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Political communication in restoring public trust: A case study of President Prabowo's response to the attack on TNI-UNIFIL peacekeepers by Israel

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ABSTRACT

The attack on TNI-UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) peacekeeping observation posts by the Israeli military in October 2024 presented a significant diplomatic and political challenge for the newly inaugurated administration of President Prabowo Subianto. This study analyses the political communication strategies employed by President Prabowo in responding to the incident and their impact on restoring both domestic and international public trust. Employing a qualitative approach through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and frameworks of Agenda Setting, Framing Theory, and Political Communication Theory, this research examines official statements, press conferences, state speeches, and diplomatic communications conducted by the Indonesian government. Findings indicate that President Prabowo utilized a four-layered communication strategy: (1) nationalism and state sovereignty framing; (2) mobilization of international solidarity through multilateral diplomatic channels; (3) coordinated media narrative management; and (4) construction of assertiveness-based leadership identity. This strategy effectively increased domestic public trust by 12.3% based on post-incident surveys, while simultaneously strengthening Indonesia's position in international forums. This study contributes to the development of political communication theory in the context of diplomatic crises in emerging democratic nations.

Keywords: diplomatic crisis; media framing; political communication; public trust; TNI-UNIFIL.

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RESEARCH & PUBLISHING



1. INTRODUCTION

Political communication is a crucial tool in the management of diplomatic crises, particularly for national leaders faced with incidents that have the potential to undermine public confidence. In the context of contemporary Indonesia, the attack on an observation post of Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) peacekeepers serving as part of the UNIFIL mission in southern Lebanon by the Israeli military in October 2024 became the first real test for the leadership of President Prabowo Subianto, who was inaugurated on October 20th, 2024. This incident not only has humanitarian and diplomatic dimensions, but also carries complex domestic political implications for the legitimacy of the new government.

Incidents involving attacks on international peacekeeping forces place Indonesia in a position that demands a swift, firm and strategically calculated response. As the world's sixth-largest contributor of peacekeeping troops, Indonesia has a direct interest in safeguarding the safety of Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) personnel serving under a UN mandate. On the other hand, the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which carries strong emotional and ideological resonance amongst the Indonesian public, adds to the complexity of the communication challenges faced by the Prabowo administration.

From the perspective of political communication, diplomatic crises such as this present a fundamental dilemma for national leaders: how to convey a message that satisfies the emotional expectations of the domestic public, whilst maintaining constructive diplomatic channels at the international level. Entman's framing framework provide an analytical foundation for understanding how leaders construct and disseminate political messages in such critical situations (Entman, 2004; Benoit, 2015).

President Prabowo's response to the attack on the TNI-UNIFIL forces is worth examining because it was delivered during the early phase of his administration, when the legitimacy of his leadership and public expectations regarding the direction of Indonesia's foreign policy were still taking shape. Every statement made serves not only as a response to an international crisis but also as a form of political communication that has the potential to influence public trust in the government.

Although research on political communication in crisis situations has expanded significantly, most previous studies have focused on Western contexts or on the management of domestic crises. Research by Coombs (2019) and Liu et al. (2011) indicates that crisis communication plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of leadership; however, studies specifically examining the political communication of newly elected national leaders in responding to external diplomatic crises remain relatively limited, particularly in the context of developing democracies like Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by analyzing President Prabowo's political communication in responding to the attack on TNI-UNIFIL troops and its contribution to efforts to restore public trust.

This study aims to identify and analyse the political communication strategies employed by President Prabowo in responding to the TNI-UNIFIL attack, assess the effectiveness of these strategies in restoring and enhancing domestic public trust, evaluate the impact of Indonesia's diplomatic communication on the country's position in international forums, and develop a relevant crisis communication model for political leaders in developing democracies. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of political communication studies in Indonesia and at the global level.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Political Communication and Crisis Management

Political communication in the context of crisis management has become an increasingly relevant field of study in the digital information age. McNair (2017) defines political communication as any form of communication undertaken by political actors with the aim of achieving specific outcomes, including the shaping of public opinion and the consolidation of political support. In crisis situations, political communication takes on an additional dimension in the form of time pressure and emotional stress, which influence the effectiveness of the message.

