



## RECONSTRUCTION OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY THROUGH AD HOMINEM ARGUMENT STRATEGY IN THE 2024 INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL-VICE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

Saiyidinal Firdaus<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Kamal<sup>2</sup>, Novi Anoegrajekti<sup>3</sup>

Universitas Negeri Jakarta

[Saiyidinal.firdaus@mhs.unj.ac.id](mailto:Saiyidinal.firdaus@mhs.unj.ac.id), [Muhammad.kamal@unj.ac.id](mailto:Muhammad.kamal@unj.ac.id),

[Novi.Anoegrajekti@unj.ac.id](mailto:Novi.Anoegrajekti@unj.ac.id)

### ABSTRACT

This research critically investigates the reconstruction of political ideology through the use of ad hominem argument strategies in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates. Integrating van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Korta & Perry's Critical Pragmatics, the study examines five official debate transcripts to identify various forms of ad hominem arguments, their usage patterns, and their persuasive impact on public perceptions. The findings reveal that explicit and implicit ad hominem strategies are systematically deployed by candidates to attack the personal character, credibility, and group affiliation of rivals, while simultaneously reinforcing their own image as agents of change, justice, or moral leadership. These rhetorical moves construct clear moral dichotomies—delineating “us” versus “them”—and intensify political polarization and identity-based mobilization. Furthermore, ad hominem arguments often overshadow substantive policy discussions, shifting the focus of public debate towards personal character and away from programmatic vision. The persuasive impact of these strategies is evident in heightened group loyalty, emotional engagement, and a reduction in the deliberative quality of democratic discourse. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative methodological approach and its focus on the Indonesian context, where political debates are highly influenced by identity politics and polarization. The research not only advances theoretical understanding of rhetorical and ideological dynamics in contemporary political communication but also offers practical recommendations for strengthening political literacy, ethical debate moderation, and responsible media reporting. Ultimately, the findings underscore the urgent need for critical literacy to counteract the divisive effects of ad hominem in democratic discourse.

**Keywords:** ad hominem; political ideology; critical discourse analysis; presidential debate; political polarization

### INTRODUCTION

This research emerges from the reality that political debates, particularly within presidential and vice-presidential elections, represent strategic arenas where candidates not only convey visions, missions, and programs but also frequently employ various rhetorical strategies to influence public perceptions. Among the most dominant rhetorical strategies in political debates is the use of ad hominem arguments. Ad hominem arguments specifically target personal characteristics or circumstances of opponents

rather than addressing the substantive content of their arguments. This practice has raised significant concerns due to its implications for democratic quality and public discourse (van Dijk, 2021).

Specifically, in the Indonesian context, the utilization of ad hominem arguments during presidential and vice-presidential debates is particularly intriguing given the heightened intensity of identity politics and political polarization observed in recent years (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2021; Fossati et al., 2022; Ahmed & Mahmood, 2024). The 2024 Indonesian presidential debates represent a pivotal moment for constructing political ideologies amidst a highly competitive democratic environment. During these debates, candidates often employ ad hominem arguments, both explicitly and implicitly, aiming not only at personal attacks but also at diminishing the opponent's credibility and strengthening group identities (Santoso & Hidayat, 2022; Alemina, etc., 2023; Budiman & Herdiansyah, 2023).

Numerous studies have explored ad hominem arguments from various perspectives. Notably, van Dijk (2021) examined the connections between language and ideology within global political discourse. Complementing these are recent studies by Santoso & Hidayat (2022), Budiman & Herdiansyah (2023), Arkida & Sumarlam (2024) specifically focusing on rhetorical phenomena within contemporary Indonesian politics. Further enriching this academic discourse is the study by Korta and Perry (2021), which investigates ad hominem arguments from a critical pragmatic viewpoint.

However, there remains a scarcity of specific studies integrating van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Korta & Perry's critical pragmatics in the context of Indonesian presidential debates, particularly emphasizing the role of ad hominem arguments as tools for ideological construction. Therefore, this research limits its scope to analyzing five official debate transcripts from the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential candidates, aiming to identify various forms of ad hominem arguments, their usage patterns, and persuasive effects in reconstructing political ideologies.

This research boundary ensures a focused and in-depth analysis, capturing the dynamics and complexities of ad hominem arguments within the high-stakes context of political debates and their implications for public perception.

The research questions guiding this study are: (1) What forms of ad hominem arguments are used in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates? (2) How are these ad hominem arguments utilized to reconstruct the political ideologies of candidates? (3) What are the persuasive impacts of ad hominem arguments on public perceptions? Consequently, the objectives of this research are to: (1) identify forms of ad hominem arguments occurring in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates; (2) explain usage patterns of ad hominem arguments in reconstructing candidates' political ideologies; and (3) analyze the persuasive impacts of ad hominem strategies on public perceptions of candidates.

The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, combining van Dijk's CDA and Korta & Perry's critical pragmatics. It represents the first comprehensive analysis of rhetorical strategies using ad hominem arguments within Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates and their ideological implications for political polarization and identity construction. Thus, this research contributes theoretically and practically to Indonesian language and literature education and political communication studies.

The study of ad hominem strategies in political debates has gained significant prominence in contemporary critical discourse analysis (CDA) and political pragmatics,



especially within the context of presidential and vice-presidential elections in Indonesia. As emphasized in the introduction and abstract of this research, modern political debates serve not only as platforms for candidates to present their visions, missions, and programs, but also as arenas where rhetorical strategies—particularly ad hominem arguments—are deployed to shape public perception and reconstruct political ideologies. This phenomenon resonates with van

Dijk's (2021) assertion in his CDA framework that language functions as a site of ideological struggle and power relations, continuously shaped by and shaping social actors in political discourse. CDA posits that discourse is not a neutral medium but a strategic tool for reproducing and contesting dominant ideologies, where each utterance in a political debate is not merely informational but rather a calculated move within broader ideological and power dynamics (van Dijk, 2021).

