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SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF HATE SPEECH AS FOUND IN COMMENTARIES OF INDONESIAN PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES' INSTAGRAM

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Abstract: This study investigates the sociolinguistic patterns of hate speech directed at the three Indonesian presidential candidates on Instagram during the 2024 election campaign. Grounded in qualitative–descriptive inquiry, the research analyzes 180 public comments using sociolinguistic discourse analysis, thematic categorization, and interpretive frameworks. Findings show that hate expressions are shaped by political identity, emotional intensity, and ideological positioning. Hate directed at Prabowo Subianto is dominated by revenge (30%) and sadism (26.7%), reflecting emotionally charged hostility tied to his long political history. Anies Baswedan receives predominantly instrumental violence (30%) and revenge (28.3%), indicating strategic attempts to delegitimize his credibility and dissatisfaction with his political maneuvers. For Ganjar Pranowo, instrumental violence (36.7%) and ideology-driven attacks (21.7%) are most prominent, embedding him in narratives of systemic distrust and corruption. Across candidates, hate speech operates as a sociolinguistic mechanism for constructing identity, reinforcing group boundaries, and sustaining political polarization in digital spaces. The study contributes to Indonesian sociolinguistic research by offering a context-specific examination of hate speech on Instagram, highlighting its linguistic forms, discursive strategies, and implications for digital political communication, identity construction, and mitigation efforts.
Keywords: *hate speech; discourse analysis; political communication; Instagram; digital media; Indonesian presidential election.*

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of digital political communication in Indonesia have escalated as the use of Instagram has become prevalent as a public sphere where political identities, ideologies, and emotions collide. Our definition 1 also includes the concept of hate speech: impoliteness, sarcasm, ethnic slurs and taboo expressions are defining elements of hate speech that is prominently emerging in the online political debate during electoral campaigns. Previous research also addressed how online spaces such as social media are often used to magnify hateful speech, this framing public opinion and politically divide viewpoints (Subyantoro & Apriyanto, 2020; Wiana, 2019; Bajari et al., 2021; Wahyuningsih, 2021; Husda & Saragih, 2021). In this space of engagement, Instagram accounts of presidential candidates are sites on which supporters and detractors contest power, identity, and legitimacy through language practices more urgently and timelily than ever, motivating the field of sociolinguistics to engage in research.

Studies on hate speech in Indonesian social media have been centred around patterns of impoliteness, linguistic aggression, discursive constructions employed by netizens in political spaces. Previous studies highlight that digital platforms become a space where they see the conflict appears in offensive language and explicit way of confronting (Subyantoro & Apriyanto, 2020; Wiana, 2019; Bajari et al., 2021; Wahyuningsih, 2021; Aini, 2025). Together, these studies demonstrate that the hate speech is not a

purely linguistic problem, but rather it is also a social or cultural manifestation of political rift and group identity.

A sono of comments on Instagram content promoting political leader identity shows that the toolkit is informed by language and linguistic repertoire as tools for social identity, group membership and power negotiation. The analyses of Jokowi's Instagram comments, for example, accentuate the interaction between multilingualism and identity formation as well as changing netizen char- acter (Saragi & SS, 2021; Irvan, 2024; Triana et al., 2025; Rahmayanti et al., 2025; Novira & Rahmat, 2024). This is the type of research that proves social media comments constitute new sociolinguistic spaces in which an online audience influences construction of political positions.

Internationally, research on hate speech within the political domain – Donald Trump campaigns, and Israeli military posts--reveal similar patterns of impoliteness, sarcasm and derogatory language being used to signify broader ideological charters (Ummah 2025; Aini 2025; Rosen & Dale, 2025; Brindle, 2016), etc. These insights resonate with the Indonesian, as if to say that political hate speech follows a transnational script as framed by digital affordances and polarised identities.

Forensic linguistic approaches have broadened the horizon to treat hate speech as data reflecting intention, identity and damaging linguistic activities. Forensic investigations report the manner that hateful discourse contains aggression, bias, and explicit threats (cf., Sari et al. 2025; Mardhatillah & Agustina 2025; Filippou & Bella 2024). This body of work reveals the structure and function of hate speech and its consequences across society.

