

Political Campaign in Southeast Asia: Visual Strategies, Public Perception, and Electoral Impact

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rise of digital political communication, campaign posters remain a key visual tool for visibility and symbolic representation in Southeast Asian elections, though their direct impact on voter behavior and final electoral outcomes remains debatable. Most existing studies, rooted in Western contexts, presume a strong link between campaign visuals and voter decisions, neglecting socio-political and cultural complexities in non-Western settings. This study explores visual communication strategies in political campaign posters from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, focusing on their representational, interactive, and compositional dimensions. Using a qualitative approach grounded in social semiotics, 75 posters from recent elections were analysed through stratified purposive sampling to ensure diversity in party affiliation, themes, and visual styles. Data were drawn from official sources, public displays, and archival records, supplemented by expert interviews and comparative analysis. The results reveal a shared reliance on national symbols, colour-coded branding, and leader-centric narratives. Thai posters employ monarchical symbolism to assert legitimacy; Malaysian visuals emphasise political continuity and ethnic inclusivity; Indonesian posters combine national and local cultural elements to strengthen voter connection. Populist messaging promising economic and social progress is widespread but contributes to urban visual congestion, which may reduce message clarity. The study also finds that Malaysia tends to favour party-driven communication, whereas Thailand and Indonesia place greater emphasis on individual candidates. Despite their prevalence, campaign posters appear to have limited persuasive power. This research contributes to political communication scholarship by contextualising campaign poster strategies within Southeast Asian electoral landscapes and offering perspectives that move beyond dominant Western centred frameworks.

Keywords: *Visual communication, campaign posters, social semiotics, Southeast Asian politics, political branding.*

INTRODUCTION

Political campaign posters are a fundamental medium of political communication designed to attract public attention and deliver campaign messages concisely and effectively. Beyond their function as campaign tools, posters serve as ideological instruments that reflect a country's political and cultural landscape. Their visual strategies are carefully crafted to shape voter perceptions and influence electoral outcomes.

Historically, posters have played a crucial role in political propaganda, particularly during wars and revolutions, such as the First and Second World Wars. They were employed to promote political causes, recruit soldiers, and mobilize public sentiment. However, the rise of television and the Internet has significantly altered the media landscape, challenging the effectiveness of posters in reaching a broad audience (Cho, 2008). Nevertheless, posters remain a vital component of political campaigns, particularly in countries with stringent

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regulations on political advertising in mass media, where they continue to establish candidate and party identities through compelling visual rhetoric.

Political campaigns have become increasingly complex in the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement. Campaign visuals are no longer merely informative; they serve as strategic tools that construct political narratives, reinforce ideologies, and evoke emotions among voters. As populism gains traction across various political landscapes, including Southeast Asia, leaders often leverage strong visual symbols to craft persuasive campaign messages. Research indicates that visual cues and candidate representations in populist campaigns significantly shape political identities and foster emotional connections with voters. (Melito & Zulianello, 2024; Nair, 2023). The extensive and often unregulated use of campaign posters in Southeast Asian elections has led to a phenomenon known as "visual pollution", the overwhelming presence of printed political materials in public spaces, creating cluttered and chaotic urban landscapes. Political parties and candidates frequently engage in an aggressive poster war, saturating streets, buildings, and public infrastructure with campaign visuals. These posters are often placed indiscriminately, contributing to urban disorder and diminishing their communicative effectiveness. While campaign posters are intended to inform and persuade voters, their excessive and haphazard distribution often results in message oversaturation, leading to voter desensitisation rather than engagement. This phenomenon, termed the "Chaotic Campaign Poster War," highlights the need to critically examine the content of campaign posters and their placement and impact on the visual environment of Southeast Asian cities.

Advancements in technology have also transformed the study of political campaign visuals. Automated visual content analysis has enabled researchers to systematically identify patterns and assess the effectiveness of visual messaging in political communication (Joo & Steinert-Threlkeld, 2021). As ideologically driven visual artifacts, Election posters employ various rhetorical strategies at representational, interactive, and compositional levels to construct favorable candidate images (Qadir, 2023).

RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite widespread political campaign posters worldwide, research on their visual communication strategies in Southeast Asia remains limited. Existing studies predominantly focus on Western contexts, often overlooking how visual elements in campaign posters interact with the socio-political and cultural dynamics of non-Western democracies. In many Southeast Asian countries, where electoral competition is intense and political advertising regulations vary, campaign posters serve as informational tools and strategic visual instruments that shape public perception and influence voter behaviour.

This study addresses this research gap by conducting a comparative analysis of political campaign poster visuals in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia through a social semiotics framework. The analysis focuses on identifying dominant visual elements such as colour schemes, typography, imagery, and symbolic motifs used in campaign posters across these three countries. It further examines how these visual strategies construct national political narratives and ideological messaging, reflecting the broader socio-political climate.

Additionally, this research investigates the extent to which local sociocultural and political contexts shape visual campaign strategies, particularly in relation to the widespread and often unregulated placement of posters in public spaces. The phenomenon, frequently described as a 'Chaotic Campaign Poster War,' has led to excessive visual clutter or 'visual pollution' in urban environments, affecting public reception and campaign messages'

effectiveness. This study explores how spatial visibility and placement strategies impact voter engagement and political discourse by analysing the interplay between campaign poster design and its physical distribution.

