Discourse Network Analysis of CNN's "*Indonesia Gelap*": Advocacy Coalition and Public Sphere

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Abstract

Demonstrations in Indonesia frequently reflect students' social and political actions, particularly in criticizing government policies. In exploring the phenomenon of "*Demo Indonesia Gelap,*" this study uncovered patterns of public discourse through the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and Habermas' concept of the public sphere. It analyzed how CNN Indonesia framed the demonstration and assessed whether its coverage adhered to principles of independent journalism. Using discourse network analysis, this research identified the roles played by relevant actors, including students, academics, and media outlets, in shaping public opinion. Findings indicate that students remain central in mobilizing critical discourse against government policies, while the media significantly influences the narratives surrounding such demonstrations. Although CNN Indonesia effectively disseminated information, questions emerged regarding its neutrality. This study highlights the increasing influence of media and communication technologies on social movements in the digital era. Moreover, the primary issue underlying the demonstrations is government policy amid a period of political transition. The research suggests the importance of addressing how media framing shapes public perception and maintaining the public sphere as a democratic space for open discourse, free from intervention by particular political interests.

Keywords: demonstration; discourse network; media; public space; social movement

Abstrak

Penggunaan Artificial Intelligence (AI) di Indonesia mengalami pertumbuhan yang Demonstrasi di Indonesia sering kali merefleksikan aksi sosial dan politik mahasiswa, terutama dalam mengkritik kebijakan pemerintah yang dianggap tidak pro-rakyat. Dalam mengeksplorasi fenomena "Demo Indonesia Gelap", penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap pola wacana publik melalui Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) dan konsep ruang publik Habermas. Selain itu, penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana media, khususnya CNN Indonesia, membingkai demonstrasi tersebut dan menilai apakah liputannya sesuai dengan prinsip-prinsip jurnalisme independen. Dengan menggunakan Analisis Jaringan Wacana, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi peran yang dimainkan oleh berbagai aktor, termasuk mahasiswa, akademisi, dan media, dalam membentuk opini publik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa tetap menjadi pusat dalam memobilisasi wacana kritis terhadap kebijakan pemerintah, sementara media secara signifikan mempengaruhi narasi seputar demonstrasi tersebut. Meskipun CNN Indonesia secara efektif menyebarkan informasi, pertanyaan mengenai netralitasnya telah muncul, yang mencerminkan kekhawatiran yang lebih luas tentang ketidakberpihakan media. Penelitian ini menunjukkan adanya peningkatan pengaruh media dan teknologi komunikasi terhadap gerakan sosial di era digital. Selain itu, isu utama yang mendasari demonstrasi adalah kebijakan pemerintah di tengah masa transisi politik. Penelitian ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya membahas bagaimana pembingkaian media membentuk persepsi publik dan menjaga ruang publik sebagai ruang demokratis untuk wacana terbuka, bebas dari intervensi kepentingan politik tertentu.

***Kata kunci**: demonstrasi; gerakan sosial; jaringan wacana; media; ruang publik*

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NTRODUCTION

In the digital age, social movements and press freedom have become closely interconnected globally. The rise of social media platforms has facilitated protest mobilization through the use of hashtags and digital activism. Notable global examples include the #ArabSpring, #BlackLivesMatter, and #MeToo movements, which illustrate how civic groups leverage social media to mobilize mass support and voice collective aspirations (Freelon et al., 2016, p. 10; Jackson et al., 2020; Mendes et al., 2018). Castells (2015) highlights these new movements as being deeply linked to autonomous digital communication networks, enabling activists to create independent communication spaces that are beyond the influence of government or corporations. These platforms provide direct channels for public discussion (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 160; Papacharissi, 2010). However, initial optimism about digital openness is challenged by issues like commercialization, fragmentation, and digital surveillance. Habermas (2006) notes that online interactions often lead to "intimate public spaces."

The digital era presents new conditions for public discourse, offering individuals greater opportunities to speak and creating challenges, such as information noise, polarization, and echo chambers. Press freedom and media accountability remain essential in maintaining healthy public discourse (McQuail, 2020). However, studies show mainstream media often focus on dramatic elements, such as riots, rather than substantive protest issues, potentially undermining public support for social movements. Recent research confirms that media portrayals frequently frame demonstrators negatively, diminishing public sympathy for their causes (Schmid et al., 2019).

Thus, media framing can reinforce existing power structures by discrediting movements challenging dominant policies. Globally, press freedom faces increasing pressures, with significant declines noted even in democratic nations (Borders, 2021). Press freedom in Indonesia has faced a series of troubling setbacks in recent years, especially with increasing political involvement in the media and a rise in violent incidents targeting journalists (Boulianne, 2015; Soetomo, 2021). Reports suggest that the "freedom from violence" index dropped considerably as journalists covering protests came under attack Aliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) (2020)There have been repeated mentions in both scholarship and news commentary about journalists experiencing growing intimidation and outright violence, particularly during public demonstrations. As Brown and Mourão (2021, p. 701) point out, such threats pose ongoing challenges to the broader principle of press freedom.

All of this makes the question of how protests are covered in today's digital world even more important. Major media outlets are expected to uphold democratic values, but in practice, they're often pulled in different directions by pressures that can undermine journalistic integrity. This tension became especially apparent during CNN Indonesia's coverage of the "*Indonesia Gelap*" protests. These demonstrations, organized by BEM SI in February 2025, saw students taking a stand against a set of policies introduced by President Prabowo Subianto and Vice President Gibran Rakabuming. The hashtag *#IndonesiaGelap* spread rapidly on social media, quickly becoming a touchstone for public frustration over the government's direction. Protesters aired a broad spectrum of demands, from calls for greater economic transparency to renewed protections for democracy, reflecting the layered and complicated nature of today's protest movements.

