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Humor as a Political Act: Study of Indonesian Presidents' Humor

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Abstract

This study aims to explain the use of humor by Indonesian presidents for political communication. Presidents' use of humor is an interesting phenomenon, given that they are social subjects who wield great power within a country. Their social position leads to different characteristics and social impacts due to the humor used. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach. Data was collected from books, news sites, and YouTube channels documenting the humor of the three Indonesian presidents. Data were then analyzed using pragmatic analysis. The results show that presidential humor varies according to personal preferences, speech objectives, and contexts. Presidents use joke, conversational humor, and pun to joke, tease, praise, satirize, criticize, and delegate power. Joking, teasing, and praising are used on friends and political allies. Meanwhile, satirizing and criticizing are applied to political opponents. Humor is a middle ground for presidents, enabling them to achieve speech objectives without explicitly expressing their intention. Politically, humor functions to (1) represent oneself positively and represent opponents negatively, (2) build relationships and positioning with opponents and allies, and (3) exercise control and discipline. However, the relationship between form, style, and illocutionary of presidential humor is often ambiguous. Such conditions seem related to political relations' dynamic and equal nature, where friends and foes are not always crystal clear.

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Introduction

Humor discourse plays a crucial role in contemporary politics. In practice, humor does not only melt the pot but also increases the persuasion of political messages (Innocenti & Miller, 2016), convey social criticism (Webb, 1981; Wijana, 2018), include and exclude certain parties (Kessel, 2011), and spread and reinforce ideology (Sorensen, 2008). Humor is also a means of resistance (Dubberley, 1988; Sorensen, 2008) as it can be employed for constructing and consolidating political brands (Săftoiu & Popescu, 2014).

President is one of the parties that use humor in his political communication. Several presidents in various countries often rely on humor for that purpose. In the United States, Presidents Abraham Lincoln, Ronald Reagan, Roosevelt, and Barack Obama were considered successful in using humor in their communication (Carpenter et al., 2019). Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe was also known for his frequent use of humor in touch (Maremera, 2020). The President of Ukraine, Vladimir Zelensky, who has a comical background, also uses humor in several political events (Zhadanova & Shirobokov, 2019).

In Indonesia, presidents also frequently employ humor for the same political purposes. Sukarno (Bung Karno), Indonesia's first president, often used humor to communicate with staff, ministers, and fellow state leaders. President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) was known to be good at using humor in various situations (Budiyanto, 2009; Faridl, 2011; Khusnita, 2013; Lu'lu, 2022; Qomariyah, 2021). Likewise, the current president of the Republic of Indonesia, Joko Widodo (Jokowi), is known to use humor on various occasions. The other four Indonesian presidents (Suharto, B.J. Habibie, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono) have also employed humor in their political communication with varying intensity.

The president's use of humor is interesting because it relates to his social status and political power. As a language user, the president is a subject who has the same position as other language users. However, on a societal level, he holds a special place as he has great power in the government. This power allows him access to information, knowledge, and social skills that ordinary people do not have. Political power also makes him have a special relationship with the people around him. These privileges allow the president to use humor differently to approach a particular discourse he wants.

Several previous studies show that humor has been widely used by presidents in many countries to campaign, debate (Rhea, 2007, 2012), establish relationships with constituents (Carpenter et al., 2019), and communicate political regulations (Waisanen, 2015). In Indonesia, studies on presidential humor are limited to the use of linguistic features in creating humor, for instance, in terms of the use of implicature (Budiyanto, 2009; Faridl, 2011; Khusnita, 2013) and the used language styles (Priharyadi & Ariyanto, 2015). There has not yet been a study on humor as a form of political action. This research possesses a novelty in terms of its exploration of the relationship between the form, style, and illocutionary humor of the presidents with the political goals they want to achieve.

This study aims to explain how Indonesian presidents use humor in their political communication. This question will be answered through a pragmatic approach. To answer it, the researchers describe (1) the characteristics and styles of presidential humor, (2) presidential humor as a form of middle-ground communication to convey political messages, and (3) the political goals that the presidents want to achieve through humor. The significance of this research is to increase understanding of the fundamental nature of humor, especially political humor. For communication practitioners, this study can be used to improve the effectiveness of political communication.

Methodology

This study used a conversational analysis (CA) approach. This approach assume that conversation is a form of social action (Baxter, 2010). This assumption is relevant to the nature of presidential humor studied in this study. The humor is basically a part of the conversation whose use involves turn-taking. The contextual meaning of humor can only be understood by involving the social context of its use. To understand the contextual meaning of humorous discourse, researchers examine the illocutionary speech by studying the form and style of humor with the social context of its use. To get the illocutionary of each humor studied, the researcher reconstructs the use of humor by involving the social context of its use. Reconstruction is carried out by digging up data on the social context of the use of humor which includes time and place settings, participants, social relations between participants, and events when humor is used. This is done because each of the humors studied contains contextual information.

