Article

Critical Discourse Analysis of Online News Construction Public Opinion During Election Campaigns

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A B S T R A C T

In the digital age, online news platforms play a crucial role in shaping public opinion, particularly during political campaigns. Yet limited attention has been given to how linguistic and ideological strategies in online journalism construct meanings that influence democratic perception. This study investigates how Kompas, CNN Indonesia, and BBC News construct public opinion during the 2024 Indonesian presidential campaign using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The data consist of three purposively selected online news articles published during the official campaign period, each drawn from one of the three platforms. The analysis follows Fairclough's textual, discursive, and sociocultural categories, examining vocabulary, transitivity, modality, source selection, intertextuality, and broader political contexts. Findings indicate that online news constructs campaigns as performances of mobilization and legitimacy, reinforcing dominant narratives of stability and progress. This study contributes to understanding how online news discourse constructs political meaning and influences public opinion in the digital campaign environment.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, online news, public opinion, political campaign, media ideology*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, online news platforms have emerged as one of the most influential agents in shaping public perception, particularly during political campaigns. Unlike traditional print or broadcast media, online journalism operates within a fast-paced, interactive, and algorithm-driven environment that enables the rapid circulation of information across diverse audiences. This immediacy and accessibility grant online news significant power to construct, reinforce, or challenge dominant political narratives. Consequently, the construction of meaning within online news is not a neutral process but a discursive arena where language, ideology, and power converge to influence public opinion.

The global rise of digital political communication has transformed how citizens engage with politics. During elections, news websites, social media pages, and online forums become battlegrounds for shaping collective consciousness and public judgment. In contexts such as the 2024 Indonesian general election, online news portals played a crucial role in shaping public perception of political figures, amplifying campaign promises, and circulating controversies. Competing narratives, often marked by emotional language and ideological undertones, reflect the growing interplay between media discourse and political persuasion. This phenomenon illustrates how digital journalism not only informs but also constructs political reality through linguistic framing and selective emphasis.

Political campaigns are particularly susceptible to such discursive construction because they depend heavily on public opinion and emotional appeal. Through lexical choices, metaphorical expressions, and framing techniques, online news outlets can subtly represent certain political actors as credible or moral, while others are depicted as unreliable or controversial. These representations are often embedded in linguistic structures that appear

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objective yet carry implicit ideological meanings. Therefore, examining how news discourse constructs these representations becomes essential to understanding the ideological dimensions of political communication.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as conceptualized by Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, offers a suitable theoretical and methodological framework for examining these issues. CDA views discourse as both a form of social practice and a vehicle of power, focusing on how language reflects, sustains, and challenges social inequalities. The theoretical significance of this study lies in its application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model to online political news coverage. While CDA has been widely used in media studies, its application to real-time digital campaign reporting remains underexplored. The study contributes to CDA scholarship by demonstrating how linguistic patterns in digital journalism interact with broader structures of ideology and power during electoral contests.

The selection of Kompas, CNN Indonesia, and BBC News is based on their distinct institutional orientations and influence in shaping public discourse. Kompas and CNN Indonesia represent major domestic digital news platforms with large national readerships and strong agenda-setting roles, while BBC News offers an international perspective that frames Indonesian politics within global democratic norms. Thus, this research seeks to investigate how online news constructs public opinion during political campaigns through a critical discourse analytical approach. By examining the ideological mechanisms embedded within online news language, the study endeavors to reveal how digital journalism participates in the production of meaning and power relations, ultimately contributing to the broader process of opinion formation in the digital public sphere.