Through this multidimensional approach, the research contributes both theoretically and practically to discussions in political communication. It provides insights into how visual modalities influence voter perceptions and electoral dynamics in Southeast Asia, emphasizing the intersection of campaign aesthetics, socio-political narratives, and strategic public placement. Beyond a descriptive analysis, this study offers a theoretical contribution to the study of visual political semiotics, shedding light on how campaign imagery reinforces political identities and mobilizes electoral support in diverse political landscapes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of visual communication, posters are a strategic medium used to convey persuasive messages to a wide audience, both in health campaigns and political campaigns. Research by Rashid & Kadir (2023) indicates that the effectiveness of posters in campaigns is significantly influenced by the message delivery strategy employed. The research found that posters with the 'teach about solutions' and 'teach about risks' strategies were predominantly used, but the 'call to action' strategy was minimal even though, according to the Extended Parallel Process Model (EPPM) used by the researchers, it is the most effective in encouraging behaviour change. This suggests that while the visual message is conveyed, the lack of a direct call-to-action element may weaken the persuasive impact of the poster on the audience. This finding becomes relevant in the context of political campaigns, where the success of political posters is also highly dependent on the selection of message strategies that are able to arouse voters' awareness, emotions and actions.

The political landscape in Southeast Asia is diverse, with each country exhibiting distinct governance structures that shape the visual strategies of political campaign posters. As a constitutional monarchy, Thailand has a political system strongly influenced by the military, which impacts the visual language of its campaign materials (Jones, 2014). Malaysia operates under a parliamentary democracy with relatively stable political parties, leading to different approaches in visual campaign strategies (Nossal & Stubbs, 1997). Meanwhile, Indonesia, as the third-largest democracy in the world, has a dynamic multiparty presidential system that fosters a highly competitive electoral environment (Hamudy & Rifki, 2019). These variations in political systems and electoral cultures influence the use of visual modalities in campaign posters across these three countries.

Visual elements play a critical role in shaping voter perceptions and electoral outcomes. Research by Carpinella and Johnson (2016) highlights the significance of visual cues in influencing political judgments; however, many studies still lack an integrated multimodal perspective that considers social semiotics, as proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2020). Given the interplay of visual, textual, and symbolic elements in Southeast Asian political campaigns, a social semiotic approach provides a comprehensive framework to analyse how campaign posters communicate ideological and cultural narratives. This study seeks to fill this research gap by examining the dominant visual strategies employed in campaign posters from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, focusing on their representational, interactive, and compositional meanings within their respective socio-political contexts.

Visual Modality in Political Campaign Posters

Visual modality refers to the way meaning is conveyed through images, colours, layouts, and other graphical elements. Social semiotics categorizes modality into three meta-functions: representational (depicting political figures, symbols, and narratives), interactive (establishing relationships between candidates and voters), and compositional (structuring visual elements to create coherence and emphasis). Modality is not just about visual accuracy but also about the perceived truthfulness of representations within specific socio-political contexts. Different societies interpret visual elements differently based on cultural and ideological factors, making it essential to consider how campaign posters construct political realities (Darmawan, 2016).

Political Context and Campaign Visuals in Thailand

A struggle between monarchy-backed elites and pro-democracy movements has long characterized Thailand's political landscape (Bishop, 2023; Hewison, 2015). The country's campaign posters frequently incorporate royal symbols, including images of the king, the royal seal, and the national colours (Phuaphansawat, 2018). These visual cues reinforce the legitimacy of ruling factions and serve as implicit endorsements for candidates aligned with traditional power structures.

Despite the growing influence of digital media, physical campaign posters remain a primary communication tool for Thai political parties, particularly in the lead-up to elections. The 2023 general election saw an overwhelming presence of posters across urban landscapes, with candidates leveraging visual materials to make promises such as financial incentives and policy reforms. The saturation of campaign posters in public spaces reflects both the accessibility and the limitations of this medium in modern electoral strategies. In Bangkok, it is hard to find a roadside electricity pole or signpost that does not display a campaign poster. Almost every significant place in the city is covered with election posters (Figure 1).



Figure 1: An election campaign poster in 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand (Zhang & Jatusripitak, 2023)

The posters generally state what voters will receive if their candidates and parties are elected to form the next government. Promises range from a 10,000 baht cash handout for every citizen aged 16 and above, a “citizen's pension” of 3,000 baht per month, cheaper electricity, and lower income tax to a three-year suspension of debt repayments.

Campaign Visuals and Electoral Competition in Malaysia

Malaysia's political campaigns are marked by an extensive use of posters, banners, and party flags, particularly in highly competitive states such as Selangor and Penang. The 15th General Election (GE15), held on 19 November 2022, showcased intense political rivalries across multiple regions, with subsequent state elections in 2023 further amplifying the visibility of campaign materials (Hutchinson, 2023; Mohamad & Suffian, 2023; Yeoh, 2022).

Political campaigns in Malaysia are often characterised by the massive use of posters, banners, and party flags that fill the main roads and villages. These campaign tools become even more conspicuous in states like Selangor and Penang, where political competition is fierce. On the other hand, more conservative areas such as Kelantan and Terengganu adopt a more cautious approach, with campaign messages often emphasising issues of religion and morality. Research on election posters in Malaysian states found that safe constituencies usually employ visuals to remind voters of past achievements. In contrast, competitive areas utilise a dynamic style to attack opponents and create urgency (Hussin et al., 2024).

Conditions on the ground also reflected a diversity of approaches to posters and banners, with some parties focusing more on the image of their leaders, while others emphasised specific policy promises. In Selangor, for example, promises to improve economic welfare were a significant focus, with posters emphasising salary increases and other financial incentives.