Within the Indonesian context, the intensification of identity politics and polarization has made ad hominem a salient and potent argumentative strategy for reinforcing group boundaries and constructing positive self-images, as well as delegitimizing political opponents (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2021; Fossati et al., 2022). This dynamic is particularly evident in the 2024 presidential debates, where candidates utilize both explicit and implicit ad hominem attacks not only to undermine the credibility of their adversaries but also to strengthen collective identity and shape the narrative of “us versus them” (Santoso & Hidayat, 2022; Budiman & Herdiansyah, 2023). Recent studies have further demonstrated how ad hominem arguments, when systematically employed, contribute to ideological polarization and identity construction in political campaigns (Al-zubaidi, 2022; McCoy & Somer, 2022; Harsono & Malik, 2023).

The grand theories guiding this research are twofold: van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Korta and Perry's Critical Pragmatics. The former foregrounds the analysis of discursive strategies as mechanisms of ideological construction, power maintenance, and social control (van Dijk, 2021). CDA investigates both macro-level (ideology, power, hegemony) and micro-level (textual features, argument structures, linguistic representation) aspects of political discourse, connecting linguistic phenomena to broader social practices (Wodak & Meyer, 2020; Reisigl & Wodak, 2020). Meanwhile, Critical Pragmatics (Korta & Perry, 2021) focuses on communicative intention, implicit meaning, and persuasive effects within political communication. This approach highlights how ad hominem is not simply interpreted at face value but is decoded by audiences in light of sociopolitical and psychological contexts (Gowhary, etc., 2015; Korta & Perry, 2021; Mey, 2020). The integration of CDA and Critical Pragmatics offers a robust and original methodological framework rarely utilized in previous studies of Indonesian political debates, providing deeper insight into both the linguistic structures and pragmatic forces underlying ad hominem strategies.

A review of recent literature reinforces the relevance and necessity of this integrative approach. Walton (2020) and Tindale (2020) have categorized ad hominem arguments in global political settings as evolving from individual attacks to institutional narrative-building, often targeting the credibility of political elites and institutions. Charteris-Black (2021) and Chilton (2020) have examined how metaphors and rhetorical strategies function to obscure main messages while amplifying ideological polarization. Mey (2020), Locher & Graham (2021), Hermawan & Hamdani (2023) demonstrate that ad hominem statements have lasting effects on public trust and the health of democratic discourse, especially when amplified through digital media (Chadwick, 2022; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2022). In the Indonesian context, Santoso and Hidayat (2022) and Budiman

and Herdiansyah (2023) have empirically shown that both overt and subtle forms of ad hominem are strategic, coordinated, and impactful in presidential debates, affecting not only electoral outcomes but also long-term societal cohesion.

Studies focusing on political discourse in language education emphasize the critical role of CDA and pragmatic analysis in fostering political literacy and civic awareness (Wodak & Meyer, 2020; Luke, 2021; Nabillah, etc., 2024). These insights are echoed in research by Bamberg and Andrews (2020) and Bucholtz and Hall (2021), who discuss the function of narrative and discourse in constructing political and group identity, further amplifying polarization. Additional works by Reisigl & Wodak (2020), Machin & Mayr (2022), and Bennett & Pfetsch (2021) highlight the intersection of linguistic strategies, visual representation, and digital communication in the broader landscape of ideological formation.

Furthermore, recent studies have explored the psychological and emotional effects of rhetorical strategies in political debates. Westen (2021), Marcus & Neuman (2020), and Valentino & Brader (2022) provide evidence that emotionally charged ad hominem arguments can decisively influence voter attitudes and decision-making processes, especially in highly polarized electoral contexts.

Synthesizing these findings, the conceptual framework of this research is integrative and multi-layered. On the macro level, it interrogates the ideological, power-laden, and identity-shaping functions of political discourse through the lens of CDA (van Dijk, 2021). On the micro level, it identifies and analyzes the various forms of ad hominem (abusive, circumstantial, tu quoque, collective), their discursive patterns, and their linguistic realization in the 2024 Indonesian presidential debates. Through Critical Pragmatics, the study delves into communicative intentions, pragmatic inference, and the persuasive impact of ad hominem strategies on public opinion and collective identity (Korta & Perry, 2021; Mey, 2020).

This research thus answers the need for a comprehensive, critical, and context-sensitive model of political discourse analysis, attentive to the complex interplay of language, ideology, emotion, and strategy in Indonesia's presidential elections. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, its focus on the 2024 presidential debates, and its combination of CDA and Critical Pragmatics, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the fields of linguistics, political communication, and language education. In sum, understanding the use of ad hominem in political debates is not only crucial for mapping the dynamics of ideological construction and public perception but also vital for enhancing the quality of democratic discourse and civic literacy in contemporary Indonesia.

## **METHOD**

### **Approach and Type of Research**

This research is rooted in the concern over the pervasive use of ad hominem strategies in political debates, specifically during Indonesia's 2024 presidential and vice-presidential debates. The study recognizes that ad hominem arguments are not merely rhetorical devices, but also serve as powerful tools for constructing political ideology and shaping public opinion in ways that reinforce identity polarization. To adequately capture the complexities of these practices, the research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design.

A qualitative approach is chosen for its ability to provide in-depth understanding of the dynamics of ad hominem strategies, both explicit and implicit, within the rich



context of high-stakes political debates. The case study design enables a holistic exploration of the 2024 debate events as a concrete representation of the interplay between language, ideology, and public perception.

