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Critical Discourse Analysis of the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election News in Asahi Newspaper

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to examine how the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun represented presidential candidates, democracy, and political stability during Indonesia's 2019 presidential election. A qualitative critical discourse analysis was conducted on a purposively selected corpus of four Japanese-language news articles and editorial texts published in April 2019, comprising 4,286 Japanese characters. The analysis integrated Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, with particular attention to transitivity, evaluative language, lexical choices, metaphors, and source selection. The findings revealed that Joko Widodo was portrayed both as an accessible, reform-oriented political figure and as a leader facing criticism over coercive political practices. In contrast, Prabowo Subianto was associated with continuity from Indonesia's military-dominated political past and concerns about potential democratic regression. The newspaper's commentary linked electoral tolerance, religious pluralism, and domestic political stability to Japanese economic interests and broader regional considerations. References to experts and business representatives further reinforced an institutional and technocratic framing of Indonesia's electoral dynamics. These findings reflected the representations identified in the selected texts rather than the perspectives of Japanese media or society as a whole. The analysis demonstrated how media representations of Indonesian democracy could integrate normative democratic concerns with considerations of regional stability and investment conditions. However, the limited corpus size, purposive sampling strategy, and interpretive nature of critical discourse analysis constrained the generalizability of the findings and precluded causal conclusions regarding editorial intentions. The interpretations were grounded in the lexical, evaluative, and contextual characteristics of the selected journalistic texts rather than assumed newspaper-wide reporting patterns.

INTRODUCTION

International mass media do not merely serve as neutral reflections of global political events but also function as active discursive agents that produce, reproduce, and transform power relations and ideological hegemony (Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Through lexical choices, syntactic framing, and intertextual structures, media texts construct particular representations of political actors, democratic systems, and national stability. These representations are shaped by the cultural, ideological, and geopolitical contexts in which media organizations operate, influencing how international political

developments are interpreted and communicated to their audiences (Cheng, 2023; Juliana et al., 2025).

Within the Southeast Asian political landscape, Indonesia's 2019 presidential election represented a significant democratic event (Chen, 2022; Qodir, 2025; Siregar, 2025). As one of the world's largest democracies and the country with the largest Muslim population, Indonesia experienced considerable sociopolitical polarization during the electoral rematch between incumbent President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) and his challenger, Prabowo Subianto, a former commander of the Indonesian Army Special Forces Command (Komando Pasukan Khusus, Kopassus). Issues involving populism, identity politics, the rise of Islamic conservatism, economic policy, and foreign investment became central points of political contestation and competing claims to legitimacy (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Hadiz, 2018; Paryanto et al., 2026; Supriatma & Hui, 2022; Taufik et al., 2023).

For Japan, Indonesia's domestic political developments held considerable strategic importance. Indonesia's geographical position along major international maritime routes, particularly the Strait of Malacca, Sunda Strait, and Lombok Strait, made the country an important contributor to maritime security and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. From an economic and geopolitical perspective, Indonesia was a significant trading partner, a major destination for Japanese foreign direct investment (FDI), and an important participant in Japan's regional infrastructure diplomacy amid China's expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Consequently, Japanese media representations of Indonesia's political leadership and democratic institutions could influence public perceptions of bilateral relations and contribute to broader discussions concerning Japan's regional foreign policy priorities.

Among Japan's major national newspapers (ōte shinbun), Asahi Shimbun occupied a distinctive position. Historically associated with liberal-progressive editorial perspectives, postwar pacifism, and criticism of militarism and abuses of state power (Amanullah et al., 2024; Feldman, 1993; Freeman, 2000), Asahi Shimbun has frequently emphasized democratic principles, human rights, and inclusive governance. This editorial orientation made its coverage of democratic transitions and political developments in Asian countries particularly relevant for examining how Japanese journalism interpreted regional political change. Its established position within Japan's national media landscape also provided an important context for investigating the relationship between journalistic discourse, political ideology, and representations of foreign democratic institutions.

Previous studies examining international media representations of Indonesia's 2019 presidential election have predominantly focused on English-language media, particularly publications originating in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, including The New York Times, The Guardian, The Sydney Morning Herald, and The Economist. These discussions have frequently emphasized tensions between liberal democratic principles, authoritarian tendencies, religious conservatism, and populist political mobilization. However, critical linguistic investigations of East Asian media coverage, particularly original Japanese-language reporting by Asahi Shimbun, remain relatively limited. Japanese media perspectives warrant further examination because their representations of Indonesian politics may reflect an intersection between normative commitments to democracy and pluralism and pragmatic considerations involving economic stability, foreign investment, corporate interests, and regional supply chains.