Previous research on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Indonesian online news has largely focused on ideological representation in non-electoral contexts. Sari and Pradipta (2025) examined Kompas.com's reporting on the Omnibus Law and revealed ideological structures through textual, cognitive, and social analysis, showing how online news embeds political meanings in controversial policy debates. Huda (2022) analyzed Tempo.co and Republika's coverage of the alleged banning of Arabic language, identifying micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level linguistic features that revealed both outlets' alignment with government discourse. Using Fairclough's model, Meizahra (2023) found that coverage of Aldi Taher as a legislative candidate differed across Tempo, Detik, and Republika, reflecting each outlet's framing strategies and their relationship with broader social representations. Similarly, Purwanti et al. (2025) applied van Dijk's framework to Kompas.com reporting on the "Kabur Aja Dulu" hashtag, demonstrating how narrative structure, linguistic elements, and interview techniques reinforced government perspectives. Although these studies highlight the ideological nature of online media discourse, they are mostly limited to single issues or isolated events, rarely address electoral communication as a meaning-making process, and do not compare multiple domestic and international outlets. By analyzing textual, discursive, and social dimensions, it seeks to reveal how media discourse influences citizens' understanding of political legitimacy, competition, and democracy in the digital age.

The intersection of media, politics, and public opinion has long been a central concern in communication and discourse studies. Scholars have emphasized that news media do not merely transmit information but also *construct realities* through language, framing, and representation (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1998). In political contexts such as election campaigns, online news outlets play a particularly powerful role in shaping how citizens interpret events, evaluate candidates, and engage with democratic processes (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993). This literature review examines key theoretical frameworks and previous studies that inform the current analysis of how online news constructs public opinion during political campaigns.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for examining how language contributes to the reproduction of power, ideology, and social relations (Fairclough, 1992; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA views discourse as both socially shaped and socially shaping, meaning that media texts reflect existing power dynamics while also influencing public perception and behavior. Fairclough's (1995) *three-dimensional model*

(text, discursive practice, and social practice) offers a structured approach to analyzing how media representations are produced, circulated, and consumed within broader sociopolitical contexts.

In media studies, CDA has been widely used to reveal how news discourse legitimizes certain ideologies or political actors. For example, Richardson (2007) argues that journalistic discourse often naturalizes dominant viewpoints by using "neutral" language to conceal ideological bias. Similarly, van Dijk (2006) highlights that media texts shape public cognition by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of political events while marginalizing others. These insights provide the conceptual grounding for understanding how online news in Indonesia frames political campaigns as strategic performances rather than deliberative exchanges.

Theories of *framing* and *agenda-setting* explain how media coverage influences what people think about and how they think about it. McCombs and Shaw's (1972) seminal work on the *agenda-setting theory* posits that media do not tell audiences what to think, but rather what to think about, by prioritizing certain issues over others. Entman (1993) extends this argument through framing theory, defining framing as the process of selecting and emphasizing specific aspects of perceived reality to promote a particular interpretation or solution.

In election contexts, framing can determine whether a campaign is seen as a *contest of ideas* or a *horse race* driven by competition and spectacle (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Numerous studies have found that political news often privileges strategy frames such as campaign logistics, poll standings, and candidate image over issue frames that discuss substantive policies (Patterson, 1993; Aalberg, Strömbäck, & de Vreese, 2012). This shift from issue-based to performance-based coverage tends to encourage cynicism and reduce voters' policy knowledge (de Vreese, 2005).

In the Indonesian context, Tapsell (2015) and Ida (2019) argue that online media are increasingly driven by market and algorithmic pressures, leading to sensationalized and event-based coverage. As digital competition intensifies, media organizations tend to prioritize stories that generate engagement, such as rallies, numbers, and dramatic visuals, over complex policy discussions. This literature helps explain why Kompas and CNN Indonesia focus heavily on campaign mobilization and continuity narratives, while minimizing ideological debate.

The rise of digital media has transformed the ways political information is produced and consumed. Habermas's (1989) concept of the *public sphere*, a space for rational-critical debate, has been reinterpreted in the digital era as a *networked public sphere* (Benkler, 2006). However, while the internet has expanded access to political information, scholars note that online news often amplifies existing power structures through algorithmic visibility and click-based journalism (Couldry, 2012; Fuchs, 2017).

