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## Construction of Political Identity Through Religious, Local Culture, and Visual Symbols in The 2024 Illiza Saaduddin Djamal Campaign

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### Abstract

This research focuses on researching the construction of political identity carried out by the Banda Aceh mayoral candidate, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, through the use of religious, local, and visual symbols when conducting an election campaign for the Banda Aceh City region in 2024. The approach used in this study is quantitative with a survey method using secondary data from 130 respondents in the Baiturrahman District who were selected through *the proportionate stratified random sampling* technique. This study aims to examine how religious symbols such as the chanting of the Badr prayer, the use of traditional musical instruments, Acehese traditional clothing, and regional languages function as important instruments in shaping the construction of Illiza's political identity. The results of the study show that the construction of Illiza's political identity is built through: (1) religious identity that places candidates as a representation of Islamic values, (2) cultural identity that associates candidates with the cultural heritage and history of Acehese women's struggles, and (3) self-visualization of candidates through attractive displays to attract youth groups. Based on the findings of the study, it shows that religious, local culture, and visual symbols are used as ornaments during campaigns that aim to attract public sympathy and trust towards Illiza. The use of symbols in the campaign received a positive response from the people of Banda Aceh City. Gen Z is interested in the visual symbols used by the Illiza-Afdhal candidate pair through uniquely designed billboards and banners, the use of campaign clothes with bright colors, and matching. Meanwhile, the elderly group is interested in the cultural and religious symbols used by Illiza-Afdhal during the campaign through religious *tausiah*, *shalawat badar*, and the use of traditional musical instruments that characterize the peculiarities of local culture.

**Keywords** : Construction, Local Culture, Political Identity, Religious Symbols, Visual.



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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The symbol is one of the important parts used in the campaign, which functions as a communication tool with various meanings, so that it is able to touch the emotional, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of the voters. Symbols are becoming increasingly important to explain sociocultural phenomena and are used simultaneously in social life. Then came symbolic interpretivism, which has gone beyond scientific theory to understand the meaning of symbols (Eko Punto Hendro, 202 C.E.) In Indonesia, the use of symbols is often used in campaigns, especially in areas that are still very thick with



culture and religion, such as in Aceh Province. Aceh is one of the regions that formally implements Islamic sharia as regulated in UUPA Number 11 of 2006. The rule was formed following the peace agreement between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Republic of Indonesia, signed on August 15, 2005, in Helsinki, Finland.

Regional head elections (Pilkada) are a way of adopting democracy into local political life and a process of consolidating local democracy. The system allows for the growth and expansion of local democracy, and political participation consists of voters based on groupings, including: pre-baby boomer, baby boomer, generation X, generation Y, and generation Z (Elonika et al., 2025). The simultaneous election of regional heads, which will be held in 2024, is part of the means of conveying the people's democratic rights. Regional elections are also part of the implementation of democracy (Fadiana, 2025). Democracy is an important momentum for the people of Banda Aceh City in determining the direction of the city's leadership for the next five years. Of the four candidate pairs who fought, the number 01 pair, the pair Iliza Sa'aduddin Djamal and Afdhal, managed to win with very high votes. The victory of the couple who carried the "City of Collaboration" was greeted with a positive response from the community.

The selection of Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal as the object of the research is based on her position as a female candidate who won the 2024 Banda Aceh City Regional Head Election amid the dominance of male leadership in Aceh politics. This success is interesting to study because Illiza utilizes various religious, local cultural, and visual symbols in an integrated manner in her campaign strategy. The use of these symbols is not only aimed at building a political image, but also represents the identity of women's leadership that is in harmony with Islamic values and Acehese culture.

The Illiza-Afdhal pair of candidates used various campaign symbols designed to form an image of leadership that is religious, inclusive, and rooted in local culture. Among the prominent symbols is the use of blue, matching clothes with his candidate partner, Afdhal Khalilullah, which symbolizes harmony and tranquility. In addition, the chanting of Shalawat Badar in campaign events is used to affirm closeness to Islamic values, as well as create a spiritual atmosphere that touches the emotions of voters. The Illiza-Afdhal couple also combines elements of traditional Acehese musical instruments in various activities to show respect for local culture and embrace regional identity. Meanwhile, Illiza carries the narrative of motherhood (*Motherhood Narrative*) strongly, framing herself as a woman leader who is loving, protective, and sensitive to the needs of the community, especially vulnerable groups such as children and women. All of these symbols form a highly visual and emotional campaign, targeting cultural and spiritual closeness to the people of Aceh, while strengthening a unique political identity in the midst of an increasingly competitive contest (Misdayanti, 2024).

