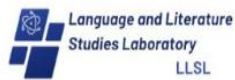


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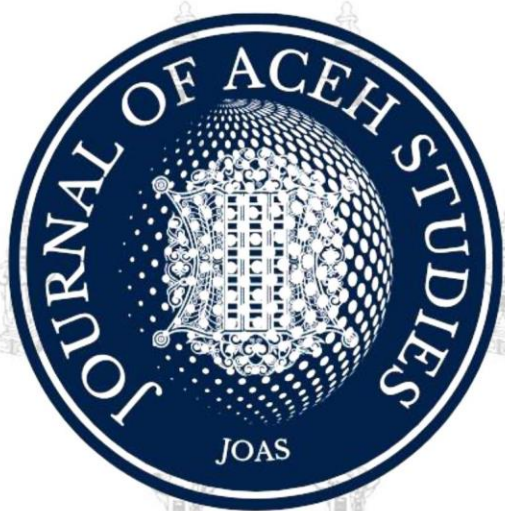


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Analysis of Digital Media Framing in Aceh–North Sumatra News: Framing, Identity, and Power in the Representation of Regional Conflict

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Abstract

Background of the problem: Territorial disputes between subnational entities in Indonesia often occur without adequate public scrutiny, revealing gaps in understanding how such conflicts are symbolically constructed and mediated through digital media narratives. **Purpose:** This research investigates how media narratives shape power relations and construct regional conflicts discursively and ideologically through symbolic framing. **Method:** Using Pan and Kosicki's framing analysis and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine 50 online news articles related to the island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra. The study was conducted through text review, keyword frequency mapping, and actor-network visualization to explore the narrative structure and power relations in media discourse. **Result:** The research revealed that digital media coverage formed a centralized and hierarchical narrative by positioning state elites such as the President, Minister of Home Affairs, and national political figures as the leading actors in conflict resolution. Conflicts are framed in administrative and legalistic terms, thus obscuring the cultural-historical context and marginalizing the agency of local actors. This discourse pattern reproduces symbolic marginalization and reinforces power imbalances between the central and regional levels. **Implication:** The findings provide practical insights for media practitioners and policymakers to be aware of the ideological function of framing in conflict coverage and theoretical contributions to media and communication studies by showing how discourse structures reinforce state-centric narratives and marginalize subnational identities. The findings open space for further research on symbolic power in digital news.

Keyword: Media Framing; Critical Discourse; Territorial Conflict; Aceh-North Sumatera; Political Communication

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Territorial disputes between subnational entities in Indonesia still rarely receive attention in public discourse, especially when the conflicts are internal, i.e., interprovincial, rather than cross-border. Susanto & Puryanto (2022); Zohrah & Handjayanti (2021) note that the long-standing conflict between Central Kalimantan and South Kalimantan has rarely received national media attention, resulting in resolutions that are primarily administrative without adequate public involvement. A similar finding was reported by Umar et al. (2019) regarding the dispute between Gorontalo and North Sulawesi, where the resolution was carried out in an elitist manner without adequate public participation mechanisms, potentially resulting in decisions that do not reflect the broader community's interests. Such findings show that internal subnational conflicts are often sidelined from the national discourse.

In addition, the dynamics of digital media coverage in inter-regional territorial disputes reflect how certain narratives can strengthen the position of local and national actors in the political arena. The media not only functions as a conveyor of information but also as an active agent in formulating discourse and influencing public opinion. This active role has implications for strengthening regional identities, polarizing communities, and reproducing power imbalances between regions. For this reason, analyzing media representation is essential to reveal how regional conflicts take place administratively or legally and through symbolic contestation in the digital public sphere.

One case that has captured the attention of the Indonesian public in recent weeks is the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra provinces, which has sparked public tension, political controversy, and media attention. However, existing studies focus on administrative law, regional autonomy, or national policy. In contrast, the construction of conflict discourse in digital media has not been widely studied throughout the research.

This shows that there is a void of studies in looking at how the media acts as a symbolic arena that shapes public perceptions of regional conflicts. In the context of regional contestation, the media plays an important role not only as a channel of information but also as an arena where the meanings of conflict are constructed, debated, and disseminated to the public. The role of the media in shaping public perceptions, framing legitimacy, and reproducing power relations in inter-regional conflicts has not been a significant concern in media studies in Indonesia (Maulana & Febriana, 2024; Yunanto et al., 2024). Therefore, this study aims to investigate how media narrative's structure power and shape conflict in a subtle but ideologically loaded way.

