

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ELITE CONFLICT: ANALYSIS OF ACTOR REPRESENTATION, RELATIONS, AND IDENTITY IN KOMPAS NEWS

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Abstract

Focusing on the representation of actors, power relations, and identity, this research analyzes the construction of elite conflict discourse in online media coverage. This study investigates how language is used to depict the internal conflict of the Golkar Party in Kompas media. This method uses Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis model. This research was conducted qualitatively by examining aspects of social practice, discursive practice, and text. The data comes from news coverage of the Golkar elite conflict from 2019 to 2024, which was analyzed using diction choices, framing, and narrative structure. According to the research findings, the mechanisms of legitimization and delegitimization shape the representation of actors ambivalently. The identities of actors and institutions develop dynamically and are not singular, showing dependence on power structures. Conversely, power relations are built asymmetrically and president-centric, placing elites as dominant actors. The results show that the media helps reproduce power hegemony in the political system by normalizing elite conflicts as something natural and recurring. The discursive model provided by this research integrates representation, relations, and identity in the analysis of elite conflict.

Keywords; Critical Discourse Analysis, Elite Conflict, Power Relations, Identity

Introduction

The media plays an important role in politics, especially in the digital era, when online media has become the primary source for the public to obtain information. The transmission of information is not always neutral; on the contrary, it is framed according to the interests and perspectives of each media outlet. Framing analysis is an important technique for understanding how the media selects, highlights, and organizes certain elements of an event to give it specific meaning (Eriyanto, 2012).

One of the conflicts highlighted by the media is the internal conflict within the Golkar party during the leadership of Airlangga Hartato. The conflict intensified as the National Deliberative Assembly (Munas) approached, particularly thru the rivalry between the factions of Airlangga Hartarto and Bambang Soesatyo. This conflict is marked by mass mobilization, a struggle for political support legitimacy, and open clashes between elite groups, which have been widely reported by the media. (Septianto, 2019).

Airlangga's decision to step down from the position of Golkar Chairman did not come from a vacuum. At least, there are two major issues that are believed to have prompted Airlangga to resign from his position. First, the legal case that has been looming over Airlangga since he was questioned as a witness in the corruption case involving the provision of crude palm oil (CPO) export facilities and derivative products in 2021. This was revealed by Professor of Political Science at the University of Indonesia (UI), Lili Romli, who suggested that one possible reason behind Airlangga's resignation from the Golkar chairmanship is related to the corruption case involving the provision of crude palm oil (CPO) export facilities (Amaranggana, 2024)

Second, the internal Golkar party is once again abuzz with discussions about an extraordinary national congress (*munaslub*). The plan for the *munaslub* to oust Airlangga's leadership at least started gaining traction in July of the previous year. In fact, Golkar itself has already planned to hold a leadership election thru the Munas in December 2024. The internal Golkar party is also lively with discussions about the extraordinary national congress (*munaslub*). The plan for the *munaslub* to oust Airlangga's leadership at least started gaining traction in July 2023. In fact, Golkar itself has already planned to hold a leadership election thru a National Conference (Munas) in December 2024. Several names have already emerged as potential candidates for the next Golkar leader. In March 2024, the Deputy Chairman of the Golkar Party's Central Board, Bambang Soesatyo (Bamsoet), revealed his plan to run as a candidate for the Golkar chairmanship in the 2024 National Conference (Munas). Three other names have also circulated as potential candidates for the next Golkar Party chairperson. Namely, Airlangga who is now stepping down from the position of chairman, then Investment Minister Bahlil Lahadalia and Industry Minister Agus Gumiwang. (Nur, 2024).

Airlangga Hartarto's sudden resignation and Bahlil Lahadalia's acclamation in the Golkar XI National Conference on August 20, 2024, made it clear that the party symbolized by the banyan tree, a legacy of the New Order, is being hijacked by more powerful elites. The democratization mechanism within Golkar is not functioning according to its substance. The internal conflicts happening within Golkar are actually also occurring within other parties. Partai Solidaritas Indonesia (PSI), a similar thing has also happened to the Democratic Party and the Hanura Party. Four examples of political party hijacking are sufficient evidence of the death of the democratization process within political parties (intra-party democracy) (Al-Hamdi, 2024).