The media response did not go unnoticed. CNN Indonesia, as one of the country's most prominent news organizations, came under heavy criticism. Many expected it to report on the student protests in a thorough and balanced manner. Instead, both commentators and everyday social media users accused the network of favoring a particular narrative, one that painted the

protesters in a negative light and, perhaps unintentionally, shaped broader public attitudes toward *#IndonesiaGelap*. At the height of the controversy, the hashtag #ShameOnYouCNNIndonesia was trending, driven by widespread disappointment at what many saw as unfair or incomplete coverage (Uldam & Askanius, 2013, p. 687).

In fact, a closer look by at least one independent observer on social media highlighted the pattern: they analyzed 39 separate CNN Indonesia articles about the protests. They found that almost every piece focusing on events outside Jakarta centered on scenes of disorder or conflict. Notably, not a single one of those 39 stories gave a clear account of what the protestors were demanding or why they were on the streets in the first place. Critics argued that such reporting fell short, as it failed to present the balanced perspective necessary for responsible journalism. Instead, around half of the coverage was found to disproportionately emphasize negative elements without including the demonstrators' own voices, which might leave audiences with a skewed understanding of what was happening. There were also questions about how CNN Indonesia chose which information to highlight, often giving government statements more weight than the protesters' concerns. Many observers worry that this kind of bias, if left unchecked, could damage trust in the media and drive people toward less reliable sources, ultimately weakening the healthy functioning of democratic discourse(Chadwick et al., 2018, p. 1567; Stier et al., 2018, p. 325; Theocharis et al., 2020, p. 12).

There's already a substantial body of research on how media framing shapes both social movements and the public's attitudes toward them. Several studies point out that social media has become an effective tool for rallying public support, with Twitter, in particular, helping activists build strong online networks for mobilization (Aisya et al., 2022, p. 47). In a separate analysis, Jamil and Doktoralina (2016) examined Detik.com's coverage of the KPK Law revisions and noted that media framing, often shaped by political interests, had a real impact on how people interpreted the news. Misran et al. (2021) examined Amnesty International Indonesia's use of social media, underscoring the crucial role of digital activism in shaping narratives and highlighting the mainstream media's framing of digital discourse. Khatami and Pahlevi (2022) showed how Tempo.co's reporting during the Covid-19 pandemic represented digital repression affecting press freedom, illustrating that media framing can serve as a tool of public discourse control (Fuchs, 2023, p. 319).

The recent *#IndonesiaGelap* movement, representing significant student protests during the 2024 election government era, underscores how media coverage can set precedents for future demonstrations. This online movement has become a crucial space for public discourse, shaping democratic dialogue. Accurate and fair media coverage can channel citizens' aspirations constructively, while biased framing risks distorting public understanding through sensationalism and polarization.

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Jürgen Habermas's concept of the Public Sphere and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) developed by (Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014). Habermas (1989) emphasises the media's role in facilitating rational, democratic public opinion. Yet, he warns of distortions due to commercial and political interests infiltrating everyday discussions. Digital transformations have reshaped the public sphere, increasing inclusivity while also introducing challenges like disinformation and fragmentation. The ACF framework further clarifies how digital movements such as *#IndonesiaGelap* strategically build sustained advocacy through coalitions comprising students, NGOs, and academics (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014, p. 222). Social media here serves not only as a communication tool, but also as a space for political articulation, consolidating and amplifying movement narratives to influence policy-making processes (Mattoni & Odilla, 2021; Mauersberger, 2016).

In this study, the concept of the public sphere is used as a normative framework to evaluate the media's role in shaping public discourse during social movements. Habermas emphasizes that a healthy public sphere requires inclusivity, rationality, and openness to diverse viewpoints. However, in real-world media environments, especially in contexts of protest, media framing often reflects the interests of dominant political actors, potentially distorting public understanding and limiting democratic deliberation. By integrating Habermas's theory with the ACF, this study examines the advocacy coalitions formed during the '*Indonesia Gelap*' protests, analyzing the media's role in facilitating or hindering democratic discourse. This research aims to investigate how CNN Indonesia's media framing influences the formation of advocacy coalitions and the broader public discourse surrounding these protests. It also explores the implications of these findings for democratic communication in the digital age.

New social movements significantly influence the discourse surrounding the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations of February 2025, attracting public attention, particularly from those supporting protests against the Prabowo-Gibran government's policies. CNN Indonesia has notably faced scrutiny due to perceived pro-government reporting tendencies. This study investigates these accusations by analyzing CNN Indonesia's newsroom discourse during the *Indonesia Gelap* (Dark Indonesia) protests. Specifically, it examines how CNN Indonesia shapes and disseminates related discourses using Discourse Network Analysis (DNA).

DNA is employed to map actors and their associated discourses, creating affiliation networks and connections between actors and discourse elements (Leifeld, 2020). Prior research demonstrates DNA's effectiveness in identifying coalitions and conflicts within public policy discourses, revealing supportive and oppositional positions (Fergie et al., 2018). Similarly, Buckton et al. (2019) applied DNA to explore media discourse on the UK's sugar tax policy.

Applying DNA, this research aims to (1) understand advocacy coalitions and discourse dynamics within CNN Indonesia's coverage of the Dark Indonesia demonstrations, and (2) identify key actors influencing CNN Indonesia's reporting in the digital media landscape, evaluating implications for public discourse and social mobilization.