Importance of Research for Field

The research can contribute to media studies, political communication, and discourse analysis by showing that framing and discourse play a central role in shaping perceptions of state authority and regional legitimacy. In Indonesia's ongoing decentralization, the media has become essential in negotiating power between the centre and the regions. Understanding how conflicts are framed in the media supports evidence-based governance and democratic accountability (Patria et al., 2024). In addition, research can also support the development of critical literacy by providing tools to interpret how language and representation influence public trust and policy-making.

Research or Theoretical Gap

Although studies on regional autonomy and media coverage of conflict have developed in Indonesia, most still focus on legal-institutional aspects or surface news content without further examining how media discourse shapes power and legitimacy in internal regional disputes. For example, studies on the framing of geopolitical conflicts such as Israel-Palestine show that Indonesian media such as CNN Indonesia and Kompas.com present different narratives, which significantly influence public perception (Maulana & Febriana, 2024). However, this level of analysis is rarely applied in the context of interprovincial domestic conflicts, such as the sovereignty dispute over four islands between Aceh and North Sumatra

In cases of domestic conflicts that have been studied, such as the 2019 Papua Dormitory riots, it was found that media discourse often reinforces ethnic bias and marginalizes local perspectives (Harsa & Rofil, 2021). The same thing was also found in the study of Angelina et al. (2023), which used the Pan & Kosicki model on the issue of West Papua and showed an imbalance of representation that prioritized the voice of the state and ignored the narratives of

indigenous peoples. However, these studies have not systematically developed ideological critiques or explored power relations in discourse.

In addition, based on several studies related to media studies in Indonesia, it is found that Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are more often used separately. Integrating the two into one analytical framework is still relatively rare, thus opening opportunities for a more holistic approach to understanding the dynamics of media discourse. Recent studies such as the one conducted by Fatinova et al. (2024) on the Rempang conflict showed how CDA was able to reveal the hegemonic position of the state, while Septiani et al. (2024) showed that media framing is strongly influenced by its ideological affiliation. However, these two findings have not been synthesized to analyze simultaneously how framing structures and ideological reproduction work in conflicts within Indonesia's Administrative borders.

This research aims to fill the void by integrating Pan & Kosicki's structural Framing Analysis and Fairclough's three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model. Unlike previous studies that only highlighted narrative structure or ideological criticism separately, this research explores what is said (narrative structure) and what is implied (ideological function). As in Sari (2016) and Yunanto et al. (2024), the media often plays a central role in reproducing the interests of political and economic elites. This research aims to deepen the understanding of how power is constructed through media language and actor visibility in the case of the dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra.

Research Objective

This study aims to identify how Indonesian digital media frames the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra and analyze the representation of actors and ideologies in media texts related to the conflict. In addition, this research also examines how the use of language in the news reflects and reproduces the political power structure behind the dispute, thus providing a deeper understanding of the media's role in shaping public perceptions and the dynamics of inter-regional conflict.

Research Question

This research focuses on how digital media in Indonesia frame the territorial dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra by examining which actors and ideologies dominate media narratives related to the conflict. In addition, the research also examines how the language used by the media reflects state power and can potentially marginalize local perspectives involved in the dispute. Furthermore, the analysis is directed at uncovering the discourse patterns used by the press, reinforcing and challenging the legitimacy of state institutions' decisions in the conflict, thus providing a complex picture of the media's role in power dynamics and the representation of regional conflicts.

Research Outline

The study combines Framing Analysis Pan & Kosicki (1993) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Fairclough (1993, 1995) to analyze how digital media in Indonesia frame the political-territorial dispute over four contested islands between Aceh and North Sumatra. This study assumes that the media are not neutral but play an active role in shaping public discourse. Framing theory is used to see how the structure of media texts is formed through syntax, script, thematic and rhetorical elements. At the same time, CDA provides a deeper understanding of how language reflects and reinforces power relations and dominant ideologies.