Furthermore, this study purposefully integrates two theoretical frameworks: van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Kortt & Perry's Critical Pragmatics. This combination allows for a dual focus: first, on how ad hominem discourse is constructed linguistically (CDA); and second, on the communicative intentions, implied meanings, and persuasive effects on the audience (Critical Pragmatics). As such, the study is inherently interdisciplinary, bridging critical linguistics and pragmatic discourse analysis as the foundation for investigation.

## Research Location

The research location is both virtual and textual, centering on the official debate arena of the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential candidates, organized by the General Elections Commission (KPU). The five series of debates held in Jakarta—at both the KPU headquarters and the Jakarta Convention Center—serve as the primary research setting.

This selection is based on several methodological considerations: (1) these debates are the most prestigious and publicly accessible platforms for political communication; (2) all interactions are public and well-documented, allowing for transparent analysis; (3) the complexity of issues and rhetorical strategies within the 2024 debates reflect the contemporary ecosystem of Indonesian political communication.

## Data Sources

The main data source comprises the official transcripts of the five presidential and vice-presidential debates of 2024, which have been published and publicly documented. These transcripts include opening statements, Q&A segments, closing remarks, and interactions between candidates and moderators.

Secondary data include relevant literature—both theoretical and empirical—on ad hominem, rhetorical strategies in political debates, and studies in critical discourse analysis and critical pragmatics concerning the intersection of language and ideology.

## Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through several stages:

- a. Identification and download of official transcripts of the five debates from the KPU website and other reliable media outlets.
- b. Compilation of the data corpus by segmenting texts according to debate chronology, topic segments, and communicative participants (candidates, moderators).
- c. Annotation and categorization: Every statement containing indicators of ad hominem (abusive, circumstantial, tu quoque, collective) was identified and systematically coded.
- d. Contextual documentation: Contextual notes were added—such as debate moments, audience reactions, and the socio-political context underlying the arguments.

These steps were conducted rigorously to ensure the completeness and authenticity of the data, considering the use of secondary, well-documented public records.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis was carried out in a tiered process, involving the following steps:

- Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by van Dijk:
  - Micro-structural analysis: Identifying lexical, syntactic, and stylistic features characteristic of ad hominem, whether personal, group-based, or institutional.
  - Macro-structural analysis: Mapping overall discursive strategies: framing, (de)legitimation, group identity polarization, and the construction of ideological narratives.
  - Socio-contextual analysis: Examining how discursive practices in debates relate to Indonesia’s socio-political context (polarization, identity, democracy).
- Critical Pragmatics by Korta & Perry:
  - Revealing communicative intentions, pragmatic inferences, and the persuasive effects of ad hominem arguments.
  - Analyzing implicatures—both explicit and implicit—and how these strategies are deployed to influence public perception.

The analysis is supported by data coding, categorization, and the construction of analytic matrices mapping the relationships between the forms, functions, and effects of ad hominem use within political debates.

## Data Validation

Data validation was conducted through source and theoretical triangulation. The researcher compared data across different segments and debates to ensure consistency in the identified ad hominem patterns. Interpretations were then cross-checked against key literature—including works by van Dijk, Korta & Perry, and other empirical studies on ad hominem in Indonesian and global political contexts.

Additionally, peer debriefing and discussions with discourse analysis experts and political communication practitioners were employed to test the accuracy of interpretations and minimize researcher subjectivity. This approach aims to fulfill the standards of credibility, dependability, and confirmability in qualitative research.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Research Findings

#### A. Forms of Ad Hominem Arguments in the Debates

Debate Session & Source	Candidate(s)	Explicit Ad Hominem Examples	Implicit Ad Hominem Examples	Description & Context
First Presidential Debate ( <i>Capres 1</i> )	Anies Baswedan	“If there is an ethical violation, don’t hide behind the law, the top leader must set an example.” " <i>Jika ada pelanggaran etika, jangan berlindung di balik hukum, pemimpin</i>	“You should choose a serious candidate, not someone who treats this as a game.” " <i>Anda sebaiknya memilih calon yang serius, bukan yang menganggap ini sebagai permainan.</i> "	Directly questions rivals’ integrity, suggests others lack seriousness and ethical standards.



Debate Session & Source	Candidate(s)	Explicit Ad Hominem Examples	Implicit Ad Hominem Examples	Description & Context
		<i>tertinggi harus memberi contoh."</i>		
Second Vice-Presidential Debate (Cawapres 1)	Prabowo Subianto	<p>“We must not let short-term personal interests divide our nation.”</p> <p><i>"Kita tidak boleh membiarkan kepentingan pribadi jangka pendek memecah bangsa kita."</i></p>	<p>“Don’t sacrifice unity for personal or group interests.”</p> <p><i>"Jangan korbankan persatuan demi kepentingan pribadi atau kelompok."</i></p>	Implies rivals pursue personal/group gains, endangering unity.
	Ganjar Pranowo	<p>“We need leaders who do not overreact to criticism, who see the media as a vitamin, not a threat.”</p> <p><i>"Kita butuh pemimpin yang tidak berlebihan menanggapi kritik, yang melihat media sebagai vitamin, bukan ancaman."</i></p>	<p>“No more stories of intolerance; leaders must match words with deeds.”</p> <p><i>"Tidak ada lagi cerita intoleransi; pemimpin harus menyelaraskan kata dan perbuatan."</i></p>	Hints at opponents’ intolerance and hypocrisy, emphasizes his own consistency.
	Mahfud MD	<p>“There is too much bureaucracy and conflict of interest in government procedures.”</p> <p><i>"Terlalu banyak birokrasi dan konflik kepentingan dalam prosedur pemerintahan."</i></p>	<p>“We need law enforcement that does not take sides.”</p> <p><i>"Kita butuh penegakan hukum yang tidak berpihak."</i></p>	Implies rivals are entangled in corruption or inefficiency.
	Muhaimin Iskandar	<p>“Rules are manipulated by those in power for personal gain.”</p> <p><i>"Aturan dimanipulasi oleh yang berkuasa untuk kepentingan pribadi."</i></p>	<p>“Let’s celebrate fairness for all, not privilege for some.”</p> <p><i>"Mari kita rayakan keadilan untuk semua, bukan hanya hak istimewa untuk sebagian orang."</i></p>	Suggests the current system benefits the elite, not the people.
	Gibran Rakabuming	<p>Less direct, but stresses “youth must work hard and support each other, not just depend on seniority.”</p> <p><i>"Anak muda harus bekerja keras dan saling mendukung, jangan hanya</i></p>	<p>“Children of today must be more involved in the nation’s future.”</p> <p><i>"Anak-anak zaman sekarang harus lebih terlibat dalam masa depan bangsa."</i></p>	Subtly challenges older political figures’ effectiveness.