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The selected data were 36 humor discourses collected from different sources. President Sukarno's humor was obtained from the book *Ketawa Bersama Bung Besar* (Laughing with the Big Bro) by Eddi Elison (Elison, 2014). Abdurrahman Wahid's humor was obtained from the book *Gitu Aja Kok Repot* by Abdul Rahman (Rahman, 2020). President Joko Widodo's humor was obtained from national news sites and Youtube. Two President Joko Widodo's humor are respectively from *CNN Indonesia* (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20180424181310-20-293221/jokowi-sindir-menteri-susi-ingin-jadi-cawapres) and *Republika* (https://sindikasi.republika.co.id/berita/ q0jv76430/jokowi-singgung-pelukan-erat-surya-palohsohibul-iman), four are from *Liputan 6* (https://hot.liputan6.com/read/3979898/ 4-guyonan-ala-jokowi-ini-sukses-bikin-ketawa), and four are from the Presidential Secretariat Youtube Channel (https://www.youtube.com/@SekretariatPresiden).

Data were analyzed using conversational analysis. The analysis was carried out in two stages, namely identification and synthesis. At the identification stage, the researcher identified the form, style, and illocutionary of humor. The form identification relies on a theory by Martin (2007) which divides humor into three forms, namely joke, anecdote, and pun. Identification is done by looking at the textual structure of humor. The style is based on a theory by Martin et al. (2003) who divided humor styles into four, namely affiliative, self-enhancing, self-defeating, and aggressive. Identification of style is done by looking at the content of humor and the relationship between humor speakers, audiences, and humor targets. The illocutionary act is based on a theory by Austin, 1962). Identification is carried out based on the content of speech and the broader context of its use. In the synthesis stage, the data that has been identified is then interpreted contextually by linking the use of humor to the social, historical and contemporary political conditions of Indonesia.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics and Choices of Presidential Humor

Both personal and social factors influence the use of presidential humor. Its choices in terms of styles and forms are due to individual preference and purpose of speech. On the one hand, humor regulates the relationship between the president and speech partners and its targets. On the other hand, humor is also held by social context the time it is expressed.

The data shows that the types of humor used by the President of Indonesia tend to vary. President Sukarno used conversational humor (8) and anecdotes (3). President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) used more diverse types of humor, such as puns (4), jokes (8), and conversational humor (2). Meanwhile, President Joko Widodo uses conversational humor more often (9) and only uses puns once.

Conversational humor is a form of spontaneous humor that usually appears in a conversation (Martin, 2007). This type of humor tends to be intuitive and is firmly correlated to context, as in Humor 1 below:

Humor 1

In May 2019, Jokowi held an iftar with high-ranking officials from other countries. Officials in attendance included the Speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly, Zulkili Hasan, Speaker of the House of Representatives Bambang Soesatyo, and ministers. Journalists asked President Jokowi about the political conditions in the country, including what agreements were made at the event.

With a serious face, Jokowi replied, "Yes, we agreed. Together at one table earlier. The speakers and deputy speakers of the People's Consultative Assembly, House of Representatives, Regional Leadership, and the Constitutional Court chief justice are also there. We all agree that later on Monday, we will break our fast at the place of the speaker of the House of Representatives, Mr. Bambang Soesatyo.

Jokes are humor in the form of anecdotes that have been packaged and memorized so they can be passed on to one another (Martin, 2007; Raskin, 1985). The characteristics of jokes are narrative, short, and containing setups ending with a punchline. One of Sukarno's humor was presented to the American Ambassador to Indonesia, Howard Jones, who was also his friend, below is anecdot.

Humor 2

"Do you know what a woman's age has in common with the state of a country?" asked Soekarno.
Ambassador Jones shook his head. Sukarno answered immediately.
"Women aged 15 to 19 are like Africans. They are wild, young, and untouched."
"Women aged 20 to 29 are like the United States. Rich, passionate, and have many advantages."
"Women aged 30 to 39 are like India. They have many stories and are mysterious."
"Women 40-49 years like France. She had the glory. But in the past."
"Women aged 50, 60, and 70 are like Russia. Big, wide, and no one wants to come close."

Pun is a type of humor that exploits the different possible meanings of a word or the fact that some words sound alike but have different meanings (Martin, 2007). Pun can be seen in Abdurrahman's humor below when he play with semantic ambiguity of term "empat mata".

