Analysis of Fairclough's Critical Discourse on Religion Visualization in the Politics of the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election

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Abstract. Social cohesion and patterns of political behavior of the community are often related to the use of religious symbols as a tool to mobilize political interests in the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia. The tendency to visualize religion in politics can be seen in political contestation in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. This phenomenon can cause social polarization and be used as a tool for identity politics. This study aims to analyze the forms of religious visualization in the 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia. The method used is qualitative research with content analysis with the Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis approach, namely description, interpretation, and explanation of Instagram social media uploads from three presidential candidates, namely Anies Baswedan, Prabowo Subianto, and Ganjar Pranowo. The results show that the three candidates use religious symbols to build political imagery, with different intensities and approaches used. Anies Baswedan often uses religious rhetoric and Islamic and Christian symbols in his campaigns, Ganjar Pranowo emphasizes interfaith harmony, while Prabowo Subianto tends to display a visualization of nationality and diversity. These findings confirm that social media is a key tool in building a religion-based political narrative, which can contribute to the formation of public perception. This study contributes to the critical literature on politics by providing insights into how identity politics works in the digital realm and its impact on democratic practices in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Political activities related to the presidential election in Indonesia that visualize religious issues, whether together with religious figures, texts, advertisements, or media are closely associated with identity politics. Identity politics is considered to create polarization in the midst of society. The excessive use of religious issues in relation to practical politics on behalf of certain groups can result in a split in political views that can lead to intolerance and acts of violence that occur in society (Purba & Widodo, 2020).

Political and religious phenomena cannot be separated just like that in Indonesia. This is marked by the majority of Indonesia's population being adherents of Islam as many as 87.20%, then Protestant Christians 6.90%, Catholic Christians 2.90%, Hindus 1.70%, Buddhists 0.70%, and Confucians 0.05% (Portal Informasi Indonesia, 2024). The data can show the character of the Indonesian people who are quite religious which is often a concern in the process of implementing politics in Indonesia. Religion and religiosity are often quite significant markets in convincing and becoming tools of legitimacy from political parties or politicians. It is not surprising that

political narratives or campaigns in religious patterns have become a mainstream way in Indonesia today (Sipa, 2021).

On the other hand, Indonesian society can be said to be a modern society with technological developments. Where Indonesian people easily have access to technology. Internet users in Indonesia reach 76.8 percent of the total population of Indonesia. Meanwhile, 61.8 percent of the Indonesian population uses social media. In contrast to this number, the level of politeness of social media users in Indonesia was ranked 29th out of 32 countries which shows that most social media users in Indonesia cannot make good use of social media in interacting, reading and disseminating information. So that Indonesian people easily become targets of populism. Indonesian people can easily become targets to gain the support of populist figures in order to gain power with the tactic of using social media. Populism can cause social polarization in society, because it is built on the basis of the narrative of hatred between one group and another (Kurniawan, 2018). This also strengthens the fact that the development of information and communication technology, especially the internet and social media, opens up new spaces for people to participate in political discourse, express aspirations, and be directly involved in public decision-making (Wahidin et al., 2025).

In the previous General Election, the 2019 General Election in Indonesia, identity politics with anti-establishment sentiments strengthened again along with the development of the populism narrative. Interestingly, this anti-establishment attitude is often associated with various religious identities, where populist politicians portray the government as the party that gets rid of certain religious groups. A clear example of this phenomenon is the emergence of the "2019 Change of President" movement, the discourse of "Satan's party vs God's party", the call for people power, as well as various forms of distrust in the official institutions of election organizers such as the General Election Commission and the Constitutional Court, as well as independent institutions that organize quick counts (Ardipandanto, 2020).

Fairclough (2003) uses discourse analysis to see, especially the use of oral and written language that is present in society. However, in the discourse analysis, Fairclough explained further by including the existence of semiotic practices such as photographic models. The use of photos in discourse analysis as a form of nonverbal communication that needs to be considered. However, based on the use of language as a medium of discourse, Fairclough investigates language by looking for information on social theory as a matter related to the form of social practice.

