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The Language of War: Lexicon, Metaphor, Discourse

Il linguaggio della guerra: lessico, metafora, discorso

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Militarized Rhetoric in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election Debate

Threats to Democratic Deliberation

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Abstract

This study employs Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to examine how the three main candidates in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election – Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo – strategically militarized language to construct politics as a battlefield. Through an analysis of the third presidential debate, this study reveals the pervasive use of war-related vocabulary, active verbs, confrontational metaphors, and other discursive strategies that positioned the candidates as commanders leading the charge against the nation's enemies. Situating this martial language within Indonesia's broader socio-political context, this study argues that such militarized campaign rhetoric both emerged from and reinforced a political culture still grappling with the legacy of authoritarianism. Tapping into deep-seated anxieties about instability and foreign threats, this discursive militarization has reduced complex policy issues to simplistic 'us vs. them' dichotomies and narrowed the space for deliberation and dissent. The normalization of war-like discourse poses a serious threat to Indonesia's democratic development. To build a more resilient democracy, Indonesia's leaders must reject martial posturing and cultivate a new language of politics centered on dialogue, pluralism, and peaceful change.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; Indonesian politics; metaphor analysis; militarization of language; political discourse.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2024 presidential election in Indonesia exemplified a global phenomenon where political campaigns increasingly resembled rhetorical warfare. As candidates competed for votes, their language became progressively militaristic, employing metaphors and rhetoric that evoked images of war, conflict, and confrontation. This 'weaponization' of words was not merely a rhetorical flourish but a deliberate strategy to mobilize supporters, delegitimize opponents, and shape the political narrative. As Reisigl (2008) noted, the political field was a field of battle, and political language was the language of battle.

In this high-stakes political contest, three main contenders emerged: Anies Baswedan, backed by a coalition of Nasdem, PKB, and PKS; Prabowo Subianto, supported by Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, and Democrats; and Ganjar Pranowo, endorsed by PDIP and PPP. Each candidate represented a distinct ideological camp – religious nationalism, militaristic nationalism, and developmentalist nationalism respectively – and their words reflected these differing worldviews and political agendas. As van Dijk (2006) argued, ideologies form the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group.

The presidential debates, in particular, became a key battleground where this war of words was waged. More than just a platform for presenting vision, mission, and programs, the debates served as an arena for argumentation, image-making, and ideological contestation. Through their choice of words, metaphors, and rhetorical devices, the candidates sought to frame political reality, appeal to emotions, and mobilize support. As Fairclough (1992) observed, ideology is located both in structures which constitute the outcome of past events and the conditions for current events, and in events themselves as they reproduce and transform their conditioning structures.

This study aims to critically analyse the language used by the presidential candidates in the 2024 election campaign, with a specific focus on the third debate held on February 4, 2024, which covered the themes of education, health, employment, culture, information technology, social welfare, and inclusion. Using Norman Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, this study examines not only the linguistic features of the debate texts, but also the processes of production and interpretation, as well as the broader social and political context. As Fairclough (2003) explained, critical discourse analysis is concerned with the relationship between language and other elements of social life, and

its particular concern is with the radical changes that are taking place in contemporary social life.

By uncovering the ideological representations embedded in the candidates' words, this study seeks to shed light on the discursive strategies employed to legitimize their positions, delegitimize their opponents, and shape public opinion. In an era of increasing polarization, disinformation, and identity politics, such a critical analysis is crucial for promoting rational public discourse, holding politicians accountable for their words, and strengthening democratic deliberation. Moreover, critical discourse analysis is needed to uncover the hidden ideology behind the text and to fight against the domination and hegemony of the ruling class (Orlowski 2012; Goodseed 2015; Paramitha 2021).

The significance of this study lies in its timely and specific focus on the 2024 presidential election, its comparative analysis of three key contenders representing different ideological camps, and its comprehensive application of Fairclough's framework to unpack the complex interplay of language, power, and ideology in Indonesian political discourse. By contributing to a deeper understanding of how words are weaponized in electoral politics, this study aims to foster a more informed and engaged citizenry, and ultimately, a more robust and inclusive democracy. As Clark and Ivanič (1997) noted, critical discourse analysis could be a tool for social transformation by raising critical awareness and empowering marginalized groups in society.