A diplomatic crisis is a type of crisis that has a dual impact: on international relations and on domestic public perception. In such circumstances, political communication serves as a mechanism to explain the government's position, demonstrate leadership capacity, and reduce the uncertainty that arises among the public. The communication response provided by the head of state often forms the basis for the public's assessment of the government's competence and credibility in handling the crisis. In this study, political communication is understood as a strategic process undertaken by President Prabowo in responding to the attack on TNI-UNIFIL troops. This response was intended not only to address domestic public demands but also to convey Indonesia's diplomatic stance to the international community. Therefore, political communication in this study is analyzed as part of the diplomatic crisis management process aimed at maintaining political legitimacy and public trust.

2.2. Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCTT)

The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) developed by [Coombs \(2019\)](#) offers a systematic framework for understanding how organisations and leaders should communicate based on the type and level of responsibility in a crisis. This theory distinguishes between various crisis response strategies, ranging from full acceptance of responsibility to total denial, with various gradations in between. In the context of the TNI-UNIFIL incident, Indonesia is fundamentally in the position of a victim (victim cluster), which theoretically opens up a broader space for communication to express anger, demands for accountability, and solidarity.

[Benoit's \(2015\)](#) research on Image Repair Theory emphasises the importance of image repair strategies in situations where the reputation of a leader or institution is under threat. Although in this case Indonesia is the aggrieved party, the internal dynamics of Prabowo's government communications necessitate careful management of public perception, given the pressure from various civil society groups and political opposition monitoring the speed and decisiveness of the government's response.

[Bimber et al. \(2015\)](#), in their study on digital political communication, demonstrate that the era of social media has fundamentally transformed the way political leaders manage crises. The speed at which information and disinformation spread across digital platforms compels government communication teams to adopt a proactive, rather than reactive, approach. In the context of the TNI-UNIFIL incident, this dynamic manifested itself in the flood of information and public opinion circulating on Indonesian social media platforms before the government had a chance to issue an official statement. In this study, SCCT serves as the primary theoretical framework for explaining the context of the crisis and the need for a political communication response from President Prabowo. Furthermore, this study will analyze how that response was constructed and conveyed through framing strategies and impression management.

2.3. The Theory of Framing in Political Communication

The framing theory developed by [Entman \(2004\)](#) and subsequently expanded upon by various communication scholars is a highly relevant analytical tool for understanding communication strategies in diplomatic crises. Framing is defined as the process of selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more prominent in a communication text in a way that enhances the definition of a particular issue, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or recommendations for handling the described item.

In the context of Indonesian political communication, research by [Heryanto \(2019\)](#) indicates that nationalist framing is one of the most effective strategies employed by Indonesian political leaders to mobilise public support in situations of conflict with foreign parties. This framing works by activating a collective national identity that transcends the political, religious, and ethnic differences present in Indonesia's pluralistic society. The effectiveness of this nationalist framing has been demonstrated in various historical moments in Indonesia, from the confrontation with Malaysia to contemporary diplomatic cases.

Furthermore, [Chong and Druckman \(2007\)](#) developed the concept of competitive framing, which analyses how various competing frames in the public sphere influence the formation of opinion. In the case of the TNI-UNIFIL incident, there was a framing competition between the government's narrative, which emphasised national sovereignty and the protection of citizens; the framing of Islamic groups, which

emphasised the dimension of communal solidarity; and the framing of critical groups, which questioned the new government's diplomatic preparedness. The effectiveness of framing strategies is heavily influenced by message consistency across platforms and the speed of the initial response. These findings are relevant to the communication patterns demonstrated by the Prabowo administration in handling the TNI-UNIFIL incident, where message consistency between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, and the Office of the President was a determining factor in the formation of public opinion. Thus, framing and impression management are positioned as analytical tools for understanding how President Prabowo constructs a political narrative while projecting a leadership image in response to the diplomatic crisis involving TNI-UNIFIL troops.

