

## THE 2024 INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' DEBATE: RHETORICAL AND POSITIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSES

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**Abstract:** The 2024 Indonesian presidential debate provided a unique platform for candidates to communicate their visions for the country's future. As part of the campaign process, presidential debates serve as a key mechanism for influencing voter perceptions through persuasive rhetoric. This study explores the use of positive language and discursive strategies by Indonesian presidential candidates in the 2024 presidential debate, focusing on how their rhetoric promotes hope, empowerment, and social change. The study analyzes speeches from the five presidential candidates, employing positive discourse analysis (PDA) to identify and interpret key strategies used to engage voters with optimism and progressive visions. The analysis revealed six primary rhetorical strategies: identifying national problems, expressing commitment to societal welfare, framing government roles through metaphors, managing public emotion with narratives, empowering society, and articulating policies through structured argumentation. These strategies were crucial in constructing a discourse of hope and change, aiming to persuade voters of each candidate's ability to address Indonesia's pressing issues. For example, Anies Baswedan used metaphors and narratives based on his governance experience, while Prabowo Subianto emphasized his military background and commitment to solving social issues. Ganjar Pranowo focused on empowering society and detailing policy frameworks to foster societal well-being. By highlighting these strategies, the research contributes to understanding the role of political rhetoric in shaping voter perceptions, particularly in multi-candidate debates. The study underscores the importance of language as a tool for political leaders to inspire hope and influence public opinion. This research also advances the field of positive discourse analysis by applying it to political communication in Indonesia, offering valuable insights into how rhetorical strategies can foster collective agency and a brighter future for society. Future research could extend this analysis to other political or cultural contexts, exploring the influence of these strategies on voter behavior and the wider implications of positive discourse in political settings.

**Keywords:** positive discourse analysis, positive language, presidential debate, discursive strategies, rhetorical strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

Presidential debates are pivotal moments in democratic processes, serving as a stage where candidates present their visions, policies, and values to the electorate. In the Indonesian context, these debates carry particular significance due to the country's diverse population, complex socio-political

landscape, and its evolving democratic traditions. As a nation with over 270 million people and a tapestry of ethnicities, cultures, and religions, political rhetoric in Indonesia must navigate the challenges of addressing pressing national issues while fostering unity and inclusivity. The 2024 Indonesian presidential debate, held in this rich and

multifaceted context, provided a unique platform for the three leading candidates—Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo—to articulate their visions for Indonesia's future amidst growing societal expectations and concerns.

Unlike conventional campaign rallies or party-political speeches, presidential debates in Indonesia represent a direct engagement with the public on critical issues such as education, health, employment, culture, technology, and social welfare. These debates are not only an opportunity for candidates to highlight their policy priorities but also a means of demonstrating their leadership qualities and ability to connect with voters' aspirations. The debate format, featuring interactive discussions and structured segments, challenges candidates to respond dynamically to panelist questions and their opponents' statements. Consequently, the rhetorical strategies they employ become a reflection of their political acumen, personal convictions, and adaptability under pressure.

In this highly competitive setting, the 2024 presidential debate gained heightened attention due to its timing and impact. As the final official debate before the general election, it was the last chance for candidates to solidify their support base and influence undecided voters. The debate's themes, encompassing Indonesia's most pressing socio-economic and cultural challenges, demanded that candidates not only articulate viable solutions but also instill hope and confidence in their leadership. Given these stakes, the candidates' use of language played a central role in shaping voter perceptions, making the debate a rich site for analyzing the application of Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA). This study, therefore, investigates how each candidate employed PDA strategies to construct narratives of optimism, empowerment, and collective agency, contributing to a broader understanding of the role of positive rhetoric in political communication.

This research sought to understand the extent to which the candidate delivers positive outcomes, empowerment, and social change through their language usage during the debate. The previous research on political language has primarily focused on socio-pragmatic aspects, including politeness and impoliteness (Kamhar et al., 2024; Melinda et

al., 2024; Simanjuntak & Simatupang, 2024). Meanwhile, some studies (Nartey & Ernanda, 2020; Su, 2016) have explored PDA in speeches. These were often limited to single-speaker contexts, concentrating on how language fosters hope and strength in audiences. Additionally, Baral et al. (2024) examined the use of PDA in media analysis, highlighting how Nepali media convey messages of hope for a better future.