Humor 3

When Megawati Sukarno Putri became president of the Republic of Indonesia, she was confused by the many problems facing this nation. She felt unable to cope with all these problems..
She was so confused, she felt should meet Gus Dur and talk to him one-on-one (in bahasa Indonesia: empat mata). Finally, Megawati invited Gus Dur to the Palace through his aide.
But what happened? Gus Dur refused Megawati's invitation. Megawati became even more confused.
When asked by his daughter, Yenni Wahid, why he refused to meet with Megawati, Gus Dur casually replied, "Obviously I refused. You already know that I only have one eye, why did he ask for a one-on-one meeting (pertemuan empat mata)?".

Table 1. Forms of Presidential Humor

President	Forms of Humor		
	Joke	Conversational Humor	Pun
Sukarno	3	8	0
Abdurrahman Wahid	8	2	5
Joko Widodo	0	9	1

In addition to varying in nature, presidential humor varies according to style. The data shows that President Sukarno more often used affiliative (amount: 5 humor), aggressive (amount: 3 humor), and self-enhancing (amount: 2 humor) styles. President Abdurrahman Wahid used aggressive (amount: 5 humor), affiliative (amount: 4 humor), and self-defeating (amount: 1 humor) styles. Most of President Jokowi's humor is affiliative (amount: 8 humor), although he also uses aggressive, self-defeating, and self-enhancing humor styles.

According to Martin et al. (2003), affiliative humor tends to be used by someone by saying funny things to cheer up others, facilitate relationships, and reduce interpersonal tension. This style usually puts the speaker and the audience on one side so that both can enjoy the fun. President Joko Widodo used this humor type in Humor 4 below:

Humor 4

When commemorating National Music Day at the State Palace, President Jokowi

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delivered a speech to the audience. The guests were musicians from various generations.

President Jokowi said that during visits to various regions, he often held quizzes with bicycle prizes. At that time, he wanted to do a quiz. However, because the bicycle had not been prepared, he would give a business card to exchange for a bicycle in the palace. "The question is not about fish," President Jokowi answered with laughter from the audience.

Self-enhancing humor is usually used to increase the speaker's pleasure. It places the unpleasant experience and the paradox of life as funny stuff. A humorous perspective makes people more relaxed in facing stress or difficulty. Sukarno used this style in Humor 5 below:

Humor 5

In 1960, when the conflict between the West and East Blocks was heating up, Bung Karno got invited to visit Moscow, the Soviet Union, on October 3, 1960. Before Bung Karno's group left, there was an argument because the Soviet Union objected to Bung Karno's departure with a chartered plane belonging to an American company Pan Am.

Kremlin offered to pick up Bung Karno on a particular Soviet plane. However, the offer was rejected. Bung Karno would cancel the visit if his decision were not agreed upon. The Soviet Union eventually softened and let Bung Karno go with Pan Am.

On the way back to Indonesia, Bung Karno told reporters, "You know, Moscow is also afraid of us if we threaten them."
"How come?" asked a reporter.
"Because Moscow knows that there are bears in Indonesia. Not a red one, but a black bear and likes to eat honey."

Self-defeating humor is used to entertain others by belittling oneself. This effort is made to win the heart or approval of others by making yourself a weak and lousy party. It is associated with humor as a means of defensive rejection or a tendency to hide underlying negative feelings. Abdurrahman Wahid used this humor, respectively, in Humor 6.

Humor 6

At the afterlife's door, an angel asked a metromini driver.
"What was your job back then in the world?"
"I was only a metromini driver, Sir." The angel then gave a luxury room to the driver, as well as some golden stuff.
Gus Dur then came, guided by his faithful aide.
"What was your job back then?" asked the angel to Gus Dur.
"I was a president and preacher, Sir." The angel then gave a small room and wooden stuff. However, Gus Dur complained about the decision.
"Sir, how can I only get these? I was a president and preacher, yet I got no more than the metromini driver, even worse."
The angel replied calmly, "You made people fell asleep during your preaching so that people forgot the God Almighty. Meanwhile, the driver, in contrast, drove in a rush; he made people pray."

Aggressive humor is associated with sarcasm, ridicule, and "insult." The distinctive character of this humor is its use of targeting other parties without regard to its potential impact on others. The user of this humor puts himself in a superior position, giving him a legitimate sense of laughing at others, even if the humor hurts them. Abdurrahman Wahid used it in 7.

Humor 7

Journalist: What position do you think is suitable for Amien Rais?
Gus Dur: Head of Bulog. Let him be happy to take care of rice (rice is pronounced the same way as Rais).

Table 2. Styles of Presidential Humor

President	Style			
	Affiliative	**Self-enhancing**	**Self-defeating**	**Aggressive**
Sukarno	5	2	0	4
Abdurrahman Wahid	6	0	3	6
Joko Widodo	7	1	1	1

The choice of various forms and styles of humor also gives birth to its various illocutions. The data shows that the presidents' illocutionary humor includes joking, teasing, satirizing, praising, criticizing, and delegating power. The table below shows the humorous illocutionary power of three different presidents.