In addition, Fairclough (2003) also always uses three types of frame of mind analysis in an effort to thoroughly study a series of certain discourse events. According to him, each discursive

event always has two aspects that are related to each other. This can be in the form of oral (speech) and written language (text). In each of these dimensions it shows that the discourse process is important to see how the text is produced and how the text is interpreted, so that it can be said to include social practice. In the analysis of social practice, to know and read an event, it is necessary to read by looking at political aspects, because all political aspects cannot be separated between the relationship of domination and power.

Discourse analysis as a social practice can be seen in an analytical framework consisting of description, interpretation, and explanation. At the description level, the text is the initial stage in a discourse, the text is still intact as a text that has not undergone a change in meaning. Meanwhile, at the level of interpretation, the position of the text should be questioned. It is related to how the production process of a text and how a text is understood as a result of interaction or negotiation in the process. At the explanatory stage, the text that has been present with all its connections between interaction and social context, with the determination of social processes. This can be understood by seeing that the text is produced and undergoes the process of interpretation, so that it has an influence or social effect (Fairclough, 2013).

The analysis of critical discourse and political issues has become one of the most popular studies in political science. This can be seen in several previous studies that are quite relevant. Syifaul Fauziyah and Kharisma Nasionalita (2018) show that at the micro level, the emphasis is on the word "kafir", although the emphasis is on the counter (opposition to the direction of the qibla), and the macro emphasis on the involvement of institutions, politics, and discourse makers into media production. The difference between this study and the researcher lies in the object of study. If the previous researcher used the object of study of the film The Enlightenment. Meanwhile, the researcher uses the object of the study of religious visualization in politics which can be obtained through electronic media and social media. The similarity of the research with the previous researcher is that they both use the Norman Fairclough analysis framework.

Another research by Fadel Mozefani et al. (2020) which shows that with an analytical approach, the critical discourse of Teun A. Van Dijk is seen in dimensions; (1) text structure, (2) social cognition, and (3) social context, which are then linked to Harolld Laswell's theory of mass communication which is summarized using the mass communication model in form, function, and meaning. Thus, a mass communication model with text structure (form), social cognition (function) and social context (meaning) was obtained. The difference between this study and the researcher lies in the object of study and the framework of critical discourse analysis. The previous researcher used the object of speech study, while the researcher used the object of the study of the visualization of religion in politics which can be obtained through electronic media

or social media. Another difference lies in the analytical framework used. The researcher used Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis while the previous researcher used Teun A. Van Dijk. The similarity of the research conducted by the previous researcher lies in the type of research, namely both conducting critical discourse analysis research.

Based on this explanation, it can be seen that the purpose of this study is to find out the form of religious visualization in the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, as well as to find out the practice of religious visualization discourse in the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election from the perspective of Norman Fairclough. This research is expected to fill the gap from previous research related to the political content, identity, and religious visualization of presidential candidates in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election on the Instagram social media of their respective candidates. This is different from other studies that only focus on one specific figure with conventional media such as speeches. So, the purpose of this research is to find out what and how the practice of religious visualization discourse in the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election is carried out with the Norman Fairclough approach.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is a content analysis research on the visualization of religion in politics related to the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. This type of research uses a qualitative method with the Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis approach. Qualitative research, according to Creswell, is one of the methods in exploring and understanding the meaning of phenomena departing from individuals and social groups of society by following the rules of the research process in collecting, processing, and analyzing data (Chali et al., 2022).

This research is a content analysis, so the primary source of data is the visualization of religion in relation to the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election in the form of images and video shows on Instagram social media accounts for each candidate for the 2024 Indonesian presidential candidate for one year. The data was obtained from the uploads of each presidential candidate from February 2023 to February 2024. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from various supporting literature related to the research conducted.

