



THE SPIRAL OF ANXIETY IN THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DISCOURSE ON X

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Abstract

This study examines the emergence of a spiral of anxiety among social media users on X (formerly Twitter) during discourse surrounding the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Drawing on the spiral of silence theory, this study investigates how users respond emotionally when their political opinions diverge from the perceived majority, particularly under conditions of intense polarization. Using a quantitative sentiment analysis approach, the study analyzes 1,060 tweets collected through six election-related hashtags between November 13, 2023, and February 13, 2024. The data were classified using the Naive Bayes Classifier (NBC) method and validated using accuracy testing/confusion matrix in Google Colab. The findings show that while polarized users often express strong sentiments, a significant proportion of users adopt neutral tones, which can be interpreted as strategic silence or emotional withdrawal caused by fear of backlash. This silence does not reflect indifference but socio-political anxiety, indicating a shift from a spiral of silence to a spiral of anxiety. As a result, the quality of discourse declines, moving from fact-based debate to emotionally charged exchanges of opinion. This phenomenon contributes to unproductive political engagement and increased social fragmentation. The study offers theoretical and empirical insights into how digital platforms shape political communication in highly polarized societies.

Keywords: Sentiment Analysis, Anxiety, Political Polarization, Indonesian Election



INTRODUCTION

In the era of digital communication, public opinion is increasingly formed and shaped within social media ecosystems, where individuals can selectively express their ideas, attitudes, and political sentiments. Social media has become a crucial arena for discursive engagement, where expressions of support and dissent contribute to broader patterns of political polarization. This process is shaped not only by content dissemination but also by how users perceive their social environment, particularly whether they feel confident enough to express minority perspectives without fear of social isolation. As a result, divergence in sentiment among social media users reflects broader societal cleavages between majority and minority opinion groups, especially during politically contentious periods such as national elections.

Previous research has consistently shown that individuals' willingness to express political views is mediated by whether they perceive their opinions as aligned with majority sentiment. The spiral of silence theory, first introduced by Noelle-Neumann¹, posits that people are more likely to voice opinions they perceive as socially acceptable or dominant, while dissenting views tend to be suppressed to avoid marginalization. Although this theory has traditionally been applied to mass media and broadcast communication contexts, its application to social media environments remains underexplored, particularly within the framework of political discourse in the Global South.

In Indonesia, political polarization has become increasingly visible through both elite discourse and mass-based political expression.

¹ Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion."

Soderborg and Muhtadi identify multidimensional sources of hostility, including religious, ethnic, regional, and historical factors, in the polarization that preceded the 2019 general election². However, their study did not account for opinion dynamics on digital platforms or address how minority sentiments are articulated in online discourse. Similarly, recent studies on sentiment analysis in Indonesian media³ have largely focused on mapping affective trends or identifying influential actors, without sufficiently examining the communicative dynamics behind opinion formation or the presence of silenced voices.

Moreover, much of the existing scholarship on sentiment analysis is rooted in computational or informatics disciplines⁴, prioritizing technical metrics over theoretical grounding in communication science. Although such studies offer methodological innovation, they often overlook the discursive and ideological implications of sentiment divergence, especially in relation to the expression of unpopular or minority opinions on platforms such as Twitter, now rebranded as X. This creates a significant gap in the literature and points to the need to theorize political sentiment and opinion formation on social media through frameworks grounded in communication studies.

Indonesia presents a compelling case for this inquiry. With 212.9 million internet users and a growing social media penetration rate⁵, the country has witnessed a surge in online political expression,

² Soderborg and Muhtadi, "Resentment and Polarization in Indonesia."

³ Wiyono et al., "Online Media Trends on Political Party Sentiment Ahead of the 2024 Election in Indonesia"; Habibi and Sunjana, "Analysis of Indonesia Politics Polarization before 2019 President Election Using Sentiment Analysis and Social Network Analysis"; Jati, "Polarization of Indonesian Society during 2014-2020: Causes and Its Impacts toward Democracy."

⁴ Gupta and Sandhane, "Use of Sentiment Analysis in Social Media Campaign Design and Analysis."