Although there has been a lot of research on the use of symbols in political communication, most previous research has focused on the influence of symbols on voting behavior, candidate imagery, or the effectiveness of political marketing in general. These studies generally place symbols as an instrument of political communication without further examining how these symbols are constructed into a candidate's political identity. In addition, studies on the integration of religious, local culture, and visual symbols in the formation of political identities of female candidates in areas with strong religious and cultural characteristics, such as Aceh, are still relatively limited. This study uses the social construction theory put forward by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann to explain how a candidate's political identity is formed through the process of externalization, objectification, and internalization.

In the context of this study, religious, local cultural symbols, and visuals are understood as the medium that candidates use to externalize their political identity, which then gains social legitimacy through interaction with voters. Aceh has a symbol that contains a long historical value. Sultan Ali Mughayat Syah in 1520 established the Kingdom of Aceh Darussalam, which combined many kingdoms in Sumatra, including Pase and Pedir, which were the heyday of Acehnese civilization (Nazaruddin, 2014). Illiza Sa'aduddin Djama is a popular female political figure in the city of Banda Aceh. As a result of the votes, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djama and Afdhal Khalilullah received 44,982 votes (41.24%). Meanwhile, the pair of Zainal Arifin and Mulia Rahman received 8,956 votes (8.21%). The pair of Aminullah Usman and Isnaini Husda won 25,191 votes (23.10%), while Teuku Irwan Djohan and Khairul Amal each received 29,946 votes (27.45%). Based on data from the results of the victory during the 2024 regional head election (Pilkada) in Banda Aceh City, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djama and Afdhal Khalilullah won 44,982 votes, which is 41.24 percent of the total votes

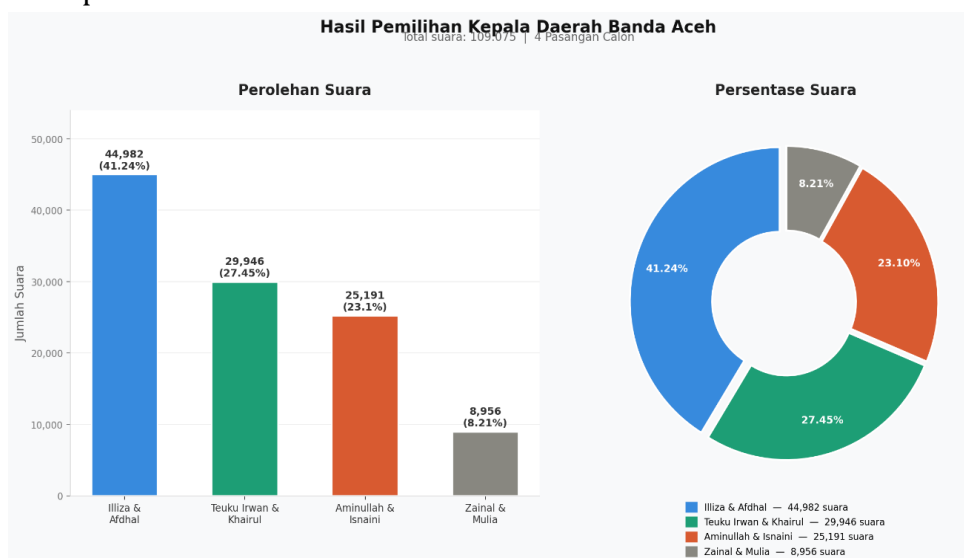


Figure 1. Votes in the 2024 Banda Aceh City Election.



Based on this victory, it attracted the attention of researchers to examine this study, considering the dominance of men in Aceh's political power as well as the cultural challenges faced by women in Aceh. In the 2024 Regional Elections, the couple, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal, uses various campaign symbols designed to form a leadership image that is religious, inclusive, and rooted in local culture. This is an important strategy in the Illiza campaign which integrates religious symbols and local culture in the communication media of his political campaign. so this study aims to examine (1) the types of religious symbols used in the campaign; (2) analyze the symbols that are constructed into the candidate's political identity (3) understand the meaning of voters to the symbol in the context of the local culture of Aceh. So, the formulation of the problem in this study is: (1) how religious, local culture, and visual symbols are used in Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal's campaign in the 2024 Banda Aceh City Regional Head Election; and (2) how the symbols are constructed into the candidate's political identity based on the perspective of social construction, Berger and Luckmann.