This research gap highlighted the importance of conducting a critical textual and contextual examination of Japanese-language news reporting to identify the ideological assumptions, evaluative patterns, and power relations embedded in representations of Indonesia's 2019 presidential election. Accordingly, this study aimed to investigate how selected Asahi Shimbun news and editorial texts constructed representations of presidential candidates, democratic governance, and political stability through lexical choices, transitivity

patterns, evaluative language, metaphors, and source selection (Alhumsi & Alsaedi, 2023). Drawing on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework (Fairclough, 1992, 2003), the study examined the relationship between textual representations, journalistic practices, and the broader sociopolitical context of Indonesia–Japan relations. Its contribution lay in exploring what may be characterized as a pragmatic discourse of stability and tolerance, in which democratic ideals were interpreted alongside concerns about socioeconomic order and bilateral economic interests. Rather than assuming a predetermined ideological position, the analysis sought to establish how these discursive tendencies emerged within the selected texts and whether they reflected tensions between democratic sovereignty, political stability, and regional geoeconomic considerations.

METHOD

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a critical paradigm, using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework. The analysis integrated textual analysis at the micro level, discursive practices at the meso level, and sociocultural contexts at the macro level to examine the relationships among linguistic representations, institutional practices, and broader sociopolitical structures.

Data Sources and Research Corpus

The primary data source of this study is the Japanese-language news text published by the national print/digital edition of the Asahi Shimbun daily newspaper in April 2019, coinciding with the crucial momentum of the Indonesian presidential election vote (April 17, 2019). The research corpus includes four comprehensive long-form news units, including field investigation reports from two correspondents (Jakarta Bureau and coverage of eastern Indonesia/Maumere) and one official headline (Shasetsu). The total length of the text corpus is 4,286 characters (moji). The sentence corpus was analyzed in depth using original Japanese linguistic data (kanji/kana), standard romaji transliteration (Modified Hepburn), and formal translation of academic Indonesian.

Data Selection Criteria

The selection of texts in the corpus is based on purposive sampling techniques with inclusion criteria: first, it was officially published by the Asahi Shimbun daily in the 2019 presidential election determination period (April 12–19, 2019); second, it contains a key lexicon of candidate naming (Joko Widodo / Joko-shi, Purabowo Subianto / Purabowo-shi), the election process (daitōryō-sen), Indonesian general elections (Indonesian senkyou), third, representing a diversity of journalistic genres: hard news, in-depth field reports (special reportage), post-quick analysis, and headlines (editorial/shasetsu).

Analysis and Work Procedures Unit

The micro-analysis unit includes words (tango), phrases, clauses (setsu), case particle selection (kaku joshi), passive/causative verb construction, and modality and evaluation tools. The data analysis procedure is operationalized into an integrated analysis formula: Japanese Textual Data → Co-text Context → Linguistic Features → Discourse Interpretation → Explanation of Ideology & Social Practice.

In stages, the work steps of the research include: first, the reduction and transcription of the corpus by compiling the original Japanese text, compiling phonemic rommaji transliterations, and establishing accurate literal-contextual translations; second, micro-textual deconstruction by classifying Halliday's transitivity verb processes (2014), identifying Martin & White attitude markers (2005), mapping Lakoff & Johnson's metaphors (1980), and noting sentence structures (active, passive ukemi, causative shieki); third, meso-discursive analysis by tracing intertextual chains, the choice of citations of news sources (political elites,

academics, ordinary people, corporations), and the position of journalist subjects (Asahi); fourth, macro-social analysis by linking textual findings with the historical conditions of post-Suharto democracy, the phenomenon of religious conservatism in Indonesia, and the constellation of interests of Japanese capital and investment diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Interpretive boundary: Claims about the interests or intentions of the newspaper are treated as readings of the four selected texts, not as independently established editorial motives. Replication would require the complete Japanese-language source texts, publication metadata, translation decisions, and a transparent coding record.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Corpus

The main corpus of the Asahi Shimbun analyzed consists of four articles published in April 2019. The first article, titled "インドネシア、民主化足踏み 独裁体制崩壊から21年 17日に大統領選" (Indonesia, Democratization of the Streets in Place: 21 Years After the Collapse of the Dictatorship Regime, Presidential Election on the 17th), is an international special report written by Nogami Hidefumi (Jakarta) and Mamoru Mayumi (Maumere) with a length of 1,842 characters. This article highlights the Jokowi-Prabowo duel, the paradox of the common people versus the iron-fisted disposition, the penetration of Islamic identity politics, and the evaluation of Japan's economy and infrastructure projects. The second article, titled "大統領選「若者40%棄権」インドネシアで調査、関心低下 明日投開票" (Presidential Election: "40% of Golput Youth", Survey in Indonesia, Declining Interest, Tomorrow's Vote), is a 584-character hard news by Nogami Hidefumi (Jakarta), discussing the apathy of the younger generation, golput advocacy movements, social polarization, and the emergence of fictitious alternative presidential candidates. The third article, titled "ジョコ氏の再選確実 インドネシア大統領選、投開票" (Jokowi Confirmed to Be Re-Elected: Indonesian Presidential Election, Voting and Vote Counting), is a 1,096-character report on the election by Nogami Hidefumi, Mamoru Mayumi, and Kaise Akihiko (Jakarta) in length, discussing the victory of the quick count, the rejection of Prabowo's defeat, the myriad burdens of the national economy, the JBIC survey, and the threat of pluralism. The fourth article, titled "(社説) インドネシア 寛容の政治が安定築く" (Headline: Indonesia, The Politics of Tolerance to Build Stability), is the official editorial of the Editorial Board of the Asahi Shimbun (Tokyo) with a length of 764 characters, discussing Indonesia's maritime geopolitical position, the imperative to maintain Pancasila tolerance, regional stability vs. the Thai junta crisis, and the call for an equal partnership between Indonesia and Japan.

