

Determining the Ideology and Neutrality of Republika English News Online in Delivering Political News During the 2024 Presidential Election Campaign

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Abstract

This study examines the ideology and neutrality of Republika English News Online in reporting political news during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign. Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study applies Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (text, discourse practice, and social practice) to trace ideological representation, together with a four-indicator neutrality framework covering balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity [CHECK: the original abstract attributes this neutrality framework to Westerstahl, but no Westerstahl citation appears in the body of the source manuscript]. Data consisted of fifteen political news articles published by Republika English News Online during the official campaign period, 28 November 2023 to 10 February 2024, collected through documentation and analyzed qualitatively. The findings show that Republika English News Online did not explicitly endorse any presidential candidate; instead, it implicitly constructed an ideology emphasizing democracy, political ethics, transparency, public welfare, and national development through lexical choices, quotation patterns, issue selection, and framing. The outlet also generally fulfilled the four neutrality indicators, distributing coverage relatively evenly across the three candidate pairs, relying on direct quotation rather than editorial commentary, and situating statements within explanatory context, even though the selection of sources, quotations, and issues still carried implicit ideological weight. The study concludes that ideological representation and journalistic neutrality are not mutually exclusive in political news reporting, and that professionally produced news inevitably involves selection processes that shape political meaning even when factual accuracy is preserved.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; ideology; media neutrality; Norman Fairclough; Republika English News Online; 2024 presidential election

INTRODUCTION

Language is the primary instrument through which human beings build relationships, exchange ideas, and negotiate meaning in social life (Sari et al., 2024; Mailani et al., 2022; Revita et al., 2023). Beyond its communicative function, language operates as a social practice capable of shaping, sustaining, and disrupting ideological structures, particularly within the political sphere (Marzuki, 2024). In this context, mass media functions as a central agent in the production and reproduction of public opinion, and the discourse it circulates rarely conveys information alone; it also carries ideological constructs that influence perception, attitude, and political preference (Nasution et al., 2025; Padilah et al., 2020). This dynamic becomes especially salient during election campaigns, when media coverage functions as a principal channel through which candidates, issues, and democratic values are represented to the public (Yanti et al., 2024).

Within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is treated as a social practice saturated with relations of power and interest rather than a neutral vehicle for facts (Rosita & Hamdani, 2024). Ideology, understood as a structured system of ideas, beliefs, and values pursued by particular groups (Karomani, 2014), manifests in journalistic practice through diction, narrative structure, and the sequencing of information that guides audience perception. Journalistic

neutrality, by contrast, is the normative expectation that media remain impartial, balanced, and free from editorial bias (Wibawa, 2020). In practice, however, this ideal is frequently strained by the commercial and political pressures that intensify during campaign periods (Pangaribuan et al., 2024).

Prior CDA research has repeatedly shown that political media discourse is rarely neutral. Comparative work on Indonesian outlets has found systematic language strategies that favor particular political actors (Zurriyati et al., 2023), while studies of digital media have shown that even ostensibly balanced platforms shape public issue narratives through selective framing (Yunanto et al., 2024). Related work on candidate discourse in broadcast interviews (Salsabila & Nurhayati, 2025) and on television neutrality ahead of the 2024 election (Hafiz et al., 2023) confirms that ideological and neutrality concerns extend across media formats. However, these studies have concentrated on Indonesian-language print, broadcast, or social media discourse; none has examined an English-language, Islamic-affiliated outlet such as *Republika English News Online*, whose international readership and institutional history as part of a Muslim-community media group (Fathurokhmah, 2015) make its coverage a distinct case for testing whether ideology and neutrality can coexist.

This study addresses that gap by applying Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model, which examines text, discourse practice, and

social practice as an integrated whole (Munfarida, 2014), together with the four journalistic neutrality indicators of balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity (Rahim et al., 2024). This combined framework allows ideological representation and professional neutrality to be assessed as two related, rather than mutually exclusive, dimensions of the same body of news texts.

Accordingly, this study aims to reveal how *Republika English News Online* represented ideology and maintained neutrality in its political coverage during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign (28 November 2023 – 10 February 2024). Its novelty lies in the joint analysis of ideology and neutrality within an English-language Islamic-affiliated news outlet using Fairclough's model, offering a case that speaks to both media studies and discourse analysis scholarship. The findings are expected to inform critical media literacy among readers, provide media practitioners with an empirical benchmark for editorial neutrality, and extend the application of Fairclough's framework to English-medium Indonesian political journalism.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, chosen because the research aims to interpret ideological meaning and neutrality positioning in political news texts rather than to measure them quantitatively (Sugiyono, 2015). The research was conducted on *Republika*

English News Online, selected for its position as a moderate English-language Islamic media outlet in Indonesia and its coverage of the 2024 presidential election campaign. The analytical approach followed Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model, which integrates text analysis, discourse practice, and social practice to connect the linguistic structure of news (micro level), its production process (meso level), and its socio-political context (macro level) (Fairclough, 2013).

