# Political Communication and Economy:

## Grassroots Community Perspectives

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*Abstract*— **The economy issue usually emerges as a vital topic in the political communication to gather interest from the society, especially the grassroots community. This article argues that political communication and economy are related to each other. The aim of this research is to analyze the political communication understanding of grassroots community and the correlation between political communication and economy provided by politicians from the perspective of the grassroots community. The method utilized in this research is system dynamics method to see the system behavior related to the political communication and economy. Primary data was collected from the respondents, which are also a part of the unit sample of this research. The result reveals that grassroots community understands political communication as a message to improve social life. The economic message is one of the most critical factors for the grassroots community to understand the meaning of political communication. The trust of community becomes the important key in increasing the efficiency of political promises realization. Then, political promises realization may influence the election participation level and economy growth in Indonesia, especially related to the unemployment rate and poverty level as indicators of social welfare.**

*Keywords—political communication; economy; grassroot community; system dynamics*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Election, either for legislative or presidential election, has become one of Indonesian democratic identities that has been embraced and applied simultaneously, as one of Indonesia political agenda. This phenomenon further pushes the emergence of various issues as political parties and their candidates' agendas in every political campaign activities. To achieve high level of interest from the society, political parties and their candidates often include several important issues in the society's social life such as economy, politics, health, education, terrorism, and other current issues [1].

Economy as one of vital issues [1] has been utilized in so many political rollouts, not only in Indonesia, but also in several advanced countries [1,2,3]. In British election of 2005, many topics regarding economic aspect has become the most popular issues in political campaign activities [1]. Meanwhile, on the previous year, economy has also becomes the most mentioned topic in 2004 Russian election. Economy has become one of ten most mentioned issues by the presidential

candidates. Kenski and Kensi also found the same phenomenon in United States of America's 2008 presidential election, where the economy has become the dominant issue in political campaign activities [4]. It means that economic issue has become the major issue chosen in the political communication in some countries in the recent years.

The strength of economic issue in directing voters has become a powerful weapon [2] for the leader's candidates (legislative or presidential) to increase their electability. The high frequency of economic issue as one of the most favorite issue by the candidates is due to the perceptions about the positive impact of economy issue to gather voters' interest [1].

Apart from the effectiveness of economic issues in political campaign activities, the candidates or political parties' ability to present their political message has also contributes to determine their campaign success. The ability to present the candidates and political parties' messages is known as the political communication ability [5]. Some researchers argued that political communication become the important factors in the election process [6,7] since it is related to how leaders candidate promote themselves, commitment, and political promises to get the society's interest and trust [8]. Actually, there are two forms of political communication which are direct communication and by using mass media [5]. The leader's candidate may use both of political communication forms or just choose the most appropriate one.

Besides creating a good communication channel by bringing important issues in the context, political communication also needs to have its distinctive appeal towards the society. Every political communication activities must be able to maintain a mutual relationship with everyday culture of the society so it stays interesting for the society [9]. This is why, political communication must be delivered both formally, or informally by the political parties or the candidates. The effect of informal political communication could bring impacts on different level of political action [10]. Furthermore, regarding informal communication, media (journalists and journalism in general), could be a good channel to deliver strategic proposals in the political communication process [11].

However, to reach success and bring significant impact towards the voters, the communication needs to be intensive and sustainable. The voters, in this case the grassroots

community, need quite a range of time to digest every aspect and issues delivered by the candidates or by the political parties during their political campaign. This subject is supported by Turska-Kawa and Wojtasik in their research on communication function of elections, which reveals that communication during election does not guarantee a quick, direct and immediate impact on the political process [12].

Today, there is a growing body of research that explores political communication generally [2] but much less attention has been paid to political communication in its relation with the economic condition, especially in Indonesia. Currently, many papers just focused on the political communication during the election without link it with the economic condition after the election. Through this study, the authors try to fill the gaps by analyzing the importance of political communication, in its relation to the economic condition and participation rate of the grassroots community in the election process. By using system dynamics, the authors try to analyze the relationship among political communication and economy, especially the unemployment rate and poverty level as social welfare indicators in Indonesia.

Then, since the success of election also may have influenced by the voters itself, the political communication also will be linked to the election participation rate, in line with the concept of social trust which is derived from the effectiveness of political communication practice. The election participation rate will be more focused on the grassroots community as ordinary people who are predicted can give positive effects to the election process.