⁵ Dataportal, "Digital 2023: Indonesia."

especially in the lead-up to presidential elections. X, with more than 24 million users in 2024, has emerged as a platform where users engage in polarized discourse, form clusters of pro- and anti-presidential candidates, and often circulate intense negative sentiment⁶. Despite its transformative potential as a digital public sphere⁷, digital communication platforms can also be used to generate substantial public support while reducing electoral campaign costs⁸. At the same time, X has amplified political animosity and disinformation⁹, raising concerns about whose voices dominate public debate and which voices become marginalized.

Given this context, the present study analyzes the divergence of pro and contra sentiment in public discourse on X related to the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Specifically, it investigates how majority and minority opinion groups express themselves in digital settings and whether patterns of silence can be identified through sentiment distribution. By applying the spiral of silence theory to a corpus of tweets, this study seeks to identify how political sentiments are shaped, suppressed, or amplified within the affordances of platform-based interaction.

This research contributes to the field of communication by (1) offering a theoretically grounded sentiment analysis based on the spiral of silence framework; (2) mapping sentiment divergence as a form of political polarization; and (3) identifying patterns of minority opinion expression in digital discourse. It addresses the underrepresentation of communication theory in computational

⁶ Ali and Eriyanto, "Political Polarization and Selective Exposure of Social Media Users in Indonesia."

⁷ Fuchs, "Social Media and the Public Sphere."

⁸ Arafat and Rahmah, "MEDIA POLITIK : SARANA PENDONGKRAK ELEKTABILITAS SEBAGAI STRATEGI PEMENANGAN"; Rani, "Dinamika Komunikasi Politik Pada Pemilihan Presiden Di Indonesia Pendahuluan."

⁹ Burgess and Baym, "Twitter: A Biography."

sentiment studies and offers empirical evidence from the Indonesian context, a vibrant yet contested site of political communication.

Methods

This study uses a quantitative research method with a positivistic approach. This approach was selected because the spiral of silence is a communication theory with positivistic methodological implications¹⁰. The object of this research is public opinion sentiment on social media. Data were collected from the X platform, formerly Twitter, to examine sentiments, opinions, and emerging political trends. The study applies sentiment analysis using the Naive Bayes Classifier (NBC) method. After the data were obtained, they were processed using the NBC method, classified into sentiment categories, and validated using accuracy testing/confusion matrix in Google Colab.

Social media research has three levels of analysis: media analysis, communication analysis, and network analysis¹¹. Media analysis refers to the assessment of social media account performance, including reach, engagement, and virality. Communication analysis focuses on conversations posted on social media, including comments, responses, and other digital traces produced by users. Communication network analysis, meanwhile, examines digitally connected communities and the patterns of coordination among their members. In this study, the researcher focuses on conversation analysis related to emotional sentiment, attitudes, and public opinion about the 2024 presidential election on social media. Accordingly, this

¹⁰ West and Turner, *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application*.

¹¹ Purnama, "NodeXL Dalam Penelitian Jaringan Komunikasi Berbasis Internet."

study employs a quantitative content analysis method¹² focusing on tweets, retweets, and hashtags on X.

The material objects of this research consist of official presidential candidates' X accounts and trending hashtags that gained popularity during the election campaign period. The candidate accounts were selected on the premise that presidential candidates communicate political ideas and public messages through personal accounts or official accounts managed by their social media teams. The accounts included in this study are @aniesbaswedan, @prabowo, and @ganjarpranowo.

In addition to official accounts, trending hashtags are also treated as key components because they function as aggregators of digital discourse and indicators of public sentiment. Hashtags often capture dominant narratives and political controversies circulating on social media.

This study focuses on six prominent hashtags that appeared frequently and generated substantial user engagement, namely #AminAjaDulu, #ObralJanjiPalsu, #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran, #PrabowoGibran, #GanjarMahfudSatSet, and #GanjarMahfud.

Data were collected between November 13, 2023, the date on which the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI) announced the final list of presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and February 13, 2024, one day before the presidential election on February 14, 2024. This timeframe was selected to capture the dynamics of public sentiment and online discourse throughout the official campaign period.

¹² Prajarto et al., *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif Komunikasi*.

Results and Discussion

Sentiment analysis is the study of people's opinions, sentiments, attitudes, and emotions¹³. It is also commonly referred to as opinion mining. Sentiment analysis helps researchers understand the attitude, mood, or sentiment of a speaker or writer toward a topic, product, service, or event. It uses natural language processing and machine learning to analyze emotions and opinions expressed in textual data. This study focuses on sentiment analysis as part of natural language processing, with the aim of automatically identifying subjective information from natural-language texts¹⁴.