RESEARCH METHOD

The dataset for this study comprises 83 CNN Indonesia news articles related to "*Indonesia Gelap*," collected using text mining methods through the MediaCloud application from February 17 to 21, 2025. The analysis involved 325 codes derived from statements made by various actors. Dataset inclusion criteria were carefully established, focusing primarily on timing and relevant keywords (Wallaschek et al., 2020, p. 269). The temporal criteria specifically capture the discourse dynamics that occurred during the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations, which began on February 17, 2025, and reached their peak on February 21, 2025. The second criterion encompassed all CNN Indonesia articles covering the events nationwide.

The selection of CNN Indonesia as the case study for this research is grounded in its established role as one of Indonesia's leading and most widely consumed news outlets. CNN Indonesia has a significant influence within the media landscape, with a large audience base that encompasses both national and international viewers. According to a 2024 survey by the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2024, CNN Indonesia ranks among the top five online news platforms in the country, particularly noted for its coverage of political and social issues (Reuters Institute, 2024).

The discourse network analysis utilized statements from various actors, including students, demonstration coordinators, police, academics, and representatives from local and central government. The coding process employed a claim-making approach, defining claims

as public articulations related to political demands, actions, proposals, or criticisms. Actor statements were first coded individually and then grouped into discourse categories, forming affiliation networks.

The research methodology followed a five-step process adapted from Wallaschek et al. (2020), which categorized articles by publication time and length, coded actors and organizational affiliations, defined issue-related problems through coded statements, identified actor positions (agreement or disagreement) concerning specific discourses, and mapped discourse relationships based on these positions. Validity and reliability were assessed using Krippendorff's Alpha with the K-Alpha Calculator software, yielding an alpha score of 0.84 for inter-rater reliability across ten analyzed articles, indicating high reliability.

Data visualization was conducted using the DNA Analyzer to visualize discourse networks, complemented by Visone and Gephi software to illustrate the positions of actors and discourses within the "*Indonesia Gelap*" affiliation network.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), discourse coalitions within social networks have a significant influence on opinion formation and policy advocacy (Gabehart et al., 2022, p. 13). Utilizing the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), this study analyzes interactions among actors within CNN Indonesia's news coverage to understand how narratives and core discourses surrounding the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations were shaped across various regions from February 17 to 21, 2025. Data was sourced from CNN Indonesia articles covering these demonstrations nationwide.

This analysis aims to achieve two objectives: (1) to examine the advocacy coalitions and discourse dynamics in CNN Indonesia's coverage of the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations; and (2) to identify key actors within CNN Indonesia's reporting networks in the digital media landscape and explore their implications for public discourse and social mobilization.

Advocacy Coalition and the Dynamics of CNN Indonesia's News Discourse in the Dark Indonesia Action

According to Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014) the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) suggests that actors with shared interests form coalitions to influence public policy through various communication channels, including the media and political institutions. From an ACF perspective, policy coalitions emerge when actors align based on common belief systems to influence policymakers (von Malmborg, 2023, p. 239). In the discourse network analyzed, two primary coalitions are identified: one comprising student and civil society advocacy groups, and another involving government and security forces.

The social movement advocacy coalition comprises students, BEM SI, academics, and activist groups, such as the Civil Society Alliance and *Jogja Memanggil* Alliance, unified by shared discourses that advocate for public interests. Key issues raised include budget efficiency, revisions to the Minerba Law, evaluation of the Free Meal Program (MBG), assessment of energy policies, and support for the asset seizure bill. Their narrative critically examines government policies perceived as detrimental to public welfare, aiming to promote transparency and enhance policy implementation.

