



## Constructing Iconization of Leadership: A Sustainability Communication of Prabowo Subianto's Policy

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the construction of President Prabowo Subianto's iconization of leadership through sustainability communication practices represented in visual social media, particularly Instagram. This study uses a qualitative approach with a constructive paradigm and iconography methods to examine the meaning, themes, and visual motifs that shape Prabowo's sustainable leadership image. The research method applied is iconography. The results show that Prabowo consistently builds sustainability-based leadership through three main icons, namely the food security icon, the affectionate icon, and the higher morale icon. Prabowo Subianto's sustainable leadership is constructed through a combination of visuals, policies, and emotions as a symbolic strategy to build legitimacy, public trust, and a vision for the nation's future

## **INTRODUCTION**

Sustainability has become a trend in development in Indonesia. This is because development is not just about the present but also about future generations. Therefore, the focus of sustainability is not only on development but also on preserving the environment. Sustainability is also influenced by various demands and factors, ranging from climate change, geopolitics, geoeconomics, to corruption and digitalization.

Indonesia is also focused on developing sustainable development. The Indonesian government is committed to sustainable development by balancing economic growth and environmental sustainability (Arifin et al., 2024). Sustainability is also a concern for public leaders, helping to build trust and enthusiasm, which is manifested in various innovations (Pradana et al., 2022). Sustainable development policies are the best solution to implement in Indonesia to protect the environment for future generations (Yahman & Setyagama, 2022).

Indonesia's actions follow the direction and direction of various governments around the world. Political leaders pay attention to the sustainable development goals (SDGs), focusing on partnerships to strengthen equitable governance (Grover et al., 2021), with the goals of "clean water and sanitation," "life below water," "zero hunger," "no poverty," and "educational quality." Environmental issues are a concern in determining leaders' behavior and public attitudes (Dalrymple et al., 2013).

Leaders, especially government leaders, also make sustainability a core priority. Sustainability is also an integral part of leadership (Senbel, 2015). This is because government leaders have a vast scope of work and are constantly in contact with many stakeholders. Moreover, they are elected by the people, so they pay attention to their voices to strengthen their popularity and electability.

One way to achieve this is by positioning leaders as green leaders. By becoming green, leaders need to develop a sustainability leadership narrative so they can become heroes who resolve the environmental crisis (Heizmann & Liu, 2017). Green leaders emerge by championing sustainable development by setting an example in all their actions and policies (Hu et al., 2022). Moreover, governments worldwide are now committed to realizing sustainable development by implementing various supportive policies at the national, regional, and local levels (Howes et al., 2017).

Green leaders are icons. Becoming an icon is a method for achieving political power (Aptsiauri, 2021). Icons become a key force in a leader's transformation process (Sen & Nielsen, 2022). Just as Nelson Mandela became a global icon as a leader fighting against injustice (Olesen, 2015), President Prabowo Subianto's leadership has also attracted attention due to his various policies. Prabowo is a decisive leader who has strengthened Indonesia's development through various policies, including industrialization (Mazda et al., 2025) and economic growth, despite challenges such as democratic decline and corruption (Nugroho & Syarief, 2025). Furthermore, Prabowo Subianto possesses powerful personalistic leadership, which is his strength (Muhtadi, 2025). Furthermore, Prabowo Subianto consistently positions himself as a military-style leader (Mustaqim, 2021).

This research is novel because studies on the iconography of President Prabowo Subianto are rare. It also has real implications because it can provide policy recommendations related to sustainability communication that the government can develop.

Based on this background, this research questions how to construct the iconization of Prabowo Subianto's leadership in Indonesia. The purpose of this research is to explore the construction of iconization based on sustainability communication in Prabowo Subianto's policies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Sustainability Communication**

Sustainability communication is a branch of communication science that focuses on environmental aspects, policy, and development. It has become a crucial field of study amidst growing environmental concerns, amidst numerous natural disasters and growing awareness of the impacts of climate change. This positions communication as an appropriate field of study to help provide solutions to various crises worldwide.