According to Liu, sentiment analysis is based on natural language processing and data mining, and its objective is to design effective models and algorithms for extracting and summarizing opinions from natural-language texts. In this sense, sentiment analysis may be understood as a subfield of semantic analysis¹⁵. As a powerful analytical tool, it has practical applications across various fields, including marketing, customer service, public opinion research, and political communication.

In the context of social media, sentiment analysis examines opinion patterns by classifying expressions into positive, neutral, and negative sentiments. Opinion is understood as a broad concept that includes sentiment, evaluation, judgment, attitude, the target of the opinion, and the person expressing it. In this study, the term sentiment refers specifically to the positive, neutral, or negative orientation implied by an opinion.

The Spiral of Silence Theory was proposed by the German political and communication scholar Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in

¹³ Liu, *Sentiment Analysis: Mining Opinions, Sentiments, and Emotions*.

¹⁴ Pozzi et al., "Challenges of Sentiment Analysis in Social Networks: An Overview."

¹⁵ Liu, *Sentiment Analysis: Mining Opinions, Sentiments, and Emotions*.

1974¹⁶. This theory explains how public opinion is formed and why some people are reluctant to voice opinions that differ from the perceived majority. Mass media can work together with dominant public opinion to silence minority positions on particular social and cultural issues. In this process, minority attitudes and understandings may become isolated and remain unexpressed in public communication spaces¹⁷.

In this study, the implications of popularity and polarization on X are examined through two major patterns emerging from social media discourse: the dominance of neutrality and high polarization. The first pattern is the dominance of neutrality. The hashtag #ObralJanjiPalsu reflects criticism of political promises perceived as common or normalized within electoral discussions. Users express dissatisfaction through tweets and hashtags, yet the issue remains normalized in online discourse. Despite generating a high volume of tweets, this topic does not produce significant momentum or mass mobilization. Thus, high popularity without polarization often reflects an issue that is widely recognized by the public but lacks sharply conflicting viewpoints.

This phenomenon reflects what may be termed critical apathy, a condition in which the public is aware of political inconsistencies but responds with passive disengagement. Although the issue is widely acknowledged, it lacks the symbolic or emotional force needed to generate conflict or sustain civic mobilization. As a result, the issue becomes normalized within digital discourse.

The second pattern is high polarization. This pattern indicates emotionally charged discussions in which audiences are divided into

¹⁶ Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion."

¹⁷ West and Turner, *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application*.

opposing camps, such as supporters and opponents of a particular candidate or issue. This is evident in the hashtag #PrabowoGibran, where polarization reflects an identity-based conflict between supporters and critics of this candidate pair. Such polarization may influence voter decisions and exacerbate broader social tensions.

The hashtag #PrabowoGibran illustrates a highly polarized discourse marked by sharp emotional divisions between supporters and critics of the presidential and vice-presidential candidate pair. In this case, polarization moves beyond policy disagreement and enters the domain of identity-based conflict, where political choices are deeply embedded in group loyalties and ideological commitments.

The discursive behavior observed here is consistent with Social Identity Theory¹⁸, which explains that individuals derive part of their self-concept from group affiliation, resulting in in-group favoritism and out-group antagonism. The hashtag also demonstrates features of the Spiral of Silence Theory¹⁹, whereby individuals with minority opinions may refrain from expressing dissent, allowing vocal and emotionally engaged groups to dominate the conversation.

Moreover, the algorithmic structure of platform X contributes to echo chambers and filter bubbles by reinforcing existing beliefs and intensifying polarization. This situation has tangible implications for democratic processes because it may affect voter behavior, increase political antagonism, and even translate into offline tensions.

Hashtags are keywords or phrases beginning with the # symbol that are used to group or categorize content on social media, making it easier for users to find and participate in discussions on specific topics. The hashtag as an online tool began on Twitter in 2007 and

¹⁸ Tajfel and Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior B."

¹⁹ Noelle-Neumann, "The Spiral of Silence: A Theory of Public Opinion."

was introduced by social media consultant Chris Messina. On August 23, 2007, he used #barcamp in a tweet to organize discussion related to an event. Although Twitter initially considered the idea unusual, it quickly became popular and is now a standard feature on various platforms, including Instagram and Facebook^{20; 21; 22}.