Conversely, the state advocacy coalition includes institutions such as the police, the Metro Jaya Police Chief, ministries, DPRD members, and the President. State actors primarily respond reactively to social movement demands, emphasizing public order, law enforcement, and the legitimacy of policy. This dynamic mirrors common media narratives that depict
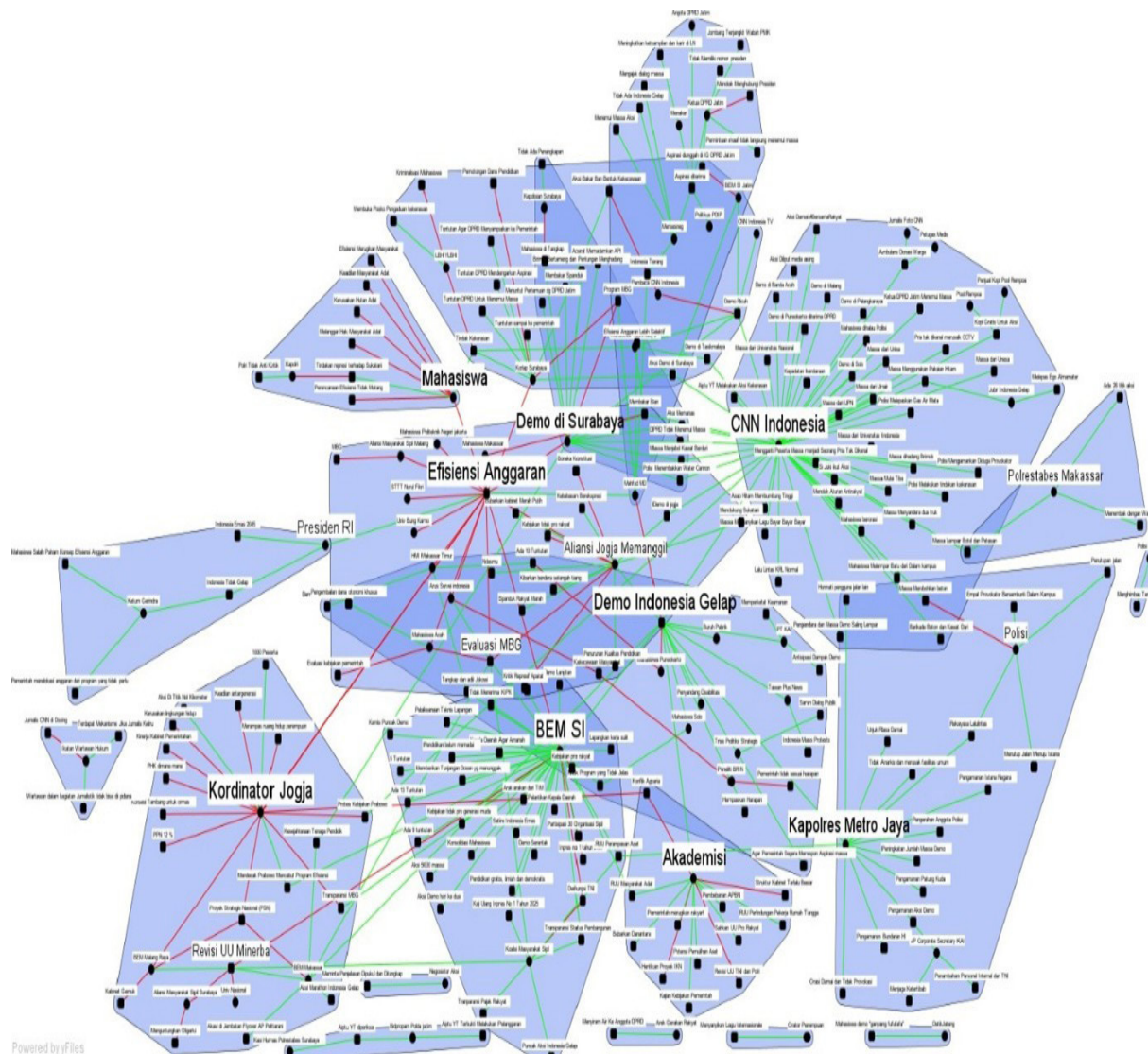
Figure 1. Dark Indonesia Affiliate Network on CNN Indonesia
Source: Research Result 2025

protests as threats to social stability.

CNN Indonesia's coverage reflects an ongoing discourse battle between these coalitions, indicating adherence to the "cover both sides" principle. However, further analysis is necessary to assess the depth of media objectivity. The resulting discourse dynamics reflect the interactions between actors within affiliation networks, with CNN Indonesia serving as both an information source and a public opinion forum, aligning with findings from Caiani (2023, p. 207) on media framing and digital social movements.

The type of relationship formed in the discourse around the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations is characterized as a two-mode relationship. This means that the actors involved are both individuals and institutional representatives, including the DPRD, BEM SI, the police, and the Civil Society Alliance. These actors, as sources cited in CNN Indonesia's reporting, express demands or opinions, forming an affiliation network. Affiliation networks illustrate relationships between actors and specific issues in media coverage, advocating for or opposing particular discourses.

Each actor maintains distinct relationships with emerging issues. Critical actors advocate

for discourses that include opposing budget efficiency, evaluating the Free Meal Program (MBG), rejecting the dual function of the TNI, opposing revisions to the Minerba Law, and supporting the ratification of the asset forfeiture bill. Conversely, government representatives, such as the Minister of State Secretary, encourage dialogue with students, while the police focus primarily on managing security during demonstrations. This affiliation network reflects complex patterns of advocacy and opposition, influencing the flow of information and public opinion (Fergie et al., 2018, p. 744).

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) classifies relationships into discourse clusters, forming advocacy coalitions. Relationships are generally categorized into two types: collaborative relationships (represented by green connections), such as partnerships between students and academics that share intellectual resources for advocacy, and conflictual relationships (red connections), exemplified by interactions between student groups and government or security forces. This binary typology is further substantiated by recent applications in various policy contexts, where coalition formation follows patterns of value congruence and strategic alignment.

Collaborative ties are often marked by the mutual reinforcement of shared belief systems, as illustrated in climate policy discourse, where academic and civil society actors coalesce around normative frames of justice and urgency. These clusters facilitate epistemic trust and co-production of knowledge, which are critical in issue areas involving scientific complexity and public engagement. Conversely, conflictual ties manifest through discursive opposition, frequently associated with institutional actors defending the status quo or mobilizing coercive legitimacy, as seen in protest policing discourse across democratic and hybrid regimes.

Moreover, discourse clusters are not static. They evolve through strategic framing, actor realignment, and shifting political opportunity structures. In protest-related discourse, this dynamism is evident in how student-led movements tactically adapt their alliances, sometimes forming temporary alliances with media or legislative actors. DNA thus enables tracing the diachronic evolution of discourse power and opposition, revealing how actor networks consolidate or fragment over time (Leifeld, 2020, p. 182).

Applying this framework to contentious politics involving students highlights the non-neutral terrain of discourse, making it a site of negotiation, resistance, and narrative competition. Here, power is exercised not only through repression or regulation, but also through the strategic marginalization of certain discourse positions within the network.