Table 3. Illocutionary Acts of Presidential Humor

President	Illocutionary Acts				
	Joking	**Teasing**	**Satirizing**	**Praising**	**Delegating**
Sukarno	5	4	0	2	0
Abdurrahman Wahid	8	3	4	0	0
Joko Widodo	5	0	2	2	1

Data in Table 1 shows that Indonesian presidents use numerous forms of humor. The variety is due to their personal preferences. In fact, personalities are proven to determine choices in humor (Ann & Calhoun, 2001; Čekrlija et al., 2022; Johnson & Mccord, 2010). Characters matter because humor styles are bounded to other qualities in individuals, which can be proposed in five factors, namely neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness.

In the presented data, President Sukarno, for example, tends to use conversational humor which is correlated with extraversion factors including sociable, talkative, and fun-loving. His humor demonstrates his fondness for conversing with various parties such as friends, ministers, journalists, palace staff, and aides. Sukarno often took the initiative to ignite humor in both official and unofficial forums.

Meanwhile, President Abdurrahman Wahid's choice of humor also directly indicates that he is a witty person. This trait is related to the openness factor, including curious, broad interests, and unconventional. In his hands, jokes became the safest choice to express his unique, against the current, and even controversial attitudes and opinions. His broad interests and knowledge make the humor topics very diverse, ranging from social, politics, to religion.

Just like President Sukarno, President Joko Widodo also majorly uses conversational humor. However, the influencing factor is different. Most of Joko Widodo's humor was conveyed when he gave a speech or was interviewed by journalists, in contrast to Sukarno who used humor to dilute informal chatter. President Joko Widodo's choice is related to the agreeableness factor including soft-hearted, good-natured, and trusting. The influence of agreeableness is relevant to the dominant humor mission in the form of praise, flattery, and once in a while: satire.

Besides the choice of forms, presidential humor styles are also various. They can be seen in Table 2. This tendency seems to be based on the nature of affiliative humor that can please all parties. President Sukarno used this humor to maintain the warmth of relations between his family, staff, subordinates, and

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fellow leaders of the country. President Abdurrahman Wahid used this type of humor to entertain his congregation (because he was also a Kiai), journalists, and his friends. Meanwhile, President Joko Widodo uses affiliative humor to strengthen relationships between people from various backgrounds, especially his constituens and allies.

The second most used humor by the president is aggressive humor. As stated by R. A. Martin et al. (2003), the distinctive character of this humor is to target other parties, both parties who hear directly and third parties. The high frequency of using aggressive humor seems to be related to the political position of the president, who often has the opposition of other politicians. President Abdurrahman Wahid often used this type of humor to satirize or criticize his political opponents, people he identified with his political and ideological interests.

Self-enhancing humor ranks third in the frequency of use. The hallmark of self-enhancing humor is to make unpleasant experiences or incongruities in life funny. A humorous perspective makes people more relaxed in facing stress or difficulty. President Sukarno used this humor, among other things, to laugh at the inconsistency of his attitude against the imperialist state but instead used its products. He also used this humor to enjoy self-superiority when dealing with leaders of other countries. President Abdurrahman Wahid used this type of humor to enjoy the humorous nature of his people, especially the Madurese, who seemed to have a special place in his heart. Meanwhile, President Jokowi uses this type of humor to make his relationship with his wife fun.

The data shows that self-defeating humor is rarely used by presidents. President Sukarno did not use this type of humor, while Presidents Abdurrahman Wahid and Jokowi only used it once. This seems to be related to the president's socially and politically superior position. As the head of state and a government whose honor is strictly guarded, he is not worthy to be humiliated even through humor.

The forms and styles of humor are influenced by personal preferences and speech objectives, while illocutionary acts are more determined by the social setting and practical goals that the president wants to achieve. By adapting hypothesis proposed by Martineau (1972) on the social function of humor, three determining social settings on presidents' position are revealed. They are (1) humor speakers and audiences are in the same group (2) humor speakers and audiences are in different groups and the content of humor is about one of the groups, and (3) humor speakers and audiences are in different groups and the humor is related to the interaction of two groups.

President is a social subject connected uniquely to other surrounding subjects such as supporters, opposition, and neutral parties. When speaking to the internal groups, the president uses humor to establish collective solidarity, discipline its members, or encourage hostility towards the opponents.

Humor 8 below is an example of an aggressive style of conversational humor that President Sukarno used when talking to Cuban President Fidel Castro. The social context shows that Sukarno and Castro were in one internal group (actor = audience), namely as leaders of countries that were both colonized. Meanwhile, Britain is an outside group because it is a colonial state.

