Identity Politics and Social Fragmentation: A Comparative Study of Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Candidate Campaign Narratives

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Abstract *The 2024 Indonesian presidential election takes place in an increasingly complex socio political atmosphere, characterized by the strengthening of identity politics and social fragmentation in the public sphere. Campaign narratives of presidential candidates play a strategic role in shaping public perceptions, building a support base, while paradoxically deepening societal polarization. This phenomenon raises questions about how identity narratives are constructed and distributed in contemporary political campaigns. This study aims to compare the campaign narratives of three pairs of presidential and vice presidential candidates in the 2024 presidential election, focusing on identity issues (religion, ethnicity, social class) and their impact on social fragmentation. This research employs a qualitative approach, utilizing Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) model and triangulation with social media data, official speeches, and campaign team statements. The results showed that the three candidate pairs used different narrative strategies in framing national identity. Still, they simultaneously strengthened social segmentation based on political affiliation, religious symbols, and moral constructions. Inclusive narratives were often overshadowed by populist rhetoric and "us vs them" imagery that reinforced group identification and weakened social cohesion. This research highlights the need for political literacy and regulation of campaign ethics to prevent continued political exclusivism.*
Keywords: *identity politics, campaign narratives, social fragmentation, 2024 presidential election, critical discourse analysis, social cohesion*

1. Introduction

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election took place in a highly dynamic socio political context, with the re-emergence of identity politics as the primary strategy in the campaign. Symbols of religion, ethnicity, and class representation have become an instrument in building electoral support while strengthening community segmentation (Khamdan, 2022; Hariyanto et al., 2025; Nasution, 2024). This phenomenon has serious consequences for social cohesion and democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

Identity politics is not only a vote mobilization tool, but also deepens social fragmentation, strengthens exclusivist sentiments, and threatens diversity. In this context, campaign narratives that divide society can lead to political radicalization at the grassroots level (Munandar & Susanti, 2025; Sari et al., 2024; Rozi & Supriatno, 2024). Therefore, an in depth study of the patterns of identity narratives in presidential campaigns and their implications for social fragmentation is needed.

In this study, social fragmentation is understood as the weakening of intergroup trust and social cohesion, characterized by increasing polarization of political

affiliation, discursive hostility in online forums, and the rise of exclusive identity-based discourse. Empirical indicators include: (1) the frequency of antagonistic binary narratives (e.g., "ummah vs elite", "true nationalist vs others"), (2) the presence of digital echo chambers where supporters avoid opposing views, and (3) the prevalence of labeling terms such as "cebong", "kadrun", or "PKI" in public discourse. These indicators are traced through campaign speeches, social media comment analysis, and symbolic language patterns, providing an operational definition of fragmentation relevant to Indonesia's 2024 election context.

This research uses Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, focusing on how campaign narratives shape collective identity and social opposition. Based on the 2024 social media data (see graph above), sentiments towards the presidential candidates are highly polarized, with Anies receiving more positive sentiments, while Ganjar and Prabowo have a relatively balanced distribution of negative and neutral sentiments (Satrio et al., 2023; Setiadarma & Abdullah, 2024; Fachrudin, 2021).

The selection of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's model, is grounded in a constructivist critical epistemology which sees language not merely as a medium of communication, but as a site of power and ideological struggle. CDA assumes that discourse is socially shaped and constitutive, reflecting existing power relations while shaping collective identities and social structures. This is particularly relevant to the study of political identity, where symbolic language and rhetorical strategies legitimize authority, construct in-groups and out-groups, and normalize exclusionary ideologies. CDA thus provides the analytical tools to uncover how political narratives operate at the textual level and in the broader sociopolitical context of identity construction and social division.