Figure 2: Flags and banners of election participants in Malaysia scattered across the state (Christiastuti, 2022)

Overall, Malaysia's 2023 general elections showcase a high level of complexity and dynamism. Each party is striving to maximise its appeal through various campaigns, including posters, which are essential for reaching voters across the state. The key themes of choice for

politicians' messages in Malaysia are education, social welfare, health, and sport (Husain et al., 2024).

National and Local Symbolism in Indonesian Campaign Posters

In Indonesia, visualisations on political campaign posters often feature a combination of national and local symbols to build candidates' identities and bring them closer to voters. Indonesia is known as an archipelago and has a variety of ethnic groups, so political campaign posters frequently showcase symbols of the region where the constituency is located. Occasionally, regional languages or local cultural symbols are displayed to attract voters from specific areas. The red and white colours, reflecting the national flag, are often used, along with political party symbols.

In the past, campaign posters in Indonesia tended to use strong social symbols to mobilise certain demographic groups behind political parties. However, contemporary posters are more visually complex and candidate-focused, highlighting what they represent (Fox, 2022). Another distinctive feature of Indonesian campaign poster is the prominence of candidate portraits. These visuals often depict politicians in authoritative yet approachable poses, reinforcing leadership qualities while fostering voter trust (Putu Dudyk Arya Putra et al., 2019). The 2024 general election saw a proliferation of posters featuring well-known public figures and celebrities, demonstrating how personal branding plays a significant role in Indonesian electoral politics.

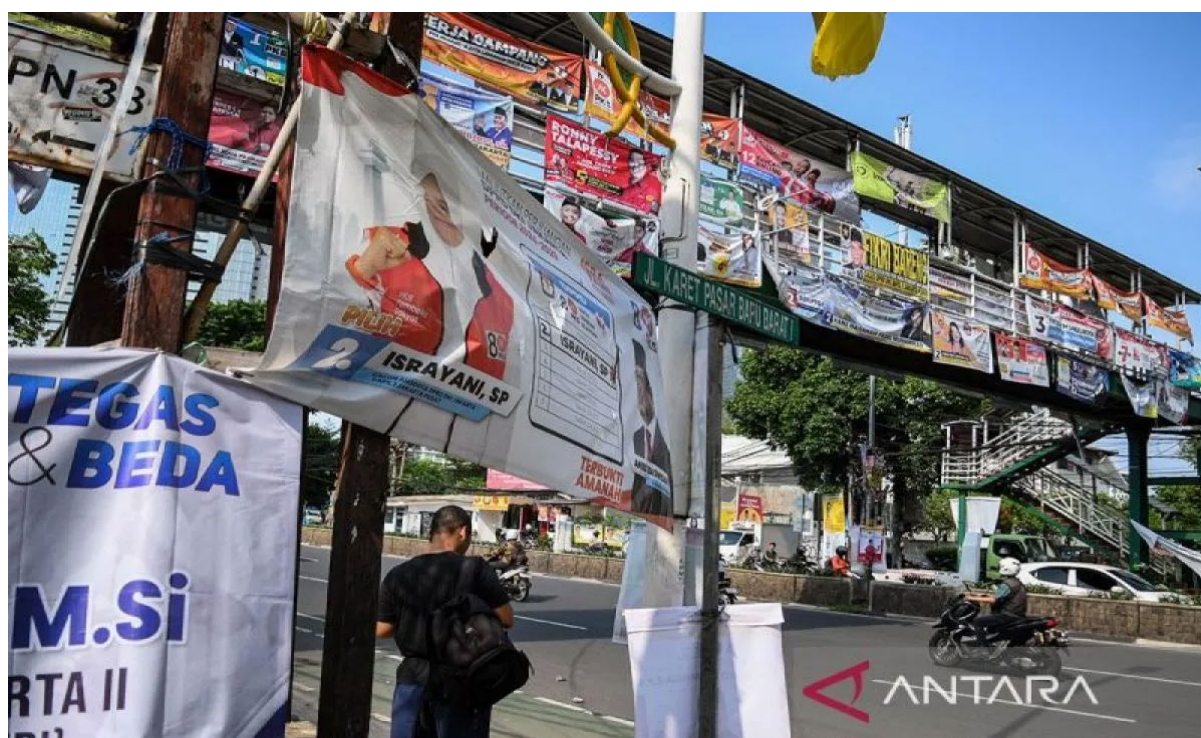


Figure 3: Political campaign posters cover pedestrian bridges as public facilities in Indonesia (Putri, 2024)

METHODOLOGY

This study applies a structured qualitative approach using social semiotics to analyse visual communication strategies in political campaign posters. The research methodology consists of three main components: research design, data collection, and analytical framework, as detailed below.

Research Design and Approach

This study uses a qualitative design based on social semiotics to examine the visual communication tactics used in political campaign posters from Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Kress and van Leeuwen's notion of social semiotics offers a framework for investigating how visual components like colours, typography, symbols, and composition are used to create meaning. In order to reveal the cultural and ideological elements present in political visuals, this study treats images as structured forms of grammar (Eriyanto, 2019).