Further research examines the use of language by Indonesian presidential candidates in official debates held by the government. These three candidates have different backgrounds. The candidates—Anies Baswedan (academician and former Governor of Jakarta), Prabowo Subianto (former military officer and the Indonesian Minister of Defense during President Joko Widodo's rule), and Ganjar Pranowo (politician and Governor of Central Java)—bring diverse perspectives to the debate, which may impact their language use and rhetorical strategies. This study examines how each candidate employs language to foster optimism and convey hope for Indonesia's future amidst pressing societal issues. The presidential candidates' diverse backgrounds will certainly affect the use of language in delivering positive messages during the debate to bring hope for the betterment of Indonesia.

The presidential debate is acknowledged as one of the significant ways to influence the candidate's electability (Witianti & Solihah, 2019). By watching these debates, voters can acquire greater information on the candidate's vision, missions, programs, plans, and policies. The debate also serves as the candidates' campaign to the public, which is a noteworthy feature of democracy.

Zhang (2017) explained that debate is a form of communication where people can convey a message and propose arguments about the discussed topic. In the debate activity, people can propose reasons to persuade someone with hope for a better future. Some previous research on persuasion in debates has found this activity brings a great potential to persuade voters due to their lack of knowledge on the candidates and their viewpoints on certain issues (McKinney & Warner, 2013). One can evaluate the results of the presidential debate by seeing the way people think based on their political views (Cho

& Ha, 2012; Holbert, 2005; Mullinix, 2015; Warner et al., 2020). Promoting encouragement to live a better life, giving hope for a bright future, presenting an optimistic plan for developing the country, as well as solving national problems through debate can give people different insights into the political world. Presidential debates serve as a critical platform for candidates to outline their policies, communicate their values, and inspire hope. Through the positive discourse analysis, this study aims to reveal how candidates use rhetorical strategies to construct positive narratives that may potentially influence voters' perceptions.

To analyze positive messages and constructive utterances that are full of hope for the future in the Indonesian presidential candidate debate, the researchers used the positive discourse analysis (PDA) approach. Hughes (2020) and Su (2016) explained that PDA is a complementary approach to the critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach, which emphasizes criticism deconstruction of oppression and discrimination rather than discussing reconstruction. Although different, PDA is a fairly new approach related to CDA in determining discourse studies literature. PDA focuses on how discourse can be formed through inspiring discourse, constructive messages, hope, and strength in facing difficulties (Nartey, 2020).

A different explanation states that the PDA approach is used to understand how change can occur for the better, for example, how feminist understanding changes gender relations in our environment, how immigrants improve their new surroundings, how Indigenous people overcome their colonial past, and so forth (Martin, 2004). Martin (2004) further claimed that linguistics as an object does not only discuss bad news but also contains peaceful good news.

This study aimed to advance the theoretical understanding of transitions that can give Indonesian society great hope for the new president using the PDA approach. This research does not focus on criticizing the Indonesian presidential candidates. However, it aims to see how these candidates encourage society to become better as well as how they deliver positive vibes and hope for a brighter life if chosen as the new president. Agustín

(2012) added that PDA aims to positively impact civil society and create social changes.

Presidential candidates' different backgrounds can influence their styles in promoting their vision, missions, and programs to persuade the voters. In addition, the current study aimed to offer a minor contribution to the significance of employing PDA by examining the three presidential candidates through their speeches delivered during the 2024 political debate. In other words, this study aimed to demonstrate the efficacy of PDA as an analytical framework in debate by applying it to debate utterances, thereby underscoring the significance of language and leadership in Indonesian political communication.

The themes discussed in the presidential candidate debate include education, health, employment, culture, technology, social welfare, and inclusion, which are issues which attract the attention of Indonesian society today. This debate was the last chance for all the candidates to formally promote their ideas, beliefs, and values. Each of these three candidates have several minutes to explain and provide arguments on their ideas, points of view, and plans related to the topics. In presidential debate contestations, candidates bring many ideas and claim that their ideas are the most plausible ones.

## METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to explore the rhetorical strategies used by Indonesian presidential candidates during the 2024 national debate. The data for this study consisted of the transcriptions of the fifth and last Indonesian national presidential candidate debate held by the Indonesian General Election Commission (*Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU*) on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The debate included discussions on the themes of education, health, employment, culture, information technology, social welfare, and inclusion.

The fifth debate was selected because it received the widest media coverage and had a bigger polling impact than the preceding debates. Moreover, it was the last opportunity for these presidential candidates to showcase their ideas, solve unresolved issues, as well as attract and give a strong impression to the voters before the general election. The last

debate consisted of six segments: the candidates' presentation of their vision and mission, in-depth explanations of their policy plans in response to panelist questions, interactive question and answer sessions, and closing statements. These segments provided a rich source of linguistic data for analyzing positive discourse strategies.

In order to obtain accurate data, the researchers downloaded the debate from the KPU YouTube platform, transcribed the video, and then compared the transcription with the original video. The data were analyzed using the steps of identification, interpretation, and explanation. During the identification step, the researchers employed the PDA approach by identifying the positive language, tone, or other linguistic aspects used to deliver positive messages in the presidential debate. More specifically, the researchers identified the linguistic markers that show metaphors, narratives, words, phrases, and expressions that convey empowerment, hope, and optimism. The next stage was interpreting the positive language and messages based on the candidates' background and the context/discourse of the debate. The presidential candidates' history (experience, value, and point of view on the debate topics) significantly influenced their language use. The last step (explanation) involved explaining the candidates' positive language and discursive strategies to promote their positive messages in the debate. In macro analysis, the researchers explained the presidential candidates' background context that underlies the text production process and linked them to the debate topic.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In the fifth presidential debate, it was found that Anies Baswedan as one of the three presidential candidates tended to use several positive messages, such as constructing Indonesia's crucial problems, expressing commitment to society, framing the government's existence using metaphor, managing public emotion using narratives, empowering society, and showing policy through argumentation.

### **Constructing Indonesia's Crucial Problems**

At the beginning of his speeches, Anies Baswedan tried to analyze the main problems

that Indonesia is facing. Showing the crucial issues in Indonesia is crucial to allow the society to understand the situation and see how Baswedan will construct solutions for those problems. Constructive discourses are positive.

- (1) *Persoalan terbesar bangsa kita hari ini, Republik kita hari ini, adalah ketimpangan, ketidaksetaraan, ketidakadilan; ketimpangan antara Jakarta dan luar Jakarta, Jawa-luar Jawa, kaya-miskin, desa-kota..... (The biggest problem of our nation today is inequality, the imbalance between Jakarta and outside Jakarta, Java and outside Java, rich and poor, villages-cities.....) (Baswedan, 2024).*
- (2) *Apa masalah hari ini? Empat puluh lima juta orang belum bekerja dengan layak. Bicara jaminan sosial, lebih dari tujuh puluh juta orang tidak punya jaminan sosial. Bicara pendidikan, jauh dari kota terpencil (What are today's problems? Forty-five million people do not have decent jobs. Concerning social security, more than seventy million people do not have social security. Talking about education, [good education is] far from remote cities) (Baswedan, 2024).*
- (3) *Salah satu persoalan utama adalah pusat kesehatan masyarakat kita saat ini diarahkan terlalu fokus pada hal-hal yang sifatnya kuratif. Lalu, urusan kesehatan seakan menjadi urusan Kementerian Kesehatan dan Dinas Kesehatan saja. Dan salah satu masalah utama adalah banyak [penyakit] yang disebabkan oleh pola hidup yang tidak sehat.... (One of the main problems is that our public health centers are currently too focused on curative matters. Then, health matters seem to be the responsibility of the Ministry of Health and the Health Service alone. And one of the main problems is that many [illnesses] are caused by unhealthy lifestyles...) (Baswedan, 2024).*