Joko Widodo's Representation: The Paradox Between Populist "Common People" and Authoritarian Practices

Textually, the Asahi Shimbun builds a representation of Joko Widodo through very dynamic discursive contradictions. On the one hand, Jokowi is idealized as a symbol of the success of post-1998 democratization because of his background free from past military oligarchs. On the other hand, Jokowi is critically evaluated for stagnant economic growth and the emergence of repressive power maneuvers.

The lexicon used to name Jokowi is very diverse. The phrase shomin-kei / shomin-ha (庶民系 / 庶民派) places Jokowi as the antithesis of the dynastic/military elite and naturalizes emotional closeness to the lower masses. Genshoku daitōryō (現職大統領) affirms formal authority, institutional legitimacy, and continuity of state power. Te no todoku rīdā (手の届くリーダー) provides a positive affective evaluation through the metaphor of physical proximity that erodes the traditional bureaucratic abyss. Burusukan (ブルスカン) is defined as a daimeishi (pronoun/identical) of Jokowi's typical "direct democratic political practice".

However, kyōken-teki sokumen / kyōken-teki shuhō (強権的側面 / 強権的手法) dismantled the illusion of the people and linked Jokowi to the techniques of political coercion in the New Order era.

The transitivity analysis unpacks how Jokowi's physical actions are constructed in detail in the text of field coverage. Text Data 1 (Asahi, April 12, 2019): Shiro shatsu wo udemakuri shite hiza wo tsuki, Joko-shi ga shokunin no koe wo kiite ita. ("With a white shirt with sleeves rolled up and kneeling, Mr. Joko listens to the voices of the craftsmen.") This sentence composes a series of stratified material processes: the verbs udemakuri shite (rolling up the sleeves) and hiza wo tsuki (kneeling/bending the knees), which precede the behavioral-mental process of koe wo kiite ita (listening to the voice). The accusative particle wo affirms the object of the suffering of the local craftsman as the target of the actor's direct affection. The progressive-durative aspect ~te ita depicts the perseverance of action on the scene (genba). The visual physical appearance (white shirt folded, physical position kneeling at the floor) serves as a political iconography of proletarian equality. The Asahi Shimbun consciously reproduces the myth of blusukan as an instrument of populist democratic legitimacy. The use of the word hiza wo tsuki (kneeling) has a strong cultural resonance for Japanese readers, associating the leader with humility (kenson) and readiness to serve without the barriers of feudalism of the ruling caste.

However, this positive construction is immediately deconstructed by the Asahi Shimbun in the next part of the text through a confrontational clause. Text Data 2 (Asahi, April 12, 2019): Tada, Suharuto-ryū-tomo ieru kyōken-teki shuhō wa, jitsuwa Joko-shi ni mo aru. Oshoku sõsa ni karamete yatō rengō wo kirikuzu shitari, daitōryō kōtai wo motomeru undō wo chian tõkyoku ni chin'atsu sasetari. ("However, authoritarian methods that can even be said to be Suharto-style, actually exist in Mr. Joko's character. Such as breaking up the opposition coalition by linking it to corruption investigations, or making the security forces suppress movements demanding a change of president.") The clause begins with an adversative conjunction that emphasizes the contrast of tada (however) and the adverb of dismantling the reality of jitsuwa (actually/fact). The noun phrase Suharuto-ryū-tomo ieru kyōken-teki shuhō (the iron hand method that can be said to be Suharto-style) becomes the focus of the predicative. The structure of action uses causative verbs with parallel particles: kirikuzu shitari (to crack/divide) and chin'atsu sasetari (to create/order oppression through the security forces). There has been a radical epistemological shift. The Asahi Shimbun identifies the paradox of Jokowi's power: behind the persona of the people (shomin-ha), there is a veil of institutional repression. Legal measures to eradicate corruption are stripped naked not as the enforcement of pure justice, but as judicial instrumentalization for the sake of electoral maneuvering (political weaponization of law). The causative construction of chin'atsu sasetari (oppressive) positions Jokowi no longer as a victim of political fragmentation, but as an initiator of state coercion that delegitimizes the democratic public space.