Data Collection and Sampling Strategy

The stratified purposive sampling method ensures that the dataset captures the diversity of political and cultural contexts, enabling the study to analyse visual communication strategies comprehensively. This approach aligns with the study's objective to uncover patterns and differences in visual political messaging across Southeast Asia. The research sample consists of 75 campaign posters collected from the most-voted political parties during the latest elections (2022-2024) in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. The selection was made using a stratified purposive sampling method, ensuring that the dataset represents: (1) country-specific political parties, with posters sourced from the dominant parties in each country's latest election; (2) key campaign themes, prioritizing messages related to nationalism, populism, political stability, and socio-economic issues; and (3) diversity of visual elements, with posters selected based on variations in colours, symbols, typography, and compositional styles. Data were obtained from multiple sources, including official party websites and social media accounts, election archives and campaign reports, as well as field documentation through direct observations in public spaces where posters were displayed. The key elements of visual strategies across these three countries are systematically presented in Table 1, summarizing main symbols, message focus, target audience, candidate image, and dominant colours.

Table 1: Visual strategies in political campaign posters

Country	Main Symbol	Message Focus	Target Audience	Candidate Image	Dominant Color
Thailand	Monarchy symbol, national colors (red, white, blue)	Populism, social welfare, legitimization of power	Lower class, conservative voters	Highlighting senior figures (established power)	Red, white, blue (nationalism)
Malaysia	Dominant party color, ethnic inclusiveness	Political stability, continuity, ethnic harmony	Various ethnic groups, moderate voters	Individual candidates (stability, confidence)	Blue (party symbols, stability), multiethnic
Indonesia	National symbols (flags, cultural icons), candidate gestures (raised hands, shaking)	Patriotism, economic progress, collaboration, youth empowerment	General public, workers, youth, families, urban professionals	Leader who engages with the community, friendly, energetic	Red, white (nationalism), political party symbols

Analytical Framework and Data Interpretation

The study employs a three-dimensional analytical framework grounded in social semiotics. This framework focuses on three key aspects. The first dimension, representational meaning, explores how candidates, political ideologies, and campaign promises are visually depicted,

providing insights into the ideological narratives embedded in the posters. The second, interactive meaning, focuses on how visual elements, such as gaze and positioning, establish relationships between candidates and voters, revealing the persuasive techniques employed. Lastly, compositional meaning examines the organization of visual elements, such as balance, hierarchy, and focal points, to analyse how attention is guided and messages are prioritized.

The study employs triangulation, utilising a variety of techniques to enhance the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the findings, while ensuring that interpretations are grounded in a range of viewpoints. This entails conducting expert interviews with political communication scholars and graphic designers to validate the interpretation of visual elements, comparing and contrasting the three countries to identify trends and variations in visual political messaging, and cross-referencing the findings with the existing body of literature on political visual communication to situate them within the broader academic discourse. These triangulation procedures provide a thorough and theoretically grounded examination of campaign poster visuals, aligning with the paradigm of social semiotics. A flow chart (Figure 4) was developed to illustrate the research process, providing a clear roadmap for the structured qualitative analysis undertaken in this study.

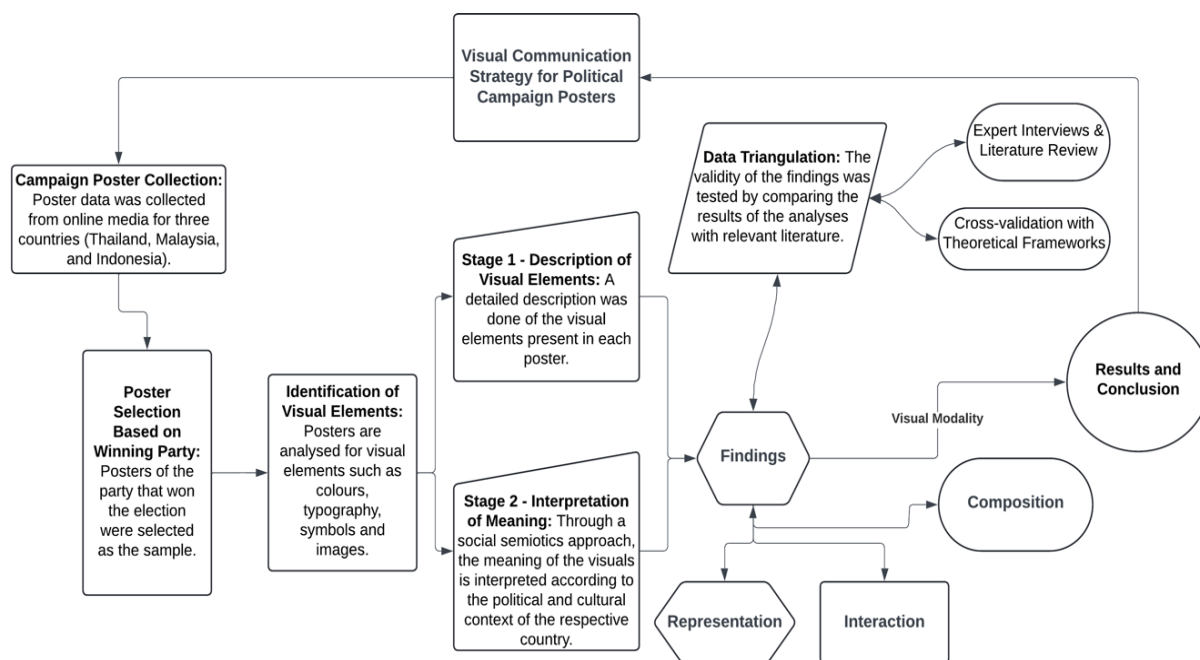


Figure 4: Research flow chart

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal distinct and overlapping patterns in the visual strategies of political campaign posters in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, shaped by each country's socio-political structure. These differences influence the symbolic, interactive, and compositional elements used in political messaging, with national symbols playing a central role in all three countries but reflecting different political priorities.