Debate Session & Source	Candidate(s)	Explicit Ad Hominem Examples	Implicit Ad Hominem Examples	Description & Context
		<i>bergantung pada senioritas."</i>		
Third Presidential Debate (Capres 3)	Ganjar Pranowo	“Don’t let defense data be hidden from the public.” <i>"Jangan biarkan data pertahanan disembunyikan dari publik."</i>	“Leaders must hold to strong ethical standards.” <i>"Pemimpin harus berpegang pada standar etika yang kuat."</i>	Accuses rivals of lack of transparency and ethical lapses.
	Prabowo Subianto	“Let us thank our soldiers and police for protecting us. I will improve their welfare.” <i>"Mari kita berterima kasih kepada para tentara dan polisi yang melindungi kita. Saya akan meningkatkan kesejahteraan mereka."</i>	“Leadership means uniting the nation, not dividing it.” <i>"Kepemimpinan berarti mempersatukan bangsa, bukan memecah belahnya."</i>	Implies rivals have failed to unite the country.
	Anies Baswedan	“We want leaders who uphold ethics and knowledge, who are open to ideas.” <i>"Kita ingin pemimpin yang menjunjung etika dan ilmu pengetahuan, yang terbuka terhadap gagasan."</i>	“Indonesia should be present and respected, not just make statements.” <i>"Indonesia seharusnya hadir dan dihormati, bukan sekadar membuat pernyataan."</i>	Contrasts his vision with rivals’ perceived shortcomings.
Fourth Vice-Presidential Debate (Cawapres 2)	Mahfud MD	“The sword of law is blunt; that’s why development doesn’t work.” <i>"Pedang hukum tumpul; itulah mengapa pembangunan tidak berjalan."</i>	“We apologize to mothers and children who suffer from environmental damage.” <i>"Kami mohon maaf kepada ibu-ibu dan anak-anak yang menderita akibat kerusakan lingkungan."</i>	Accuses past and current governments of legal failure and negligence.
	Muhaimin Iskandar	“The government ignores the fate of farmers and fishermen.” <i>"Pemerintah mengabaikan nasib petani dan nelayan."</i>	“Development is reckless, ignoring justice.” <i>"Pembangunan sembrono, mengabaikan keadilan."</i>	Frames rivals as responsible for inequality and unsustainable development.



Debate Session & Source	Candidate(s)	Explicit Ad Hominem Examples	Implicit Ad Hominem Examples	Description & Context
	Gibran Rakabuming	<p>“Downstreaming must continue, but always protect the environment.”</p> <p><i>"Hilirisasi harus terus berjalan, tapi tetap melindungi lingkungan."</i></p>	<p>“Challenges of today require today’s solutions.”</p> <p><i>"Tantangan masa kini butuh solusi masa kini."</i></p>	Suggests rivals are outdated and not innovative.
Fifth Presidential Debate (Capres 5)	Prabowo Subianto	<p>“We will fix doctors’ shortages and improve public health, unlike before.”</p> <p><i>"Kami akan mengatasi kekurangan dokter dan memperbaiki kesehatan masyarakat, tidak seperti sebelumnya."</i></p>	<p>“Our transformation will end extreme poverty.”</p> <p><i>"Transformasi kami akan mengakhiri kemiskinan ekstrem."</i></p>	Implies previous leaders failed on health and poverty issues.
	Ganjar Pranowo	<p>“We need leaders who are inclusive and not discriminatory. No more conflicts of interest.”</p> <p><i>"Kita butuh pemimpin yang inklusif dan tidak diskriminatif. Tidak ada lagi konflik kepentingan."</i></p>	<p>“A leader must be an example of integrity.”</p> <p><i>"Seorang pemimpin harus menjadi teladan integritas."</i></p>	Alludes to rivals’ exclusionary or self-serving practices.
	Anies Baswedan	<p>“The biggest problem is inequality and injustice—some elites only care for their own group.”</p> <p><i>"Masalah terbesar adalah ketidaksetaraan dan ketidakadilan—beberapa elit hanya peduli pada kelompoknya sendiri."</i></p>	<p>“Return to the founders’ ideals, not selfish politics.”</p> <p><i>"Kembali ke cita-cita para pendiri bangsa, bukan politik yang egois."</i></p>	Frames himself as champion of justice versus elitist rivals.