Sustainability communication promotes balanced social processes in society, thus fostering lively discussions in the public sphere. Sustainability communication emphasizes transformative efforts (Weder, 2025), restoring human-nature relationships (Weder et al., 2021; Godemann, 2021), public engagement (Luo et al., 2022), and brand advocacy (Alnawas et al., 2025). Sustainability communication also demands responsibility for human interactions with nature and the social environment, always understanding the causes and providing solutions within the context of social discourse (Godemann & Michelsen, 2011). Sustainability communication provides solutions to various societal problems, particularly those related to the environment, through public involvement.

Sustainability communication focuses on improving information (Tölkes, 2018) and fostering dialogue and discourse (Newig et al., 2013). Sustainability communication is also demonstrated in narratives that demonstrate power, authority, knowledge, ideology, and identity (Mustaqim, 2021). Sustainability communication is often divided into three models: (1) sustainability issues as part of public discourse, such as transparency and the construction of meaning; (2) achieving specific goals or targets as an instrument; and (3) a campaign within a nonprofit context (Weder et al., 2021). Sustainability communication typologies are generally distinguished by communication mode: communication of, about, and for sustainability, with an educational system perspective as well as the media system (Fischer et al., 2016).

The sustainability message maintains the use of traditional and digital media (Park & Minton, 2025), social media (Kapoor et al., 2021), artificial intelligence (AI) (Mustafa & Smolarski, 2025), virtual reality, and augmented reality (Negi, 2024). Sustainability communication often discusses how to create sustainability messages or how these messages are communicated to the public, whether in mass media or on websites using the keyword "green" (Golob et al.,

2022). Sustainability communication operates across platforms to convey messages to the public.

The study of sustainability communication is generally associated with business corporations, but it has also become an interesting topic in the political sphere. Political actors also frequently discuss sustainability (Weder et al., 2021). In politics, sustainability means communicating opportunities and outcomes to generate collective decisions that take into account political, policy, and political factors (Newig et al., 2013). Political leaders have also adopted sustainability communication to engage diverse communities to promote sustainable development through social media (Grover et al., 2021). Sustainability communication also requires the ability to build relationships with various stakeholders and build grassroots coalitions (Titley, 2003), while maintaining long-term political resonance (Hasanagas & Shoesmith, 2002).

Thus, sustainability communication combines political and policy aspects to communicate to the public through various platforms to foster harmonious relationships. Collectivity is a hallmark of sustainability communication, as it involves multiple actors to achieve common goals.

### **Sustainability Policy**

Sustainability policy focuses on incentives for consumption and investment, which can include consumption taxes, capital and investment subsidies, or a combination of both to encourage a more open economy (Pezzey, 2004). Achieving sustainability policy requires not only a shared understanding but also flexibility in objectives and procedures to address real-world issues (Bueren & Jong, 2007). Openness and flexibility are key strengths of sustainability policy.

Key sustainability issues relate to climate change, urban development, agroecology, and food systems (Armstrong & Kamienicki, 2019), thus creating a harmonious integration between environmental, climate, and agricultural policies (Streimis & Balezentis, 2020). Sustainability policy tends to integrate various sectors, not just climate factors, but also maintains balance with other areas, from agriculture to the economy and social spheres.

Indicators for determining sustainability policy include public interest, inclusiveness, and a science-based approach to creating a more sustainable world (McCool & Stankey, 2004). Another indicator is how economic, political, and communication development factors contribute significantly (Howes et al., 2017). Furthermore, the social dimension is also a crucial component of sustainable development, supporting environmental and social issues (Colantonio, 2011). Prioritizing the public is a goal in implementing sustainable policy.

Achieving sustainable policy requires integrating human and natural components across their various dimensions to create effective policies for achieving global sustainability (Liu et al., 2015). Sustainable policy requires a broader and more integrated approach (Atkinson & Klausen, 2011) to realize a sustainable society (Shin et al., 2008).