Figure 1. Distribution of 2024 Presidential Candidate Campaign Sentiments on Social Media
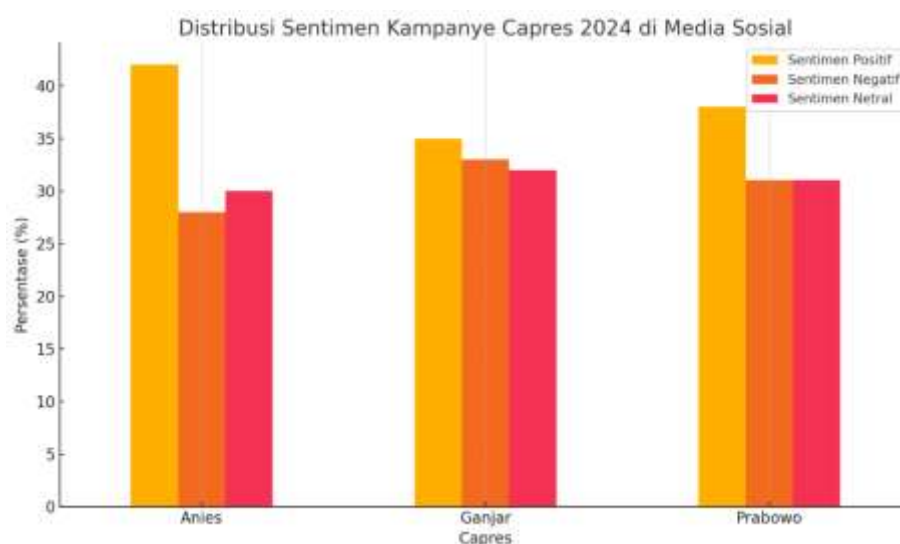
Previous studies have discussed identity politics in the 2014 and 2019 elections, highlighting the role of religion and media in shaping public perceptions (Putra, 2019; Prayudi, 2021; Ulfah, 2024). However, the dominant approach tends to be monocase and has not conducted systematic comparisons between candidates in one electoral contestation.

To date, there is no comparative study that compares explicitly the campaign narratives of the three Indonesian 2024 presidential candidates in terms of identity politics and their impact on social fragmentation. The literature focuses more on electability, political marketing strategies, and the use of digital media, without exploring the socio cultural effects of these narratives (Sari et al., 2024; Khamdan, 2021; Nayudhystira, 2024).

This study offers a novel approach by combining critical discourse analysis and social reading of social media data and campaign speeches to understand how identities are constructed and reproduced in political narratives (Kurniawati & Madu, 2022; Pangestu & Agrimiandra, 2024; Rahayu & Setyawan, 2024). The focus on social fragmentation due to identity politics makes this study important for portraying post election social stability.

Digital political communication systems that strengthen echo chambers and filter bubbles also reinforce the rampant use of identity politics. This causes supporters of each presidential candidate only to be exposed to narratives that support their political preferences, thus widening the social gap (Setiadarma & Abdullah, 2024; Rudi Candra, 2022; Artiningtyas et al., 2019).

The three presidential candidates use different symbolic approaches to targeting their constituent bases. Anies utilizes Islamic symbols and narratives of change, Ganjar promotes Pancasila based inclusiveness, and Prabowo plays the role of a nationalist and senior statesman (Putra, 2019; Yudha, 2024; Satrio et al., 2023). It is interesting to analyze structurally and semantically.

If not properly managed, identity politics used in campaigns can create lasting social impacts long after the election. This polarization process has the potential to threaten social solidarity, deepen distrust between community groups, and weaken the state's capacity to build post election political stability (Khamdan, 2022; Hariyanto et al., 2025; Fachrudin, 2021).

This research aims to: (1) compare the campaign narratives of three Indonesian 2024 presidential candidates in the context of identity politics; (2) analyze the symbolic construction used in building group identity; and (3) evaluate the impact of political narratives on social fragmentation in society. A comparative approach is crucial both scientifically and socially. Scientifically, it allows for a systematic understanding of how different political actors construct identity narratives in varied ways, revealing not only rhetorical styles but also underlying ideological positions and their discursive

effects. By analyzing the three major presidential candidates in parallel, this study identifies patterns, contrasts, and points of convergence that would be missed in single case analysis. Socially, the comparison provides insight into how different identity framings may influence public perceptions, voter alignment, and the risk of polarization. In a fragmented digital democracy like Indonesia, understanding these variations is crucial for informing more ethical, inclusive, and cohesive political communication practices.