## **2. METHOD**

This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method. This research is a development of a previous study conducted by Teuku Muhammad Naufal Akbar on the influence of the use of symbols on the political marketing of Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal in Baiturrahman District in the 2024 Banda Aceh City Regional Head Election. The data used in this study are in the form of secondary data derived from the results of the distribution of questionnaires to respondents. The quantitative method was chosen because it allows researchers to objectively measure and analyze social phenomena based on numerical data, in contrast to the qualitative method, which, according to Bogdan and Taylor, produces descriptive data in the form of written and oral data observed through individual behavior (Mamik, 2015). Quantitative research focuses on measuring relationships between variables through statistical analysis. This approach is used to identify the influence of the use of religious, local culture, and visual symbols on people's voting behavior (Tunggal, 2024). The stages of data analysis include data collection, data grouping, data presentation, and conclusion. The analysis process is carried out systematically to produce a comprehensive interpretation of the research findings (Haryoko et al., 2020). In addition, secondary data in the form of books, journals, news, and other supporting documents are used to strengthen the analysis and provide context to the research results (Naamy, 2019). The process of reviewing and interpreting data is carried out through reading, reviewing, and connecting various sources relevant to the research focus (Abdussamad, 2021).



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### **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Social construction occurs through three stages: externalization, objectification, and internalization. According to Berger and Luckmann, externalization highlights the behavior of individuals who convey ideas through social media so that social structures are formed, as well as language and social norms. Objectification is the result of externalization accepted by society in general. Meanwhile, internalization occurs in the formation of social reality that is part of an individual's consciousness in the midst of a social group (Bungin et al., 2025). Social construction theory is relevant in examining the symbols/attributes used by Illiza when conducting campaigns. Social construction can affect its constituents so that symbols can be constructed as attractively as possible to attract and shape certain perceptions among the community. In the context of this study, there are three symbols used by the Illiza-Afdhal pair when campaigning in the 2024 Regional Elections (Bungin et al., 2025).

#### **3.1 Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal Campaign Symbol**

Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal uses several symbols in carrying out her political campaigns, including religious symbols, local cultural symbols, and visual symbols :

##### **a. Religious Symbols**

Religious symbols are symbolized through the chanting of Shalwat Badar as campaign music that is played and sung together in every activity. The successful use of these religious symbols creates a deep inner bond, where voters feel internally "safe" and confident that the candidate's leadership will run within the corridor of their religious beliefs.

##### **b. Local cultural symbols**

The performance of traditional Acehnese musical instruments (such as rapai and serunee kale) displayed in various campaign activities, the use of Acehnese traditional clothing, and the use of the Acehnese language in campaign speeches aimed at creating closeness between candidates and voters. By highlighting cultural symbols, Illiza succeeded in positioning herself as an inseparable part of the social structure of Acehnese society, so that the decision to vote was based on a sense of solidarity and a desire to maintain the local values represented by the candidate.

##### **c. Visual Symbol**

Illiza-Afdhal couple. When conducting a campaign using clothes or uniforms dominated by blue, the color conveys the meaning of calm, harmony, and trust. The use of uniforms in the same way between Illiza-Afdhal creates a high level of unity and solidarity between the candidate pairs. The use of Muslim women's clothing also characterizes the candidate's Islamic identity, as well as various



verbal expressions based on Islamic values, such as Amanah and responsibility, spoken by the candidate during the campaign. These symbols serve as stimuli that arouse trust and inner comfort between candidates and society. The use of visual symbols is not just aesthetic, but a substantive message about the candidate's readiness to lead in an organized manner.

### **3.2 The Process of Constructing Political Identity through Various Symbols**

Social construction is basically influenced by the media, culture, and religion, so that based on these influences, social construction is formed in society through perceptions and mindsets that have been formed beforehand. Political candidates use religious and cultural symbols to build a positive image of the community or the target of their constituents (Bungin et al., 2025). Based on the results of the research, it can be identified that the three layers of political identity construction are built through these symbols. Hence, the identity construction process consists of three processes.

