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Transactional Leadership Practices of Political Parties in Indonesia's 2019 Simultaneous Elections Democratic Dynamics and Political Pragmatism

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Abstract

The 2019 simultaneous election in Indonesia represented a major democratic transformation by integrating presidential and legislative elections into a single electoral process. This study aims to analyze the implementation of transactional leadership within political parties during the 2019 election through the perspective of transactional leadership theory. The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using library research and secondary data obtained from academic journals, regulations, books, and official reports. The findings indicate that transactional leadership practices were reflected through three primary dimensions: contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. Contingency reward was manifested through political bargaining, strategic position allocation, and reward-based loyalty systems within party structures. Active management by exception appeared through direct supervision, campaign monitoring, and corrective intervention by party elites to maintain organizational performance and public support. Meanwhile, passive management by exception emerged when party leaders intervened only after significant political deviations or conflicts occurred. The study demonstrates that transactional leadership remains dominant in Indonesian political party behavior and contributes to pragmatic political culture during elections. Although such leadership strengthens short-term organizational effectiveness, it simultaneously creates risks of political patronage, elite transactionalism, and declining democratic trust. The study contributes to the broader discourse on political leadership and democratic governance in developing countries.
Keywords: Transactional Leadership; Political Parties; Elections; Political Pragmatism; Democracy; Indonesia

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INTRODUCTION

Elections are fundamental instruments of democratic governance because they provide citizens with the constitutional right to determine political leadership and governmental representation (Kurniawan, 2025). In democratic systems, elections function not only as mechanisms for leadership succession but also as indicators of political participation, legitimacy, and democratic consolidation (Apriliyanti, 2023; Rusnaedy et al., 2021). Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election became a historic milestone in the country's democratic development because, for the first time, presidential and legislative elections were conducted simultaneously across the nation (Apriliyanti, 2023; Sirajuddin et al., 2021).

The implementation of simultaneous elections introduced significant political complexity involving political parties, candidates, and electoral institutions (Samsidar, 2025). Fourteen political parties participated in the election, each attempting to maximize public support through various political strategies and campaign approaches (Hermanto, 2019). In this context, political party leadership became a crucial determinant of organizational performance and electoral competitiveness (Kristiyanto et al., 2023). Party leaders were expected to maintain internal solidarity, strengthen political communication, and mobilize party members effectively to achieve electoral success (Fikarno, 2021).

Political parties serve as important democratic institutions that connect society with government. According to Indonesian Law Number 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties, political parties are national organizations established voluntarily by citizens to fight for political interests and maintain national integrity (Fossati et al., 2020; Radjiloen & Sirat, 2025). In practice, however, political parties often face challenges related to internal management, political competition, and leadership effectiveness (Al-Hamdi, 2021). Consequently, leadership style becomes an essential factor influencing party stability and political strategy (Fionna & Tomsa, 2020).

Leadership theory explains how leaders influence followers to achieve organizational objectives (Addiansyah, 2019). Among various leadership models, transactional leadership is particularly relevant in political organizations because it emphasizes exchanges between leaders and followers based on rewards, obligations, and performance expectations (Burhan & Sejati, 2023; Rajagukguk et al., 2021). Burns defined transactional leadership as a leadership relationship grounded in political and economic exchanges, while Bass and Avolio further developed the theory through dimensions such as contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception (Taqwa & Suleman, 2023).

In political practice, transactional leadership is frequently associated with political bargaining, strategic position allocation, campaign mobilization, and organizational control (Arifianto, 2019). Political leaders often provide incentives, access to power, or strategic advantages in exchange for loyalty and political support (Ulum, 2020). Although transactional leadership may improve organizational effectiveness and short-term political stability, excessive implementation can encourage political pragmatism, patronage, and declining democratic values (Gunanto et al., 2024).