2. Method

Type of Research

This qualitative descriptive research employs a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, drawing on the Norman Fairclough model. It examines the narrative construction of the Indonesian 2024 presidential candidate campaign, which contains elements of identity politics, and its impact on social segmentation. This approach is used because it can reveal the relationship between language, power, and ideology in political texts.

The term "descriptive" in this study refers to the effort to systematically present patterns of identity narratives found in campaign materials across different candidates. However, using critical discourse analysis (CDA) ensures that the analysis goes beyond description. It is inherently interpretative and critical, aiming to uncover how language legitimizes power, marginalizes certain groups, and shapes ideological meanings in political discourse. Thus, the descriptive element serves as the foundation, while CDA provides a deeper understanding of how identity politics operates through discourse at both textual and socio-political levels.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study includes all public campaign materials from the three pairs of presidential and vice presidential candidates in 2024, such as:

1) Political speech,
2) KPU's official debate,
3) Official social media content,
4) A snippet of a campaign ad.

Samples were taken using a purposive sampling technique, with the following criteria:

1) Content that explicitly contains symbols or narratives of identity (religion, ethnicity, class),
2) Has high engagement (>50,000 views/likes/shares),
3) Delivered during the official campaign period (November 28, 2023, to February 10, 2024),

4) Proportionally involve all three presidential candidates.

The sample comprises 30 key contents: 10 from Anies, Ganjar, and Prabowo.

Research Instrument

The research instruments were compiled based on:

1) Fairclough's discourse analysis framework (text structure, discourse practices, sociocultural practices),
2) Thematic coding of identity narratives (religion, ethnicity, social class, nationalist symbols),
3) Visual analysis templates (for social media such as Instagram, YouTube, TikTok). The instrument was pretested on three samples to ensure the clarity of categories and the consistency of interpretation.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection techniques are done through:

1) Digital documentation from official YouTube channels, presidential X/Twitter accounts, and political news sites,
2) Online nonparticipatory observation, tracing public conversation trends in comments and quote tweets,
3) A complementary literature study to support the validation of the social context of each narrative.

Primary sources were obtained from the presidential candidates' official accounts and the transcribed results of the KPU debate.

Research Procedure

Steps of research implementation:

1) Develop identity politics narrative indicators based on literature and CDA theory,
2) Determine data sources (campaign digital content) and download primary documents,
3) Identify the text structure and social context of each narrative.
4) Perform narrative classification based on identity dimensions (religion, ethnicity, nationalism),
5) Compile a comparative matrix between vice presidents based on thematic categories,
6) Interpret the results of the analysis into descriptive and visual forms.

Data Analysis Technique

The data was analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with three levels:

1) Text Description: examines the vocabulary, metaphors, and language style of the campaign,
2) Interpretation: analyze the relationship between texts and discursive practices (production, distribution, consumption),
3) Explanation: Evaluate the influence of sociopolitical structures on the narrative. In addition, thematic analysis was employed to identify the identity trends presented by each presidential candidate and to conduct a comparative analysis between candidate pairs.

3. Result & Discussion

Identity Narratives in Campaigns: Mapping Issues and Rhetorical Styles

Analysis of 30 campaign contents reveals that each presidential candidate pair presents thematically and semantically distinct identity narratives. The Anies Muhaimin pair most dominantly used religious based symbols and narratives, especially with references to Islamic values, morality, and the representation of "ummah" as a collective identity (Khamdan, 2022; Hariyanto et al., 2025; Putra, 2019). Ganjar Mahfud put more emphasis on pluralism, constitutional nationalism, and resistance to the politicization of religion (Rahayu & Setyawan, 2024; Sari et al., 2024; Ulfah, 2024), while Prabowo Gibran mostly used nationalism narratives combined with rhetoric of stability and continuity of power (Fachrudin, 2021; Pangestu & Agrimiandra, 2024; Nayudhystira, 2024).