## II. RESEARCH METHOD

### A. Research Method

To reach the objectives of this research, questionnaire then be used to identify the perspective of grassroots' community towards the political communication and economic issue in Indonesia. Questionnaire is appropriate for social research, since it is perceived can acquire more information about public perception [13]. The questionnaire is expected can gather more information about political communication and economy from the grassroots' community perspective in Indonesia. Then, to analyze the result, the authors used system dynamics method. It is because, according to Forrester, system dynamics is appropriate to analyze such a complex system [14].

### B. Sample and Population

Since the objective of this research is to examine the political communication and economy of Indonesia, so Indonesia becomes the population of this research. Meanwhile, the sample of this research is grassroots community which comes from various provinces in Indonesia like West Java, Jakarta, West Sumatera, South East Sulawesi, South Sumatera, Central Java, Banten, West Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, and East Kalimantan. The sample is predicted can represents grassroots community in Indonesia.

### C. Research Design

To answer the research questions and objectives of this research, there are some steps used by the authors as shown on the Fig. 1, problem identification becomes the first stage used in this research. In this research, the authors try to highlight the political communication issue. To support the analysis of this research, the authors review some literature from some sources like journals, books, articles, etc. The basic concept of this research is political communication and economy concept. After create some critical review, the next stage is data collection by using two types of data which are primary and secondary data. The data obtained then will be modeled and simulated using system dynamics modeling. This model will describe the effect of political communication to the Indonesian economy, in its relation to the social welfare. The result then will be analyzed and conclude so the authors can give some recommendation for stakeholders involved as consideration in making some decision.
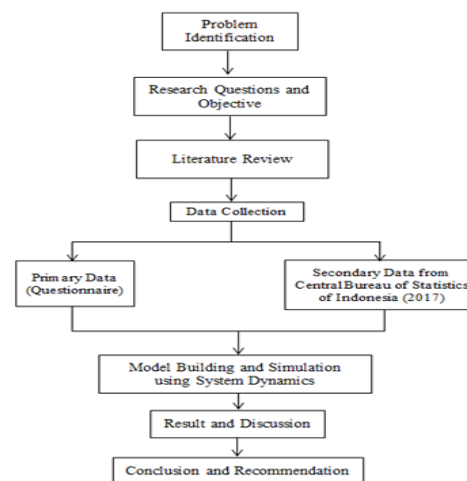


Fig. 1. Research Design

### D. Model Building

To construct system dynamics model, the first stage should be taken is analyzing the variables and construct the Causal Loop Diagram from that variables. Then, after the CLD is built, the next stage which is Stock Flow Diagram can be initiated before simulate the system dynamics model.

*1) Causal Loop Diagram:* After identifying variables and stakeholders involved, the next stage is building causal loop diagram. (CLD). This CLD is constructed to give better understanding about the relationship among variables related to the political communication and economy issue in Indonesia. In this CLD, each variable will be linked with other variables to get better understanding about the impact may be caused by each variable constructed. This CLD model becomes the major processes that determine how the effectiveness of the political communication may have impact to the economic condition in Indonesia. In this part, the authors will explain the causal relationship among political communication effectiveness with the social welfare and election participation rate in Indonesia.

*2) Stock Flow Diagram:* After developing the causal loop diagram, the next stage in developing system dynamics model is construct stock flow diagram (SFD). This SFD model is used to see the relationship between the stock and flow variables. In this research, there are 3 major stock used, which is unemployment rate, poverty level, and election participation rate.

*3) Simulation:* System dynamics modeling was used as general model of this research. To complete the process, the authors used Vensim PLE Plus 7.2 (Single Precision) x32 software to simulate the SFD model. After develop the causal loop and stock and flow diagram, the simulations are performed. At this stage, possible scenarios are made in order to obtain the best scenario that can be implemented by the aim to improve the Indonesian economy in its relation to the political communication.

*a) Simulation Scenarios:* There are two scenarios used in the simulation, which are high and low political communication effectiveness. Those scenarios are expected can influence the political promises realization which impact to the society's trust. If the society's trust is increase, then it is

expected can give positive impact to the Indonesian economy, especially to the social welfare. The society's trust also becomes one of the important factors in increasing the number of election participation rate. If the trust of the society to the leaders is increase, then it is expected can increase their participation in the election process so it may reduce the number of abstain in the Indonesian election.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### A. Causal Loop Diagram (CLD)

Based on the questionnaire result, we found critical issues related to the political communication and its relation to the Indonesian economy. The effectiveness of political communication builds social trust and, in the end, may have impact to their participation in the election. The result showed that political communication effectiveness can influence the economy, especially social welfare.