Prabowo Subianto's Representation: Military Aristocracy, Authoritarian Revanchism, and the Dangers of Sectarian Opportunism

Prabowo Subianto is consistently represented through a historical-genealogical lexicon that binds his figure inextricably with the authoritarian structures of the past and the threat of disintegration of the pluralistic order of the nation. The lexicon of the moto gunjin / moto rikugun kanbu (元軍人 / 元陸軍幹部) activates the memory scheme of the New Order's military violence and past human rights violations. Suharuto moto daitōryō no moto musumemuko (スハルト元大統領の元娘婿) constructs Prabowo as the direct heir to the blood of the overthrown dictatorial dynasty. Yatō tōshu (野党党首) places him as a challenger to the status quo of the power holders. Tokei no hari wo modosou to neratte iru (時計の針を戻そうと狙っている) frames time as a movement of political backwardness/reactionary.

Haiboku wo mitomete henna (敗北を認めていない) shows an anti-institutional attitude, rejecting the norms of civilized electoral democracy.

Prabowo's ideological characterization is seen very sharply in the construction of temporal metaphor. Data Text 3 (Asahi, April 12, 2019): Ippō, Joko-shi ni futatabi idomu yatō tōshu no moto gunjin Purabowo-shi wa, Asahi shinbun nado no intabyū ni 'chihō bunken wa chihō de no oshoku wo fuyashita dake da' to hanashite ori, moto musumemuko toshite uyamau Suharuto-ryū no chūō shūken ni 'tokei no hari' wo modosou to neratte iru. ("On the other hand, the former military leader who became the chairman of the opposition party and again challenged Mr. Joko, Prabowo, said in interviews with the Asahi Shimbun and others that 'decentralization only adds to corruption in the regions', and aimed to turn back the 'clock' towards the Suharto-style centralization of power that he revered as his former son-in-law.") The contrasting topical particle ippō (on the other hand) confirms the candidate's polarization. Prabowo's prediction is packed with multi-layered modifications: the motto gunjin (former soldier) and the musumemuko toshite uyamau motto (respect [Suharto] as his former son-in-law). The use of the direct quote clause ~dake da (only... only) confirms the reductionism of Prabowo's evaluation of decentralization reform. At its peak, the idiomatic phrase 'tokei no hari' wo modosou to neratte iru (targeting turning clockwise) uses the verb will/intentionality voluntarily (nerau - aim) in a progressive aspect (~te iru). The conceptual metaphor REFORM POLITICS IS A JOURNEY OF TIME FORWARD is aggressively violated by Prabowo, who is portrayed as attempting to make historical regression. The Asahi Shimbun explicitly positions Prabowo's proposed centralization of power as a direct threat to the democratic order resulting from the 1998 Reform. The presence of the word "aim" (nerau) imports militaristic semantics: a calculative plan to restore the New Order's authoritarian centralist hegemony to the contemporary political stage.

Furthermore, the Asahi Shimbun underscores Prabowo's alliance with the spectrum of religious radicalism. Data Text 4 (Asahi, April 18, 2019): Purabowo-shi wa kagekina gendō de shirareru Isuramu shūdan no shiji mo uke, 1-pai-me de shōsū-ha e no hairyo wo uttaeta Joko-shi mo konkai, hoshu Isuramu no shidō-sha wo fukudaitōryō kōho ni eranda. ("Mr. Prabowo also received support from Islamic groups known for his radical actions and speeches, while Mr. Joko, who in his first term called attention to minorities, this time chose a conservative Islamic leader as his vice presidential candidate.") The participatory construction of the kagekina gendō de shirareru Isuramu shūdan (an Islamic group known for extreme/radical speech and actions) uses the passive participatory form of shirareru (widely known). The additive particle mo uke (also accept) positions Prabowo as a passive-opportunistic recipient of the legitimacy of the radical group (referring to the FPI which in the April 12 article was identified as ikyōto e no shūgeki de shirareru / a group known for attacks on non-Muslims). This clause maps a worrying power relationship: Prabowo is portrayed as willing to compromise the basic principles of nationality by embracing fundamentalist factions for the sake of vote mobilization. But critically, this sentence also links Prabowo's maneuvers to the erosion of Jokowi's idealism, which in turn forced him to elect Ma'ruf Amin (hoshu Isuramu no shidōsha / conservative Islamic leader) solely as an electoral shield.