Airlangga's resignation as the chairman of the Golkar party has drawn comments from several political observers, including Ahmad Khoirul Umam, Executive Director of the Institute for Democracy and Strategic Affairs (Indostrategic). He believes that Airlangga's resignation is related to power struggles within Golkar. According to him, factions within Golkar's internal structure had already emerged leading up to the previous Presidential Election (Pilpres). (Tim Detik, 2024).

A study on how the media creates reality shows that news cannot be understood as an objective reflection of events; instead, it is a process of selecting and emphasizing certain elements of social reality. In research on political conflict reporting, it has been proven that the media has the ability to create different perspectives on the same event, depending on the interests and political context involved. In fact, conflicts can be portrayed as a result of power intervention or merely as internal conflicts, depending on the media's perspective (Krisdinanto & Hartiana, 2023).

Furthermore, from the perspective of critical linguistics, the language used in the media is never neutral because it is part of social practices laden with ideology. The language used in political discourse reflects the ideological positions of the media and the institutions that support it. Differences in ideology within the media will lead to varying tendencies in news coverage. The media not only conveys information but also actively shapes public opinion thru the construction of the language used (Mukhlis & Puspita, 2022).

Mass media, as a public space, also serves to represent political ideologies thru symbols, language, and text structure. Critical discourse analysis views the media as a tool of hegemony that can instill certain ideologies in society. Political reporting in online media shows that diction, sentence structure, and the use of metaphors are important tools for creating an image of power and influencing public perception (Amir et al., 2019).

The dynamics of the conflict are becoming increasingly complex as the 2024 elections approach, marked by the emergence of demands for an Extraordinary National Congress (Munaslub), the tug-of-war of elite interests, and the rise of various factions attempting to influence the party's policy direction. The pressure comes from various internal party figures who question the leadership and political direction of Golkar. This situation reveals structural tensions within the party that could potentially trigger a leadership crisis (Kurniawan, 2023).

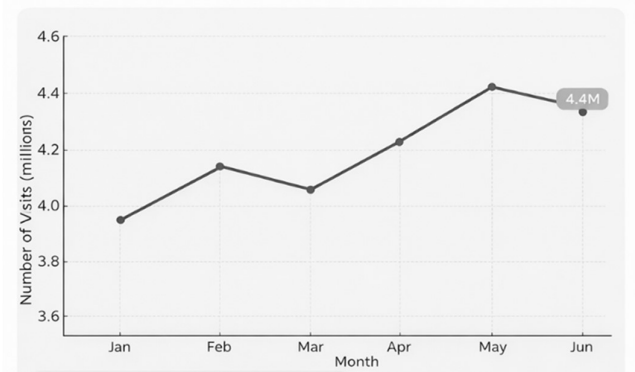
In that context, mass media not only functions as a conveyor of information but also as a public space that allows various actors to construct meaning and influence public opinion. The media becomes

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ELITE CONFLICT: ANALYSIS OF ACTOR REPRESENTATION, RELATIONS, AND IDENTITY IN KOMPAS NEWS

an arena for discourse battles where social reality is constructed thru specific language and narratives. Thus, the news presented to the public is the result of social construction that is inseparable from ideological interests and power relations (Al-Hamdi, 2024).

Data shows that Kompas has a very wide readership. In the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022, Kompas was named the most trusted media in Indonesia, with a trust level reaching 69 percent, surpassing other major media outlets such as CNN Indonesia and Detik (Javier, 2023). Most of its readers have a higher education background (46% Bachelor's degree, 7.5% Master's degree) and belong to the upper-middle class economically. This means that the narrative shaped by Kompas is highly likely to influence the views of the intellectual community and even policymakers (123dok, 2017).