That causal relationship explains about the impacts caused by one variable to the other variable in its relation to the political communication and economy. The CLD is shown in the causal loop diagram in Fig. 2.
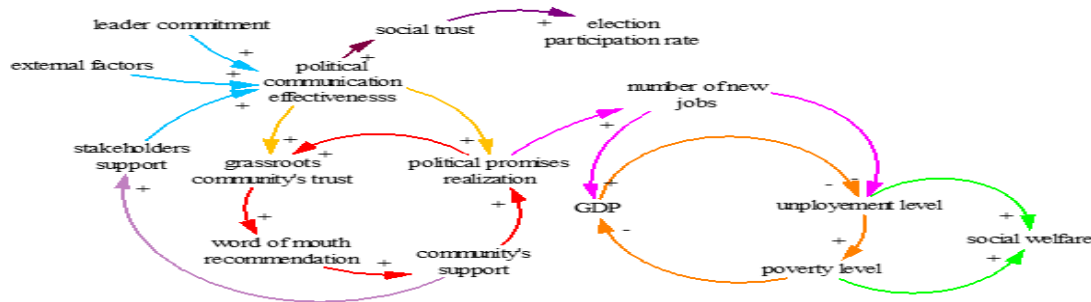


Fig. 2.  Causal Loop Diagram

Causal Loop Diagram (CLD) explains that political communication presented by the leader's candidates and their commitment to realize the promises are important in getting other stakeholders to support the promises realization when they are chosen as the future leader.

### B. Stock Flow Diagram

After construct the CLD model, the enxt stage is build SFD model to see the relationship among stock and flow variables. Figure below shows the stock flow diagram for this research.
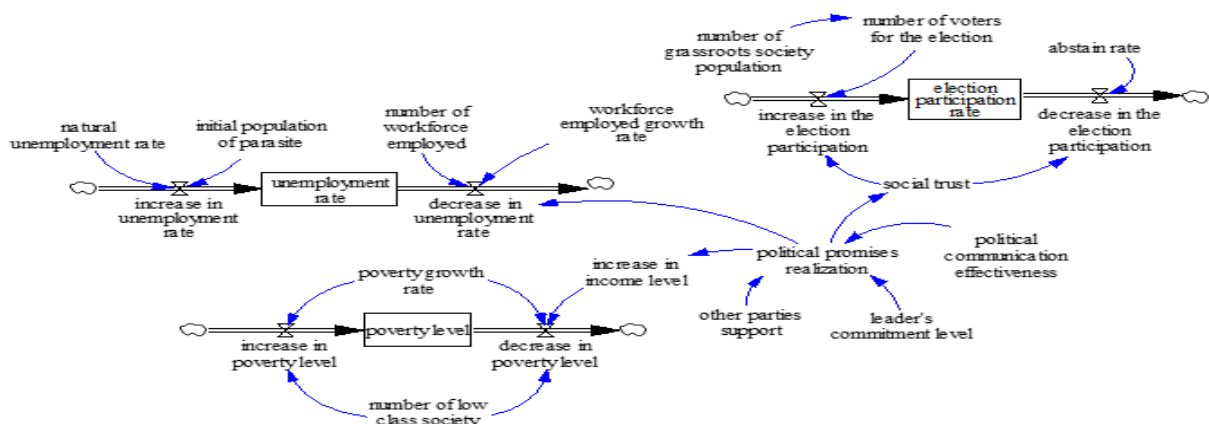


Fig. 3.  Stock Flow Diagram

Stock flow diagram in Fig. 3, explains that political communication has important impacts to the economic development in Indonesia, especially in its relation to the development of social welfare. This research was limited to choose two indicators are used to measure the social welfare in Indonesia, which are poverty level and unemployment rate. The increaseing or decreasing number of poverty level of Indonesia may be influenced by the income level of the Indonesian society, number of low class scoiety, and annual poverty growth rate. In its relation to the poverty level, effectiveness of political communication can impacts to the percentage of political promises that may influence the increasing number of income of Indonesian society. Moreover, the income as one of the poverty indicator is important to increase the poverty level.