Primary data comprised fifteen political news articles published by *Republika English News Online* during the official campaign period of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, 28 November 2023 to 10 February 2024, selected because they directly reported presidential candidates and campaign-related political issues (see Table 1 and the appended data list). Secondary data consisted of scholarly literature on media ideology, journalistic neutrality, and CDA used to contextualize the analysis. Data were collected through documentation, namely the selection, storage, and classification of news texts published on the *Republika English News Online* site (Rumina, 2024).

The researcher served as the primary instrument, supported by three tools: a text-analysis sheet based on Fairclough's CDA categories (diction, modality, narrative structure, metaphor, and framing); a discourse-strategy matrix following Ruth Wodak's model (nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation); and thematic

coding used to group findings under the two major themes of ideological representation and editorial neutrality. Data analysis proceeded through Fairclough's three interpretive stages: text analysis (diction, syntax, metaphor, modality, and narrative structure), discourse-practice analysis (sourcing, editing, and editorial direction), and social-practice analysis (Republika's institutional position, the broader political climate, and national polarization ahead of the election).

Data validity was addressed through four qualitative strategies (Bungin, 2007): credibility, achieved through methodological and theoretical triangulation combining Fairclough's and Wodak's models; transferability, supported by rich contextual description; dependability, maintained through transparent documentation of the analytical process; and confirmability, established through an auditable trail of raw data, analytical notes, and interpretive results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Ideological Representation

At the textual level, Republika English News Online consistently paired presidential candidates with positively valenced diction, direct quotation, and metaphor, producing implicit rather than explicit ideological representation. Reports on the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka pair emphasized responsiveness and problem-solving, as in the coverage of Kaesang Pangarep's

campaign tour through Sumatra:

Excerpt 1 (News 1)

"We toured Sumatra to absorb people's aspirations, hear, and offer solutions that we can work with."

The verbs absorb and offer solutions frame campaign activity as responsive listening rather than mere political mobilization, constructing an image of a candidate attentive to public need. A parallel pattern appears in coverage of Anies Baswedan, where repetition functions as the primary ideological device. In reporting Anies's appeal for presidential neutrality, the term neutral recurs throughout the article:

Excerpt 3 (News 3)

"Like his statement I hold that he is neutral."

By foregrounding and repeating neutral, the outlet positions presidential impartiality as a core democratic value without stating an editorial opinion, allowing the source's own words to carry the ideological weight. Ganjar Pranowo's coverage, in turn, is anchored in the vocabulary of hope and transformation:

Excerpt 4 (News 4)

"This is our bounding today, and elections are a hope for a struggle for change."

Here, hope and change reframe the election beyond electoral competition, aligning Ganjar with a narrative of social betterment. A comparable strategy of

moral framing appears in coverage of Anies's campaign in Bandung, where democracy is repeated as an anchoring term and the electoral contest is subordinated to democratic principle:

Excerpt 9 (News 9)

"Democracy should not be undermined by anyone. Democracy governs, republics also govern personal rights, family rights, and of course public rights."

Poverty alleviation coverage of Prabowo–Gibran similarly relies on decisive, target-oriented diction:

Excerpt 11 (News 11)

"Prabowo Gibran made poverty alleviation a major concern. The target is that in the first two years we will abolish extreme poverty to 0 per cent."

and Ganjar's coverage of electoral ethics draws on moral vocabulary rather than developmental language:

Excerpt 13 (News 13)

"There should be shame, there should be an apology."

Across the fifteen articles, this lexical pattern recurs: welfare, transparency, democracy, neutrality, unity, and commitment consistently accompany the three candidate pairs, paired with active verbs such as support, strengthen, encourage, and ensure that represent political actors as agents working on behalf of the public. Direct quotation functions as the dominant compositional strategy; nearly every article is built from

statements by candidates, party officials, volunteers, or political observers rather than editorial commentary. In Fairclough's terms, however, this reliance on quotation does not place the text outside ideology: the selection of which statement to feature, and which to omit, remains an editorial act that shapes the representation delivered to readers.