The research begins by outlining the approach and then collects and analyses data from 50 online news articles. The data was analyzed using digital tools such as Voyant Tools and Google Colab. The analysis was conducted by applying Fairclough's three-dimensional model (text analysis, discourse practices, and social practices) and Pan and Kosicki's (1993) framing framework to explore the narrative structure and ideological content in media texts. The analysis results show that state actors are primarily featured in the news, while the voices of local communities tend to be ignored. This shows the symbolic reproduction of central power in media discourse. This study concludes that the media has a vital role in shaping political legitimacy and silencing local voices, especially in the context of post-authoritarian politics in Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing Theory

Pan & Kosicki (1993) developed a framing analysis model by dividing the news text structure into four main elements: (1) Syntax, which is the structure of sentences and opening paragraphs

that determine which actors appear first; (2) Script, which is the narrative flow or chronological pattern that describes the sequence of action in the news; Thematic, relating to the grouping of topics and subtopics that direct the focus of attention; and (4) Rhetorical, including the choice of diction, language style, quotes, and symbols used to reinforce specific meanings. The model is relevant in analyzing how the media constructs political narratives through language structure and information selection.

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach is used as a complement to the analysis to read the conflict not only as a form of structural narrative but also as an ideological practice related to power. Pan & Kosicki's theory and Fairclough's CDA provide a comprehensive dual analytical framework: first, to systematically dissect the structure and framing strategies of the media, and second, to reveal the ideological relations underlying the narratives that are built. This approach is particularly relevant in regional political conflicts such as the four-island dispute, which is a legal-territorial issue and closely related to representations of identity, history and power. Thus, this research explains how the news is framed, why certain narratives dominate, and who benefits from this dominance.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as developed by Norman Fairclough, views language as a social practice that is not neutral but shapes and is shaped by power relations and ideologies (Fairclough, 1995). In the media context, CDA examines how political, and media actors construct narratives that maintain dominance or challenge legitimacy. This approach allows researchers to see hidden layers of meaning in news texts that frame conflict as natural, neutral, or provocative, depending on the interests of the dominant party. Fairclough (1993) developed a three-dimensional model of discourse analysis, which includes (1) text analysis, which refers to how language structures are used to construct meaning on a micro level (diction, syntax, metaphor); (2) discursive practice, which is the process of production, distribution, and consumption of texts by media institutions and the public; and (3) social practice, which refers to the broader social, political, and ideological context in which discourse is produced and interpreted.

These three dimensions are interrelated and need to be analyzed in an integrated manner to reveal how power works through language. In the context of digital media, this model is very relevant to uncovering how news not only conveys facts but also shapes perceptions, legitimizes authority, and marginalizes alternatives. The application of CDA to the coverage of the Aceh-Sumut conflict shows how the discourse of political elites is channeled by the media and reinforced through source selection, narrative arrangement, and obscuring local perspectives. Thus, framing is not only understood as a technical form of narrative but also as an ideological tool in shaping public opinion and reproducing the dominance of central state power.

METHOD

Research Design

The research used a qualitative content analysis design within a critical paradigm framework to explore how digital media framed the political-territorial conflict related to the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth analysis of the text and can reveal power relations and ideologies implicit in the discourse (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In particular, the research also adopted Framing Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as analytical tools to examine media texts. These approaches are relevant because they aim to reveal how meaning is shaped, and social reality is constructed through media narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Data sources

The data in the study consisted of 50 news titles and online articles obtained through the top search results on Google with the keyword "Dispute over 4 Aceh-Sumut Islands". News sources were taken from digital media, including national mainstream media such as Kompas.com, CNN Indonesia, designers, and Tempo.co. All articles analyzed were published between 13 and 16 June 2025, when news coverage on this issue peaked. No additional filtering was done after the data reached saturation point, as the collected material already reflected recurring narrative patterns and consistent actor representations (Guest et al., 2006, 2013). This research did not involve informant interviews or participation, as the focus was entirely on analyzing publicly available media texts. The following are news data that have been searched as the object of research study.