Several previous studies have discussed political participation, electoral behavior, and political party functions in Indonesia (Sejati & Hakim, 2024). However, limited studies specifically examine the implementation of transactional leadership within political parties during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election. Therefore, this study seeks to analyze how transactional leadership practices were implemented by political party leaders during the

election and how these practices influenced political dynamics in Indonesia's democratic process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Transactional Leadership Theory

Transactional leadership, as originally conceptualized by Burns, describes a leadership relationship built on an exchange between leaders and followers, in which political and economic transactions substitute for a shared long-term vision (Taqwa & Suleman, 2023). Bass and Avolio later refined the framework into three empirically measurable dimensions: contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception, each describing a different way in which leaders monitor performance and distribute incentives or sanctions (Taqwa & Suleman, 2023; Burhan & Sejati, 2023). Within political organizations, this theory offers a useful lens because political parties, like formal organizations, depend on structured incentive systems, supervisory hierarchies, and performance-based loyalty to sustain member commitment (Rajagukguk et al., 2021).

Comparative leadership studies in Indonesia's political sphere show that transactional patterns coexist with, and are frequently contrasted against, transformational and value-based leadership models. Fikarno (2021) argues that the era of digital democracy demands transformative leadership capable of building ideological cohesion beyond material exchange, while Radjiloen and Sirat (2025) demonstrate that leadership analysis in regional head elections benefits from combining contemporary leadership theory with normative frameworks such as Islamic leadership values. These studies indicate that transactional leadership, although operationally effective, is often treated by scholars as a leadership style to be balanced rather than an end in itself.

Political Parties, Institutionalization, and Leadership in Indonesia's Electoral System

Political parties occupy a central position in Indonesia's democratic architecture as the primary vehicle for political representation and leadership succession. Ulum (2020) traces two decades of post-reform party development and finds that institutional maturity remains uneven across parties, while Kristiyanto et al. (2023) show that party resilience depends heavily on internal organizational management rather than ideological branding alone. Fionna and Tomsa (2020) further document a long-term shift in Indonesian party factionalism from principle to patronage, suggesting that internal party competition increasingly revolves around access to resources and strategic positions rather than programmatic disagreement. Samsidar (2025) synthesizes this literature and concludes that the consolidation of Indonesian democracy is closely tied to how political parties manage internal leadership and organizational discipline.

Political Pragmatism, Patronage, and Elite Bargaining

A substantial body of research links Indonesian electoral politics to pragmatic and patronage-based practices. Fossati et al. (2020) find that ideological representation is frequently subordinated to clientelistic exchange in Indonesia's party system, while Apriliyanti (2023) and Kurniawan (2025) trace how patronage networks persist and adapt across state institutions and local governance structures. Burhan and Sejati (2023) and Sejati and Hakim (2024) describe political pragmatism as a dominant behavioral pattern among both elites and voters in Indonesia's modern democracy, and Taqwa and Suleman (2023) document concrete patronage practices during the 2019 legislative election in South Sumatra. Studies on dynastic politics (Wardani & Subekti, 2021; Wadipalapa & Tyson, 2025; Rusnaedy et al., 2021) similarly

show that family networks and elite bargaining continue to shape candidate selection, reinforcing transactional rather than ideological criteria for leadership succession.

Simultaneous Elections and Democratic Dynamics in 2019

The 2019 simultaneous election has generated extensive scholarly attention regarding its procedural fairness and democratic implications. Sirajuddin et al. (2021) and Rajagukguk et al. (2021) evaluate the administrative and constitutional dimensions of merging presidential and legislative elections, while Arifianto (2019) situates the election within broader debates on the health of Indonesian democracy. Al-Hamdi (2021) shows that ideological cleavages persisted under the open-list proportional representation system despite coalition pragmatism, and Hermanto (2019) and Addiansyah (2019) document how coalition formation for the presidential race was driven more by strategic calculation than ideological alignment. Studies on campaign behavior (Akbar et al., 2023; Nurhasanah, 2019) and party-specific dynamics (Yuwanto et al., 2020) add further evidence that electoral competitiveness during 2019 was shaped by pragmatic organizational strategies rather than purely programmatic appeals.

Research Gap and Analytical Framework

The reviewed literature converges on two largely separate strands. The first, rooted in political science, extensively documents patronage, pragmatism, dynasticism, and institutionalization within Indonesian political parties (Apriliyanti, 2023; Fionna & Tomsa, 2020; Kurniawan, 2025; Wadipalapa & Tyson, 2025). The second, rooted in leadership and organizational studies, develops and refines transactional and transformational leadership models but rarely applies them systematically to political party behavior within a specific electoral context (Fikarno, 2021; Radjiloen & Sirat, 2025; Taqwa & Suleman, 2023).