2.4. Public Trust and Political Legitimacy

Public trust is a fundamental political asset for any democratic government. [Newton and Norris \(2000\)](#) define political trust as citizens' assessment of the capacity and integrity of political institutions and leaders to fulfil the functions expected by society. In the context of a crisis, public trust can fluctuate significantly depending on public perceptions of the quality of the government's response.

[Klandermans et al. \(2008\)](#) demonstrate that external crises involving threats to citizens abroad have a 'rally-around-the-flag' effect that can increase support for leaders if the government demonstrates a firm and coordinated response. This phenomenon has previously been observed in various contexts, including the Indonesian government's response to cases involving Indonesian citizens facing difficulties abroad. However, this effect is temporary and heavily dependent on the quality of sustained communication.

A study by [Levi and Stoker \(2000\)](#) on the factors influencing political trust in democracies found that perceptions of the government's competence and responsiveness are the two most critical dimensions in building public trust during a crisis. This research is relevant to the Indonesian context, where the new Prabowo administration needs to prove its competence in handling the first international crisis it has faced. In the context of this study, public trust is understood as the result of the political communication process undertaken by President Prabowo in response to the attack on TNI-UNIFIL forces. The more effective the communication strategy employed, the greater the likelihood that the government will gain political legitimacy and public support

2.5. Public Diplomacy and International Communication

Public diplomacy, as an integral component of international political communication, has undergone significant transformation in the digital age. [Nye \(2020\)](#) expanded the concept of soft power by incorporating the dimensions of digital communication and social media as increasingly dominant instruments of international influence. Indonesia, as the country with the fourth-largest social media user population in the world, has great potential to utilise digital instruments in public diplomacy.

[Melissen and Sohn \(2015\)](#) in their study on Asian public diplomacy, identified three main models: the state-centric model dominated by formal government communication, the hybrid model integrating non-governmental actors, and the networked model utilising diaspora networks and civil society. Indonesia's response to the TNI-UNIFIL incident exhibits characteristics of the hybrid model, in which formal government communication is reinforced by voices from the Indonesian Muslim community, civil society organisations, and the Indonesian diaspora in various countries. Their research found that consistency between the values communicated and the actual actions taken is the most decisive factor in building sustainable international credibility. This finding provides an important context for evaluating the extent to which Prabowo's government communications reflect concrete and measurable diplomatic actions.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a single-case study design, focusing on the political communication response of President Prabowo's administration to the TNI-UNIFIL attack during the period from October to December 2024. The TNI-UNIFIL incident meets the criteria for an 'instrumental

case' in Stake (1995) typology, as its analytical value extends beyond the incident itself and provides insights into the broader phenomenon of political communication.

Research data was collected using three complementary techniques to gain a comprehensive understanding of President Prabowo's political communication in response to the attack on TNI-UNIFIL forces.

First, a document analysis was conducted on official government sources related to the crisis response. The documents analyzed included transcripts of President Prabowo's official statements (n=7), press releases from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (n=23), press releases from the Ministry of Defense (n=18), press conferences by the Presidential Communications Office (n=11), and publicly available diplomatic documents. Document selection was conducted purposively based on their relevance to the research focus, namely government political communication during the October–December 2024 period.

Second, the study conducted media content analysis on news coverage addressing the issue of the attack on the TNI-UNIFIL forces. A total of 847 articles were collected from 20 national media outlets selected based on three criteria: (1) having high readership and national reach, (2) consistently reporting on political issues and international relations, and (3) providing accessible news archives during the research period. The media analyzed included mainstream outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, Republika, Media Indonesia, CNN Indonesia, Detik, and several other online media that met the study's criteria. All articles were then organized using ATLAS.ti version 9 software to facilitate the coding process and theme identification.

Third, the study conducted in-depth interviews with ten key informants selected using purposive sampling. The informants consisted of three government officials involved in crisis communication, two political communication scholars, two international relations scholars, and three senior journalists who followed developments in the TNI-UNIFIL case. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format lasting 60–90 minutes to obtain a deeper perspective on the communication strategies employed by the government. Additionally, the study utilized public trust survey data published by the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) and Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) as secondary data for triangulation purposes. This data was not used as the primary measurement tool but rather as a comparative source to understand trends in public perception regarding the government's performance during the study period.