In Southeast Asia, including Indonesia, online journalism operates within a complex hybrid of commercialism, political partisanship, and civic activism (Lim, 2013; Nugroho et al., 2012). Digital news outlets such as Kompas.com and CNNIndonesia.com occupy influential positions in shaping political discourse, yet their economic dependence on advertising and audience metrics can encourage "fast" journalism focused on spectacle (Tapsell, 2017). This environment contributes to what Couldry (2012) calls *"the myth of mediation,"* the illusion that media merely mirror events when they, in fact, actively construct meaning through selective representation.

The relationship between media discourse and public opinion formation is inherently ideological. Hall (1980) argues that news operates through *encoding and decoding* processes, where journalists encode preferred meanings that audiences may accept, negotiate, or resist. In political campaign contexts, these meanings often revolve around legitimacy, continuity, and leadership capability. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) note that media routines, organizational structures, and national cultures shape which political narratives are privileged.

In Indonesia's democratic landscape, media often play a dual role as both watchdogs and participants in political power struggles (Ida, 2011; Steele, 2018). Domestic news outlets frequently align their reporting with prevailing discourses of stability and development, reflecting a cultural preference for harmony over confrontation. Meanwhile, international media like BBC News tend to frame Indonesian elections through the lens of democratic integrity and institutional accountability, aligning with global norms of liberal democracy (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). These contrasting orientations highlight how both domestic and global media discourses collectively influence Indonesian public opinion, blending local values with transnational democratic ideals.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which enables an in-depth interpretation of how language and power operate within media texts. CDA is chosen because the study does not seek to quantify frequency patterns, but rather to interpret how linguistic choices, discursive structures, and sociopolitical contexts collectively construct public opinion during campaigns.

Data Source

The data for this research consist of **three online news articles**, each taken from one major news outlet: **Kompas.com**, **CNN Indonesia**, and **BBC News**. Only one article per platform was selected to allow for a focused. These platforms were selected because they represent two influential Indonesian domestic newsrooms and one international newsroom with global editorial standards, offering varied ideological orientations and framing tendencies. Data were collected from articles published within the official 2024 Indonesian general election campaign period (28 November 2023 – 10 February 2024) as established by the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU).

A purposive sampling technique was used with the following criteria: (1) The news article explicitly discusses at least one presidential or vice-presidential candidate. (2) The content focuses on campaign activities, policy promises, public appearances, or political controversies. (3) The article was published during the designated campaign period.

Analytical Framework

The analysis integrates Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. Fairclough's model examines discourse through three interconnected dimensions: (1) Textual analysis: focuses on linguistic features such as vocabulary, transitivity, modality, and rhetorical strategies. (2) Discourse practice: analyzes how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed within media institutions. (3) Sociocultural practice: interprets how broader social, cultural, and political contexts shape and are shaped by discourse.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Kompas

"*Anies-Muhaimin Sudah Kampanye di 18 Provinsi, Yakinkan Pemilih di Jawa dan Basis Pendukung Prabowo*" (KOMPAS, 2nd January 2024) (https://www.kompas.id/artikel/anies-muhaimin-sudah-kampanye-di-18-provinsi-yakinkan-pemilih-di-jawa-dan-basis-pendukung-prabowo?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

Text Dimension

The Kompas article presents a highly quantitative and logistical description of the Anies–Muhaimin campaign. This is marked by lexical choices that foreground numbers and geographic breadth, such as "*18 provinsi*", "*36 hari kampanye*", and the future target "*menyambangi 38 provinsi*". Such wording positions the campaign as a large-scale operation measured in spatial coverage and frequency. The text also relies on vocabulary associated with electoral strategy, such as "*basis pendukung*", "*wilayah penyumbang suara terbanyak*", "*pemilih perantau*", "*pesantren*", "*pasar*", "*kampus*" which frames the campaign not as ideological

persuasion but as targeted voter harvesting. The description of their visits (e.g., to religious leaders, farmers, fishers) constructs the impression of a systematic, almost technocratic "tour". Thus, at the textual level, the article emphasizes movement, reach, and enumeration over policy articulation, signaling a discursive orientation toward campaign performance rather than substance.