Table 1: Aceh-Sumut News

No	News Title	Published	News Portal
1.	Istana Pastikan Prabowo Akan Ambil Alih Polemik 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>The Palace Confirms Prabowo Will Take Over the Controversy Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
2.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut: Diambil Alih Prabowo dan Terbuka Ubah Kepmendagri <i>The dispute over four islands in Aceh and North Sumatra: Prabowo takes over and opens up the Minister of Home Affairs' decree</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com
3.	Reaksi atas Prabowo Ambil Alih Penyelesaian Sengketa 4 Pulau <i>Reactions to Prabowo Taking Over the Settlement of the Dispute Over Four Islands</i>	16 June 2025	Tempo.co
4.	Massa di Aceh Demo Bawa Bendera Bulan Bintang, Tolak 4 Pulau Masuk Sumut <i>Masses in Aceh Demonstrate Carrying Moon and Star Flags, Rejecting Four Islands Being Included in North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	detikNews
5.	Secara Hukum dan Sejarah, Jimly Sebut 4 Pulau yang Disengketakan Lebih Dekat ke Aceh <i>Legally and historically, Jimly says the four disputed islands are closer to Aceh</i>	16 June 2025	MetroTVNews
6.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Bima Arya Akui Masukan JK Penting Jadi Rujukan <i>Dispute over 4 islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Bima Arya acknowledges JK's input as an important reference</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	SindoNews
7.	Prabowo Janji Bakal Ambil Keputusan Secepatnya soal Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut	Monday, 16 June 2025	Wartakotalive.com
8.	Presiden Prabowo ambil alih sengketa 4 pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>President Prabowo takes over dispute over four islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	ANTARA News
9.	PDIP Respons Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut: Sebut Mendagri Kurang Kerjaan <i>PDIP Responds to Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra: Says Minister of Home Affairs Has Too Much Work</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Serambinews.com
10.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Senator Asal Tanah Rencong Ingatkan Ini kepada Mendagri <i>Dispute over 4 islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Senator from Tanah Rencong reminds Minister of Home Affairs of this</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Rpublika.co
11.	Legislator Dukung Presiden Tangani Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Legislators Support President in Handling Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	RRI.co.id
12.	Nasib Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut Kini di Tangan Prabowo <i>The fate of the dispute over four islands in Aceh and North Sumatra is now in Prabowo's hands</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
13.	Akibat yang Mungkin Timbul dari Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Possible Consequences of the Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16 June 2025	Tempo.co
14.	Prabowo Ambil Alih Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Kemendagri Evaluasi Menyeluruh <i>Prabowo Takes Over Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Ministry of</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	detikNews

	<i>Home Affairs Conducts Comprehensive Evaluation</i>		
15.	Jelang Rapat di Kemendagri, Ini Dokumen Penting yang Dibawa Aceh Hadapi Sengketa 4 Pulau dengan Sumut <i>Ahead of the Meeting at the Ministry of Home Affairs, These Are the Important Documents Brought by Aceh to Address the Dispute Over Four Islands with North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Merdeka.com
16.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut Memanas, Setara Institute: Jakarta Harus Netral! <i>Dispute over 4 islands in Aceh-North Sumatra heats up, Setara Institute: Jakarta must remain neutral!</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Suara.com
17.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Prabowo Diminta Cabut Kepmendagri <i>Dispute over 4 islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Prabowo asked to revoke Minister of Home Affairs Decree</i>	16 June 2025	Liputan6.com
18.	Lemhanas Siap Beri Saran Prabowo soal Ribut 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Lemhanas Ready to Advise Prabowo on the Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16 June 2025	Tirto.id
19.	Komisi II DPR: Argumen 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut Sama Kuat, Tepat Presiden Ambil Alih <i>House of Representatives Commission II: Arguments for the 4 Islands of Aceh-North Sumatra are Equally Strong, President's Take-over is Appropriate</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	detikNews
20.	Polemik 4 Pulau: Aceh Menentang, Sumut Bertahan, Prabowo Turun Tangan <i>The 4 Islands Controversy: Aceh Opposes, North Sumatra Stands Firm, Prabowo Steps In</i>	15/06/2025	Kompas.com
21.	Wamendagri soal Polemik 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut: Tak Ada Keputusan Tak Bisa Diubah <i>Deputy Minister of Home Affairs on the Controversy Surrounding Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra: No Decision Cannot Be Changed</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	detikNews
22.	Lokasi Empat Pulau Aceh Lebih Dekat ke Sumut, Yusril: Faktor Geografis Bukan Satu-satunya Penentu <i>The location of the four Aceh islands is closer to North Sumatra, Yusril: Geographical factors are not the only determining factor</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com
23.	PKB Desak Prabowo Segera Beri Solusi Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh Masuk Sumut <i>PKB Urges Prabowo to Immediately Provide Solution to Dispute Over 4 Aceh Islands Included in North Sumatra</i>	Saturday, 14 June 2025	detikNews
24.	Yusril: Perjanjian Helsinki & UU '56 Tak Atur Batas 4 Pulau Sengketa <i>Yusril: Helsinki Agreement & 1956 Law Do Not Regulate Boundaries of Four Disputed Islands</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
25.	Mendagri Segera Pertemuan Gubernur Aceh dan Sumut, Bahas Sengketa 4 Pulau <i>Minister of Home Affairs to Meet with Governors of Aceh and North Sumatra to Discuss Dispute Over Four Islands</i>	Monday, 16-06-2025	DISWAY.ID
26.	Istana: Prabowo Selesaikan Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh dan Sumut sesuai Historis <i>Istana: Prabowo Resolves Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh and North Sumatra Based on Historical Evidence</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Sindonews