In the opening of Baswedan's speech, he used the phrases "Masalah terbesar?", "Apa masalah hari ini? Salah satu persoalan..." (What is the biggest problem? What are our problems today? One of the main problems...). This was

the way Baswedan shows that Indonesia has serious problems that attract his attention nowadays, such as inequality, poverty, and injustice. Constructive discourse is one way to communicate to build understanding, solve problems, and foster collaboration and a positive point of view to the audience or other people. By showing the crucial problems in Indonesia, Baswedan encouraged society to understand Indonesia's condition today and provide solutions related to the problems. Here, Baswedan demonstrates empathy with society about the crucial problem of building trust and hope among Indonesian citizens. The presidential candidate's policy toward the problem, which also represents the political party's policy, will significantly influence citizens' policy opinions (Bullock, 2011; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2021). The purpose of the constructive discourse approach is also to address challenges and goals related to the problem.

Based on his background as an academic and the former Governor of Jakarta, Baswedan tried to analyze the problems first. Then, he arranged strategies to solve these problems. His statements on some problems, such as "Inequality, the imbalance between Jakarta and outside Jakarta...", "Forty-five million people do not have decent jobs...", and "Our public health centers are currently too focused on curative matters," prove that Baswedan understands what he has to do to improve the better future of Indonesian society. This language choice helped the candidate build a sense of optimism in society. This discursive strategy helped Baswedan to influence the voter's strategy.

### **Commitment to Society**

Commitment in PDA refers to the responsibility of people or groups to maintain and promote positive and constructive communication. It shows the goal of people or groups for a better future. They believe in and are sure to give and do something good and better for society. Here, commitment will help individuals or groups lead more meaningful and impactful outcomes. In this context, Anies Baswedan was committed to improving Indonesia's health, welfare, equality, and justice system.

(4) *Satu, kita akan memastikan hidup sehat dan bila sakit ada pertolongan cepat*

*tumbuh cerdas dengan biaya terjangkau.*

*(One, we will ensure a healthy life and if you are sick, there is quick help with smart development at an affordable cost) (Baswedan, 2024).*

(5) *Salah satu proyek strategis kita intinya adalah memberi makan bergizi untuk seluruh anak-anak Indonesia, termasuk yang masih dalam kandungan ibunya dan selama sekolah sampai dari usia dini sampai dewasa.*

*(One of our strategic projects is to provide nutritious food for all Indonesian children, including those who are still in their mother's womb and at schools from an early age to adulthood) (Prabowo, 2024).*

(6) *Komitmen kita terhadap data disabilitas: yang pertama, negara harus hadir tidak boleh alpa. Yang kedua, kita mesti menyiapkan data dengan baik.*

*(Our commitment to disability data is that firstly, the state must be present and must not be absent. Secondly, we must prepare the data properly) (Ganjar, 2024).*

Some discursive strategies were used to deliver commitment by showing responsibility, which impacted Baswedan's words and actions. The phrase choice, "We will ensure a healthy life, and if you are sick, the state must be present," shows Baswedan's commitment to guaranteeing the healthy life of society. Also, the statement, "We will ensure," supports Baswedan's commitment to progressive change in society's health. This commitment aligns with commissive action, which commits some future course, promise, and action (Searle, 1976; Ulum et al., 2018). Expressions "we" and "the state must be present" refer to the government's commitment to providing greater attention to society's health.

Prabowo also specifically stated the form of commitment: "One of our strategic projects is to provide nutritious food for all Indonesian children." Prabowo committed to providing free lunches for pregnant women and students. The function of using commitment (promise) was to explain that the candidate aimed to gain society's consideration and that in exchange, he would provide them with some benefits, a futuristic life, and changes in people's future. Besides, Husain et al. (2020) explained that

people use commitment to show the candidate's capability to gain consideration from society. This was to gain society's votes with good empathy.

The next phrase, "Our commitment to disability data is that firstly the state must be present and must not be absent." This showed Ganjar Pranowo's commitment that the government would manage and prepare the data well. Using "commitment," he strongly stated that the program was part of his big concern. Also, it showed that the government would be responsible for everything related to the case.