At the level of discourse practice, news production relied predominantly on direct statements from identifiable sources — candidates, campaign teams, officials, volunteers, and political observers — rather than on journalists' own interpretation. News 1, for instance, was built around a statement from PSI Secretary-General Raja Juli Antoni, while News 2 relied almost entirely on Mahfud MD's explanation of the defense-budget debate, and News 5 incorporated the independent assessment of a political analyst to explain a potential Anies–Ganjar coalition. Distribution occurred exclusively through the English-language *Republika* platform, extending the intended readership beyond Indonesia to an international audience interested in Indonesian political developments, while consumption was facilitated by direct quotation and clear chronological framing that allowed readers to follow events without needing supplementary sources.

At the level of social practice, coverage reflected the intensity of the campaign period and the national political climate. Each candidate pair became associated with a distinct thematic cluster: Ganjar Pranowo with farmers' welfare, education, health, and political ethics;

Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka with poverty alleviation, MSME support, and volunteer mobilization; and Anies Baswedan with democracy, presidential neutrality, community protection, and social justice. This differentiation shows that ideology is produced not only through diction but through the outlet's decisions about which issues, actors, and events merit coverage, decisions inseparable from the socio-political conditions surrounding the 2024 election.

These findings support Fairclough's (2013) contention that ideology is embedded in ordinary linguistic choices rather than only in explicit political statements, and align with Ratnaningsih (2019), who argues that CDA seeks the ideological interests underlying textual structure rather than surface grammar alone. The recurrence of positively valenced vocabulary across candidates corroborates Mahdi's (2022) claim that news is inherently a representation of media ideology, since every stage of production entails selection and emphasis, and resonates with Karomani's (2014) view that ideology governs which issues receive prominence and how political actors are portrayed. The thematic clustering identified here also mirrors Entman's (1993) framing theory, in which journalists make certain aspects of reality more salient than others; Republika English consistently foregrounded democracy, welfare, transparency, and ethical leadership, steering readers toward interpreting the election as a contest over governance

quality rather than mere political rivalry. This pattern is consistent with Zhang's (2014) argument that political journalism is never fully neutral because institutional and ideological positions inevitably surface through lexical choice and thematic organization, and with Kanwal and Maldonado García's (2019) finding that framing strategies shape audience perception of political figures by emphasizing selected values and identities. Dahlan's (2025) observation that discourse transmits values through persuasive, non-coercive language is likewise borne out here: campaign reports favored polite, constructive, non-confrontational language over direct attacks on rival candidates, delivering ideological meaning implicitly rather than as overt propaganda. The findings additionally extend Fathurokhmah's (2015) observation that Republika's reporting reflects value-based perspectives even outside explicitly religious discourse, and align with Waluyo et al. (2025) in showing that political discourse remains bound to broader institutional and social interests. Finally, the outlet's role in constructing rather than merely reflecting political reality corroborates Karman (2022) and Nurdiansyah et al. (2025), who argue that media strengthen democratic participation precisely by selecting and organizing the information through which the public comes to understand political processes.

2. Journalistic Neutrality

Neutrality was examined through four

indicators — balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity — applied across the full corpus of fifteen articles rather than to each article individually, since campaign reporting of this kind typically centers on a single candidate's activity at a time.

Candidate Pair News Items (of 15) Dominant Themes

Anies Baswedan–Muhaimin Iskandar 5
(News 3, 8, 9, 10, 12) Democracy,
presidential neutrality, equitable
development, social justice

Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming
Raka 5 (News 1, 7, 11, 14, 15) Poverty
alleviation, MSME support, volunteer
mobilization

Ganjar Pranowo–Mahfud MD 5 (News 2,
4, 5, 6, 13) Farmers' welfare, budget
transparency, political ethics

Table 1. Distribution of News Coverage by
Candidate Pair, 28 November 2023 – 10
February 2024

Regarding balance, coverage was distributed evenly across the three candidate pairs (five articles each) and spanned a wide range of themes for each, indicating that no single pair dominated the corpus even though individual articles typically foregrounded one source. Regarding impartiality, the outlet largely avoided evaluative commentary, relying on reporting verbs such as said, explained, stated, and revealed, and allowing criticism — for instance Anies's remarks on presidential neutrality, Mahfud MD's comments on budget transparency, or Ganjar's statement on

electoral ethics — to remain attributed to the speaker rather than adopted as editorial judgment. Regarding fairness, most articles supplied contextual background (for example, explaining that Mahfud MD's statement responded to a candidate debate, or that Anies's remarks followed a prior presidential comment), enabling readers to interpret quotations within their originating context rather than in isolation. Regarding objectivity, articles were consistently built on identifiable, verifiable sources — named individuals with stated positions, dated events, and specific locations — with no instance of emotionally charged or hyperbolic language found across the fifteen texts.