Few studies bridge these two strands by using an established leadership theory as an explicit analytical framework for explaining political party behavior during a specific election. Samsidar (2025) reviews the general role of political parties in democratic consolidation but does not isolate leadership style as a unit of analysis, and studies of the 2019 election (Arifianto, 2019; Sirajuddin et al., 2021) focus on institutional and constitutional dimensions rather than leadership behavior within parties. This leaves a research gap: the absence of a study that applies Bass and Avolio's transactional leadership dimensions: contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception, as a structured analytical tool to interpret political party leadership practices during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election and their consequences for democratic quality. This study addresses that gap by positioning transactional leadership theory as the primary analytical lens through which political party dynamics and political pragmatism during the 2019 election are examined.

This study develops its analytical framework from Bass and Avolio's transactional leadership model, operationalized into three dimensions used to classify and interpret political party leadership practices during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election (Taqwa & Suleman, 2023; Burhan & Sejati, 2023). Each dimension functions as an analytical category through which secondary data drawn from academic literature, legal regulations, and official reports are read and interpreted, as outlined in the research framework presented in Figure 1.

Contingency reward is operationalized as the exchange of political incentives, strategic positions, or organizational privileges for loyalty and performance, consistent with the patronage-oriented leadership behavior described in the political pragmatism literature (Apriliyanti, 2023; Kurniawan, 2025).

Active management by exception is operationalized as direct supervision, campaign monitoring, and corrective intervention undertaken by party elites before problems escalate, reflecting the organizational discipline mechanisms noted by Kristiyanto et al. (2023).

Passive management by exception is operationalized as reactive intervention that occurs only after conflicts, violations, or controversies have become visible threats to party legitimacy, a pattern consistent with the institutional fragility described by Fionna and Tomsa (2020).

These three dimensions are positioned within an input-process-output logic: literature and secondary data serve as analytical input, classification according to the three leadership dimensions constitutes the analytical process, and the interpretation of political pragmatism and democratic dynamics constitutes the analytical output (Permana & Widianto, 2025; Wardani & Subekti, 2021). By anchoring the analysis in this framework, the study moves beyond a purely descriptive account of the 2019 election and instead offers a structured explanation of how transactional leadership behavior contributes to both organizational effectiveness and the democratic paradox discussed in the Results and Discussion section (Permana & Widianto, 2025; Wadipalapa & Tyson, 2025).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze transactional leadership practices within political parties during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election (Arfah et al., 2025). The research utilized library research methods by collecting secondary data from books, scientific journals, government regulations, academic articles, and official reports related to political leadership, elections, and political party dynamics in Indonesia.

Research Setting

The research focused on Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous presidential and legislative elections. The 2019 election was selected as the research setting because it represented an important transformation in Indonesia's electoral system, in which presidential and legislative elections were conducted simultaneously for the first time. This electoral context involved complex interactions among political parties, party elites, candidates, voters, and electoral institutions.

The research specifically examined political party leadership practices during the 2019 electoral process, including candidate recruitment, political bargaining, campaign mobilization, organizational supervision, allocation of strategic positions, and responses to political conflicts or deviations. The setting was therefore not limited to a particular geographical location but encompassed documented political practices occurring within Indonesia's national electoral system during the 2019 election period.

Data Sources

The study relied primarily on secondary data. Data were obtained from peer-reviewed scientific journals, academic books, government regulations, electoral documents, official reports, and other credible publications addressing political parties, transactional leadership, electoral politics, political pragmatism, patronage, and democratic governance in Indonesia.

The selection of secondary sources was based on their relevance to the research questions, credibility of publication, and contribution to understanding transactional leadership practices during the 2019 election. Particular attention was given to sources that documented political bargaining, party leadership behavior, organizational control, campaign strategies,

patronage relationships, candidate selection, and political responses to conflicts or electoral deviations.

Secondary data were used as documentary evidence rather than as numerical observations. Accordingly, the unit of analysis was not individual respondents but documented instances, narratives, practices, and political events that reflected the three dimensions of transactional leadership.

Informant Selection

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in political party activities and the 2019 simultaneous election. The selection criteria included individuals who had relevant knowledge of political party leadership, electoral strategies, campaign management, organizational decision-making, or political bargaining during the 2019 election.