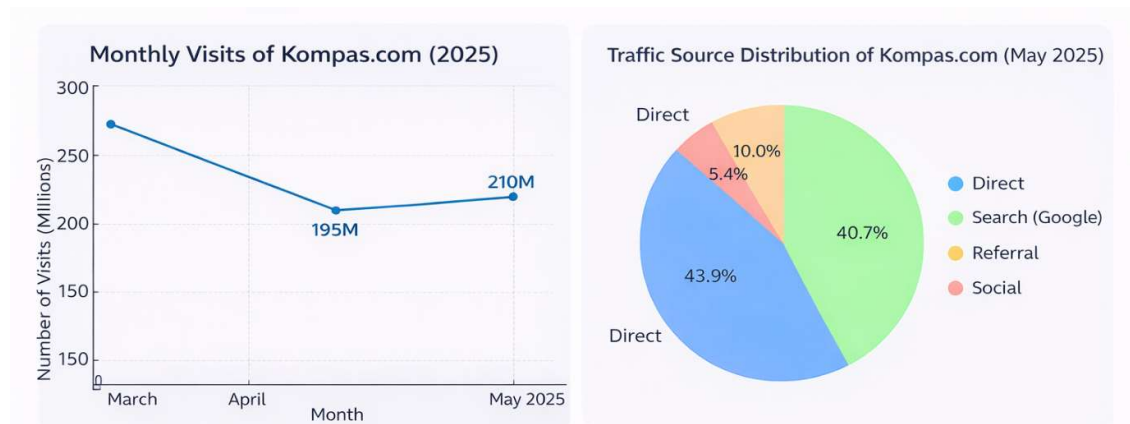
Kompas.id has an average of 4.4 million visitors per month, and about 93% of the traffic comes from Indonesia. Kompas.id also has a strong national reach.



Source: Traffic Readers of Kompas.id

In the meantime, Kompas.com is one of Indonesia's biggest online news portals with over 212 million monthly visits. Visitors spend an average of 9 minutes and 28 seconds on the Kompas.com website, visiting 2.19 pages each time. A crucial aspect of today's digital society is the quick and selective information consumption behaviors, which are reflected in the 60% bounce rate. Furthermore, because Kompas.com is a free platform, it favors popular news and eye-catching headlines, creating room for critical examination of framing, gatekeeping, and representation in contentious or viral news

With the large traffic, long reading duration, and dominance of organic searches from Indonesia, it is very representative as the main subject in critical discourse research, which will strengthen the



legitimacy and relevance of the research focus. This shows that the discourse is read and can widely influence Indonesian society. As the digital version of the daily newspaper, Kompas.id and

Kompas.com generally have a more serious and educated readership, including academics, professionals, and policymakers.

This makes the analysis of its reporting more relevant because its audience has the potential to influence political discourse. Political conflicts do not only occur within the internal arena of parties but are also produced in the public sphere thru the media. In the context of Indonesian politics, internal party conflicts are an interesting phenomenon to analyze, especially in relation to how the media constructs the narratives of these conflicts.

The aim of this research is to examine how the representation of actors, relationships, and identities in elite conflict discourse is constructed by online media. Additionally, how this construction reflects and replicates power relations in the context of Indonesian politics.

Literatur Review

Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis Model

The approach used in this research refers to Norman Fairclough's model, which views discourse as a social practice with three main dimensions: text, discursive practice, and sociocultural practice. This model allows for a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between language structure and the broader social context (Eriyanto, 2012).

In the text dimension, the analysis focuses on linguistic aspects such as word choice, sentence structure, as well as coherence and cohesion. This dimension is used to see how reality is represented in media texts. Meanwhile, the discursive practice dimension relates to the processes of text production and consumption, including how news is produced in journalistic routines. The sociocultural practice dimension refers to the social, political, and cultural contexts that influence discourse production.

More specifically, Fairclough emphasizes that language simultaneously shapes three main aspects, namely representation, relation, and identity. Representation refers to how reality or events are depicted in the text. Relation pertains to how relationships between actors are constructed. Meanwhile, identity refers to how the positions and social roles of actors are formed thru discourse (Eriyanto, 2012).

Construction of Media Reality

Media Reality Construction The concept of reality construction explains that social reality does not exist objectively, but is formed thru a social process involving human interaction. In this perspective, media play an important role as agents of reality construction, as they organize events into meaningful narratives (Kuswarno, 2013).

Thru the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization, social reality is constructed and maintained in societal life. The media plays a role in this process by packaging events into discourses that can be accepted and understood by the public. Thus, news is not reality itself, but rather a construction of reality.

Language becomes a key element in that construction process. Word choice, sentence structure, and the way information is presented will influence how reality is interpreted by the public. Therefore, the media has the power to shape the image, meaning, and public perception of an event (Eriyanto, 2012).

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a critical paradigm. This approach was chosen because the research aims to uncover power relations, ideologies, and hidden discursive practices within media texts. In the critical paradigm, language is not viewed as a neutral medium, but rather as a social practice laden with interests and power.

The object of this research is news texts from the online media Kompas.com and Kompas.id that directly or indirectly discuss the internal conflict of the Golkar Party during the leadership of Airlangga Hartarto in the period 2019–2024.