2. Literature review

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model has been widely applied to examine the ideological underpinnings and power dynamics of political discourse. Fairclough (1995, 2003, 2010) argues that discourse is a form of social practice that both reflects and constructs social realities, and that CDA aims to uncover the ways in which language is used to maintain, challenge, or transform power relations. Numerous studies have employed Fairclough's framework – text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice – to analyse political speeches, debates, and media coverage (Chilton 2004; Wang 2016; Wodak and Meyer 2016; Amoussou and Allagbe 2018).

The language of war has been a recurring theme in political discourse analysis, as it serves as a powerful metaphorical framework for

conceptualizing political competition and mobilizing public support. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that metaphors are not merely linguistic devices but fundamental cognitive structures that shape our understanding and experience of reality. The POLITICS IS WAR metaphor, in particular, has been widely documented in various political contexts, from election campaigns to international conflicts (Charteris-Black 2004; Semino 2008; Flusberg *et al.* 2018).

Charteris-Black (2005) provides a comprehensive analysis of how political leaders across different cultures and time periods employ war metaphors to frame their political agendas and galvanize support. His work demonstrates that the use of militaristic language in politics is not unique to Indonesia but is indeed a global phenomenon.

Lakoff's (1996) influential work on moral politics introduced the concept of the "strict father" model of governance, which resonated strongly with the militaristic rhetoric observed in the Indonesian presidential debate. This model frames the nation as a family and the leader as a strong, authoritative father figure who has to protect and discipline his children (citizens) in a dangerous world.

In the context of Indonesian politics, several studies have applied CDA to examine the discursive strategies employed by political actors to legitimize their power and advance their ideological agendas. Studies have shown that the Indonesian government has employed legitimation strategies such as moral evaluation, rationalization, and authorization to convince society of the positive aspects of laws like the Omnibus Law on Job Creation (Ananda and Nurmainiati 2022).

Additionally, CDA has been instrumental in examining social actors' representations in political events, showcasing how different ideologies and political interests shape discourses and power dynamics (Santoso *et al.* 2022). Furthermore, CDA has been highlighted as a valuable tool to investigate how political leaders use language to manipulate, persuade, and shape public opinion, emphasizing the interplay between power, ideology, and language in national discourses (Orungbeja and Ajilore 2022). Moreover, CDA has been applied to profile coordinated campaigns in the digital realm, revealing how actors engage in information manipulation maneuvers to influence online conversations and potentially cause political polarization (Danaditya *et al.* 2022).

In conclusion, this study aims to critically analyze the ideological representations of the three main contenders in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election – Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar

Pranowo – as manifested in their language use during the third presidential debate. By applying Norman Fairclough's model of CDA, this study seeks to uncover not only what was said, but also why and how it was said, and what the broader implications were for Indonesian politics and society.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to critically analyze the language used by the three main candidates – Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo – in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debates. The research design is based on Norman Fairclough's CDA model, which examines the relationship between language, power, and ideology in political discourse (Fairclough 1995, 2003, 2010).

3.1. *Data collection*

The primary data for this study consisted of video recordings and transcripts of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debates, with a specific focus on the third debate held on February 4, 2024. The debate videos were accessed through the tvOneNews YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZOf4DIMZIs). The third debate was chosen as the focal point of analysis due to its thematic focus on critical issues such as education, health, employment, culture, information technology, social welfare, and inclusion.

3.2. *Data analysis*

The data analysis process followed Fairclough's CDA framework, which includes textual analysis, discursive practice analysis, and social practice analysis (Fairclough 1995, 2003).

3.2.1. *Textual analysis*

The first stage of analysis involved a close examination of the linguistic features of the debate transcripts, including vocabulary, grammar, and

textual features. The analysis focused on identifying key words, phrases, and metaphors used by the candidates to construct their political narratives and ideological positions. Particular attention was paid to the use of war-related language, such as military terminology, combat metaphors, and adversarial framing.

3.2.2. *Discursive practice analysis*

The second stage of analysis explored the production, distribution, and consumption of the debate texts, as well as their intertextual relationships with other political discourses. The analysis highlighted how the candidates use language related to war and combat to present politics as a never-ending battle that requires a strong, fatherly government to aggressively intervene.

3.2.3. *Social practice analysis*

The final stage of analysis situated the debate texts within the broader social, political, and historical context of Indonesia. The analysis focused on how the candidates' rhetorical strategies, particularly their use of war-related metaphors and lexicon, intersect with and reproduce existing power relations, ideological structures, and social hierarchies in Indonesian society.