These commitments were some of the positive messages delivered by Anies Baswedan, Prabowo, and Ganjar Pranowo as presidential candidates, who aimed to convince society that if elected, they would provide them with a healthy life, bring welfare, and provide benefits for society.

### Using Metaphor to Frame the Government's Existence

Baswedan used metaphor to show the role of government in society. Metaphors would shape how society interprets and engages with the presidential candidate's speeches and potentially become impacted (Sun et al., 2021).

(7) *Negara adalah regulator dan negara memberikan ekosistem yang sehat. Jadi, negara menciptakan universitas sebagai eskalator sosial-ekonomi. (The state is a regulator and provides a healthy ecosystem, so it creates universities as social and economic escalators) (Baswedan, 2024).*

In the data above, Baswedan used the word "*negara*" (state), which does not refer to a country but to the people/apparatus in an urgent position to improve societies' lives. A metaphor is a language expressing concepts to enhance speech's meaning through comparison. A metaphor refers to a word or group of words that describe similarities or comparisons rather than their actual meaning. (Martani et al., 2019). This metaphor emphasizes that the government's role was to prioritize the welfare of society's public services, addressing the needs and ensuring the resources rather than merely aiming to

gain profit. Baswedan used the word *regulator* in "*The state is a regulator*" and "*Universities as social and economic escalators*," which meant that the government's responsibility was overseeing and controlling various aspects of the society, including the economic, social, and legal sectors.

Additionally, the escalator here was the mechanism that supported people in rising and developing to become more advanced. The university is one of the highest education institutions. The government believes that through this platform, the people can improve their social status and economic condition through education. Education can empower society to have the opportunity to gain knowledge, skills, qualifications, and experience. Education can help society achieve better jobs, reach higher incomes, and improve social networking.

The use of metaphor in this speech is to deliver the political point of view and give a positive message to the voters. Baswedan shows that there are big hopes for the future that there will be a better life for Indonesian society. The use of metaphor in this case is in line with Trump's use of metaphor in his speech to convey his political views and pursue listeners (Zhu, 2021). In this debate, not all the candidates used metaphors to express a positive message. Baswedan was the candidate who used metaphors to convince society that the country has a big role in society's life. Metaphors are one of the positive messages that influence society.

### Managing Public Emotion Using Narratives

Narratives are stories that are delivered in an oral or written manner by a narrator (Jahn, 2021). Here, as a presidential candidate, Baswedan talked about his experience as Governor of Jakarta and the Indonesian Minister of Education. Prabowo is an ex-military member and the Minister of Defense during President Joko Widodo's rule, while Ganjar Pranowo is the Governor of Central Java. They explained actions that the previous leadership had already taken as well as described their successful experiences when becoming leaders in each of their sectors. In PDA, narratives PDA emphasize positive aspects of social life. It encourages hope and agency because these narratives focus on people's or communities' stories in solving

problems, identifying the challenges, achieving success, and creating positive contributions.

- (8) *Dan kami cerita sedikit yang kita kerjakan, di Jakarta, PAUD, guru-guru PAUD mendapatkan hibah di Jakarta. Kemudian, guru-guru agama kita berikan bantuan. Semua guru dan dosen di Jakarta bebas PBB rumahnya, sebagai apa? Sebagai penghargaan dari negara untuk mereka.*

(And we will narrate a little about what we did in Jakarta, concerning kindergartens. Kindergarten teachers obtained grants in Jakarta, and then we assisted religious teachers. All teachers and lecturers in Jakarta are free from land and building taxes for their houses as an award from the state for them) (Baswedan, 2024).

- (9) *Saya juga sering mengirim tim-tim olahraga untuk Olimpiade disabilitas, ee, sepak bola disabilitas dan sebagainya*

(I also often send sports teams to the disability Olympics, ... disability football, and so on) (Prabowo, 2024).

- (10) *Kawan-kawan buruh kemarin bertemu dengan saya, "Tolong, Pak! Sekedar review Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja karena ini yang perlu mendapatkan keseimbangan dengan nasib kami.*

(Yesterday, fellow workers met with me, "Sir, please review the Job Creation Law because it needs to be balanced with our fate") (Pranowo, 2024).

