Flood, State, and Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Tempo Media's Coverage of The Prabowo Administration's Disaster Management Policy In Sumatra

Veri Setiawan*[1], Ade Aula Maulana[2], Muhammad Shidqie [3], Al Miftahul Rizqi[4]
[1](Department of Communication, University of Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia, Email)
[2](Department of Communication, University of Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia, Email)
[3](Department of Communication, University of Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia, Email)
[4](Department of Communication, University of Darussalam Gontor, Ponorogo, Indonesia, Email)
*corresponding author (adeaulamaulana1506@gmail.com)

Received: 2026-May-10
Rev. Req: 2026-May-11
Accepted: 2026-Mei-14

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license(https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

ABSTRACT: *Floods that struck multiple regions of Sumatra in late 2025 generated not only a humanitarian crisis but also a discursive arena involving the state, mass media, and civil society. This study examines how Tempo, Indonesia's prominent critical news magazine, framed the Prabowo administration's disaster management policies and investigates the ideological formations embedded in these discursive productions. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, this research analyzes four Tempo news articles published between November and December 2025, focusing on textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The findings reveal that Tempo predominantly represents the state as a responsive, capable, and morally accountable actor through narratives of rapid military mobilization, presidential empathy, and policy legitimacy. However, this dominant discourse exhibits a significant gap between official claims and the lived experiences of flood victims, particularly regarding unequal aid distribution and structural deficiencies in disaster response. The study confirms that disaster coverage in media discourse transcends natural event reporting; rather, disasters function as political arenas in which language serves to maintain, negotiate, and occasionally challenge state power and legitimacy. This analysis contributes to a broader understanding of the interplay between disaster journalism, political power, and ideological reproduction in postauthoritarian Southeast Asian democracies.*

ABSTRAK: Banjir yang melanda sejumlah wilayah di Sumatera pada akhir 2025 tidak hanya menghadirkan krisis kemanusiaan, tetapi juga memunculkan kontestasi wacana antara negara, media, dan masyarakat sipil. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bagaimana media *Tempo* membingkai kebijakan penanggulangan banjir pemerintahan Prabowo serta ideologi yang bekerja di balik produksi wacana tersebut. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui Analisis Wacana Kritis (AWK) model Norman Fairclough, penelitian ini mengkaji empat berita *Tempo* periode November–Desember 2025 pada tiga dimensi: teks, praktik diskursif, dan praktik sosial. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa pemberitaan *Tempo* cenderung merepresentasikan negara sebagai aktor utama yang responsif, berkapasitas, dan bermoral melalui narasi mobilisasi cepat, empati, dan legitimasi kebijakan. Namun, wacana tersebut berjarak dengan realitas sosial korban, terutama terkait ketimpangan distribusi bantuan dan keterbatasan respons struktural. Studi ini menegaskan bahwa bencana dalam pemberitaan media bukan sekadar peristiwa alam, melainkan arena politik

tempat bahasa digunakan untuk mempertahankan sekaligus menegosiasikan legitimasi kekuasaan negara Indonesia.

Keywords: *flood disaster; state representation; ideology; critical discourse analysis;*

I. INTRODUCTION

The catastrophic floods that swept across several provinces in Sumatra during the closing months of 2025 were among the most devastating natural disasters to affect the Indonesian archipelago in recent years. Beyond the immediate humanitarian consequences—displacement, casualties, and infrastructural destruction—these events triggered an intense discursive struggle among three principal actors: the state apparatus, mass media institutions, and organized civil society. This convergence rendered the disaster a critical site for examining how governmental authority is constructed, contested, and reproduced through journalistic discourse.

In the context of disaster governance, policy responses are never merely administrative or technical interventions. As Tierney (2014) argues, disasters are inherently social phenomena shaped by pre-existing conditions of power, inequality, and institutional capacity. The decisions made by governing authorities—including the declaration of emergency status, resource allocation, and the mobilization of military assets—carry profound ideological significance that extends beyond their immediate practical effects. These decisions are simultaneously acts of governance and acts of meaning-making, subject to interpretation, contestation, and legitimation through media discourse.

Tempo occupies a distinctive position within Indonesia's media landscape. Established during the New Order era and suspended under Suharto's authoritarian regime before resuming publication in 1998, Tempo has cultivated an institutional identity as a vehicle for investigative, critical journalism. Its coverage of the Sumatra flood crisis provides a rich corpus for examining how a self-consciously critical media outlet navigates the complex terrain between journalistic independence and the gravitational pull of official narratives.

