

Moral judgements and ideological positioning: A critical discourse analysis of Prabowo Subianto's portrayal in BBC News

ABSTRACT - This study examines the discursive representation of Prabowo Subianto, a prominent Indonesian political figure, within a selected corpus of news articles published by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the analytical framework, the research integrated both deductive and inductive analytical approaches. The deductive phase was grounded in Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal framework, which systematically categorized evaluative language into three attitudinal resources: affect, judgement, and appreciation. The inductive phase complemented this by uncovering hidden ideologies embedded within the news texts that may not be explicitly captured by the appraisal system alone. Data annotation was conducted using the UAM Corpus Tool to ensure systematic and replicable identification of attitudinal resources. The quantitative findings reveal that judgement constitutes the most frequently deployed attitudinal resource, accounting for 53.13% of all identified occurrences, followed by affect (30.96%) and appreciation (15.89%). Within the judgement sub-category, negative judgement of propriety, which evaluates behavior according to ethical and moral standards, dominates the discourse at 30.80%, collectively portraying Prabowo as morally problematic. Negative affect, in turn, reflects public fear and anxiety toward Prabowo's personal conduct and political candidacy, while appreciation resources highlight his strategic efforts to secure voter support. The study concludes that the predominance of negative evaluations aligns with the BBC's publicly stated commitment to universal human rights and liberal democratic values. Conversely, the presence of positive evaluations suggests a concurrent journalistic effort to maintain balance and impartiality, reflecting the inherent tension between advocacy-oriented reporting and the normative ideal of journalistic neutrality. These findings contribute to the broader understanding of how international media construct political identities in non-Western contexts and underscore the ideological underpinnings of ostensibly objective news discourse.

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1. Introduction

Critical thinking is an important aspect for students to deeply understand media texts, particularly in language and discourse studies. As we know, media outlets use language as a tool to shape narratives, frame public opinions, and construct ideological perspectives (Wodak, 2001; van Dijk, 2008; Fairclough, 2013). van Dijk (2006) later adds that media discourse does this by organizing information in specific ways, selecting certain lexical items, foregrounding yet also backgrounding certain aspects of events, and employing evaluative language to guide public interpretation. Therefore, it becomes essential for students, specifically students of English studies to develop their critical skills so that they may interpret texts beyond the surface meanings. Critical thinking empowers students to question the assumptions embedded in media texts by identifying whose interests are being served and which perspectives are ignored. In accordance with this, Gee (1996), Luke (2000), and Janks (2010) explain that critical literacy focuses on revealing the ideologies, biases, and power within a discourse. It enables students to understand how language functions within structures of power.

In language studies, the appraisal framework (Martin & White, 2005) is considered a useful tool for uncovering the ideological meanings in media texts. The attitude resources which consist of affect, judgement, and appreciation focus on evaluating people, emotions, and the value of things or phenomena (Martin & White, 2005; Bednarek, 2006; White, 2015). Attitude resources explain how language expresses emotions (affect), judges someone's behaviour based on moral values (judgement), and evaluates things or phenomena based on their qualities or appearance (appreciation). Bednarek (2006) argues that it offers a systematic approach to analyze how journalists use evaluative language to align with or distance themselves from particular perspectives, which in turn shapes readers' interpretations of events, individuals, and issues. Therefore, equipping critical literacy with appraisal analysis enables students to understand how evaluation works in language, how texts serve certain ideologies, and how they influence readers' interpretations.

To support the appraisal analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed since CDA is helpful to understand how language reflects and is influenced by social and political reasons. According to Wodak (2001) and van Dijk (2008), CDA provides the tools to investigate how discourse reflects, reproduces, or challenges power structures, identities, and ideologies. This interdisciplinary approach is beneficial for analyzing how media portray political leaders, as evaluative language is often used to influence public perception. Previous research indicates that the framing of political leaders significantly affects public judgement and influences how leaders are perceived in terms of character and competence (Pinto, 2021), trustworthiness, and leadership (Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Simunjak & Street, 2017). In democratic countries, media portrayals of political leaders are often viewed as essential to electoral success. The way political leaders manage their image and reputation plays a major role in determining electoral success and political survival (Jones, 1995; Franklin, 2004; Simunjak & Street, 2017).

However, problems may arise whenever the portrayals are done by foreign or international media because they often present viewpoints that do not align with the national narratives (Du, 2012; Zhang & Meadows III, 2014; El Sherbieny, 2022). This contrast is

definitely obvious when the portrayal covers controversial figures, as such coverage may signal biases or indicate disapproval. It finally affects how the leaders are seen internationally. In Indonesia, controversial figures such as Prabowo Subianto, often draws media attention and public debate. His polarizing reputation, influenced by his background in military and politics, leads to different stories: some view him as a strong and capable leader, while others worry about his authoritarian tendencies (Aspinall, 2015; Rakhmani & Saraswati 2021; Tanto & Tanusy, 2024; Yilmaz et al., 2024).

Throughout his career, Prabowo Subianto has received both praise and criticism. In February 2024, BBC News portrayed him as an authoritarian leader. BBC emphasized his military past which led to his alleged involvement in human rights abuses. As a result, it raised concerns about democracy and freedoms. This portrayal went alongside his major loss in the 2024 presidential election among overseas voters. He and his running mate Gibran Rakabuming Raka only received 748 votes in the UK and Ireland, behind rivals Anies-Muhaimin (1,527) and Ganjar-Mahfud (1,400) (taken from Kompas.com, February 2024). This result may reflect the impact of BBC coverage on Indonesian voters overseas.

