

Political Propaganda and Islamic Communication Values: An Analysis of the “Empty Column” Victory in the 2018 Makassar Mayoral Election

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Abstract

This study examines political propaganda practices surrounding the victory of the “Empty Column” in the 2018 Makassar Mayoral Election, with particular attention to the intersection between political persuasion and Islamic communication values. The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach informed by Islamic da'wah and political communication perspectives. Data were collected through interviews with political party leaders and administrators, government officials, interest groups, opinion leaders, disqualified mayoral and deputy mayoral candidates, polling station officers, election supervisors, and voters, as well as through observations and written sources. The data were analyzed through interpretation and meaning-making to identify patterns of political propaganda. The analysis indicates that the bandwagon technique was a prominent form of political persuasion used in mobilizing support for the “Empty Column.” Political elites and community actors disseminated messages emphasizing Danny Pomanto's achievements and successful programs during his tenure as mayor and associated these achievements with the “Empty Column” after his disqualification from the electoral contest. The findings suggest that repeated communication through elite and community networks contributed to the construction of a positive political image of Danny Pomanto and its association with the “Empty Column.” From an Islamic communication perspective, these practices can be interpreted in relation to principles such as qaulan sadidan (truthful speech) and qaulan balighan (effective and persuasive communication), particularly where messages were grounded in claims concerning observable political achievements. However, the qualitative evidence does not establish a causal effect of the propaganda on voter behavior or demonstrate population-level persuasion. The study highlights the intersection between political propaganda, political image construction, and Islamic communication values while emphasizing the ethical responsibility associated with persuasive political communication.

Keywords: Islamic Political Propaganda; Political Communication; Bandwagon Technique; Empty Column; Makassar Mayoral Election; Islamic Da'wah.

INTRODUCTION

Politics is an important arena for pursuing the public good (*al-maslahah al-'ammah*) and exercising responsibility, justice, and accountability in public life. In Islamic political thought, these principles extend beyond individual religious obligations to the organization of social relations, the exercise of authority, and the protection of collective welfare (Al-Qaradhawi, 2019; Abdullah, 2012; Amin, 2014; Muhammad, 2012). These values are relevant to political communication because

electoral messages do more than mobilize support; they also construct political images, communicate claims about leadership, and shape perceptions of political legitimacy. Consequently, political communication can be examined not only through its persuasive strategies but also through the ethical principles governing the production and circulation of political messages. This perspective provides a basis for exploring the relationship between political propaganda and Islamic communication values without assuming that every political message delivered in a Muslim-majority society necessarily represents Islamic political communication.

Local elections are important arenas in which political parties, candidates, elites, and voters negotiate political support (Hartaman et al., 2023). In Indonesia, however, direct local elections have increasingly included contests featuring only one candidate pair. Under this arrangement, voters choose between the sole candidate and an empty-column option, making electoral competition different from conventional contests involving multiple candidates (Muharam & Pradhanawati, 2023). Previous studies have associated the emergence of single-candidate elections with political party pragmatism, incumbency advantages, weak party institutionalization, and the concentration of political resources among particular candidates or elite networks (Safa’at, 2022); (Alyonni et al., 2025). Other research has highlighted the role of incumbency and unequal coalition formation in limiting opportunities for alternative candidates to participate in local elections (Rosanti, 2020). These developments raise questions about the quality of democratic competition and the ways voters interpret political choices when electoral alternatives are restricted.

The implications of single-candidate elections extend beyond party recruitment and electoral regulations. Such contests create a distinctive communication environment in which political actors must establish legitimacy, circulate political images, and mobilize support under conditions of limited candidate competition (Sistyawan et al., 2025). Voters may rely on political elites, community leaders, and social networks to interpret political events and evaluate available choices. Nevertheless, the circulation of political messages should not automatically be equated with successful persuasion (Harutyunyan & Yeghiazaryan, 2022). Research on political cues and persuasion indicates that their influence varies according to individual orientations and contextual conditions (Cakanlar & White, 2023). Similarly, studies of political communication caution against inferring changes in voting preferences merely from exposure to campaign messages or from an election result (Druckman & Leeper, 2012); (Coppock et al., 2022). These distinctions are essential for examining propaganda as a communication practice without assuming that it directly determines electoral behavior.