Humor 8

When Bung Karno made a state visit to Havana on May 9, 1960, Bung Karno was greeted by Prime Minister Fidel Castro. They seemed so close that they exchanged hats. Bung Karno gave his Taqiyah (Muslim skullcap) to Castro, and Castro gave his guerrilla hat to Bung Karno.

Castro then served Bung Karno a cigar while commenting, "This is the original production of our country. Tobacco and sugar make the colonial state always target us."

After smoking a cigar with Castro, Bung Karno handed him a can of his favorite cigarette, the Player brand, made in England. Castro was amazed and asked, "Don't the imperialists make this?"

"That's right! The imperialists and capitalists must be sucked into smoke and dust," answered Bung Karno.

The preceding humor is used by President Sukarno to enhance internal solidarity and hostility with external groups. The solidarity function is manifested with pre-assumption that Indonesia and Cuba are two countries experiencing the same terrible fortune to be colonized. Meanwhile, the hostility function is manifested by sparing Britain as a colonial state.

Humor 7 is an aggressive-style pun used by President Abdurrahman Wahid to charge external groups. Aggressive humor is style of humor associated with sarcasm, ridicule, and "insult" (Martin, 2007). This humor was created by Abdurrahman Wahid by taking advantage of the similarity of the sound of Amien's last name, "Rais", to the word "rice", which was the main commodity managed by Bulog. The social context that triggered this humor was the political enmity between the President and Amien Rais, who was then Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). Amien Rais is trying to oust Abdurrahman Wahid through a special trial.

This social context proves that Abdurrahman Wahid's humor was used to disintegrate his political opponent Amien Rais. The proposed social function is accommodated by humor potential in bringing certain illocution, which in this case, is an effort to made fun of opponents—to trigger his anger.

Humor 4 is an affiliative-style conversational humor used by President Joko Widodo to maintain internal solidarity. Its humor was given birth by a specific social context, namely the commemoration of music day. As the leader of the government in charge of regulating music, President Joko Widodo invites musicians to talk about the progress of national music scheme. This context shows that President Joko Widodo as an actor (A), is in the same group with the musicians as the audience (Au). The humor refers to President Joko Widodo's habit of carrying out quizzes by asking the names of fish when meeting people. Instead of asking the same questions, President Joko Widodo chose to ask about music.

Humor 4 serves to increase internal solidarity because it contains an illocutionary, namely in the form of praise, to the audience who are considered too intelligent to be simply asked the names of fish. Moreover, by asking about music, President Joko Widodo demonstrates that he has the same interest and appreciation as the musicians.

Humor as Middle Ground in Political Communication

Table 3 shows that illocutionary acts in presidential humor are quite various due to distinguishing speech objectives and social contexts. This part will reveal that illocutionary acts in presidential humor can serve as a political communication middle ground. Humor is used to joke, tease, satirize, criticize, and delegate power. By using humor, speech objectives can be achieved without overlooking correlated values and social contexts.

Joking

Joking is the most common speech act found in presidential humor. This speech act can be related to Indonesia's social and political context. President is culturally a person possessing a noble and dear position. This status can construct a distant relationship with others. Meanwhile, social distance is the potential to cause communication problems, a situation that no speaker, including the president, wants. By using humor, the president tried to reduce the distance so that communication with his family, palace staff, journalists, and the general public got the streets ahead. This speech act can be seen in the following Humor 9:

Humor 9

After inaugurating the Indonesian Ambassador to the Kingdom of the Netherlands, Soedjarwo Tjondronegoro, Bung Karno saw a reporter enjoying the beauty of the Denok statue in the Bogor palace courtyard.

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The statue was made by a sculptor Trubus, depicting an officer in Bogor Palace.

Bung Karno approached the reporter and asked, "What's interesting from the Denok?"
"Mr Trubus's ability to sculpt it, Sir!"
"Are you sure not because of the naked statue?"
The reporter blushed.
"You are still young. " I know what's in your thought…" said Bung Karno. Seeing the reporter smiling, Bung Karno asked again, "Have you seen the original body?"

President stands in a particular political position. This position often places the president as "another" or even an opponent to other political actors. As a social distance, the political difference can also create communication problems. Hence, the president jacks self-acceptance up by utilizing humor to omit the communication barrier. This strategy can be observed in the following humor 10:

Humor 10

During a speech at the National Conference of the Golkar Party, President Jokowi, a cadre of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), expressed his experience of being asked by many people.

"I was asked, 'Why is the Coordinating Minister for Political, Legal, and Security Affairs (Luhur Binsar Panjaitan) calling the Regional Leadership Councils (DPDs) of Golkar?' I replied, 'Mr Luhut is in the Golkar Party Advisory Council'. Isn't he?"