3.3. *Theoretical framework*

The analysis was informed by key concepts and theories in critical discourse analysis, political discourse analysis, and metaphor theory. These included Fairclough's (1995, 2003, 2010) work on the dialectical relationship between language and social practice, Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) conceptual metaphor theory, and Charteris-Black's (2004) critical metaphor analysis approach. This study also draws on insights from political communication research on the role of language in shaping public opinion and electoral outcomes (Mio 1997; Boeynaems *et al.* 2017).

4. Findings

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election exemplified how political campaigns resemble rhetorical warfare, with language serving as ammunition for competing ideological forces. Norman Fairclough's CDA model illuminates how the candidates Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo strategically deployed lexicon, metaphor, and discourse as linguistic weaponry to legitimize their vision and secure a popular mandate.

4.1. *Textual analysis*

The analysis reveals how the candidates strategically militarize language to construct politics as a battlefield necessitating aggressive state intervention. The textual analysis highlighted the use of active, transitive verbs, modals conveying urgency, inclusive pronouns indicating populism, and coherence markers suggesting well-structured arguments. These linguistic choices positioned the candidates as decisive agents of change, projecting a leadership identity that is at once visionary and uncompromising. *Table 1* presents the analysis of the campaign rhetoric used by the three main candidates.

This table presents their statements in the original Indonesian, provides English translations, and interprets the significance of their word choices. The analysis reveals a common theme across all candidates: the use of militaristic and confrontational language to frame political, social, and economic issues. Prabowo's rhetoric focuses on 'seizing' technology and science, implying a forceful approach to progress, and he speaks of eliminating poverty as if it were an enemy to be expelled. Anies emphasizes 'upholding' justice and 'embracing' forces, suggesting a mix of forceful and inclusive approaches, while also framing governance in terms of territorial defense. Ganjar describes health initiatives using defensive military tactics, equates policy decisions with military maneuvers, and even discusses social progress using forceful language. This linguistic analysis suggests that all three candidates aim to convey strength and decisiveness through their choice of words, framing complex societal challenges as battles to be won or enemies to be defeated.

Table 1. – Examples of militaristic language used by candidates.

CANDIDATE	ORIGINAL TEXT	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	SIGNIFICANCE
Prabowo	"Rebut teknologi"	Seize technology	Framed technological progress as a military conquest
Prabowo	"Kita rebut sains"	We seize science	Portrayed scientific advancement as a battle to be won
Prabowo	"Menghilangkan kemiskinan dari bumi Indonesia"	Eliminate poverty from Indonesian soil	Depicted poverty as an enemy to be expelled from national territory
Anies	"Tegakkan keadilan"	Uphold justice	Implied justice as a force to be imposed
Anies	"Rangkul semua kekuatan"	Embrace all forces	Framed social groups as military units to be mobilized
Anies	"Menjaga setiap jengkal tanah republik ini"	Guard every inch of this republic's land	Portrayed governance as territorial defence
Ganjar	"Mencegah stunting"	Prevent stunting	Framed health issues in terms of defensive military tactics
Ganjar	"Ambil langkah-langkah berani"	Take brave steps	Equated policy decisions with military manoeuvers
Ganjar	"Mendorong peranan wanita"	Push forward women's roles	Described social progress in terms of forceful advancement

The lexical analysis delves deeper into the candidates' word choices, uncovering a pervasive use of war-related terminology. The candidates strategically select lexical items that activate war-related conceptual frames in the audience's minds. Prabowo's use of the verb "rebut" (seize/capture by force) in phrases like "rebut teknologi" and "kita rebut sains" is the most aggressive example. "Rebut" connotes a forceful, violent acquisition of something, typically associated with military conquests. By applying this to technological and scientific development, Prabowo frames these domains as adversarial battlegrounds where Indonesia must forcefully assert dominance against competitors. This martial lexical choice constructs an 'us vs. them' paradigm, implying that Indonesia's progress hinges on its ability to aggressively outmaneuver and overpower rivals in a high-stakes, winner-takes-all struggle.

Prabowo's reference to Indonesia being among the "10 negara ter-tinggi angka kematian ibu" (10 countries with the highest maternal

mortality rates) also evokes war imagery by citing statistics reminiscent of casualty counts. This lexical choice primes the audience to perceive the issue through a lens of life-and-death urgency akin to military conflicts.

While less pronounced, Anies and Ganjar also incorporate war-related lexicon. Anies' use of "rebut" in advocating seizing cultural resources for development, while more metaphorical, still taps into the 'acquisition by force' connotation. Ganjar's choice of "mencegah" (prevent) when discussing stunting, while not directly martial, implies a defensive posture against an impending threat, subtly echoing military tactics of pre-emptive action.