The 2018 Makassar mayoral election provides a significant case for investigating these dynamics. The Appi–Cicu ticket, comprising Munafri Arifuddin and Andi Rachmatika Dewi, received support from ten political parties: Golkar, NasDem, PDI-P, PPP, PBB, Gerindra, PKS, Hanura, PAN, and PKB. This broad coalition represented substantial formal political support and access to established party networks. However, the electoral configuration changed when incumbent mayor

Danny Pomanto was disqualified from the contest, leaving Appi–Cicu to compete against the “Empty Column.” Danny Pomanto consequently remained a prominent political figure despite no longer appearing as a candidate on the ballot. His political image, governing record, and supporters therefore became relevant to the communication surrounding an election in which voters could no longer choose him directly.

The result was unexpected. Of the 565,040 valid votes recorded, the Empty Column received 300,795 votes, while Appi–Cicu obtained 264,245, producing a difference of 36,550 votes (Harianto et al., 2020). The Empty Column also prevailed in thirteen of Makassar’s fifteen subdistricts, while Appi–Cicu won in Manggala and Tamalate. This outcome demonstrates the geographical breadth of support for the Empty Column, but the vote totals alone cannot explain how that support was constructed or why individual voters selected that option. Nor does the result establish that a particular propaganda technique caused the victory. Instead, it provides an empirical context for examining the communication practices through which political images, public evaluations, and collective preferences were articulated during the election.

Existing studies of single-candidate elections have largely examined party pragmatism, candidate nomination, incumbency, political coalitions, electoral regulations, and voter behavior. Research on the Makassar election has also addressed its institutional and political circumstances. However, less attention has been given to how political communication connected the image of a political figure who was absent from the ballot to an available electoral option. This issue is important because support for the Empty Column could not be explained simply as support for an alternative candidate. Rather, the case raises questions about how political actors and community networks communicated the meaning of the Empty Column and how Danny Pomanto’s political image was associated with that choice. Addressing this gap shifts the analytical focus from the institutional origins of single-candidate elections to the communicative processes through which political support is represented, circulated, and interpreted.

This study examines these processes through political communication and propaganda, with particular attention to the *bandwagon* technique. In political propaganda, a bandwagon appeal encourages people to support a particular position by presenting it as widely accepted, socially shared, or supported by influential actors and groups (Schmitt-Beck, 2024). Its relevance to the Makassar case lies in the reported communication that highlighted Danny Pomanto’s achievements and successful programs during his tenure as mayor and associated them with the Empty Column after his disqualification. Political elites and community actors could thereby transform retrospective evaluations of government performance into messages concerning an available electoral choice. When such evaluations were connected to visible endorsements or perceptions of collective support, the communication could frame the Empty Column as a continuation of support for Danny Pomanto’s political legacy rather than merely as a ballot option opposing the sole candidate.

This analytical distinction is important because positive evaluations of a political figure do not, by themselves, constitute evidence of a bandwagon appeal. The bandwagon dimension emerges when claims about performance are linked to the perception that a political preference is shared, socially reinforced, or supported by a broader community. Accordingly, this study distinguishes between the substantive content of political messages, particularly claims about Danny Pomanto’s achievements, and the persuasive mechanism through which those claims were associated with the Empty Column. The analysis focuses on how these messages were constructed and circulated through political and community networks, rather than assuming that their circulation necessarily changed voter preferences. This approach allows the study to examine propaganda as a situated communication practice while avoiding unsupported causal conclusions about the election result.

Islamic political communication provides a complementary perspective for interpreting the ethical dimensions of these practices. Islam emphasizes that communication should be accountable to principles of truthfulness, responsibility, justice, and public welfare. The principle of *qaulan sadidan* highlights truthful and appropriate speech, while *qaulan balighan* concerns communication that is effective and capable of reaching its intended audience. The principles of *amanah* and justice further underscore the responsibility of political actors when communicating information about public leadership and government performance (Masorong, 2025); (Arif, 2025); (Ushama, 2026). These principles offer a normative framework for considering whether persuasive political messages are grounded in credible claims and communicated responsibly. Their relevance does not depend solely on whether a message successfully attracts support, it also concerns the ethical means through which political legitimacy is constructed.