The dynamics of discourse surrounding conflicting narratives provide significant advantages to those with higher media accessibility, enabling them to exert greater influence in shaping public opinion. Mapping the "*Indonesia Gelap*" discourse network on CNN Indonesia offers valuable insights into how this issue is constructed within the public sphere. The diversity of actors illustrates that the debate encompasses not merely economic concerns

Table 1. Main Discourse in the Dark Indonesia news on CNN Indonesia

Public Discourse	Percentage
Budget Efficiency	5,9
Dark Indonesia Demo	4,9
MBG Evaluation	3,0
Reject Minerba Revision	3,0
Chaotic Demo	2,0

Source: Research Result, 2025

but also broader social and political dimensions. Media coverage highlights a clear contest between the government's efforts to legitimize its policies and critical groups questioning their effectiveness and impacts. Gramsci (1971) theory of hegemony is particularly relevant here, as it demonstrates how dominant discourses can significantly shape public perceptions. Therefore, discourse network analysis effectively reveals the relationships between various actors and the issues that shape public opinion.

Ideally, the media should serve as a deliberative space that fairly represents diverse perspectives without being dominated by any particular group (Wallaschek et al., 2020, p. 268). However, an analysis of CNN Indonesia's coverage reveals unequal exposure among actors. Student groups, notably BEM SI, appear more prominently in shaping narratives, suggesting CNN Indonesia prioritizes voices from social movement advocacy coalitions. Conversely, state actors are depicted in a more reactive role. While this demonstrates adherence to journalistic principles like "cover both sides," it also aligns with critical media studies, which highlight the media's role in amplifying civil society perspectives often marginalized by pro-government outlets (van Stekelenburg & Gaidytė, 2023, p. 950).

These dynamics can be understood through the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), which emphasizes policy subsystems that include government, civil society, and media actors (von Malmborg, 2023, p. 237). Non-governmental actors, such as students and academics, significantly influence policy discourses, supported by the media's role in disseminating information. The "hybrid media system" concept illustrates how traditional and social media collaboratively shape public opinion. CNN Indonesia's prominence confirms the ongoing importance of mainstream media as primary information sources, complemented by social media for rapid mobilization.

Additionally, academics significantly enhance the legitimacy of advocacy by providing knowledge-based support (Fischer & Gottweis, 2012). In the examined network, collaborations between students, academics, labor, and media illustrate robust coalitions advocating for public interests. However, coalition sustainability depends heavily on internal cohesion and adaptive organizational strategies (Anam et al., 2020, p. 79).

Within this discourse network, students emerge as the central driving force behind the "*Indonesia Gelap*" social movement. However, despite their pivotal role, students rely significantly on other actors to strengthen their advocacy positions. According to Eriyanto (2019), central actors hold substantial potential for influencing policies. Here, BEM SI and CNN Indonesia occupy central roles, possessing substantial capacity to shape public opinion and impact policymakers.

This analysis further highlights how conflicts within discourse networks frequently catalyze policy shifts. Baumgartner and Jones (2015), through the lens of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, argue that significant policy changes typically result from intense public pressure and influential actors capable of effectively mobilizing discourse (Matzke, 2020). Thus, well-coordinated student movements play a critical role in driving policy reforms. The network's focal advocacy issues, such as Budget Efficiency and the revision of the Mineral and Coal Law, underscore the coalition's strategic efforts to engage both public and policymaker attention (Nagel & Bravo-Laguna, 2022, p. 62).

From a policy perspective, these findings indicate the need for government responsiveness to the dynamics of advocacy networks. Ignoring these discursive trends risks escalating public dissatisfaction and further intensifying social movements. Therefore, discourse network analysis illustrates that effective policy advocacy extends beyond public demonstrations to include sophisticated media strategies, academic engagement, and coordinated social

mobilization (Bhattacharya, 2020, p. 231). Understanding these networks provides insight into the collaborative efforts that influence public policy in Indonesia.

These results contribute to the literature on digital media and social movements by illustrating how traditional media, such as CNN Indonesia, continue to shape public perceptions, even in an era dominated by digital activism and social media. In particular, this study builds on the work of Polletta and Chen (2017), who found that while social movements increasingly leverage digital platforms for mobilization, traditional media still play a central role in shaping the narratives that influence public opinion. The study highlights how media, in both digital and traditional formats, act as a powerful intermediary between activists and the general public (Ghinoi & Steiner, 2020, p. 217).While protestors have the ability to amplify their messages through social media, traditional media outlets like CNN Indonesia continue to have significant sway in determining which narratives reach a wider audience.

Key Actors in the Dark Indonesia Discourse on CNN Indonesia's Coverage

The primary actors within advocacy coalitions aim to influence policy through social movements conducted in the public sphere. These movements seek to garner broader attention, shaping public opinion and influencing policymakers. Figure 1 illustrates the interconnectedness of actors within discourse networks based on shared ideas of supporting or opposing government policies. This network highlights actor connections through concepts they endorse or challenge (Sumirat & Eriyanto, 2023, p. 18). Indicate that actors within discourse networks form "discourse coalitions," which significantly influence the public's interpretation of policy issues. This phenomenon is evident within the "*Indonesia Gelap*" action network, notably connecting student groups and academics in their critical stance towards government policies.

CNN Indonesia plays a central role in disseminating information, as evident in its extensive connectivity with various actors and discourses (see Table 2). The narratives constructed by CNN Indonesia represent diverse perspectives, including those of students, academics, and security forces. According to agenda-setting theory, media do not merely report events but actively shape public agendas by emphasizing specific issues (Yousaf et al., 2022). Given CNN Indonesia's prominence within this discourse network, it can be concluded that the media acts as a gatekeeper, determining which aspects of the "*Indonesia Gelap*" actions receive heightened public exposure.