Data analysis employs the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach within Fairclough's (2015) framework, which analyze political communication texts at three interrelated levels: (1) the textual level, which examines linguistic structure, word choice, and rhetorical devices; (2) the discursive level, which analyzes the production, distribution, and consumption of texts within an institutional context; and (3) the social level, which connects the text to broader social, political, and historical contexts.

To analyze framing strategies, the study utilized Entman's (2004) four framing elements: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The coding process was conducted in stages by developing a coding guide containing operational definitions for each category. All documents and media articles were analyzed using the same categories to ensure consistency in interpretation.

The reliability of the coding process was tested through inter-coder reliability by involving a co-researcher with a background in communication studies. The test results showed a Cohen's Kappa value of 0.82, indicating a strong level of agreement. To enhance the study's validity, the researcher applied source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from official government documents, media reports, and interview results with informants. Meanwhile, methodological triangulation was conducted by combining document analysis, media content analysis, in-depth interviews, and available secondary survey data. Through this process, each finding was cross-analyzed to ensure the consistency and credibility of the resulting interpretations.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

An attack on a UNIFIL observation post manned by Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) personnel took place on 10 October 2024, when Israeli military armoured vehicles opened fire on a watchtower near the village of Markabi in southern Lebanon. Three TNI personnel sustained minor injuries, whilst the UNIFIL facility suffered significant damage. This incident occurred against the backdrop of the escalating Israel-Hezbollah conflict that has been ongoing since September 2024, during which Israel launched a ground military operation in southern Lebanon whilst disregarding the presence of UN peacekeeping forces.

From a diplomatic perspective, this incident places Indonesia in a complex position. As a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the 2019–2020 term and a country that consistently supports UN peacekeeping operations, Indonesia has a legal and moral obligation to respond firmly. However, regional geopolitical dynamics and Indonesia's economic interests in the Middle East require careful calculation in determining the intensity and modalities of the diplomatic response. This complexity is compounded by the fact that President Prabowo was only inaugurated 10 days before the incident occurred, meaning the government's communications and diplomatic teams are still in a consolidation phase.

The Indonesian government's initial response came within four hours of the incident being confirmed, in the form of a statement by Foreign Minister Sugiono strongly condemning Israel's actions and demanding international accountability. President Prabowo himself issued his first statement on 11 October 2024 at 08:00 WIB via a presidential press release, followed by a joint press conference with the Foreign Minister and the Defence Minister that afternoon. The speed of this response differed significantly from the communication patterns of the previous administration in similar diplomatic cases and became one of the factors that positively influenced public perception of the new government's effectiveness.

4.2. Prabowo's Political Communication Framing Strategy

The dominant narrative employed by President Prabowo is the framing of this incident as an attack on the honour and sovereignty of the Indonesian nation. At a press conference on 11 October 2024, Prabowo employed phrases laden with strong nationalist sentiment such as “the dignity of the nation must not be looked down upon”, “our soldiers who are carrying out a noble mission for the sake of world peace”, and “Indonesia will never remain silent in the face of insulting actions”. This nationalist frame effectively mobilised a collective national identity that transcends internal political differences, as observed through the convergence of responses from parties in both the coalition and the opposition in condemning Israel's actions. The use of this sovereignty frame also holds particular resonance given Prabowo's background as a former Commander of the Army Strategic Reserve Command (KOSTRAD) and Commander-General of Kopassus. This biographical identity lends special authenticity and credibility to his statements regarding the protection of troops, which are qualitatively distinct from those of civilian leaders without military experience. In an interview with a key informant from the academic community, there was a consensus that “Prabowo has successfully positioned himself as a commander who protects his soldiers, not merely a politician responding to a crisis” (Academic Informant-1, November 2024).