Considering the problem above, this study aims to analyze how BBC News portrays Prabowo Subianto in its news articles. Utilizing appraisal analysis, this study focused on examining how evaluative language shapes attitudes toward his character and political image. Using the UAM Corpus Tool (version 6.2) which was developed by O'Donnell (2009), the study systematically identified both implicit and explicit evaluations in the texts. BBC News was chosen as the primary data source for this study due to its recognition as one of the most trusted global news outlets (Lewis & Cushion, 2019), particularly in the context of political and international affairs (Pew Research Center, 2020; Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021). This reputation makes BBC News an ideal platform for examining how media outlets employ evaluative language to construct ideological positioning in their reporting. Ahmad (2025) argues that the BBC is widely recognized as a powerful institution that shapes news norms and practices in media reporting, which reinforces its credibility and influence in the global media landscape. Given this role, BBC News holds a significant part in framing political narratives, including its portrayal of Prabowo Subianto, Indonesia's current president and a prominent political figure.

Several studies have investigated Prabowo Subianto's image through different frameworks. Dewi et al. (2021) utilized CDA to explore transitivity in The Guardian's coverage of Prabowo's appointment as Defence Minister, the next research comes from Asidikiy (2022) which applied Multimodal Discourse Analysis to Tempo magazine's portrayal during the 2019 election. Later Thahara et al. (2024), analyzed The Jakarta Post's evaluative language using attitude resources, and then Tanto and Tanusy (2024) employed van Dijk's CDA framework to uncover ideological positioning in The New York Times. Similarly, Widiandi and Sufyanto (2024) identified positive narratives in a YouTube interview using the same model. The most relevant study for this is by Yolanda and Simamora (2024), which examined BBC News' portrayal of Prabowo using appraisal analysis and the AntConc Corpus tool.

While those studies have offered useful research contributions, it should be noted that they do not integrate multiple perspectives to comprehensively examine the complexity of media portrayals. To address these gaps, this research adopted an interdisciplinary approach by integrating SFL appraisal analysis with CDA, specifically Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA). By integrating these frameworks, this study provides a more nuanced analysis of evaluative language and DHA used in the media's representation of Prabowo Subianto. Unlike earlier studies that focused on specific events or election periods, this study examined news discourse over a decade (2014–2025). This time frame makes it possible to trace how Prabowo's portrayal shifts over time, from his earlier political career to his current position as president. In terms of methodology, this study differs in the use of the UAM Corpus Tool for data annotation and analysis, which allows a more systematic and transparent examination of the data. It combines qualitative analysis with computational support to provide a more comprehensive account of how Prabowo Subianto's image is constructed in international media.

2. Literature review

2.1. *Critical discourse analysis*

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines the dialectical relations between language and power, and how this interaction influences other social relationships and structures (Fairclough, 2013). CDA revolves around three fundamental concepts: critique, ideology, and power (Reisigl and Wodak, 2017). Critique involves analyzing discourse in a way that challenges dominant narratives and brings hidden assumptions to light. Ideology refers to the underlying beliefs and values that shape how discourse is constructed, while power focuses on how language is used to sustain, contest, or reshape social hierarchies and control. Fairclough (2013) suggests that research and analysis count as CDA if they meet this following characteristics: 1) It is not just an analysis of discourse (or more specifically texts), but it involves a systematic, transdisciplinary analysis of the relationships between discourse and other aspects of the social process, 2) It is more than general commentary on discourse, it requires a structured and careful analysis of texts, and last 3) It is not purely descriptive, it also has a normative dimension, which functions to identify social wrongs in discourse and explore ways to intensify or mitigate them.

2.2. *Discourse historical approach (DHA)*

Wodak proposed Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), which emphasizes the role of historical context in discourse analysis (2001). DHA combines textual analysis with ethnographic studies, interviews, and historical research to trace how discourses on identity, politics, and discrimination evolve over time. Wodak (2016) describes DHA as three-dimensional after (1) having identified the specific contents or topics of a specific discourse, (2) discursive strategies are investigated. Then, (3) linguistic means are examined as types, and the specific, context-dependent linguistic realizations are examined as tokens. This implies analyzing the coherence of the text by first detecting the macro-topics and related subtopics. Therefore, it is important to understand the aim of the text producer in a specific genre including

whether the speaker intends to convince someone and thus create or perform a persuasive text, tell a story, or select a more factual mode to report an incident.

2.3. Appraisal analysis

Appraisal analysis focuses on how texts convey evaluation whether they are positive or negative (Martin & White, 2005). It is categorized into three subsystems: 1) attitude which deals with the expression of feelings, 2) engagement which deals with how speakers or writers engage with other voices and perspectives, and 3) graduation which deals with the scaling of intensity or force in evaluative expressions. Through the use of appraisal, we can examine how writers or speakers position themselves and their audiences, and how language is used to convey ideological and social meanings. In CDA, appraisal plays effectively to uncover how evaluative language functions to reinforce or challenge power structures, social norms, and political positions. This framework emphasizes the significant role of language not merely as a medium of communication, but as a mechanism that can sustain, contest, or transform societal norms and ideologies.