Critical Discourse Analysis, as systematized by Norman Fairclough (1989, 1995, 2010), provides the theoretical and methodological apparatus for this inquiry. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework—encompassing textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice—enables researchers to trace the mechanisms by which language choices at the micro-level of text articulate with macro-level structures of power and ideology. Applied to disaster journalism, this framework illuminates how the selection of actors, the deployment of metaphor, the attribution of agency, and the structuring of narrative all function to position the state in relation to its citizens and to naturalize particular understandings of governmental responsibility.

This study addresses three interconnected research questions: (1) How did Tempo frame the Prabowo administration's disaster management policies in response to the Sumatra floods? (2) How was the Indonesian state represented in relation to the crisis, and what subject positions were constructed for both state actors and affected populations? (3) What ideological formations are embedded within and reproduced through Tempo's disaster coverage? By addressing these questions, the study contributes to an emerging body of scholarship on the politics of disaster representation in contemporary Indonesian democracy and to broader comparative debates about media, power, and ideology in Southeast Asian contexts. Critical

Discourse Analysis (CDA) constitutes a heterogeneous field of linguistic inquiry united by a commitment to examining the relationships between language, power, and social structure (Fairclough, 1989; van Dijk, 1998). Among the multiple theoretical traditions within CDA, Fairclough's dialectical-relational approach has proven particularly influential for media studies owing to its systematic integration of close textual analysis with sociological theorization of discourse as social practice.

Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model conceives of every communicative event—including news articles—as simultaneously a text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice. At the textual level, analysis attends to the formal linguistic features of discourse: vocabulary selection, grammatical structures, the distribution of active and passive voice, transitivity patterns, and the rhetorical organization of narrative. These micro-level features are not considered aesthetically neutral; rather, they encode particular representations of social actors, events, and causal relationships.

The second dimension, discursive practice, examines the processes through which texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. This includes analysis of the sourcing practices that determine whose voices are included and whose are silenced, the generic conventions that shape journalistic form, and the intertextual relationships through which news discourse draws upon and reproduces prior texts, including official statements, expert pronouncements, and competing media narratives. Discursive practice analysis reveals news production as an institutionally embedded process shaped by organizational hierarchies, professional norms, and power differentials between sources.

The third dimension, social practice, situates discourse within broader socio-historical structures of power, ideology, and hegemony. Drawing on Gramsci's concept of hegemony and Althusser's theory of ideological state apparatuses, Fairclough argues that discourse functions as a form of ideological practice that contributes to the naturalization of particular social arrangements and the marginalization of alternatives. Applied to disaster journalism, this dimension prompts inquiry into how media coverage reproduces or challenges dominant ideologies of state authority, development, and risk distribution.

The concept of framing, developed within communication research by Entman (1993) and others, provides a complementary analytical lens for examining how Tempo structures its disaster coverage. Frames operate through selection and salience: news texts select particular aspects of perceived reality and render them salient, thereby promoting particular causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and policy prescriptions. In disaster contexts, framing choices determine whether events are primarily understood as natural occurrences, failures of state governance, consequences of development policy, or expressions of social inequality.

Van Leeuwen's (2008) framework for the analysis of social actors in discourse enriches this approach by attending specifically to how participants are included or excluded, nominated or anonymized, personalized or categorized, and activated or passivated in news narratives. These representational choices are consequential: the positioning of flood victims as passive recipients of state assistance rather than active subjects with legitimate political claims, for instance, forecloses certain interpretative possibilities while enabling others.

II. METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in Fairclough's threedimensional CDA framework. The qualitative approach is appropriate given the interpretive nature of the inquiry: the study seeks to understand how meaning is constructed and negotiated within news texts, a question that cannot be adequately addressed through quantitative content analysis alone. The interpretive framework is informed by constructivist epistemology, which holds that social reality—including the reality of the Indonesian state's disaster response—is produced through discursive practices rather than simply reflected by them.

Data Sources and Corpus

The analytical corpus comprises four news articles published by Tempo—one of Indonesia's most widely read and internationally recognized news magazines—during November and December 2025. These articles were selected purposively on the basis of three criteria: temporal relevance (published during the acute phase of the flood crisis), thematic centrality (foregrounding government policy responses), and discursive diversity (representing distinct rhetorical strategies and narrative positions). Table 1 provides a systematic overview of the corpus.