Candidate	Instagram account	Number of posts analyzed	Time range
Anies Baswedan	@aniesbaswedan	147 posts	Feb 2023- Feb 2024
Prabowo Subianto	@prabowo	62 posts	Feb 2023- Feb 2024
Ganjar Pranowo	@ganjar_pranowo	212 posts	Feb 2023- Feb 2024

Table 1. Number of uploads of candidates

Regarding the content analysis in this study, the data collection techniques carried out are in the form of: (a) looking for visualization data related to the research objectives, (b) conducting

readings related to the data that has been obtained to become material for analysis, (c) grouping data that has previously been found based on the results of data readings. The data analysis carried out in this study consists of several stages. The first stage is to identify the data, then the second stage is to classify the data, then to present the data, and the last stage is to draw conclusions. Each of these stages is carried out a cross-checking mechanism between researchers to avoid subjective bias.

RESULT

Data obtained from each Indonesian presidential candidate for the 2024-2029 period was obtained within one year. So, some of the uploads related to this research data are each as a potential presidential candidate and have not been officially designated as a presidential candidate by the General Election Commission. However, the data was still taken because it was considered relevant to research conducted related to the visualization of religion in the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. The relevance of this data is evidenced by the rampant discourse that is present in the midst of the community related to the issue of presidential candidates in the 2024 general election. In addition, uploads are made on social media accounts to present an image to the public, especially social media users themselves.

Based on the results of research that has been carried out related to the visualization of religion in the politics of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election in each candidate. The form of religious visualization carried out by the number one candidate or Anies Rasyid Baswedan is in the form of visualization of mosques, Islamic boarding schools, meetings of religious leaders, pilgrimages to the graves of religious leaders, attending events affiliated with religion, visiting dioceses, and monasteries. For more clarity, you can see the following table:

Forms of Visualization	Number of Posts
Mosque	25
Islamic Boarding School	38
Religious Leaders	30
Tomb Pilgrimage	21
Episcopate	1
Vihara	1
Religious Affiliate Events	53

Table 2. Number of Anies Baswedan's uploads about the form of religious visualization

Meanwhile, the religious visualization carried out by the number 2 presidential candidate, Prabowo Subianto, on his Instagram social media account is less than that of presidential candidates Anies Rasyid Baswedan and Ganjar Pranowo, with a total of 62 forms of religious visualization. For more clarity, the following table can be seen related to the form of religious visualization in the politics of Indonesia's 2024 presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto.

Forms of Visualization	Number of Posts
Mosque	15
Islamic Boarding School	5
Religious Leaders	15
Tomb Pilgrimage	5
Church	1
Religious Affiliate Events	27

Table 3. Number of Prabowo Subianto's uploads about the form of religious visualization

Furthermore, the religious visualization carried out by candidate number 3 or Ganjar Pranowo has similarities to the religious visualization carried out by Anies Rasyid Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto on their respective Instagram social media accounts. For further clarity, see the following table.

Forms of Visualization	Number of Posts
Mosque	16
Islamic Boarding School	39
Religious Leaders	83
Tomb Pilgrimage	22
Episcopate	8
Vihara	3
Temple	2
Church	3
Religious Affiliate Events	66

Table 4. Number of Ganjar Pranowo's uploads about the form of religious visualization

