

# News Discourse and Gender Bias Toward Female Presidential Candidates Approaching the 2024 Election in Indonesia

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**Abstract.** This paper investigates media bias against female politicians in the context of Indonesia's upcoming 2024 elections. Utilizing the framework of media framing, the study analyzes news reports from the highly influential online media outlet, Kompas. Specifically, it focuses on four prominent female presidential candidates: Puan Maharani, Khofifah Indarparawansah, Susi Pudjiastuti, and Tri Rismaharini. Employing framing analysis by Pan and Kosicki to study the discourse of news reports toward female politicians and their gendered representations, the research highlights the pervasive presence of media bias in shaping public perceptions of women's leadership within Indonesian democracy. By identifying and examining instances of bias, this study contributes to the scholarly discourse surrounding media bias and gender politics in Indonesia. Furthermore, it aims to raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of pervasive challenges faced by female politicians in the country.

**Keywords:** gender bias, media framing, female politician, election, online media

## 1. Introduction

Women continue to face significant underrepresentation in politics on a global scale. The report titled "Women in Politics: 2023," produced by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women, provides the latest data showcasing the underrepresentation of women across all levels of political decision-making. This reveals the formidable challenges in achieving gender equality in political participation. Currently, only 31 countries have women serving as Heads of State or Government, and women constitute a mere 26.5 percent of parliamentary members. Moreover, at the global level, women's representation in Cabinet Ministries stands at a meager 22.8 percent. The data also unveil a gendered imbalance in policy portfolios, with women predominantly assigned leadership roles in areas such as human rights, gender equality, and social protection, while men continue to dominate sectors like defense and the economy.

Since Indonesia's Reformasi period in 1998, the political landscape of the country has undergone significant changes. Although the implementation of direct elections in 2004 allowed many newly formed parties to vie for strategic government positions, female representation remains underrepresented. According to the World Bank [1] report of 2022, women occupy only 22% of seats in national parliaments, ranking Indonesia 7th among Southeast Asian countries [2]. This disproportionate female representation in the public sphere persists due to the state's paternalistic gender ideology, which exacerbates gender inequality across various aspects. Existing social norms, national and customary laws, and the intersections of politics, religion, and culture often serve as barriers for women accessing fundamental human rights, such as education and health [3]. This discrimination further reinforces the glass ceiling for women in leadership positions, particularly in the economy and politics, compared to their male counterparts.

Gender differentials in political participation have garnered increased attention in many countries, leading to efforts to boost women's presence in politics, including the implementation of gender quotas for female participants. As Agusta [4] notes, Indonesia has initiated gender quotas requiring political parties to include at least 30% female candidates in their total representatives, with parties facing disqualification from the general election if they fail to meet this requirement. Nevertheless, challenges persist, including limited access to politics for the general public and a political landscape marked by inequalities based on kinships and personal ties. Luluk Nur Hamidah from The National Awakening Party (PKB) has pointed out that political parties often increase the number of female representatives just to meet the quota, leaving questions about whether the 30% genuinely represent women in decision-making roles and strategic positions [5].

In Indonesia, Kompas or Kompas.com is considered one of the most prominent news outlets, founded in 1965, and has been a primary source of national and international news for Indonesians ever since. During political campaigns, the media becomes a battleground for politicians to shape their images and engage in political maneuvering to compete with other candidates. Frequently, female leaders find themselves in vulnerable positions through media depictions. As the 2024 general elections approach, several male and female politicians have been featured in Kompas, the leading news source. This research aims to analyze whether gender biases are present in media representations of four prominent female presidential candidates: Puan Maharani, Khofifah Indarparawansah, Susi Pudjiastuti, and Tri Rismaharini, as covered in selected articles published by Kompas. This paper will employ Pan and Kosicki's [6] framing analysis, specifically examining Syntactical Structures, Script Structures, Thematic Structures, and Rhetorical Structures in the four Kompas articles.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Media Reporting on Female Politician**

The discussion of female representation in politics invariably intersects with prevalent gender stereotypes and biases. Society tends to reinforce gender divisions based on assigned sex at birth, adhering to a performativity framework that assumes the construction of gender through the enactment of predefined gender 'roles' (a practice often referred to as "doing gender") [7]. Additionally, the conventional notion that the public domain is primarily the domain of men,

while the domestic sphere is designated for women, places women in a state of vulnerability. The normalization of politics as a predominantly masculine sphere further restricts women's opportunities to occupy positions of power, as their skills and credibility are frequently subjected to intense scrutiny and skepticism [8].