Table 1. Analytical Corpus: Tempo News Articles on Sumatra Flood Disaster Management (November–December 2025)

Article Title	Author(s)	Publication Date	Main Theme
Prabowo Sebut Status Darurat Daerah Cukup untuk Tangani Banjir dan Longsor Sumatera	Galih Pradipta (Antara / Tempo)	November 2025	Government emergency classification and policy framing
Teddy: Kerja Pemerintah di Bencana Sumatera Tanpa Kamera	Y. Hendrik (Tempo)	November 2025	Government responsiveness and media visibility
Prabowo Kerahkan 3 Pesawat Hercules dan 1 Airbus A400 untuk Tangani Banjir Sumatera	E.Y. Saputra (Tempo)	December 2025	Military mobilization as state legitimacy symbol
Kunjungi Aceh, Prabowo Sampaikan Maaf hingga Minta Warga Bersabar	Tempo (English)	December 2025	Presidential rhetoric: apology and moral appeal

The selection of Tempo as the primary data source is theoretically motivated. As a media institution with an established critical orientation toward governmental power, Tempo occupies a discursively significant position: its coverage cannot be straightforwardly characterized as

either state propaganda or oppositional counter-discourse, but rather as a site of ideological negotiation and tension.

Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure proceeded in three sequential stages corresponding to Fairclough's three analytical dimensions. In the first stage, close reading of each article enabled identification of key textual features: patterns of lexical selection, grammatical constructions (particularly active/passive voice distribution and transitivity), metaphorical framings, and the positioning of social actors within narrative structures.

In the second stage, discursive practice analysis examined sourcing patterns, intertextual references, and the circulation of discourse across institutional contexts. This involved mapping the sources cited in each article, identifying the proportion of space allocated to official versus non-official voices, and tracing the intertextual chains through which official narratives were reproduced or contested.

In the third stage, social practice analysis situated the discursive findings within the broader sociopolitical context of Indonesia under the Prabowo administration, including analysis of the political economy of disaster governance, the historical precedents invoked in coverage, and the ideological formations that the discourse serves to reproduce or challenge.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following analysis systematically examines the four corpus articles across Fairclough's three analytical dimensions. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the CDA analytical framework as applied in this study, while Tables 2 and 3 synthesize the principal findings at each analytical level.

Figure 1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Framework as Applied to Tempo's Disaster Coverage



Figure 1. Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Framework (Source: Adapted from Fairclough, 1995, p. 98)

Table 2. Summary of CDA Findings Across Three Analytical Dimensions

CDA Dimension	Analytical Focus	Key Findings	Ideological Function
Textual Analysis	Diction, sentence structure, actor positioning, metaphor usage	State actors placed as primary active agents; flood victims positioned passively as aid recipients; military imagery dominates lexical choice	Constructs perception of a capable, highcapacity state through language selection
Discursive Practice	Source selection, narrative framing, intertextuality	Official government sources dominate; civil society voices are marginalized; state mobilization narrative supersedes victim experience	Legitimizes government policy while limiting alternative counternarratives
Social Practice	Macro-social context: power structures, development ideology, disaster governance	Disconnect between official rapid-response claims and uneven aid distribution reality; palm-oil economic interests surfaced amid crisis	Reinforces developmentalist ideology and centralist state authority; obscures structural policy failures

1. **Textual Analysis: Language Choices and State Representation**

Across the four corpus articles, a consistent pattern emerges in which the state is represented as the primary, active agent of disaster response. The first article's headline—"Prabowo Sebut Status Darurat Daerah Cukup untuk Tangani Banjir dan Longsor Sumatera"—exemplifies the textual strategy of positioning the president as a declarative authority whose pronouncements establish the parameters of policy reality. The modal construction "sudah cukup" (already sufficient) performs a rhetorical closure: it forecloses deliberation by asserting that existing mechanisms adequately address the crisis, thereby delegitimizing civil society demands for a national emergency declaration.

The third article's deployment of militarized lexis—"dikerahkan" (deployed/mobilized), "pesawat angkut besar" (large transport aircraft), "atas instruksi langsung" (under direct instruction)— constructs an image of state power that is imposing, technologically sophisticated, and hierarchically commanded. This lexical register, drawn from military discourse, serves an ideological function identified by Fairclough (1995) as technologization: the translation of political decisions into the apparently neutral language of operational logistics, which naturalizes the state's approach and depoliticizes questions about its adequacy.

Transitivity analysis reveals a systematic asymmetry in agency attribution: government actors consistently appear in active subject positions ("Prabowo mengirimkan," "Teddy menegaskan," "pemerintah mengerahkan"), while affected populations appear as passive objects or beneficiaries of state action. This grammatical arrangement reproduces what van Leeuwen (2008) identifies as the exclusion of social actors through passivation—a strategy that renders certain participants invisible as political subjects even as they are rendered visible as humanitarian objects.