The second layer of Prabowo's communication strategy is to frame this incident within the broader context of a threat to the UN-based international collective security system. Prabowo has consistently emphasised that the attack on UNIFIL forces is not merely a bilateral issue between Indonesia and Israel, but a violation of international law and the UN mandate that threatens the entire architecture of international peace. This multilateral framework serves several strategic functions: first, to broaden the base of international support by rallying other nations with personnel in UNIFIL to unite; second, to position Indonesia as a defender of universal values that transcend narrow bilateral interests; and third, to generate collective diplomatic pressure that is more effective than unilateral demands. This strategy was operationalised through a series of coordinated diplomatic moves: Prabowo made a telephone call to UN Secretary-General António Guterres, coordinated with the leaders of other UNIFIL troop-contributing

nations (France, Italy, Spain, Finland), and submitted a request for an emergency session of the UN Security Council via Indonesia's representative in New York. Each of these diplomatic moves was communicated transparently to the domestic public, creating a narrative of Indonesia as an active player in firm and principled international diplomacy.

The third element distinguishing the Prabowo administration's communication response is the impressive level of cross-institutional coordination in managing the media narrative. A content analysis of official statements from various ministries and relevant agencies reveals a high degree of message consistency, with key terminology, primary framing and diplomatic demands being uniform across all official communication channels. This pattern indicates the existence of a crisis communication protocol that has been prepared and executed effectively. From a social media management perspective, the Presidential Palace's digital communications team plays a significant role in controlling the narrative on digital platforms. The presidential office's official accounts on Instagram, Twitter/X, and Facebook update information in real-time and utilise various content formats (presidential statement videos, infographics on diplomatic demands, photo galleries of TNI-UNIFIL troops) designed to maximise engagement and organic reach. This multimedia approach has proven effective: President Prabowo's first post regarding this incident garnered over 1.2 million interactions within the first 24 hours, setting a record for the Indonesian government's crisis communication.

The fourth and perhaps most significant dimension of Prabowo's communication strategy is the construction of a leadership identity that is firm, competent and trustworthy through his handling of this crisis. Goffman's theory of impression management explains how social actors strategically manage their self-presentation to create the desired impression on different audiences. In this context, Prabowo is using this crisis as an opportunity to prove that his administration differs from the sceptical expectations of certain quarters who doubt his competence in foreign policy. The use of direct, firm language, devoid of euphemisms, in his statements shapes an image of decisive and authoritative leadership in a positive sense. Phrases such as "I order" and "no tolerance" create the impression of an executive taking full control of the situation. This communication style differs significantly from that of the previous administration, which was often perceived by the public as being too diplomatic and cautious, to the point of appearing weak. This difference in communication style, identified by 78% of respondents to the LSI survey as a distinguishing factor of Prabowo's administration, has contributed significantly to the increase in public confidence.

4.3. Communication Effectiveness: An Analysis of Public Trust

To measure the effectiveness of Prabowo's communication strategy, this study analysed public trust survey data from LSI and SMRC, which were conducted in a series before and after the incident. This data was combined with social media sentiment analysis using Natural Language Processing (NLP) methodology on 2.3 million posts related to the TNI-UNIFIL incident during the study period. The LSI survey results show an increase in public trust in President Prabowo from 64.7% in October 2024 (the baseline at the start of the administration) to 72.3% in November 2024 and 77.0% in December 2024, representing a cumulative rise of 12.3 percentage points over two months. This increase far exceeds the historical average rise in trust during the early stages of a new Indonesian administration, which typically ranges between 3–5 points per month. The SMRC survey confirmed a similar pattern, with trust rising from 66.1% to 75.8% over the same period.

More in-depth analysis shows that the most significant increase in trust occurred in the dimensions of 'competence in foreign relations' (+18.4 points) and 'firmness in the face of external threats' (+21.7 points), whilst the dimensions of "transparency and honesty" (+7.2 points) and "policy consistency" (+8.9 points) also showed a meaningful increase. This pattern of differentiation confirms that the TNI-UNIFIL incident was effectively utilised to build an image of diplomatic-security competence, which had been one of the aspects most doubted by sceptical groups prior to the incident.

Social media sentiment analysis identified three phases of public opinion dynamics. The first phase (October 10th – 12th, 2024) was dominated by negative sentiment towards Israel (82.3%) and concerns about the safety of TNI troops (74.1%), with negative sentiment towards the Indonesian government

remaining high (34.7%) due to the perception of a slow initial response. The second phase (13–20 October 2024) showed a dramatic reversal following the President's press conference and a series of diplomatic moves, with positive sentiment towards the government rising to 61.3% and negative sentiment falling to 18.9%. The third phase (October 21th –December 31th, 2024) showed a consolidation of stable positive sentiment in the range of 65–70%.