This phenomenon, pervasive on a global scale, is not exempt from the Indonesian media landscape. Evidently, this bias manifests through the prevailing portrayal of male figures in local news reports. According to a report by the Tempo Institute [9], female figures are featured as news sources in only 11% of content across seven print media and three online media outlets, spanning various sections such as headlines, politics, economics, and law, when compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, many news narratives tend to associate female politicians with stereotypical terms or headlines centered on their 'feminine traits' rather than highlighting their competencies and political contributions, often used to undermine their leadership positions [10].

Women politicians often find themselves depicted in the media using stereotypes and what is termed "trap roles" [11], [12]. These trap roles, as identified by Kanter, encompass portrayals such as the seductress, the mother, the mascot, and the iron maiden. However, as observed [13], there has been a discernible shift in media coverage over time, transitioning from overt stereotypes toward more nuanced framing. This includes framing women as pioneers in their roles, emphasizing their leadership as a milestone for women as a whole, yet simultaneously portraying it as an anomaly [14]. Another framing strategy involves presenting women politicians as outsiders or novices, underestimating their capacity to hold office or run for candidacy. Additionally, women leaders are frequently framed as agents of change, tasked with driving substantial transformations [15].

Empirically, [16] delineates several recurring trends in media portrayal and the construction of women's political images. These trends involve the use of their first names, an emphasis on aspects of their private lives, interpreting their political stances in relation to influential men, and employing metaphorical-reproductive language. Similarly, [17] identified four recurrent stereotypes: emphasizing the role of motherhood and domestic life, explaining female candidates' political careers and achievements in the context of powerful men, alluding to their lack of control, rationality, or emotional intelligence, and accentuating the significance of their physical appearance and attire.

## **2.2 Media Framing**

Media news reporting is consistently subject to framing [18]. Framing entails a deliberate effort to either omit certain details or emphasize specific attributes when discussing an object, event, or individual [19], [20]. This occurs because the media operates based on two core principles: firstly, as profit-driven entities, there exists a necessity to publish stories that are deemed more 'marketable,' capturing readers' attention through newsworthy reports that generate increased clicks and readership. Secondly, the influence of cultural backgrounds cannot be disregarded. The media is far from neutral and is not a monolithic entity; rather, it comprises numerous public and private organizations often rooted in a dominant culture that shapes the interpretation of events. Journalists and editors themselves possess distinct cultural backgrounds that inevitably influence their writing.

Framing suggests that the readers' opinions on certain issues are cognitively affected by the choice of frames presented in the news reports [21]. As a result, the media is seen to have a power in shaping public opinion regarding foreign policy, i.e. CNN effect [18], [22]. Additionally, it implies that media has a preferred tendency that makes them unable to escape from bias or slant [23]. Thus, framing becomes an important aspect to study how media contribute to how certain people are represented that perpetuates stereotypes or other discriminatory treatments.

### **2.3 Analyzing News Discourse Through Framing**

Scholars in political communication examine how news media frame and constrain discussions on public events, how non-governmental organizations and politicians employ framing to influence public opinion on specific policies [18], and how news is cognitively consumed and processed by audiences [24]. [6] introduced an approach that facilitates the analysis of the relationship between news text and its interpretation by readers. This approach enables the analysis of news discourse by scrutinizing the framing employed by journalists or editors in news articles. Framing analysis encompasses four key elements:

1. Syntactical Structures

Syntactical structures investigate established word and phrase patterns in news articles, examining the macro syntax that defines news structure. News articles generally adhere to an inverted pyramid structure, positioning the most powerful framing devices at the top. The hierarchy of salience in a news article typically includes the headline and lead, which exert the greatest influence. Additionally, syntactical structures may incorporate claims of objectivity by quoting experts or official sources, promoting certain ideas while marginalizing others [6].

2. Script Structures

Script structures represent a series of activities or components that depict an event [6]. In news reports, a script can convey historical events or information that connects the audience to current events. The standard script structure comprises the 5W (what, when, where, who, why) and 1H (how).

3. Thematic Structures

News reports often possess a hypothesis-testing feature rooted in the logical-empirical principles of social sciences, shaping their thematic structure. Thematic analysis involves examining the main theme, subthemes, and supporting elements that underpin the hypothesis, often marked by phrases like "if...then," "because," "since," or "for."