The statements, "And we tell a little bit about what we do in Jakarta," "I also often send sports teams to the disability Olympics," and "Yesterday, fellow workers met with me" show how Anies Baswedan, Prabowo, and Ganjar Pranowo encourage hope from their experiences in the previous leadership. Narratives are crucial as they can spread positive and constructive discourse. This positive discourse motivates society to believe that the government can overcome Indonesia's problems, creating optimism toward the government.

This was according to the opinion of Boyd et al. (2020), that telling stories functions to make sense of past events and build new worlds and possibilities for ourselves and others. By stating, "I have been involved in

*Pencak silat (Indonesian martial arts) for 37 years" and "I also often send sports teams to the disability Olympics,"* Prabowo wanted to ascertain that he cared about Indonesia's "Pencak silat" traditional culture and sports by becoming the organization committee for 37 years. Here, he expressed his involvement in establishing Indonesia.

Unlike Prabowo, Ganjar Pranowo, in his phrases "Yesterday my fellow workers met with me," and "We slept in a resident's house," expressed his experience of being close to society and hearing their complaints. This story gives a positive message that he, as the Governor and presidential candidate, is close to society and can hear their voices. He believed that he could do more by hearing the direct opinions of society. Those three presidential candidates used narrative to promote a story that emphasized social life to encourage hope.

### Empowering Society

Empowerment is a core notion in Positive Discourse Analysis (PDA). It uses language to promote positive social change, elevate disadvantaged voices, and empower individuals and communities to take charge of their situations (Mubarak, 2023). Empowerment refers to giving or granting power or authority, enabling and authorizing someone to carry out a certain thing, as well as energizing, motivating, and encouraging individuals and entire civilizations to wield personal, interpersonal, and governmental authority to improve their lives and the world. Examples of the three presidential candidates' speeches on societal empowerment are shown below:

- (11) *Kedua, masalah teknologi selalu berurusan dengan sumberdaya manusia. Kita harus sekarang mendidik anak-anak kita lebih banyak di bidang sains, teknologi, engineering mathematics.*

*(Second, the problem of technology always deals with human resources; we must now educate our children more in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics)* (Baswedan, 2024).

- (12) *Jadi benar, peran aktivis-aktivis sangat penting di bidang, e, pembelaan hak-hak*

*pekerja kita di luar negeri. Mereka adalah pahlawan-pahlawan. Terima kasih.*

*So, it is true that the role of activists is very important in defending our workers' rights abroad. They are heroes. Thank you) (Prabowo, 2024).*

- (13) *Peran Posyandu, peran Dasa Wisma, peran Kelurahan, RT, itu menjadi kekuatan yang luar biasa di samping, tentu saja, pemerintah akan mendampingi setiap kebijakan yang ada. (The role of Integrated Service Posts, the role of Dasa Wisma [community groups consisting of five houses], and the Sub-District [Government], hamlets are an extraordinary force; besides, the government will accompany every existing policy) (Pranowo, 2024).*

Baswedan's statement, "We must now educate our children more in the fields of science." shows how he, if elected as the next president, would empower the next generation to have a good education and knowledge of science and technology.

In another aspect, Prabowo tried to convince society by saying, "The role of activists is very important." It means that Prabowo recognizes that activists have a vital role in the Indonesian workforce abroad. There are many cases where Indonesian workers abroad need help and support from many parties. Empowering Indonesian activists abroad will make it easier to solve these problems. Empowerment through social action strives to strengthen the autonomy, power, and influence of oppressed communities. Lack of empowerment was linked to the patriarchal and authoritarian understanding of power (Freire, 2020; Kendall, 1998; Rappaport, 1987).

Pranowo also used empowerment in positive discourse analysis, saying, " *The role of Integrated Service Posts, the role of Dasa Wisma, and the Sub-District [Government], hamlets are an extraordinary force.*" These things that Pranowo mentioned are low-level governments that are vital to society. Ganjar recognized that all government levels play a vital role in developing society.