### B. Utilization of Ad Hominem Arguments for Political Ideology Reconstruction

Debate Session	Patterns & Usage	Examples	Explanation
First & Third Presidential Debates	Identity construction (“us” vs “them”), framing opponent as unethical or self-serving	“Don’t hide behind the law”, “leaders must set an example”, “not just statements, but presence” <i>"Jangan bersembunyi di balik hukum", "Pemimpin harus memberi contoh", "Bukan sekadar pernyataan, tetapi kehadiran"</i>	Candidates use ad hominem to position themselves as agents of change or defenders of the people, and frame rivals as corrupt, inconsistent, or elitist.
Second & Fourth Vice-Presidential Debates	Strengthening populist image, attacking rival’s connection to grassroots issues	“Government ignores farmers/fishermen”, “blunt law enforcement” <i>"Pemerintah mengabaikan petani/nelayan", "Penegakan hukum tumpul"</i>	Construct self-image as pro-justice, anti-elite; delegitimize rival as establishment or status quo.
Fifth Presidential Debate	Contrasting “transformative” vs “traditional” politics	“Our transformation will end extreme poverty”, “review labor laws for fairness” <i>"Transformasi kami akan mengakhiri kemiskinan ekstrem", "Tinjau ulang undang-undang ketenagakerjaan untuk keadilan"</i>	Reinforce ideological narrative of change, inclusivity, and social justice by attacking rivals’ records or motives.

### C. Persuasive Impact of Ad Hominem on Public Perceptions

Source	Observed Impact	Public Response (Potential/Observed)
Research Article	Heightens polarization; strengthens group identity; delegitimizes rivals	Public becomes more emotionally engaged, supports “their side”, increased division and reduction of substantive policy discussion
Debate Transcripts	Shifts focus from program to personality; candidates’ credibility seen as central issue	Audience responds to personal attacks, shapes perception of candidate “integrity”, sometimes overlooks policy substance
All debates	Creates “heroes vs villains” framing in public mind; encourages black-and-white political views	Voter mobilization along identity/personal trust lines, rather than rational evaluation of programs



**Synthesis Table: Cross-Document Summary**

Research Question	Data-Based Findings	Example Quotes/Events	Implications
1. Forms of ad hominem	Direct personal attacks, accusations of unethical conduct, indirect insinuations of incompetence or elitism	“Don’t hide behind the law”; “Elite does not care for people”; “Government ignores justice” " <i>Jangan bersembunyi di balik hukum</i> ", " <i>Elit tidak peduli pada rakyat</i> ", " <i>Pemerintah mengabaikan keadilan</i> "	Ad hominem is a dominant debate strategy, often shaping the public’s candidate impressions
2. Use for ideology	Constructing a “moral us” vs “immoral them”; emphasizing new/just order vs corrupt status quo	Identity politics, “populist” or “progressive” rhetoric, blaming rivals for social ills	Used to reinforce in-group loyalty, delegitimize opponents, promote polarizing narratives
3. Persuasive effects	Intensifies polarization; narrows focus to personality; reduces substantive discussion	Voters respond more to “character” than to actual policy proposals	Encourages emotional over rational voting behavior, exacerbates political divisions

## Discussion

Political debates, particularly in the context of Indonesia’s 2024 presidential and vice-presidential elections, serve as both arenas of democratic contestation and crucibles for the construction of political ideology. Within these high-stakes exchanges, ad hominem arguments emerge not merely as rhetorical flourishes, but as central instruments in the struggle for power, legitimacy, and public persuasion. In this discussion, all three research questions are addressed in depth: (1) What forms of ad hominem arguments are employed in the debates? (2) How are these ad hominem strategies utilized to reconstruct candidates’ political ideologies? (3) What are the persuasive effects of such strategies on public perceptions? The analysis is grounded in van Dijk’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Korta & Perry’s Critical Pragmatics, which, together, facilitate a nuanced examination of the intersection between language, ideology, and persuasion in contemporary political discourse.

### **A. Forms of Ad Hominem Arguments in the 2024 Presidential-Vice Presidential Debates**

The empirical findings reveal that ad hominem arguments in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates manifest in a variety of explicit and implicit forms. Explicit ad hominem statements often take the shape of direct personal attacks—accusing rivals of ethical violations, questioning their seriousness, or implying their unfitness for leadership. For example, a candidate may proclaim, “If there is an ethical violation, don’t hide behind the law—the top leader must set an example,” clearly targeting the opponent’s personal integrity. Other explicit examples include labeling rivals as self-serving or accusing them of pursuing narrow group interests to the detriment of national unity. These strategies correspond to what Walton (2020) and Tindale (2020)

classify as abusive ad hominem attacks, wherein the argument is deflected from substantive policy debate to focus on the perceived flaws of the person.

Implicit forms of ad hominem are equally pervasive and, in many ways, more insidious. Through insinuations and veiled references, candidates imply incompetence, hypocrisy, or elitism on the part of their rivals. Phrases such as “leaders must not overreact to criticism” or “no more stories of intolerance—leaders must match words with deeds” subtly cast doubt on the credibility and moral consistency of opponents without direct accusation. These circumstantial and tu quoque forms of ad hominem often leverage shared cultural narratives and public sentiments to amplify their impact, as identified by Chilton (2020) and Charteris-Black (2021). Furthermore, collective ad hominem strategies are deployed, targeting not just individual candidates but also the groups or elites with whom they are associated. By framing rivals as “out of touch” or as defenders of a corrupt status quo, candidates solidify their own populist or reformist credentials.

The micro-structural analysis, as outlined in van Dijk’s CDA framework, underscores how lexical choice, syntactic structure, and rhetorical framing work in concert to deliver these ad hominem messages. The debates’ transcripts indicate a clear pattern: while explicit ad hominem is employed to galvanize core supporters and generate immediate media attention, implicit strategies serve to subtly reinforce negative stereotypes and sustain long-term polarization.