Comparative Comparison: Discursive Polarization and the Ideological Square

Through Teun van Dijk's (1998) Ideological Square framework, the representation of the two political actors by the Asahi Shimbun shows a carefully managed polarization structure. The binary comparison matrix of political actors' representation can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Binary Comparison Matrix of Representation of Political Actors

Evaluation Dimensions	Joko Widodo (Incumbent/Status Quo)	Prabowo Subianto (Challenger/Oppositio n)	Discourse Implications and Power Effects
Political Genealogy	*Shomin-kei* (Ordinary people, non-elite, non-military, new regional leadership coaches).	*Moto gunjin*, aristocratic, *Suharuto and moto musumemuko* (Trajectory of the New Order dynasty).	Jokowi is legitimized as an organic representation of the people; Prabowo is suspected of being a factor in the restoration of military feudalism.
Leadership Practices	*Burusukan*, *shimin mesen* (citizen's perspective), dialogical, quick to provide technocratic solutions in the field.	Centralistic, relying on mass speeches in grand stadiums, elitist rhetorical orations.	The political transformation from elitist ceremonies shifted towards direct public service managerialism.
Economic Orientation	Massive physical infrastructure development (highways, dams, MRT), foreign capital openness (*FDI).*	Populist nationalistic protectionism, anti-foreign capital (*gaishi tanomi hitei*), attacks the state debt.	Jokowi represents market predictability for Japanese investors; Prabowo represents regulatory uncertainty and protectionism.
Relationship with Religion	Stuck defensively (*narifuri kamatte irarenai*); cooperating with Ma'ruf Amin as a rational defensive tactic.	Offensive opportunists; actively allied with radical mass organizations (*FPIs*) to mobilize fanatical masses.	Tolerance is marginalized by both camps, but Jokowi is seen as a "lesser evil" alternative.
Institutional Compliance	Waiting for the official results of the KPU (*kōshiki happyō o matsu*); appealing to the maturity of the nation (*seijuku shita kokka*).	Rejecting the results of a quick count, claiming a unilateral victory, *haiboku wo mitomete henna* (rejecting defeat).	The inauguration of Jokowi as a figure who guards the rule of law; the delegitimization of Prabowo as a threat to civil stability.

Source: Data presented in the original manuscript.

Advanced Micro-Textual Analysis: Transitivity, Modality, Appraisal, and Metaphor

To prove the analytical accuracy of a high standard, the linguistic data of the corpus was dissected through functional grammatical systems and evaluation theory. The transitivity analysis of the Functional Grammar system (SFL Halliday) revealed how ideational meanings and discourses are produced. In the Joko-shi ga shokunin no koe wo kiite ita (D1) clause, the process of verbal behavior-mental (listening) with actor Joko Widodo and participants affected by the voice of the Cirebon rattan craftsman (shokunin no koe) builds an empathetic and responsive leadership discourse to the economic grievances of the grassroots community. In the clause daitōryō kōtai wo motomeru undō wo chian tōkyoku ni chin'atsu sasetari (D1), the causative-material process (suppression) with Joko Widodo's actor (implicit) via the apparatus and participants affected by the presidential change movement (undō) reveals the repressive actions of the state controlled by the executive elite in order to silence the democratic opposition. In the clause of Suharuto-ryū no chūō shūken ni 'tokei no hari' wo

modosou to neratte iru (D1), the material-desiderative process (aiming backward) with actor Prabowo Subianto and participants affected by the centralization of power in the style of Suharto accuses the challenger actor of trying to undermine the achievement of regional autonomy through retrograde political aggression. In the clause ikyōto e no shūgeki de shirareru shūdan... 'kōhosha' to mo yobikaketa (D1), the verbal process (calling/hailing) with FPI/radical group actors and affected participants Prabowo Subianto associates Prabowo's religious legitimacy with intolerant factions who are used to using physical violence. In the Joko-shi no saisen ga kakujitsu ni natta clause (D4), the intensive relational process (attributive becoming) with the actors of the Presidential Election (Daitōryō senkyō) and participants affected by Jokowi's re-election (saisen ga kakujitsu) removes the space of doubt (closure) and confirms the objective reality of the incumbent's victory before the KPU is completed.

The analysis of the modality system (epistemic and deontic) reveals the effects of discourse and ideological function. In the clause of saisen ga kakujitsu shi sareru (D1, D3), the high level of epistemic modality (certainty/probability) with the grammatical realization of kakujitsushi sareru (seen as certain) creates a discourse certainty (truth claim) of Jokowi's victory and closes the space for speculation of the opposing camp. In the clause of Isuramu shidōsha wo erabanakereba makeru kamo shirenai (D1), the middle-level epistemic modality (possibility) with the realization of kamo shirenai (it may happen) reveals Jokowi's fatal electoral vulnerability in the face of the pressure of the Islamic masses. In the tokei no hari wo modosou to neratte iru (D1) clause, the modality of volition/volition in the form of modosou intent + verb nerau attributes a deliberate negative intention to Prabowo to undermine democratization. In the hisan na shūkyō aidentitī seiji ga nedzuita yō da clause (D1), the evidential epistemic modality with the realization of yō da (seemingly/seemingly) constructs an external analytical conclusion regarding the decay of the quality of democracy by sectarianism. In the seiken un'ei wo kenjitsu ni ninatte moraitai (D4) clause, the deontic modality/high level of expectation (obligation/desire) with the realization of moraitai (expected to do) provides normative instructions of the Japanese media's institutions to the elected president to maintain stability. In the saishin no chūi wo haratte hoshii clause (D4), the deontic modality/high level of invocation (imperative/wish) with the realization of hoshii (desired/requested) voices the institutional demands of the Asahi to the new regime to stem the socio-religious segregation.