27.	Kemendagri Bantah 4 Pulau Aceh ke Sumut Hadiah untuk Jokowi dan Bobby <i>Ministry of Home Affairs Denies 4 Aceh Islands to North Sumatra as Gifts for Jokowi and Bobby</i>	Saturday, 14 June 2025	CNN Indonesia	
28.	JK: Empat Pulau Sengketa Milik Aceh <i>JK: Four Disputed Islands Belonging to Aceh</i>	15 June 2025	Tempo.co	
29.	Ketua DPRD Sumut soal Sengketa 4 Pulau: Kita Harus Pertahankan <i>Head of North Sumatra DPRD on the Dispute over Four Islands: We Must Defend Them</i>	Friday, 13 June 2025	CNN Indonesia	
30.	Legislator Golkar Minta Pemerintah Mediasi Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Golkar Legislator Requests Government Mediation in Aceh-North Sumatra Dispute Over Four Islands</i>	Saturday, 15 June 2025	detikNews	
31.	Prabowo Ambil Keputusan soal Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh ke Sumut Pekan Depan <i>Prabowo to Make Decision on Dispute Over Four Islands from Aceh to North Sumatra Next Week</i>	15/06/2025	Kompas.com	
32.	Kemendagri Akan Laporkan Bukti Baru soal Sengketa Pulau Aceh-Sumut ke Prabowo <i>Ministry of Home Affairs to Report New Evidence on Aceh-North Sumatra Island Dispute to Prabowo</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com	
33.	Kemendagri Temukan Bukti Baru Terkait Polemik 4 Pulau Rebutan Aceh-Sumut <i>Ministry of Home Affairs Finds New Evidence Related to the Controversy Over Four Islands Disputed by Aceh and North Sumatra</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	detikNews	
34.	Sengketa 4 Pulau, PCO: Tak Tertutup Kemungkinan Prabowo Komunikasi dengan Gubernur Aceh-Sumut <i>4 Islands Dispute, PCO: Prabowo May Communicate with Aceh-North Sumatra Governors</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com	
35.	Pemerintah Diingatkan Hati-hati dalam Penyelesaian Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Government Reminded to Exercise Caution in Resolving Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com	
36.	Bima Arya Bilang Kepmendagri soal 4 Pulau Aceh Masuk Sumut Bisa Berubah <i>Bima Arya Says Ministry of Home Affairs Decision on 4 Aceh Islands Being Included in North Sumatra May Change</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	SINDONews	Nasional
37.	Pemerintah Jadikan Pandangan Jusuf Kalla sebagai Rujukan Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Government Uses Jusuf Kalla's Opinion as Reference for Aceh-North Sumatra Dispute Over Four Islands</i>	16 June 2025	Tempo.co	
38.	Presiden Prabowo Segera Ambil Keputusan soal Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>President Prabowo to Make Decision Soon on Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16 June 2025	MetroTV News	
39.	Prabowo Ambil Alih Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Anggota DPR: Kami Meyakini Kebijaksanaan Presiden <i>Prabowo Takes Over Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Member of Parliament: We Believe in the President's Wisdom</i>	15/06/2025	Kompas.com	

