

**JLPH:**
Journal of Law, Politic
and Humanities<https://dinastires.org/JLPH> dinasti.info@gmail.com +62 811 7404 455E-ISSN: 2962-2816
P-ISSN: 2747-1985DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/jlph.v5i6>
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Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Speech on Human Rights By Prabowo Subiyanto In The First Debate of The 2024 Presidential Election

KhoironFaculty of Public Administration, Islamic University of Malang, khoiron@unisma.ac.idCorresponding Author : khoiron@unisma.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines how a presidential candidate strategically constructed human rights (HAM) discourse as a political instrument to secure victory in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Through the deployment of human rights discourse, Prabowo Subianto sought to influence public perception and voter preferences in his favor. Ultimately, his success in the election demonstrates how political discourse articulated through public debate texts—effectively shaped public cognition, guided reasoning processes, and influenced electoral choices. The central argument of this article is that human rights discourse, when employed as a political tool, is not ideologically empty. Instead, it functions as a form of political truth production tailored to serve particular interests. The study employs Teun A. van Dijk’s critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework, which integrates three levels of analysis: textual analysis, social cognition, and sociocultural context. What distinguishes this research is its methodological novelty: the application of Van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a critical intervention in the field of discourse studies, which has often privileged content analysis over a deeper interrogation of textual and discursive structures. Accordingly, this study contributes to the discourse analysis literature by foregrounding the interplay between language, power, and political strategy in the context of contemporary Indonesian electoral politics. The findings of the study reveal three primary discursive strategies: (1) The reframing of human rights as a counter-narrative to legal controversies, (2) The construction of a populist leadership image, and (3) The invocation of “people’s sovereignty” as a protective narrative to legitimize political positioning.

Keyword: Discourse, Contestation, Discourse Politics, and Legal Politics

INTRODUCTION

Theoretically, democracy is understood as “the rules by people,” with one of the key markers of democracy being national elections to elect presidential and vice presidential candidates. Democracy can also be interpreted as a discourse that has diverse meanings. Therefore, democracy cannot be interpreted unilaterally, as it is embedded in a public discourse that is always dynamic. As one of the markers of democracy, elections are a method of democracy, according to Schumpeter’s understanding of democracy, which views democracy

as a democratic method (Schumpeter, 2003; 250). Moreover, in the book "the history and the last man," Francis Fukuyama (1992) concluded that liberal democracy is the final form of governance of modern humanity, indicating that state power is not based on natural rights or supernatural but on the will of the sovereign people (Sorensen, 2008; 06). From here, the democratic regime aligns with the principle of liberalism, where everyone must respect the outcomes of collective decisions, not because they are fair, good, or right, but because they are the result of procedures considered fair (Gyorfi, 2013; 322). However, democracy still emphasizes only procedural and mechanistic aspects (Pereira, 2000; 71).

In Indonesia, following the 1998 reform, there have been at least several direct presidential elections from 2004 to 2024, indicating that our democracy is indeed sufficient to move towards a better democracy than before, although not yet at the essential and substantive levels. Elections provide a space for contestation among candidates, as seen in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. The discourse struggle of the contestants is a sign that this democracy is growing well and healthily. As a political system, many experts feel quite sceptical about democracy as a form of government (Weale, 1999; 03). In other words, although elections are a democratic procedure, every nation will always seek an ideal democratic format that aligns with its society's culture, including the democracy that Indonesia is currently undergoing through direct presidential elections.

In February 2024, Indonesia held its direct presidential election for the 2024-2029 period, marking a significant departure from the 2004 election, when the president was still elected by members of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR). As a contestant, Prabowo had long been a candidate for president or vice president. Since he decided to leave the Golongan Karya (Golkar) party in 1998, he founded a new party, Gerakan Indonesia Raya (Gerindra), in the same year. He is a retired general of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) with his full name Prabowo Subianto Djojohadikusumo, born on October 17, 1951. His father was Soemitro Djojohadikusumo from Kebumen, Central Java, who was an economic expert and also a politician from the Indonesian Socialist Party (Partai Sosialis Indonesia) who had just finished serving as Minister of Industry in the Natsir Cabinet in April 1952.¹ From here, Prabowo is the son of an Indonesian intellectual and economist. Prabowo himself has a 28-year education and career in the military, which means that his military experience provided him with sufficient knowledge to establish himself as a future leader of Indonesia.