For example, Anies Baswedan frequently used the phrase *"perubahan untuk rakyat" (change for the people)* in his speeches, which implicitly constructs a moral opposition against the status quo, reinforcing the image of an elite versus the people. In contrast, Ganjar Pranowo often echoed inclusive rhetoric such as *"semua golongan punya hak yang sama dalam republik ini" (all groups have equal rights in this republic)*, a discursive attempt to bridge ideological divides. Prabowo Subianto, meanwhile, emphasized national unity and stability with statements like *"kita butuh pemimpin yang bisa menjaga keutuhan bangsa" (we need a leader who can safeguard national integrity)*, invoking a paternalistic nationalism that centers authority and order.

Figure 2. Distribution of Identity Narratives in 2024 Presidential Candidate Campaigns
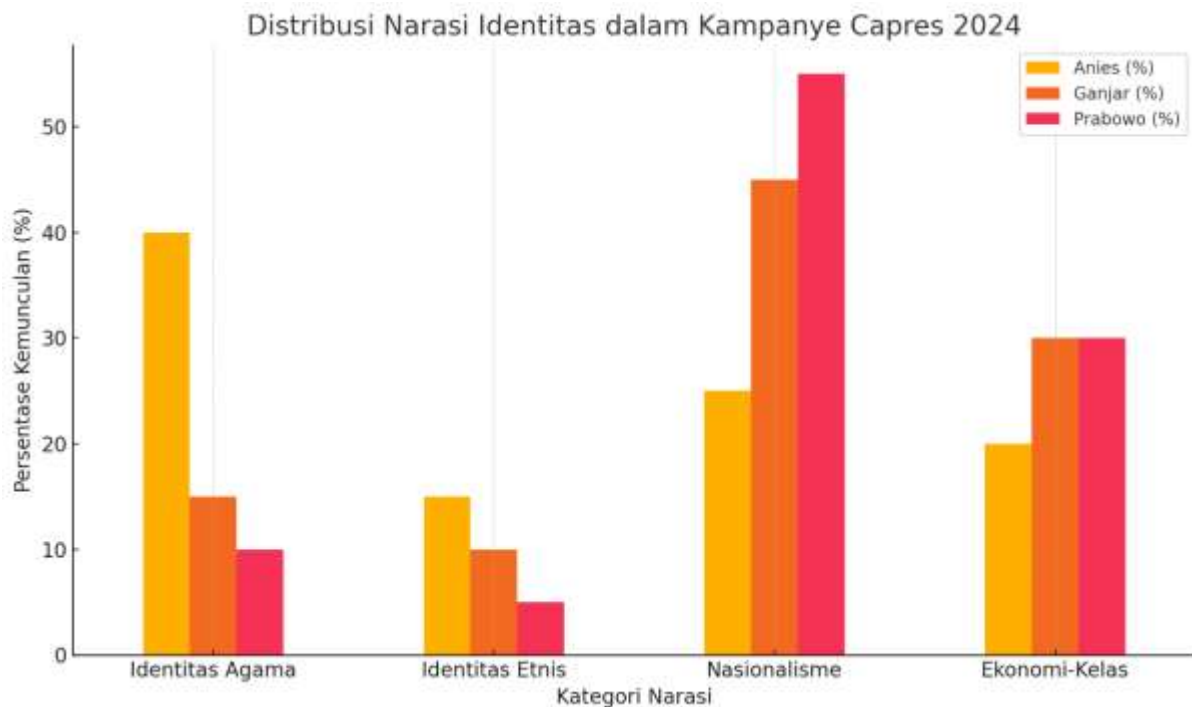
In the graph above, the "Religious Identity" category is most associated with Anies (40%), while Prabowo dominates the "Nationalism" narrative (55%). Ganjar balances these two axes with a combination of moderate nationalism and class economic issues (30%) to build an inclusive narrative.

This variation suggests that identity construction in Indonesian politics is flexible and used strategically to appeal to different constituency segments, according to the ideological support base of each candidate pair (Setiadarma & Abdullah, 2024; Kurniawati & Madu, 2022; Satrio et al., 2023).