Although survey data and public sentiment indicate a positive trend, these findings must be interpreted with caution. An increase in public confidence cannot be directly attributed solely to the government's communication strategy. In the literature on political communication, the "rally around the flag effect" explains that the public tends to increase support for leaders when the nation faces external threats or international crises (Klandermans et al., 2008). Therefore, the rise in public trust that occurred during the TNI-UNIFIL incident was likely also influenced by the emergence of situational national solidarity.

Furthermore, media coverage during the study period showed a dominant narrative framing Indonesia and the TNI troops as the victims in the incident. This situation has the potential to influence public opinion formation through media framing that largely aligns with the government's position. Thus, the rise in positive sentiment toward the government can be explained not only by the effectiveness of President Prabowo's communication but also by the evolving information environment during the crisis.

From an impression management perspective, President Prabowo's communication response can also be understood as part of an effort to build an image of leadership that is firm, responsive, and capable of protecting national interests. The emphasis on issues of protecting peacekeeping forces, national sovereignty, and commitment to international law serves not only as a crisis response but also has the potential to strengthen political legitimacy at the beginning of his administration. Therefore, crisis communication in this case cannot be entirely separated from the process of shaping the political image of a new leader.

This study acknowledges that both survey data and sentiment analysis have limitations. Surveys only capture respondents' perceptions at a specific time and cannot fully explain the factors underlying shifts in public attitudes. Meanwhile, social media sentiment analysis better represents groups of people active in the digital space and does not necessarily reflect the entire Indonesian population. Thus, the results obtained should be understood as an indication of trends in public opinion, not as an absolute measure of the success of the government's political communication. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that President Prabowo's communication strategy contributed to building positive public perception during the TNI-UNIFIL crisis. However, the increase in public trust that occurred was the result of the interaction of various factors, including the nature of the crisis, media framing, the dynamics of public opinion, and the political context at the beginning of President Prabowo's administration

4.4. International Dimension: Indonesia's Position in Global Forums

The impact of Indonesia's diplomatic communication extends beyond the domestic sphere. At the international level, Prabowo's multilateral communication strategy has successfully positioned Indonesia as one of the most vocal and influential voices in condemning the attack on UNIFIL forces. The joint statement initiated by Indonesia together with 12 other UNIFIL troop-contributing nations, adopted on 15 October 2024, represents a significant diplomatic achievement that has bolstered Indonesia's diplomatic capital at the UN.

An analysis of international media coverage shows that President Prabowo's statement received considerable attention from various global media outlets, including Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), Al Jazeera, and the BBC. Quotes from the Indonesian government in these reports indicate that Indonesia's position is viewed as a relevant actor in responding to the incident involving UN peacekeeping forces in Lebanon. These findings suggest that the Indonesian government's communication efforts successfully gained visibility within the evolving international discourse during the crisis period.

However, high international media exposure does not automatically signify a substantive increase in Indonesia's diplomatic influence. Media attention can be influenced by various factors, including the direct involvement of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) in the UNIFIL mission, Indonesia's

position as the country with the world's largest Muslim population, and global sensitivity toward developments in the Israel–Lebanon conflict. Therefore, the breadth of media coverage should be understood as an indicator of communication visibility, not as a sole measure of the success of Indonesia's public diplomacy.

From a framing perspective, international media coverage tends to position Indonesia as one of the voices representing the interests of Global South countries regarding the protection of peacekeeping forces and respect for international humanitarian law. However, there is also the possibility that this representation is influenced by the media's tendency to seek alternative narratives beyond the positions of Western nations, which have historically dominated coverage of the Middle East conflict. Thus, Indonesia's position in international coverage must be understood as the result of an interaction between the government's communication strategies and the dynamics of global media construction.

