

### *Book Review*

## **Sair, A. (2024). *Dramaturgi Politik Elektoral: Memahami Perilaku, Wacana, dan Motif Politik di Aras Lokal*. Intrans Publishing. 148 pp.**

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#### **Abstract**

This book offers a thorough investigation of political dramaturgy within the context of the 2010 Regional Head Elections in Surabaya. It spans six chapters, exploring the historical and theoretical foundations of political dramaturgy and providing a detailed case study of its application in Surabaya's electoral politics. Drawing on Erving Goffman's concepts of dramaturgy, the book illustrates how political interactions resemble theatrical performances, encompassing both "frontstage" and "backstage" elements. The backstage arena includes all the necessary preparations for the actors' performances on the front stage, ranging from research to logistical and technical requirements. In contrast, the front stage focuses on the actors' skills in impression management, which involve face-to-face interactions and the use of technology to effectively communicate political messages and influence public opinion. Overall, this book highlights the importance of dramaturgical elements in shaping electoral strategies and provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of cultural, social, and political factors that affect the dynamics of electoral politics at the local level.

**Keywords:** *political dramaturgy; regional elections; electoral politics*

#### **Abstrak**

Buku ini membahas secara mendalam tentang dramaturgi politik dalam konteks Pemilihan Kepala Daerah 2010 di Surabaya. Buku ini terbagi menjadi enam bab, yang mengeksplorasi secara historis dan teoritis konsep dramaturgi politik dengan mengangkat studi kasus penerapannya dalam pemilihan kepala daerah di Kota Surabaya. Mengacu pada konsep dramaturgi Erving Goffman, buku ini mengilustrasikan bagaimana interaksi politik dapat menyerupai pertunjukan teater, yang mencakup elemen seperti panggung depan dan belakang. Panggung belakang mencakup semua persiapan yang diperlukan untuk pertunjukan para aktor di depan panggung, mulai dari penelitian hingga kebutuhan logistik dan teknis. Selanjutnya, panggung depan lebih berfokus pada keterampilan aktor dalam manajemen impresi, yang melibatkan interaksi tatap muka dan penggunaan teknologi untuk menyampaikan pesan politik untuk dapat mempengaruhi opini publik. Secara keseluruhan, karya ini menyoroti pentingnya elemen dramaturgikal dalam membentuk strategi pemilihan dan memberikan wawasan berharga tentang interaksi kompleks antara faktor budaya, sosial, dan politik yang memengaruhi dinamika politik elektoral di aras lokal.

**Kata kunci:** *dramaturgi politik; pemilihan kepala daerah; politik elektoral*

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## Introduction

Following the collapse of the New Order era and the beginning of the Reformation period, Indonesia experienced significant changes in all aspects of life, particularly in its political dynamicity (Berger, 1997). In his book, Sair notes three major socio-political changes (Sair, 2024). Firstly, political parties have proliferated and diversified, each representing the various identities within society. Previously, elections from 1977 to 1997 were contested by only three parties: Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP), Partai Demokrasi Indonesia, and Golkar. Secondly, the introduction of the direct election system in Indonesia. This was a new development in the Reformation period since, under the previous regime, the president and vice president were elected by the MPR, not the people. Lastly, Indonesia's legal system has increasingly supported the growth of democracy by creating laws that prioritise the sovereignty of the people.

These changes have significantly impacted the strategies of political parties in planning and executing campaigns. In the Post-reformation era, electability is crucial for political actors to win elections (Danugroho, 2024). The people now play a critical role in democracy, influencing the process through voting. As a result, political parties must not only lobby the political elite, as they did during the Suharto era, but also actively and creatively design campaigns that attract public trust and sympathy (Robin et al., 2022). This makes political activities now resemble a *lakon*, an Indonesian term meaning a theatrical performance, meticulously crafted by the team behind the actor to captivate the public (Sair, 2024).