From the three tables, tables 2 to 4, it can be seen that the presidential candidates in the 2024 general presidential election visualized several religious symbols in their uploads on Instagram in the last 1 year, from February 2023 to February 2024, before the election was held. This can be seen in the image below.
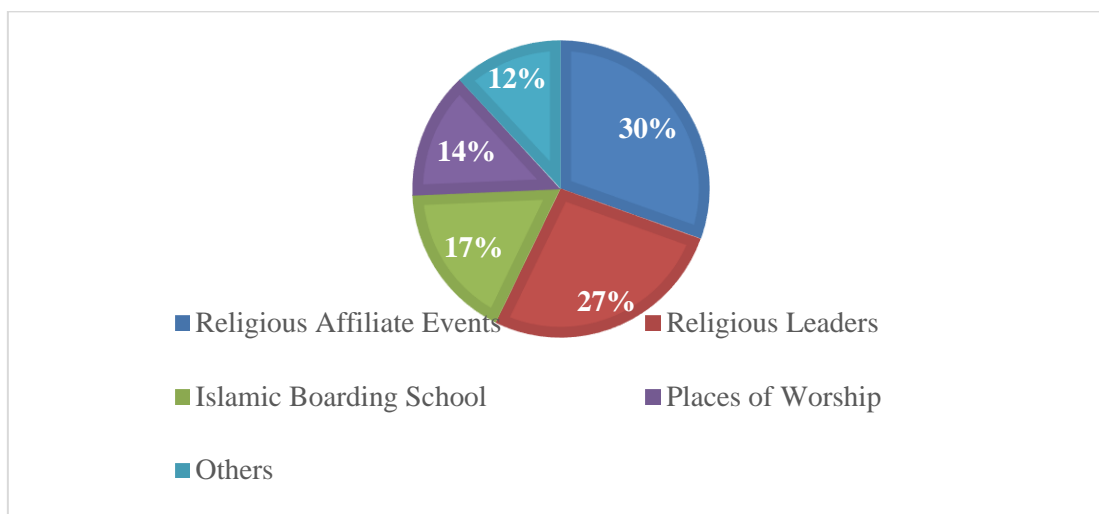

Figure 1. Number of Religious Visualization Percentages in Presidential Candidates' Uploads

The forms of visualization, as shown in Figure 1, are dominated by activities affiliated with certain religions, such as gatherings with religious leaders, Harlah activities or birthdays of religious leaders, Haul activities, joint prayer activities, and Christmas activities. Furthermore, it was also followed by various uploads that showed closeness to religious leaders. Likewise with the visualization of houses of worship, which are still dominated by uploads of activities in mosques, and religious educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools.

DISCUSSION

An image should indeed be formed or created to the community, because it is one of the ways to communicate through the mass media. The delivery of the image of an individual or figure and institution also influences to instill trust or credibility in him. A positive picture will affect people's decisions to act, in this case determining choices in elections (Abdullah, 2019). Firmanzah through Abdullah (2019) revealed that there are indicators that take part in creating an image as marketing. The first indicator shows that building an image takes a relatively long time and cannot be done instantly. Furthermore, that there needs to be consistency in various aspects by a figure or political party, including in conveying ideology, and then that the public gives impressions and opinions about political figures or political parties. These various phenomena in the 2024 presidential election in Indonesia, as a democratic system, have long-term implications for citizens' attitudes towards the legitimacy of the election results (Fernando et al., 2024).

The Practice of Anies Rasyid Baswedan's Religious Visualization Discourse in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

Anies Rasyid Baswedan consistently integrates Islamic and Christian symbolism throughout his campaign as a strategy to frame himself as both inclusive and morally upright. His Instagram uploads emphasize visits to mosques, Islamic boarding schools, grave pilgrimages, and Christian religious events. These visualizations are not incidental but calculated representations intended to engage voters through religious emotionality and familiarity. The high frequency of posts related to events with religious affiliations (53 uploads) affirms this tendency.

At the descriptive level, Anies employs religious rituals such as *haul*, *sholawatan*, and interfaith celebrations to convey sincerity and spiritual grounding. This is exemplified in his participation in the Safari Natal event, where his interaction with Archbishop Mgr. Agustinus Agus and symbolic Christian elements like crosses and Christmas trees underscore his inclusive outreach (Baswedan, 2023a).