Other lexical selections reinforce this martial framing. Phrases like "menjaga setiap jengkal tanah republik ini" (guarding every inch of the republic's land), "tegakkan hukum [...] dengan sekeras-kerasnya" (uphold the law [...] with utmost strictness), "ambil langkah-langkah berani" (take brave steps), "mendorong peranan" (pushing forward roles), and "rangkul semua kekuatan" (embrace all forces) cast governance as an aggressive, militaristic endeavor. Word choices like "menjaga", "tegakkan", "sekeras-kerasnya", "berani", "mendorong", and "kekuatan" all have combative underpinnings, conjuring images of fortification, strict enforcement, courage in the face of adversity, forward assaults, and marshalling of strength.

The cumulative effect of this lexical field is to frame the electoral contest and policymaking as warlike campaigns demanding bold, uncompromising stances. It creates a sense of high-stakes urgency, implying that only leaders willing to adopt a militaristic posture of unwavering resolve can vanquish the nation's foes. This discursively narrows the range of acceptable leadership styles to those associated with martial virtues of aggression, discipline, and conquest, potentially eclipsing more conciliatory, cooperative approaches.

The metaphor analysis illuminated how the candidates map concepts from the source domain of war onto the target domain of politics, encouraging audiences to understand and evaluate political issues through a martial lens. Building on this lexical foundation, the candidates employ metaphors that vividly depict the electoral arena and policy issues as ideological battlefields. Metaphors, by mapping concepts from a source domain (e.g., war) onto a target domain (e.g., politics), subtly encourage audiences to understand and evaluate the target through the lens of the source. The candidates harness this to construct politics as a realm of adversarial struggle where martial values reign supreme.

Prabowo's central metaphor of "rebut teknologi" is a potent example. By portraying technological progress as a territory that must be forcefully seized, he maps the dynamics of military occupation onto the sphere of scientific innovation. This implies that staking a claim over technology is not a matter of cooperative exchange or joint development, but a zero-sum game where Indonesia must vanquish competitors to emerge victorious. The metaphor naturalizes cut-throat competition as the modus operandi of technological advancement.

Similarly, Prabowo's framing of stunting as an enemy force to be subjugated ("mengatasi masalah stunting") and poverty as an occupying power to be expelled ("menghilangkan kemiskinan dari bumi Indonesia") metaphorically constructs these social issues as invasive adversaries that must be forcefully eliminated from the nation's body. By likening poverty to a foreign occupier contaminating the "bumi Indonesia", Prabowo sacralizes the nation as a pure, inviolable entity that must be militantly defended from external violation. These metaphors prime the audience to view complex, systemic challenges like malnutrition and deprivation through a simplistic lens of good vs. evil that leaves no room for nuance.

Anies' metaphorical framing of human capital development as a military-economic 'investment' requiring strategic resource deployment and decisive returns also taps into martial imagery. By equating educational initiatives with strategic battlefield decisions, this metaphor implies that policymaking should be driven by the same calculating logic of risk and reward that governs military campaigns. It subtly subordinates humane considerations to a coldly instrumental view of citizens as assets to be optimized for maximum national gain.

Anies' rallying cry to "tegakkan keadilan" by "rangkul semua kekuatan" also evokes a metaphor of societal forces as troops to be assembled in a righteous crusade against injustice. This mapping frames social inequity not as a complex web of structural barriers, but as a monolithic enemy that can be vanquished through a show of unified might. While inspiring, it risks oversimplifying the intricacies of social change.

Ganjar's metaphors, while less overtly combative, also bear martial undertones. His depiction of migrant worker protection as a 'mission' requiring strict controls mirrors the regimented discipline and top-down command of military operations. Framing the government's role as a paternal guardian deploying surveillance tactics to keep watch over vulnerable citizens resonates with imagery of a nation-as-military camp.

While these linguistic choices effectively mobilize voters by tapping into desires for decisive leadership, they risk oversimplifying complex sociopolitical issues and foreclosing space for nuanced deliberation. By framing every policy challenge as an epic battle between righteous defenders and malicious invaders, the candidates' discourse reduces governance to a series of adversarial conquests rather than a process of inclusive, dialogic reform.