Besides of poverty level, the political communication also may has influence to the unemployement rate. Today, unemployment rate is one of the indicators of social welfare. Then, since the leaders need to communicate their political promises, it may create some intention from some parties. The more effective the leaders in presenting their political promises, the higher their participation rate in the election.

*C. Simulation Result*

There are three important results derived from the system dynamics simulation, which are simulation in unemployment rate, poverty level and election participation rate. The first scenario shows the result for low political communication (around 45%). Meanwhile the second scenario shows the result for the high political communication (around 85%). To get deeper understanding about the result, each result will be explained more detailed in the description below.

*1) Unemployment result:* By using two scenarios, which are high and low political communication effectiveness. Figure below explains the impacts of political communication effectiveness to the unemployment rate in Indonesia.
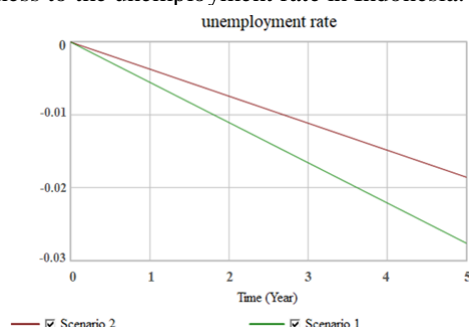


Fig. 4.   Unemployment Rate

Unemployment rate becomes one of the consideration indicators used to measure economy condition [3]. The unemployment rate in Fig. 4, explains about the prediction for the percentage of unemployed people in Indonesia. However, Unemployment rate may have direct or indirect impact to the social welfare [3]. Therefore, through this paper, the authors try to analyze the linkage between political communication and economy condition, especially social welfare, unemployment rate is chosen as one of the economics condition measurement.

According to the data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Indonesia in 2017, the current unemployment rate in Indonesia is around 5.53% [15]. The simulation result shows that if the political communication is effective, it is expected can give great impact to the realization of the political promises. This political communication effectiveness is about how effective the political promises were communicated to the society to attract their attention to the election process. To gain more interest and trust from the society, the leaders need to be more clear and committed to the promises. So, it may help them in gaining other parties supports like society's support to realize the promises.

The simulation in Fig. 4, shows that the increasing in the political communication effectiveness is predicted can decrease the unemployment rate in Indonesia for the next 5 years. In the first year, the number is expected can decrease by 0.6 percent That number is predicted to continue to increase, so it can decrease the unemployment rate by 2.8 percent in the fifth years. This number is quite good in its relation to the decreasing in the unemployment rate.

If we compare the result of the first and second scenario, the better result for this simulation is the second scenario. It means that the high political communication effectiveness can give better result in the decreasing number of unemployment rate in Indonesia. Since the political communication effectiveness become on of the key factors in the realization of the political promises, so it is expected can decrease the unemployment rate.

*2) Poverty Level:* Poverty level has been cosidered as one of the social welfare indicators in Indonesia. According to BPS, poor people can be defined as the population that has an average per capita expenditure below the poverty line. This method was used by BPS since 1998, to make sure the results of the calculations are consistent and time-varying [15]. Relying on the data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics (BPS) of Indonesia, in  2017, the number of poor people in Indonesia in September reached 26.52 million or less than 1.19 million people compared to March 2017. Thus, the percentage of poor people in Indonesia reached 10.12 percent or the lowest since the last 16 years. In this research, the poverty level is predicted can be infleunced by the political communication effectiveness. This statement was supported by the simulation result shows that the more effective of the political communication, the higher in the decreasing number of poverty level in Indonesia. The Fig. 5, may gives more explanation about the simulation result.
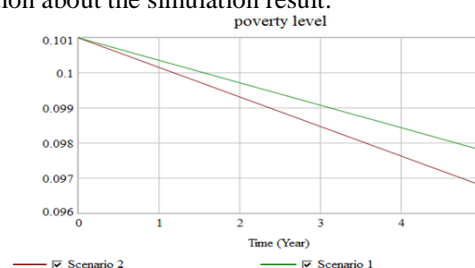


Fig. 5.   Poverty Level

Refers to the system dynamics simulation result above, the decline number of poverty level in Indonesia is quite significant. In the first scenario, the decrease of poverty rate is still not maximum. It is due to the lack of efficiency in the political communication. In the first scenario, the effectiveness of political communication is assumed to be low, which is only 45%. Nevertheless, the results show that there is a decrease in poverty levels in Indonesia so that poverty rates are predicted can reach 9.8 percent in the fifth year of leadership. Meanwhile, the second scenario shows that the more effective political communication, the decreasing poverty rate is predicted to increase to reach 9.7% percent in the fifth year.