For the sampling process, the purposive sampling method was used, which is sampling based on specific objectives. In this case, the news articles that will be sampled are adjusted to the objectives of this research.

The subject of the research is the content of news texts published on Kompas.com and Kompas.id,

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ELITE CONFLICT: ANALYSIS OF ACTOR REPRESENTATION, RELATIONS, AND IDENTITY IN KOMPAS NEWS

which are analyzed to observe language patterns, information emphasis, and potential ideologies contained within.

The data analysis technique used is the Critical Discourse Analysis model by Norman Fairclough. This model consists of three stages:

1. Textual Analysis: Examining how language is used in the text. For example, how words are chosen, how titles are constructed, and how narratives are built to shape readers' understanding.
2. Discursive Practice: Examining how news is produced by the editorial team and how readers are likely to interpret the news. This includes analyzing the media context, editorial routines, and editorial policies.
3. Social Practice: Connecting discourse in the news with broader social structures, such as national political conditions, elite interests, or emerging dominant ideologies.

Tabel Three-Level Analysis (Micro, Meso, and Macro) (general findings, general theme, and analysis/interpretation)

Micro Level (Production Process)	Meso Level (Interpretation Process)	Macro Level (Discourse Process)
Representation Relation Identity ↓ Description	Individual Worker Network Work Pattern ↓ Interpretation	Situational Institutional Social ↓ Explanation

Result and Discussion

Actor Representation: Ambivalence, Legitimacy, and Delegitimization

The analysis results show that the representation of political actors in Kompas news is not only descriptive but also serves as an ideological mechanism to support and oppose political actors. Word choices such as "turmoil," "shaken," and "maneuver" are used to describe the internal conflict of the Golkar Party as a strategic crisis. This indirectly encourages readers to perceive the conflict as a serious and systemic power struggle.

This lexical choice is not neutral in the context of Critical Discourse Analysis; rather, it is part of a representation process that selects and highlights certain aspects of the world. Language helps define conflict as something repetitive, unstable, and threatening to the broader political structure. In this construction, Airlangga Hartarto's role is very important. He is depicted ambivalently, which is an important discursive strategy to maintain ideological balance in the media. On one hand, Airlangga is portrayed as a rational, technocratic, and consistent leader capable of maintaining the party's electoral results. On the contrary, he is depicted as a character who is under pressure, not fully independent, and trapped in the power dynamics from external sources.

This ambivalence is more than just a change in the story; it is an ideological strategy that allows the media to avoid extreme positions. According to Fairclough's perspective, such representations show how ideology functions to balance meaning (balancing discourse), allowing criticism to be given without explicitly delegitimizing certain actors.

Relations: Asymmetry of Power and Elite Domination

The structure of unequal relationships indicates elite conflict, according to discourse analysis. For the most part, the relationship between political parties and the state, especially the executive power, is depicted as a subordinate relationship. This means that the legitimacy of party leadership heavily depends on its relationship with the center of power.

This relationship is shaped by narratives such as "the president's blessing." Political legitimacy in media discourse is determined by the formal mechanisms of the organization and the symbolic recognition of state actors.

This shows that the power conflict in Golkar is centered at the vertical level rather than the horizontal level. Elite relations within the party are depicted as organized and dynamic battlegrounds. The party functions as a place for continuous power negotiation, as evidenced by factional conflicts, political maneuvers, and support mobilization. What is interesting is that these disputes occur as part of the "normal rhythm" of elite politics rather than being seen as an existential threat.

Parties function as venues for continuous power negotiations, as evidenced by factional conflicts, political maneuvers, and support mobilization. Interestingly, these disputes are never depicted as existential threats, but rather as part of the "normal rhythm" of elite politics. This phenomenon shows that elite conflict has become normal in media discourse. Conflict is not seen as a failure of democracy, but as a way to adapt to authoritarian political structures and nepotism. Critically, this normalization helps maintain system stability by obscuring existing structural inconsistencies. Moreover, the absence of public representation in this relationship indicates that political conflict is merely a conversation among elites. Because the people, cadres, and social bases of the party do not appear as active actors, they only serve as a passive backdrop. This confirms that the discourse is driven by the elite and implicitly reproduces political exclusivity.

