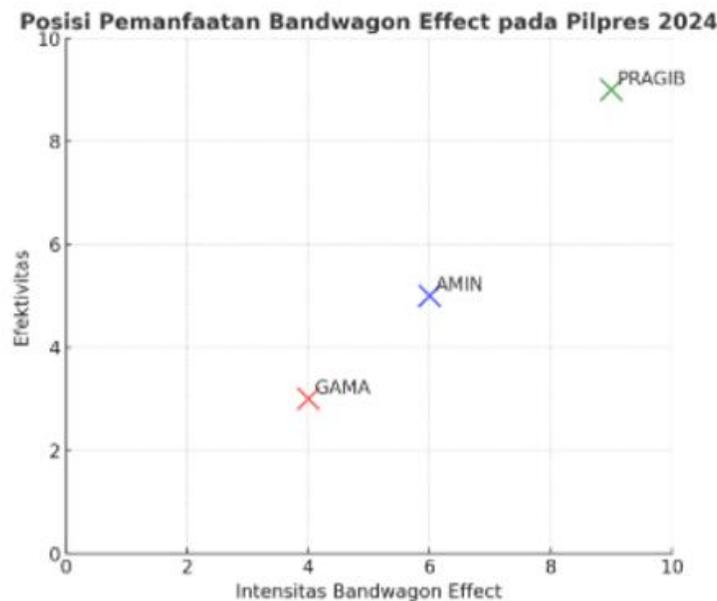
effective than another by identifying communication patterns, persuasion techniques, and public responses (Ragin, 1987; Lijphart, 1971; Mills, 2014).

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Implementation of the Bandwagon Effect Model

When compared comprehensively, it appears that PRAGIB utilized the bandwagon effect most intensively and effectively, both through offline campaigns (mass mobilization and symbolic actions) and online campaigns (social media, buzzers, and the involvement of artists/influencers). AMIN attempted to exploit the bandwagon effect through a dialogical approach and organic social media, but was limited by limited resources. GAMA, on the other hand, relatively failed to utilize this strategy effectively, resulting in minimal impact on electability.

Regarding the implementation of the bandwagon effect by each candidate pair, resource person Much Adam Kamal generally compared them using an X-Y diagram, where X = bandwagon effect intensity, and Y = bandwagon effect effectiveness, illustrated by a scatterplot in Figure 1.



Sumber: Hasil wawancara (2025)

Figure 1. Scatterplot of the Effectiveness and Intensity of Bandwagon Effect Implementation for the Three Candidate Pairs in the 2024 Presidential Election.

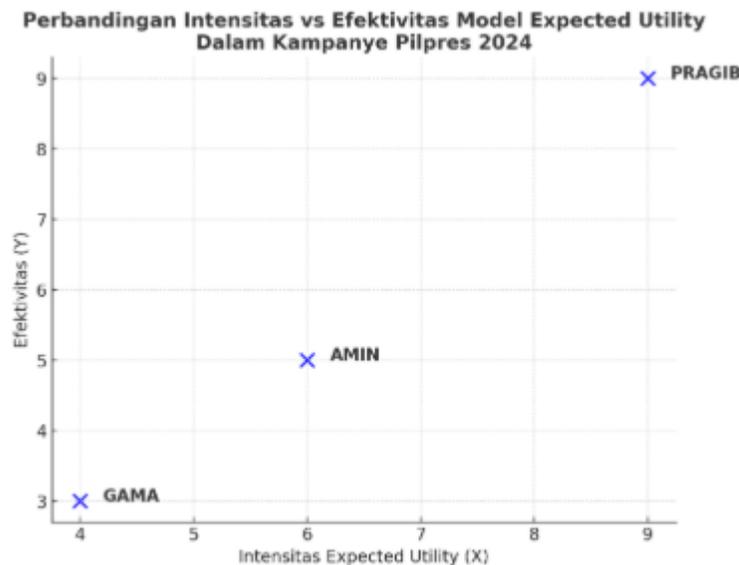
Based on the Scatter Graph (Figure 1) for each candidate pair, it can be interpreted as follows:

1. The PRAGIB candidate pair ranked highest in both intensity and effectiveness. This reflects their success in combining a strategy of mass mobilization, a popular campaign narrative (Gemoy), and optimizing social media with the support of influencers and political infrastructure. Academically, PRAGIB's bandwagon effect can be categorized as a comprehensive strategy because it reached across voter segments and significantly contributed to electoral victory.
2. The AMIN candidate pair ranked in the middle, with relatively high intensity but relatively limited effectiveness. Their "Press Anies" and "Serang Anies" activities successfully created an image of organic support from young people, the middle class, and urban groups. However, limited funding, resources, and reach to remote areas hampered the impact of this bandwagon effect on electoral outcomes. Consequently, a strong bandwagon strategy in urban and digital spaces is insufficient without being balanced by extensive political infrastructure and field mobilization.
3. The GAMA candidate pair ranked lowest in both dimensions. The low intensity of the bandwagon effect is reflected in minimal mass mobilization and a muted campaign message. Its effectiveness is also limited because ambiguous and cynical narratives weaken electoral appeal. The academic implication is that the weak utilization of the bandwagon effect demonstrates the importance of consistent political narratives and clear positioning in democratic contests.

Implementation of the Expected Utility Model

Overall, the findings from both sources indicate that the application of the expected utility model in the 2024 presidential election campaign in Indonesia is more effective when implemented in the form of simple, direct, and easily understood programs. However, this model still has limitations in explaining voter behavior comprehensively, considering that other factors such as political identity, popularity of figures, and socio-economic dynamics also influence the distribution of electoral support.

Regarding the implementation of the expected utility model by each candidate pair, the source, Much Adam Kamal, generally compared them using an X-Y diagram, where X = intensity of the bandwagon effect, and Y = effectiveness of the expected utility model, illustrated by a scatterplot in Figure 2.



Sumber: Hasil wawancara (2025)

Figure 2. Scatterplot of the Effectiveness and Intensity of the Expected Utility Model Implementation for the Three Candidate Pairs in the 2024 Presidential Election.

Based on the scatterplot (Figure 2), the following interpretations can be made for each candidate pair: There are significant differences in the utilization of the expected utility model by each candidate pair. Prabowo-Gibran (PRAGIB) holds the most prominent position, both in terms of intensity and effectiveness. This confirms that simplifying campaign programs into concrete promises (Free Nutritious Meals and continued social assistance) successfully met voter expectations, particularly those from the lower-middle class. This success aligns with the theory that voters tend to respond to programs directly related to daily needs.

Meanwhile, Anies-Muhaimin (AMIN) holds a middle position. Their intensity is quite high because their campaign, based on a vision and mission for change and a rational narrative, is consistently prioritized. However, their effectiveness is limited because these abstract ideas are difficult to translate into simple messages that are easily understood by the general electorate. This demonstrates the limitations of expected utility when programs are not communicated in a concrete and popular manner.

Ganjar-Mahfud (GAMA) holds the weakest position, both in terms of intensity and effectiveness. Their lack of program differentiation and failure to articulate their promises in simple language make them less competitive. A fragmented support base also weakens their program's appeal.

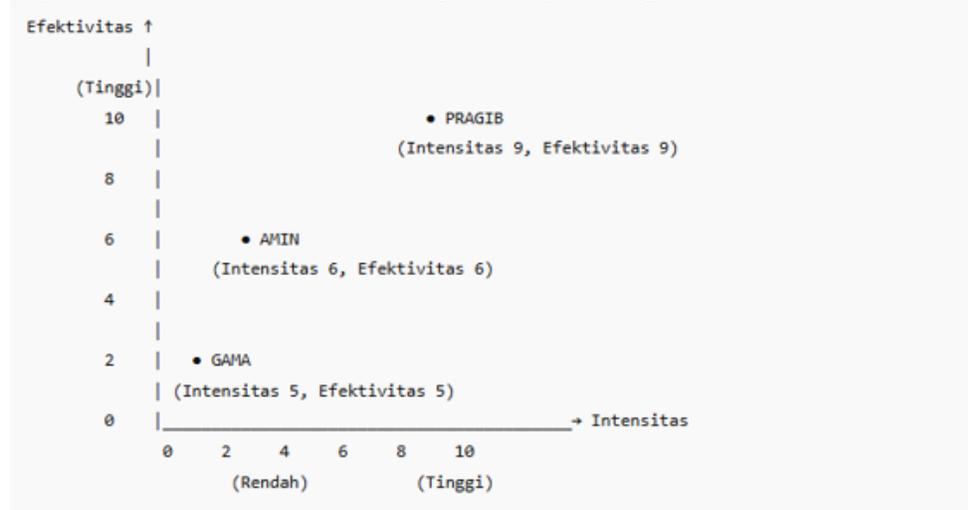
Overall, these findings indicate that, in the context of Indonesian electoral politics, the effectiveness of the expected utility model is determined more by the simplicity and affordability of the program than by the breadth of the vision or abstract argumentation. This underscores the importance of a political communication strategy that bridges policy concepts with voters' perceptions of their daily needs.