#### **3.2.1 Religious Symbols: Candidates as Representations based on Islamic Values**

##### **In Aceh**

The city of Banda Aceh, as one of the areas for the application of strong Islamic sharia, is dubbed the "City of the Porch of Mecca". Religious and customary values influence the political ecosystem in this city. The symbols used in the campaign succeeded in touching the roots of the identity of the people of Banda Aceh. Religious symbols in campaigns have been shown to increase the electability of candidates. However, voters also still consider the candidate's vision, mission, and capabilities, so that the effective use of Islamic symbols must be combined with a concrete track record (Hastarini et al., 2025). The use of religious symbols is often used by political candidates in campaign narratives, whether formally or not. In general, in the delivery of narratives during the campaign by political candidates, the integration of Islamic values is conveyed through da'wah openly (Fanyra & Ananta, 2025).

Aceh is known as the "Porch of Mecca," so the central role of religion was used by Illiza during the campaign through various methods. **First**, Shalawat Badr. Shalawat Badar describes the history of the struggle with Islam. Through the prayer of Badr, Illiza conveyed several messages at once: first, her commitment to Islamic values; second, the spirit of struggle; Third, emotional closeness to Muslim voters who feel the majesty of the Badr prayer. **Second**, Illiza builds himself as a trustworthy leader. A trustworthy, responsible, and effective leader is a concept in Islamic leadership that the people of Aceh appreciate. The religious symbols used consistently build the argument that Illiza is a leader who is not only technically capable but also has moral integration based on Islamic values. **Third**, Illiza-Afdhal, together with Ustad Somad, openly invited the public to attend the grand tabliq held at the Ratu Safiatuddin Park. The activity was carried out in



the form of a peace-loving and calm leader who was packaged with religious elements. In addition, the activity also aims to reduce conflicts due to polarization between communities (Aldevan, 2024).

The results of the study show that the integration of religious symbols through the Illiza-Afdhal campaign received a positive response from the community. Based on collective data, as many as 84.62% of respondents gave positive appreciation, consisting of 50.00% agreeing that it was dominated by 38 men and 34.62% strongly agreeing that it was dominated by 30 men, which shows that religious narratives have succeeded in touching the emotional aspects of voters. Although there was a slight increase in the hesitant group to 9.23%, the rejection rate remained at a very low level, at only 4.62% for the disagree category and 1.54% for strongly disagree. This concludes that the use of religious symbols is a very appropriate strategy to gain persuasive mass support (Akbar, 2026).

Religious symbols have a strong meaning and influence voter perception. When the symbols used are able to show that women's leadership does not contradict Islamic values but reflects an attitude of trust, fairness, and responsibility, then the symbol can strengthen the candidate's social legitimacy and open up a wider space for acceptance of women in politics, especially for the people of Aceh. Another religious symbol displayed is that Iliza consistently uses Muslim women's clothing with a hijab that covers the awrah perfectly. This appearance is not only a form of expression of personal faith but also as proof that Islamic values have been integrated into Iliza's life. For Illiza, the consistency of the use of muslinah clothing during the campaign is a form of authentic Islamic identity to constituents/voters (Syadiyah et al., 2024).

The consistent use of religious symbols not only reflects the candidate's personal orientation but is a communication strategy that is consciously constructed to build the perception of the candidate as a leader who is in line with Islamic values. The use of religious symbols is practiced through language, art, and other religious practices. The use of religious/religious symbols can strengthen the emotional bond between candidates and voters and brand the image of candidates who are religious to Islamic values in the framework of democracy (Riyanto et al., 2024).

### **3.2.2 Cultural Symbols: Candidates Integrate Cultural Values in Campaign Media**

The political culture of the community also influences how the message can be received. In the modern era, the transformation of symbols from local culture is displayed through artistic displays such as the use of musical instruments, the use of traditional clothing by candidates, and the use of local language (Fanyra & Ananta, 2025). The use of the Acehese language in the campaign serves as part of strengthening local culture in

the midst of modern conditions. The Acehese language is often used in Illiza-Afdhal campaign speeches as a form of building local identity. The use of this diction reflects that Illiza-Afdhal is part of the identity of the Acehese people. The use of the Acehese language creates emotional closeness to voters and can strengthen cultural identity in the midst of the development of globalization currents. In addition, the use of Acehese language during the campaign is also to minimize the occurrence of miscommunication because voters in the Banda Aceh City area will not only consist of millennials but also consist of the elderly/elderly group who do not understand Indonesian. In addition to the use of the Acehese language, other cultural identities are the traditional clothing used. The clothing characterizes the representation of cultural values, social status, and ethnic identity that have been inherited over the centuries. Indirectly, the use of religious and cultural symbols can strengthen political messages while building an emotional closeness between candidates and their constituents (Ladya & Ardiansyah, 2025).