2.4. Attitude resources

As mentioned earlier, attitude in Appraisal Theory explains how language expresses emotions, judges behaviour, and evaluates things (Martin & White, 2005). It is divided into three categories: affect (expression of feeling), judgement (evaluation of behaviour), and appreciation (assessments of value).

2.4.1. Affect

Affect refers to the linguistic resources used to express emotions, whether positive or negative, such as happiness, sadness, confidence, anxiety, interest, or boredom (Martin & White, 2005). Affect serves as a core element of the attitude system which reflects the emotional dimension of human experience in language (Martin & White, 2005). Affect is categorized into un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, and dis/inclination. Firstly, un/happiness deals with the feelings of happiness and sadness. These feelings may appear as general emotional states, but they can also be directed at a specific trigger, such as liking or disliking someone or something (Martin & White, 2005). Secondly, dis/satisfaction deals with feelings people have about success or frustration in the activities they take part in, whether as active participants or as observers (Martin & White, 2005). Thirdly, in/security deals with feelings of peace or anxiety in relation to one's surroundings, including the people within them. These emotions reflect whether individuals feel safe and secure, or instead experience threat and uncertainty (Martin & White, 2005). Lastly, dis/inclination deals with feelings of desire or reluctance to engage in an activity or situation. Positive feelings indicate willingness or eagerness, while negative feelings show avoidance or lack of interest (Martin & White, 2005).

2.4.2. *Judgement*

Judgement refers to how language evaluates people and their behaviour, which focuses on evaluating their character, actions, and ethics. Judgement enables speakers and writers to express admiration or criticism, praise or condemnation, based on societal norms and values. Martin and White (2005) categorize judgement into two: social esteem and social sanction. Social esteem evaluates individuals based on the norms of daily behaviour and qualities that are socially admired or criticized within informal settings, such as family, friends, or communities. Social esteem consists of three dimensions: First, normality concerns whether a person's behaviour or characteristics align with societal expectations of what is typical or unusual. Second, capacity evaluates a person's competence, skills, or ability to perform effectively. Third, tenacity assesses an individual's persistence, reliability, and resolve in achieving goals or overcoming challenges (Martin & White, 2005). On the other hand, social sanction evaluates people's behaviour based on established moral or ethical rules, generally shaped by formal institutions like law or religion. Unlike social esteem, social sanction may result in formal penalties, such as legal or institutional punishments. It is concerned with two dimensions: veracity which relates to a person's honesty, integrity, and commitment to truth, and propriety which assesses whether a person's behaviour aligns with social or ethical norms, focusing on issues of morality, kindness, and ethical conduct (Martin & White, 2005).

2.4.3. *Appreciation*

Appreciation consists of the systems: reaction, composition, and valuation (Martin & White, 2005). Firstly, reaction deals with how things are experienced or perceived by individuals. It consists of two dimensions: impact and quality. Impact refers to how strongly a situation or event affects someone. Quality, on the other hand, refers to the type or nature of the reaction, focusing on what kind of feeling or evaluation is triggered by an experience and how that experience is appraised based on its characteristics (Martin & White, 2005). Secondly, composition deals with how something is structured or arranged as a whole. It focuses on whether the elements within an entity are perceived as balanced or unbalanced, and whether the structure is seen as simple or complex (Martin & White, 2005). Thirdly, valuation deals with how a phenomenon is assessed in terms of its social or cultural value. Valuation examines whether something is seen as important, valuable, or worthwhile from the speaker's point of view (Martin & White, 2005).

Although the Appraisal Theory and the Discourse Historical Approach belong to different analytical frameworks, they can be effectively integrated to examine media discourse. Appraisal, especially the attitude resources, provides a structured way to analyze evaluative language at the level of the text. However, this analysis cannot stand alone, since evaluation is always embedded within a broader discursive context, as pointed out by Hunston and Thompson (2000). Therefore, an analysis that focuses only on evaluative language at the textual level may be limited, as it does not fully explore the broader contexts in which these meanings are produced and consumed.

This is where DHA becomes helpful. Instead of considering linguistic choices in isolation, DHA places discourse within broader contexts such as historical, social, or political contexts. In this way, the analysis can move beyond the text itself and consider how certain portrayals develop over time and within specific socio-political settings. DHA provides a broader perspective for understanding how BBC News portrays Prabowo Subianto across different periods and contexts. When combined, these two frameworks make it possible to connect detailed textual analysis with a broader contextual interpretation. Appraisal theory helps to identify how Prabowo is evaluated in the text, while DHA helps to explain how these evaluations are connected to shifting political contexts and media narratives.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study used both deductive and inductive analysis within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Wodak & Meyer (2001) describe that CDA focuses on examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology, which makes it relevant for analyzing media portrayal. The deductive analysis was used to apply the attitude subsystem of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005). The UAM Corpus Tool assisted the researchers in doing manual annotation and measuring the frequency of affect, judgement, and appreciation. Meanwhile, the inductive analysis was employed to interpret these linguistic patterns in relation to the broader historical, social, and political contexts in which the news texts were produced. Through this process, the study explored the BBC's ideological stance as reflected in its coverage of Prabowo Subianto.

