

## Semiotic Analysis of the Film Dirty Vote in the 2024 Election

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### Abstract

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This research analyzes the documentary "Dirty Vote" using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis to identify and interpret the signs and symbols used in the film. The film, which was released ahead of the 2024 General Election, raises the issue of fraud in Indonesia's electoral process. The semiotic analysis shows that the signs in the film represent complex political strategies and manipulations, including the use of the chess game symbol to illustrate careful planning and the term "pork barrel politics" to indicate the use of public funds for private interests. In addition, the "4-finger salute" symbol indicates the merging of certain political forces. The film "Dirty Vote" succeeded in raising public awareness of the importance of transparency and fairness in the electoral process, as well as motivating people's active participation in election monitoring.

**Keywords:** Documentary film, election fraud, pork barrel politics, 4-finger salute, 2024 elections

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## INTRODUCTION

Film is a symptom of mass communication that continues to this day, which people use to convey messages and influence audiences with specific goals. (Panuju, 2019) Currently, films are not only seen as mere entertainment, but are also considered to represent developing problems. Films are recognized as having a strong influence and are more sensitive to society's culture than a monograph created by a historian. Watching films is a very complex social and cultural activity, in which there can be a struggle for meaning between the audience and films that have many interests and certain ideologies.

Films are considered to have a role in representing reality in the form of symbols that have undergone commodification. (Isnaniah, 2015) According to Effendy (in Rizal, 2014) the main purpose of the general public in watching films is to obtain entertainment. However, apart from that, films can also contain informative, educative, or even persuasive functions. This is in line with the national film mission since 1979 which states that apart from being an entertainment medium, films can be used as an educational medium to develop the younger generation in building character. Therefore, films have various purposes ranging from entertainment to education depending on the purpose of the film and its marketing objectives.

Approaching the 2024 Election Day, Indonesian people were shocked by the presence of the film "Dirty Vote" which is Dandhy Laksono's second film

released ahead of the general election in Indonesia after *Sexy Killers* in the 2019 general election. This film tells the story of an analysis of fraud in the General Election (Pemilu) process in 2019. 2024, which presented three academics and legal experts, namely Bivitri Susanti, Feri Amsari, and Zainal Arifin Mochtar. (Documentary Film Review “Dirty Vote,” 2024).

According to Dandhy, he was motivated to create *Dirty Vote*, partly because of his concern about the results of the Constitutional Court's decision in November 2023 which lowered the age requirements for vice presidential candidates. The reason he chose Zainal Arifin, Bivitri, and Feri as sources was their experience in handling cases at the Court and their ability to explain constitutional issues to viewers. He also denied the involvement of foreign companies in funding this film project. The *Dirty Vote* film was distributed through two videos uploaded via the YouTube channel of the same name and via the Indonesian Law and Policy Study Center channel on February 11 2024 at 11.00 WIB. The accumulated number of views of the two videos was recorded at least six million times on the first day of broadcast. (Wikipedia “Dirty Vote,” 2024).

According to Maryam's research (2024), Joni Aswira as General Chair of the Indonesian Society of Environmental Journalists (SIEJ) and one of the producers of this film said that the film *Dirty Vote* took about two weeks for the film making process, including data collection and analysis that would be carried out. explained by legal experts. Several non-profit organizations collaborated in the production of this film, including the Alliance of Independent Journalists, Greenpeace Indonesia, Indonesia Corruption Watch, Mining Advocacy Şaringan, Mining Advocacy, Association for Elections and Democracy, and the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation.(Panuju, 2019).

*Dirty Vote* is here to make us aware that Indonesian democracy is not doing well. Indonesian democracy is on the verge of collapse because all kinds of fraudulent practices are carried out to fulfill personal interests. The law is used as a tool to gain power, the people are used to achieve victory. (*Dirty Vote: exposing fraudulent practices in the 2024 general election*, 2024).

One of the unique things about democracy, according to Seymour Lipset (1959), is the harmony between process and results. The process in this case is designed through democratic procedures. This differentiates it from another part that is no less important, the substance of democracy. This procedure is what three legal experts, Bivitri Susanti, Zainal Arifin Mochtar and Fery Amsari, want to prove. However, the film not only highlights the problems that occurred during the election process, but also provides space to explore possible solutions to overcome these challenges. First, the *Dirty Vote* film can encourage active public participation in observing and supervising the general election process. Through public awareness campaigns and training, people can learn how to report potential fraud and ensure that their votes are counted correctly. Second, the electoral system must be changed so that people have more trust and are more open and accountable.(Nathaniella et al., 2024).