### **3.2.3 Visual symbols: The Candidate Visualizes Himself as a Modern Leader and Protector of Society.**

One of the visual symbols displayed by Illiza during the campaign is through the uniform used with the candidate pair, namely Afdhal, which aims to strengthen the solidarity of the candidate pair, then as a visual identity, so that the public can easily recognize them at the time of the election, and the form of campaign branding. Other visual symbols can be seen through billboard ads that have a considerable influence on building political imagery and shaping voter perception. So it can be said that visual power is the key to presenting the "Modern" and "Professional" impression of a candidate in the eyes of citizens. The visual symbols in Illiza's campaign are not just aesthetic aspects, but instruments that form a new 'network of meanings' about modernity. This visual symbol is present as a communication bridge for rational young voters.

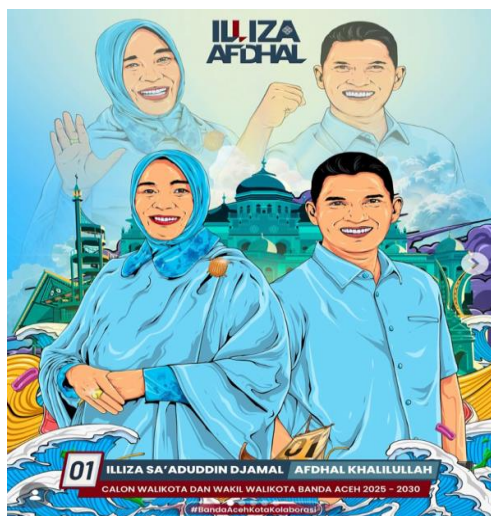


Figure 2. Instagram @ [Illiza.Afdhal](https://www.instagram.com/illiza.afdhal)



The results showed that the visual elements of the campaign, which included billboards, banners, and logo designs, received high appreciation with an accumulation of positive responses reaching 86.15%. This figure is a combination of respondents who agreed that 34 men dominated 46.92% and strongly agreed that 39.23% were also dominated by 34 men, which at the same time confirmed the success of outdoor media in capturing public attention. On the other hand, hesitation was only shown by 7.69% of respondents, while negative sentiment was at a very low level, namely disagreement at 4.62% and strongly disagreed at 1.54% (Akbar, 2026).

The use of symbols in campaigns shows that the process of political communication not only rationally conveys programs and visions, but also builds meaning through socially understood signs and representations. The target of Illiza-Afdhal's constituents does not only consist of the elderly group, but also consists of the younger generation, especially Gen Z, because Gen Z is also the most active group in using social media, which is a space for Gen Z to express themselves. Indirectly, Illiza-Afdhal also packaged her campaign symbols through the use of clothes with the same color, live broadcasts on TikTok and Instagram, and billboard designs that aim to attract the younger generation to support the candidate pair (Prisilia et al., 2025). Because the young generation (Gen Z) has begun to be politically literate and can determine their political choices, the sustainability of the political system in Indonesia also greatly affects the role and political participation of the younger generation (Hafifa et al., 2024).

The billboards of the couple, Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal and Afdhal Khalilullah, display various visual elements that are deliberately used to build a certain political image in front of the people of Banda Aceh City. Overall, the billboard design combines candidate figures, colors, typography, local cultural symbols, and political slogans as a means of visual political communication. In addition, Illiza also constructed herself as a woman leader who did not stand alone. However, Illiza takes advantage of the strong symbolic legacy of historical female figures of Aceh, such as Laksamana Malahyati and Cut Nyak Dien, who were tough, brave heroes who were admired and respected by the people of Aceh.

By highlighting her identity as a female leader, Illiza implicitly integrates this symbolic heritage with herself. Because basically voters from Aceh have a strong memory about these heroine figures and can indirectly be easily accepted and supported by the community in their election. Then, Illiza also positions herself as a mother who is protective, sensitive to the needs of vulnerable communities, and leads with compassion. The narrative is built through: Illiza's presence in social activities with vulnerable groups (children, the elderly, women).