Then, someone else asked why the Vice President also gathered the DPDs. My answer was the same, 'Mr Jusuf Kalla used to be the (General) Chairman of the Golkar Party. That's fine too.'
Various questions went in a row. 'So where is the palace?' This was my crystal clear answer, 'The palace? It is at Merdeka Utara Street.'"

For a political figure such as president, joking is a speech act which facilitates a positive and wide acceptance in certain environments. In some interpersonal relationships, it can create a better quality, leading to a higher possibility of being loved and respected by people in general.

Teasing

The speech act of teasing can also be found in presidential humor. It is identical to aggressive humor, which presidents commonly use to change certain conditions on staff, political allies or opponents, or journalist into pleasant situations. This speech act can be found in the following humor:

Humor 11

Journalist: Gus, what if you were nominated with your partner, Akbar Tanjung?
Gus Dur: Nah, I'm afraid of the breaking!
Journalist: What breaking?
Gus Dur: The students. They will be on the roof of the legislative building again.

In Humor 7 Abdurrahman Wahid used humor to tease Akbar Tanjung. As the General Chair of the Golkar Party, he was responsible for causing student demonstrations at the DPR/MPR building in 1998. This humor is to show implicative rejection and dislike. Humor, in this case, is to avoid the image of the arrogance of the President.

Satirizing

The president may disagree with others as an individual or head of a country. The president's disapproval can be presented directly or indirectly. In Indonesia, disagreements tend to be expressed indirectly to remain courteous. The following Humor 12 contains an innuendo by President Jokowi to his coalition partner, Chairman of the Nasdem Party Surya Paloh for his political manoeuvre.

Humor 12

In a speech during the celebration of the 55th anniversary (HUT) of the Golkar Party at the Sultan Hotel, Senayan, Central Jakarta, Wednesday night (11/5/2019), President Jokowi greeted all chairpersons of invited parties.

"The honorable party chairman Mr Surya Paloh. We know by looking at him that tonight, he is much brighter than usual after meeting Mr Sohibul Iman at PKS. His face is so glaring," said Jokowi.

President Jokowi mentioned that Surya Paloh embraced Sohibul Iman in the previous meeting.
"I've never been embraced by Mr Surya as tight as he did with Mr Sohibul Iman," explained Jokowi.

The satire is a form of indirect warning made by President Joko Widodo against Surya Paloh. Joko Widodo can imply disapproval of Surya Paloh's actions without having to express it directly with humor. As a coalition partner in the government, the President realized he did not have the authority to directly rebuke Surya Paloh. Moreover, Surya Paloh is a senior to respect, typically in Indonesian culture. Satire through humor is a middle ground that allows disagreements to be presented without tarnishing the face of the reprimanded party.

Praising

Praising is a form of expressive speech act. Besides direct praise sentences, this speech act can also be done using humor. President Jokowi's humor in the Democratic Party Congress, as expressed in Humor 13, is praise for Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. Even though this humor can be interpreted as satire, President Jokowi's position as SBY's junior makes praising a more reasonable speech act he intended.

Humor 13

At the Democratic Party's National Working Meeting, President Joko Widodo mentioned that he needed more time to prepare clothes whenever he got invited to a Democratic Party event.
"I feel a huge gap regarding clothes with Mr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono this far. Today I have been preparing things since dawn because I had to guess which outfit Mr SBY would wear."

"The dealings with him have not yet been done, and now there is Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono. Things get worse. Look at him: young, charming, and smart. He dresses neatly, perfect. It is totally different from me."

Criticizing

The speech act of criticizing can also be found in the president's humor. Anecdote in Humor 14 is used by Abdurrahman Wahid as an open critique of the military—which are considered not capable enough of carrying out duties.

Humor 14

Gus Dur said that once, a corporal of ABRI (military force) dressed in plain clothes walked alone on a dark, deserted street. He was then spontaneously intercepted by two men with guns. "I'm not joking," said one of the men threateningly. "Give me your money, or I'll scatter your brain."

"Just shoot me and scatter my brain," replied the corporal calmly. "As an ABRI member, I don't need a brain. All I need is money to live."

Humor 14 is a critique because in the context of Indonesian politics, Gus Dur has shown disputes with the military. The conflicts occurred because he was a scholar who often criticized the government—while the army tended to defend it. By using humor, Abdurrahman Wahid chose a safe way so he could deliver sharp criticism without offending the military. Meanwhile, Humor 6 is a middle ground to convey to the preacher without making the utterance seem impudent. By using himself as an anecdote character, Abdurrahman Wahid disguises his social criticism as if it were autocritique.