The phenomenon of this so called *lakon* performed by political actors during elections inspired Sair to study it deeply and critically. His thoughts are embodied in his book, *Dramaturgi Politik Elektoral: Memahami Perilaku, Wacana, dan Motif Politik di Aras Lokal*, which uses the 2010 Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) in Surabaya as a case study. The book examines political dramaturgy using Erving Goffman's dramaturgical framework (1959), analysing political phenomena in elections through two main dimensions: frontstage and backstage.

## Discussion

This book comprehensively examines the phenomenon of political dramaturgy in the case of Regional Head Elections in Surabaya in the year of 2010. It spans 148 pages and is divided into six chapters: an introductory chapter and five chapters discussing the history, theories, and case study of political dramaturgy in Surabaya's electoral politics. The numerous illustrations of political practices depicted by the author help readers understand the book's content more easily.

In the first chapter, the introduction, the author explains the socio-political background of how political dramaturgy emerged in Indonesia and provides an overview of the book's main themes. The phenomenon of dramaturgy in Indonesia's political process is closely related to the rise of democracy (Sair, 2024), which has made voters' voices the source of political legitimacy. This has made political campaigns more influential in gaining public sympathy and trust. Political activities have transformed into a dramatic stage where actors play their roles with scripts designed by their teams (Fitzgerald, 2015). The author captures this dramaturgical framework in the 2010 Surabaya Regional Head Elections, categorising political activities during this election into two different stages: frontstage (political image) and backstage (strategy, discourse, and political motives).

Next, in the second chapter, the author elaborates on the history of how the concept of dramaturgy emerged. This exploration reveals the thoughts of several prominent political thinkers worldwide. For instance, it includes Thomas Hobbes' idea of political hypocrisy, Aristotle's thoughts on theatre, Kenneth Burke's concept of dramatism, and Erving Goffman's idea of the theatrical stage. Broadly, these concepts guide readers to understand that humans instinctively tend to play different roles in various settings. For example, in a political context, dramaturgy is likely to occur, especially when leaders who claim to act in the public interest are merely making promises, as most of their work is actually for personal and group interests (Merelman, 1969).

Following this, in the third chapter, the author explains some key aspects of Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory based on his

book, "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (Goffman, 1959). Firstly, according to Goffman, social interactions among people in daily life can be likened to a theatrical performance. Everyone strives to create a specific image of themselves so that others will believe in that image. This process, which Goffman calls self-presentation, involves presenting oneself in the best possible way to others. Consequently, everyone informally adopts a character or image through the symbols or accessories they wear daily. Goffman then divides the realm of social interaction into two dimensions: frontstage and backstage.

The frontstage refers to every conscious self-presentation made in public, such as how people dress, the accessories they use, or even how they express their ideas and the language they use in public conversations (Goffman, 1959). The backstage is where people prepare their frontstage performance, researching strategies or styles they will use as their public identity, hidden from public view (Goffman, 1959). To achieve the best frontstage performance, Goffman argued that people should collaborate with others in what he called a performance team. Since the actor cannot work alone, he needs the creative and structural team to help him perform successfully in front of public.

In the fourth chapter, the author discusses the social, political, economic, and cultural conditions of Surabaya, as well as the background of the dynamics surrounding local elections in the city. Surabaya is characterized by its vibrant and unique "Arek" culture, known for being straightforward and candid, which contributes to a political environment that is more open and egalitarian (Sungkowati, 2019; Tinarso et al., 2018). Additionally, the diverse community of Surabaya, made up of various ethnicities and races, enriches political discussions and fosters openness among its residents, making them more receptive to differing viewpoints. However, despite this diversity in socio-political background, Sair (2024) argues that nationalist political parties are more dominant and influential in Surabaya. For instance, Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDIP) was the winning party in the Surabaya elections in 1999 and 2004, while Partai Demokrat won in the 2009 elections.

In the fifth chapter, which is the core part of the book's discussion, Sair elaborates on the concept of dramaturgy, previously explained in the third chapter, as a framework for analyzing the electoral process in Surabaya. The discussion on electoral political dramaturgy in Surabaya is divided into two main parts: the backstage and the front stage.