Socio-cognitive CDA, on the other hand, considers hate speech to be connected with ideological manipulation and mental models that help shape group cognition. Corpus-based evaluations show that hate speech arises from established cognition building patterns of bias and intergroup hostility (Condor, 2019; Sirulhaq et al., 2023; Quatrini, 2022; Technau, 2018; Klein, 2018). For most categories it is too simplistic to think in terms of women and men when considering indices of conservative traditions. These models highlight how cognitive and social contextual conditions influence the expressions of hate.

Sociolinguistic models emphasize that hate speech represents deep-seated patterns of social relations, power imbalances and constructions of identity. The foundational principles of language and society emphasize that linguistic choices are mediated by social meaning, ideology, and community norms (Hudson, 1996; Wardhaugh, 2006; Hymes, 1983)

Hate speech around elections This special kind of hate speech can be characterised by a number of discursive strategies, all working in tandem – political jargon, euphemism, contestation in discourse and strategic labeling. The research on memes, political slogans, and campaign narratives show how hate expressions are framed in wider semiotic and ideological battles (Anwar et al., 2024; Manik et al., 2024; Wibowo & Ramadhani, 2024; Pornying & Tantiniranat, 2024; Septiana et al., 2025). These discursive practices justify and strengthen group demarcations and narrative framing.

The role of intersectional dimensions of hate speech, eg. gender, ethnicity/migration and religion are the subject matter of research too. Thus, examinations antagonism towards women, religious and migrant communities further illustrate the way in which digital hatefulness is influenced by compound identities (Wahyuningsih, 2021; Totibadze 2024; Achamaleh et al., 2025; Zeeshan, 2025; De Pascale et al., 2024). Such findings underscore the multilayered character of hate speech.

On a macro level, studies on political communication indicate that online media provide an environment in which polarization (e.g., by Ditto and Lopez 1992), contestation discourse (e.g., by Van Zomeren et al. 2008) and criticism of government is made widespread more quickly (e.g., Hindman 2009). Instagrams posts and comment threads are turned into battlegrounds in which politicians and citizens fight over power in discursive battles (Triana et al, 2025; Said-Hung et al., 2024; Sousa-Silva, 2024; Surahmat et al., 2025; Gbeyonron, 2024). This reveals the importance of digital platforms in formulating a political narrative.

Technological perspectives suggest that online hate speech is both a reflection of and influence on society's linguistic behavior at large. It has been found that the presence of antisemitic and Islamophobic speech can decrease linguistic diversity within conversations, demonstrating measurable sociolinguistic effects (Rosen & Dale 2025; Grieve et al., 2025; Dees, 2025; Gagliardone et al. These findings shed light on how the social norms of communication in online communities are transformed by hate speech.

Together, previous analyses present rich and complex frameworks for studying hate speech but they also suggest the need for more context-

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specific investigation into political actors' social media use, with a particular focus on Instagram. Despite some studies focusing on specific events, platforms or figures (Subyantoro & Apriyanto, 2020; Wiana, 2019; Anwar et al., 2024; Ambarwati & Arimi: 2025; Sari et al., 2025), how Indonesian candidates for president use their Instagram account during election periods is still under-explored. This void indicates an area for future sociolinguistic work.

Even though there are numerous works on political hate speech in heterogeneous platforms, only limited ones have focused on the sociolinguistic patterns in Indonesian presidential candidates' Instagram, especially during elections when hostility could hit their highest level. The role of the linguistic forms, identity makers, and discursive strategies in hate expressions has not been comprehensively covered in current research publications from this context (Bajari et al., 2021; Saragi & SS, 2021; Wagiati et al., 2025; Anwar et al., 2024; Aini, 2025). Thus, the study inquires: What sociolinguistic markers of hate speech are apparent on Indonesian presidential candidates Instagram posts and how do these features manifest a wider social identity and political polarization?

This study is original in its contribution to the literature that examines Instagram-based hate speech for Indonesian presidential candidates by blending sociolinguistic theory, discursive analysis, and identity. In contrast to existing research on hate speech of general political events or other platforms, this research offers an analysis of linguistic features as well as identity cues and discursive constructions in a high-stakes national political situation (Subyantoro & Apriyanto, 2020; Irvan, 2024; Anwar et al., 2024; Zeeshan, 2025; Rosen & Dale, 2025).