Delegating

The power possessed by a president accommodates him to delegate things to his subordinates. President Jokowi used the following Humor 15 to hand over tasks to his minister.

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Humor 15

President Jokowi was once asked what foreign investors could do to make it easier to invest in Indonesia, and he replied, "I want to test my minister's knowledge. So give it an answer, Mr Minister, but it must be no longer than my speech."
The Minister of Trade, Thomas Lembong, immediately stood up and responded to the instructions.

After the answer, the moderator, Richard Bush, joked, "Mr President, I was impressed by your ability to lead. You know how to delegate responsibilities without handing the power over."
Jokowi repeated this when asked about the prospects for American-Indonesian civil society relations. "I want to test my minister again, but this time for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Please answer," said Jokowi with a smile, again attracting laughter from the audience.

President Joko Widodo expressed Humor 15 when he was being interviewed Brookings Institute in an international forum. All questions on public policies were answered efficiently. However, when the interviewer asked about more detailed technical questions, Joko Widodo seemed incapable. He then used humor to delegate his ministry the task (to answer). In this case, humor becomes a middle ground for Joko Widodo to delegate the task without seeming to be confused with the proposed questions.

Political Functions of Presidential Humor

Presidential humor has a political dimension not only because it is used by social subjects possessing notable political positions but also because every discourse in principle, has its political dimension (Fairclough, 2001). Language is used to control others, establish power, or resist. The choice of form and content of discourse is tied to its users' social relations and social subject (Fairclough, 2001). The data points out that presidential humor has three political functions, namely (1) representing the president positively and others negatively, (2) maintaining or building relationships and positions, and (3) carrying out controlling and disciplining.

Representing the President and Others

Representation is political as it does not merely re-display reality but shows the intention of language users and even constructs a new reality (Hall, 1997). Representation strategy is implemented by depicting certain parties or figures negatively and portraying other parties or figures positively at once. In President Sukarno's humor, the negatively-represented parties were countries that were politically opposed to him, including the Netherlands, America, Britain, and Russia. They were described as stupid (Netherlands), big but not brilliant (America), greedy (England), and submissive (Russia). Meanwhile, Sukarno and Indonesia have generally represented positively as reasonable, intelligent, friendly, and lucky parties.

President Abdurrahman Wahid also used the politics of representation. In contrast to Sukarno, who represented other countries negatively, Abdurrahman Wahid's humor tended to be directed at his political opponents, including Amien Rais, Akbar Tanjung, ABRI, and Harmoko. They were described as stupid (ABRI), incompetent (Amien Rais), hated by society (Akbar Tanjung), and even evil (Harmoko). The following Humor 16 shows a negative representation of Harmoko as the same party as the devil:

Humor 16

President Suharto went to Mecca for the hajj. Some ministers had to accompany him, including the most sedulous "guidance asker," Minister of Information Harmoko.

After going through several hajj rituals, Suharto's entourage did the jumrah ritual, symbolizing exorcising demons by throwing a pillar like a statue. The problem arose here, especially for Harmoko. The stones he threw always turned around and hit his forehead times.

Harmoko threw again, and the stone hit his forehead again. "Why is it always like this, huh?" thought Harmoko, starting to tremble with fear. He then changed positions.

After seven shots, Harmoko looked left and right, looking for President Suharto's position to "ask for guidance ." However, before standing in front of the president, he heard a whisper, "Fellow demons are forbidden to throw each other." The result was the same: the stone he threw hit him as there was someone who sent it back.

In President Joko Widodo's humor, the politics of representation tends to be used to describe him. Jokowi is tendency to avoid conflict makes him less likely to be offensive. In his humor, President Jokowi represents himself as an ordinary person. The presented nature and role is himself as a good grandfather, a romantic husband, a leader with close relation to the community, and an unpretentious official. The following Humor 17 is a typical form of representation of President Jokowi:

Humor 17
During his conversation about his grandchild Jan Ethes, President Jokowi said that he frequently was in charge of being an MC.
"Harusnya tugasnya MC itu kan Master of Ceremony gitu, Pak," ujar Cak Lontong. ("MC should be Master of Ceremony, Sir," said Cak Lontong.)
"No, MC is Momong Cucu (taking care of grandchild)," replied Jokowi.

However, in some humor, President Jokowi also represents himself as a party with high power or authority, as shown in Humor 12 and Humor 15.

Build Relationship and Positioning

The president's humor is also used to regulate positions and social relations. Fairclough (2001) explains that relations and subjects are two closely related aspects that even habitually overlap. However, in text analysis, both have to be distinguished. Relations intertwine with various relationship patterns established due to power distribution. Meanwhile, subjects are related to power accumulation on specific individuals or institutions. In discursive practice, relations cannot be separated from positioning. According to Tirado & Gálvez (2008), positioning is a discursive construction utilized to construct specific actions that can be understood by oneself and others. Moreover, positioning creates a space where the members participating in the conversation have certain positions.