3.2. Data source

The data of this study were thirteen BBC News articles covering Prabowo Subianto from 2014 to the most recent data in 2025. The time span allowed the researchers to trace changes in the coverage of Prabowo's portrayal. The source of the data was the official BBC News website at www.bbcnews.com.

3.3 Data collection procedure

The data collection procedure for this study was carried out in several steps. First, the researchers retrieved relevant articles from the official BBC News website at (www.bbcnews.com) using the keyword "Prabowo". Second, the researchers selected articles that specifically discussed Prabowo Subianto. Third, each selected article was saved as a Word document, labeled and arranged in chronological order based on the publication date to support temporal analysis. Lastly, the researchers organized all the files in a single folder so they could be easily accessed and analyzed during the study.

3.4. Corpus analysis

Corpus analysis is a reliable quantitative tool that allows researchers to examine linguistic data statistically while maintaining a corpus-driven perspective. It helps uncover

patterns that may not be immediately expected, while also supporting anticipated findings by assigning objective significance to the data (Mezghanni, 2018). The corpus analysis in this study was carried out in two main steps. The first step involved building the corpus, while the second focused on annotating the data. The procedures for each step are explained below.

3.4.1. Building or developing the corpus

Alsaiani (2024) and Nurlela et al, (2025) suggest that the first step in corpus analysis involves building or developing the corpus. This process includes the following steps as adopted by Nurlela et al. (2025). First, the researchers selected the “*Launch New Project*” option in the UAM Corpus Tool. Next, the researchers named the project “*Attitude Resources of Prabowo Subianto*” and clicked the “*Make Project*” button to create it. Then, the newly created project was selected from the project list. After that, the researchers chose “*Add File to Corpus*” and selected “*Paste from Clipboard*” in the file section. Each news text was copied and placed into a separate sub-corpora within the main project. Finally, the researchers saved the files to ensure that all data were properly stored.

3.4.2. Annotating the corpus

Annotating the corpus is the next step in corpus analysis after we finish building the corpus. According to Leech (2011), this step involves adding extra details about the structure or meaning of a text, which allows us as the researcher to find and analyze specific language features within a corpus. Alsaiani (2024) explains that through this step, we can conduct detailed searches and obtain statistical data to support the analysis. Once the news texts had been imported into the UAM Corpus Tool, the researchers annotated them manually using the attitude appraisal framework. The annotation process followed several steps adapted from Nurlela et al. (2025):

1. First, the researchers selected “*Add New Layer*” under the manual annotation menu in the Layers section of the UAM Corpus Tool.

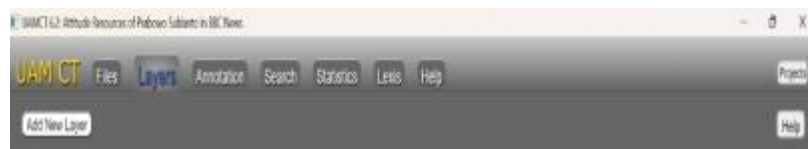


Figure 1. Add new layer button in the layers tab of UAM corpus tool

2. Next, the researchers chose “*Built-in Scheme*” and then selected “*Appraisal Analysis: Attitude Only.*”

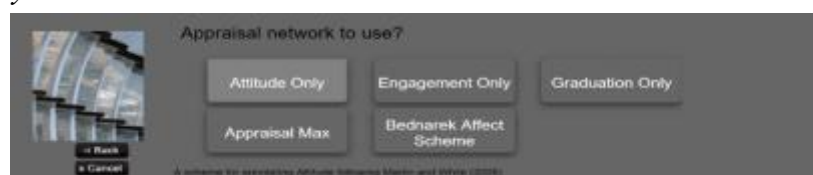


Figure 2. Attitude scheme for appraisal analysis

7. Finally, the researchers accessed the “*Statistic Display*” feature to generate an overview of the annotated data based on attitude lexicalization.

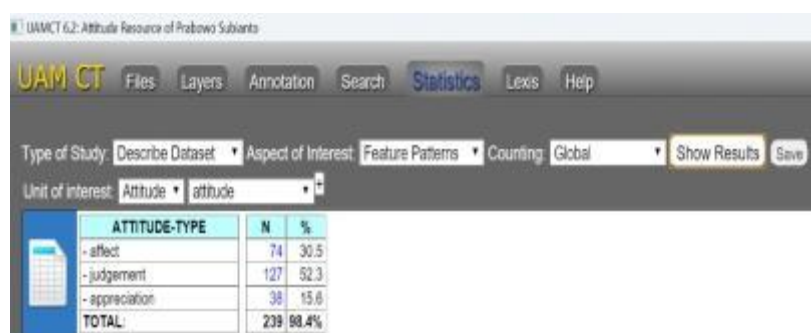


Figure 6. Statistical display of data annotation

3.5. Data analysis

This study applied Wodak’s (2001) Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) within the framework of CDA through two main steps of analysis. The first step was to identify the general discourse topic. This analysis was done with the assistance of the UAM Corpus Tool, in which all texts were annotated based on the presence of attitude resources, including affect, judgement, and appreciation, along with their dimensions such as polarity, explicitness, and appraiser. The researchers conducted the annotation manually, after that the UAM Corpus Tool was used to calculate the distribution and percentage of the annotated data. By analyzing these evaluative patterns, the study was able to identify recurring themes in the discourse more clearly, which helped to highlight the main topics reflected in BBC News coverage.