4.2. *Discursive practice*

The analysis further highlights how the candidates use language related to war and combat to present politics as a never-ending battle that requires a strong, fatherly government to aggressively intervene. They paint a picture of the government as a warrior-protector that must fight against the nation's enemies, both from within and outside the country. *Table 2* illustrates how the candidates employ war-related language to frame politics as a battlefield.

This table shows the discursive practices employed by Prabowo, Anies, and Ganjar. It further shows specific examples of their rhetoric. The subsequent analysis interprets the significance of their language choices. Prabowo's rhetoric draws on military discourse, using phrases like "Dengan sekeras-kerasnya" (With utmost strictness) to evoke discipline in law enforcement, while also employing populist appeal with "Kita rebut" (We seize) to create a sense of collective struggle. Anies incorporates religious intertextuality, framing leadership as a sacred trust with terms like "Amanah rakyat" (People's mandate) and utilizes nationalist discourse to emphasize territorial integrity and patriotism. Ganjar adopts a technocratic approach, referencing a 'dashboard' for crisis response to present governance as data-driven, while also employing a developmentalist narrative that frames progress as forceful, top-down intervention. These diverse discursive practices reveal how the candidates strategically use language to construct their political identities, appeal to different voter bases, and frame their approaches to leadership and national development. Despite their differences, there is a common thread of portraying governance and progress in terms of forceful action or control, albeit through varying lenses of military, religious, nationalist, and technocratic discourse. This analysis highlights the complex interplay of these elements in Indonesian political rhetoric and how they are used to shape public perception and political narratives.

Table 2. – Discursive practices in candidates' rhetoric.

CANDIDATE	DISCURSIVE PRACTICE	EXAMPLE	SIGNIFICANCE
Prabowo	Intertextuality with military discourse	"Dengan sekeras-kerasnya" (With utmost strictness)	Evoked military discipline in law enforcement
Prabowo	Populist appeal	"Kita rebut" (We seize)	Created a collective 'we' engaged in national struggle
Anies	Religious intertextuality	"Amanah rakyat" (People's mandate)	Framed leadership as a sacred trust
Anies	Nationalist discourse	"Setiap jengkal tanah republik" (Every inch of the republic's land)	Appealed to territorial integrity and patriotism
Ganjar	Technocratic discourse	'Dashboard' for crisis response	Presented governance as data-driven command and control
Ganjar	Developmentalist narrative	"Mendorong peranan" (Pushing forward roles)	Framed progress as forceful, top-down intervention

This war-like way of speaking is most obvious in Prabowo's words. When he talks about enforcing the law "dengan sekeras-kerasnya" (with the utmost strictness), it brings to mind the strict discipline and force of military rule. By talking about law enforcement in terms of military toughness instead of fair justice, he promotes a style of governing based on force and obedience to authority.

Prabowo also uses alarming language when discussing maternal mortality, describing it as a battle against unnecessary deaths that demands bold, aggressive actions. This makes creating policies seem like a military operation. By presenting the government's role as that of a warrior in a life-or-death fight against the hidden enemy of system-wide problems, Prabowo limits acceptable government actions to only those that show decisive, forceful determination.

Prabowo's promise to aggressively "mendorong" (push) women's roles in society under his administration further strengthens this idea of progress as a battlefield that must be won through one-sided displays of strength by a fatherly government. The suggestion is that only a dominant male leader willing to forcibly push aside cultural obstacles can achieve women's empowerment, rather than women activists negotiating their own liberation.

Anies' call for "semua kekuatan" (all forces) to unite in upholding justice also promotes an 'us vs. them' view of brave allies coming together to defeat evil forces. While meant to inspire unity, this black-and-white view of light against darkness risked glorifying a single, mythical 'people's struggle' that ignored the diverse identities and interests within Indonesian society. It created a split between those who were 'with us or against us' in a grand moral battle, leaving no room for thoughtful disagreement or principled neutrality.

Even Ganjar's more technical language slips into military tones when explaining his vision for governing. His description of a government equipped with data 'dashboards' to quickly detect and 'respond' to crises resembles strict military surveillance. The effect is to make a model of constant, all-knowing government control seem like the ideal that democratic governments should strive for – a modern twist on Foucault's idea of the "panopticon", a prison where inmates are always watched.