In Malaysia's parliamentary system, campaign visuals emphasize party identity and collective messaging, reinforcing political stability and party strength. In contrast, with their presidential and mixed electoral systems, Thailand and Indonesia prioritize candidate-centred visuals, where individual personas take precedence over party branding. This distinction

highlights how electoral structures shape campaign design and messaging, ultimately influencing voter perceptions and engagement. Additionally, the unregulated and widespread placement of posters in public spaces contributes to excessive visual clutter, often referred to as a *Chaotic Campaign Poster War*. The saturation of competing visuals in urban landscapes leads to visual pollution, reducing the effectiveness of campaign messaging as voters become overwhelmed by redundant or conflicting imagery.

In many Southeast Asian countries, posters are often placed indiscriminately in public spaces, on electric poles, walls, fences, and street corners as candidates seek to maximize visibility. While this strategy may enhance exposure, the absence of strict regulations results in overwhelming campaign materials, leading to inefficiency and diminished message retention among voters. Given the challenges of excessive poster placement in Southeast Asia, one possible solution is adopting Japan's regulated system. Japan enforces strict regulations requiring all candidates to display their posters exclusively on designated election boards provided by the government (Lewis & Masshardt, 2002). This structured approach ensures equal visibility among candidates and prevents financial or logistical advantages from influencing exposure. Moreover, it significantly reduces visual pollution, maintaining a cleaner and more organized campaign environment.

By implementing designated poster boards in urban and rural areas, Southeast Asian governments could create a fairer electoral landscape while minimizing the negative effects of visual clutter. A regulated system would also foster a more level playing field, preventing wealthier candidates from dominating public spaces with excessive campaign materials. Furthermore, structured poster placement could enhance voter engagement by ensuring that campaign messages are presented in an organized and accessible manner rather than being lost in a chaotic visual landscape. While some may argue that restricting poster placement could limit grassroots campaign strategies, a well-implemented regulatory framework could balance accessibility and fairness, ensuring that all candidates, regardless of financial resources, have an equal opportunity to communicate with voters.

Social Semiotics of Political Campaign Posters in Thailand

Thai political campaign posters are a complex blend of cultural symbolism, visual power and social rhetoric designed to construct persuasive political narratives. Through a social semiotics approach, the visual elements and text in this poster convey political messages and reproduce dominant values in Thai society, such as nationalism, loyalty to the monarchy, and trust in personal leadership. Visual modalities- the level of realism or believability transmitted through design to reinforce the credibility of political messages and figures.

Various parties, such as the Pheu Thai Party, Move Forward Party, For the Nation Party, Palang Pracharath Party, and others, have also emerged in Thailand as forums for people's aspirations to engage in politics. These posters generally offer populist policies expected to attract people and increase the number of voters for the party, as seen in the Palang Pracharat Party poster (Figure 5). The information on the posters is similar to political posters in other Asian countries. Campaign promises provide the lure of prosperity for the people who vote. At the top of the poster is a large text that reads, “พร้อม!!! สานต่อบัตรประชาชน เพิ่มเงิน เพิ่มสวัสดิการ ผู้มีบัตรสวัสดิการแห่งรัฐ 700 บาท/เดือน”. The message in Thai means: “Ready! Continue the State Welfare Card, Increase Funds, and Increase Benefits. State Welfare Card Holders Will Receive 700 Baht per Month.”



Figure 5: A sample of political campaign poster of Palang Pracharath Party in Thailand (Ch3plus, 2023)

The political campaign posters in Thailand prominently feature themes of economic welfare and social support, prominently showcasing initiatives like the "ประชาชน Card" (Rakyat Card). This card provides its holders with financial assistance and life insurance, highlighting the focus on improving living standards through social welfare programs. The posters identify political parties and leaders, such as "ภูมิใจไทย" (Pride Thai Party) and "พรรคเพื่อไทย" (Pheu Thai Party), complete with their respective candidate numbers, which aids voters during elections. Moreover, they emphasize promises of accessibility to services, including low-interest loans and educational funds, reflecting a commitment to directly assist citizens in enhancing their livelihoods. Additionally, the posters convey messages of stability and security, which resonate in Thailand's political context, as concerns about social unrest often influence voter behavior. Cultural symbols and nationalistic imagery are also employed to create an emotional connection with the electorate, thus fostering a sense of national identity among the populace.

Overall, these campaign posters effectively combine messages of economic improvement, party identity, service promises, and cultural representation to engage and garner support from the community. The detailed visual structure and representation of political campaign posters in Thailand are outlined in Table 2 to highlight the use of monarchical symbols, national colors, and populist promises.

Table 2: Visual strategies in political campaign posters

Aspect	Description
Design Elements	The posters employ a structured layout, integrating images of political leaders alongside their respective party symbols, making the hierarchy of information clear and approachable.
Visual Modality	The use of photographs of candidates enhances personal engagement with voters, presenting them as relatable figures and accessible leaders.
Color Usage	Incorporates nationalistic colours and symbols to evoke national pride and stability.
Symbolism	Includes election symbols like the serial number of Party with a red X to direct voters and create urgency.
Text and Typography	Prominent use of large, bold fonts ensures key messages are easily readable from a distance, while varying font sizes help prioritize information.
Message and Ideology	The underlying ideologies focus on economic support, stability, and community welfare, with messages emphasizing promises of financial assistance, loans, and social programs.
Composition	Structured to create a hierarchy, placing authoritative figures prominently to signify leadership.
Interaction with Audience	The posters encourage interaction through clear calls to action and relatable messaging, inviting voters to reflect on their needs and consider their party of choice.