The relationship between propaganda and Islamic communication must nevertheless be defined carefully. Political propaganda, political communication, and *da‘wah* are related through their communicative functions, but they are not interchangeable concepts. Political communication concerns the production, circulation, and interpretation of messages in relation to political interests and collective decision-making, whereas *da‘wah* is oriented toward conveying and encouraging adherence to Islamic teachings (Kenski & Jamieson, 2017); (Abdulsalam, 2025). Propaganda theory therefore serves as the principal analytical framework for identifying persuasive strategies, while Islamic political communication and *da‘wah* provide contextual concepts for interpreting religious and moral considerations. Islamic principles are used as normative criteria for evaluating the ethical dimensions of the communication identified in the empirical data. This distinction prevents political activity from being classified as Islamic propaganda merely because it occurs in a Muslim-majority context or incorporates religious symbols and social values.

Against this background, the present study investigates how political propaganda operated in the 2018 Makassar mayoral election, focusing on the use of the bandwagon technique and the association between Danny Pomanto’s political image and the Empty Column. It also examines how

these communication practices can be interpreted in relation to Islamic communication values, particularly truthfulness, persuasive responsibility, justice, and public welfare. Using qualitative evidence from interviews, observations, and written sources, the study explores the messages and meanings communicated by political elites and community actors involved in or familiar with the election. Its contribution lies in explaining how the political image of a non-candidate could be linked to an electoral option within a single-candidate contest and in distinguishing the empirical analysis of propaganda from the normative evaluation of its ethical dimensions. The study does not seek to establish that propaganda directly caused the Empty Column’s victory; rather, it identifies the communication practices and interpretive processes that formed part of the political context surrounding that outcome.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative interpretive approach with a descriptive-interpretive (Wiesner, 2022) orientation to examine how political propaganda was constructed, communicated, and interpreted during the 2018 Makassar mayoral election. Rather than measuring the statistical effects of propaganda on voting behavior, the study focused on political messages, persuasive strategies, communication networks, and the meanings attributed to them by relevant actors.

The research was conducted in Makassar City, Indonesia. Political communication theory provided the overarching perspective, while propaganda theory, particularly the *bandwagon* technique, served as the primary analytical framework. The analysis examined how political support was represented as socially shared, how Danny Pomanto’s political image and governing achievements were associated with the “Empty Column,” and how these messages circulated through political and community networks. Islamic political communication and *da’wah* functioned as contextual concepts, while Islamic principles, including *qaulan sadidan* (truthful speech), *qaulan balighan* (effective communication), *amanah* (trustworthiness), justice, and *maslahah* (public welfare) provided normative criteria for evaluating the ethical dimensions of political communication (RM et al., 2025).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 15 purposively selected informants who had direct involvement in, knowledge of, or experience with the election and the political communication surrounding the Empty Column. The informants comprised six political elites, four government or election-related informants, one civil society or interest-group representative, two community or opinion leaders, and two disqualified mayoral or deputy mayoral candidates. Selection criteria included relevant electoral experience, knowledge of political communication or Empty Column-related activities, and the ability to provide information based on personal experience or observation.

Additional data were obtained through field observations and documentary sources, including scholarly publications, newspaper reports, online materials, relevant legislation, and election documents from the General Elections Commission (KPU). These sources provided contextual information and enabled comparison between interview accounts, observed practices, and available documentary evidence.

Data analysis followed an iterative process adapted from Creswell (Akinyode & Khan, 2018). Interview transcripts, field notes, and available audio-visual materials were organized and reviewed before relevant data were coded. The codes were grouped into themes corresponding to the research questions and analytical framework. The bandwagon technique was identified through four indicators: the representation of support as widely shared, repeated positive evaluations of Danny Pomanto’s leadership, the association of his political image with the Empty Column, and the use of political and community networks to reinforce perceptions of collective support. The resulting themes were interpreted within the political context of the election.