Implementation of the Simple Candidate Preference Model

Overall, the findings from both sources indicate that: (i) The simple candidate preference model is indeed the initial foundation of the campaign strategies of the three candidate pairs. However, its effectiveness is heavily influenced by the candidate's brand recognition (long-term political capital, such as that of Prabowo). (ii) The support and consolidation of political parties as social nodes that expand the candidate's reach. (iii) The suitability of the narrative to the voter segment (complex for the educated middle class, simple and popular for grassroots voters). In

the context of the 2024 Presidential Election, PRAGIB excelled in combining these three factors, thus successfully optimizing the simple candidate preference model more effectively than AMIN and GAMA.

Regarding the implementation of simple candidate preference by each candidate pair, source Much Adam Kamal generally compared them using an X-Y diagram, where X = intensity of simple candidate preference, and Y = effectiveness of simple candidate preference, illustrated by a scatterplot in Figure 3.



Sumber: Hasil wawancara (2025)

Figure 3. Scatterplot of the Effectiveness and Intensity of the Simple Candidate Preference Model Implementation for the Three Candidate Pairs in the 2024 Presidential Election.

The scatterplot (Figure 3) shows that the three candidate pairs differed in the intensity and effectiveness of their campaigns based on simple candidate preference—that is, simple likes or dislikes of the candidate. PRAGIB occupies the upper right quadrant: both simple preference intensity and effectiveness are high. AMIN occupies a middle position: quite effective in certain segments, but not dominant. GAMA occupies a relatively low position in both intensity and effectiveness, thus unable to compete with PRAGIB. The following description of the positions of each candidate pair can be interpreted as follows for each:

1. PRAGIB occupies the top position (high intensity and effectiveness). This reflects the success of the campaign, which relies on Prabowo's personal image as a firm-populist figure and a symbol of continuity, reinforced by Gibran, who is directly associated with Jokowi. This simple yet strong emotional bond creates a dominant effect that is easily understood by a broad range of voters, making PRAGIB the most effective in the simple candidate preference strategy.
2. AMIN occupies a middle position. Its intensity and effectiveness are quite strong, especially among educated, urban, and religious groups. However, limitations in reaching grassroots voters meant that his emotional appeal was not as strong as PRAGIB's. This suggests that AMIN's simple preference was more segmented, rather than cross-class.
3. GAMA ranked relatively low in terms of both intensity and effectiveness. Although Ganjar and Mahfud had positive images (people-oriented, clean, and intellectual), the simple emotional narrative that could stick in voters' minds was less successful. The power of their personal image was not strong enough to sway voter preferences broadly.

Theoretical Discussion

1. McNair's Perspective (2011): Information Control, Agenda, and Framing. McNair emphasizes that political communication is the process of producing, disseminating, and influencing messages related to power. Its essence is:
 - a. Control over the flow of information. The research results show that PRAGIB excels in: (i) mastery of social media, (ii) buzzer machines, (iii) influencer support, and (ii) mainstream media coverage. This aligns with McNair's concept that candidates who can control the flow of information will be more dominant in shaping public opinion.