The analysis of the attitude system (Martin & White's Appraisal System) maps linguistic evaluation. In the realm of Judgement: Propriety, the lexicon of ikyōto e no shūgeki de shirareru (known for attacks on non-Muslims) with a negative polarity and the target of FPI/political allies of Prabowo's mass organizations gives birth to ethical delegitimization of the opposition camp and exposes the use of religion-based violence in elections. In the realm of Judgement: Capacity, the lexicon kokusei ni ashiba wo motazu, tasūhakōsaku ni fuete na (not grounded in the national realm, awkward lobbying the majority) with negative polarity and Joko Widodo's target explains Jokowi's structural weaknesses that force him to take political compromises and legal repression. In the realm of Appreciation: Reaction, the lexicon of dokusai ga owatte... tōnan ajia no 'yūtōsei' (exemplary student of Southeast Asia) with its positive polarity and post-Suharto Indonesian democracy goals builds a narrative of Western/international pride over Indonesia's peaceful transition which is now in danger of regression. In the realm of Appreciation: Composition (Structure/Performance), the lexicon 7-pāsento no keizai seichō wa, ashibumi jōtai ga tsudzuku (7% economic growth continues to be held back in place) with negative polarity and the target of Jokowi's economic campaign promises deconstructs claims of economic development success and highlights structural stagnation and industrial congestion. In the realm of Judgement: Tenacity, the lexicon kurīn na seiji shisei to shitashimiyasusa (clean political attitude and friendliness) with positive

polarity and Joko Widodo's targets (quoted from the residents of Elvi) reproduces electoral legitimacy in the eyes of the urban middle class based on anti-corruption morality and proximity.

The analysis of conceptual metaphor mapping (Lakoff & Johnson) dismantles the ideological function. The expression Minshu-ka ashibumi (民主化足踏み) with the realm of physical movement sources stomping on the spot without stepping forward (ashibumi) and the objective realm of the development of Indonesia's democratization process constructs political stagnation: elections run procedurally, but the substance of civil liberties stops evolving. The expression Tōnan ajia no 'yūtōsei' (東南アジアの「優等生」) with the realm of educational institutions, exemplary students, and the domain of the target realm of Indonesia's political governance reputation, places Southeast Asian countries in the global moral hierarchy and considers that Indonesia is in danger of losing its elite status. The expression Tokei no hari wo modosou (時計の針を戻そう) with the realm of the source of chronological mechanics turning back the clock and the realm of the target of restoring the New Order model of centralization of power by Prabowo radiates the meaning that Prabowo's political ideas are an anachronistic threat that opposes the direction of modernity civilization. The expression Seiji no tōryūmon (政治の登竜門) with the realm of Chinese mythological sources, the dragon gate (Dragon Gate) where fish jumps into dragons and the realm of the target position of regional head (mayor/governor) justifies decentralization as a new leadership mobility mechanism that gave birth to figures such as Ridwan Kamil. The expression Enjo suru gawa / sareru gawa (援助する側・される側) with the realm of sources of philanthropic hierarchy of the donor versus the recipient of aid and the target realm of Indonesia-Japan bilateral economic relations deconstructs the past colonial paternalistic relationship/donor towards an equal strategic partnership.

Discursive Practices: Chains of Intertextuality, Elite Voices, and the Exclusion of Marginal Voices

Fairclough's second dimension analyzes how discourse is produced and consumed through quotation patterns. The Asahi Shimbun consistently practices the dominance of technocratic and elitist academic voices to reinforce its claims of truth. The strategy of intertextual discourse and news source selection can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Intertextual Discourse Strategy and News Source Selection

Source Categories	Figures / Entities Cited	Speech Representation Patterns	Rhetorical Function and Transformation of Meaning
International Academics	Prof. Jeffrey Winters (Northwestern Univ.) & Ben Bland (Lowy Institute)	Indirect *Reporting* with attribution of authoritative expertise	Importing Western political science authorities to confirm the "end of the Suharto era" as well as the "tragic root of identity politics" (*hisan na shūkyō aidentitī*).
Japanese Business Community	Hirofumi Takeda (Chairman of the Jakarta Japan Club / President Director of Sojitz Indonesia)	Direct Speech on the foreign investment climate	Transforming the election narrative from citizens' rights into an instrument for evaluating the certainty of Japanese capital corporate profits.

