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# Reading Power Through the Cover and Text: Critical Semiotic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis of Jokowi's Representation in Tempo Magazine Covers After the 2024 Indonesia Presidential Election

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) in Tempo magazine covers and accompanying texts published after Indonesia's 2024 presidential election. The research employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis and Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyse fourteen Tempo covers and related editorial texts, supported by interviews with Tempo editorial figures and members of Jokowi's communication team. The findings indicate that Tempo consistently portrays Jokowi as a dominant political actor whose influence extends beyond his formal presidency. Through visual metaphors, satire, and discursive framing, Jokowi is associated with dynastic politics, political intervention, image management, and the preservation of power through informal networks. The covers and texts function not merely as news representations but as symbolic critiques of democratic decline, power centralisation, and authoritarian tendencies in post-election Indonesia. The study demonstrates how visual and textual narratives work together to construct political meaning and shape public perceptions of leadership, legitimacy, and democracy. These findings contribute to political communication and critical media studies by highlighting the role of media in producing alternative interpretations of political power.

*Keywords*: Discourse analysis, Jokowi, political communication, semiotic analysis, Tempo media

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## INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary media environment, magazine covers function not only as promotional devices but also as ideological texts that construct political meaning.



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Through visual symbols, illustrations, and editorial framing, media representations shape public perceptions of political actors, power, and democracy (Sarihati et al., 2022). As one of Indonesia's most influential news magazines, Tempo is known for its use of satire, symbolism, and visual metaphors to comment on political developments. Its covers often serve as editorial statements that offer interpretations and critiques of current political issues (Ramli, 2020).

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election marked a significant moment in Indonesia's democratic trajectory. Although the election resulted in a formal leadership transition, public debate continued to focus on President Joko Widodo's political influence, particularly regarding dynastic politics, the nomination of Gibran Rakabuming Raka as vice president, and allegations of political intervention in electoral processes (Febrianto et al., 2023). These issues generated broader discussions about democratic accountability, political legitimacy, and the concentration of power.

Previous studies have presented contrasting assessments of Jokowi's political legacy. Early scholarship portrayed him as a symbol of democratic renewal and reform-oriented leadership (Hadiz & Robison, 2017; Mietzner, 2015), whereas more recent studies have highlighted concerns about democratic backsliding, elite accommodation, and executive power consolidation (Asrinaldi et al., 2022; Tomsa, 2017). These debates demonstrate that Jokowi's political image remains contested and subject to competing interpretations.

Media and political communication scholars argue that media institutions actively construct political meaning through framing, symbolism, and discourse (Page, 1996; Tapsell, 2012). Research on Tempo has shown that its covers frequently function as vehicles for political criticism and ideological expression (Ambat & Lesmana, 2024; Pramaskara, 2022). However, existing studies largely focus on individual cover editions or specific political events. Limited research has systematically examined multiple post-election covers while simultaneously analysing visual representations and textual discourse.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite growing academic interest in media representations of Indonesian politics, there remains limited understanding of how Tempo constructs the political image of President Joko Widodo through the interaction of visual symbolism and textual discourse in the post-2024 election period. Furthermore, few studies have integrated Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, myth, and the rhetoric of images (Barthes, 1972, 1985), and Teun A. van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which examines discourse through macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure levels (Van Dijk, 1993).

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It addresses the following research question: How does Tempo magazine represent President Joko Widodo through visual and textual narratives in the post-2024 presidential election period?

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach combining Barthes'(1972) semiotic analysis and Van Dijk's (1993) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research analyses fourteen Tempo magazine covers published between February and December 2024 together with their accompanying cover stories and editorial texts. Data were collected from Tempo archives and supported by semi-structured interviews with former Tempo Editor-in-Chief Tomi Aryanto and political communication expert Sukardi Rinakit. The analytical process involved examining denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings, followed by textual discourse analysis at the macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure levels.




*Figure 1*. Cover Tempo Jokowi edition

As shown in Figure 1, the Tempo cover presents Jokowi through visual representations that contribute to the construction of political meaning and public discourse surrounding his role and influence. The analysis reveals six dominant representations of Jokowi across the fourteen Tempo covers. First, Jokowi is portrayed as a shadow controller of political power whose influence extends beyond his formal presidency. Second, the covers associate him with dynastic politics through the promotion of family succession and the preservation of political legacy. Third, Tempo represents Jokowi as intervening in regional electoral processes through elite influence and political manoeuvring.

Furthermore, the covers construct Jokowi as a political actor engaged in image management and branding strategies to maintain public legitimacy. Through recurring visual symbols, satire, and metaphorical illustrations, Tempo frames Jokowi as a figure whose authority continues after leaving office. At the mythological level, these representations challenge democratic assumptions regarding the transfer of power and instead construct a narrative of enduring influence through symbolic legitimacy and political networks.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of fourteen Tempo magazine covers published after the 2024 presidential election demonstrates that Tempo constructs a critical representation of President Joko Widodo through the interplay of visual symbolism and textual discourse. Using Roland Barthes's semiotic framework and Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis, the study finds that Jokowi is portrayed as a political actor associated with dynastic politics, political intervention, and the preservation of influence beyond his formal presidency. Through recurring metaphors, satire, and symbolic imagery, Tempo frames Jokowi as the "King of Java," a figure whose power extends beyond constitutional authority and shapes post-election political dynamics.

These findings confirm that media representations are not neutral reflections of reality but active constructions of political meaning. The integration of semiotic and discourse analysis reveals how visual and textual narratives work together to communicate critiques of power relations, democratic accountability, and political legitimacy. The study contributes theoretically by combining two complementary analytical approaches and empirically by providing a comprehensive examination of Tempo's post-election coverage. More broadly, the findings highlight the role of visual journalism in fostering public scrutiny and democratic debate. However, this study is limited to Tempo magazine; future research could compare representations across different Indonesian media outlets to explore variations in political framing and ideological positioning.

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