40.	Kata Golkar soal Prabowo Ambil Alih Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Golkar's statement on Prabowo taking over the dispute over four islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16 June 2025	Tempo.co
41.	Muzakir Tolak Ajakan Bobby Kelola Bersama 4 Pulau Sengketa <i>Muzakir Rejects Bobby's Invitation to Jointly Manage Four Disputed Islands</i>	Saturday, 14 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
42.	6 Fakta Kasus Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh dengan Sumut, Apa Saja yang Perlu Diketahui? <i>6 Facts About the Dispute Between Aceh and North Sumatra Over Four Islands: What You Need to Know</i>	16/06/2025	Kompas.com
43.	Komarudin PDIP Sebut Masalah 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut Jadi Aib Seluruh Indonesia <i>Komarudin PDIP Calls the Issue of Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra a Disgrace to All of Indonesia</i>	Saturday, 15 June 2025	detikjateng/detik.com
44.	Pemprov Aceh Respons Yusril Terkait Batas 4 Pulau Sengketa <i>Aceh Provincial Government Responds to Yusril Regarding the Boundaries of Four Disputed Islands</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
45.	Aceh Tak Tempuh Jalur Hukum Meski Keberatan soal 4 Pulau Masuk Sumut <i>Aceh Does Not Take Legal Action Despite Objections to Four Islands Being Included in Sumut</i>	Saturday, 14 June 2025	detikNews
46.	Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut, Kemendagri Temukan Novum Baru, Bisa Ubah Putusan? <i>Dispute over 4 islands in Aceh-North Sumatra, Ministry of Home Affairs finds new evidence, could it change the ruling?</i>	16 June 2025	kumparanNews
47.	Bima Arya Jelaskan Isu 4 Pulau Sengketa Aceh-Sumut: Pemutakhiran Kode Wilayah RI <i>Bima Arya Explains the Issue of Four Disputed Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra: Updating the Indonesian Territory Code</i>	16 June 2025	kumparanNews
48.	Presiden Segera Putuskan soal Sengketa 4 Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>President to Decide Soon on Dispute Over Four Islands in Aceh-North Sumatra</i>	16 June 2025	RRI.co.id
49.	Respons Wamendagri soal Dokumen Helsinki di Sengketa Pulau Aceh-Sumut <i>Deputy Minister of Home Affairs Responds to Helsinki Document in Aceh-North Sumatra Island Dispute</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	CNN Indonesia
50.	Polemik Sengketa 4 Pulau Antara Provinsi Aceh dan Sumatera Utara, Anggota Komisi II DPR RI, Ahmad Irawan: Tidak Akan Ada Disintegrasi <i>Controversy over the dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra provinces over four islands, Member of Commission II of the Indonesian House of Representatives, Ahmad Irawan: There will be no disintegration</i>	Monday, 16 June 2025	Lombok Post

Data Collection and Procedure

The data collection process began with a structured Google search to simulate the type of information that the public is likely to access. The researcher selected and archived the first 50 news stories based on relevant keywords. Each headline and its content were extracted and compiled for further analysis. The data was then processed using Voyant Tools to identify recurring keywords and emerging discourse patterns. In addition, Google Colab was used to code and visualize the frequency and interrelationships between key terms. This triangulated digital approach ensured the data collection process was systematic and replicable (Saldaña, 2025).

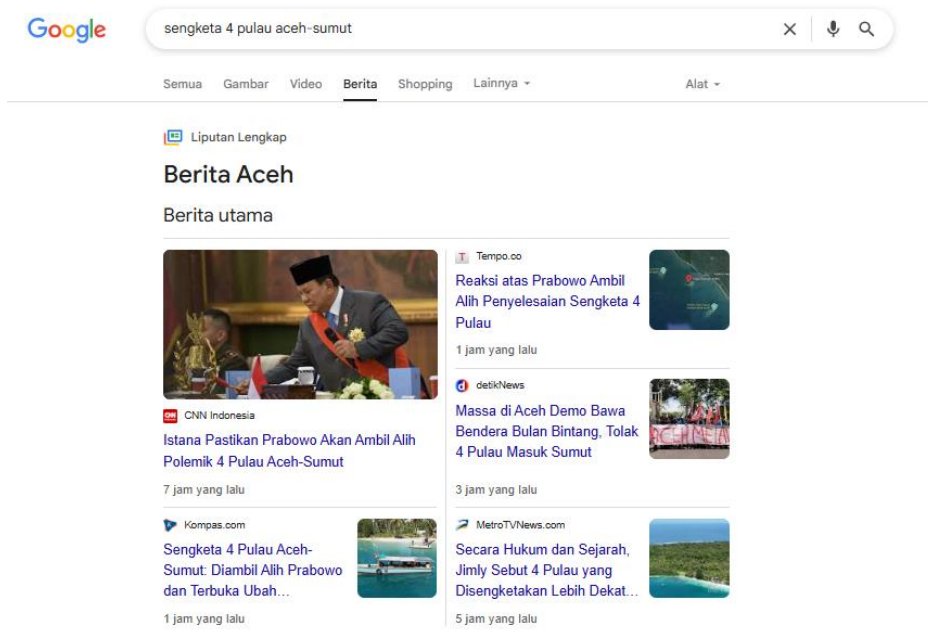


Figure. 1: Search Results with Keyword Disputes over 4 Aceh-North Sumatra Islands

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted using Fairclough's (1993) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which includes (1) textual analysis (lexical and syntactic choices), (2) discourse practices (quotation patterns and actor positions), and (3) social practices (socio-political context and power structures). In parallel, Pan & Kosicki's (1993) framework of four framing devices, namely syntactic, script, thematic and rhetorical structures, is used to identify how the media constructs narratives about authority, conflict and legitimacy.