The attempts to empower society and all levels of government show that Anies

Baswedan, Prabowo, and Ganjar Pranowo cared about Indonesian society and ascertained that Indonesia belongs to the citizens. Each of them proposed their ideas to make Indonesia better. Empowerment is a positive message that builds society's trust in the government's existence.

### Showing Policies Through Argumentation

These presidential candidates used argumentation strategies to describe policies. Through argumentation, these presidential candidates explained how they would implement their plans.

- (14) *Jadi, kalau cara pandanganya begitu, maka biaya pendidikan tinggi ada dua penyediannya, satu...*

(If that is how you look at it, then there are two providers of higher education costs, one...) (Baswedan, 2024).

- (15) *Saya kira itu mungkin, ya. Tapi, saya tidak bermaksud bahwa internet gratis itu tidak penting, tidak! Kalau dibandingkan dengan makan gratis, makan gratis bagi saya strategik mengatasi banyak masalah.*

(I think it is possible. However, I do not mean that free internet is less important than free food, no! For me, (free food) is strategic to overcome many problems) (Prabowo, 2024).

- (16) *Membangun Indonesia yang beradab kita mulai dari tiga bagian...*

(To build a civilized Indonesia, we start from three parts...) (Pranowo, 2024).

Based on the data above, Anies Baswedan explained how the government would manage school fees so that society could obtain a better education. All levels of need to experience higher education. Based on his educational background, Baswedan proves that high education will help society change their lives as they can get many job opportunities.

Prabowo explained that programs from other participants, like free internet, are also important. However, if he compares them with his program, he believes that his free lunch program is better. He believed that giving free lunches was one of the strategic ways to solve



many problems in Indonesia. Prabowo is an ex-military member, which provides him with many experiences gathering with society in isolated areas. From his experience, he was very optimistic that giving free lunches to Indonesians would have a huge impact on the Indonesian future.

Ganjar, at the beginning of his speech, used an argumentation strategy by showing some of his planning policies for building Indonesia. He explained some techniques for civilizing Indonesia. Based on his background as a politician, he has had many experiences in managing, seeing, and controlling society's problems.

Using some rhetorical style in delivering argumentation is in line with the explanation of van Eemeren (2010) that argumentation refers to communicative activity involving dialectical and rhetorical attention. These candidates used argumentation to support a claim (or viewpoint) in front of a critical audience. They do so in an attempt to persuade argumentation with different forms of persuasive communication (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, 2009; van Eemeren, 2010, 2016; van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). Anies Baswedan, Prabowo, and Ganjar Pranowo used argumentation as a discursive strategy to promote a positive message, explaining some strategies they used to bring good hopes for society and life.

The findings of this study strongly align with prior research on political language and the application of positive discourse analysis (PDA), while also introducing new dimensions to the field. Earlier studies, such as those by Nartey & Ernanda (2020) and Su (2016), highlighted PDA's role in fostering hope and strength through rhetorical strategies. They demonstrated that language can be a powerful tool to construct positive narratives, particularly in single-speaker contexts such as individual political speeches or media content. Similarly, this study confirms that the Indonesian presidential candidates effectively used PDA principles to inspire optimism and societal empowerment during the 2024 debate. The rhetorical strategies of problem framing, commitment demonstration, metaphorical language, narrative construction, societal empowerment, and structured argumentation resonate with the overarching goals of PDA identified in prior research—

creating hope and envisioning positive social change.

However, this study builds upon previous research by exploring a unique and dynamic context: a multi-candidate presidential debate. This setting contrasts with the single-speaker focus seen in studies like Su (2016), where the speaker addressed a general audience without immediate competition. In the 2024 debate, Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo competed not only to articulate their visions but also to differentiate themselves from one another. This competitive element introduced variations in how PDA strategies were employed. For example, Baswedan's focus on metaphors and education-centric narratives reflected his academic and governance background, while Prabowo's action-oriented approach and narratives highlighted his military and leadership experience. Ganjar, on the other hand, relied on structured argumentation to articulate policy-driven empowerment. These nuances reveal that while the foundational principles of PDA are consistent, their application can vary significantly depending on the speaker's context, identity, and objectives.