Narrative and Social Fragmentation: "Us vs. Them" Representations

The results of the discourse analysis reveal that identity politics narratives are often presented in binary opposition formats, such as "us vs. them," "ummah vs. elite," or "nationalist vs. sectarian." These narratives strengthen group loyalty and create exclusivity in public socio-political interactions (Munandar & Susanti, 2025; Artiningtyas et al., 2019; Rudi Candra, 2022).

For example, Anies' campaign narrative uses the phrase "change for the people" as an antithesis to the status quo associated with the power elite. Meanwhile, Ganjar avoids polarizing narratives and chooses the "all parties have the right to feel part of the republic" approach (Rozi & Supriatno, 2024; Prayudi, 2021; Nasution, 2024). On the other hand, Prabowo puts forward a discourse of integration and stability, but

occasionally comes up with the framing of "true nationalists vs development disruptors".

Symbolic opposition strengthens the psychological and cultural cleavages between community groups, especially on social media, thereby reinforcing the filter bubble. As a result, public interaction becomes increasingly narrow and homogeneous in terms of political views (Khamdan, 2021; Fachrudin, 2021; Yudha, 2024).

Social Media as a Space for the Production and Reproduction of Political Identity

Social media has become the primary platform for disseminating campaign narratives, thereby accelerating the formation of political group identities. Content containing religious or nationalistic narratives tends to go viral faster and achieve higher engagement than technocratic or policy narratives (Sari et al., 2024; Ulfah, 2024; Setiadarma & Abdullah, 2024).

In the analysis of comments and retweets, it was found that supporters of each presidential candidate actively reproduce exclusive narratives, defending their group and cornering other groups with certain labelizations such as "cebong", "kadrun", or "cult of Gibran" (Artiningtyas et al., 2019; Rahayu & Setyawan, 2024; Khamdan, 2022).

This dynamic reveals that social media serves as a channel of information and a space for forming increasingly polarized political identities. This digital fragmentation creates social barriers based on political affiliation that impact offline social interactions (Putra, 2019; Nasution, 2024; Prayudi, 2021).

The Challenge of Social Cohesion and the Role of Campaign Ethics

Identity politics narratives that are not ethically controlled risk creating post-election social residue. The social fragmentation that emerged during the 2024 campaign can persist in everyday life, particularly in urban and digitally savvy communities that are actively engaged in symbolic polarization (Hariyanto et al., 2025; Yudha, 2024; Khamdan, 2021).

One of the biggest challenges in the 2024 elections is the absence of strict regulations against exclusive speech in digital campaign narratives, especially on nonofficial social media. This allows for replicating identity narratives that reinforce discriminatory sentiments, intolerance, and the labeling of political minority groups (Fachrudin, 2021; Kurniawati & Madu, 2022; Rudi Candra, 2022).

The government and election organizers need to evaluate legal instruments and voter education to ensure that campaign narratives are not only electoral strategies but also responsible for their social impacts (Pangestu & Agrimiandra, 2024; Setiadarma & Abdullah, 2024; Nayudhystira, 2024).

4. Conclusion

This study found that the three Indonesian presidential candidates for 2024 used different identity narrative strategies in framing their political support. The Anies Muhaimin pair emphasizes religious identity in a symbolic and rhetorical format, which is effective in reaching Islamic value based communities. Ganjar Mahfud emphasizes pluralism and an inclusive national identity, while Prabowo Gibran dominantly uses narratives of nationalism and continuity of power. Despite different rhetorical and symbolic styles, all pairs utilized identity elements as strategic and targeted campaign instruments.

However, using identity politics in campaigns also has significant social consequences. Oppositional narratives, such as "us vs them", indirectly reinforce social fragmentation, especially in highly polarized digital spaces. Social media has become the primary space for the reproduction of political group identities, accelerating the process of discourse segregation and narrowing the scope of dialogue across different views. The findings emphasize the importance of campaign narrative regulation and citizen political education in preventing post election social conflict residue. This research concludes that identity politics is a powerful electoral tool, but needs to be controlled through ethical approaches and progressive public policies to maintain social cohesion in a multicultural democracy like Indonesia.

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