Historically, Prabowo Subianto's political career began when he nominated himself as a presidential candidate for Indonesia from the Golkar Party at the Golkar Presidential Candidate Convention in 2004. Although he passed, he lost the vote to Presidential Candidate, Wiranto. After losing at the Golkar convention on February 6, 2008, Prabowo, together with activists and colleagues, founded the Gerindra Party.² On May 9, 2008, the Gerindra Party declared Prabowo as its presidential candidate for the 2009 election. However, after a complex bargaining process, Prabowo finally agreed to become Megawati Soekarnoputri's presidential candidate, even though the Mega-Prabowo alliance lost to the SBY-Boediyono coalition.

In the 2014 presidential election, Prabowo ran again as a candidate for president of Indonesia. Prabowo paired with Hatta Rajasa as his vice presidential candidate, although Prabowo-Hatta lost narrowly to the Jokowi-Yusuf Kalla pair. In the 2019 presidential election, Prabowo ran again, this time with Sandiaga Uno as his running mate. However, victory did not side with Prabowo-Sandiaga. Even though he lost, Prabowo was finally willing to become a

¹Accessed on July 20, 2024 www.BiografiPrabowoSubianto.com, Karir di Militer hingga Jadi Menteri Pertahanan - Gramedia Literasi, by Nandy

²Accessed on July 20, 2024 www.BiografiPrabowoSubianto.com, Karir di Militer hingga Jadi Menteri Pertahanan - Gramedia Literasi, by Nandy

minister in the Jokowi-Ma'ruf cabinet for the 2019-2024 period.³ From here, Prabowo was portrayed as someone who had tenacity in fighting for his interests in the 2024 presidential election. Based on his experience in participating in the contestation of power (presidential election) from 2009 to 2019, the 2024 presidential election presents a good opportunity to win the contest. With complete confidence, the Gerindra party nominated him again as its presidential candidate for the 2024-2029 term. After navigating various dynamics and political intrigues, Prabowo partnered with Gibran Rakabumingraka, the mayor of Solo and the son of President Joko Widodo.

The aforementioned political fact, namely the victory of Prabowo-Gibran, indicates that the discourse offered by Prabowo was able to influence the public, causing them to feel the need to choose him as their leader. However, the discourse offered by Prabowo is implicitly a product that was born in personal cognition and the dominant social context at the time of the 2024 presidential election. In other words, what Prabowo offered was nothing more than what was constructed not only from Prabowo's personality as a former military man but also from the results of the dominant social construction of society at that time.

Therefore, this study reveals the truth or political goals that Prabowo tried to offer to win the political contest, in line with Laswellan's (1936) political theorization, politics as "who gets what, when, how" where politics assumes that every autonomous individual has the right to contest and maintain power (position), at all levels of organizational life (Peters, 2004). Politics is dimensional in interests, so it is very plural and not reduced to mere ideology.

METHOD

This study used qualitative methods and discourse analysis techniques. Teun A. van Dijk's critical discourse analysis and interpretive approach. This approach was used to understand meaning and form actions based on certain beliefs and preferences (Marsh & Stoker; 2002). The interpretive approach aims to understand the meaning behind the political struggle of discourse in Prabowo Subiyanto's speech text. Through data collection in the form of speech texts in the first debate of the 2024 presidential election regarding Human Rights. Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis technique consists of three stages: text, social cognition, and social context. From these three levels of analysis, this study revealed why the discourse was produced and used for Prabowo's political interests to achieve power.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This article thoroughly employs discourse theory, utilising Teun van Dijk's critical discourse analysis method, which operates through three levels of analysis: text, social cognition, and social context. Therefore, from the three levels, political interests drive the discourse on human rights offered by Probowo.

Human Rights as a Counter to Legal Issues

In the 2024 presidential election, the contestants conducted what became known as a public debate. The goal is clear: to influence the public through discourse in the form of texts delivered orally by the candidates. The discourse was produced and disseminated into the public space to portray themselves as candidates who are worthy of leading Indonesia in the future. Therefore, one of the contestants is the former general of the Indonesian National Armed Forces, Probowo Subiyanto, who is the general chairman of the Gerindra party.