The study also diverges from prior research by considering the role of multi-dimensional discourse mediums, such as televised debates, in shaping voter perceptions. Earlier studies like Baral et al. (2024) concentrated on media-driven discourse, often in written or single-medium formats. In contrast, the 2024 debate incorporated verbal, visual, and performative elements, enriching the layers of rhetorical engagement. This multi-modal approach demonstrated how candidates leveraged live interaction to adapt their language dynamically, responding to panelist questions and audience reactions. Such adaptability adds a new layer to the understanding of PDA, suggesting that its effectiveness may be heightened in interactive and multi-speaker environments.

The implications of these findings are significant for both academic and practical perspectives. Academically, this research expands PDA's applicability to competitive, multi-candidate settings, underscoring the versatility of positive rhetoric in diverse political contexts. It also highlights the

importance of integrating individual backgrounds into the analysis, as personal experiences and professional identities profoundly shape rhetorical strategies. Practically, the findings suggest that political candidates and campaign strategists can benefit from understanding and employing PDA principles to build trust and inspire hope among voters. Furthermore, the study provides a framework for future comparative research, encouraging scholars to explore how PDA is utilized across different cultural, political, and media environments.

This research also underscores the need for further exploration of PDA in digital and social media settings. While traditional televised debates were the focus here, digital platforms play an increasingly dominant role in political communication, offering opportunities for real-time voter engagement and narrative dissemination. Future studies could examine how PDA strategies evolve in these platforms, as well as how voters perceive and respond to such rhetoric in online versus offline contexts. By bridging established insights from prior research with new observations from the 2024 Indonesian debate, this study highlights the transformative potential of positive rhetoric to inspire and mobilize societies toward collective action and national progress.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study investigated the use of positive language by Indonesian presidential candidates during the 2024 debate, identifying six key discursive strategies: constructing Indonesia's crucial problems, demonstrating a commitment to society, framing government roles using metaphors, managing public emotions with narratives, empowering society, and articulating policies through argumentation. Each candidate employed these strategies to resonate with their audience and establish their vision for Indonesia's future. Anies Baswedan, drawing on his background in education and governance, highlighted pressing national issues, used metaphors to articulate government roles, and shared personal narratives to underscore his commitment to solutions. Prabowo Subianto, with his military and defense expertise, emphasized action and experience-based narratives to empower and

connect with voters. Meanwhile, Ganjar Pranowo focused on well-structured argumentation and policy advocacy, reflecting his political acumen and vision for societal empowerment. Together, these approaches illustrate how political rhetoric can inspire optimism and collective agency for national progress, embodying the principles of positive discourse analysis (PDA).

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of the Indonesian presidential debate. This research sheds light on how political figures employ rhetorical strategies to persuade and inspire hope among the public, especially in multi-candidate debates. Positive rhetoric not only positions candidates as capable leaders but also fosters a sense of possibility and trust within the electorate. The study provides critical insights into the role of language in political communication, revealing how metaphors, narratives, and commitments serve as powerful tools to shape public perception and engagement. However, these findings are context-specific, and future research could explore similar strategies in different cultural and political environments, further advancing the application of PDA in political discourse. Such studies might also examine the dynamic interplay of digital media in disseminating and amplifying positive messages during political campaigns.

This research underscores the transformative power of language in fostering societal hope and optimism, urging further inquiries into its broader implications. Throughout the debate, Anies, Prabowo, and Ganjar sought to persuade the public that they could lead Indonesia toward a better future, leveraging positive discursive strategies to demonstrate their capability and vision. The study emphasizes that political rhetoric can reframe governance as a collaborative endeavor, instilling a shared sense of purpose and agency. Future research could compare the impact of positive rhetoric across various media platforms—written, audiovisual, traditional, and digital—and cultural contexts, offering deeper insights into how linguistic strategies shape public discourse. By building on these findings, scholars can continue to unravel the evolving role of rhetoric in promoting constructive political engagement and societal transformation.

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