In the quote, "maka ketika itu masuk dalam dashboard kami dalam 'LaporGub!' pada saat itu kita merespon dengan sangat cepat karena kita tahu persoalan yang mereka hadapi" (so when it enters our dashboard in the 'LaporGub!' at that time we respond very quickly because we know the problems they are facing), Ganjar describes a system where the government closely watches citizen feedback through a central data dashboard, ready to quickly step in at the first sign of trouble. While good public service is admirable, the specific words used here subtly echo the image of a military war room. The idea of an all-seeing, all-knowing government constantly monitoring the people for signs of unrest, ready to swiftly remove any threats, points to a milirary mindset.

This consistent use of war-like language in discussing policy taps into Indonesia's deep fears about instability at home and interference from abroad. By portraying the nation as a frontier fortress under attack from all sides by threats to its land, economy, and culture, the candidates appeal to the voters' hidden desire for a powerful protector to restore order and greatness.

However, this constant 'us vs. them' talk risks creating a future where governing is always seen as being at war. When every policy challenge is described as an epic battle between righteous national heroes and evil enemies, there is less room for practical compromise and step-by-step problem-solving. The government is pressured to act like a hypermasculine, military-like "strict father" forcing unruly social forces to obey, rather than an inclusive moderator and honest broker between diverse groups (Lakoff 1996).

Moreover, always praising strongman rule as the only sure defense against ever-present threats can create a political culture of paranoia, fear of outsiders, and aggressive nationalism. When calls for restraint and cooperation are constantly suspected as signs of weakness or even betrayal, the door opens for rabble-rousing and dictatorship to take hold under the guise of patriotic protection.

While the candidates mention goals of economic development and social welfare, these aims are often overshadowed by the overriding need to fight and win symbolic wars against vague enemies. The danger is that projecting state power becomes more important than the real, detailed work of reforming institutions and building capabilities. Governing is reduced to a series of triumphant battle stories, with the mundane but essential work of delivering effective services and responsive policies brushed aside as mere afterthoughts.

From the viewpoint of critical discourse analysis, the candidates' military-style language is not just a passive reflection of Indonesia's political culture, but an active force shaping it. Each rhetorical choice, however small, ripples out to influence public perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of what leadership and governance should look like.

4.3. *Social practice*

The final stage of critical discourse analysis places the language used by the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidates within the larger social, political, and historical context of the country. The analysis shows how the candidates' choice of words, especially their use of war-related metaphors and vocabulary, reflects and reinforces existing power structures, ideologies, and social hierarchies in Indonesian society. To further explore the nuances of their rhetoric, *Table 3* provides an overview of key statements by each candidate, their translations, and the underlying metaphorical frameworks they deploy to communicate their political vision.

This table shows the rhetorical strategies of Prabowo, Anies, and Ganjar, contextualizing them within broader sociopolitical trends and examining their potential social implications. Prabowo's rhetoric is characterized by militaristic nationalism, which reflects Indonesia's history of military involvement in politics and potentially normalizes authoritarian governance styles. He also employs a "strict father" model of leadership, reinforcing patriarchal social structures and top-down, paternalistic leadership. Anies combines religious and nationalist discourse, tapping

into growing religious conservatism in Indonesian politics, which may blur the lines between state and religious authority. His populist 'people's struggle' narrative, while addressing rising economic inequality, risks oversimplifying complex socioeconomic issues. Ganjar's approach is marked by a technocratic surveillance rhetoric, echoing post-9/11 global security discourse, which could justify expanded state monitoring powers. His developmentalist 'pushing forward' stance evokes the legacy of the New Order's forced modernization, potentially legitimizing state intervention in various social spheres. This analysis reveals how each candidate's rhetorical strategies are deeply rooted in Indonesia's historical and current sociopolitical context and highlights the potential broader implications of their discourse on governance styles, social structures, and the relationship between state and society.

Table 3. – Social practice implications of candidates' rhetoric.

CANDIDATE	RHETORICAL STRATEGY	BROADER CONTEXT	SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS
Prabowo	Militaristic nationalism	Indonesia's history of military involvement in politics	Normalized authoritarian governance styles
Prabowo	"Strict father" model (Lakoff 1996)	Patriarchal social structures	Reinforced top-down, paternalistic leadership
Anies	Religious-nationalist fusion	Growing religious conservatism in politics	Blurred lines between state and religious authority
Anies	Populist 'people's struggle' narrative	Rising economic inequality	Simplified complex socioeconomic issues
Ganjar	Technocratic surveillance rhetoric	Post-9/11 global security discourse	Justified expanded state monitoring powers
Ganjar	Developmentalist 'pushing forward'	Legacy of New Order's forced modernization	Legitimized state intervention in social spheres