The second step was to examine the broader contexts where the discourses were embedded. In this step, the researchers examined implicit assumptions within the texts to identify the ideological perspectives shaping the portrayal. This step aimed to explain why certain representations were constructed in particular ways by considering the historical, social, and political contexts in which the texts were produced and consumed. This contextual analysis enabled a deeper interpretation of BBC News’s portrayal of Prabowo Subianto and helped reveal the ideological stance reflected in its reporting. Finally, the study concluded by summarizing the findings and outlining their broader implications.

3.6. Trustworthiness

Following Creswell (2014), this study ensured trustworthiness through systematic procedures applied to both quantitative and qualitative data. For the quantitative data, trustworthiness was achieved through inter-rater reliability by consulting with experts in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), including the research supervisors and several doctoral students with strong academic backgrounds in these fields. Meanwhile, for the qualitative data, trustworthiness was achieved through peer debriefing. The process required the researchers to discuss their data analysis and interpretations with their fellow researchers and their academic peers to make sure that their findings were consistent, well-grounded, and free from potential bias.

4. Findings

To portray Prabowo Subianto in its news coverage, BBC News uses evaluative language in the form of attitude resources to shape the narrative surrounding him. The distribution of the attitude resources identified in the news texts is presented in the table below.

Table 1

The distribution of attitude resources found in the BBC news.

Attitude Resource	Frequency	Percentage
Affect	74	30.96%
Judgement	127	53.13%
Appreciation	38	15.89%
Total	239	100%

From the table above, we can see that judgement is the most dominant attitude resource in BBC News coverage of Prabowo Subianto, which dominates for 53.13% of the 239 identified realizations. The result indicates that the coverage mainly focuses on assessing Prabowo's character and ethical conduct, particularly in his relation to alleged human rights violations. Affect, which appears as the second most frequent category, represents 30.96% of the data. These affective meanings are primarily expressed through public reactions to Prabowo's presidential candidacy and public persona. The expressions commonly reflect feelings of anxiety and concern, those regarding his potential leadership style and perceived authoritarian tendencies. Appreciation occurs least frequently, gaining only 15.89% of the total. The data implies that the BBC's portrayal prioritizes a narrative about Prabowo's character and persona over a substantive evaluation of his political work. In other words, the portrayal is more concerned with defining who he is (often through judgement and affect) than with assessing what he does (which would require more appreciation of his policies and administrative performance).

To further understand the evaluative position taken by BBC News in its portrayal of Prabowo Subianto, this table below presents the distribution of attitude dimensions based on three key aspects: polarity, explicitness, and appraiser. The distribution of each element is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Distribution of attitude dimensions in BBC's news.

Aspect	Device	Total	Percentage
Attitude polarity	Positive	96	40.16%
	Negative	143	59.83%
Explicitness	Inscribed	230	96.23%
	Invoked	9	3.76%
Appraiser	Writer-appraiser	163	68.20%
	Other-appraiser	76	31.80%

Table 2 shows attitude dimension which includes attitude polarity, explicitness, and appraiser. In terms of polarity, the analysis reveals that BBC News tends to portray Prabowo Subianto negatively, as negative attitudes constitute 59.83% of the total realizations. This tendency reflects the coverage's emphasis on Prabowo Subianto's past human rights record and his personality traits. Talking about explicitness, the analysis shows that most attitudes are expressed explicitly, gaining 96.23% of the data. The discourse shows a clear pattern: evaluations are often explicit rather than implied. This directness establishes the BBC's unambiguous stance on Prabowo's character and leadership. With regard to the source of appraisal, writer-appraised attitudes dominate the data at 68.20%, showing that the evaluations are largely constructed by the news writers themselves, rather than being attributed to quoted sources or external voices.

4.1. Types of attitude resource found in BBC news

4.1.1. Affect

BBC News primarily employs affect to highlight the emotional responses of Indonesian citizens toward Prabowo Subianto, particularly emphasizing the fear and anxiety surrounding his perceived temperament and authoritarian tendencies. The lexical choices used by BBC such as doubt, fear, warn, and worry, serve to underscore this sentiment by foregrounding insecurity.

Extract 1:

They fear a Suharto-era general back at the helm of Indonesia will drag the country back into a dark period. (BBC News, 2024)

Affect is also used to reflect the perspectives of Prabowo's supporters, some of whom desire a strong leader for Indonesia, which contributes to the occurrence of inclination. This inclination is reflected in expressions that signal admiration for Prabowo's strongman image which are perceived as qualities necessary to ensure national stability and security.

Extract 2:

Some on voting day even told the BBC they wanted a strongman in office – someone to carry on the policies of the widely adored outgoing President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo. (BBC News, 2024)

Table 3

Distribution of affected resources in BBC news.

Affect Type	Polarity	Freq	%	Total	Total (%)
Un/happiness	Positive	14	5.85%	14	5.85%
	Negative	-	-		
Dis/satisfaction	Positive	-	-	17	7.11%
	Negative	17	7.11%		
In/security	Positive	3	1.25%	28	11.71%
	Negative	25	10.46%		

Dis/inclination	Positive	12	5.02%	15	6.27%
	Negative	3	1.25%		

4.1.2. Judgement

BBC News utilizes judgement to evaluate Prabowo Subianto's personalities and behaviours with the most dominant type being negative propriety judgement. This is demonstrated in the way the BBC repeatedly exposed Prabowo's alleged human rights violations during his tenure in the Indonesian special forces (Kopassus).