Source Categories	Figures / Entities Cited	Speech Representation Patterns	Rhetorical Function and Transformation of Meaning
National Political Elite	Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) & Ridwan Kamil	Official *Releases* & Exclusive Interviews	Articulating the ruling elite's concerns over national divisions while legitimizing the career trajectory of regional leadership succession.
Lay *Voices*	Sumantri (rattan laborer), Pancrasius (Flores farmer), Elvi (housewife), Juan Ricardo (golput Christian voter)	Limited Direct Quotes (*Micro-testimonials*)	Serving as an instrument of "human *interest framing*"; their voices are arranged to confirm the journalist's thesis on the paradox of leadership.
Independent Survey Agencies	CSIS, Kompas, SMRC, Indonesian Political Indicators	Numerical Tabulation	Using the prestige of statistical science objectivity to suppress the manipulative victory claims of the Prabowo camp after the vote.

Source: Data presented in the original manuscript.

The intertextual practices of the Asahi Shimbun show a pattern of engagement (heteroglossic contraction). When discussing Islamic polarization and intolerance, Asahi quotes SBY's statement:

「選挙で特定の宗教を誇示すべきではない。 国が分断されてしまう」 ("We cannot flaunt certain religions in elections. The country will be divided.")

This quote was strategically chosen to provide moral legitimacy for Asahi's criticism of Prabowo's campaign strategy at the Gelora Bung Karno Stadium featuring FPI's appeals. Nevertheless, the pattern of exclusion is evident: the Asahi Shimbun leaves no room at all for the articulation of the voices of the undercurrent Islamists to explain the roots of their economic oppression that drives support for Prabowo. Religious aspirations are a priori classified into pejorative labels: "extreme", "radical", and "endangering the state" (haigaiteki na taido).

Social Practices: Democracy Construction, Hegemony Stability, and Japan's Geoeconomics

In the macro dimension of social practice, the analysis shifts to the deconstruction of the ideology that operates behind the journalistic text of the Asahi Shimbun. There are three main ideological formations articulated in the entire corpus. First, the Techno-Stability Hegemony which locates on the title Kanyō no seiji ga antei kizuku (The politics of tolerance builds stability). This formation constructs power relations in the form of the subordination of mass sovereignty under the control of the technocratic governance of the bureaucratic elite and the capital market. Japan's national and geostrategic interests served are the need for certainty of the stability of the Indonesian archipelago in order to secure the shipping of energy tanker fleets from the Middle East. Second, the Ideology of Secular Multicultural Liberalism which locates on D1 & D4: the defense of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (kokuze) and regret for the criminalization of the former governor of Jakarta (Ahok). This formation favors the hegemony of post-war Japanese/Western-style universal values over local Islamic political aspirations, with the aim of counteracting the rise of Islamic sharia law or religious protectionism that can

discriminate against expatriates as well as Japanese banking/corporate regulations. Third, the Geoeconomic Capital Partnership Ideology that locates on D1 & D4: the spotlight on the Jakarta MRT project, the JBIC investment survey, and the call to end the "give/recipient" paradigm. This formation transformed the postcolonial asymmetric relationship/ODA into the interdependent hegemony of the transnational corporate market, with the aim of securing contracts for Indonesia's national strategic projects from China's capital expansion of infrastructure (Belt and Road Initiative).

The relationship between election representation and Japan's economic interests is transparently exposed in coverage of the inauguration of the Jakarta MRT. Text Data 5 (Asahi, April 12, 2019): 1-nichi ni wa, Nihon no zenmen shien de, Indonesia-hatsu no chikatetsu wo fukumu Jakaruta toshi kōsoku tetsudō ga honkaku kaigyō shita. Daga, Joko-shi wa 3-gatsu gejun no kaigyō shikiten de seika wo kyōchō shitsutsu mo, Nihon e no kansha no kotoba wa nakatta. Seifu kankei-sha wa 'Purabowo-shi no hihan mo ari, ii nikukatta node wa' to oshihakaru. ("On the 1st, with full support from Japan, the full operation of the Jakarta integrated highway covering the first subway in Indonesia officially began. However, although Mr. Joko emphasized the results of these achievements at the opening ceremony at the end of March, there was no word of thanks to Japan. Government officials suspected, 'It may be difficult to say, one of which is because of the criticism from Mr. Prabowo.") The above paragraph shows the hidden diplomatic-economic disappointment of the Japanese press. The choice of the phrase Nihon no zenmen shien de (with Japan's full support) demands reciprocity of symbolic recognition from the Indonesian head of state. Jokowi's disregard for gratitude is interpreted as clear evidence of how the pressure of anti-foreign discourse orchestrated by the challenger camp (Prabowo) has distorted normal diplomatic relations. The Asahi Shimbun views Prabowo's sovereignty rhetoric as a disruption to the ethics of bilateral investment partnerships.