4. Rhetorical Structures

Journalists employ rhetorical structures in news reports to elicit specific responses from readers [6]. Framing devices include metaphors, catchphrases, examples, depictions, and visual images, as identified [25]. In their study on media discourse and public opinion regarding nuclear power in the United States. Metaphors employ figures of speech, exemplars provide lists of key examples, catchphrases include slogans or quotes from prominent figures, depictions vividly describe and illustrate to add depth, and visual images showcase events or individuals featured [26].

### **3. Method**

This paper utilizes a qualitative approach, employing critical discourse analysis (CDA) as the primary method. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is particularly suitable for examining social inequalities where the misuse of power and the assertion of dominance are perpetuated, replicated, and resisted through textual materials [27]. Therefore, in the examination of gender bias against female politicians in Indonesian media, this methodology is well-suited to unveil unequal gender relations that portray women differently from men.

Four news reports were chosen from Kompas based on their first appearance in Google search results using the keywords "kompas, capres, [politician name]." The first news article displayed was considered the most popular or readily accessible among the search results. The female politicians under scrutiny in this paper encompass Puan Maharani, Khofifah Indarparawansah, Susi Pudjiastuti, and Tri Rismaharini, whose names have been widely discussed in the context of the upcoming 2024 election. The selected articles are subsequently subjected to CDA within the framework of framing analysis.

### **4. Analysis**

#### **4.1 Article on Puan Maharani, Speaker of the House of Representatives**

This article delves into the portrayal of Puan Maharani, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, in the media. The article titled "Puan: Capres PDI-P untuk Pemilu 2024 Tak Harus Saya" (Puan: the Presidential Candidate from Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle for the 2024 Election Does Not Have to Be Me) was published by Kompas on January 13, 2023 [28]. This headline, which also serves as the article's title, is followed by a lead that reads, "PDI Perjuangan DPP (Central Board) Puan Maharani believes that Megawati Soekarnoputri will appoint the best PDI-P cadre to run for president in the 2024 election." Both elements of this syntactical structure suggest Puan's unwillingness and undeservedness to run as the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggles' representative in the presidential election. The choice of words, "doesn't have to be me," also functions as a narrative device and attention-grabber for readers. It's worth noting that in the previous year leading up to the election, Puan Maharani had been rumored to run for the position, competing directly with another PDI-P cadre, Ganjar Pranowo.

The lead further uses the phrase "the best PDI-P cadre," implying that Puan and the article consider her not the best or as lacking in some aspects compared to the male cadre. The two opinions quoted in the article are from Puan herself and Megawati Soekarnoputri, the leader of PDI-P and Puan's mother. The narrative conveyed through the article's headline and lead is that "Puan is not the chosen one."

The script structure describes the event on which the news report is based. Puan was invited as a guest on Rosi, a Kompas TV program, on January 13, 2023. Although this event is not historical per se, it contributes to the overall narrative of Indonesia's presidential election in 2024. The news follows the 5W 1H structure to provide details about Puan's perspective regarding the presidential candidacy.

The article also exhibits a thematic structure, with the main theme being Puan not being the best candidate for president. This idea is supported by Puan's statements indicating that it doesn't

have to be her. Additionally, the subtheme revolves around the mother-daughter relationship between Megawati and Puan, which is frequently highlighted in the report. The mention of this relationship suggests that if Puan were chosen as the candidate from PDI-P, some might perceive it as nepotism, a practice prevalent in Indonesia, which ranks as the fifth most corrupt country in Southeast Asia according to Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index [29].

The excerpt below also supports this theme and sub-theme:

*"Ini bukan tentang anak, bukan, tapi ya seorang kader yang dianggap mumpuni dan bisa mampu untuk ditempatkan dalam posisi tertentu,"*[28]

Translation:

"This is not about children, no, but yes a cadre who is considered qualified and able to be placed in certain positions,"

Excerpts in the article further reinforce this theme and sub-theme. For example, Puan's statement that she feels there is no privilege for her underscores the challenges faced by female politicians in the country. Megawati's description as a leader and her ability to differentiate between her roles as a mother and the chairman of the party also reinforce certain stereotypes and perceptions about female politicians.