Identity: Ambivalent Construction and Fragmentation of Meaning

In the discourse of elite conflict, individual identity is formed thru a complex and often contradictory discursive process. Beside being an individual, Airlangga Hartarto is depicted as a representation of a certain political position within the power structure. He also serves as a symbol of stability, loyalty, and dependence on state power.

This unclear construction of identity shows that the media do not establish a specific identity; instead, they leave the identity open to different interpretations. According to Fairclough, the discursive practices that are always present in negotiations show how identity is formed.

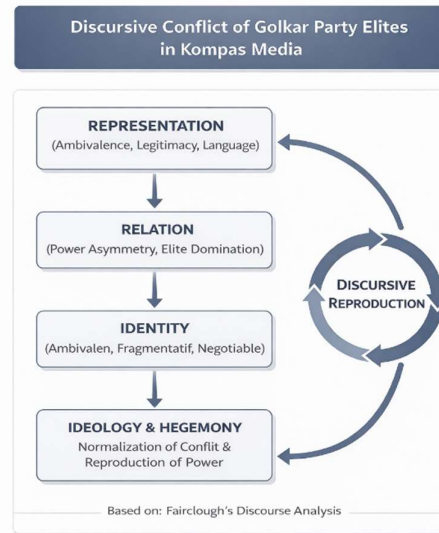
A person's identity is formed thru a complex and often contradictory discursive process in elite conflict discourse. Airlangga Hartarto is depicted as a representation of a certain political position within the power structure, in addition to being an individual. He is also a representation of stability, loyalty, and dependence on state power.

This unclear construction of identity shows that the media do not create a specific identity; instead, they leave the identity open to various interpretations. Fairclough argues that the discursive practices that are always present in negotiation demonstrate how identities are formed.

Critical Synthesis: Discourse as a Mechanism of Hegemony Overall, the representation of actors, relationships, and identities in elite conflict discourse shows that thru discursive practices, the media functions to replicate power structures. According to the discourse constructed by Kompas, conflict is not considered a significant democratic crisis because it is seen as something ordinary, repetitive, and managed.

According to the hegemony perspective, this action demonstrates how the media helps create political common sense. Power imbalances and the limitations of internal democracy are not deeply questioned, but elite conflicts are considered part of the legitimate system.

DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION OF ELITE CONFLICT:
ANALYSIS OF ACTOR REPRESENTATION,
RELATIONS, AND IDENTITY IN KOMPAS NEWS



Source: Processed by the Author

This study shows that the three main dimensions: representation, relations, and identity, interact dialectically in the elite conflict discourse in Kompas's reporting. While the asymmetric relationships indicate the dominance of elite power and dependence on state authority, the ambivalent representation of actors helps maintain ideological balance. On the other hand, the incomplete construction of identity allows for various interpretations of meaning. All three dimensions work together, producing ideological practices such as the normalization of elite conflict as a normal component of political dynamics. They also revive exclusive and hegemonic power structures.

Conclusion

This study shows that the elite conflict discourse in Kompas's reporting creates a discursive construction filled with ideology and power relations rather than showing reality neutrally. There is evidence that in the internal conflict of the Golkar Party, the representation of actors, relationships, and identities is shaped by language strategies that depict and direct the meaning of the conflict. This was found thru the Critical Discourse Analysis approach of Norman Fairclough's model.

Political figures like Airlangga Hartarto are depicted in two dimensions: as rational and stable leaders and as pressured actors who are not fully independent. This representation shows how the mechanisms of legitimization and delegitimization function together in media texts, so that the position of the actor is not determined directly, but thru complex disputes of meaning.

Second, the discussion of elite conflict shows a structure of asymmetrical and elitist relationships. The imbalance in the relationship between political parties and the state indicates that the legitimacy of political party leadership tends to depend on their proximity to executive power. Furthermore, the internal relations of the party are also depicted as an arena of ongoing elite contestation, and the public and mass base are usually not considered important actors in the political discourse.

Third, from an identity perspective, the identities of political actors and political institutions continue to change and evolve. The Golkar Party is depicted as a party that is not truly autonomous, but rather closer to the national authority. This identity indicates a transition from an ideological party to a pragmatic party that relies on a broader power structure.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that elite conflict discourse in the media helps normalize political disputes. No one considers conflict a crisis of democracy; on the contrary, conflict is a recurring, controlled, and normal phenomenon within the Indonesian political system. Critically, this action shows that the media shapes power hegemony by creating boundaries of meaning about what is considered normal in politics.

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