A recurring limitation across all four indicators was single-sourcing: most articles relied on one primary source connected to the reported event (for example, News 1 on PSI's Raja Juli Antoni alone, or News 11 on the Prabowo–Gibran campaign team alone), without soliciting a response from competing candidates. This pattern, however, reflects the straight-news, event-driven character of campaign reporting rather than a deliberate partisan choice, since each article's purpose was to document a specific activity or statement rather than to adjudicate between candidates.

These results are consistent with Wibawa (2020), who argues that neutrality does not require identical coverage volume for every actor but rather fair opportunity to communicate positions according to the newsworthiness of specific events, and with Pangaribuan et al. (2024), who define election-period neutrality as

professional consistency in fact reporting rather than mechanical equality of publication frequency. The reliance on direct quotation over editorial judgment reflects Fairclough's (2013) view that discourse production is shaped by institutional norms and professional routine, even though, as Mahdi (2022) and Karman (2022) note, complete impartiality remains elusive because journalists inevitably determine which quotations and events are included. This qualified neutrality is corroborated by Rahim et al. (2024) and Hafiz et al. (2023), both of whom found that Indonesian media approaching the 2024 election generally avoided explicit bias through factual reporting and balanced source attribution. The contextual framing observed here supports Bakri (2021) and Anisa (2019), who link neutrality to transparency and equal respect for competing perspectives, and Fadila et al. (2024), who argue that digital-era journalism must balance publication speed with contextual accuracy. Finally, the outlet's use of verifiable, source-attributed reporting affirms Widirahayu's (2018) view that objectivity rests on verification and source credibility rather than the complete absence of editorial choice, while Zurriyati et al. (2023) and Entman (1993) together caution that even factually accurate reporting inevitably constructs a particular representation of political reality through the choices embedded in framing.

Read together, the ideology and neutrality findings indicate that Republika English News Online achieved a form of

neutrality compatible with implicit ideological construction. The outlet's professional adherence to balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity coexisted with a consistent thematic emphasis on democracy, ethical leadership, transparency, and public welfare — an emphasis produced through lexical choice, source selection, and issue framing rather than explicit partisan statement. This supports the broader CDA claim that no journalistic text is ideologically empty, even when it meets recognized standards of professional balance.

This study is limited to fifteen articles from a single outlet during the official campaign window, restricting generalizability to Republika's broader coverage; it examines text and production practice without investigating newsroom decision-making or audience reception directly; and it relies on qualitative interpretation rather than quantitative content analysis. Future research could compare multiple Indonesian online outlets with differing editorial affiliations, incorporate larger datasets, or combine CDA with quantitative content analysis to build a broader picture of ideology and neutrality in Indonesian election coverage.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine how Republika English News Online represented ideology and maintained neutrality in reporting the 2024 Indonesian presidential election campaign. Two conclusions follow. First,

the outlet did not demonstrate explicit political partisanship toward any presidential candidate; instead, it constructed an implicit ideology emphasizing democratic values, political ethics, public welfare, transparency, and national development through lexical choice, quotation selection, and issue framing, reflecting its self-positioning as a media institution that promotes democratic and public-interest values while upholding professional journalistic practice. Second, the outlet generally maintained neutrality across the four indicators of balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity, distributing coverage evenly among the three candidate pairs, relying on attributed direct quotation over editorial commentary, situating statements in explanatory context, and grounding reports in verifiable, identifiable sources — even though the underlying processes of source selection and issue framing inevitably carried implicit ideological weight.

Future researchers are encouraged to examine political coverage across multiple online outlets with differing editorial backgrounds, or to combine Fairclough's model with other CDA frameworks or quantitative content analysis, to build a broader comparative understanding of ideology and neutrality in Indonesian election reporting. Media practitioners are encouraged to continue upholding balance, impartiality, fairness, and objectivity while remaining conscious that editorial and framing decisions inevitably shape public perception, making transparency and professionalism essential to sustaining public trust.

Readers, in turn, are encouraged to cultivate critical media **literacy** by comparing multiple sources and recognizing that even professionally produced, factually accurate news may carry implicit ideological meaning.

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