The primary goal of sustainable policy is individual-driven behavioral change to build "the initial impetus of global-level frameworks" (Baum & Gross, 2016). In addition to behavior, long-term goals encompass several dimensions:

environmental, non-environmental, business-to-consumer, and business-to-business, all of which have a direct impact on sustainability (Iyer & Reczek, 2017). Furthermore, achieving human well-being without ecological limits is the focus of human development (Jain & Jain, 2020). Sustainable policy encompasses many dimensions, collaborating with various sectors to achieve goals that directly impact society.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a constructive paradigm. The research method applied is iconography. Iconography is a method of analyzing visual content that is influenced by cultural traditions and guided by an interest in various social science studies that have a spirit as a forensic method (Muller, 2011). Iconography is also a method that examines images as part of a corpus of works, closely related to archaeology and stylistic analysis (Muller, 2014).

The researchers analyzed 50 photos featuring President Prabowo on his Instagram account, @prabowo, which has 15.1 million followers. The study was conducted from January 1, 2025, to December 31, 2025. This study focused only on photos, not videos, uploaded to social media, particularly Instagram. Therefore, photos in mass media related to Prabowo were not examined.

The iconography analysis procedure consists of three stages: description, classification, and interpretation of themes and motifs (Cassidy, 1995), examination, categorization, and interpretation of imagery (Darinville, 2018), and clustering techniques to understand the relationships between variables (Muurlink et al., 2020). This method also has emotional and creative dimensions (Notermans Kommers, 2012), enabling it to uncover the role of images and their positions in specific media (Slager, 2010). Through icon analysis, researchers can explore the meanings, processes, and transformations demonstrated by political actors and their lives (Olesen, 2015).

In this study, the analytical procedures used consisted of description and examination, classification and clustering, and interpretation based on themes and motifs. Other factors used in the analysis were emotion, creativity, and context. Thus, the analysis results will be more objective and holistic because they are based on process and transformation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In this research, the primary focus is on photos. Why photos? Photos convey a million feelings and stories. In a society inundated with videos, they still possess a strong character. When researchers examined the iconography on Prabowo Subianto's Instagram, it was generally dominated by photos. Reels or short videos were rare. This is what makes Prabowo Subianto's Instagram unique amidst the flood of information; it displays its own uniqueness and uniqueness to strengthen his leadership in creating a specific icon.

## Food Security Icon



Figure 1. President Prabowo Launches the Indonesia Planting Movement (Gerina). @prabowo, April 22, 2025.

In his long-term governance, Prabowo focused on positioning himself as a food security leader. This was demonstrated in a series of photos published on April 22, 2025. It can be interpreted that Prabowo aspires to be a food security leader. He is transforming himself into a leader who will achieve food self-sufficiency in Indonesia.

Research defines a food security leader as a leader who prioritizes agricultural development, both in their vision and mission, through policies that promote food self-sufficiency and thus improve the welfare of farmers and the wider community. A food security leader bases his policies on sustainability, maintaining a balance between empowering farmers to provide food and expanding opportunities for agricultural development.

Various photos depicting Prabowo as a food security leader show him clearing new land. This represents a breakthrough, as Prabowo's policies no longer focus on maximizing existing agricultural land but instead on developing and expanding new land. In the end, food security will actually increase agricultural production capacity.

Agricultural extensification is a primary focus of food security policy. This is an advantage given Indonesia's vast country, where inter-island agricultural disparities persist. Agricultural extensification has also encouraged the emergence of new farmers in various regions of Indonesia. However, the process requires long-term work, and the results are not immediately visible.

Furthermore, the food security leader Prabowo has constructed also emphasizes the diversification of agricultural commodities. Not only does he focus solely on rice cultivation, but President Prabowo's policies also encourage Indonesia to stop importing corn and other commodities, thus achieving not only significant self-sufficiency but also self-sufficiency in various other commodities.

In realizing a food security icon, Prabowo also seeks solutions to various post-harvest problems. Farmers can easily grow various agricultural products, but marketing and distribution pose challenges, especially when agricultural commodities originate from distant islands. Therefore, more equitable distribution efforts and the establishment of an agricultural commodity processing industry are needed. This will ultimately result in a diverse range of processed agricultural products, with farmers also experiencing tangible positive impacts.