From the results of this simulation, it can be concluded that the more effective political communication of prospective leaders, the opportunity to get the support from the grassroots society becomes greater, making it easier for them to realize their political promises so it is expected can reduce the level of poverty in Indonesia.

*3) Election Pariticipation Rate:* The importance of participation rate in the election processs of the leaders in Indonesia makes the political communication effectiveness gain more attention from many parties, especially leaders who participate in the election process in Indonesia. The number of voters become the key factors in the success of election process. Indonesia as one of the democratic country organize election process. This event need contribution from all of society in Indonesia as the voters. The relationship among grassroots community vote with the election participation rate is shown in the Fig. 6 below.
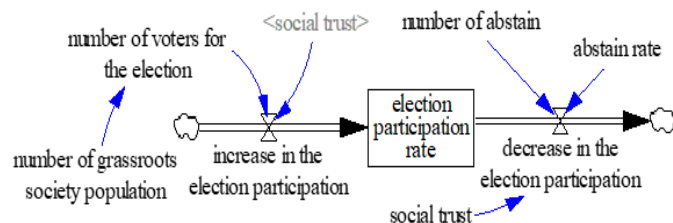


Fig. 6.   Election Participation Rate

In the SFD above, the grassroots community population becomes the major focus of this research. In the election conducted in 2014, the participation of grassroots community is high so it will be a high opportunity for the leader candidates to increasing its political communication activity to the grassroots community. The more understanding gained by grassroots community, the more likely they will be to participate in the elections.

Based on the data obtained from the BPS, in 2014, the election participation rate in Indonesia is around 72 percent. This number is quite higher than the level of voter participation in the 2009 Election that is only reach 70.99 percent. It means that Indonesia need to increase the number of election participation rate to make the election process become more effective. Through this paper, this rate is expected will increase if there is increasing in the effectiveness of the political communication. Fig. 7 describe the relationship among the political communication with the election participation rate was simulated by using system dynamics.
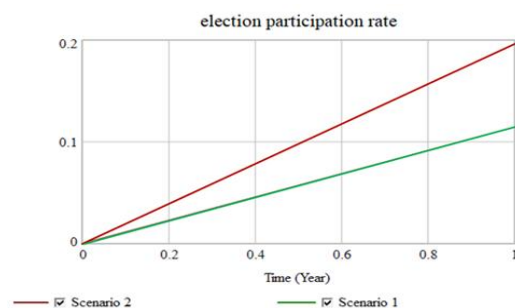


Fig. 7.   Election Participation Rate

After analyzing the simulation result above, the election participation rate is predictid will be higher. This result may be caused by the increasing number of effectiveness in the political communication. The first scenario shows the increasing number of participation rate by 11%. Meanwhile, the second scenario shows tha result of efectivenss of the political communication can increase the participation rate by around 20%.

By comparing the first and second scenario result, we can conculde that the political communication has positive impact to the election pariticaption level. The basic explanation towards this condition is that the political communication can becomes the consideration for the society in voting the leader candidates. The society's trust derived from the effectivenss of the leaders in communciation their vision, mission, and promises in its relation with the economic development of Indonesia is become the major driver for them in making voting decision. This society's trust then become the basic motivation for them to participate in the election process.

## IV.   CONCLUSIONS

Political communication is expected can give positive impact to the increasing of social welfare in Indonesia that is indicated by the declining in the unemployment rate and poverty level. The effectiveness of the political communication can give opportunity to the leader candidates to get trust from the grassroots community that support them in realizing the political promises related to the economy development in Indonesia.

The simulation result also predicts that political communication may have positive influence to the increasing number of election participation rate. Through political communication, the leader candidates are expected can get more attention and trust from the grassroots community so the participation rate of the society in the election is expected will be higher.

The importance of the political communication in increasing the economy development and election participation rate then direct the leader candidates to give more attention to the political communication process. In addition, since the economy issue is become the major issue considered by the society, it is important for the candidates to be more aware about the issues faced by the Indonesian economy and try to get appropriate solution to be communicated to the society through the political campaign.

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