Hashtags have become important tools for pushing issues into viral circulation and encouraging social media users to participate in public discussion. They are often used to mobilize groups around specific goals. Among the most widely known hashtags on Twitter are #BlackLivesMatter, #Brexit, and #CupForBen²³. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag is one of the most iconic examples. It emerged after the shooting of a 17-year-old African American teenager in Florida by a neighborhood patrol coordinator who was later acquitted. The movement demanded justice for the victim and became a global symbol of racial justice activism.

This study highlights the findings obtained from six election-related hashtags, as shown in Table 1. These hashtags were selected because they appeared frequently in public conversations on X and represented different forms of political discourse surrounding the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Each hashtag functioned not only as a marker of online discussion but also as a discursive space in which users expressed support, criticism, doubt, or restraint toward specific candidates and political issues.

The sentiment of the 2024 presidential election on X was observed through tweets, retweets, and reposts associated with these

²⁰ Panko, "A Decade Ago, the Hashtag Reshaped the Internet | Smithsonian."

²¹ Cakebread, "A Twitter User Included the First Hashtag in a Tweet 10 Years Ago - and Changed Our Online Conversations Forever | Business Insider India."

²² SouthChinaMorningPost, "#ToldYouSo: Meet Chris Messina, the Man Who Invented the Hashtag | South China Morning Post."

²³ Pavey, "These Are the Most Iconic Hashtags on Twitter of All Time | London Evening Standard | The Standard."

hashtags. By examining these forms of interaction, the study identifies the distribution of positive, neutral, and negative sentiment across different hashtag conversations. This analysis also helps reveal how certain hashtags generated broad public attention, while others produced stronger emotional responses and more visible patterns of political polarization.

Table 1. Hashtag-Based Discourse

Hashtag	Sentiment Positive	Sentiment Neutral	Sentiment Negative	Total Tweets
#AminAjaDulu	7	124	25	156
#ObralJanjiPalsu	3	503	1	507
#PrabowoGibran	14	214	28	256
#JanganPilihPrabowoGibran	0	16	0	16
#GanjarMahfudSatSet	1	36	2	39
#GanjarMahfud	2	69	15	86
Total	27	962	71	1060

Source: Primary data processed through Google Colab.

Based on the data above, the hashtag #AminAjaDulu shows relatively strong polarization, with 25 negative tweets. #ObralJanjiPalsu recorded the highest number of tweets (507), dominated by neutral sentiment. #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran had the lowest activity, with only 16 tweets, all of which were neutral. #GanjarMahfudSatSet and #GanjarMahfud showed higher levels of negative sentiment than positive sentiment.

The findings show that hashtags associated with Anies Baswedan and Prabowo Subianto were among the more visible hashtags ahead of the 2024 presidential election. This visibility is reflected not only in the number of tweets but also in the direction of sentiment, which contributes to discursive contestation in public spaces, including social media.

Popular hashtags such as #ObralJanjiPalsu and #PrabowoGibran tend to generate more neutral discussions. #ObralJanjiPalsu reflects public attention to political promises perceived as unrealistic or unfulfilled, making it a dominant issue. Meanwhile, #PrabowoGibran

and #GanjarMahfudSatSet involve criticism of specific candidate pairs, although their relative frequency is much lower than that of #ObralJanjiPalsu.

By contrast, hashtags with lower popularity, such as #AminAjaDulu and #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran, show different patterns. #AminAjaDulu contains a noticeable proportion of positive and negative sentiment, while #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran remains entirely neutral. These findings indicate that popularity does not necessarily produce polarization. Rather, polarization emerges when positive and negative sentiments become visible and are reinforced within echo chambers.

Popularity and polarization are interrelated concepts in political discussions on social media, but they carry different implications. Popularity refers to the amount of attention or the volume of conversation around a particular topic, candidate, or issue. In this context, popularity is measured by the number of tweets using the six observed hashtags. High popularity does not necessarily indicate positive sentiment; rather, it reflects the level of public awareness or discussion surrounding an issue.