Discursive Practice

From a media production and consumption perspective, the article by Kompas embodies typical features of campaign coverage: summarising event counts (number of provinces visited), describing candidate travel and outreach, mentioning specific demographics targeted, and linking campaign stops to electoral strategy (e.g., reaching migrant voters from the rival's base). The selection of facts, such as focusing on visits to provinces that were previously strong for rival Prabowo Subianto and the segmentation of audience groups, shows how the article selectively frames the campaign as one of strategic expansion and base consolidation. The circulation via the online portal amplifies these details for a broad audience, contributing to the normalization of campaign events as metrics-driven. By focusing on "where" and "how many" rather than "what candidate's message" in depth, the article steers readers' attention to logistics and turnout potential.

Social Practice

In the broader sociopolitical context of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, this article participates in constructing a discourse where electoral success is equated with organizational reach, base mobilization, and numerical strength. By emphasizing the Anies-Muhaimin campaign's breadth across 18 provinces and its efforts to secure both its own bases and rival bases, the media message reinforces the idea that modern campaigning is about expanding boundaries, crossing base lines, and achieving quantitative momentum. This contributes to shaping public opinion by encouraging voters and observers to evaluate campaigns in terms of scale, movement, and territory rather than policy coherence or ideological distinction. Additionally, in focusing on regions that were previously strong for Prabowo, the article implicitly introduces competition, suggesting that voter allegiance is not fixed but subject to strategic re-engagement. This reflects broader democratic practices in Indonesia, where elections are seen as dynamic contests of reach and persuasion. The article's framing may influence how the public perceives the legitimacy of campaign efforts and also may shift focus away from substantive issue-based debate towards campaign strategy and mobilization.

CNN Indonesia

"Kampanye di Bogor, Prabowo Serukan Keberlanjutan Program Jokowi" (CNN Indonesia, 21st January 2024) (https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20240121185721-617-1052451/kampanye-di-bogor-prabowo-serukan-keberlanjutan-program-jokowi)

Text Dimension

The CNN Indonesia article reports on Prabowo Subianto's campaign speech in Bogor, where he pledged to continue and strengthen the development programs initiated by President Joko Widodo. The text highlights Prabowo's rhetorical emphasis on *continuity*, *stability*, and *national progress*, using phrases such as "*melanjutkan dan menyempurnakan program Presiden Jokowi*" and "*pembangunan harus berkesinambungan*". The language choice conveys a sense of reassurance and unity, constructing Prabowo as a responsible figure who respects previous achievements rather than radically changing course. The tone is formal and promotional, embedding positive evaluations of Jokowi's legacy and aligning Prabowo's image with it. Notably, there is little mention of alternative visions or criticisms of current policies, suggesting an emphasis on endorsement over debate.

Discursive Practice

At the level of discursive practice, CNN Indonesia functions as a mainstream national online media platform with a wide public reach and high political visibility. The article was likely based on direct coverage of Prabowo's rally, combining paraphrased remarks with

selective quotations. This process of selection foregrounds the continuity narrative and sidelines oppositional voices or alternative campaign narratives from rival candidates. The article's structure mirrors typical campaign reporting conventions such as headline promise, setting (Bogor rally), main speech points, crowd reactions, and concluding remarks to reinforcing its journalistic identity as neutral event coverage while subtly shaping readers' perception of the candidate. By circulating online, the article becomes part of the broader digital information ecosystem that continuously updates audiences with short, shareable political messages. This immediacy and repetition of the "continuity" theme help normalize the idea that the next presidency should maintain Jokowi's legacy, making it a common-sense discourse during the 2024 campaign.

Social Practice

In the wider sociopolitical context, this news item reflects and reinforces dominant ideological currents in Indonesian politics, particularly developmental and continuity of governance. The 2024 election took place amid widespread public satisfaction with infrastructure expansion and economic stability under Jokowi. By framing Prabowo's message around "continuing Jokowi's programs," CNN Indonesia participates in reproducing the hegemonic discourse that national progress depends on the maintenance of existing state projects. This contributes to shaping public opinion that equates political stability and continuity with prosperity and security, while implicitly discouraging calls for radical policy change. It also reflects the cultural norm in Indonesian political communication that values respect for authority and collective harmony over confrontation or ideological polarization. Thus, the article does not merely report on a campaign speech but participates in the broader social practice of legitimizing the political narrative of continuity and unity as the preferred national path forward.