In this vein, it also makes a novel contribution to empirical research on the appearance and circulation of hate speech as well as its implications for identity construction in digital discourse on presidential candidates' Instagram accounts. The implications of these findings are relevant for understanding political behavior online, digital literacy promotion and hate speech mitigation policy discussions (Gagliardone et al., 2015; Wardhaugh, 2006; Sirulhaq et al., 2023; Sousa-Silva, 2024; Mutlak, 2024).

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative–descriptive approach using a secondary online qualitative research design, a method widely employed in contemporary linguistic and social media research (Cheong et al., 2023; Dubey & Kothari, 2022; Islam, Khan & Baikady, 2022). This approach is justified because the dataset consists of public Instagram comments that naturally reflect linguistic practices in digital socio-political contexts, aligning with the foundations of social research methodology (Singh, 2022; Mishra & Alok, 2022; Gupta & Gupta, 2022). Consistent with principles of qualitative inquiry, the study focuses on interpreting meanings, linguistic patterns, and social relations embedded in hate-laden digital discourse, in line with contemporary methodological guidance (Saharan et al., 2024; Sreekumar & Sreekumar, 2023).

The research design integrates qualitative content analysis with sociolinguistic discourse analysis and thematic categorization, an approach suitable when the aim is to analyze meaning-making and identity construction rather than to measure effects (Creswell, 2021; Chivanga & Monyai, 2021; Zou & Xu, 2023). Given that the data are already available online, the study employs secondary digital-data methodology (Cheong et al., 2023), offering systematic procedures without direct interaction with participants. The design follows an integrated-flexible model that accommodates the dynamic nature of digital linguistic data (Saliya, 2023; Marx, 2023), and aligns with best-practice recommendations for credible and impactful qualitative research (Aguinis, 2023; Dehalwar & Sharma, 2023).

Philosophically, the study is grounded in interpretivism, positioning language as a socially constructed product shaped by ideology and identity (Bonyadi, 2023). This stance is reinforced by sociocognitive discourse perspectives that conceptualize hate speech as reflecting group-based cognitive structures and biases. A decolonial methodological orientation is also employed to ensure that Indonesian sociocultural contexts are foregrounded, addressing critiques of Western-centric research norms (Denscombe, 2025). This position echoes recent discussions on paradigm shifts influenced by artificial intelligence and evolving research methodologies (Pal, 2023).

The population consists of all public comments on Indonesian presidential candidates' Instagram posts during the official campaign period. Following social research standards, the target population comprises comments that explicitly contain hate speech, identity-based attacks, or verbal aggression (Willie, 2024; Gamage, 2025). Purposive sampling is used to select information-rich cases, based on linguistic, pragmatic, and

sociolinguistic indicators of hate, with sampling continuing until data saturation (Aguinis, 2023). Inclusion criteria require relevancy to candidates, presence of hate elements, use of Indonesian or mixed language, and appearance within the campaign timeframe. Data collection is conducted manually by scraping comments from posts with high engagement. Each comment is recorded with minimal metadata and anonymized to ensure adherence to ethical standards for online research (Saharan et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2022). Only public comments are included, and sensitive information is masked.

Data analysis proceeds through three stages. The first involves mapping linguistic features, including lexical aggression, taboo expressions, metaphors, interjections, and impoliteness strategies, following linguistic and applied sociolinguistic frameworks. The second stage conducts sociolinguistic discourse analysis to examine identity markers, labeling practices, othering strategies, and ideological positioning, informed by established discourse-analytic theories. The third stage synthesizes themes into broader hate-speech categories such as ethno-religious hostility, political identity attacks, personal derogation, moral-judgment labeling, and profanity-based aggression. These phases align with thematic interpretation principles in qualitative research (Creswell, 2021; Javali & Javali, 2024).

