

Rhetorical Strategies In Prabowo Subianto's 2024 Presidential Debate: Implications For Language and Civic Education at The Tertiary Level

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Abstract

In the 2024 Presidential Debate, Prabowo Subianto (PS) attracted public attention not only due to his political profile and electability, but also because of his rhetorical delivery in presenting his national vision and mission. This study analyzes the persuasive power of rhetorical elements in a five-minute speech segment delivered by PS during the vision and mission session. Grounded in Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory, the research adopts a descriptive qualitative approach supported by critical discourse analysis. The findings reveal that PS employed the three rhetorical appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos, in a balanced and strategic manner. This suggests a mature rhetorical style and an effective adaptation to the communicative demands of electoral democracy. Furthermore, this study contributes to Southeast Asian rhetorical and political discourse studies by highlighting how classical rhetorical strategies remain relevant and impactful in contemporary political communication. In addition, the findings hold pedagogical significance for higher education, particularly in the teaching of language, communication, and civic education. The rhetorical strategies observed in PS's speech can serve as authentic learning materials for developing students' rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and public speaking skills, especially within the framework of democratic engagement and media literacy.

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Introduction

Political communication in the context of electoral democracy serves as a crucial arena for shaping public opinion and directing voter support (Norris, 2000). Among various forms of political communication, presidential debates are the most strategic medium for articulating ideas, presenting visions and missions, and constructing public image and trust (Jamieson & Birdsell, 1988). Debates are not merely forums for rationalizing policy programs, but also symbolic and rhetorical battlegrounds laden with ideological and emotional meaning (Benoit, 2014). This is where the role of language and political rhetoric becomes highly significant: how words are chosen, how sentences are structured, and how emotion, credibility, and logic are combined to persuade and influence the audience.

In the 2024 Presidential Debate, Prabowo Subianto emerged as a key figure who drew significant public attention, not only due to his political position and electability, but also because of his delivery style and rhetorical approach in presenting his national vision and mission. Prabowo, previously known for his fiery oratory filled with emotional intensity, exhibited a calmer and more measured rhetorical tone in this debate (Arfa et al., 2014), while still maintaining strong persuasive power. His speech was framed within a grand narrative touching on various aspects of public life such as food security, child nutrition, stunting, education, healthcare, and human resource development. In his delivery, Prabowo frequently employed emotionally resonant expressions while also embedding statistical data, structured policies, and acknowledgments of previous government achievements, all of which contributed to building the credibility and appeal of his arguments.

This phenomenon illustrates how political rhetoric functions not only as a tool for communication but also as an instrument of persuasion (Charteris-Black, 2011). According to Aristotle's classical rhetorical theory, rhetoric comprises three main, complementary elements: *ethos* (the speaker's credibility or character), *pathos* (emotional appeal to the audience), and *logos* (logical strength of the argument). These three are the core pillars that shape persuasive power in political discourse (Aristotle, 2007). In Prabowo's speech, all three elements appear in an integrated manner: *ethos* is evident in his references to his role in national development and his expressed readiness to continue the legacy of the previous administration; *pathos* emerges through narratives of poverty, children, pregnant women, and the marginalized; while *logos* is presented through a systematic argument structure supported by data, numbers, and concrete policy targets.

While previous studies have acknowledged the importance of rhetorical strategies in political speeches (Jamieson, 1990; Charteris-Black, 2011), most have focused predominantly on *ethos* or general persuasive style, with limited attention to how *pathos* and *logos* are integrated and function together in Indonesian political discourse. Moreover, rhetorical analyses of Prabowo Subianto's speeches remain scarce, often lacking in-depth examination of how emotional appeals are interwoven with logical arguments to strengthen persuasive impact. This study seeks to address that gap by offering a critical rhetorical analysis of Prabowo's speech during the 2024 debate.

In the Indonesian context, where electoral politics is increasingly competitive and voters are more discerning, rhetorical strategies that can appeal to both reason and emotion have

become crucial in shaping public perception and support. Analyzing political speeches in presidential debates is therefore important not only from a linguistic perspective, but also in terms of mass communication, identity politics, and democratic participation.

This research aims to examine in depth the persuasive power of Prabowo Subianto's political speech in the 2024 Presidential Debate. It focuses on how *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* are constructed within his political narrative and how these rhetorical elements function to create emotional resonance, build credibility, and frame the logic of proposed policies. A descriptive qualitative approach is employed, using rhetorical and critical discourse analysis to explore the forms, functions, and persuasive effects found in the speech. Thus, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of political linguistics, public communication, and democratic studies in Indonesia. More broadly, it reflects on how political speeches can serve as tools to convey national vision, build public trust, and influence decision-making within the broader political landscape.