The political forces backing each candidate significantly influence the topics and language used during the debate. Anies, supported by a nationalist-religious coalition of Nasdem, PKB, and PKS, presents his programs in the context of Pancasila, independence ideals, and stressed honesty, justice, and concern for the common people. Prabowo, backed by Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, and Democrats, uses his military

background and nationalist feelings to portray himself as a strong and decisive leader, criticizing the previous government's performance and offering a 'transformation' solution to speed up national progress, using populist and symbolic rhetoric. Ganjar, supported by the nationalist-secular PDIP and PPP, highlights his managerial skills and experience as a regional head, trying to appeal to voters who want gradual change and servant leadership, but his ties to the ruling party also risked triggering anti-incumbent sentiments.

The candidates' use of war-related words and metaphors is woven into broader narratives that paint Indonesian politics as a never-ending battlefield requiring aggressive, paternalistic state intervention. These narratives depict the government as a warrior-guardian that has to take up arms against the nation's enemies, both foreign and domestic.

This framing is most noticeable in Prabowo's rhetoric. His emphasis on enforcing the law "dengan sekeras-kerasnya" (with the utmost strictness) presents legal enforcement through the lens of military strictness rather than impartial justice. This narrative promotes a model of governance based on coercion and obedience to authority. Prabowo's alarmist language about maternal mortality, which he presents as a battle against needless deaths requiring bold offensive actions, also portrays policy-making as a kind of military campaign. By describing the government's role as that of a warrior in a life-or-death crusade against the shadowy enemy of systemic dysfunction, Prabowo limits acceptable state actions to those that show decisive, forceful resolve.

Anies' call for "semua kekuatan" (all forces) to unite in upholding justice also taps into an 'us vs. them' narrative of brave comrades joining together to fight evil forces. While meant to inspire solidarity, this black-and-white rhetoric of light against darkness risks glorifying a single, mythical 'people's struggle' that glosses over the diverse identities and interests within Indonesian society.

Even Ganjar's more technocratic language slips into martial tones when describing his vision of governance. His description of a state equipped with data 'dashboards' to quickly detect and 'respond' to crises resembles military-style surveillance and command and control.

The post-debate context was marked by controversies over alleged fraud in the 2024 elections, as reported by Ganjar Pranowo's camp due to lower-than-expected votes, and questions about President Jokowi's role in boosting Prabowo's electability, which some saw as a form of neo-authoritarianism. The merging of President Jokowi's power with Prabowo Subianto's, referred to as "Prabowo Widodo" and "Joko Subianto", led to

Prabowo's vision, mission, and programs being seen as a continuation of Jokowi's policies, contributing to his higher vote share compared to other candidates.

The social practice analysis also suggests that the candidates' rhetoric was influenced by the broader socio-political context of economic recovery, pandemic management, law enforcement, and human rights issues. The framing of programs within ideological narratives (e.g., Pancasila, independence ideals) and the use of terms like "transformation", "acceleration", and "progress" could be seen as creating a sense of urgency and mobilization similar to wartime rhetoric. Moreover, the institutional support of political parties with different ideologies (nationalist-religious, modernist Islam, nationalist-secular) and the candidates' personal backgrounds (e.g., Prabowo's military experience) likely shaped the language strategies used to appeal to different voter groups. The controversies around electoral fraud and neo-authoritarianism also pointed to a heightened sense of political contestation and power struggle.

Ultimately, the candidates' militarized language reflected and reinforced a political culture that valued shows of strength over dialogue and compromise. By framing governance as a series of triumphant conquests against vague enemies, this rhetoric prioritized projecting state power over the hard work of institutional reform and responsive policymaking. This focus on performative toughness over substantive problem-solving risked worsening Indonesia's deep-rooted problems of corruption, inequality, and social polarization. It also carried the danger of fostering a culture of paranoia and hyper-nationalism, where every critic was labelled a traitor and every call for moderation was suspect.

4.4. *Discussion*

Militaristic metaphors in political discourse, as seen in Indonesia's 2024 presidential campaign, are not merely rhetorical devices but powerful cognitive structures that shape public perception and political action. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argued, metaphors are deeply embedded in the way people think and act. By consistently mapping the source domain of war onto the target domain of politics, Indonesian candidates like Prabowo Subianto frame governance as a high-stakes, zero-sum battle between good and evil. This ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor naturalized the idea that politics is inherently combative, where leadership is equated with domination, conquest, and unwavering resolve.