Extract 3:

During his time as a leading officer in Suharto's regime, he's accused of ordering his unit to abduct and torture dozens of democracy activists. (BBC News, 2024)

However, BBC News also attempts to maintain a sense of balance in its reporting by employing positive capacity judgement. This evaluation highlights Prabowo's competence and political ability, particularly in successfully attaining the highest political office during the 2024 presidential election.

Extract 4:

After two failed attempts, Prabowo Subianto has finally clawed his way into Indonesia's ultimate seat of Power. (BBC News, 2024)

In addition, judgement is also employed by BBC News to portray Prabowo as a figure lacking honesty and integrity. This is exposed through several realizations of negative veracity judgement, which depict him as someone who frequently denies allegations of human rights abuses.

Extract 5:

He has always denied these allegations. (BBC News, 2024)

Table 4

Distribution of judgement resources in BBC news.

Judgement Type	Polarity	Freq	%	Total	Total (%)
Normality	Positive	2	0.83%	4	1.67%
	Negative	2	0.83%		
Capacity	Positive	30	12.55%	41	17.15%
	Negative	11	4.60%		
Tenacity	Positive	8	3.34%	8	3.34%
	Negative	-	-		
Propriety	Positive	9	3.76%	67	28.03%
	Negative	58	24.26%		
Veracity	Positive	-	-	7	2.92%
	Negative	7	2.92%		

4.1.3. Appreciation

All three resources of appreciation: reaction, composition, and social valuation, were found in BBC News' coverage of Prabowo Subianto, although their presence is relatively limited throughout the text. However, the polarity of appreciation is presented in a fairly balanced manner. Positive appreciation is employed to appreciate Prabowo's strategic ability in running an effective campaign that ultimately led to his election as president which was manifested in positive social valuation.

Extract 6:

It proved very effective, in particular with younger Indonesians who have little knowledge of Mr Prabowo's controversial past. (BBC News, 2024)

In contrast, negative appreciation is used to critique certain policies associated with Prabowo, particularly those perceived as ineffective or lacking public benefit shortly after his electoral victory. BBC News utilizes negative appreciation composition to present this case, mostly when it reports on his newly formed cabinet, which is described as excessively large.

Extract 7:

A "bloated cabinet" can complicate bureaucracy and lengthen the policy making process. (BBC News, 2024)

BBC News also conveys a positive appreciation (impact) toward Prabowo's victory by framing the moment as both dramatic and historically significant for Indonesia. This evaluation is clear in the following extract, where the media emphasizes it as very emotional and symbolic. It frames Prabowo's victory in the 2024 presidential election not merely as a political success, but as a significant moment in Indonesia's history.

Extract 8:

The apparent victory of Prabowo Subianto in Indonesia's presidential election is a dramatic moment in the country's history. (BBC News, 2024)

Table 5

Distribution of appreciation resources in BBC news.

Appreciation-type	Polarity	Freq	%	Total	Total (%)
Reaction	Positive	12	5.02%	17	7.11%
	Negative	5	2.09%		
Composition	Positive	-	-	3	1.25%
	Negative	3	1.25%		
Social-valuation	Positive	7	2.92%	18	7.53%
	Negative	11	4.60%		

4.2. *Underlying reasons behind BBC news portrayal*

To uncover the reasons behind BBC News' portrayal of Prabowo Subianto, we as the researchers drew on the final stage of Wodak's (2001) Discourse-Historical Approach. In this stage, we emphasized the importance of analyzing the broader context in which the discourses are embedded. To conduct this, three interrelated contexts: historical, social, and political, were carried out. We begin with the first context which is historical since in most coverage, BBC News often connects Prabowo to his past. Historically, Prabowo Subianto is closely associated with the traditional elite. As the son of a popular economist and the former son-in-law of Suharto, Prabowo has long had a position of power and influence in Indonesia. His privileged background is shown by how quickly he rose in the military, one of them is by becoming a commander of the special forces. This can be seen in the following extract.

Extract 9:

Mr Subianto, a wealthy former army general, has close ties to the elite and used to be married to former president Suharto's daughter. (BBC News, 2014)

Next, BBC frequently discusses Prabowo's involvement in some serious human rights abuses. He was accused of being involved in the abduction and disappearance of pro-democracy activists during the final years of the Suharto regime in the late 1990s. These allegations have remained central to discussions of his political career, particularly during his repeated bids for the presidency. In its coverage, the BBC frequently brings this controversial past, framing it as a source of ongoing concern. Some coverage even implies that Prabowo's return to politics may bring back authoritarianism and can cause risks to Indonesia's democracy, as shown in this following extract.