In his first debate, Prabowo outlined his vision and mission through a speech text..."Bismillahirrahmanirrahim. Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Peace be

³Accessed on July 20, 2024 www.biografi.prabowo.id. Biografi Prabowo Subianto, Karir di Militer hingga Jadi Menteri Pertahanan - Gramedia Literasi, by Nandy

upon us all. Shalom, om swastiastu, namo buddhaya, greetings of virtue. Thank you for the opportunity to convey our vision and mission. Ensuring the law is upheld, improving government services, combating corruption, and protecting all groups in society are crucial. Therefore, in our vision and mission, these things are placed at the top..⁴ From the text, in general, Prabowo understood the ethics of giving a speech by greeting all adherents of various religions. He understood very well that the Indonesian nation is profoundly religious and holds its cultural heritage tightly, especially in terms of public ethics. Therefore, he used the expression “Bismillahirrahmanirrahim, assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh. Peace be upon us all. Shalom, om swastiastu, namo buddhaya, greetings of virtue” instead of using other expressions such as *Selamat malam* (good evening) in opening his inaugural speech which of course will bring negative responses from the public. In its global meaning, his opening expression is him seeking the sympathy of a heterogeneous and plural public. He understood that since 2014, he had always been portrayed as a candidate who was close to radical groups (Islamism) in every presidential election event.

In his vision and mission, he put the law in the first statement. Even in his last speech, he said “crucial..” and “..palced at the top... .” From here, he tried very hard to elevate the issue of law enforcement from other issues, even though they were both placed as top priorities. However, he tried to make the law a dimension of his worthiness as a leader, seen in the words “..palced at the top... .” and not the words “put in the middle or below..” which, of course, have a bad value in the eyes of the public.

The texts appear because, cognitively, Prabowo is the former general of the Indonesian National Armed Forces. He understands enough about the diversity and plurality of society. As a soldier, he received a genuine national education through various military operations, which made him a highly nationalistic figure. In this sense, his nationalism grew and developed in a militaristic world, especially since he was the son-in-law of the longest-serving president (New Order). However, what is interesting is that he prioritized the law in his vision and mission; this cannot be separated from the law cases that often surround him after the 1998 activist kidnapping case emerged. He was trying to delegitimize legal discourse by offering law enforcement above all his visions. That means he tried to eliminate his legal traces by offering new leadership to law enforcement.

Portraying Himself as a Populist Leader

One of the goals of the 1998 reforms was to establish strong and independent law enforcement in the sense that the law is the ultimate authority in creating social justice. However, the conflict and violence that accompany the law enforcement process in Indonesia do not seem to have produced results that satisfy the public. For example, the violence that occurred in Papua is a challenge for the 2024 presidential candidates, including the political challenges of law enforcement. The public understands that Papua is one of the areas that requires serious attention from the state.

In this case, Prabowo tried to place the Papua issue in a historical dimension, he said in his 2024 presidential debate speech ..”..The problem of Papua is complicated because there is a separatist movement there, and we have been following this separatist movement for quite some time. We observe that foreign interference is at play, and we see that specific forces consistently seek to destabilize Indonesia and cause it to disintegrate. For that reason, the issue of human rights is something that we must prioritize. Among other things, we must protect all the Papuan people because terrorist groups are now attacking the Papuan people themselves— separatist terrorist groups are terrorizing innocent people, women, old people, and unarmed

⁴ Accessed on August 15, 2024 (384) PANAS! Debat Pertama Capres Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, dan Ganjar Pranowo di Pilpres 2024 - YouTube

children. First, I plan to enforce the law, strengthen the apparatus, and accelerate economic development. Thank you..”⁵ Globally, there is an implied meaning in the sentences as a sign of Prabowo’s assertiveness. For example, “...foreign interference is at play, ...” is preferable to using “foreign intervention.” In its global context, Prabowo is conveying a political narrative through sentences that are easily understood by the public. The sentence suggests that Prabowo genuinely sought to be portrayed as a populist leader or one close to the people, particularly the lower classes. He could have said “foreign intervention” or “international political penetration.” Theoretically, according to van Dijk (2002), the discourse of the text is a product of social cognition and the social context of a hegemonic society, indicating that as a former commander, Prabowo was shaped in an environment that was very strict, disciplined, and firm in its rules. He attempted to translate the issues of law enforcement and human rights into freedom in enforcing the law without any international political intervention. The public understands that Prabowo will not be able to escape the issues of enforcing human rights violations and their accountability. However, in the discourse, it is very clear that he has attempted to delegitimise himself through the politicisation of law enforcement, thereby minimising his image as a human rights violator.

The discourse of the text above cannot be separated from the social context of Indonesian society, which generally has a strong social memory related to the political tragedy that accompanied Indonesia’s democratisation after the Soeharto regime collapsed in 1998 and entered the reform era. This strong public memory has portrayed the Soeharto family as human rights violators, including, in this case, Prabowo, the 2024 presidential candidate. Therefore, what is being produced in the discourse above is a form of Prabowo’s attempt to delegitimize issues that often arise in various political events so far.