President Sukarno's humor was used in various relations, including friendship, professionalism, and kinship. President Sukarno positioned himself as egalitarian in friendly relations with his humorous listeners. This relationship was intertwined when Sukarno spoke with Fidel Castro (Humor 8) and journalist (Humor 5). Professional relation places Sukarno superiorly so that he has the chance to tease and even make fun his subordinates. Meanwhile, the family relation places him as a father with authority.

President Abdurrahman Wahid shows a more assertive positioning. In almost all of his humor, Abdurrahman Wahid put himself in a political position as a critic of ABRI (Humor 14), the New Order (Humor 11, Humor 16), and other political opponents (Humor 7, Humor 3). At the same time, he builds a positioning as an insider of Nahdlatul Ulama (Humor 6) who stand close to the grassroots. His positioning as a member of NU is built by utilizing the internal code, and his intimacy represents his closeness to the grassroots in joking with the Madurese and Tegalese.

Meanwhile, President Joko Widodo's humor exemplifies friendly and authoritative political relations. Friendly relations are shown when he talks to ordinary people, figures, or groups with no direct political affiliation (Humor 1, Humor 4, Humor 17). However, he also does not hesitate to show an authoritative position when using humor in front of his ministers, colleagues, and political opponents (Humor 12, Humor 15). Such positioning can be considered ambiguous or even contradictory. However, as a form of political action, these two forms of positioning are in the line since the authority as state head

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comes from the people's support. By placing himself as an ordinary person and close to the people, President Jokowi is strengthening his political authority.

Carry Out Controlling and Disciplining

Humor, just like other speech forms, possesses a particular impact on the attitudes and behavior of those who hear it. In the speech act theory proposed by Austin (1962), speech is called perlocutionary as it might cause other effects after being produced. This theory assumes that the power in an utterance can lead to inevitable social consequences, such as actions. This ability makes humor can control and discipline certain social subjects. Through humor, presidents influence others to do and not to do something.

Controlling and disciplining through humor are related to humor's cognitive and psychological mechanisms. Butler (2015) emphasizes that humor might control people since most dislike being laughed at. Therefore, they avoid actions that might lead to jokes, banter, or insult. Because no one likes to be laughed at, laughter can be applied to prevent people from doing socially-deviant things (Larkin-Galiñanes, 2017). The humor discourse can effectively sort out what is expected and deviant because it connects the two opposing things.

President Abdurrahman Wahid used humor to reject a policy issued by the Governor of Jakarta Sutiyoso with the following humor.

Humor 18

One day, when Abdurrahman Wahid served as president of the Republic of Indonesia, there was a serious discussion about the dengue fever outbreak that was hitting Jakarta at that time. Gus Dur was busy discussing the deadly disease.
"In your opinion, why is dengue fever increasingly prevalent in Jakarta, sir?" asked a minister.
"Yes, because the Governor of Jakarta, Sutiyoso, forbade bemo, auto-rickshaw, and bajaj soon. Even though the mosquitoes here are only afraid of tiga roda (three wheels)."

By putting a policy to be seemed funny, Abdurrahman Wahid tries to convey that the regulation must not be carried out. In the context of public policy-making, there is a mental process implying that funny is inappropriate.

The same phenomenon can also be found in President Joko Widodo's humor. In Humor 12, President Jokowi try to disciplining one of his allies. He also uses humor to control the behavior of his ministers as shown in humor 10. Making funny of action is a strategy for depreciation; the action will be considered silly, unintelligent, or even unethical. Therefore, President Jokowi expects that the parties he mentions will not commit similar acts.

Conclusion

Humor plays a significant role in presidents' political communication. Its feature tendency to be funny makes it an appropriate way to convey various political messages. Presidents can strengthen internal solidarity with allies through humor. This objective is manifested by using affiliative-style humor with multiple illocutionary forms, namely joking, teasing, or praising. At other chances, humor can also be used to express disapproval, rejection, and hostility towards other parties. Presidents tend to use aggressive humor with illocutionary forms of satirizing and criticizing. However, the relationship between form, style, and illocutionary of presidential humor is often ambiguous. Such conditions seem related to the dynamic and equal nature of political relations, where friends and foes are not always crystal clear.

Considering that studies on humor and politics in Indonesia are still relatively deficient, these findings can serve as a starting point to examine the political function of humor more generally. Humor's role in jacking up the persuasion of political messages is worthy of study, as well as its use to communicate public policy. Furthermore, Indonesia will hold a general election in 2024.

We can use this momentum to examine whether prospective voters will prefer candidates with good humor or not.

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