Method

This study adopts a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2016) as it aims to understand the meanings and communication strategies employed in political speeches. This approach enables the researcher to explore persuasive elements in depth through the analysis of language, context, and rhetorical impact. The subject of this study is Prabowo Subianto (PS), while the object is the utterances delivered by PS in presenting his vision and mission as a presidential candidate during the 2024 Presidential Debate. The speech segment analyzed is a five-minute excerpt from the "vision and mission" session, which was broadcast nationally on February 4, 2024, and selected based on its density of rhetorical elements and its relevance in shaping the candidate's persuasive message. The delimitation of this segment was guided by thematic cues and transitions in the debate format to ensure consistency and analytical focus. Data were collected using observation and note-taking techniques by recording the televised debate, repeatedly reviewing the footage, and transcribing the speech verbatim to facilitate the analysis process. To enhance reliability and reduce interpretive bias, the transcription and initial annotations were jointly reviewed by two researchers. Discrepancies in interpretation were discussed and resolved through consensus. The data were analyzed using a critical discourse analysis approach (Wodak & Meyer, 2015), by examining the relationship between linguistic choices, rhetorical strategies (Chilton, 2004), and their potential impact on the audience. Special attention was given to how *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* were constructed and interactively employed throughout the selected segment. Reflexivity and ethical considerations were also taken into account in this study. The researchers acknowledge their positionality as academic observers of political discourse, recognizing that their analytical perspectives may be shaped by sociocultural background and interpretive stance. Since the data are based on publicly available speech materials, formal ethical clearance was not required. Nonetheless, the study adheres to academic standards of integrity, transparency, and ethical representation.

Results and Discussion

Results

The analysis of Prabowo Subianto's vision and mission speech during the 2024 Presidential Debate reveals that his persuasive power is not only structured through the classical Aristotelian elements of logos, ethos, and pathos, but also emerges from inductively identified thematic patterns in the data. Through open thematic coding, three major themes consistently surfaced: (1) human resource development through nutrition, education, and healthcare; (2) social justice and equitable welfare distribution; and (3) national transformation framed under the "Golden Indonesia 2045" narrative. These themes were further analyzed through the lens of classical rhetorical theory to illuminate how rhetorical strength is constructed in political speech.

The element of logos, or logical appeal, forms the foundation of Prabowo Subianto's argumentative strategy. Inductive analysis of the speech data reveals a recurring rhetorical pattern involving the use of quantitative data, causal relationships, and structured policy proposals. Topics such as child nutrition, poverty reduction, healthcare infrastructure, and economic growth are framed in a manner that emphasizes logic and objective reasoning.

Table 1. Analysis of the use of logos in Prabowo Subianto's presentation of vision and mission

| No. | Quotation / Expression | Explanation of <i>Logos</i> Element |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | "Providing nutritious food for all Indonesian children, including those still in their mothers' wombs." | A logical program aimed at preventing stunting and poverty from an early age, based on a public health approach. |
| 2 | "This will reduce maternal mortality during childbirth." | A clear cause-effect explanation, indicating that the program will have real impacts on maternal health. |
| 3 | "This will address malnutrition, child stunting. This will eliminate extreme poverty." | Deductive reasoning: nutrition → improved quality of life → poverty reduction → forming a coherent and logical strategy. |
| 4 | "This will increase our economic growth. At least around 1.5–2%." | Use of quantitative data to support claims → creates an impression of objectivity and economic calculation. |
| 5 | "We lack around 140,000 doctors, and we will address this immediately..." | Statement of the problem based on factual data → strengthens the argument's validity for expanding medical services. |
| 6 | "We will increase the number of medical faculties from the current 92 to 300." | A systemic and logical solution → expanding the capacity for producing medical personnel through formal education. |
| 7 | "We will also send 10,000 smart students abroad..." | A policy based on human resource investment to support technological and scientific advancement. |
| 8 | "We will build 3 million houses: 1 million in rural areas, 1 million in coastal areas, and 1 million in urban areas." | Logical distribution based on geographical segmentation → a calculated approach to housing equity. |
| 9 | "We must provide training... and improve the salaries of civil servants, military, | A human resource improvement program based on welfare logic → higher income = better motivation and public service. |

| No. | Quotation / Expression | Explanation of <i>Logos</i> Element |
|--|--|--|
| | police, and agricultural extension workers...” | |
| 10 | “We will achieve Golden Indonesia 2045.” | A long-term vision with a structured timeline → demonstrating a planned and strategic development framework. |
| (Prabowo Subianto, TV One Presidential Debate, February 4, 2024) | | |

These data points indicate that Prabowo consistently uses logic-based arguments to present himself as a competent, data-driven leader capable of offering technically feasible solutions to national problems. Inductive coding also uncovered recurring rhetorical patterns aimed at shaping the image of a visionary, responsible, and morally committed leader. Although Prabowo does not overtly declare his credibility, his lexical choices, narrative structure, and emphasis on legacy and continuity construct an ethos of trustworthiness and national leadership.