To ensure trustworthiness, the study employs theoretical triangulation, peer checking, an audit trail, and thick description, which reflect established criteria for qualitative rigor (Aguinis, 2023; Creswell, 2024; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). Ethical considerations include anonymizing all identifiers, avoiding sensitive verbatim reproductions, and refraining from interacting with Instagram users, consistent with contemporary digital research ethics (Saharan et al., 2024; Chali, Eshete & Debela, 2022). Mixed-methods perspectives are also referenced to strengthen the conceptual framing of qualitative validity and interpretation (Hirose & Creswell, 2023; Younas et al., 2025; Leite et al., 2021; Adhikari & Timsina, 2024; Weyant, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 180 Instagram comments shows that hate speech directed at the three Indonesian presidential candidates varies in motivation, linguistic intensity, and sociopolitical orientation. Across all candidates, hate expressions reveal how online audiences negotiate identity, emotion, and political allegiance, consistent with patterns noted in Indonesian and global social-media–based hate speech studies.

For Prabowo Subianto, the most frequent motivation was Revenge (30%), followed by Sadism (26.7%). Revenge-driven comments conveyed disappointment or betrayal toward his long political trajectory, often using personal insults or derisive name-play. Sadistic comments focused on mocking his age, physical expressions, and past failures, illustrating a form of emotional release and enjoyment in humiliation. This pattern reflects the affective and personalized nature of digital hostility highlighted in previous Indonesian sociolinguistic research, where historical grievances and leader-centered sentiments intensify online antagonism.

For Anies Baswedan, Instrumental Violence (30%) was dominant, closely followed by Revenge (28.3%). Instrumental comments strategically worked to delegitimize him by portraying inconsistency, unreliability, or rhetorical manipulation, echoing findings that political hate speech often functions as a tool for discursive disqualification rather than mere emotional outburst. Revenge-motivated comments targeted his character and intellect, reflecting dissatisfaction with his perceived political maneuvers and identity-based appeals. These patterns align with studies showing how Indonesian online spaces amplify ideological contestation and rhetorical mistrust during electoral cycles.

For Ganjar Pranowo, Instrumental Violence (36.7%) was also prominent, while Ideology (21.7%) played a substantial role. Instrumental comments framed him as dangerous, incompetent, or deceitful, reinforcing narratives of political threat. Ideology-driven comments positioned him within a broader system of corruption and institutional decay, mirroring discourse structures observed in forensic linguistics and critical sociocognitive studies where hate speech embodies shared mental models of systemic distrust. These ideological attacks show how sociopolitical narratives extend beyond the individual and attach candidates to collective grievances.

In comparison, hate directed at Anies and Ganjar is more strategically oriented, seeking to undermine their political credibility and position them as threats to national stability—patterns consistent with research on political labeling, discursive contestation, and cognitive frames of group-based hostility. Conversely, hate toward Prabowo is more emotionally charged, rooted in

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personal resentment and punitive sentiment, aligning with findings that long-standing political figures often become targets of emotionally saturated forms of online aggression.

Table 1. *Motivations of hate speech toward Indonesian presidential candidates on Instagram*

Candidate	Dominant Motivations	Percentage	Examples of Comments (Paraphrased)	Interpretation
Prabowo Subianto	Revenge	30%	Expressions of regret and betrayal toward his past political actions.	Indicates long-standing resentment tied to his lengthy and controversial political career.
	Sadism	26.7%	Mocking age, physical appearance, and perceived incompetence.	Reflects pleasure in humiliating him publicly.
Anies Baswedan	Instrumental Violence	30%	Attempts to undermine credibility by highlighting inconsistency and perceived dishonesty.	Shows strategic efforts to weaken his political image.
	Revenge	28.3%	Attacks on intelligence and character.	Reflects anger over perceived political manipulation or identity-based appeals.
Ganjar Pranowo	Instrumental Violence	36.7%	Claims that he is incompetent or dangerous for the nation.	Signals attempts to deny his legitimacy and suitability as a leader.
	Ideology	21.7%	Accusations linking him to systemic corruption or political cartels.	Embeds him in broader narratives of ideological and institutional distrust.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that hate speech on candidates' Instagram accounts reflects a fusion of emotional expression, ideological warfare, and strategic delegitimization. These patterns reinforce the sociolinguistic view that political hate speech is not merely linguistic deviance but a manifestation of identity conflict, polarized cognition, and digitally mediated power negotiation.