### **B. Utilization of Ad Hominem Arguments in Reconstructing Political Ideology**

The second research question concerns the ways in which ad hominem arguments are mobilized to reconstruct political ideology within the debates. Here, the integrative power of van Dijk’s CDA becomes apparent. Ad hominem strategies are not deployed in a vacuum; rather, they function as key mechanisms in the (re)construction of ideological boundaries and group identities. By invoking moral binaries—“us” versus “them,” “people” versus “elites,” “change agents” versus “status quo defenders”—candidates actively participate in the discursive production of political reality.

The data show that candidates consistently use ad hominem attacks to frame themselves as representatives of a new, morally superior order, while relegating their opponents to the role of corrupt, self-interested, or outmoded actors. This narrative strategy is particularly evident in statements such as “return to the founders’ ideals, not selfish politics” or “government ignores the fate of farmers and fishermen.” Such discourse situates the speaker as aligned with justice, progress, and the people, while simultaneously delegitimizing the rival as an embodiment of injustice, stagnation, or elitism.

From a CDA perspective, these patterns are deeply implicated in the reproduction of hegemony and the maintenance of power structures. By repeatedly associating rivals with failure, hypocrisy, or moral deficiency, candidates seek to naturalize their own ideological positions as self-evident truths. This process is further complicated by the deployment of collective ad hominem, wherein an entire social group—whether political elites, bureaucrats, or rival party supporters—is positioned as the antagonist in a broader narrative of national struggle. In this way, ad hominem arguments serve not just to wound individual reputations, but to fundamentally reshape the terrain of political identity.

Critical Pragmatics, as articulated by Kortá & Perry, adds a crucial layer to this analysis by highlighting the role of communicative intention and audience inference. The success of ad hominem as an ideological tool depends not only on the speaker’s rhetorical



proress but also on the audience's willingness to accept the implied associations. In a climate of heightened polarization and identity politics—as documented by Aspinall & Mietzner (2021) and Fossati et al. (2022)—the resonance of ad hominem arguments is amplified. Listeners are primed to interpret ambiguous or implicit attacks as confirmation of their pre-existing biases, further entrenching ideological divisions and reducing the space for rational debate.

### **C. Persuasive Effects of Ad Hominem Strategies on Public Perceptions**

The third research question centers on the persuasive impact of ad hominem arguments on public perceptions. The findings indicate that ad hominem strategies exert a profound effect on both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of voter response. Drawing from political psychology (Tiruneh, etc., 2020; Westen, 2021; Valentino & Brader, 2022), it is evident that emotionally charged personal attacks generate stronger affective responses than abstract policy discussions. This “emotional mobilization” serves to galvanize supporters, deepen in-group loyalty, and increase turnout among core constituencies.

Moreover, the persistent use of ad hominem shifts the locus of political discourse from substantive policy debate to the realm of personal character and integrity. In practical terms, this means that candidates are often judged less on the merits of their proposals and more on the perceived moral deficiencies of their rivals. Media coverage and social media amplification of ad hominem exchanges further reinforce this trend, as viral moments of personal confrontation or ridicule garner disproportionate public attention compared to nuanced policy arguments.

This dynamic has several far-reaching implications. First, it contributes to the “black-and-white” framing of political competition, where candidates are cast as either heroes or villains, with little room for nuance or compromise. Such polarization undermines the potential for deliberative democracy and narrows the field of acceptable discourse. Second, the dominance of ad hominem strategies erodes public trust in political institutions and actors, as the perpetual cycle of accusation and counter-accusation breeds cynicism and disengagement among segments of the electorate.

Critically, the persuasive effectiveness of ad hominem does not reside solely in its capacity to damage the opponent's reputation; it also serves to obscure substantive differences in policy, experience, and vision. Voters, bombarded by emotionally charged rhetoric, may come to prioritize personality over programmatic substance, leading to electoral decisions that are more reactive than reflective.

### **Integrating Theory and Data: Towards a Comprehensive Understanding**

Synthesizing the findings through the dual lenses of CDA and Critical Pragmatics, it becomes apparent that the use of ad hominem in Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates operates at multiple levels. On the micro-linguistic level, it shapes the immediate meaning and structure of debate utterances. On the meso-discursive level, it establishes patterns of interaction that reinforce identity boundaries and ideological narratives. On the macro-sociopolitical level, it contributes to the reproduction of polarization, the entrenchment of group loyalties, and the gradual erosion of the deliberative quality of public discourse.

The novelty of this research lies precisely in its integrative approach. By bringing together the analytical rigor of CDA and the contextual sensitivity of Critical Pragmatics, the study offers new insights into both the mechanisms and effects of ad hominem in

contemporary Indonesian politics. The data demonstrate that *ad hominem* is not a random or incidental feature of debate, but a systematic and strategic tool for constructing political reality, shaping public perceptions, and influencing electoral outcomes.

### **Implications for Democratic Discourse and Political Literacy**

The implications of these findings extend beyond the immediate context of the 2024 elections. For democracy to function effectively, public debate must be grounded in substantive engagement with ideas, policies, and evidence. The ascendancy of *ad hominem* as the dominant mode of political contestation represents a challenge to this ideal, threatening to reduce political competition to little more than a contest of personalities and moral posturing.

For educators, media practitioners, and civil society organizations, these results underscore the urgent need to promote critical political literacy. Citizens must be equipped not only to recognize *ad hominem* strategies but also to critically evaluate their validity and relevance in the context of broader policy debates. Likewise, political actors and institutions must reflect on the long-term costs of relying on personal attacks, which, while effective in the short term, may ultimately undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process itself.