Social Semiotics of Political Campaign Posters in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there are strict rules governing political campaigns, including how and where posters or other campaign materials can be displayed. Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with a system of parliamentary democracy. This means that executive power rests with the Cabinet led by the Prime Minister, while legislative power rests with the Parliament elected by the people. In this context, elections are the primary mechanism for electing representatives in Parliament (People's Council) and state legislatures (State Invitation Council). Strict rules regarding political campaigns aim to maintain the integrity of this democratic process, ensuring that elections are conducted fairly and are free from abuse of power. To analyse the visual modality of political campaign posters in Malaysia, the author obtained examples of political campaign posters from the Barisan Nasional Party (Figure 6), formed in 1973 as a replacement for the Alliance coalition, which had been in power since Malaysia's independence in 1957. The Alliance consisted of three main parties: the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA), and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). BN was formed to broaden the political support base by incorporating more parties from different ethnic groups and regions, including parties from Sabah and Sarawak and other smaller parties. The coalition adopts a consensual political approach, making decisions through inter-party deliberation (Hwang, 2009).



Figure 6: A billboard bearing Datuk Seri Reezal Merican Naina Merican's image is pictured in Kepala Batas on November 10, 2022, picture taken by Shafwan Zaidon (Loheswar, 2022)

The political posters in Malaysia's electoral landscape blend traditional and modern design elements. Prominently, the posters feature the candidates' names and party affiliations, such as "REEZAL MERICAN NAINA MERICAN," which underscores the importance of personal branding in Malaysian politics. Vibrant colours and bold typography aim to capture voters' attention and convey a sense of urgency and importance to the elections, reflecting the highly competitive nature of Malaysian political campaigns.

These visual elements also indicate the cultural significance of face-to-face engagement in Malaysian politics, where candidates are often seen as representatives of their communities. The imagery of traditional symbols and local contexts within the posters resonates with voters' identities and values, enhancing the emotional connection between the electorate and the candidates. Notably, some posters highlight local issues, such as infrastructure and community welfare, which align with the Malaysian political culture that emphasizes responsiveness to grassroots concerns. This approach fosters a sense of accountability and reinforces politicians' roles as community caretakers.

Moreover, the diverse presentation of candidates indicates Malaysia's multi-ethnic composition, where political messaging is tailored to appeal to various demographic groups, reflecting the country's complex social fabric. The interplay of party symbols and campaign slogans illustrates the entrenched party system within Malaysian politics, showing how parties leverage their historical legacies and public perceptions to mobilize support.

Overall, these campaign posters serve as a communication tool and reflect Malaysia's political culture. Visual representation, community connectivity, and party loyalty play pivotal roles in shaping electoral outcomes. The emphasis on local concerns and community representation reveals a political culture deeply rooted in the values of mutual respect and collaboration among Malaysia's diverse ethnicities. Table 3 provides a structured overview of visual representation and key design elements in Malaysian campaign posters, emphasizing stability and multi-ethnic inclusivity.

Table 3: Visual structure and representation of political campaign posters in Malaysia

Aspect	Description
Design Elements	Character images, text, and party logos are placed hierarchically. Main characters are centered, with key texts below.
Visual Modality	Imagery used in the posters is striking and multifaceted, often featuring both candidate portraits and symbolic visuals that represent local issues and cultural identities, thereby enhancing relatability.
Colour Usage	Uses natural colors and national flag colors to symbolize strong national identity.
Symbolism	Party logo and national colors prominently feature, indicating national pride and stability.
Text and Typography	Text is clear and easy to read, with important information prominently placed.
Message and Ideology	Conveys trustworthiness, stability, and national pride.
Composition	Structured to direct attention to key elements, ensuring clear and effective communication.
Interaction with Audience	Establishes a relationship through realistic portrayals and familiar symbols, fostering trust and reliability.

Social Semiotics of Political Campaign Posters in Indonesia

Campaign regulations in Indonesia are established through various laws and regulations by official institutions such as the General Election Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and other related institutions. The primary purpose of these rules is to ensure that the implementation of political campaigns occurs in an orderly and fair manner in accordance with democratic principles. One necessary legal basis for campaigns is Law No. 7/2017 on Elections, which comprehensively regulates all aspects of the campaign, from campaign methods to sanctions for violations. In addition, the General Election Commission Regulation (PKPU) also provides more detailed technical guidelines regarding campaign procedures that election participants must comply with, thus ensuring order and fairness in its implementation.

In the context of the 2024 General Election, the winning party becomes one of the essential subjects of this analysis because the visual strategies employed often reflect the dominant trends and preferences in society. The faces in political campaign posters generally feature candidates with smiling expressions, dressed formally and posed in positions that convey a sense of closeness to the people. Contestants widely adopt this style, effectively building a positive image and connection with voters. These posters often include nationalistic elements such as flags, party symbols, and slogans reinforcing a particular narrative.

In Figure 7, the poster visually employs a communication approach that emphasises the candidate's identity while reinforcing strong political affiliations. Himmatul Aliyah, as the primary candidate, is centrally positioned, dressed in white with a hijab, symbolising simplicity and religious values, both crucial factors in Indonesian politics. Meanwhile, the presence of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming in the background is not merely decorative but a deliberate branding strategy rooted in political patronage, a common practice in the region. The inclusion of national figures in a local candidate's poster exemplifies how visual strategies leverage the popularity of prominent leaders to influence voter preferences.