The description of Megawati in the article also supports the trap roles stereotypes of female politicians, such as the mother and iron maiden, as studied by Kantler. Furthermore, it correlates with the current trends of media portrayal of women in politics by emphasizing motherhood. The iron maiden stereotype is also supported by the choice of frame chosen by the journalist to depict Megawati as a leader with her speech style:

*"Enggak ada (pengumuman capres), ini urusan gue!" kata Mega* [28]

Translation:

"There is no (announcement of presidential candidates), this is my business!" said Mega

The word *gue* (colloquial Bahasa Indonesia for "me") is originally written in italics, which makes it stand out from the rest of the text, followed by an exclamation point that emphasizes her strong emotions.

Furthermore, the article highlights the rhetorical structure, which includes the use of metaphors and visual photographs. The metaphor "karpét merah" or "red carpet" is used when Puan explains that being a politician is hard work and not a ride on her mother's coattails. The accompanying photo depicts Puan standing in a black dress amidst other men dressed in red, with journalists pointing microphones and cameras at her. This visual reinforces the scarcity of women candidates in Indonesian politics and her status as a standout PDI-P cadre who seems out of place. The official color of PDI-P is red, and Puan's choice of black attire, combined with the headline, further alienates her from the presidential candidacy.

Overall, the article employs various linguistic and rhetorical devices to shape the narrative of Puan Maharani's potential presidential candidacy, emphasizing gender-related issues and familial connections.

#### 4.2 Article on Khofifah Indarparawansah, Governor of East Java Province

The news report discusses the potential candidacy of Khofifah Indarparawansah, the current governor of East Java, as the vice-presidential candidate alongside Anies Baswedan in the upcoming election. The article is titled “Ditanya Kesiediaan Jadi Cawapres Anies, Khofifah Bungkam” or “Asked about her willingness to be Anies' vice-presidential candidate, Khofifah remains silent” and was released on March 19, 2023 [30]. This news significantly contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding the 2024 election, particularly with regards to the vice-presidential candidacy.

In terms of macro-syntax, the headline employs the word “bungkam,” a verb denoting silence or speechlessness. Following the headline is the lead, which reads, “Gubernur Jawa Timur (Jatim) Khofifah Indar Parawansa bungkam saat ditanya terkait kesediaannya menjadi calon wakil presiden (cawapres) mendampingi Anies Baswedan” or “The Governor of East Java (East Java) Khofifah Indar Parawansa remained silent when asked about her willingness to become a vice-presidential candidate (cawapres) alongside Anies Baswedan.” Both the headline and lead are pivotal elements of the news's syntactical structure, shaping the overall tone of the article. These two components collectively convey the idea of Khofifah's reticence and her subordinate position as the companion of the more powerful male leader.

The script component of the article comprises the 5W 1H elements, providing insights into the likelihood of Khofifah's vice-presidential candidacy. It commences with Khofifah declining to respond to reporters' inquiries following her participation in an event. Subsequently, the article quotes male politicians to lend an authoritative and factual dimension to the discussion. A significant portion of the article is dedicated to describing the opinions of male political experts regarding the feasibility of the Anies-Khofifah pairing.

Furthermore, the article presents a hypothesis concerning Khofifah's potential role as Anies's vice-presidential candidate. On one hand, the primary theme centers on her silence and lack of comment on the speculation. On the other hand, her participation in the election is not solely within her control; there are more influential male figures who will ultimately determine her candidacy. This aspect becomes evident through the author's choice of language in reporting on her and through the quotations from the experts.

*Khofifah tak menjawab satupun pertanyaan awak media yang menanyakan hal tersebut. Ia hanya mengatupkan kedua tangannya di depan dada dan menyampaikan terimakasih. [30]*

Translation:

Khofifah did not answer any questions from the media crew who asked this. She simply clasped her hands together in front of her chest and said thank you.

While no metaphor is used in the article, the journalist includes a photograph of Khofifah wearing her orange-colored hijab, her hands clasped in front of her chest when she says her thank you. This image could be interpreted together with the headline where she is said to “remains silent”. Her silence as the whole theme of the news report correlates with the trend of media reporting that focuses on the femininity aspect (silence and calm are seen as traditional femininity) and her position as being dependent on her male counterpart.

#### **4.3 Article on Tri Rismaharini, Current Minister of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia**

The article, "Namanya Masuk Bursa Capres, Risma: Enggak Kepikir, Aku Enggak Punya Duit" (translated as "Her Name Listed in Presidential Candidacy, Risma: Haven't Thought of It, I Have No Money"), published by Kompas.com on May 25th, 2021, discusses rumors surrounding Tri Rismaharini's potential candidacy in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election [31]. The headline, framed as an influential device, captures attention by quoting Risma's reluctance to run for President. This article's syntactical structure reveals gender bias in both the headline and the lead.