- b. Campaign message management. McNair emphasizes the importance of simplifying messages for easy public absorption. The research findings show that (i) PRAGIB simplified the messages "Free Nutritious Meals" and "Continue Jokowi's Program." (ii) AMIN & GAMA tended to use complex messages. This indicates that PRAGIB was more effective in implementing strategic message management, according to McNair.
 - c. Issue framing and visibility. McNair explains that whoever sets the frame, controls public perception. Research findings: (i) PRAGIB creates a positive frame (Gemoy, program continuity). (ii) AMIN focuses on criticism and change (more risky in terms of perception). (iii) GAMA lacks a strong and consistent frame.
2. Nimmo's Perspective (2000): Symbols, Images, Emotions, and Rhetoric. Nimmo views political communication as an effort to influence public opinion through:
 - a. Political symbols. PRAGIB uses symbols: the command salute, Gemoy, and Jokowi's icon. AMIN uses symbols of change and religiosity. GAMA uses populist symbols, but these are weak in terms of virality. PRAGIB is most consistent in using symbols that are easily recognized by the masses. Nimmo calls this symbolic politics.
 - b. Candidate imagery. Nimmo explains that image is more important than substance in modern campaigns. Research findings align with this theory: (i) Prabowo is reconstructed as a "paternalistic" and "humanistic" figure. (ii) Gibran as a symbol of regeneration and modernity. (iii) AMIN emphasizes an intellectual-moral image, but is segmented. (iv) GAMA does not create a massive emotional image.
 - c. Emotion as a persuasive tool. Nimmo asserts that political communication influences the public through pathos, an emotional appeal in communication or rhetoric, namely the effort to convince or influence the audience by arousing certain feelings—such as sympathy, joy, hope, fear, anger, pride, or nostalgia. In Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory, there are three pillars of persuasion: ethos (the speaker's credibility), logos (logic/rational argument), and pathos (the audience's emotions). When Nimmo states that political communication influences the public through pathos, he emphasizes that emotion is the primary weapon in building political opinion and support. (i) PRAGIB most intensely uses emotional sentiments such as humor (Gemoy), which can create closeness and affection; Jokowi's nostalgia, which triggers a sense of security, familiarity, and continuity; and the simplicity of the message (free meals), which evokes feelings of comfort, hope, and well-being. These emotions make political messages easily accepted and remembered, making them more effective in influencing voter choices than purely rational arguments. Nimmo's theoretical study concluded: PRAGIB excelled because it was most successful in combining symbols, emotions, and images into a popular narrative.
3. McQuail's (2010) perspective: media, technology, and the structure of mass communication. McQuail provided three relevant concepts:
 - a. Media power. The research results show that PRAGIB has: (i) the greatest reach. (ii) more favorable media framing. (iii) a massive supply of digital content. McQuail asserted that the party with the greatest access to media typically wins in democratic contests.
 - b. Media as an arena of representation. McQuail stated that the candidate who appears most frequently in the media will be considered the most relevant. The research findings are consistent with this theory, as PRAGIB appears most frequently in news reports and on social media. AMIN and GAMA lag behind in terms of exposure.
 - c. Digitization of politics. McQuail emphasized that modern politics is moving toward digital mobilization. PRAGIB maximizes this through: (i) influencers & artists. (ii) viral content. (iii) low-cost, high-impact campaigns such as the "Gemoy Movement." McQuail's theoretical study concludes: PRAGIB's communication victory reflects dominance in media visibility, digital mobilization, and symbolic representation.

Empirical Discussion

- a. Bandwagon effect. Many studies show that a candidate who leads in polls and media reports will trigger a bandwagon effect. For example: Mehrabian (1998) – voters support the candidate they believe will win. Goidel & Shields (1994) – electability news increases preference for the winning candidate. Kim (2012) in South Korea: media exposure increases bandwagonism among young people. Similarly, research by Burhanuddin Muhtadi (2019) concluded that Jokowi's support increases as the image of victory broadens. Saiful Mujani (2022) stated that the intensity of news coverage increases the perceived chance of winning. The findings of these previous studies are consistent with the fact that PRAGIB is strongest in the bandwagon effect due to: (i) greater media