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research uses descriptive qualitative methods through the use of semiotic analysis based on Ferdinand de Saussure's theory. The most important

main discussion in Saussure's theory is the principle which states that language is a system of signs, and each sign is composed of two parts, namely the signifier (signifier) and the signified (signified). A sign is a unity of a form of signifier with an idea or signified. This approach focuses on how the signs in a film can be interpreted and how this meaning is formed and understood by the audience. The data sources used include primary and secondary data. Primary data is the film "Dirty Vote" itself, while secondary data includes articles and relevant literature. With this method, research is expected to be able to identify and interpret the meaning in the film "Dirty Vote" using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic approach, providing a deeper understanding of the signs and symbols used in the film.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### RESULTS & DISCUSSION



**Figure 1. Poster for the film 'Dirty Vote'**

The film "Dirty Vote" is a documentary film that shows a reality based on objective facts and without engineering which has an important and fundamental value about life (Rikarno, 2015). The film, which features three Indonesian constitutional law experts, namely Bivitri Susanti, Feri Amsari, and Zainal Arifin Mochtar who share their views and analysis on the issue of fraud in the election context, will be broadcast on February 11 2024 via the YouTube channel called Dirty Vote with a duration of 1:57 :22. The following is a picture that represents the signs in the film "Dirty Vote" analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic method. Markers are elements that are seen, heard and felt in an object. Meanwhile, the signified is the concept, meaning, essence and thought of what is seen, heard and felt on the object. These two elements are interconnected and are the main thing in Saussure's semiotic theory (Bisri, 2020:43 in Sobur, 2004:46).

Marker (Signifier)	Signified
The thumbnail or poster of the film is like a game of chess	There is a correlation between the game of chess and the election fraud described in the film, the film displays well-planned strategies in achieving their goals or bringing down their opponents. The game of chess, too, requires a good strategy to overthrow your opponent.

Based on the table above, the visual of the chess game on the film poster as a signifier is used to describe complex strategy and planning, similar to what is needed in a game of chess. In the game of chess, every move is carefully thought out and has the goal of winning the game. Likewise, in the context of election fraud, well-planned strategies are used to manipulate the results to benefit a particular party. Chess is all about the tactics and moves taken to trap the opponent.

Likewise, in election fraud, various tactics are used to defeat or trap political



opponents. The game of chess also requires intelligence, just as election fraud strategies require intelligence in planning and executing actions that are undetectable or difficult to prove.

**Figure.2 Pork Barrel Politics**

Marker (Signifier)	Signified
<p>In the minute (42:10) one of the experts discusses "Pork Barrel Politics". literally refers to a barrel used to store pork. However, in a political context, it is not only political practices but also signs that have multiple meanings.</p>	<p>The term pork barrel politics shows how politics is manipulated and public funds are not used for the public interest, but rather for the benefit of politicians who seek to maintain or increase power. It also shows how power moves for personal interests in government.</p>

Based on the table above, the term pork barrel politics was originally known in the United States during the era of slavery as lure politics and the use of state resources to buy voter influence. Slaves deliberately slowed down their work to reduce slave owners' profits. Therefore, slave owners used strategies to stimulate slave performance. This method involves preparing pork soup in a barrel. The slave owner would announce who worked the fastest and most diligently and would be

invited to take the meat. This method was then reproduced in the world of politics. So the assumption that arises is that economic problems and hungry stomachs cannot be compromised.

In practice, pork barrel politics is carried out with state resources, through populist programs that are deliberately implemented during the electoral period with the aim of winning votes and voter support. In this case, those who implement the social assistance program are of course the authorities. The target groups are those who are supporting voters or even voters who lean towards the opposition.

In this pork barrel politics goods and services are exchanged. Official actors allocate budget resources through various assistance programs. Meanwhile, people who feel helped will repay their "kindness" by voting for them again. So that the rulers benefit and the people receive assistance.

The term pork barrel politics mentioned in the documentary refers to a method of politics that uses state money to be poured into electoral districts by politicians so that they can be re-elected. This shows that public funds are allocated to projects selected based on potential political gain rather than community needs, as a result of this politicians can damage public trust in the government system. This creates a vicious cycle in which voters tend to view politicians as self-serving, which in turn can reduce public participation and trust in the democratic process. In addition, pork barrel politics can cause injustice in the distribution of resources. Regions in greater need may not receive adequate funding because they are not considered politically strategic. This can exacerbate social and economic inequalities and hinder equitable and sustainable progress.



Figure 3. 4 Finger Greeting

Marker (Signifier)	Signified
<b>In the context of the film "Dirty Vote", Zainal Arifin Mochtar, one of the constitutional law experts involved in the film, explained that there was a "4 finger salute" movement.</b>	The 4 finger salute in this film is considered a symbol of resistance or support for certain groups or ideologies related to the political context. The sign of the 4 finger salute is related to the messages or values conveyed by the characters in the film, such as support for transparency and justice.