The backstage involves a team responsible for preparing everything needed for the actors to perform on the front stage. This includes conducting opinion polls, providing SWOT analysis, developing symbols and images, managing the stage during campaigns, and handling all logistical and technical needs, such as t-shirts, posters, stickers, banners, food, billboards, and flags (Sair, 2024). For example, in Surabaya's local elections, the backstage team created campaign slogans for candidates. In the case of the Risma & Bambang DH pair from PDIP, research from the backstage team led to the invention of slogan "risma & bambang, Not the Others."

Meanwhile, the front stage focuses on the actors' communication skills in front of the public to align with public expectations. These skills include using language, body gestures, facial expressions, and proper behavior when engaging with audiences. The key aspect of the front stage is impression management, or the art of managing the actor's message. In Surabaya's elections, impression management encompasses two categories: face-to-face interactions and the use of technology (Sair, 2024). Face-to-face interaction involves direct communication, where the actor meets constituents in person and uses various scripts, props, and strategies based on research conducted by the backstage team. Dramaturgical technology refers to the use of media and technology by actors to convey their political messages, whether through narratives or political images, to influence public opinion with an added element of drama. For instance, Risma was portrayed in digital media as "one of the most remarkable women" who is responsible for the advancement of Surabaya's urban environment.

This book provides a compelling analysis of the dynamics of electoral politics in local elections in Indonesia through a dramaturgical perspective. However, several aspects could be improved for greater clarity and relevance. First,

the discussions on the history of political dramaturgy and Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory in the second and third chapters could be effectively integrated into a single chapter. This would enhance the theoretical rigor and making it easier for readers to grasp the presented ideas. Additionally, this integration would allow the author to further elaborate on the core findings derived from research conducted in Surabaya. For instance, adding a deeper and more critical analysis and examples of political dramaturgy happened. This could involve showing readers some transcripts of interviews, particularly with those identified as the backstage team, showing readers illustration of team's activities on the backstage, or adding some pictures of political actors on the frontstage. This might helping readers better understand the context of the book.

Furthermore, despite the engaging analysis, the data presented in the book is slightly outdated, primarily based on information from around 2010. This affects its relevance to today's political conditions. For example, the book notes that political actors once relied mainly on newspapers and television for political campaigns to influence public opinion. However, in today's era of social media and Artificial Intelligence (AI), these media have become more digitalized. Political actors now use platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp to disseminate their political messages (Hutabarat, 2024), a shift not covered by the book since its data is slightly outdated. Nevertheless, readers can still relate the ideas in the book to current phenomena. Then, from a technical standpoint, the author could enhance the writing style within each chapter to make it more engaging and accessible for readers. A summary at the beginning of each chapter would serve as an overview, improving reader comprehension and interest, and enhancing the overall aesthetic quality of the writing.

Despite the explanation above, this book significantly contributes to public understanding of electoral politics in Indonesia through a rarely used lens—the dramaturgical perspective. It offers valuable insights, particularly for those interested in understanding the political dynamics in Indonesia, especially in regional level, from a practical standpoint rather than through rigid theoretical discussions. Furthermore, the book's conversational writing

style makes it easy to read, understand, and follow. Ultimately, this book greatly enriches the field of political science by effectively presenting the actual political processes occurring in the field, offering practical insights alongside theoretical concepts and analysis

## Conclusion

This book is not only a valuable source of knowledge for political science academics, but it is also an essential resource for practitioners in the political field. The book dissects electoral political phenomena in a clear and easily understandable way. Its use of a dramaturgical framework as a tool to analyze electoral political phenomena is one of the book's main strengths. The dramaturgical political analysis is presented in a way that is very easy for readers to grasp and reflect upon. This book is a must-read not only for students and academics in the social and political sciences fields but also for anyone with a strong interest in politics.

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## Book Cover