The analysis steps include:

1. Selecting representative texts from the data set,
2. Identifying keywords and dominant actors,
3. Categorizing themes into framing categories,
4. Interpreting ideological implications and power distribution.

The combined approach allows for a deeper and more layered understanding of the discourse beyond a surface analysis of the content (Silverman, 2020).

Accuracy

To maintain the accuracy of the analysis, this study applied data triangulation between textual content, keyword analysis, and actor mapping. The coding process was done manually with the support of an automated tool for word frequency (Voyant Tools). Throughout the analysis process, the researcher applied reflexivity by constantly reviewing positions and viewpoints to minimize interpretive bias (Noble & Smith, 2015). Although no human subjects were involved, interpretation was kept neutral, avoiding over-generalization or projecting personal views onto the text.

Trustworthiness

The study's reliability was maintained through methodological transparency and replicability in data selection. All articles analyzed were publicly available and timestamped, allowing other researchers to access the same corpus in the future. This study also applied thick description and inter-coder reliability tests to ensure consistency in thematic interpretation (Nowell et al., 2017).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The main findings of the analysis of 50 online news articles discussing the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra are grouped into several categories, namely the distribution of news based on the type of media, the number of occurrences of specific keywords, the identification of actors involved, and the narratives built, and the framing patterns used by digital media.