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- exposure; (ii) mass mobilization; and (iii) a narrative of victory. PRAGIB in 2024 repeats the same pattern as Jokowi in 2019.
- b. Expected utility model. International research shows that voters support concrete and easily understood programs. Aldrich (1980) – rational voters support candidates who provide tangible utility. Persson & Tabellini (2000) – promises of direct aid are most effective among lower-middle class voters. Simpson (2013) – populist programs increase electoral support, especially in developing countries. Similarly, a study by LIPI (2020) concluded that direct programs such as social assistance influence lower-middle class preferences. The findings of Indikator Politik (2023) concluded that voters are responsive to populist-communal messages, such as the PRAGIB Free Meal Promise, align closely with findings regarding the effectiveness of concrete programs. These research findings align with the following: (i) PRAGIB has concrete utility (free food, social assistance). (ii) AMIN: an abstract vision, making it less effective among grassroots voters. (iii) GAMA: minimal program differentiation.
 - c. Simple candidate preference. Research shows that a simple image is crucial. Popkin (1991) in *The Reasoning Voter* concluded that voters choose figures who are easy to understand. Lenz (2012) concluded that personal image trumps issue substance. McAllister (2007) suggested that a figure's popularity is a key predictor of election results. A CSIS study (2023) found that emotionally popular candidates are more likely to be elected than candidates with complex ideas. SMRC (2024) noted that Prabowo's personal image as the "father of the nation" increased dramatically after the Gemoy digital campaign. The findings of previous studies are entirely consistent with this study: PRAGIB has the simplest and most easily internalized image ("firm, funny, close to Jokowi"). AMIN and GAMA have images, but they are not mass-based.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the political communication strengths of the three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs in the 2024 Presidential Election (PRAGIB, AMIN, and GAMA) differ significantly in their utilization of the three models of voter behavior—bandwagon effect, expected utility, and simple candidate preference—used as an analytical framework by Abramowitz (1989). These differences determine the effectiveness of each pair's campaign strategy in shaping public perception, influencing voter preferences, and converting electoral support.

- 1) PRAGIB as the pair with the most dominant political communication strength. Prabowo-Gibran (PRAGIB) holds the highest position across all three models of voter behavior. They are able to combine: (i) Mastery of the media and information flow (McNair, 2011); (ii) Strong use of political symbols, images, and emotions (Nimmo, 2000); and (iii) Massive digital and mainstream media visibility (McQuail, 2010). PRAGIB was most effective in: (i) Spreading the bandwagon effect through mass mobilization, a victory image, and influencer support. (ii) Offering expected utility through simple and concrete promises such as a free nutritious meal program. (iii) Optimizing simple candidate preference through Prabowo's assertive-populist image and Gibran's association with Jokowi. Consistency of communication, simplicity of message, and media dominance made PRAGIB the most successful in converting its communication strategy into massive electoral support.
- 2) AMIN occupied a middle ground: strong in ideas, limited in reach. Anies-Muhaimin (AMIN) demonstrated a relatively high campaign intensity, particularly in: (i) Mobilizing issues of change, program rationality, and a dialogical approach. (ii) Popularity among the educated middle class, urbanites, and young voters. However, the effectiveness of their strategy was limited by: (i) Limited financial and logistical resources. (ii) Messages that tended to be abstract, thus less likely to reach grassroots voters. (iii) Limited access to major media and digital visibility compared to PRAGIB. In the voter behavior model, AMIN ranks midway in terms of bandwagon, expected utility, and simple preference.
- 3) GAMA is in the weakest position because its narrative and image are not consistently developed. Ganjar-Mahfud (GAMA) demonstrates: (i) Low intensity in the bandwagon (minimal mobilization and virality). (ii) Program messages that are not prominent and difficult to distinguish from other candidates (expected utility). (iii) A positive personal image but not massive or emotional (simple preference). These weaknesses result in low communication effectiveness and an inability to create strong electoral appeal.
- 4) Empirically, the research findings align with the results of international and national studies. This research is consistent with: (i) global bandwagon effect research (Mehrabian, 1998; Kim, 2012). (ii) Expected utility studies that confirm the effectiveness of concrete promises (Aldrich, 1980; LIPI 2020). (iii) A study of a simple candidate image as a determinant of public choice (Popkin, 1991; Lenz, 2012; SMRC 2024). Empirically, PRAGIB's communication victory reflects an ideal combination of a strong personal image, a simple populist program, and media dominance.

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- 5) General conclusions of the study. This study confirms that: (i) The strength of political communication is a primary determinant of campaign effectiveness and electoral outcomes. (ii) PRAGIB excels across all three models of voter behavior, demonstrating the most comprehensive, structured, and effective communication strategy. (iii) AMIN's campaign intensity is high but its effectiveness is limited due to uneven reach and a less straightforward message. (iv) GAMA is the weakest candidate in all communication aspects due to its uncompetitive narrative, image, and mobilization strategy. Thus, PRAGIB's success in winning the contest was influenced not only by structural political factors, but primarily by the dominant political communication that aligns with Indonesian voter behavior in 2024.

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