Risma's reluctance to enter the presidential race is framed as a result of financial limitations. The headline's choice of "Haven't Thought of It" implies a lack of interest in politics and overlooks the broader challenges faced by female politicians in reaching higher positions. The phrase "I Have No Money" is emphasized, but it misses the opportunity to explore fundamental issues like the gender pay gap and women's labor participation. In 2022, Indonesia's Central Agency on Statistics (BPS) reported a 22.09% gender pay gap, a 1.7% increase from the previous year [32]. Despite structural changes in education and the economy, female labor participation remains low at 53% [33].

The article follows the inverted pyramid structure, presenting the headline, lead-in, main body, and supporting details. The main body compares Risma's electability to male ministers, while survey results validate her candidacy. The article adheres to the 5W1H formula but lacks context for unfamiliar readers.

Two subthemes emerge in the thematic structure: Risma's reluctance to run for president and her electability rates. The first hypothesis is insufficiently addressed and ends with Risma's financial reasoning. In contrast, the second hypothesis, supported by survey data, is well-documented. However, subtle gender bias is found when comparing her electability to male ministers, framing her as inferior.

The rhetorical structure includes a visual image of Risma wearing a white shirt, black hijab, and a mask, holding a microphone. The title and sources accompany the image, providing context without bias.

In conclusion, the article explores Tri Rismaharini's potential presidential candidacy and frames her reluctance as a financial issue. While some gender bias is evident, particularly in comparing her electability to male ministers, the image used is neutral. The article could benefit from a more comprehensive discussion of gender-related challenges in Indonesian politics.

#### **4.4 Article on Susi Pudjiastuti, Former Minister of Marine Affairs and Fisheries of the Republic of Indonesia**

Kompas.com featured Susi Pudjiastuti in an article titled "Didukung Maju Jadi Capres, Susi Pudjiastuti: 'There Is No Room' untuk Saya" (translated as "Supported to Run for President, Susi Pudjiastuti: 'There is No Room' for Me"), published on July 3rd, 2022 [34]. The article follows an inverted pyramid structure, with the headline quoting Susi's reluctance to run for President.

Script structure analysis reveals the use of the 5W1H formula throughout the article, providing context about Susi and her independent supporter group, Kopi Susi. The main hypothesis is



Susi's inability to enter the election, while the subtheme highlights Kopi Susi's eagerness to support her. However, the article lacks background information on women's political participation, quotas, or context, leaving room for deeper exploration.

Susi's reluctance is explained through her statements about lacking political party membership and resources. For instance, she mentions, "There is no room for people like me," highlighting the challenges faced by female politicians. However, the article could benefit from more in-depth explanation and context regarding the political system and its constraints on women.

The article aligns with Panke's study, framing female politicians as agents of change. Kopi Susi's leader expresses support for Susi as a presidential candidate, emphasizing her aversion to oligarchy and polarization.

A visual framing device includes a picture of Susi Pudjiastuti, resembling an election campaign poster. However, her non-affiliation with political parties suggests she may not be the main choice for the 2024. The metaphor "dark horse" is also used in this line:

*Lebih jauh, kata Susi, Kopi Susi ini juga bukan bentuk pergerakan politik. Susi menekankan dirinya bukan sosok alternatif ataupun kuda hitam capres.[34]*

Translation:

Furthermore, said Susi, Kopi Susi is also not a form of a political movement. Susi emphasized that she was not an alternative figure or a dark horse for the presidential candidate.

Such metaphors employed implied her position as an alternative choice, not the main choice of the election 2024. Her non-affiliation to any political parties also suggests that only a few people who want her in the position of power.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, upon examining the four news reports published by Kompas pertaining to female politicians within the context of the 2024 election, it becomes evident that gender bias continues to persist. Specifically, the headlines of these four articles employ phrases such as "does not have to be me," "remains silent," "haven't thought of it," and "there is no room." Some stereotypes involving their role as mothers, questioned capabilities, and submissiveness or dependence to men are also present in the news, coming from a source widely read by the Indonesian public. While news reports are generally perceived as conveying objective information, viewing them as discourses enable us to move beyond the presented facts and analyze the text as a mechanism through which power dominance and gender inequality are established, perpetuated, and upheld [27]. Consequently, these gendered reports serve to marginalize and subordinate women in relation to men in the realm of political leadership in Indonesia.

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