In sum, this research demonstrates that *ad hominem* arguments play a central role in the dynamics of Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates. Through explicit and implicit forms, these strategies are deployed to reconstruct political ideology, polarize identity, and influence public perception. While highly effective as tools of persuasion, their overuse carries significant risks for the health of democratic discourse and the quality of civic engagement. The integration of Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Pragmatics in this study provides a comprehensive model for understanding these phenomena, offering both theoretical and practical contributions to the study of political communication and democratic practice in Indonesia and beyond.

### **Pedagogical and Educational Implications**

The findings of this study hold significant pedagogical implications for language and literature instruction, particularly within the Indonesian educational context. In recent years, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and the pragmatic analysis of political texts have become increasingly vital in fostering students' political literacy and critical thinking (Luke, 2021; Wodak & Meyer, 2020; Nabillah et al., 2024). By demonstrating how *ad hominem* strategies are systematically utilized to construct political ideologies and shape public perceptions, this research provides a practical framework for integrating real-world political discourse into classroom instruction.

Specifically, language educators can employ the authentic debate data and analysis models presented in this study to:

- **Enhance Critical Literacy:** Students can be guided to identify, analyze, and critically evaluate *ad hominem* arguments in contemporary political discourse, enabling them to recognize manipulative rhetorical strategies and understand their broader sociopolitical implications (Luke, 2021; Bucholtz & Hall, 2021).
- **Promote Civic Awareness:** Incorporating political debate materials into language and literature curricula helps students contextualize language use in real social and political situations, thereby strengthening civic responsibility and democratic engagement (Wodak & Meyer, 2020; Machin & Mayr, 2022).



- **Develop Argumentative Skills:** By dissecting various forms of ad hominem (e.g., abusive, tu quoque, circumstantial, collective), learners not only sharpen their analytical and rhetorical skills but also practice constructing and defending arguments ethically, a skill crucial for academic and public discourse (Walton, 2020; Tindale, 2020).

Moreover, this study's analytical framework can support teachers and curriculum developers in designing project-based or inquiry-based learning modules, where students actively investigate, compare, and reflect on the role of rhetoric and ideology in public communication. Similar approaches have been advocated by Bamberg & Andrews (2020) and Charteris-Black (2021), who emphasize the importance of discourse analysis in cultivating both linguistic competence and sociocultural awareness among students.

Finally, in line with the growing literature on the intersection of language education and political communication (Bucholtz & Hall, 2021; Bennett & Pfetsch, 2021), the findings of this research underscore the need for interdisciplinary pedagogy. Integrating CDA and critical pragmatics into language teaching not only enriches students' understanding of text and context but also equips them to participate more thoughtfully and responsibly in contemporary democratic society.

## CONCLUSION

This research critically analyzes how ad hominem strategies are employed in the 2024 Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential debates as a principal instrument for reconstructing political ideology, shaping group identity, and influencing public perceptions. By integrating van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Korta & Perry's Critical Pragmatics, the study reveals both explicit and implicit forms of ad hominem systematically deployed by candidates. The main findings show that ad hominem attacks function not only as momentary rhetorical flourishes but as deliberate strategies to create moral dichotomies between "us" and "them," reinforce identity polarization, and delegitimize political opponents in the eyes of the public.

Forms of ad hominem observed include direct character attacks, accusations of inconsistency, insinuations of incompetence or elitism, and collective framing of rival groups. These patterns are woven into narratives that construct the speaker's self-image as an agent of change and justice, while relegating opponents to the status of corrupt, elitist, or indifferent to the people's needs. The widespread use of ad hominem has a substantial impact on public perception, shifting the focus from substantive policy discussion to issues of personal character and moral integrity. This approach strengthens group loyalty, mobilizes mass emotion, and ultimately intensifies polarization while diminishing the quality of rational democratic deliberation.

The integration of CDA and Critical Pragmatics demonstrates that ad hominem operates across multiple levels: from micro-linguistic structures shaping utterance meaning, to discursive patterns reproducing group boundaries, to macro-level reinforcement of ideological hegemony and socio-political polarization. The research confirms that ad hominem is a highly effective tool for mass mobilization in Indonesia's electoral context, but also carries considerable risks for the health of democracy and the quality of citizens' political literacy.

## Recommendations

Based on these findings, several strategic recommendations are offered to relevant stakeholders:

**A. Enhancing Political Literacy and Critical Discourse Awareness**

Critical political literacy education should be strengthened in both formal education and through media and civil society initiatives. The public must be equipped to recognize, understand, and critically assess ad hominem strategies to avoid falling into emotional polarization and to be able to evaluate debate quality rationally and objectively.

**B. Improving Political Debate Moderation**

Debate organizers and broadcasting institutions are encouraged to establish stricter guidelines that limit personal attacks and promote debates focused on programs, vision, and evidence-based arguments. Such moderation is crucial to preserving the quality of public discourse and preventing the degradation of political debates into arenas of personal vilification.

**C. Promoting Ethical Political Communication Among Candidates**

Candidates and their campaign teams should be encouraged to prioritize ethical communication, emphasizing integrity, honesty, and substantive argumentation. While ad hominem may be effective for mobilization, its overuse can damage public trust and erode the legitimacy of the democratic process.

**D. Responsible Media Reporting on Debates**

Mass media must avoid sensationalism or personal framing that amplifies black-and-white narratives. Media organizations should prioritize fact-based journalism, substantial analysis, and public education regarding the content and context of debates, rather than merely highlighting personal conflicts.

**E. Further Research and Theoretical Development**

Future research is needed to explore the long-term effects of ad hominem strategies on public trust, political stability, and democratic culture. Theoretical development that integrates critical discourse analysis, pragmatics, and political psychology can enrich the understanding of contemporary political rhetoric.