"Dirty Vote" is a film that explores political issues, including corruption, election manipulation, and power. In this film, the 4 finger salute is used as a powerful political symbol. As a marker, the 4 finger greeting consists of a hand movement where four fingers are raised. This hand gesture may seem simple but the sign it refers to is a message of solidarity, resistance and the desire for change. One of the constitutional law experts involved in the film explained that the "4 finger salute" movement seemed to be an offer and symbol that showed the merging of the powers of pairs 01 and 03 through this movement. This makes the public believe that in the future, Anies and Ganjar will form a coalition to defeat the political power of Prabowo-Gibran. This "4 finger greeting" movement was previously echoed by social media activist @johnmuhammad\_ who said that candidate pair Number 2 (Prabowo-Gibran) was not worthy of being elected and should be avoided. Social media timelines are also colored with posts and explanations of similar meanings, making the public think that the power of Anies and Ganjar is needed to defeat the political power of Prabowo-Gibran. In the context of the film "Dirty Vote", the "4 finger salute" movement is considered a symbol of merging the strength of pairs 01 and 03, which shows that the future in this presidential election is the combination of these forces through this movement. This makes the film "Dirty Vote" a hot topic of conversation among the public, especially regarding the issue of internal fraudThe 2024 elections and the "4 finger salute" movement associated with them.



**Figure 4. One legal expert named Bivitri Susanti**

Marker (Signifier)	Signified
<p>At the end of the documentary, one of the experts said, "composing and carrying out this dirty scenario does not require intelligence and cleverness, what is needed is only two things, namely a cunning mentality and a sense of shame."</p>	<p>A quote from one legal expert implies that dirty scenarios can be carried out by anyone without requiring special skills. It is enough to have a deceitful mentality which refers to being cunning, dishonest and manipulative and not feeling ashamed or guilty for unethical actions carried out to achieve the desired goals.</p>

At the end of the documentary, one of the experts said "composing and carrying out this dirty scenario does not require intelligence and cleverness, what is needed is only two things, namely a cunning mentality and being embarrassed" (1:54:37 - 1:54:48). For Bivitri, the election fraud revealed in this film was not actually a great plan or design. According to him, scenarios like this were carried out by previous regimes in many countries and throughout history. "Therefore, to plan and carry out a dirty scenario like this, you don't need intelligence or wit. All you need are two mental traits: being cunning and being embarrassed," said Bivitri.

In this case, cheating is framed as an immoral act. It is said to be immoral because cheating occurs because of cunning and a desperate desire to win. Additionally, cheating is framed as a dishonorable act because it is done with no sense of remorse or remorse. In the film "Dirty Vote", this can be seen from the segment about political movements leading up to the 2024 election in which the Constitutional Court seems to have passed Gibran in the nomination for president and vice president. At that time, President Jokowi, when interviewed by journalists, answered with a statement as if he had never interfered in this matter. The shame-resistant nature that emerged was that when everyone suspected the president's role in Gibran's candidacy, the president still did not comment much. (Satata et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSION

This research analyzes the documentary film "Dirty Vote" using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic method to identify and interpret the signs and symbols used in the film. The following are the conclusions and implications of this research:

### 1) **Chess Game**

The poster for the film "Dirty Vote" displays the visual of a chess game which is used as a symbol to depict complex strategy and planning in the context of elections. This reflects how well-planned tactics are used to manipulate election results to benefit certain parties.

### 2) **Pork Barrel Politics**

In the second minute (42:10), this term refers to political practices in which public funds are used for the personal benefit of politicians. This shows how state resources are used to buy influence and voter support.

### 3) **Greetings 4 Fingers**

This symbol is used in the film to show solidarity and support for certain politics, as well as a symbol of combining the political forces of pairs 01 and 03 against pair 02.

### 4) **The Meaning of Fraud in Elections**

This film reveals that fraud in elections is not the result of a sophisticated plan, but rather the deceitful mentality and resilience of shame possessed by the perpetrators. This emphasizes that fraud is committed without requiring special intelligence, but only the courage to act unethically.

## Implications

The film "Dirty Vote" succeeded in raising public awareness about the issues of election fraud and unethical political practices. Viewers have become more critical of the electoral process and more aware of the importance of transparency and fairness in politics. Documentaries like "Dirty Vote" play an

important role in educating the public about the complexities of politics and the importance of integrity in the electoral process. Media can be used as a tool to promote democratic values and encourage active participation of citizens in politics. This research shows that political systems are often vulnerable to manipulation and fraud. There is an urgent need for political reform and increased oversight of the electoral process to ensure that the results reflect the will of the people.

This research only uses Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis to interpret the signs in the film "Dirty Vote." For further research, it is recommended to use other qualitative approaches, such as discourse analysis or narrative analysis, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the messages conveyed in films. In addition, research can be expanded by conducting comparative studies with other documentaries that raise similar issues to see how signs and symbols are used in various cultural and political contexts..

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