Data credibility and confirmability were supported through source triangulation, clarification of informant statements, repeated data checking, and documentation of analytical decisions. Interview accounts were compared with observations and documentary materials where possible, while divergent accounts were retained for consideration. The analysis identifies communication practices and meanings reflected in the qualitative data; it does not establish that propaganda directly caused the Empty Column’s electoral victory or that the findings represent the entire electorate.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political Image Transfer and the Construction of Electoral Meaning

The victory of the “Empty Column” in the 2018 Makassar mayoral election illustrates how political support can be communicated and organized beyond the conventional structure of candidate-centered electoral competition. Although the Appi–Cicu ticket was supported by ten political parties, the Empty Column received 300,795 votes, compared with 264,245 votes for Appi–Cicu, a difference of 36,550 votes. The Empty Column also prevailed in thirteen of Makassar’s fifteen subdistricts (Harianto et al., 2020). These results demonstrate the electoral significance of the Empty Column, but they do not independently explain why voters selected it. The qualitative findings instead direct attention to the political messages, relationships, and interpretations through which support for Danny Pomanto was associated with the available electoral alternative.

A central finding is that Danny Pomanto’s political image remained present in electoral discourse after his disqualification. His absence from the ballot did not necessarily eliminate his relevance as a political reference point. Instead, political elites and community actors continued to communicate positive assessments of his previous administration, particularly his programs and achievements, and connected these assessments to the Empty Column. This process can be understood

as political image transfer, in which the favorable meaning attached to a political figure is transferred to an electoral option that can symbolically represent continued support for that figure.

The distinction between a political figure and an electoral option is important. The Empty Column did not have a candidate’s personal identity, campaign platform, or governing record in the conventional sense. Its political meaning therefore depended partly on the interpretations constructed around it. By communicating that Danny Pomanto’s achievements provided a reason to support the Empty Column, political actors made an otherwise abstract ballot option intelligible through an established political identity. The Empty Column was consequently presented not merely as a rejection of the sole candidate but also, in some supporters’ narratives, as a means of maintaining an existing political preference.

This interpretation extends the discussion of political image construction by highlighting the possibility that a political image can remain electorally relevant even when its subject is no longer a candidate. The Makassar case suggests that the relationship between political identity and electoral choice is not always determined by formal candidacy. It may also be shaped by public memories of leadership, evaluations of government performance, and communication networks that preserve a political figure’s visibility (Fong et al., 2019); (Antweiler, 2024). Such a process is especially relevant in single-candidate elections, where voters face a choice between supporting the sole candidate and selecting the Empty Column.

Nevertheless, the evidence should not be interpreted as proof that Danny Pomanto’s image was the only factor underlying the Empty Column’s victory. The study documents how informants and political actors constructed and circulated this association, rather than establishing the motivations of all voters. Electoral choices may have reflected different considerations, including dissatisfaction with the available candidate, evaluations of government performance, political loyalties, or other contextual factors (Kulachai et al., 2023). The principal contribution of the findings is therefore to explain how the Empty Column acquired political meaning through communication, rather than to provide a comprehensive causal explanation of the electoral outcome.

The Bandwagon Technique: From Performance Narratives to Collective Support

The findings can be interpreted through the concept of the *bandwagon* technique, which describes persuasive communication that encourages acceptance of a political choice by presenting it as widely supported, socially recognized, or associated with influential actors. In the Makassar case, the bandwagon appeal was not limited to explicit claims that the Empty Column represented the majority. It also emerged through the combination of positive evaluations of Danny Pomanto’s leadership, repeated communication through political and community networks, and the association of his political legacy with the Empty Column.

The first component was the communication of Danny Pomanto’s previous governmental performance. Hasanuddin Leo (H2L), a Makassar City DPRD member affiliated with PAN, explained

that his support for Danny was based on his assessment of the latter’s programs and perceived achievements. H2L also described how he had invited Danny to constituency recess meetings over approximately two years, providing opportunities for constituents to interact with the mayor and hear about his work. His account indicates that political communication took place through recurring interpersonal encounters rather than exclusively through formal campaign events.

These encounters can be interpreted as a form of political socialization. Repeated interaction may increase familiarity with a political figure, communicate the preferences of a trusted political representative, and sustain the visibility of particular evaluations of government performance. However, the evidence does not establish that constituents adopted H2L’s preference or voted according to his recommendation. What it demonstrates is that a favorable political image was communicated over time through an established relationship between an elected representative, a mayor, and the representative’s constituents.

The second component was the role of community-based communication. Syamsuddin Raga, a political and community actor, similarly emphasized Danny Pomanto’s perceived contributions to Makassar, including urban planning, public services, alley lighting, and efforts to address waste-related problems. Raga explained that he communicated these assessments to residents and connected them to the Empty Column after Danny was no longer eligible to participate in the election. His statement, “I told the community that the ‘Empty Column’ was Danny” (Raga, 2019), provides a particularly clear illustration of the symbolic transfer between a political figure and a ballot option.