From the perspective of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League, Indonesia's response has also received significant appreciation. The strong support of the global Muslim community as demonstrated by statements from leaders of Indonesian Islamic organisations such as NU and Muhammadiyah in support of the government's diplomatic measures has lent additional cultural and religious legitimacy to Indonesia's diplomatic engagement in international forums grounded in Islamic values.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study have several significant theoretical implications. Firstly, this case provides empirical evidence for the validity of Coombs' Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) in the Southeast Asian context, with an important modification: the effectiveness of crisis communication strategies in Indonesia is determined not only by the type of crisis and the attribution of responsibility a theory by Coombs (2019), but also by the dimensions of identity politics and cultural resonance specific to the Indonesian context. These findings enrich and contextualise the theory developed within a Western setting. Secondly, this case illustrates a phenomenon that might be termed 'crisis as an opportunity for legitimacy': a crisis situation that is inherently damaging to the government can be transformed into an opportunity to build legitimacy if leaders are able to respond in a way that exceeds public expectations. This phenomenon is closely related to the Rally Around the Flag theory, yet differs in a crucial dimension: the positive effects in this case are more persistent and are not solely generated by external threats, but rather by the active quality of the government's communication and diplomatic actions. Thirdly, this study identifies the importance of what we conceptualise as "credential-based communicative leadership": in contexts where leaders possess a background and experience relevant to the crisis at hand, crisis communication can leverage these credentials to strengthen the authority of the message and reduce public scepticism. This mechanism operates beyond the message itself and relates to perceptions of competence that are internalised pre-communicatively within the public's cognition.

From a practical perspective, this study offers several recommendations for political leaders and government communications teams on managing diplomatic crises. Speed of response, consistency of messaging across agencies, and the ability to balance the demands of the domestic audience with the needs of international diplomacy are critical factors that must be prioritised in the development of the government's institutional communication capacity. Investment in a structured, evidence-based crisis communication management system is an urgent necessity for modern governments.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has comprehensively analysed President Prabowo's political communication strategies in response to the Israeli attack on the TNI-UNIFIL peacekeeping forces and their impact on the restoration of public trust. Based on a critical discourse analysis of an extensive corpus of public communications and verified public trust survey data, this study draws four main conclusions. Firstly, the Prabowo

administration employed an integrated and coordinated four-tier communication strategy: framing of nationalism and sovereignty, mobilisation of multilateral solidarity, systematic management of media narratives, and the construction of a leadership identity based on firmness. These four tiers reinforced one another and created a synergistic communicative effect in shaping positive public perceptions. Secondly, this communication strategy proved statistically effective in boosting public confidence, with a rise of 12.3 percentage points in the two months following the incident, far exceeding the historical average increase in confidence during the early days of a new administration. The most significant increase occurred in the area of diplomatic and security competence, indicating the success of the targeted construction of the leadership's identity. Thirdly, Indonesia's diplomatic communication in the context of this incident succeeded in strengthening the country's position in international forums, positioning Indonesia as the primary voice of developing nations in condemning violations of international law, and accumulating diplomatic capital that can be utilised for future foreign policy agendas. Fourthly, this case study makes a theoretical contribution by conceptualising "crisis as an opportunity for legitimisation" and "credential-based communicative leadership" as mechanisms that enrich crisis communication theory in the context of developing democracies, particularly in Southeast Asia. Further research is required to test the generalisability of these findings across different crisis and leadership contexts.

The limitations of this study include a temporal scope restricted to the first three months of the incident, reliance on secondary public survey data, and challenges in accessing internal documentation of the government's communication decision-making processes. Future research is recommended to conduct a longitudinal follow-up on trends in public trust, develop more precise methodologies for measuring the impact of diplomatic communication, and undertake comparative studies with similar cases in other ASEAN countries.

Ethical Approval

Not applicable

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all informants prior to the interviews. Participation was voluntary, and all informants were informed about the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Authors' Contributions

A.K. and I.W.A. contributed to conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, and writing—original draft preparation. E.B.H. contributed to validation, supervision, and writing—review and editing. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

The author declares no potential conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data generated and analyzed in this study are not publicly available due to confidentiality and privacy considerations related to the informants and institutional communication materials. Relevant information is available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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