Table 2. Analysis of ethos in Prabowo Subianto’s presentation of vision and mission

| No. | Quotation / Expression | Explanation of <i>Ethos</i> Element |
|--|--|---|
| 1 | “Prabowo-Gibran has a grand plan that we call the national transformation strategy.” | Demonstrates strategic initiative and visionary leadership, building an image of a leader with a big-picture mindset. |
| 2 | “The core of this strategy is, of course, to improve the prosperity of the Indonesian people...” | Displays moral commitment to public welfare, strengthening personal integrity. |
| 3 | “We will build modern hospitals in every regency and city.” | Implies capability in policy execution, showcasing preparedness and technocratic credibility. |
| 4 | “We will quickly resolve the shortage of doctors in Indonesia.” | Projects the image of a responsive leader capable of addressing national crises. |
| 5 | “We will send 10,000 smart high school graduates to study medicine and science.” | Builds the image of a leader who values the younger generation and higher education. |
| 6 | “We must improve teachers’ salaries, including those on contract...” | Expresses empathy and social concern → establishing ethos as a leader who cares about people’s welfare. |
| 7 | “We do not merely want development; we want the transformation of our nation.” | Emphasizes a transformative commitment, demonstrating idealism and depth of national vision. |
| 8 | “Based on the economic foundations already built by President Joko Widodo...” | Shows respect for previous leadership, reinforcing ethos as a statesmanlike figure. |
| 9 | “We are confident we will carry this out. And we will achieve Golden Indonesia 2045.” | Displays confidence and personal credibility, reinforcing ethos as a convincing and trustworthy leader. |
| (Prabowo Subianto, TV One Presidential Debate, February 4, 2024) | | |

This ethical appeal is conveyed not through overt claims, but through consistent alignment with national values, continuity of governance, and a pragmatic yet idealistic tone. The element of pathos emerges strongly in emotionally charged segments of the speech. Thematic coding identified emotional appeals related to maternal and child welfare, social inequality, and national pride. Prabowo's language frequently evokes feelings of empathy, shared struggle, and collective aspiration.

Table 3. Analysis of pathos in Prabowo Subianto's presentation of vision and mission

| No. | Quotation / Expression | Explanation of <i>Pathos</i> Element |
|-----|---|--|
| 1 | "Providing nutritious food for all Indonesian children, including those still in their mothers' wombs." | Appeals to compassion for children and pregnant women, triggering sympathy for the most vulnerable groups. |
| 2 | "This will reduce maternal mortality during childbirth." | Evokes empathy through humanitarian concerns, particularly the suffering of mothers and families during labor. |
| 3 | "This will address malnutrition, child stunting." | Draws emotional attention to the future of children—evoking both hope and parental concern. |
| 4 | "We will also build 3 million houses for those who do not yet have a home." | Raises the issue of social vulnerability and inequality—touching public concern for the living conditions of the poor. |
| 5 | "We must improve teachers' salaries, including those on contract..." | Appeals to emotions of justice and appreciation for teachers, who are often perceived as underappreciated. |
| 6 | "We will provide training and development programs..." | Inspires a sense of recognition and dignity among civil servants and field workers, beyond their bureaucratic roles. |
| 7 | "We will send 10,000 smart children abroad..." | Stirs national pride and hope for the younger generation as the future of the nation. |
| 8 | "We believe... we will achieve Golden Indonesia 2045." | Evokes collective emotion, optimism, and strong nationalism for a shared future. |
| 9 | "My dear brothers and sisters..." (repeated frequently) | Builds emotional connection and rhetorical closeness between the speaker and audience—creating a sense of unity and familiarity. |

(Prabowo Subianto, TV One Presidential Debate, February 4, 2024)

Through pathos, Prabowo effectively bridges the psychological distance with the audience, reinforcing his political message with emotional connection. References to national transformation and a hopeful future contribute to a shared emotional narrative that underpins his overall rhetorical strategy.