This affiliation network comprises several central actors crucial in disseminating information and coordinating actions. CNN Indonesia notably holds a high level of centrality, measured by its prominence and extensive interactions with other actors within the network (Mulyani et al., 2022, p, 378). CNN Indonesia's central role stems from the dataset being exclusively sourced from its articles. Consequently, CNN Indonesia's journalistic viewpoint significantly shapes how events are presented. This framing is reinforced by relevant external

Table 2. Main Actors in the Dark Indonesia coverage on CNN Indonesia

Organisation	Percentage
CNN Indonesia	18,8
BEM SI	18,4
Korlap Surabaya	9,0
Metro Jaya Police Chief	6,4
Jogja coordinator	5,6

Source: Research Result, 2025

sources, such as BEM SI and other student coalitions involved in the demonstrations. BEM SI acts as another critical node, serving as the main driving force behind this social movement. The significant centrality of these actors indicates their substantial influence over information dissemination and policy advocacy (Gutiérrez-Meave, 2024, p. 510).

BEM SI and student groups have emerged prominently, driving discourses against government policies and closely affiliating with issues such as the evaluation of the Free Meal Program (MBG) and budget efficiency, forming the core of their protests. Furthermore, the strong connection between BEM SI and academic actors underscores the intellectual backing for the movement, notably evident in their joint advocacy for the Asset Forfeiture Bill, which targets corruption (see Figure 2). Research by Wilujeng et al. (2024, p. 67) highlights that successful social movements strongly depend on the networks and alliances they construct. Thus, the collaboration between students and academics signifies that the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations possess a solid intellectual foundation underpinning their advocacy efforts.

Figure 2 illustrates the structure of an advocacy network comprising diverse actors, including students, academics, labor representatives, media representatives, and researchers, who collaborate in policy advocacy efforts (Sconfienza & Durand, 2023, p. 200). Understanding these linkages reveals how actors strategically coordinate to influence policy agendas. According to the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), policy coalitions form due to shared values and beliefs, motivating actors to align around specific policy goals. Prominent groups in this network, such as Indonesian National Executive Board (BEM SI), *Demo Indonesia Gelap*,
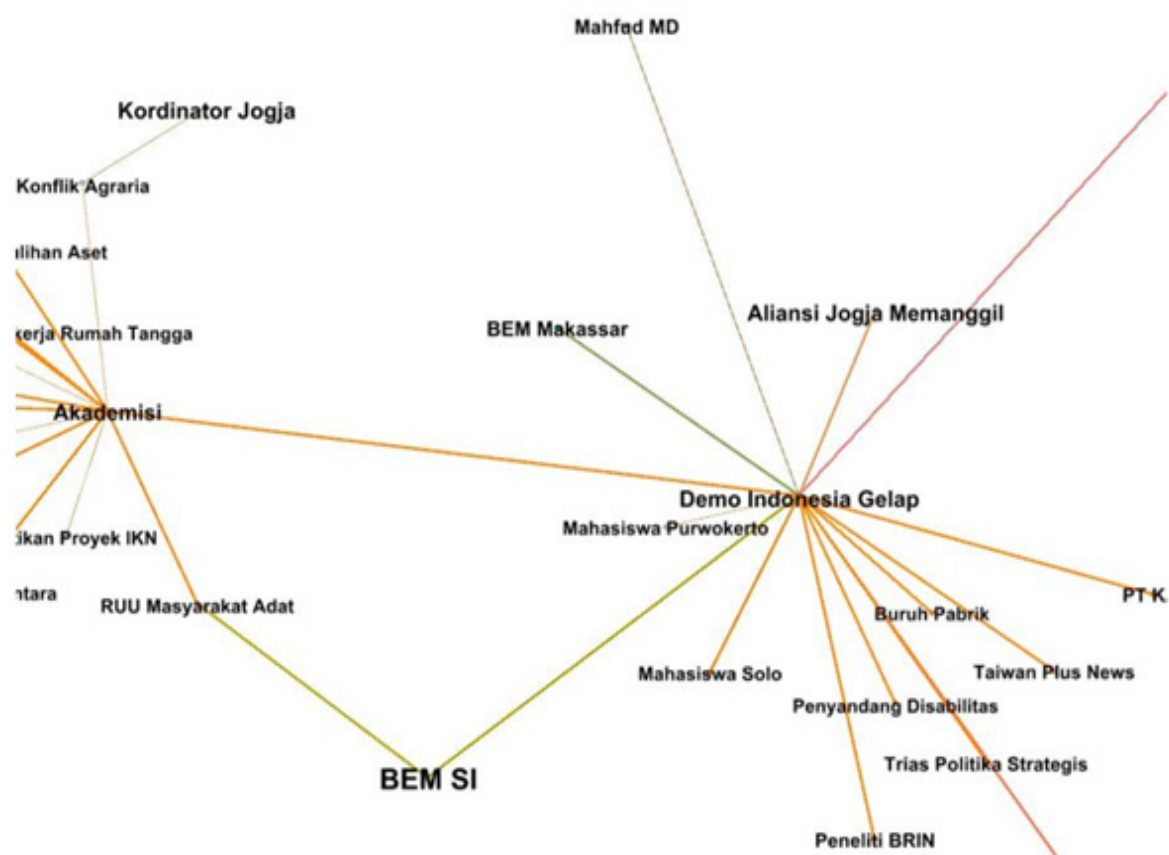

Figure 2. Discourse linkage of academic actors and BEM SI
Source: Research Result, 2025

and *Aliansi Jogja Memanggil*, advocate issues like the Indigenous Peoples Bill and agrarian conflicts.