This statement is analytically important because it demonstrates how an electoral alternative without a candidate’s identity could be given a recognizable political meaning. The Empty Column was communicated as a continuation of support for Danny Pomanto, allowing positive evaluations of his leadership to become arguments for a specific electoral choice. In this context, the bandwagon dimension emerged when the political image was communicated through actors who had established relationships with community members and could present their preferences publicly.

The third component was the circulation and repetition of these messages through networks. Political elites, community leaders, and campaign-related teams provided channels through which evaluations of Danny Pomanto were communicated and reinforced. Raga also described community-oriented activities, including distributing iftar meals, organizing *sahur on the road*, and conducting community clean-up activities under the banner of the Empty Column. Such activities became politically relevant when they were connected to messages about Danny Pomanto’s performance and the electoral option associated with him.

The activities themselves should not automatically be classified as propaganda or as evidence of electoral persuasion. Community service, religious gatherings, and public engagement can serve multiple social and political purposes. Their significance for this study depends on the identifiable connection between the activity, the political message communicated, and the Empty Column as an

electoral choice. The findings suggest that these activities provided contexts in which political identity and messages could be communicated, but they do not establish how individual participants interpreted them or whether they changed their voting preferences.

This distinction clarifies the analytical meaning of the bandwagon technique in the Makassar case. Positive evaluations of a political figure’s performance do not, by themselves, constitute a bandwagon appeal. They may instead represent retrospective assessments of leadership or ordinary political advocacy. The bandwagon dimension becomes more evident when these evaluations are connected to the perception that support for the figure or associated electoral option is already shared by influential actors or segments of the community. The persuasive structure thus combines a performance narrative with a social cue that gives the choice a sense of collective recognition.

This interpretation is consistent with the broader understanding of propaganda as the strategic construction and circulation of political messages (Jowett & O’Donnell, 2012). It also highlights why propaganda should not be equated automatically with falsehood. Political messages may refer to identifiable programs or publicly discussed achievements while still selecting and emphasizing particular aspects of a political record to support a preferred electoral outcome. The relevant analytical questions concern how information is selected, connected to political interests, repeated, and framed as a justification for collective action.

Political Networks, Party Alignment, and Community-Based Communication

Another important dimension of the findings concerns the relationship between formal party structures and informal political networks. Appi–Cicu had the support of ten political parties, representing substantial formal organizational backing. Nevertheless, several political and community actors continued to express support for Danny Pomanto or the Empty Column, even when their party organizations supported Appi–Cicu. This divergence indicates that party endorsement and individual political alignment did not necessarily coincide.

The findings do not establish that party machinery was ineffective in every respect, nor do they demonstrate that informal networks were more influential than formal organizations across the electorate. Instead, they reveal that formal endorsements were only one component of the communication environment. Political actors also operated through constituency relationships, community leadership, personal loyalties, and established networks of interaction. These channels allowed political preferences to be communicated in ways that did not always correspond to official party positions.

H2L’s account illustrates this tension. Although he acknowledged the need to follow party directives, he also described an established history of communication and support for Danny Pomanto. His earlier interactions with constituents meant that his political preferences had been communicated before the official campaign period. Even when he reduced his public promotion of Danny after the party’s position changed, he believed that members of his team already understood

his preference. This account illustrates the potential continuity of political communication beyond changes in formal party alignment.

Raga’s account reveals a related but distinct process. His support for the Empty Column was associated with his political affiliation, his evaluation of Danny Pomanto’s performance, and his position within the local community. His communication activities connected political messages to community relationships and practical concerns, such as public services and urban management. In both cases, the findings indicate that political communication was embedded in social relationships rather than confined to formal campaign messages.

From a political communication perspective, these relationships help explain how messages may gain visibility and credibility within particular communities (de Nardis, 2020). Political elites and community leaders can function as intermediaries who interpret political events for their constituents or social networks (Garrido-Vergara, 2020); (Gelape et al., 2026). Their importance, however, should not be assumed to produce uniform influence. Community members may accept, negotiate, or reject the messages they encounter, depending on their own experiences, preferences, and evaluations.