The selected informants may include political party leaders or administrators, party members involved in electoral activities, election campaign teams, and political observers or academics with relevant expertise in Indonesian electoral politics. These informants were considered capable of providing information concerning the implementation of transactional leadership practices, particularly in relation to contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception.

The selection of informants was conducted purposively to ensure that the information obtained was directly relevant to the research objectives. The number of informants was determined based on data adequacy and information saturation, whereby additional informants were no longer required when the information obtained became repetitive and no longer generated substantially new findings. Information obtained from the informants was subsequently compared with secondary data from academic literature, regulations, official electoral documents, and other relevant sources. This process was conducted to strengthen the credibility of the findings through source triangulation.

Data Collection

Data collection focused on identifying concepts and practices associated with transactional leadership theory, particularly the dimensions proposed by Bass and Avolio, including contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. The collected data were analyzed descriptively to interpret patterns of political leadership behavior and their implications for democratic governance.

Data Analysis

The analysis process consisted of three stages: data collection, data classification, and interpretative analysis. First, relevant literature and documents were gathered from credible academic and legal sources. Second, the data were classified based on the dimensions of transactional leadership theory. Third, the findings were interpreted to explain the implementation of transactional leadership practices within political parties during the 2019 election in Figure 1.

Figure1. Research Framework of Transactional Leadership Analysis in Indonesia's 2019 Election

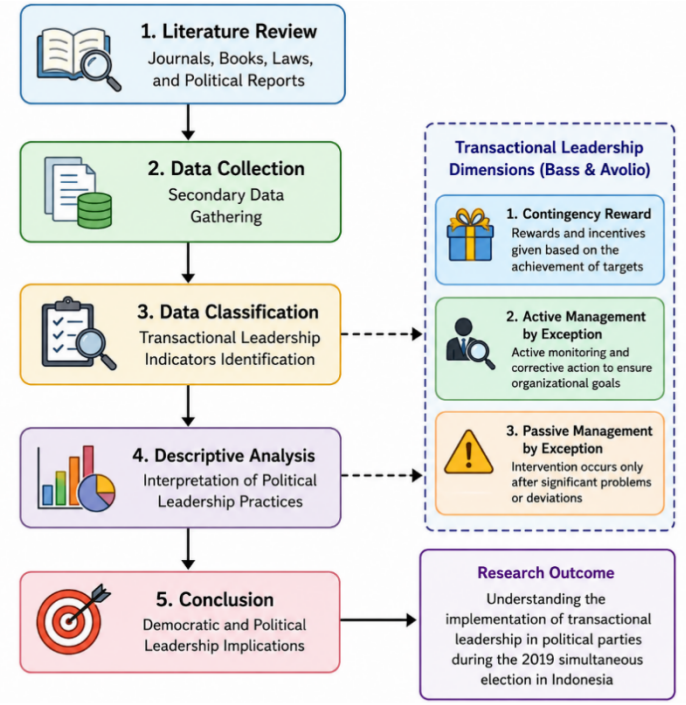


Figure 1 illustrates the research framework used in this study to analyze transactional leadership practices within political parties during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election. The research process began with a literature review involving journals, books, laws, and political reports related to leadership, political parties, and democratic governance. Subsequently, secondary data were collected from various academic and official sources to support the analysis.

The collected data were then classified based on the dimensions of transactional leadership theory proposed by Bass and Avolio, namely contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. After the classification process, the data were analyzed descriptively to interpret political leadership practices implemented by political parties during the election period. Finally, the research produced conclusions regarding the implications of transactional leadership on democratic dynamics and political pragmatism in Indonesia's electoral system.

Trustworthiness And Research Ethics

The trustworthiness of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation and cross-document comparison. Evidence concerning political party leadership practices was compared across different types of sources, including peer-reviewed academic publications, books, electoral documents, government regulations, and official reports.

The researchers also compared findings from different scholarly perspectives to identify consistencies, contradictions, and contextual differences. Particular attention was given to the consistency between documented political practices and the conceptual dimensions of transactional leadership. The use of multiple sources reduced dependence on a single interpretation and strengthened the credibility and analytical validity of the findings. In addition,

the researchers maintained a clear distinction between documented evidence and analytical interpretation. Claims concerning political leadership practices were based on identifiable documentary evidence, while broader conclusions concerning political pragmatism and democratic implications were developed through comparative interpretation across the selected sources.