Figure 7: Campaign posters in Indonesia are dominated by candidate faces and symbols (Fadlurrohman, 2024)

From the perspective of public perception, the use of colours, typography, and symbols in this poster shapes the intended image of the candidate. The light blue attire worn by Prabowo and Gibran conveys a sense of calmness and reliability, while the white clothing of the main candidate signals purity and neutrality. The Gerindra Party logo, featuring a golden Garuda bird, serves as a visual element that reinforces political identity, nationalism, and the party's strength in the electoral competition. The slogan "*Bersama Indonesia Maju*" ("Advancing Indonesia Together") frames a collective vision, reflecting the broader communication pattern in Indonesia, where the rhetoric of development and stability is commonly employed to appeal to voters. The inclusion of social media account icons on campaign posters offers voters a space to interact directly with candidates. This strategy highlights the increasing integration of digital communication within Indonesian political culture as campaigns strive to modernise their outreach.

The electoral impact of this visual strategy lies in its ability to create strong political recall among voters. The candidate's ballot number, accompanied by a nail icon, exemplifies the effective use of symbols to reinforce voter awareness of the voting process. Additionally, the poster illustrates how identity politics, particularly religious affiliation, remains a significant factor in mobilizing electoral support in Indonesia. This trend aligns with broader patterns across Southeast Asia, where ethnic and religious identities often serve as key elements in political campaign strategies. Table 4 systematically presents the structural elements of Indonesian campaign posters, including national and local symbolism.

Table 4: Visual structure and representation of political campaign posters in Indonesia

Aspect	Description
Design Elements	The posters feature a blend of images, including candidate portraits and party logos.
Visual Modality	Strong emphasis is placed on photographic representations of candidates, which humanizes them and fosters a sense of connection with the voters. The inclusion of diverse individuals reflects the multicultural fabric of Indonesia.
Color Usage	Incorporates nationalistic colours like red and white, symbolizing national pride and stability. Colours are strategically used to denote political affiliations and to attract attention.
Symbolism	Various symbols, including party emblems and national motifs, are utilized to instil a sense of national pride and identity.
Text and Typography	Fonts are selected for visibility and impact, often featuring bold, large-type slogans. The text commonly conveys key messages, campaign promises, and party philosophies.
Message and Ideology	Emphasizes stability, security, and continuity, convincing voters to choose stability over change.
Composition	Main figures are centred and prominently displayed, ensuring they are the focal point.
Interaction with Audience	Establishes a connection through realistic portrayals and nationalistic symbols, fostering trust and reliability. Using informal language, hashtags, and community-driven slogans is aimed at engaging younger voters.

Comparative Analysis of Visual Political Strategies in Southeast Asia

This study reveals that while political campaign posters in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia share common visual elements—such as national symbols, populist rhetoric, and color-coded messaging—each country employs distinct visual strategies that reflect its unique sociopolitical landscape. A comparative analysis highlights both commonalities and divergences in visual communication across these three countries. Table 5 summarizes the critical elements of visual strategies, including main symbols, message focus, target audience, candidate image, and dominant colours.

Table 5: Comparative visual strategies in political campaign posters

Country	Main Symbol	Message Focus	Target Audience	Candidate Image	Dominant Colour
Thailand	Monarchy symbol, national colours (red, white, blue)	Populism, social welfare, legitimization of power	Lower class, conservative voters	Highlighting senior figures (established power)	Red, white, blue (nationalism)
Malaysia	Dominant party colour, ethnic inclusiveness	Political stability, continuity, ethnic harmony	Various ethnic groups, moderate voters	Individual candidates (stability, confidence)	Blue (party symbols, stability), multi-ethnic colours

Indonesia	National symbols (flags, cultural icons), candidate gestures (raised hands, shaking)	Patriotism, economic progress, collaboration, youth empowerment	General public, workers, youth, families, urban professionals	Leader who engages with the community, friendly, energetic	Red, white (nationalism), political party symbols
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Use of National Symbols and Political Identity

The strategic use of national symbols in political campaign posters is common across Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. However, each country employs these symbols distinctly, reflecting its unique political and cultural landscape. In Thailand, the monarchy serves as a central visual motif in political imagery, with parties incorporating royal symbols to assert legitimacy and stability. The prevalent use of red, white, and blue in campaign materials aligns with the colours of the national flag, reinforcing a sense of patriotism and unity. In Malaysia, political campaigns often blend national symbols with multi-ethnic visual elements to emphasise unity and inclusivity. The colour blue, notably utilised by the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition, conveys messages of continuity, trust, and calmness, aiming to appeal to a diverse electorate. In Indonesia, campaign visuals integrate national symbols with local cultural markers, such as regional languages, traditional attire, and indigenous motifs, to resonate with both national pride and local identities. The colour red is prominently featured, symbolising courage and the spirit of nationalism, and is associated with major political parties like the Gerindra Party or the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). These practices indicate that while national symbols anchor political identity across these nations, their specific applications are tailored to align with each country's dominant political narratives and cultural contexts. In Thailand, this manifests as an emphasis on monarchical legitimacy; in Malaysia, a focus on ethnic inclusiveness; and in Indonesia, a celebration of decentralised political engagement and regional diversity.