The popularity of #ObralJanjiPalsu and #PrabowoGibran is evident in the number of tweets they generated, with #ObralJanjiPalsu recording 507 tweets and #PrabowoGibran recording 256 tweets. This indicates that public attention was more focused on criticism of political promises as a substantive issue than on narratives concerning specific candidate pairs. Meanwhile, polarization was more visible under #PrabowoGibran, which recorded 28 negative tweets out of 256 total tweets.

Polarization refers to a sharp division between groups holding opposing views, which can be identified through the distribution of

positive and negative sentiment as well as lower levels of neutrality. On social media, sentiment may trigger polarization, particularly when platform algorithms reinforce fragmentation by presenting content aligned with users' preferences. This process creates echo chambers that make differences of opinion appear more extreme and may lead to verbal conflict.

Hashtags with higher polarization, such as #AminAjaDulu, therefore require careful communication strategies to address criticism and prevent issues from escalating. However, polarization does not always appear with the same intensity in offline interactions. In the case of the Ganjar-Mahfud hashtags, polarization appears lower than in the Prabowo-related hashtag, with the predominance of neutral sentiment indicating that Ganjar-Mahfud supporters were less emotionally active in digital political discussions.

Based on the Spiral of Silence Theory, individuals tend to avoid expressing opinions that differ from what they perceive as the dominant or majority view in public discourse. This tendency is rooted in fear of social isolation, criticism, or backlash, especially in politically sensitive environments. In the context of this study, such dynamics are reflected in the dominance of neutrality observed across several political discussions on X. The prevalence of neutral sentiment illustrates a cautious public stance in expressing opinions about candidates or political issues. This caution may arise from fear of being criticized or drawn into heightened polarization.

Sentiment can contribute to political polarization, particularly on social media, although its intensity is not always mirrored in offline interactions. In digital environments, platform algorithms tend to reinforce informational fragmentation by curating content aligned with users' preferences, thereby producing echo chambers that

amplify perceived differences and may intensify verbal conflict. According to the Spiral of Silence Theory, individuals often refrain from expressing opinions that deviate from the perceived majority due to fear of social isolation, criticism, or backlash. This pattern is reflected in the dominance of neutral sentiment in political discussions on X, indicating a cautious public stance amid heightened polarization.

At the same time, negative political issues such as broken promises are more readily circulated and accepted in public discourse. This is illustrated by the hashtag #ObralJanjiPalsu, which attracts broad engagement but is accompanied predominantly by neutral sentiment. Such issues appear to be framed as collective normative grievances rather than emotionally or ideologically polarizing debates. Consequently, even widely discussed topics do not necessarily generate strong polarization.

The hashtag #ObralJanjiPalsu further illustrates how users may engage with negative political issues that represent shared dissatisfaction without directly attaching the issue to a specific identity or candidate. This makes the issue easier to circulate and discuss without necessarily producing sharp affective polarization.

The researcher identifies a dynamic interplay between popularity and polarization across the observed hashtags. #ObralJanjiPalsu illustrates a pattern of high popularity but low polarization. With 503 out of 507 tweets expressing neutral sentiment, this hashtag reflects significant public engagement without emotional fragmentation. The issue of political promises appears to have been normalized in public discourse and treated as a general political problem rather than a trigger for partisan conflict. Thus, although the hashtag is widely used, it does not provoke sharp divisions or identity-based debate.

The hashtag #AminAjaDulu illustrates a more complex dynamic, combining a significant number of neutral tweets (124) with noticeable negative (25) and positive (7) sentiments. This mixed sentiment reflects a moderate to high level of polarization, suggesting that public opinion around this topic is more contested and diverse. The coexistence of positive and negative responses alongside neutrality implies that the issue remains under negotiation within the public sphere, with different interpretations competing for dominance.

A highly impactful tweet can trigger both popularity and polarization. In this context, a negative tweet connected the emergence of Dirty Vote, a documentary uploaded to YouTube, with political grievances surrounding Anies Baswedan. The tweet framed the film as a form of retribution against those who had previously slandered him: "At least dirty voter menjadi karmanya @aniesbaswedan kepada orang-orang yang fitnah beliau. Dan kalau kata orang jawa GUSTI ALLOH MBOTEN SARE!!!....." This message was strengthened through hashtags such as #dirtyvoter, #AMINAjaDulu, and #AMINKanIndonesia, as well as calls for mobilization such as "Kapan nih demo besar besaran dimulai? Dirty vote Gejayan memanggil #AMINAjaDulu." These expressions show how strong negative sentiment can amplify emotional responses and catalyze political mobilization on social media.