Types of hate speech

The distribution of hate speech types highlights which aspects of each candidate's identity were most frequently targeted. For Prabowo Subianto, attacks centered mainly on political issues (70%), often criticizing his military past and policy stances, with radical insults (16.7%) appearing as the next most common. Anies Baswedan also received dominant political hate speech (45%), but he experienced a higher proportion of radical (23.4%) and religious hate speech (21.6%), the latter frequently accusing him of exploiting religion for political gain. Ganjar Pranowo faced primarily political attacks (63.3%), accompanied by radical hate speech (16.7%), including vulgar remarks related to his age and appearance. Overall, political hate speech is the most prevalent across all candidates, while identity-based (religious) and highly vulgar (radical) attacks emerge when political criticisms escalate or intensify.

Table 2. *The comparison of hate speech types*

Candidate	Political Hate Speech	Radical Hate Speech	Religious Hate Speech	Key Characteristics of Attacks
Prabowo Subianto	70%	16.7%	Minimal/Not prominent	Critiques of political record, military background; dehumanizing insults.
Anies Baswedan	45%	23.4%	21.6%	Criticism of governance and strategies; accusations of religious opportunism; strong radical/vulgar remarks.
Ganjar Pranowo	63.3%	16.7%	Minimal/Not prominent	Attacks on policy performance; vulgar animal metaphors; insults targeting age/appearance.

Terms of hate speech

This category focuses on the linguistic strategies employed in hostile expressions. For Prabowo Subianto, defamation (33.3%) was the dominant method, consisting of unverified or damaging claims about his character and political past, followed by direct insults (21.7%). In Anies Baswedan's case, provocative statements (33.3%) were most prominent, often aiming to stir ideological tension and rejection, with insults (30%) also commonly used. Meanwhile, Ganjar Pranowo received the highest proportion of insults (36.6%), frequently crude and aimed at undermining his intelligence and morality, accompanied by widespread defamation (31.6%). Overall, each candidate is targeted through different linguistic tactics: Prabowo through character-damaging allegations, Anies through ideological provocation, and Ganjar through harsh personal humiliation.

Tabel 3. *Linguistic strategies in hate speech*

Candidate	Defamation	Insults	Provocation	Key Characteristics of Attacks
Prabowo Subianto	33.3%	21.7%	Minimal/Not prominent	Damaging claims about political history and character; personal remarks.
Anies Baswedan	Lower/Secondary	30%	33.3%	Ideological provocation; statements designed to incite anger or rejection; frequent direct insults.
Ganjar Pranowo	31.6%	36.6%	Minimal/Not prominent	Crude insults targeting intellect and morality; claims questioning integrity.

Hate speech as a mirror of sociopolitical tensions

The findings illustrate that hate speech on Indonesian political Instagram accounts mirrors broader sociopolitical tensions, reinforcing what prior scholarship has consistently observed. Subyantoro and Apriyanto (2020) and Wiana (2019) both found that election-related online spaces are marked by high emotional intensity, where political animosity is expressed through impoliteness, personal attacks, and symbolic violence.

The dominance of political hate speech in the current dataset aligns with Saragi and SS (2021), who showed that Instagram comment sections on Jokowi's posts function as battlegrounds for ideological contestation rather than spaces for civic dialogue. The motivations rooted in revenge and instrumental violence echo findings from Wahyuningsih (2021) and Sari et al. (2025), who demonstrated that users deploy hate speech strategically to delegitimize opponents and amplify their own political in-groups. The rise of religiously charged hate speech, particularly toward Anies Baswedan, resonates with Wagiati et al. (2025) and Bajari et al. (2021), who highlight the increasing role of identity politics as a destabilizing force in Indonesian digital communication. This pattern is consistent with global comparative studies such as Aini (2025) and Zeeshan (2025), suggesting that hate speech in polarized political climates is often intersectional, attacking not only political stances but also religious, ethnic, and moral identities.