2. **Discursive Practice: Source Hierarchies and Narrative Dominance**

Analysis of discursive practice reveals a pronounced hierarchy of source authority across the corpus. Official government sources—presidential statements, cabinet secretary press conferences, and military communiqués—dominate the informational architecture of all four articles. This finding is consistent with the "hierarchy of credibility" identified in classical sociology of news (Becker, 1967) and reproduced within contemporary political journalism: institutional sources are accorded epistemic privilege that structures what counts as newsworthy information.

The second article's account of the "working without cameras" narrative illustrates the mechanism of intertextual reproduction particularly clearly. Secretary of Cabinet Teddy Indra Wijaya's press conference statements are cited directly and at length, creating an intertextual relay that amplifies the official claim of ceaseless governmental effort while the structural conditions limiting aid effectiveness receive no comparable discursive space. The "without cameras" formulation itself is a meta-discursive move that pre-emptively delegitimizes media criticism: it positions any reporting of governmental inadequacy as a product of media inattention rather than governmental failure.

Tempo's fact-checking practice—evident in the article addressing the misattributed claim that Prabowo had declared a national disaster—demonstrates an additional dimension of discursive power: the capacity to function as an arbiter of factual legitimacy. While this practice serves democratically valuable functions, it also positions Tempo itself as an institutional authority whose verification procedures determine the boundaries of legitimate public information, a positioning that reinforces rather than challenges the institutional hierarchy of credibility.

3. **Social Practice: Ideology and the Governance of Disaster**

At the level of social practice, the Tempo corpus articulates with broader ideological formations that structure the political economy of disaster governance in contemporary Indonesia. The consistent emphasis on state capacity, hierarchical command, and technical mobilization reflects what might be termed a "developmentalist disaster ideology": a framework in which disaster response is conceptualized primarily as a logistical challenge to be solved through state resources and military efficiency, rather than as a crisis rooted in structural vulnerabilities produced by development patterns, land-use policies, and social inequality.

The fourth article's account of President Prabowo's Aceh visit—with its presidential apology and call for patience—illustrates what Fairclough (1995) terms ideological closure at the level of social practice. The presidential "maaf" (apology) acknowledges governmental limitation while simultaneously foreclosing structural critique: by personalizing responsibility in the figure of an empathetic president who acknowledges fallibility, the discourse deflects attention from the systemic dimensions of disaster governance failure, including deforestation, inadequate early warning systems, and the chronic underfunding of provincial disaster management agencies.

The sporadic appearance of palm oil industry references within flood coverage gestures toward a deeper ideological formation: the subordination of disaster risk reduction to the imperatives of extractive economic development. This ideological layer—present but muted in the Tempo corpus—connects Indonesia's flood crisis to global debates about the relationship between development models, environmental degradation, and disaster vulnerability. Its underdevelopment within the analyzed articles suggests the limits of Tempo's critical orientation when confronted with economic interests aligned with the state's development agenda.

Table 3. State Narrative Strategies, Ideological Functions, and Counter-Realities in Tempo's Disaster Coverage

Narrative Strategy	Key Discourse Marker	Ideological Function	Counter-Reality
Rapid Mobilization	Deployment of military aircraft (Hercules, A400)	State as a highcapacity institution	Aid distribution bottlenecks in remote areas
Behind-the-Scenes Work	"Working without cameras" narrative (Seskab Teddy)	State as morally committed, not media-dependent	Structural inequities in aid delivery obscured
Presidential Empathy	Presidential apology and call for patience (Aceh visit)	State as morally accountable and empathetic	Rhetorical politics over systemic accountability
Policy Boundary Control	"Regional emergency status is sufficient" framing	State as competent self-regulator	Civil society demands for national status dismissed

4. The Gap Between Discourse and Social Reality

A fundamental tension runs through the Tempo corpus: the distance between the state's discursive claims and the social reality experienced by affected populations. This gap—identified across all three analytical dimensions—constitutes the most significant finding of this study. At the textual level, the language of governmental competence and coordination

coexists with oblique references to unmet needs. At the level of discursive practice, official source dominance systematically limits the representational space available for victim testimony and civil society critique. At the level of social practice, the developmentalist ideology that structures official discourse conflicts with the structural vulnerabilities that produce disproportionate disaster impacts on marginalized communities.