Discussion

Prabowo Subianto's speech reflects a balanced and structured use of the three classical rhetorical appeals ethos, logos, and pathos suggesting a deliberate rhetorical construction that appears responsive to the communicative demands of electoral democracy. In the context of

political communication, especially during presidential debates, the delivery of a vision and mission operates not merely as policy exposition, but as a rhetorical act that seeks to construct credibility (Chebat & Filiatrault, 1987; Theo Teven, 2008), organize logical reasoning (Hassan et al., 2024), and stimulate emotional resonance (Jamal & Hassan Abu Bakar, 2021).

The interplay among these rhetorical elements appears to form a persuasive framework that engages audiences on intellectual, emotional, and ethical levels. Rather than representing rhetorical “maturity” as an absolute judgment, this study interprets the integration of ethos, logos, and pathos as indicative of a multifaceted communication style that aligns with broader trends in contemporary political rhetoric. This reading is in line with recent studies (Isa, 2023; Hapsari et al., 2024) that emphasize the strategic role of rhetoric in shaping public persona and cultivating leadership trust. Historical comparisons may also be drawn to figures such as Soekarno and Winston Churchill, whose speeches combined emotional and rational appeals to persuasive effect (Zair, 2024; Wilhelmina, 2024). Likewise, the emotionally resonant discourse of Joko Widodo exemplifies how pathos has remained a powerful device in fostering relational proximity with voters (Sari & Supriyadi, 2021).

Theoretically, this study contributes to the rhetorical analysis of political speech by demonstrating how classical appeals can be adaptively integrated into the context of modern Indonesian political discourse. It extends Aristotle’s framework by situating it within a democratic setting in which rhetorical credibility is not assumed but performed, through evidence-based claims, emotional identification, and moral positioning. From a pedagogical standpoint, these findings hold significant applied value for the teaching of rhetoric in higher education. The analysis of Prabowo Subianto’s speech can serve as a relevant case study for examining the application of rhetorical strategies in the context of contemporary political performance. This speech offers more than a political discourse for linguistic analysis it functions as a medium for learning persuasive communication practices within democratic societies.

Educators can incorporate this material into a range of active learning activities. For instance, through speech deconstruction, students are encouraged to identify and analyze the use of ethos, logos, and pathos in constructing arguments and influencing audiences. Debate simulations can also be employed to train speaking skills and argumentative reasoning based on classical rhetorical principles. Furthermore, structured argumentative exercises help students internalize rhetorical elements in both applied and reflective contexts (Crovitz et al., 2022).

Such pedagogical strategies play a crucial role in fostering rhetorical awareness among students. More importantly, they also enhance critical thinking abilities and civic engagement skills, which are vital in democratic societies (Hiew et al., 2021; Aritonang, 2025; Gasca & Rafael, 2021). Students are not only taught to understand rhetoric as a theory but are also trained to apply it actively in discussions, presentations, and public discourse.

Moreover, the development of rhetorical competence equips students to participate meaningfully in the public sphere, which is increasingly complex and digitized. Amid the rapid and sometimes overwhelming flow of digital information, the ability to construct credible, emotionally resonant, and morally grounded arguments becomes increasingly essential.

Therefore, integrating political speech analysis into rhetorical education is not only academically relevant but also practically impactful in shaping a generation of thoughtful and effective public communicators (Wang & Liu, 2024; Quan, 2020).

Nonetheless, this study has several limitations. Its scope is restricted to a single speech by one presidential candidate, which limits the generalizability of its findings. Future research may adopt a comparative design to investigate rhetorical variations across different candidates or electoral cycles. Additionally, the current analysis focuses on verbal content; a multimodal approach that includes non-verbal cues such as gesture, tone, and audience response would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how political rhetoric operates across modes.

Conclusion

This study concludes that Prabowo Subianto's speech in the 2024 presidential debate demonstrates the effective integration of classical rhetorical elements: ethos, logos, and pathos, within the context of political communication. Through a well-structured and contextually relevant discourse, he constructs credibility, presents logical arguments, and engages the audience's emotions to convey his political vision and policy priorities. These rhetorical strategies reflect an adaptive and strategic approach to electoral discourse, illustrating how persuasive communication is shaped by both audience expectations and sociopolitical context. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how rhetorical appeals are operationalized in Indonesian political speech and how they function to influence public perception. Future research could examine rhetorical variation across political candidates, explore audience reception to different persuasive strategies, or investigate how rhetorical styles adapt across different media platforms and cultural contexts. Such studies would enrich the broader discourse on political rhetoric and enhance the practical applications of rhetorical analysis in democratic societies.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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