The weaponization of language

Language in this dataset functions as an intentional weapon, echoing patterns documented across Indonesian and international sociolinguistic research. The use of defamation, insults, vulgarity, and animal metaphors is consistent with the impoliteness strategies described by Ummah (2025), Husda and Saragih (2021), and Fadli (2025), who reported that digital hate speech relies heavily on taboo expressions, slurs, and dehumanizing labels to escalate conflict and degrade the target's social worth. These linguistic choices also parallel findings in international contexts, such as Brindle's (2016) corpus analysis of supremacist rhetoric, Technau's (2018) exploration of ethnic slurs, and Quatrini's (2022) study of antagonistic discourse on Twitter.

The deliberate use of vulgar and metaphorical expressions like *"babi"* or *"anjing"* reflects what Babou (2014) termed the "sociolinguistic economy of insults"—a system where the severity of the insult signals social position, group affiliation, and communicative intent. Furthermore, the widespread use of provocation accords with Anwar et al. (2024), who found that political memes weaponize humor, hyperbole, and ridicule to mobilize in-groups and shame ideological opponents. Taken together, the findings affirm that hate speech in Indonesian digital spaces is not accidental but strategically crafted to inflict maximum symbolic harm, disrupt communicative norms, and assert group boundaries, consistent with sociolinguistic theories on language, identity,

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and power articulated by Hudson (1996), Hymes (1983), and Wardhaugh (2006).

The digital environment as an amplifier

The amplification of hate speech on Instagram is strongly supported by prior studies documenting how digital affordances intensify aggression, polarization, and communicative norm breakdown. Subyantoro and Apriyanto (2020) and Novira and Rahmat (2024) demonstrated that online anonymity and low social accountability lower users' inhibitions, enabling more severe impoliteness and more frequent violations of politeness norms. This aligns with findings by Bajari et al. (2021) and Ambarwati and Arimi (2025), who observed that Facebook and Instagram's algorithmic visibility reward provocative, sensational comments, creating a feedback loop where hateful expressions gain traction and become normalized.

Internationally, similar patterns are noted in Rosen and Dale (2025), who showed that hate speech in comment threads precedes measurable declines in lexical diversity, signaling the dominance of repetitive, emotionally charged language over constructive discourse. Studies such as Cho and Moon (2021) and Gagliardone et al. (2015) further argue that platform architecture itself incentivizes hostility by privileging engagement over civility. The current findings, which show increasingly extreme language required to capture attention in a saturated environment, resonate with global observations (Zeeshan, 2025; Pornying & Tantiniranat, 2024) that digital ecosystems amplify antagonism, foreground identity conflict, and encourage the performance of hostility for peer validation. This underscores the sociocognitive perspective advocated by Sirulhaq et al. (2023), emphasizing that hate speech online is shaped not only by individual attitudes but also by technological, ideological, and group-based dynamics embedded in the digital environment.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that hate speech directed at Indonesian presidential candidates on Instagram is shaped by a complex interplay of political ideology, identity negotiation, and linguistic aggression. Across all candidates, political hate speech emerged as the dominant form, revealing that public discourse in digital political spaces is primarily driven by ideological contestation rather than personal or demographic identity alone. However, the significant presence of radical, religious, and identity-based attacks—especially toward Anies Baswedan—shows that when political criticism intensifies, users often shift to more personal or identity-laden forms of hostility.

The linguistic strategies used to express hate speech also varied across candidates. Prabowo Subianto was targeted largely through defamation, aimed at undermining credibility and political legacy. Hate speech toward Anies Baswedan frequently relied on provocation, tied to ideological and religious sentiments. In contrast, Ganjar Pranowo faced predominantly direct insults, reflecting an intention to demean and attack his persona. These findings highlight that hate speech is not uniform but tailored to each candidate's public image, political history, and perceived vulnerabilities.

Overall, the study underscores the urgent need for deeper sociolinguistic engagement with political discourse in Indonesian digital spaces. It also demonstrates the value of qualitative, discourse-based approaches for mapping how language constructs, reinforces, and amplifies political animosity online. Future research could expand the dataset across platforms, incorporate multimodal analysis, or explore algorithmic amplification patterns to further understand how hate speech circulates and gains traction in contemporary digital politics.

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