This discursive gap is neither accidental nor simply a product of journalistic limitations. It reflects the structural position of news organizations like Tempo within a media ecology in which access to official sources, advertising dependencies, and the professional norms of "balanced" reporting all create institutional pressures toward the reproduction of dominant narratives. Fairclough's framework enables us to see this not as individual failure but as the systematic effect of social structures operating through discursive practices.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Tempo's coverage of the Prabowo administration's response to the 2025 Sumatra floods operates as a complex discursive formation in which legitimizing narratives predominate without achieving complete ideological closure. Through systematic application of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, the analysis has traced the mechanisms by which state actors are positioned as primary agents of disaster response, official narratives are reproduced through source hierarchies and lexical choices, and developmentalist ideology is naturalized through the technologization of political decisions.

The study's principal theoretical contribution lies in its demonstration that disaster journalism functions not merely as a mirror of social reality but as an active participant in the production of political meaning. The language choices, sourcing practices, and framing strategies documented in the Tempo corpus do not simply describe the government's disaster response; they participate in constructing public understanding of what constitutes an adequate response, who bears responsibility for disaster outcomes, and what kinds of political claims are legitimate.

These findings have implications for both media practice and disaster governance scholarship. For media practitioners, the analysis highlights the importance of diversifying source hierarchies to include affected community voices and independent expert analysis, and of attending critically to the ideological implications of language choices in disaster coverage. For scholars of Indonesian politics and comparative disaster governance, the study illuminates the discursive mechanisms through which state legitimacy is constructed and contested during crisis events—a dynamic of particular significance in Indonesia's still-consolidating democratic context.

Future research should extend the corpus to include a wider range of media outlets—including community media, social media platforms, and international coverage—to enable systematic comparison of framing strategies across different institutional positions. Longitudinal analysis tracking the evolution of disaster discourse through the recovery phase would additionally illuminate how initial crisis representations shape the subsequent politics of reconstruction and accountability. Comparative research examining disaster media coverage across Southeast Asian democracies would further contextualize the Indonesian case within regional patterns of mediastate relations.

V. REFERENCES

[1] ANTARA News. (2025, December 1). LSM harap bantuan bencana dipercepat ke wilayah terisolir Aceh [NGOs hope disaster aid is expedited to isolated Aceh regions]. ANTARA News.

[2] Antara News. (2025, December 7). Prabowo assigns Army Chief to lead emergency bridge repairs in Aceh. Antara News.

[3] Becker, H. S. (1967). Whose side are we on? Social Problems, 14(3), 239–247. https://doi.org/10.2307/799801

[4] Chilton, P. (2004). Analysing political discourse: Theory and practice. Routledge.

[5] Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. Journal of Communication, 43(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

[6] Fairclough, N. (1989). Language and power. Longman.

[7] Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language. Longman.

[8] Fairclough, N. (1995). Media discourse. Edward Arnold.

[9] Fairclough, N. (2010). Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language (2nd ed.). Routledge.

[10] Farmita, A. R. (2025). Keliru: Presiden Prabowo tetapkan bencana Sumatera sebagai bencana nasional [False: President Prabowo declares Sumatera disaster as national disaster]. Tempo.

[11] Hendrik, Y. (2025). Teddy: Kerja pemerintah di bencana Sumatera tanpa kamera [Teddy: Government work in Sumatera disaster without cameras]. Tempo.com.

[12] Indoleft. (2025, December 14). 113 organisations demand Prabowo declare Sumatra floods a national disaster. Indoleft.

[13] Mardianti, D. L. (2025). Pakar hukum kritik gaya Prabowo atasi bencana Sumatera [Legal experts criticize Prabowo's style in handling Sumatera disaster]. Tempo.

[14] Reddit. (2025, December 17). PKS heran: Listrik Aceh Tamiang nyala saat Prabowo datang, mati setelah kunjungan? [PKS puzzled: Aceh Tamiang electricity active during Prabowo's visit, off after?]. Reddit.

[15] Saputra, E. Y. (2025). Prabowo kerahkan 3 pesawat Hercules dan 1 Airbus A400 untuk banjir Sumatra [Prabowo deploys 3 Hercules aircraft and 1 Airbus A400 for Sumatra floods]. Tempo.

[16] Tempo (English). (2025, December 13). Prabowo urges disaster victims to remain patient. Tempo. T

[17] ierney, K. (2014). The social roots of risk: Producing disasters, promoting resilience. Stanford University Press.

[18] van Dijk, T. A. (1998). Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach. Sage Publications.

[19] van Leeuwen, T. (2008). Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis. Oxford University Press.