Gabehart and Weible (2023, p. 8) highlight that policy systems typically involve competing coalitions aiming to shape policymakers' decisions. Figure 2 illustrates multiple interconnected groups that potentially oppose specific policies. Actors, such as academics and journalists, utilize knowledge-based advocacy and media strategies to legitimize their positions and amplify their messages. Resources, including information, expertise, social networks, and public support, significantly enhance a coalition's advocacy effectiveness. The involvement of BRIN, Taiwan Plus News, and labor researchers illustrates the diverse utilization of resources within the advocacy network, including scholarly research, media outreach, and manpower.

Barung (2023, p. 30) emphasizes that student movements in Indonesia frequently act as catalysts for policy change through demonstrations, academic collaboration, and partnerships with civil society groups. This dynamic is evident in the analyzed network, where students collaborate closely with academics and other civil organizations.

The ACF framework also emphasizes coalition strategies that involve persuasion, public mobilization, and media utilization. The participation of media organizations like Taiwan Plus News reflects strategic mass communication efforts aimed at boosting public awareness and mobilizing support. Social network analysis reveals a decentralized structure, with central
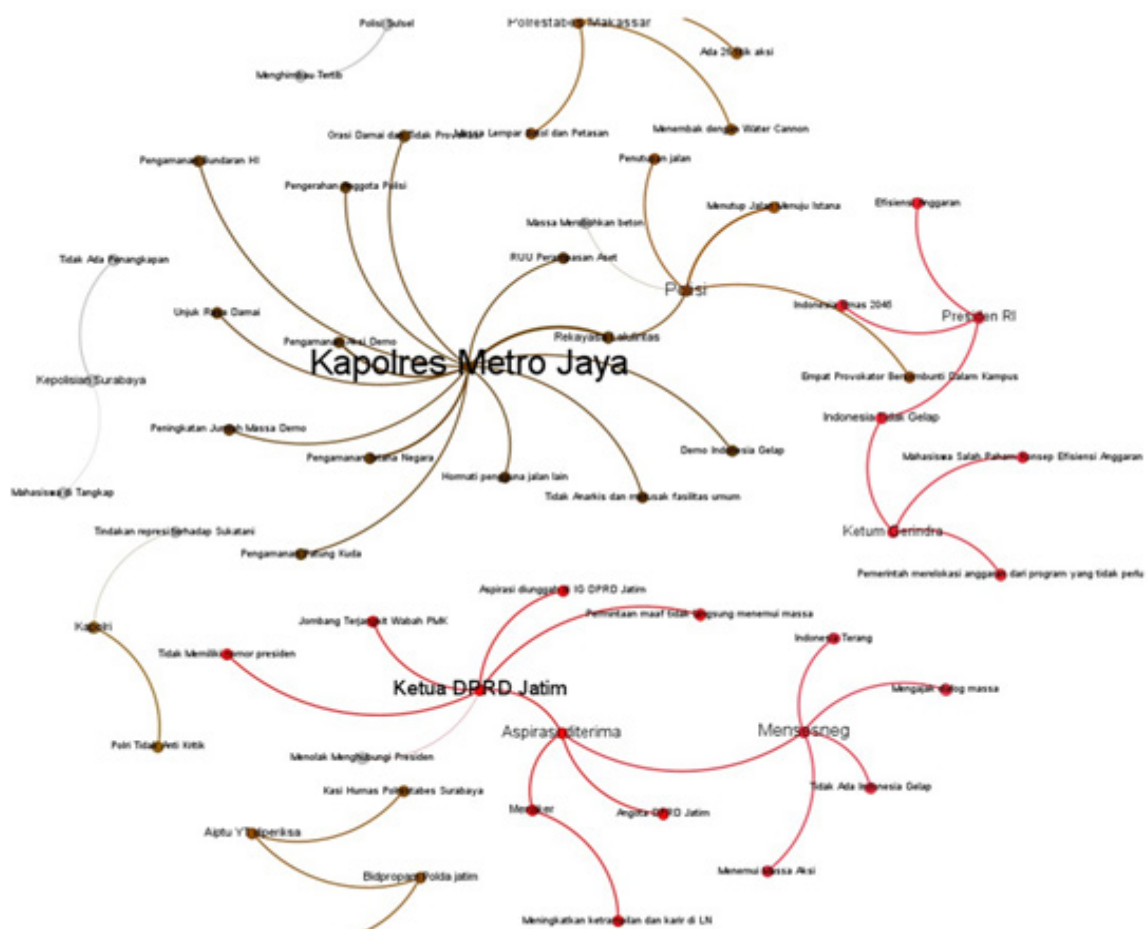

Figure 3. Country Advocacy Coalition
Source: Research Result, 2025

hubs such as BEM SI and *Demo Indonesia Gelap* facilitating communication and mobilizing collective action. Borgatti et al. (2013) describe such highly connected actors as critical "brokers," who accelerate the flow of information and drive advocacy movements forward, thereby explaining the central roles of these groups.

Within the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), policy actors form coalitions based on shared core beliefs rather than acting independently(Gabehart & Weible, 2023, p.8). Figure 3 illustrates how actors like the Metro Jaya Police Chief, the Chairman of the East Java Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), and the President of the Republic of Indonesia established a state advocacy coalition. This coalition actively sought to shape the narrative surrounding the demonstrations, emphasizing security concerns and legitimizing government responses. Institutional figures, including the President, Minister of State Secretary, DPRD members, and police representatives, primarily engaged in discourses centered on law enforcement and stability. Their involvement predominantly reflected reactions to protests rather than initiating new discussions (Dynel & Poppi, 2020, p. 2339).