Illiza carries the narrative of motherhood (*Motherhood Narrative*) strongly, framing herself as a woman leader who is loving, protective, and sensitive to the needs of the community, especially vulnerable groups such as children and women. Illiza did this to target cultural and spiritual closeness with the people of Aceh, as well as to strengthen a unique political identity in the midst of increasingly competitive political contests (Misdayanti, 2024). The maternal narrative that has been built works very effectively in attracting the attention of the people of Aceh because it does not contradict the values of Islam and actually strengthens them. Because in the Acehnese tradition, the position of the mother is highly valued and respected. Thus, the maternal narrative is also one of the sources of power that is used strategically in Illiza's campaign to win votes from her constituents in the city of Banda Aceh.

The slogan "#BandaAcehKotaKolaborasi" contains the main message that the candidate pair wants to construct, namely the importance of cooperation between the government, the community, and various stakeholders in building Banda Aceh. The use of the word "collaboration" indicates a participatory and inclusive leadership orientation, in contrast to the centralistic leadership model. The hashtag (#) used also indicates a digital political communication strategy that aims to expand the spread of political messages through social media. Overall, all visual elements in this billboard form the construction of meaning that the Illiza-Afdhal couple is a religious, modern leader figure, close to the community, respects the local identity of Aceh, and prioritizes collaboration in the development of the city of Banda Aceh.

### **3.3 Consumer Response to the Illiza-Afdhal Campaign Symbol**

Illiza-Afdhal was elected as the Mayor of Banda Aceh in the 2024 Regional Elections. Illiza-Afdhal excelled with 44,982 votes, equivalent to 41.24 percent of the total valid votes. The Illiza-Afdhal pair excelled in 238 out of 335 polling stations (TPS) spread throughout Banda Aceh sub-districts, with the most votes in Kuta Alam (6,836 votes), Shia Kuala (5,878 votes), and Baiturrahman (5,548 votes) (Aceh, 2024). The victory of the Illiza-Afdhal pair received a positive response from the public.

The high vote acquisition was, of course, also influenced by the symbol displayed by Illiza-Afdhal during the campaign. The response of constituents/communities to the Illiza campaign symbol, which consists of religious symbols, local cultural symbols, and visual symbols, as a whole, the people of Banda Aceh City feel represented by the candidate through symbols, because these symbols also build the moral legitimacy of the candidate.

In the modern era and digitalization, every candidate is required to be more adaptive and responsive to the needs of society. For Gen Z, political participation continues to increase, so it is a challenge for political candidates to package their



campaign strategies. The presence of Gen Z is not only symbolic but has become an important part of the current democratic process. Gen Z characters are a visually responsive group that is responsive to attractive and unique appearances (Afifah et al., 2025). For Illiza-Afdhal, the visual symbols displayed are in the form of campaign uniforms that match light colors and attractive billboard/banner designs. For the Millennial generation, visual symbols greatly affect their selection of candidates. Illiza-Afdhal's visual display, using clothes with the same color, has managed to attract the attention of young people. Besides that, the use of unique and attractive billboard designs and banners also gives a positive impression to young people.

For the community, the elderly group responds well to local religious and cultural symbols. In the religious symbol, Illiza-Afdhal succeeded in internalizing Islamic values through Shalawat Badr so that it received a warm welcome from the public, especially the elderly group. religious symbols by Illiza succeeded in triggering a significant level of public trust.

Religious symbols carried out by Illiza through Tabligh Akbar and shalawat badar which interpret as Politics of Peace so that it gets high appreciation from the residents. Meanwhile, from the cultural symbols, the elderly also responded well to the symbols of cultural values displayed through the performance of traditional /Acehnese musical instruments (such as rapai and serunee kale), and speeches in the local language delivered during the campaign by Illiza-Afdhal. Based on this, it can be concluded that voters consist of various age groups with different educational backgrounds. Older voters with strong religious orientations tend to respond to religious symbols and cultural symbols. while young voters are more influenced by visual symbols that are uniquely and attractively packaged.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Illiza Sa'aduddin Djamal has succeeded in building a political identity construction through three main symbols in the 2024 Banda Aceh City Election campaign. Namely, religious symbols (shalawat badar and Tabliq akbar), local cultural symbols (traditional musical instruments, traditional clothes, and Acehnese language), and visual symbols (blue uniforms, modern billboard designs, and social media). Third, the symbol effectively reaches various segments of voters. Where visual symbols attract the younger generation, while religious and local cultural symbols are more responsive to the elderly group, this strategy succeeded in leading Illiza-Afdhal to win the regional election with 44,982 votes (41.24%), proving that symbols are not just campaign ornaments, but effective political communication instruments in forming the trust and legitimacy of candidates in the midst of Acehnese society.



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