Another category, low popularity and low polarization, is illustrated by the hashtag #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran. With only 16 tweets in total and no positive or negative sentiment, this hashtag appears to lack both emotional appeal and broader political traction.

The findings reveal empirical indications of Spiral of Silence dynamics within hashtag-based political discourse. The following analysis offers a sharper lens on this phenomenon by examining four categories of hashtags, each reflecting different patterns of popularity and polarization.

Table 2. Description of Hashtags Based on the Spiral of Silence²⁴

Hashtag	Polarization	Spiral of Silence Dynamics
#ObralJanjiPalsu	Very low. Predominantly neutral sentiment.	- Neutrality Dominance: The hashtag is primarily used to convey facts or critiques without emotional expression. - Minimal Emotional Expression: Both positive and negative sentiments are scarce, indicating that the conversation is driven by factual or neutral discourse rather than emotionally polarized narratives.
#AminAjaDulu	Noticeable polarization. Negative sentiment (25) clearly outweighs positive (7).	- Criticism Prevails: Although a significant portion remains neutral, the dominance of critical narratives shapes the discourse. - Muted Supporters: Those expressing support (positive sentiment) may experience reluctance to speak out, fearing domination by critical voices.
#PrabowoGibran	Clear polarization. Negative sentiment (28) surpasses positive (14).	Criticism Prevails: Although a significant portion remains neutral, the dominance of critical narratives shapes the discourse. Muted Supporters: Those expressing support (positive sentiment) may experience reluctance to speak out, fearing domination by critical voices.
#JanganPilihPrabowoGibran	No polarization. Entirely neutral content.	No emotional polarity is evident. The hashtag failed to generate controversy, and no dominant narrative emerged to pressure users to conform or remain silent.

The hashtag #ObralJanjiPalsu indicates the dominance of critical discourse expressed in a neutral tone, with little strong emotional sentiment. However, the potential emergence of a spiral of silence effect remains plausible, particularly if negative sentiment begins to

²⁴ Table 2 focuses on selected representative hashtags that illustrate distinct patterns of popularity, polarization, and spiral of silence dynamics.

rise and shift the tone of the discussion. In contrast, #AminAjaDulu is characterized by higher polarization, marked by a significant imbalance between negative and positive sentiment. This analysis highlights the need to manage dominant issues more strategically in order to encourage positive engagement and improve public perception, especially because negative sentiment under this hashtag exceeds positive sentiment.

Another noteworthy case is the hashtag #PrabowoGibran, which displays a larger number of negative sentiments (28) than positive ones (14), alongside a substantial volume of neutral sentiment (214). This configuration suggests a polarized discourse. Despite the prevalence of criticism, the level of neutrality remains high, indicating a tension between active critique and passive observation. The data also suggest that supporters of this pair, represented by positive sentiment contributors, may be more reluctant to speak out due to apprehension about confronting the dominant critical narrative. As a result, minority support appears to be suppressed within the discursive space.

Polarization on social media is closely associated with the emergence of echo chambers, where users curate information sources that align with their pre-existing beliefs²⁵, ²⁶. Negative tweets, which are often sensational and emotionally charged, tend to be prioritized by platform algorithms because they generate higher engagement²⁷. This dynamic entrenches polarized viewpoints and amplifies social fragmentation.

Users tend to engage with content that reaffirms their beliefs, thereby reducing exposure to dissenting perspectives. This behavior

²⁵ Pecile et al., *Decoding Political Polarization in Social Media Interactions*.

²⁶ Levy and Razin, "Social Media and Political Polarisation."

²⁷ Berman, *Polarization on Social Media*.

fosters ideological homogeneity within user networks and limits the possibility of cross-cutting political dialogue²⁸. Fear of rejection or social exclusion further discourages individuals from expressing contrary views, contributing to patterned user behavior and reinforcing polarization.