The culmination of the discursive conceptualization of the Asahi Shimbun is manifested in the text of the Editorial of April 19, 2019. The title of this article places Indonesia within a broader regional geopolitical framework. Data Text 6 (Asahi, April 19, 2019): Tōnan'ajia no betsu no shuyōkoku Tai wa, gunsei no konran kara nukedasete inai. Soredake ni Indonesia no jūyō-sei wa mashite iru. Minshu shugi ga hatten sureba, chiiki zentai no antei ni kiyo suru darou. ("The other major major country in Southeast Asia, Thailand, has not been able to get out of the chaos of the military regime. Therefore, Indonesia's importance is increasing. If democracy develops, it will contribute to the stability of the entire region.") The Asahi Shimbun frames the success of the Indonesian presidential election as the antithesis to the failure of the Thai military junta. Indonesia's democracy is considered important not primarily for the emancipatory welfare of its people alone, but because of its function as an anchor of regional system stability (chiiki zentai no antei ni kiyo suru). For Japan, the Southeast Asian region fragmented by a military regime or radical Islamist theocracy will threaten freedom of navigation (Indo-Pacific maritime security) and the production chains of transnational corporations. Thus, the editorial preference of the Asahi Shimbun that leans towards Jokowi is essentially the rationality of preserving a predictable governance.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the critical discourse surrounding Indonesia’s 2019 presidential election in the Japanese newspaper Asahi Shimbun, addressing three research questions concerning linguistic representations, discursive framing, and ideological implications. First, regarding the linguistic representation of presidential candidates, the analysis of lexical choices, transitivity patterns, and modality revealed contrasting portrayals of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. Joko Widodo was represented ambivalently: on the one hand, he was

portrayed as a reform-oriented, pragmatic leader with a common touch (shomin-ha); on the other hand, his leadership was associated with concerns about authoritarian tendencies and the use of coercive political methods (kyōken-teki shuhō) reminiscent of Indonesia's New Order era. In contrast, Prabowo Subianto was frequently characterized through references to his military background (moto gunjin), his former familial ties to President Suharto, and concerns about potential democratic regression. These representations reflected distinct evaluative patterns that positioned the candidates within broader narratives of political reform, authoritarian legacies, and democratic continuity.

Second, regarding the framing of political contestation and democracy, the analysis of discursive practices identified patterns of ideological polarization and technocratic-institutional framing. Asahi Shimbun portrayed Indonesian democracy as experiencing political stagnation (ashibumi), characterized by the coexistence of relatively peaceful electoral procedures and persistent challenges involving religious identity politics, political polarization, and voter disengagement (golput). References to international observers, Japanese business organizations such as the Jakarta Japan Club, and public opinion surveys contributed to an institutional framing that emphasized political stability, electoral legitimacy, and governance performance. These source-selection patterns suggested that expert assessments and economic perspectives played an important role in shaping the newspaper's representations of Indonesia's democratic development.

Third, regarding the reproduction of ideology and power relations, the analysis of social practices suggested that Asahi Shimbun's coverage situated Indonesian democratic developments within Japan's broader geopolitical and economic interests. Electoral competition was discussed alongside concerns about Japanese investment, regional labor conditions, and the security of maritime trade routes in the Indo-Pacific. Within this context, the discourse of political tolerance was represented not only as a democratic principle supporting peaceful coexistence in Indonesia's multicultural society but also as a condition associated with economic predictability and regional stability. These findings suggested that the selected texts connected normative democratic values with pragmatic considerations regarding Japan's economic interests in Southeast Asia, although they did not establish deliberate editorial intentions or direct economic influence over news production.

Theoretically, this study contributed to critical discourse analysis by illustrating how selected Japanese media texts represented democratic developments in Indonesia through interconnected narratives of political stability, institutional legitimacy, and economic interests. Methodologically, the integration of Fairclough's three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework, Halliday's transitivity system, and Martin and White's Appraisal framework provided a structured approach to examining linguistic and ideological representations in Japanese-language news texts written in kanji and kana. However, the findings were limited to a purposively selected corpus of four news and editorial texts published by Asahi Shimbun in April 2019 and therefore could not be generalized to the newspaper's overall editorial orientation or the broader Japanese media landscape. Future research should expand the corpus and incorporate comparative analyses of other major Japanese newspapers, including Yomiuri Shimbun and Nihon Keizai Shimbun (Nikkei), across longer periods encompassing subsequent political developments, including the post-election reconciliation process and Indonesia's 2024 presidential election. Such comparisons could provide a more comprehensive understanding of ideological variation, evolving media representations, and the relationship between democratic discourse and geopolitical interests in Japanese coverage of Indonesian politics.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Najih Imtihani was solely responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, data collection, corpus selection, critical discourse and linguistic analysis, interpretation of the findings, manuscript preparation, review, and final approval of the article.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The author declares that generative artificial intelligence was used solely to assist in improving the language clarity, grammatical accuracy, and readability of the manuscript. Generative AI was not used to generate or replace the research data, conduct the critical discourse analysis, or formulate the substantive research findings and conclusions. The author reviewed and verified the AI-assisted content and assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the final manuscript.

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