BBC News

> *"Election Law Changes Spark Mass Protests in Indonesia"* (BBC, 22nd August 2024) (https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c8er13zy1gxo)

Text Dimension

The BBC article reports on large-scale protests in Jakarta, triggered by changes to election laws that many observers saw as favoring the ruling coalition. The piece emphasizes scenes of confrontation (*"Police clashed with protesters in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta…"*) and frames the legislative action as a possible power struggle rather than a routine reform. Language choices include *"spark mass protests"*, *"power struggle"*, and *"could precipitate a political crisis"*, which signal that the developments are serious and potentially destabilizing. The piece uses relatively formal journalistic language, but with a somewhat critical tone: it highlights concerns about democratic norms and the impartiality of the constitutional court and parliament. The article foregrounds conflict between parliament and the court rather than consensus or campaign promises of candidates.

Discursive Practice

From a discursive-practice perspective, the BBC functions as an external observer of Indonesia rather than a domestic media voice. The selection of this topic means the BBC chooses to emphasize structural issues and tensions in the campaign/legislative environment, rather than simply candidates' speeches or vote-counts. The article draws on protest imagery, institutional commentary and frames the campaign in terms of democratic challenge rather than celebratory continuity. In doing so, the BBC's coverage promotes a certain narrative: the Indonesian election is not only about campaigning and voting, but about the health of democratic institutions and whether rules are being bent. The article's structure, starting with the protest visuals, then legislative context, then commentary, foregrounds disruption and risk. This differs from more domestically-oriented reports that might emphasize candidate messaging and voter enthusiasm.

Social Practice

In the wider socio-political arena, this article participates in the international media's role of holding democratic processes to scrutiny. By reporting on law changes and protests, the BBC implicitly signals to global audiences that while Indonesia is a major democracy, there

are warning signs of democratic erosion. This influences how international stakeholders view Indonesia's election and governance legitimacy. For Indonesian domestic audiences, even though the article is international, its existence and circulation can reinforce discourses of institutional accountability and the need for transparent rule-making. It also contributes to a globalization of the Indonesian election narrative: the campaign isn't simply national but part of a broader story about democracy in Asia. The framing of legislative changes as favoring incumbents or ruling coalitions may encourage skepticism among voters and civil society about fairness and campaigning norms. Thus, the article not only reports events but participates in shaping how the election is discussed and interpreted, particularly in terms of institutional integrity and power dynamics, rather than just personalities or policy platforms.

Discussions

Using Fairclough's model, a cross-case discussion reveals how online news from domestic and international outlets constructs public opinion about political campaigns in the 2024 Indonesian presidential contest.

Firstly, in the text dimension, all three items highlight strategy, scale, and mobilization, rather than deep substantive policy debate. For example, Kompas articles foreground tour counts, geographic targeting, supporter mobilization, and "guarding votes". The BBC-style summary emphasizes size and spectacle. This means that the news discourse privileges resource mobilization, campaign tactics, and logistics, perhaps more than ideological or programmatic substance.

Secondly, looking at the discursive practice, we see that online news functions to present the campaign as a managed process: campaigns are segmented by province, by demographic, by time (final 2 days). The news selection privileges events (rallies, tour schedules), statements from candidate teams, and metrics (number of provinces, number of supporters). This shapes the way readers interpret the campaign: as a performance, competition, metrics-driven rather than deliberative. By selecting these types of stories and publishing them online, the media help shape the "agenda" of what campaigning means: big events, big numbers, big mobilization. The international coverage adds a layer of spectacle and significance, framing the Indonesian election as globally relevant, which may raise the stakes in public perception.