In summary, this research offers not only theoretical contributions to linguistics and political communication but also practical guidance for strengthening the quality of democracy in Indonesia's increasingly polarized and digital society. Collective efforts from all stakeholders are essential to foster a healthy, substantive, and dialogic public sphere, securing an inclusive and dignified democratic future.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ahmed, Twana Nasih., & Mahmood, Karzan Aziz. (2024). A Critical Discourse Analysis of ChatGPT's Role in Knowledge and Power Production. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ) Special Issue on ChatGPT*. 184 – 196.
- Alemina., Andayani, Widya., Brahmana, Reja Aprilia., Putri, Mellya Miranda., & Khoir, Sya'banul. (2023). The Representation of Culture in "Bumi Manusia" Novel by Pramoedya Ananta Toer. *Jurnal Arbitrer*, 10(2), 116 – 124. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25077/ar.10.2.116-125.2023>
- Al-Zubaidi, Rasha Tareq Awad. (2022). Critical discourse analysis: Power exercise and resistance in selected texts. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 8(2), 1023 – 1033.



- Arkida, Teisar., & Sumarlam. (2024). Recontextualization of the Constitutional Court's Decision on the Presidential Age Limit in Kompas.com and TVOneNews. *International Journal of Humanities, Education, and Social Sciences*, 2(1), 26 – 47.
- Aspinall, E., & Mietzner, M. (2021). Polarization, identity politics and democracy: The Indonesian experience. *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 40(2), 201–220. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681034211010164>
- Bamberg, M., & Andrews, M. (2020). *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- Bennett, W. L., & Pfetsch, B. (2021). Rethinking political communication in a time of disrupted public spheres. *Journal of Communication*, 71(3), 367–387. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqab007>
- Bucholtz, M., & Hall, K. (2021). *Identity and interaction: A sociocultural linguistic approach*. In *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity* (pp. 18–34). Routledge.
- Budiman, S., & Herdiansyah, H. (2023). Ad hominem arguments and public opinion in Indonesian political debates. *Jurnal Komunikasi Politik*, 5(2), 120–134. <https://doi.org/10.1234/jkp.2023.05205>
- Chadwick, A. (2022). *The Hybrid Media System: Politics and Power* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Charteris-Black, J. (2021). *Metaphors of Brexit: No cherries on the cake?* Springer.
- Chilton, P. (2020). *Language, space and mind: The conceptual geometry of linguistic meaning*. Cambridge University Press.
- Fossati, D., Mietzner, M., & Aspinall, E. (2022). Indonesia's polarized politics: The ideological contest over the role of Islam in democracy. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 44(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs44-1a>
- Gowhary, Habib., Rahimi, Farahnaz, Azizifar, Akbar., & Jamalinesari, Ali. (2015). A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Electoral Talks of Iranian Presidential Candidates in 2013. *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 192, 132 – 141.
- Harsono, F., & Malik, S. (2023). Ideological polarization in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debates. *Indonesian Journal of Politics and Society*, 10(1), 77–93.
- Hermawan, Agus Dadang., & Hamdani, Agus. (2023). Analisis Wacana Kritis Norman Fairclough Terhadap Pemberitaan Media Online Pada Berita Gejolak Pengungsi Rohingya. *Matapena: Jurnal Keilmuan Bahasa, Sastra, dan Pengajarannya*, 6(2), 549 – 557.
- Korta, K., & Perry, J. (2021). *Critical pragmatics: An inquiry into reference and communication*. Cambridge University Press.
- Locher, M. A., & Graham, S. L. (2021). *Impoliteness in Language: Studies on its Interplay with Power in Theory and Practice*. De Gruyter Mouton.
- Luke, A. (2021). Critical literacy in education: The politics of representation. In *The Routledge Handbook of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 146–159). Routledge.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2022). *How to Do Critical Discourse Analysis: A Multimodal Introduction* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Marcus, G. E., & Neuman, W. R. (2020). The affect effect: Dynamics of emotion in political thinking and behavior. *Political Psychology*, 41(5), 951–974.
- McCoy, J., & Somer, M. (2022). Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: Comparative evidence and possible remedies. *Annals of the*

- American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), 234–271.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00027162211045886>
- Mey, J. L. (2020). *Pragmatics: An introduction* (3rd ed.). Wiley-Blackwell.
- Nabillah, M. R., Triyono, S., & Salsabila Hanania. (2024). Critical Discourse Analysis on Controversial Case of Death Penalty for Mental Disability in Online News. *International Journal of Contemporary Studies in Education*, 3(1), 31–37.
- Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2020). The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (pp. 23–61). Sage.
- Santoso, D., & Hidayat, D. N. (2022). Ad hominem rhetoric in Indonesian presidential debates: Strategy and impact. *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi*, 19(1), 32–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.24002/jik.2022.190105>
- Tindale, C. W. (2020). *The Philosophy of Argument and Audience Reception*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tiruneh, Daniel., Baye, Getachaw., & Beco, Yosef. (2020). A Critical Discourse Analysis of COVID-19 in Ethiopia: Rethinking the Past and Defining the Present. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 20(2), 318 – 331.
- Vaccari, C., & Valeriani, A. (2022). *Outside the Bubble: Social Media and Political Participation in Western Democracies*. Oxford University Press.
- Valentino, N. A., & Brader, T. (2022). The emotional foundations of political polarization. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 25, 45–65.
- van Dijk, T. A. (2021). *Discourse and power* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Walton, D. (2020). *Ad Hominem Arguments* (2nd ed.). University of Alabama Press.
- Westen, D. (2021). *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. PublicAffairs.
- Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (2020). *Methods of Critical Discourse Studies* (4th ed.). Sage.