While these discursive strategies effectively tapped into public desires for strong, decisive leadership, they oversimplified complex issues. As Tannen (1998, 4) warned, the ARGUMENT-AS-WAR metaphor promotes a confrontational style of discourse, which limits the space for compromise and collaboration. By constructing every policy dilemma as a battle between righteous defenders and malevolent adversaries, the candidates' rhetoric undermined nuanced deliberation, cast dissent as treasonous, and shrank the room for inclusive problem-solving. While goals of economic development and social welfare were mentioned, they were often overshadowed by the symbolic wars projected onto vague enemies, prioritizing the display of state power over the mundane but essential work of institutional reform and policy implementation.

This rhetorical framework can be observed internationally as well. In the U.S., leaders like George W. Bush relied heavily on war metaphors to frame domestic and foreign policies, especially after 9/11 (Barrett and Sarbin 2007). This rhetoric was used to manipulate public fear and push through a right-wing agenda, including military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner 2007). Similarly, Biden's inaugural address employed conceptual and cultural metaphors to make complex political challenges more relatable (Qin 2023; Jesudas and Mohammed 2024), while reinforcing his role as a healer, warrior, and protector. In the U.K., Margaret Thatcher's 'Iron Lady' moniker fused masculine and feminine traits, positioning her as a tough, warrior-like leader within a male-dominated political sphere (Richards 2011). These metaphors, whether used in Indonesia, the U.S. or the U.K., shaped public expectations of leadership, often narrowing the scope of acceptable political actions to those that demonstrated strength and dominance.

Thus, the use of militaristic and conceptual metaphors in political leadership spans diverse cultures, from Prabowo's martial language in Indonesia to Bush and Biden's use of war-related metaphors in the U.S., and Thatcher's dual gendered representation in the U.K. These metaphors not only simplify complex issues but also shape public perceptions, reinforcing authoritative, often paternalistic, models of leadership (Lakoff 1996). In all these cases, metaphors frame governance as a form of combat, where strength, authority, and discipline are central to the leader's identity.

From a critical discourse analysis perspective, the militarization of political language not only reflects a society's political culture but also actively shapes it. As Foucault (1972, 49) argued, discourse was a productive force that "constructed topics" and "defined the objects

of knowledge". In this sense, every invocation of warfare metaphors in political speech does more than simply echo pre-existing cultural tropes – it entrenches them as the "common sense" of political discourse, incrementally shaping public attitudes and limiting the range of leadership models available.

The Indonesian candidates' militaristic rhetoric, like that of other leaders globally, entrenched a narrow view of governance. By casting leadership in the image of a warrior-protector, this discourse eroded alternative models that emphasized conciliation, cooperation, and inclusive governance. As Lakoff and Johnson (2003) suggested, these metaphors do more than communicate – they shape the very understanding of politics, framing it as a battleground where strength and force are paramount, leaving little room for dialogue, deliberation, or collective progress.

5. Conclusion

The critical discourse analysis of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debate, using Norman Fairclough's framework, revealed that candidates used militarized language to frame politics as a battlefield needing aggressive state intervention. Prabowo Subianto's rhetoric was the most overtly militaristic; Anies Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo also employed war-like metaphors to portray their leadership as decisive and combative. This strategy mobilized voters by tapping into fears about instability and threats but risked simplifying complex issues and glorifying strongman rule, which narrowed democratic deliberation and dissent.

The analysis situated this martial language within Indonesia's broader sociopolitical context, showing how it emerged from and reinforced a political culture still grappling with authoritarian legacies. This discourse shaped Indonesia's democratic culture by normalizing conflict and eroding the legitimacy of more conciliatory leadership, fostering a climate where might made right and dissent was seen as treason. The militarization of rhetoric posed a threat to democratic development, as it valorized state power over institutional reform and exacerbated issues like corruption, inequality, and polarization.

While this study offered a rich, in-depth analysis of militarized discourse in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debate, it was not without limitations. The analysis was limited to the presidential debate and did

not encompass other forms of campaign communication, such as rallies, advertisements, or social media posts, which may have employed different rhetorical strategies. A more comprehensive study could have compared the relative prevalence and nature of militarized discourse across various campaign platforms to gain a fuller picture of its role in shaping electoral narratives. Moreover, future studies could investigate the relationship between candidates' use of war-like language during campaigns and their actual policy positions and governance styles once in office, which could shed light on the predictive power of electoral rhetoric.

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