Sheltering within the Narrative of People’s Power

In liberal democratic reasoning, power lies in the hands of the people, clarifying the accurate marker of democracy: that the highest power resides in the hands of the people. In the 2024 presidential debate, the issue of human rights violations was again raised against Prabowo, who had a career in the army forces and was terminated in 1999. However, Prabowo tried to clarify with the discourse he produced..”So, Mr. Anies, yes, indeed, political developments have several perspectives, yes. My team, the legal experts who accompanied me, said that from a legal perspective, there was no problem. The problem that was considered a violation of ethics had been addressed, and a decision was made, yes, at that time, by the authorized party. Then there was action, and the action was still being debated because the person concerned was still processing it. However, the point is that the decision was final and could not be changed. Yes, I implemented it, yes, and we are not small kids anymore, Mr. Anies, yes. You also understand, yes, never mind, yes. The point, is that the people decide, and the people judge. If the people do not like Prabowo and Gibran, do not vote. We are ready, and I am not afraid of not being able to serve..”⁶ From the text, globally, the implied meaning is that the highest power is in the hands of the people, as seen from “The point is, the people decide, and the people judge.” this is an expression that tries to lead the truth of the issue of violence to public reason, not to the applicable legal reason. The meaning behind it is that Prabowo handed over the truth about the issue of violence in 1998 to the people and, more precisely, sheltered in the power of the people. Cognitively, every 5-yearly political event where Prabowo appears as a contestant, he is always associated with the early political history of the 1998 reform. The emergence of these sentences is more of a rebuttal or counter-discourse

⁵ Accessed on August 15, 2024 (384) PANAS! Debat Pertama Capres Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, dan Ganjar Pranowo di Pilpres 2024 - YouTube

⁶ Accessed on August 15, 2024 (384) PANAS! Debat Pertama Capres Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, dan Ganjar Pranowo di Pilpres 2024 - YouTube

to the discourse of violence that appears in every political event in Indonesia, where Prabowo is a contestant.

Indeed, like the previous presidential election in 2019, the issue of violence associated with Prabowo has always emerged well before the campaign period and will likely intensify during the political campaign process of Prabowo's competitors. Many observers consider the 2024 election to be a highly competitive and intense political contest. The debates between the contestants are very fierce, especially on human rights issues. In the 2024 political contest, presidential candidates Anies and Ganjar always linked Prabowo to violence against activists in 1998. From this political context, the discourse above emerged and was utilized in Prabowo's political campaign, which aimed to delegitimize the issue of violence..."Mr. Anies, in a democracy, the highest power lies with the people. The highest judge is the people. On February 14, the people will make a decision. If we are not correct, wrong, or betrayal, the people will punish us..."⁷ In general, the text shows Prabowo's desperation in countering the issue of violence in 1998, as seen in the sentence, "The highest judge is the people." In a democratic country, it is the court judge who has the authority to judge whether something is right or wrong. Moreover, as a sign of frustration over the issue of violence, Prabowo did not use sentences such as "in court, I was declared not guilty," which are more argumentative. Of course, the public understands how Prabowo's cognition is when he has to explain human rights.

However, Prabowo's attempts to avoid the discourse related to human rights violations have always been linked to him in every political event since 2009. This means that he felt uninterested, or at least did not pay much attention to the issue of human rights. From here, the public understands that what Prabowo is conveying is nothing more than his desperation over issues that concern him.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this research, the researcher concludes that behind the discourse of the text produced by presidential candidate Prabowo in relation to the issue of Human Rights, there is a claim and effort to strengthen law enforcement in his leadership. In the case, Prabowo tried to escape international political pressure related to law enforcement in areas still affected by violence and social conflict. When asked about Prabowo's involvement in human rights violations, he created a dissenting opinion by hiding behind the discourse that power lies with the people. In other words, behind the discourse of the text that Prabowo produced, disseminated, and promoted as a political instrument lies a form of Prabowo's cognitive situation, which tends to be portrayed as firm and militaristic.

Moreover, the discourse of the text is a manifestation of the strengthening public dominance, particularly in resolving cases leading up to the 1998 reform. Critically, what Prabowo produced and disseminated is more of a tool or instrument that is utilized for his political interests through the issues he offered, such as law enforcement, legal politics, and people's power. However, this study has limitations in terms of the scope of the data analyzed, as it only covers the first speech of the 2024 Presidential Election debate and is limited to topics such as Human Rights. Therefore, further research could be conducted with a broader range of data and topics.

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⁷ Accessed on August 15, 2024 (384) PANAS! Debat Pertama Capres Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, dan Ganjar Pranowo di Pilpres 2024 - YouTube

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