CNN Indonesia operates as the primary connector among various actors and narratives in this discourse network. Beyond merely disseminating information, CNN Indonesia has a significant influence on public interpretations of the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations. Media studies recognize that news organizations possess considerable framing power, shaping public perceptions of events. CNN Indonesia provided diverse perspectives, but primarily situated the demonstrations within specific frameworks that influence public opinion. According to Habermas' theory of the public sphere, media should facilitate open and rational discourse rather than merely reinforcing state legitimacy (Larsen, 2020, p. 255). However, Figure 3 indicates the state coalition's narrative dominance, focusing heavily on security issues like "mass security," "no anarchists," and "traffic engineering," thereby framing the protests as disruptions.

Public sphere theory further addresses communication distortion, highlighting the state's use of media to control public narratives. The prominent roles of the Metro Jaya Police Chief and the East Java DPRD Chairman illustrate institutional dominance over public discourse concerning demonstrations. Similarly, it was found that states frequently align with security forces and officials to maintain stability during social unrest, framing demonstrations as security threats rather than legitimate political expressions (Tenove et al., 2022, p. 300).

In this scenario, the state strategy involved redirecting public discourse away from protest demands towards security logistics. However, Törnberg and Törnberg (2016) noted that despite state-controlled media dominance, social movements often establish counter-discourses through alternative digital platforms. Although CNN Indonesia dominated mainstream coverage, student narratives likely proliferated across more open digital spaces, highlighting ongoing resistance beyond conventional media constraints (Putra, 2024).

From the perspective of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), the sustainability of state advocacy coalitions significantly relies on institutional and media support (Gabehart & Weible, 2023). When media coverage predominantly features a single perspective, such as the frequent appearances of the Metro Jaya Police Chief and the Chairman of the East Java Regional House of Representatives, the public sphere's democratic nature diminishes. However, CNN Indonesia's coverage network indicates a coalition formed among students, academics, and critical government groups, suggesting a robust discourse conflict in the media (Abzianidze, 2020, p. 250).

Discourse conflicts are not confined to physical protests but also extend to media arenas, shaping dominant public narratives (Bossner & Nagel, 2020, p. 320). With the significant

presence of student and academic discourse, public perceptions may lean toward criticizing government policies. Nonetheless, the presence of governmental and security narratives demonstrates attempts to balance coverage.

CNN Indonesia's framing portrays the demonstrations in dual contexts, highlighting student activism and potential threats to public order, while also emphasizing the media's role in shaping public understanding. These dynamics could influence future government policy responses, necessitating more accommodating strategies to address public concerns if criticism continues (Saumer et al., 2024, p. 10).

This research, based solely on CNN Indonesia coverage over a brief period, might not fully represent the broader media landscape. Future studies could benefit from comparative analyses involving additional media outlets or more extended observation periods. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews, could further enhance insights into discourse dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that the contestation in CNN Indonesia's reporting on the "*Indonesia Gelap*" demonstrations is closely related to the power dynamics of Indonesia's digital public sphere. Rather than acting as a neutral forum, the media environment functions as a field where competing coalitions, especially those aligned with state interests and those representing student and civil society groups, struggle to define the meaning, legitimacy, and direction of public protest. It is apparent from the analysis that state-affiliated actors continue to shape the dominant narrative, frequently presenting demonstrations as issues of order and security. At the same time, the voices of protestors and their allies are often minimized or relegated to secondary status. This pattern is consistent with ongoing concerns about media pluralism and the barriers faced by marginalized groups in gaining sustained visibility within mainstream coverage. Despite the transformative potential of digital media to broaden access to public debate, the research indicates that structural inequalities in message amplification and agenda setting persist. The capacity of civil society actors to influence national conversations still depends on strategic engagement with both alternative platforms and established news outlets, as well as the cultivation of alliances that can bridge institutional divides.

These findings demonstrate that policy outcomes and the trajectory of public discourse are rarely shaped solely by the content of protest messages; instead, effective advocacy now demands a nuanced grasp of media logics, strategic anticipation of framing practices, and persistent efforts to secure access to influential communication channels. Although digital platforms have opened new spaces for participation, they have not fully dismantled entrenched hierarchies within the Indonesian media landscape. This shows the enduring power of editorial decisions in shaping democratic processes and the need to understand that media control and representational dynamics influence access and voice in public debate. Looking forward, further research is essential to explore how emerging forms of activism and alternative media might disrupt or recalibrate existing structures of power and visibility, e.g., through comparative analyses across diverse media systems and longitudinal studies within the Indonesian context. Such inquiries could reveal the development of advocacy coalitions and media strategies amidst shifting political and technological terrains. Importantly, future studies should incorporate a broad range of media outlets beyond CNN Indonesia to allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how different platforms mainstream and alternative frame social movements, especially in politically charged environments. Equally vital is the role of media institutions in adopting more balanced and inclusive editorial practices to preserve the integrity of the public sphere by ensuring equitable representation of both protestors and state actors. At the same

time, fostering media literacy among the public becomes imperative to empower citizens with the critical tools needed to navigate and challenge biased media portrayals. Finally, examining the role of social media platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, could be a promising avenue for assessing whether these digital spaces serve as viable alternatives for democratic discourse. Through these combined efforts across research, policy, and practice, a more inclusive and participatory media environment can be cultivated, one in which social movements are afforded meaningful opportunities to influence public discourse and policymaking.

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