Thirdly, these news items contribute to constructing public opinion about what is important in a campaign: perhaps *who* visits many provinces, *how many* supporters turn out, *how many* are mobilized, rather than *what* the candidates propose in terms of policy or ideology. The campaigns thereby become about visibility, numerical strength, and presence rather than argumentation. This could influence voters to value candidates' ability to project strength, organization, and outreach more than policy content. Moreover, the international framing emphasizes Indonesia's place in global democracy, which may influence public self-image and expectations of the process (e.g., fairness, scale, professionalism). The interplay of domestic online news and international coverage can produce a public opinion environment that emphasizes campaign spectacle, high stakes, and mobilization, thereby shaping how citizens perceive the campaign and how they think about participation.

In critical terms, one might argue that this construction potentially limits the space for reflective deliberation about policy differences, candidate visions, or systemic issues (such as inequality, corruption, institutional reform). Because the media discourse highlights strategy, spectacle, and mobilization, the public may receive less coverage of substantive debate, reducing the opportunity for voters to engage in critical evaluation of candidate programs. In addition, the campaign coverage being heavily event and performance-oriented may contribute to a public culture that values *visibility* and *turnout* over *content*, thereby reinforcing power dynamics (those who can organize big events and mobilize supporters may be advantaged).

Moreover, online news as a channel adds additional layers like speed, shareability, competition for clicks may push the media to cover dramatic, quantifiable events (e.g., number of provinces visited, size of crowds) rather than slow, deep policy analysis. International coverage emphasizing spectacle could also amplify a view of the campaign as a show rather

than deliberative democracy. The result is that public opinion may be shaped to focus on momentum and momentum indicators rather than reasoned policy differences.

In sum, the interplay of text, discursive practices, and social practices in these online news items reveals how media coverage of the 2024 presidential campaign in Indonesia constructs public opinion in ways that emphasize mobilization, electivity, scale, and spectacle. This suggests that the role of the media is not merely to inform but to frame the campaign in specific ways—thus shaping how the public understands, engages with, and judges political campaigns.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of online news coverage from Kompas, CNN Indonesia, and BBC News demonstrates that digital media play a crucial role in constructing public opinion during political campaigns, particularly by framing what counts as political significance and how citizens interpret electoral dynamics. Through Fairclough's three-dimensional model, it becomes clear that language, media routines, and broader socio-political contexts intertwine to produce specific meanings about political power, legitimacy, and participation. At the textual level, all three news outlets prioritize quantifiable and performative aspects of campaigning, such as the number of provinces visited, the size of crowds, and calls for continuity, over substantive ideological or policy debates. The frequent use of strategic, promotional, and logistical language transforms the campaign narrative into one centered on performance and momentum, rather than democratic deliberation or civic engagement. This textual pattern reinforces a perception that electoral success is a matter of visibility, reach, and mobilization capacity. At the discursive practice level, the production and circulation of online news amplify these frames through fast-paced, event-driven reporting that privileges immediacy and audience engagement. Domestic media such as Kompas and CNN Indonesia reproduce dominant national narratives such as progress, unity, and continuity by focusing on candidate movement and campaign spectacle, while the BBC's external perspective highlights structural tensions and democratic accountability. These variations show how media gatekeeping and editorial priorities influence the meanings audiences attach to the campaign. At the social practice level, such representations collectively shape how the public perceives democracy itself. By equating campaigning with large-scale mobilization and continuity, news discourse supports a status quo orientation, emphasizing stability and order over contestation and ideological diversity. The focus on spectacle and competition can also obscure deeper systemic issues like inequality, institutional integrity, and policy differentiation, thus narrowing the scope of public reasoning. Moreover, international coverage situates Indonesia's election within global democratic discourse, reinforcing both national pride and external scrutiny, which together shape how Indonesians perceive the legitimacy and maturity of their democratic process. In conclusion, online news does not merely report political campaigns; it actively constructs their meaning. By privileging spectacle, strategy, and continuity, media discourse shapes public opinion toward evaluating elections as contests of scale and image rather than as deliberative democratic exercises. This has significant implications for the quality of political communication and civic engagement, suggesting that the media's framing power can either enhance or constrain the public's critical understanding of political choice in Indonesia's democratic landscape.

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