Although this study did not involve direct interaction with human participants, ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. The researchers used academic publications, official documents, regulations, and publicly available reports responsibly and accurately. Sources were appropriately acknowledged through academic citation, and the interpretation of political events was conducted objectively without deliberately misrepresenting the positions or findings of previous researchers.

The study also sought to avoid unsupported generalizations concerning individual political actors or political parties. Interpretations were limited to evidence available in the selected sources and were presented within the historical and institutional context of Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election. Academic integrity was maintained through transparent source selection, accurate citation, and responsible interpretation of secondary evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contingency Reward in Political Party Leadership

The findings indicate that contingency reward became one of the dominant leadership practices within political parties during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election. Political leaders frequently utilized political incentives, strategic positions, and organizational privileges to strengthen member loyalty and campaign effectiveness. Party members and legislative candidates who demonstrated strong commitment and political performance were often rewarded with greater political opportunities and strategic roles within party structures.

This exchange-oriented relationship reflects the core characteristic of transactional leadership, where organizational support is obtained through reciprocal political benefits. In many cases, political bargaining and position allocation were used as mechanisms to consolidate internal party strength and maintain electoral competitiveness. Although such practices improved organizational discipline and campaign coordination, they also contributed to the emergence of political patronage and transactional political culture.

Active Management by Exception

Active management by exception was reflected through direct supervision and monitoring conducted by political party leaders during campaign implementation. Leaders actively evaluated campaign strategies, monitored political communication, and intervened when deviations from party objectives occurred. Political elites also ensured that party members maintained organizational discipline and aligned their actions with party ideology and electoral goals.

This leadership approach enabled political parties to respond quickly to political challenges and maintain public trust during the election process. Corrective actions implemented by party leaders helped reduce organizational conflict and strengthened campaign coordination. The findings demonstrate that active supervision became an important strategy for maintaining organizational stability within highly competitive political environments.

Passive Management by Exception

Passive management by exception appeared when political leaders intervened only after significant political problems emerged. In several cases, party leaders delayed corrective action until internal conflicts, campaign violations, or public controversies became serious threats to party legitimacy. This reactive leadership behavior illustrates a leadership pattern that prioritizes problem resolution only after organizational standards have been disrupted.

Although this approach may reduce short-term political tension, passive management by exception potentially weakens institutional accountability and public confidence in political parties. The findings suggest that reactive leadership behavior remains common in political organizations characterized by high levels of uncertainty and political pragmatism.

Discussion

The implementation of transactional leadership during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election demonstrates the dominance of pragmatic political behavior within political parties. Transactional leadership provided organizational advantages such as discipline, rapid coordination, and electoral effectiveness (Akbar et al., 2023; Nurhasanah, 2019). However, excessive dependence on transactional mechanisms also strengthened elite-centered politics, political bargaining, and patronage networks.

From a democratic perspective, transactional leadership creates a paradoxical situation (Permana & Widianto, 2025; Wardani & Subekti, 2021). On one hand, it improves organizational efficiency and political competitiveness; on the other hand, it risks reducing democratic quality by prioritizing short-term political interests over ideological consistency and public accountability (Wadipalapa & Tyson, 2025; Yuwanto et al., 2020). Therefore, political parties in Indonesia require a more balanced leadership approach that integrates organizational effectiveness with democratic ethics and transformational political values.

CONCLUSION

Transactional leadership significantly influenced political party dynamics during Indonesia's 2019 simultaneous election. The study identified three major dimensions of transactional leadership implementation: contingency reward, active management by exception, and passive management by exception. Political leaders utilized rewards, direct supervision, and corrective interventions to strengthen organizational performance and electoral competitiveness.

Although transactional leadership improved short-term political effectiveness, excessive implementation contributed to political pragmatism, patronage practices, and democratic controversies. Therefore, Indonesian political parties should strengthen transformational leadership values that emphasize integrity, ideological commitment, public accountability, and democratic participation to improve the quality of democratic governance and public trust in democratic institutions.

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