Agriculture is the focus of Prabowo's policies, leading him to construct a food security icon. What is his motive? From a sustainability leadership perspective, food is the foundation and primary foundation for building a nation. It is related to survival. Once a country's food needs are met, the government will then move on to other matters. Prabowo's social security pillar focuses on ensuring sufficient food supplies for the population. This is achieved through immediate measures, such as importing food products. However, food stability is also built through the opening of new agricultural land.

Furthermore, food security also ensures a government maintains economic growth and stability. Furthermore, Prabowo's administration is targeting high growth rates in its first year in office. Once food security is secured, the government will run smoothly and without many obstacles. Later, when economic growth is maintained, public productivity will follow suit. Furthermore, markets will become more stable because there will be no food shortages.



Figure 2. Prabowo Mengendari Traktor saat Panen Jagung di Bengkayang, Kalimantan Barat. @Prabowo, June 5, 2025.

In building a nation, political stability is paramount. Political stability is inseparable from food security. When people are no longer hungry, they will be less inclined to resist or criticize the government. This principle seems to be applied by many governments around the world, including Indonesia. However, Prabowo does not apply this principle in an instant, but rather prioritizes a long-term, albeit complex, process, such as moving from food self-sufficiency to food security.

Another motive is Prabowo's desire to demonstrate himself as a leader capable of building a legacy as a leader capable of achieving food self-sufficiency. Since the New Order era, no leader has been able to achieve food self-sufficiency in Indonesia. Prabowo is enthusiastic and ambitious about achieving this goal. This has become his construction as an icon of a food security leader. He not only builds a legacy in Indonesia, but also globally.

As a food security leader, Prabowo also wants to demonstrate that food-based development also protects the environment. This is because agriculture can utilize natural resources with a focus on sustainability. This is because agricultural land management, especially the opening of new land, is managed using environmentally friendly technology with an effective and efficient

irrigation system. In the future, agriculture will also not have a negative impact on the environment.

### **A Affectionate Icon**



Figure 3. President Prabowo Kisses A Child's Forehead. @Prabowo, December 1, 2025.

In the 12 photographs analyzed by researchers, particularly during visits to natural disaster sites in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra, Prabowo consistently greets children. He even kisses their foreheads. He also appears to display happiness and joy when meeting children in disaster areas. He wants to show himself as a leader who loves and cares for children.

Prabowo aims to construct himself as an icon for an affectionate leader. This research defines an affectionate leader as a leader who devotes his or her policies to building the future of Indonesian children. Such a leader pays serious attention to pro-child policies and prepares a clear scenario for human resource development for Indonesia's future.

Especially in times of disaster, when Indonesia is labeled a disaster-risk country, this demonstrates how a leader constructs himself or herself as a leader who consistently demonstrates empathy and appreciation, especially for children in disaster areas. Everyone knows that children suffer the most when disasters strike. It is appropriate for a leader to pay significant attention to children, as they also face the greatest physical and psychological stress in disaster areas.

As a leader with a military background, Prabowo also wants to project himself as a leader capable of leading with affection by demonstrating love, compassion, and friendliness. This is the image Prabowo wants to project to the public. Through this leadership, Prabowo wants to be seen as a leader who listens, understands, supports, sacrifices, and empowers.

In many cases, Prabowo's attention isn't solely focused on children. Several photos show him affectionately embracing a grandmother; he also pays attention to many women. This demonstrates an effort to construct an image of a leader close to his people.

The emotional aspect is a key element emphasized by Prabowo in his green leadership style. Emotion-based leadership tends to prioritize emotions to strengthen public trust, thus eliciting a positive and productive response. This

underpins his approach and policies, which are based on building self-awareness with the aim of gaining sympathy. Once an emotional pattern is achieved and attained, it will strengthen his social leadership.

By emphasizing the highly emotional aspect, Prabowo seeks to convey his vision more clearly and gain support by inspiring people to support his policies. This approach also encourages harmony by successfully establishing an emotional bond between a leader and the people they lead.

The emotionally-based green leadership model also demonstrates a leader's willingness to listen to the community. This will eliminate the authoritarian impression of green leadership. A willingness to listen will also encourage more open communication with the public.



Figure 4. Presiden Prabowo Subianto Meninjau Program Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) di SDN 1 dan SDN 2 Kedung Jaya, Bogor, Jawa Barat. @Prabowo, February 10, 2025.