Extract 10:

As a member and later commander of Indonesia's elite special forces he was accused of serious human rights abuses during the occupation of East Timor, and of ordering the abduction and torture of student activists in the last days of the Suharto regime in the 1990s. He denies the allegations and has not been convicted of anything. (BBC News, 2024)

Dealing with social context, it is obvious that BBC news coverage focuses more on a generational shift in political engagement especially during the 2024 presidential campaign. This is evident in many sources where BBC mostly discusses Prabowo's tactics to gain voters' support by transforming himself into a softer and more approachable figure. BBC is aware that the majority of the voters are millennials and Gen Z voters, and many of them have no direct memory of the Suharto era. Prabowo's rebranding as a "cuddly grandfather" has been effective in reshaping his public image. In this situation, the BBC shows appreciation for his success in doing the campaign. As a result, it covers more positive portrayal in some news that show how well his message connects with people, while giving less attention to his past controversies. The coverage that indicates this social context is presented in this following extract.

Extract 11:

Gone were the inflammatory, nationalist comments of his previous presidential runs; in the 2024 election he sold himself as a cute grandpa on TikTok, flashing heart signs and doddering around with a viral dance. It worked for younger voters - a generation poorly informed of the country's past under a military dictatorship. (BBC News, 2024)

Dealing with the last context, political, we found out that BBC coverage of Prabowo Subianto revolves around his participation in three consecutive presidential elections: 2014, 2019, and 2024. BBC frames this narrative by emphasizing Prabowo's lasting ambition and determination to get the highest position in Indonesia. Across several articles, especially those published during the election years, the BBC often brings up this persistence. The patterns of this portrayal can be clearly observed in the following extract.

Extract 12:

Having failed twice to become president, Prabowo finally clawed his way to the highest office after winning over 58% of the vote in February's elections, against two rivals. (BBC News, 2024)

Following Prabowo's victory, the BBC's coverage shifts from the election itself to what his presidency means for the country. Their coverage tends to focus more on professional and governmental matters rather than personal aspects like in the previous coverage. We consider that BBC appreciates Prabowo as the new leader particularly now that he holds the highest position. This leads their coverage to concentrate more on his policies and decision-making such as the report on the formation of his new cabinet or the passing of the Indonesian National Army (TNI) law. The following extract demonstrates this.

Extract 13:

Former military general Prabowo Subianto has been sworn in as Indonesia's president, as he announced the country's largest cabinet since the 1960s. (BBC News, 2024)

After considering the historical, social, and political contexts, we conclude that BBC News coverage of Prabowo Subianto can be categorized into two: positive and negative portrayal. The discussion of each portrayal is presented in the following sections.

4.2.1. Negative portrayal

The majority of BBC News coverage presents Prabowo Subianto in a negative tone. It commonly covers his controversial past, especially his alleged role in human rights violations in 1998 activists' abduction. Being a Western media outlet which supports human rights and democracy, the BBC's coverage reflects its values, drawing attention to concerns about Prabowo's authoritarian tendencies and the potential risks for Indonesia's democracy. By focusing on the negative aspects, the BBC seems to question whether Prabowo is fit for democratic leadership or not. In certain news, it mentions Prabowo's actions and traits that go against accountability and human rights. The coverage reflects BBC's journalistic duty to

scrutinize political figures with controversial pasts, especially when those pasts involve violence or authoritarianism.

The negative portrayal also shows that the BBC follows liberal democratic values, which guide its reporting. These include supporting transparent governance, freedom of speech and the press, and civilian control over the military. In Indonesia, Prabowo is often seen as temperamental and authoritarian, traits that could threaten the country's democracy. His alleged use of force to silence critics during Suharto's regime raises fears that similar actions could happen if he becomes president. From the BBC's perspective, Prabowo's character does not fit with the democratic principles it supports. As a result, it leads to a careful and critical coverage of him.

4.2.2. Positive portrayal

While negative coverage dominates BBC's reporting on Prabowo, positive coverage still accounts for a substantial portion. The BBC tries to show a more balanced view by pointing out his political skill and determination. This attempt reflects the BBC's commitment to fairness and impartial reporting, showing that it aims to provide a nuanced perspective rather than one-sided criticism. By recognizing Prabowo's ability to adapt and persist in politics, the BBC lets readers see a fuller picture of him, rather than focusing only on his past controversies and negative aspects.

As one of the world's most trusted public broadcasters, the BBC is committed to journalistic integrity, especially fairness and impartiality. It gives space to voices supporting Prabowo, as well as those from opposition figures and independent experts. The balanced approach shows that the BBC meets its editorial standards and it helps maintain its credibility. We can conclude that there are two main reasons why the BBC remains neutral. First, public trust is vital, its credibility depends on reporting fairly, accurately, and without bias. Any hint of partiality could damage audience trust and weaken its role as an independent media outlet. Second, neutrality follows international journalism standards, where impartial reporting is a core principle. In this sense, neutrality serves the purpose of ensuring journalistic integrity and maintaining global credibility as a reliable news organization.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study conform to the theory of appraisal proposed by Martin and White (2005), the role of attitude resources in political discourse. The findings demonstrate that attitude is an effective analytical tool for identifying and uncovering ideological stances embedded in media texts. This aligns with previous research by Mayo and Taboada (2017), Asad et al. (2021), Aljuraywi and Alyousef (2022), Susanto and Bimo (2023), Thahara et al. (2024), and Yi (2025) who have applied attitude resources in the analysis of political discourse to capture the evaluative language employed by media outlets in constructing ideological positioning. The present study also acknowledges the importance of attitude resources in examining the media portrayal of political leaders, as demonstrated by Yolanda and Simamora (2024) who analyzed Prabowo Subianto's portrayal in BBC News, and Yi (2025) who analyzed Donald Trump's

portrayal in American, British, and Indian Media. The findings of this study indicate that media tend to evaluate political leaders primarily in terms of competence and character, consistent with Bittner's (2011) and Pinto's (2021) claim. As a result, judgement emerges as the most dominant attitude resource in this study, which is similar to the findings from Yolanda and Simamora (2024) and Yi (2025).