The findings therefore support a relational understanding of political communication. Messages were communicated through existing networks, while the meanings attached to them drew on shared experiences and evaluations of political leadership. The Empty Column’s symbolic association with Danny Pomanto was sustained through these connections, making it a recognizable option for actors who wished to communicate continued support for his political legacy. However, the study cannot determine the relative influence of each network or estimate the number of votes attributable to particular actors.

Islamic Communication Values and the Ethics of Political Persuasion

The relationship between political propaganda and Islamic communication values provides a further dimension for interpreting these findings. The study uses Islamic communication principles as normative criteria for evaluating the ethical character of political messages, rather than as evidence that all communication supporting the Empty Column constituted Islamic propaganda or *da’wah*. This distinction is important because political persuasion and religious communication may share certain communicative functions while differing in purpose, institutional context, and normative orientation.

The principle of *qaulan sadidan*, commonly understood as truthful or sound speech, is particularly relevant to political messages concerning government performance. In the Makassar case, informants repeatedly referred to Danny Pomanto’s achievements as reasons for supporting the Empty Column. From an Islamic communication perspective, such claims raise questions about the accuracy, completeness, and context of the information being communicated. Political actors have an ethical responsibility to ensure that claims about public programs and leadership are not fabricated, exaggerated, or presented in ways that materially mislead audiences (Holdo, 2022).

The interview accounts establish that political actors communicated positive evaluations of Danny Pomanto’s administration. They do not independently verify every performance claim mentioned by informants. Consequently, these accounts should be treated as evidence of political narratives rather than conclusive proof of the administration’s achievements. Independent government records or performance reports would be needed to substantiate specific claims. This evidentiary distinction is essential when evaluating political communication against the standard of truthful speech.

The principle of *qaulan balighan*, referring to communication that is effective and appropriate to its audience and purpose, provides another interpretive perspective. The repeated communication of Danny Pomanto’s political image through constituency meetings and community networks suggests that political messages were conveyed through interpersonal channels familiar to their audiences. Such communication may be meaningful because it connects political narratives to existing relationships and locally recognizable concerns. However, communicative reach or rhetorical effectiveness should not be equated automatically with ethical legitimacy. A message may be compelling while still requiring scrutiny regarding its accuracy, fairness, and intended consequences.

The Islamic principle of *amanah* also directs attention to responsibility in the use of political influence. Political elites and community leaders who communicate political messages occupy positions in which their statements may be regarded as meaningful by others. Their responsibility therefore extends beyond the pursuit of electoral support to the careful representation of information and the avoidance of misleading claims. In the context of the Empty Column, this principle invites consideration of whether political actors communicated their evaluations transparently and distinguished personal political preferences from independently verified information.

Similarly, *maslahah*, or public welfare, provides a normative basis for examining the political content of performance narratives. Informants presented Danny Pomanto’s perceived achievements in terms of urban improvements, public services, and efforts to address community problems. These themes connected electoral communication to questions about the public interest rather than solely to personal or party loyalty. Nevertheless, claims about public benefit remain subject to evidence and competing interpretations. Invoking public welfare does not automatically make a political message accurate or ethically justified.

Justice and social responsibility are equally relevant (Axelsen et al., 2019). Political communication should permit citizens to assess political alternatives through fair and adequately contextualized information. Selective presentation of achievements, omission of relevant limitations, or unsupported claims about the extent of public support may undermine informed electoral judgment. The bandwagon technique is therefore ethically ambivalent: it can communicate the existence of a political coalition or a visible preference, but it can also encourage conformity if audiences are led to believe that a choice is universally supported without sufficient evidence.

Qur’anic guidance in Q.S. Ali ‘Imran 3:104, which calls for inviting people toward good, encouraging what is right, and discouraging what is wrong, offers a broad ethical orientation for public communication (Kementarian Agama RI, 2017). Applied cautiously to political communication, this guidance emphasizes the responsibility to connect persuasive messages with truthfulness and public benefit. It does not, by itself, establish that a particular campaign strategy is religiously legitimate. Such an assessment requires consideration of the message’s content, the accuracy of its claims, the means through which it is communicated, and the political purpose it serves.