An affectionate leader is also evident in Prabowo's policy regarding the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG), which has sparked much controversy and polemic. However, from a green leadership perspective, the program also has a positive side in fostering sustainable leadership, as the food consumed by Indonesian children will impact their future.

The Free Nutritious Meals policy is a sustainable policy that implies Prabowo as an affectionate leader. Its foundation is an effort to demonstrate a leader's affection for the people he leads. It also encourages the image of a leader who fully commits his policies to his people by fulfilling their most basic rights, namely providing free food.

From a sustainable leadership perspective, the motive for promoting the icon of an affectionate leader is to provide affirmation as a form of appreciation for the community. This affirmation generally demonstrates compassion, demonstrating a leader's presence during difficult times, such as disasters, or even when the situation is indeed unfavorable.

Sustainable policies should demonstrate a leader's presence within the community. Prabowo achieved this by constructing an affectionate leader. He demonstrated his government's dedication and concern for his people through policies of being present within the community. In this way, he was able to build public awareness.

So, what was his motive? An affectionate leader like Prabowo always talked about investing in people. His various policies for the community were always

motivated by human resource development. Prabowo repeatedly stated that his policies were based on investing in people because a leader's orientation tends to focus on the future, not just short-term policies.

When compassion is the foundation, empowerment becomes a key strength. This is a step towards continuously increasing community capacity. This, in turn, will foster resilience within the community through government support. Ultimately, this is an effort to build loyalty among the community, encouraging them to remain loyal and support their leader's policies.

### **A Higher Morale Icon**

A higher moral icon is the pinnacle of sustainable and green leadership. This relates to the principles embodied in President Prabowo's leadership vision and mission. This not only relates to morality in eradicating corruption, but also to how he builds the spirit of his people in facing life. He strives to be present in various efforts to realize the community's hopes.

Morals aren't always just about upholding the truth and destroying hypocrisy in leadership. A higher moral icon tends to convey a sense of a leader's presence within the community. This isn't about excessively greeting citizens or receiving guests, but rather about how the leader's policies are directly felt by the Community.



Figure 5. Presiden Prabowo Subianto Bertemu dengan Pengemudi Ojek Online untuk Memberikan Dukungan Seiring dengan Kebijakan Bonus Hari Raya.

@Prabowo, March 2025.

A higher moral icon focuses on building values in its various policies. However, that alone is not enough. Continuous efforts are needed to build positive leadership by communicating all policies effectively and efficiently, avoiding negative aspects and instead demonstrating recognition and appreciation to the public.

Even by joining hands with online motorcycle taxi drivers, a leader can build their morale. They will be able to sense how close a leader is to the community. Raising morale is the most communicative strategy for making a policy a success. Prabowo did this to create the impression of achieving a balance between the policy's success and its implementation, which can be felt by the public.

What was his motivation? Prabowo wanted to build direct engagement with the communities he led. Engagement is a way for a leader to establish effective dialogue with those they lead. By promoting two-way communication, a leader will be able to foster open communication rather than building barriers

that would hinder it. The public will perceive a more participatory approach to sustainable policy.



Figure 6. Prabowo Welcomes the Public at the 2025 New Year Celebrations.  
@Prabowo, January 1, 2025.

Building enthusiasm also forms the foundation of motivation because it must be action and energy. A leader must convey and emphasize the importance of generating energy. Sometimes, leaders must be close and directly involved with the community to directly experience that energy. Without physical and emotional contact, energy cannot be directly transmitted.

A higher moral icon is a people-driven leader, making the community's energy their primary strength. Such a leader will view challenges in society as opportunities to continuously develop and find solutions to various problems. Therefore, Prabowo always views challenges as a good opportunity for him to continue fighting.

By prioritizing engagement, the community's enthusiasm and energy will always be the victory of a leader's achievements. Raising public morale is a leader's hard work, combining communication and appropriate policies. This is key to consistently providing feedback and community service.

As a higher moral icon, Prabowo also uses a personalized approach. This is an effort to construct a personal agenda as a public commodity. This encourages efforts to create honest communication through conversations aimed at building trust. The public will always judge a leader based on themselves, their family, and their environment.