Notably, this study also identified a dominant use of negative judgement propriety which evaluates a figure in terms of ethical and moral conducts. This pattern is similarly observed in Yolanda and Simamora's (2024) study, where BBC's portrayal of Prabowo Subianto was dominantly characterized by negative judgement of propriety, which reflects the media's moral disapproval of his character. The findings also highlight the power of judgement in political discourse as a tactic to attack and discredit political figures which is also found in Aljuraywi and Alyousef's (2022). Their study emphasizes that media narratives strategically use judgement to construct ideological alignment and position political figures within a framework of moral legitimacy or illegitimacy. In contrast, Yi (2025) presented a different pattern, where the evaluative emphasis in American, British, and Indian media focus more on judgement capacity, assessing Donald Trump's abilities and competence as a political leader rather than his moral character. This variation suggests that media outlets may vary their evaluations based on the figure being evaluated, their socio-political context, and their journalistic purposes. This is particularly relevant to the present study, as it indicates that BBC's evaluative choices are not merely representational but serve an ideological purpose in shaping public perceptions of Prabowo's credibility for leadership.

The findings of this study revealed that BBC News predominantly portrays Prabowo Subianto negatively, which reflects his controversial reputation tied to allegations of human rights violations and authoritarian tendencies. This negative portrayal is consistent with previous findings by Hermawan (2016), Rejeki and Aziz (2024), and Tanto and Tanusy (2024), who highlight that Prabowo's military background and involvement in human right violations have contributed to his negative image in international media. These controversies are perceived to conflict with the values upheld by BBC News. As Strömbäck and Shehata (2007) explain, British newspaper journalists see it as their duty to advocate for certain values and ideals, and a political figure who does not embody those principles may be portrayed negatively. In this context, Prabowo's perceived disregard for democratic norms contrasts with the values promoted by the BBC. Seaton (2021) and Moore (2024) highlight the BBC's strong commitment to democratic values, which may account for its critical stance toward figures like Prabowo, who are perceived as posing a threat to democracy in Indonesia.

While adopting a critical stance toward Prabowo Subianto, this study also shows that BBC News reflects a degree of impartiality by acknowledging his positive attributes and political achievements. Such balance aligns with Wahl-Jorgensen's (2017) and Lewis and Cushion (2019) findings, which emphasize the BBC's institutional commitment to fairness and impartiality as a public service broadcaster. This balance can further be understood as reflecting a broader tension in journalism between critical scrutiny and impartiality. On the one hand, the media are expected to critically examine political leaders, particularly those associated with

controversial pasts. On the other hand, as a public service broadcaster, the BBC is expected to maintain neutrality and fairness in its reporting. This dual responsibility often leads to a more balanced reporting, where critical evaluations are presented alongside more neutral or supportive representations. Thus, the BBC's portrayal of Prabowo Subianto illustrates how evaluative language is strategically managed to navigate these competing journalistic norms. Integrating appraisal analysis with the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA), this study explains how linguistic evaluation and discursive strategies can be applied together to investigate political representation, effectively showing how ideological values shape media discourse. The findings also emphasize the role of media literacy in supporting readers to critically engage with evaluative meanings and political bias in news coverage.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that attitude resources, analyzed through the Discursive-Historical Approach (DHA), significantly shape how international media manage the tension between historical accountability and political relevance in their representations of political figures. Through systematic attitude analysis, the study explains how media outlets strategically deploy linguistic resources to frame news narratives and shape readers' interpretations. The findings further indicate that the DHA facilitates a deeper examination of how historical, social, and political factors contribute discursively to the production of media texts. Moreover, the application of the DHA reveals that media representations of the same political figure may undergo temporal shifts, reflecting the evolving sociopolitical contexts within which discourse is produced. Notwithstanding these contributions, this study acknowledges several methodological limitations. First, the data corpus is confined to a single media outlet, which constrains the generalizability of the findings to other media sources or contextual settings. Consequently, claims regarding representativeness must be made with due caution. To address this limitation, future research should incorporate data from a diverse range of media outlets, as such comparative designs would yield a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the discursive construction of political figures across varying contexts. Second, the theoretical framework employed focuses exclusively on the attitude subsystem of the Appraisal framework, without integrating the engagement and graduation subsystems. As a result, this study may not offer a fully comprehensive analysis of the entire appraisal system. Future investigations would benefit from expanding the theoretical framework to incorporate these additional subsystems, thereby enabling a more holistic analysis and generating deeper insights into the evaluative dynamics of political media discourse.

Declaration on the use of AI

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used Grammarly (Version 14.1274.0) for language editing and writing clarity, and Zotero (Version 9.0.3) for reference management. The authors prepared and finalized the manuscript independently and took full responsibility for its content, analyses, and conclusions.

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