Accordingly, Islamic communication values in this study function as standards for critical evaluation rather than labels that automatically validate a political campaign. The presence of religiously meaningful activities, community service, or public-welfare narratives does not prove that a political message is inherently Islamic. The Islamic dimension becomes analytically relevant when a clear connection can be established between a communicative practice, an identifiable Islamic value or symbol, and the political meaning being promoted (Tanjung & Abdullah, 2025). This approach helps avoid conflating religious values with electoral interests and preserves the distinction between empirical findings and normative interpretation.

Theoretical Implications and Limitations

The findings contribute to the study of political communication in single-candidate elections by showing how an electoral option without a conventional candidate can acquire meaning through the political image of a figure who is no longer eligible to compete. The Makassar case illustrates a communication process in which performance narratives, interpersonal networks, and perceptions of collective support were connected to the Empty Column. It therefore shifts analytical attention from the formal configuration of candidates and parties toward the construction of political meaning under conditions of restricted electoral competition.

The case also refines the application of the bandwagon concept. The evidence suggests that the technique should not be identified merely from positive statements about a political figure or from the existence of a large number of supporters. Rather, the analysis requires attention to how claims about performance are linked to socially visible support and presented as a reason to adopt a particular choice. In Makassar, the bandwagon-oriented message emerged through the association of Danny Pomanto’s perceived achievements with community and elite support for the Empty Column.

At the same time, the findings emphasize the need to distinguish between communication strategies and electoral effects. The Empty Column’s victory is consistent with the political significance of the messages documented in the study, but it does not prove that those messages caused the result. The qualitative interviews primarily reveal how political actors understood their activities, justified their preferences, and communicated their interpretations of Danny Pomanto’s

political record. They cannot establish how representative these views were among voters or how individual voters responded to particular messages.

The study also has limitations concerning the verification of performance claims and the diversity of voter perspectives. Informants’ accounts provide insight into political communication but may reflect their own political positions and retrospective interpretations. Further research could examine campaign materials, local media coverage, and voter interviews to compare elite narratives with how citizens received and interpreted them. Such work would help clarify whether the symbolic association between Danny Pomanto and the Empty Column was understood consistently across different communities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that political support in a single-candidate election can be communicated through the transfer of political image, the circulation of performance narratives, and the use of established community networks. The bandwagon technique provides a useful framework for understanding how these practices can present an electoral choice as socially recognized and collectively meaningful. Islamic communication values add an ethical dimension by requiring political messages to be assessed in relation to truthfulness, responsibility, justice, and public welfare. Together, these perspectives show that the study of political propaganda should consider not only how messages are constructed and circulated, but also the standards by which their claims and political uses can be evaluated.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of the bandwagon technique in political communication surrounding the 2018 Makassar mayoral election, particularly the association between Danny Pomanto’s political image and the “Empty Column” following his disqualification. The findings indicate that political elites and community actors communicated positive evaluations of Danny Pomanto’s previous administration and connected these narratives to the Empty Column as an available electoral choice. Through repeated communication, constituency interactions, community activities, and established social networks, the Empty Column acquired symbolic meaning beyond its formal status as a ballot option without a candidate.

The bandwagon dimension emerged when narratives about Danny Pomanto’s perceived achievements were linked to the perception that support for him and the Empty Column was shared by political elites and community members. This finding highlights how political image transfer and network-based communication can make an electoral option socially recognizable and politically meaningful, particularly in a single-candidate election. However, the qualitative evidence documents the construction and circulation of these messages rather than proving that the bandwagon technique directly caused the Empty Column’s electoral victory or determined individual voting behavior.

From the perspective of Islamic political communication, the findings underscore the importance of evaluating political persuasion through the principles of *qaulan sadidan* (truthful speech), *qaulan balighan* (effective communication), *amanah* (trustworthiness), justice, and *maslahah* (public welfare). Although performance-based narratives may connect political communication with public concerns, their ethical legitimacy depends on the accuracy of the claims, the responsibility of communicators, and the avoidance of misleading representations of collective support. Islamic values therefore provide a normative framework for assessing political propaganda rather than automatically legitimizing a particular campaign strategy.

This study contributes to political communication research by explaining how a political figure who is no longer a candidate can remain symbolically relevant through the transfer of political image and the circulation of collective-support narratives. Further research involving voters, campaign materials, and media coverage is needed to examine how these messages were received, interpreted, and related to electoral decisions. Such research would deepen understanding of the relationship between political propaganda, voter interpretation, and ethical communication in single-candidate elections.

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