The effects of high polarization have several significant consequences:

1. Unproductive discourse. Public dialogue often shifts from evidence-based debate to emotionally driven exchanges of opinion. The presence of both negative and positive sentiment within tweets reflects an increase in personal and affective responses to political content.
2. Social fragmentation. Polarization creates segmented public spheres in which users align themselves with ideologically similar groups, making reconciliation and consensus-building increasingly difficult.
3. Drawing on Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann's Spiral of Silence Theory, individuals who perceive themselves as holding minority opinions may withhold their views to avoid criticism or social ostracism. In some cases, individuals refrain from tweeting altogether due to fear of being targeted by political opponents or "haters."

This silence often develops into a spiral of anxiety, in which fear becomes intertwined with various socio-emotional stressors. In highly polarized environments, this spiral not only fosters individual anxiety but also contributes to a socially pressurized media space. Fear of criticism, attacks from opposing groups, and pressure to support a

²⁸ Pecile et al., *Decoding Political Polarization in Social Media Interactions*.

particular political faction together constitute a web of anxiety experienced by social media users.

Analysis of X hashtags across four categories, namely high popularity and polarization, low popularity but high polarization, low popularity and low polarization, and neutral sentiment, reveals indications of Spiral of Silence dynamics in political discourse. The data suggest that polarization is most visible in issues involving specific political candidates, whereas political promises tend to attract more neutral narratives.

Understanding the interaction between popularity, polarization, and user behavior on social media is crucial for addressing ideological fragmentation. The Spiral of Silence offers a robust theoretical lens for examining how individuals navigate contentious political environments. To mitigate polarization, it is essential to foster inclusive and fact-based dialogue in order to create healthier digital public spheres.

Polarization is further reinforced by algorithms used on social media platforms such as Twitter. A study conducted by Cinelli et al.²⁹ found that these algorithms amplify echo chambers by connecting users to networks with similar viewpoints. This significantly reduces the likelihood of encountering diverse perspectives, narrows the space for dialogue, and intensifies polarization. In simple terms, echo chambers refer to the phenomenon in which content frequently liked or retweeted by users with similar beliefs continues to appear on their timelines, reinforcing pre-existing convictions.

Moreover, social media algorithms prioritize emotionally charged content, particularly content that evokes anger or fear, because it captures users' attention more effectively and sustains engagement

²⁹ Cinelli et al., "The Echo Chamber Effect on Social Media."

for longer periods. As a result, provocative content is more likely to be disseminated widely and consumed by specific groups, which can exacerbate intergroup conflict.

The polarization of these hashtags is driven by negative emotions such as fear, anger, and disappointment toward specific candidates or their policies. In this context, negative tweets associated with hashtags such as #ObralJanjiPalsu, #PrabowoGibran, and #GanjarMahfudSatSet reflect these emotional responses.

Social media algorithms contribute to the amplification of controversy, as content expressing negative or controversial sentiment, such as criticism within the hashtag #ObralJanjiPalsu, tends to receive greater visibility and engagement than neutral or positive content. Consequently, a practical approach to mitigating polarization involves strengthening positive narratives and promoting fact-based discussion. These strategies are crucial for fostering more effective and inclusive political campaigns.

Conclusion

First, sentiment analysis of the 2024 Indonesian presidential election on X, observed through tweets, retweets, and reposts, reveals significant polarization, especially under the hashtag #AminAjaDulu, which recorded a notable number of negative sentiments (25 tweets). In contrast, #JanganPilihPrabowoGibran showed the lowest activity (16 tweets), all of which were neutral. These findings suggest that public attention focused more on substantive criticism of political promises than on personal narratives concerning specific candidate pairs. Clearer polarization was evident in the hashtag #PrabowoGibran, which recorded 28 negative tweets out of 256 total tweets, indicating that popularity and polarization can coexist,

producing a climate of dominant neutrality accompanied by high polarization.

Second, individuals tend to refrain from expressing opinions they perceive as divergent from the majority. The dominance of neutral sentiment indicates a cautious attitude among users when discussing candidates or political issues, likely driven by fear of backlash and intensifying polarization. This pattern aligns with the transformation of the spiral of silence into a spiral of anxiety. Such anxiety stems from potential attacks by political opponents and social pressure to align with a particular political camp, creating a networked sense of fear among social media users. High polarization, reflected in the prevalence of neutral sentiment, leads to unproductive discourse as debates shift away from fact-based argument toward emotionally charged opinion clashes, resulting in social fragmentation. In such environments, individuals from non-dominant groups may hesitate to speak out due to fear of criticism and may suppress their intention to post on social media.

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