The Role of Populist Messaging in Visual Communication

Populist narratives manifest distinctly across Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, each reflecting unique political climates and cultural contexts. In Thailand, political campaign posters prominently feature welfare populism, with bold typography and vibrant colours underscoring promises of financial aid and economic benefits. Candidates often portray themselves as benevolent figures, emphasizing stability and economic security. In Malaysia, campaign visuals prioritize political stability and continuity, targeting a diverse populace through multilingual text and carefully curated leadership imagery. Rather than adopting radical populist appeals, these posters emphasize gradual progress and societal harmony. This strategy reflects Malaysia's complex socio-political fabric, where maintaining ethnic inclusiveness and political stability is paramount. Meanwhile, Indonesia's political posters often depict leader-centric populism, showcasing candidates engaging directly with citizens, shaking hands, attending local events, and participating in communal activities. This portrayal fosters an image of grassroots connection and accessibility, reinforcing the leader-as-representative narrative. Such imagery resonates with Indonesia's decentralized political landscape, where personal charisma and direct engagement are crucial for garnering support.

Visual Modalities in Election Posters

In visual communication theory, visual imagery is vital in creating messages that the target audience can easily understand. Based on Kress and van Leeuwen's theory, this poster

employs two main principles: salience and framing. The principle of salience is evident through the prominence of the main character, depicted in a large size at the front of the poster, which immediately attracts the audience's attention. The candidate's party name, position, and serial number are placed prominently on the side, making it easy for voters to remember the identities of both the candidate and the party. This is an essential strategy in political communication, where quick and precise identification of the candidate is critical. Furthermore, the framing principle in this poster is illustrated in how the visuals and text separate the local candidate from the national figure. Although the roles are distinct, they are linked through visual communication elements, such as eye gaze, illustrating the strong support between the national figure and the local candidate. This builds a narrative of a robust political coalition between the two levels of leadership. The discourse presented in this poster highlights the collaboration between national political elites and the aspirations of local communities, a common strategy employed in Indonesian and Thailand politics.

Implications for Political Communication and Electoral Strategy

The findings of this study highlight the strategic use of visual elements in political campaign posters across different electoral systems. In Malaysia's parliamentary system, campaign visuals emphasize party identity and collective messaging, reinforcing the strength and stability of political parties. In contrast, Thailand and Indonesia rely more on candidate-centred visuals with their presidential and mixed electoral systems, where individual personas take precedence over party branding. This distinction underscores how political structures shape the design and messaging of campaign materials, influencing voter perceptions and engagement. Furthermore, the widespread and often unregulated placement of these posters in public spaces contributes to excessive visual clutter, leading to what has been described as a 'Chaotic Campaign Poster War.' The overwhelming presence of competing posters in urban landscapes creates visual pollution and affects the effectiveness of campaign messaging, as voters are bombarded with redundant or conflicting visuals. Therefore, political actors must carefully balance visibility with strategic placement to avoid diminishing the communicative impact of their campaign materials.

Another critical implication is the tension between national and local identities in campaign visuals. In Indonesia, political parties often incorporate regional symbols, local languages, and ethnic elements to resonate with specific voter demographics. This localization strategy fosters a sense of belonging and strengthens voter affiliation with candidates. Meanwhile, in Thailand, political posters have historically leaned on nationalist iconography, including symbols associated with the monarchy. However, as younger and more progressive voter bases emerge, there is a growing need for Thai political parties to adopt more inclusive and contemporary visual narratives that transcend rigid nationalistic imagery. This shift reflects a broader transformation in political communication strategies, where adaptability to societal changes becomes crucial in maintaining voter relevance.

Moreover, the study identifies the strategic use of populist imagery, which varies according to national priorities and economic conditions. In Thailand, campaign posters frequently highlight welfare-oriented populism, showcasing promises of economic relief, social aid, and financial incentives to attract lower-income voters. In contrast, Indonesia exhibits relational populism, where visuals emphasize the candidate's proximity to the people through imagery of direct engagement, such as handshake moments and community visits. These variations demonstrate that while populist visual strategies are prevalent across

Southeast Asia, their execution must align with national socio-economic contexts to maximize voter appeal.

CONCLUSION

This research reveals significant differences in the visual communication strategies of political campaign posters in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, reflecting each country's political and cultural contexts. Although the results of this study cannot be generalised, the large number of posters in each country complicates the findings. In Thailand, visual elements such as monarchical symbols and national colours were used to emphasise populist messages and the legitimacy of power, targeting conservative voters. In Malaysia, campaign posters highlight political stability and ethnic inclusiveness by using dominant party colours and national symbols to appeal to diverse ethnic groups and moderate voters. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, posters combine national and local symbols with the building of candidates' identities, bringing them closer to voters, often featuring collaborations between national and local figures to emphasise nationalism and regional prosperity.

The findings suggest that visual modalities in political campaign posters function as communication tools and reflect broader political and social dynamics. This research's novelty lies in its in-depth comparative analysis using a social semiotics approach, which is rarely applied to the study of political visual communication in Southeast Asia. It contributes to a deeper understanding of how visual elements convey political messages and influence public perceptions.

For further research, it is recommended to expand coverage to other Southeast Asian countries and conduct longitudinal studies to observe changes in visual strategies over time. Research should also integrate audience reception analysis to understand the effectiveness of visual methods in influencing voters' perceptions and preferences. In addition, exploring the interaction between traditional visual communication strategies and social media platforms will provide insights into the evolution of political communication in the digital era. This research paves the way for developing a more comprehensive analytical framework for examining political campaign posters across different cultural and political contexts, which is essential for understanding the dynamics of elections today.

By highlighting the distinct visual strategies employed in Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia, this study enriches the theoretical understanding of visual semiotics and provides actionable insights for practitioners in political campaign design across diverse cultural landscapes.

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