Furthermore, leading by example is Prabowo's attitude, demonstrating a model of behavior that embodies the standards of a good leader. Maintaining a balance between expectations and reality is something that cannot be forced; it can occur naturally. Thus, Prabowo demonstrates himself as a flexible leader. Flexibility provides an opportunity to continually accommodate various commitments and encourage efforts to resolve various problems effectively.

#### **Iconization of Sustainable Leadership**

This research shows that sustainable leadership is not solely related to green or environmental policies. Rather, sustainability has undergone a shift and redefined, as the focus of leadership shifts to sustainability for society.

The findings of this study align with several previous studies. Sustainability policy has also shifted from economic growth versus the environment to growth for the environment, and from direct public regulation to market-based instruments (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015). Sustainable policy also requires collaboration across various sectors and integrates various fields, including environmental, social, and economic (Arifin et al., 2024).

This research also confirms that sustainable leadership cannot be separated from sustainable communication. For a government policy to succeed, an appropriate communication strategy is required. Building engagement through dialogue is key to positive policy discussions within the community.

Sustainability communication is a social process that emphasizes contributions and debate to shape better social, economic, and ecological lives (Ziemann, 2011), generally related to climate change, implemented in various public spaces (Godemann and Michelsen, 2011), and solutions for nature and society (Mitnick et al., 2021).

Furthermore, sustainability policies embodied in sustainability communication are more easily constructed through iconization. Prabowo Subianto, who constructed icons in his sustainability communication, demonstrates how he built a brand and myth to foster public loyalty. Icons not only convey a vision but can also serve as guides and encourage collaboration because they provide clues for building better synergy.

Someone who becomes an icon plays a role in creating a movement through the narrative they convey (Brugger & Wieser, 2022). Moreover, iconization always reflects the values and goals of actors and groups (Olesen, 2016).

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This research concludes that President Prabowo Subianto's leadership is constructed through strong sustainability communication, particularly through the visual medium of photos on his official Instagram account. Using an iconography approach, this study found that Prabowo consistently constructs a sustainability-based leadership iconization by displaying three main icons: a food security icon, an affectionate icon, and a higher morale icon. These three icons complement each other and form a narrative of sustainable leadership that is oriented not only toward policy but also toward the meaning, emotions, and identity of leadership.

As a food security icon, Prabowo is constructed as a leader who prioritizes food security as the primary foundation of national sustainability. Through visualizations of land clearing, harvesting, and direct involvement in agricultural activities, Prabowo constructs a leadership image that emphasizes food self-sufficiency, agricultural extensification, commodity diversification, and a balance between food production and environmental sustainability. This icon represents a long-term sustainability policy that serves as a support for social, political, and economic stability.

Furthermore, the affectionate leader icon demonstrates the emotional dimension of sustainable leadership. Prabowo demonstrates his closeness to children, disaster victims, vulnerable groups, and the wider community as a demonstration of empathy, compassion, and the presence of the state. Policies

such as the Free Nutritious Meals program reinforce this construct as a manifestation of investment in people and sustainable human resource development.

Meanwhile, a higher morale icon culminates in Prabowo's green leadership construct. This icon emphasizes building collective values, spirit, and energy within the community through direct engagement, appreciation, and participatory communication. By combining policies and personal communication, Prabowo seeks to build public trust, loyalty, and moral legitimacy.

Overall, this research confirms that Prabowo Subianto's leadership iconization is inseparable from a sustainability communication strategy that combines visuals, policies, and emotions. Sustainable leadership, in this context, is not only interpreted as environmental management but also as a symbolic process for building meaning, hope, and a future for the nation.

A limitation of this study is its focus solely on sustainability. Future research could focus on developing studies on more specific policies. Furthermore, future research could also compare the practices of various world leaders.

Meanwhile, this research recommends how iconization can be applied to popularize policies within the community. Iconization is also part of image construction to strengthen leadership positions, both in the real world and on social media.

## **FURTHER STUDY**

This research still has limitations so that further research is needed related to the topic of Constructing Iconization of Leadership, in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers..

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