In the interpretive dimension, these visuals serve dual purposes: broadening appeal beyond conservative bases and crafting a political image aligned with values of tolerance and reform. The repeated use of the word "change" in captions emphasizes a thematic commitment to transformation grounded in communal religiosity (Baswedan, 2023d; Kurniasih & Setianti, 2024). On the explanatory level, the discourse reflects deeper social practices of populism and identity politics. His assertion that "the government must not be hostile to the ulama" (Baswedan, 2023b) critiques the status quo while presenting Anies as a moral alternative. The alignment with Islamic scholars and pesantren legitimizes his leadership through religious capital, echoing patterns identified by Prawoto (2018) and Hertiana et al. (2024).

Prabowo Subianto's Practice of Religious Visualization Discourse in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election with Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

Prabowo Subianto's visualization of religion focuses on nationalist-religious integration rather than explicit theological symbolism. Compared to other candidates, his religious uploads are fewer (62 posts), yet they are rich in cultural resonance and social respectability, such as attending national prayer gatherings and visiting prominent pesantren. At the descriptive level, his presence at events like the Haul of KH. Damanhuri Romly and the National Prayer at Istiqlal Mosque is depicted through images of solemn gatherings and respectful posture among revered clerics (Subianto, 2023b). He incorporates expressions like *"Alhamdulillah"* and invokes spiritual unity to emphasize sincerity.

In the interpretive layer, these acts highlight Prabowo's efforts to humanize his leadership through humility and spiritual affiliation. His interaction with Gus Miftah and Pastor Gilbert (Subianto, 2023a) constructs a narrative of interfaith cooperation, positioning him as a guardian of pluralism and religious harmony. This aligns with his broader political branding as a nationalist with cultural sensitivity (Wijanarko et al., 2025).

On the explanatory level, these uploads represent a bid to secure legitimacy through traditional Islamic institutions and interreligious visibility. By engaging with pesantren communities and respected spiritual figures, Prabowo extends his authority to symbolic religious domains, which reinforces moral leadership in the public consciousness (Ridho & Mirwan, 2022; Ayyaz, 2024). This mirrors broader trends in Indonesian politics where religious authority bolsters electoral legitimacy (Subqi, 2021).

The Practice of Ganjar Pranowo's Religious Visualization Discourse in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election with a Norman Fairclough Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

Ganjar Pranowo adopts a more visibly pluralistic and tolerant visual narrative, leveraging interfaith unity and cultural openness to construct his political image. His Instagram posts (212 uploads) are the most voluminous and diverse, including engagements with religious leaders from Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. At the descriptive level, Ganjar displays active involvement in interfaith prayers, dialogues, and visits to sacred sites of multiple religions. Captions like "knocking on the door of heaven with all the prayers of the kiai" (Pranowo, 2023) blend personal piety with communal blessing. His interaction with Kiai Sarkoso Subkhi, for instance, symbolizes not only respect but also receipt of divine legitimacy.

In the interpretive stage, this diversity is a conscious branding strategy that targets a wide demographic across religious and ethnic lines. Phrases such as "victory with dignity" and "do it in a good way" (Pranowo, 2023a) reflect Ganjar's emphasis on ethical politics. He contrasts his values with the implicit suggestion of dishonesty among rivals, appealing to the electorate's moral expectations (Bentzen & Gokmen, 2023). In the explanatory dimension, Ganjar's discourse highlights an effort to anchor his campaign in spiritual morality and interreligious solidarity. By showcasing joint prayers with religious leaders in regions like NTT, he frames unity and religious harmony as foundational pillars of his political message. His uploads serve not just as campaign tools but as performances of social identity formation and national integration (Wibisono, 2021; Barokah, 2023).

CONCLUSION

The study found that the visualization of religion in the 2024 presidential election was used by all candidates, but with a different approach. Anies Baswedan often uses religious symbols explicitly in his campaigns, Ganjar Pranowo emphasizes interfaith harmony, while Prabowo Subianto displays symbols of nationalism. These findings confirm that religion-based identity politics is increasingly strengthened by social media. The implications of this study show that regulations related to religion-based political campaigns on social media need to be clarified to prevent polarization. Further research can explore how the visualization of religion in politics influences voter decisions through interviews and field surveys.

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