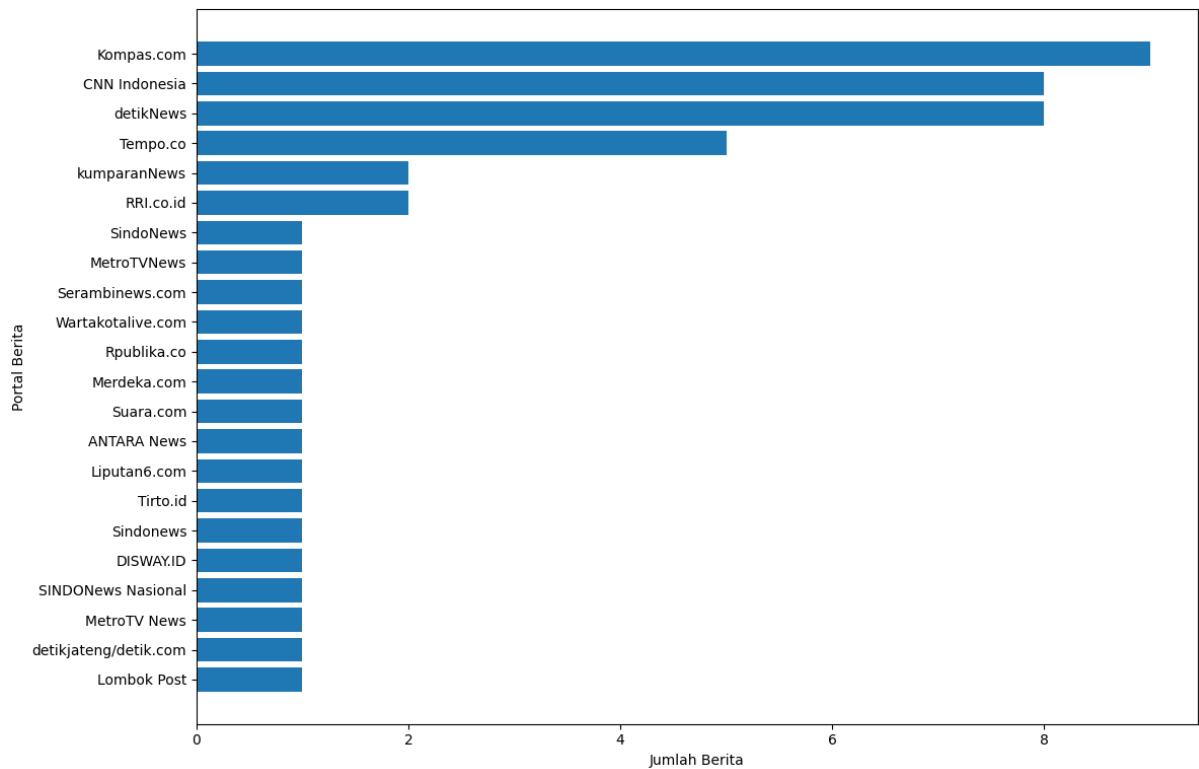


Figure. 2: Distribution of Media Counts

The news distribution per media shows that the issue of the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra was mainly reported by three national media, namely Kompas.com (9 articles), CNN Indonesia, and designers (8 articles each). Tempo.co followed with five articles, while other media such as kumparanNews, RRI.co.id, and dozens of other portals only wrote one or two news articles. The coverage from these large media outlets shows that they have a significant role in shaping public opinion on this issue. Therefore, in framing analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the main attention is given to how these major media outlets construct narratives and use their power to influence how the public understands the dispute.

Table. 2: Corpus Word List Aceh-Sumut News

Kata	Frekuensi
Sengketa	37
Ambil	10
Alih	8
Polemik	5
Keputusan	4
Tolak	2
Demo	1
Netral	1
Cabut	1
Desak	1

The words in the analysis were selected purposively based on the criteria of frequency of occurrence and their relationship to the meaning of conflict in the corpus of headlines. The words belong to lexical categories that reflect conflict, pressure, or power dynamics, as identified through the word list, and at the same time represent symbolic conflict or opposition between society and authority. They represent non-state actors, such as demonstrators or local communities, who tend to be marginalized in constructing dominant media narratives.

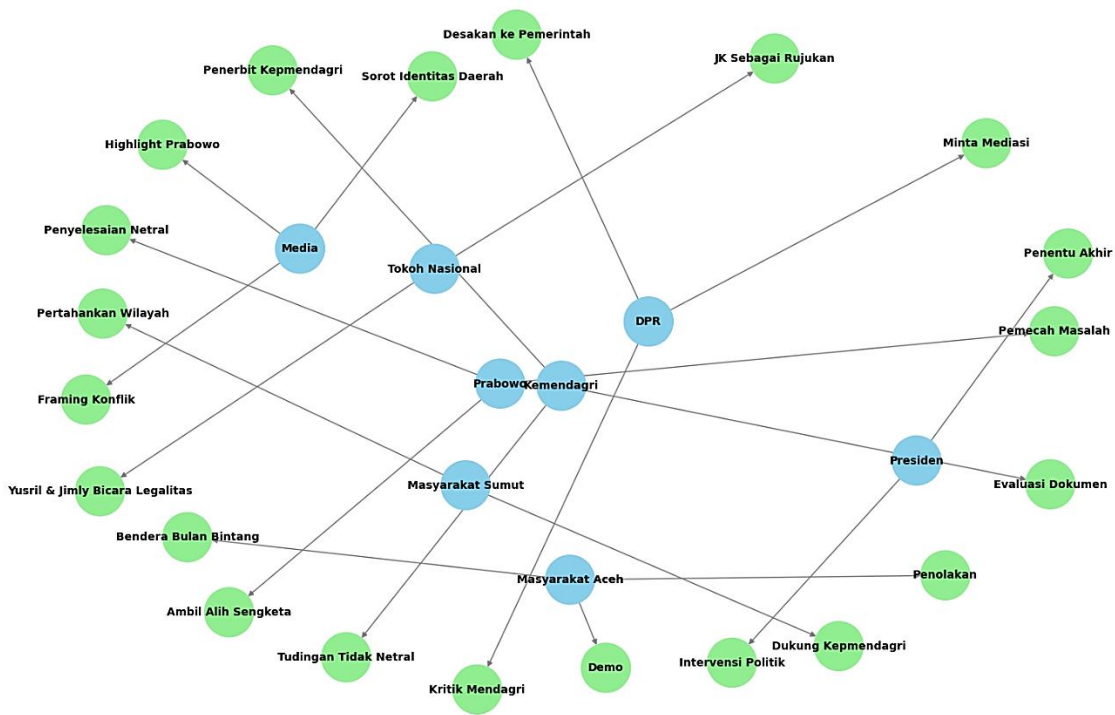


Figure. 3: Map of Actors and Narratives in the News of the Dispute over 4 Aceh-Sumut Islands

The visualization is done by analyzing the actors and narratives that appear in 50 online news titles regarding the four-island dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra. The data used came from a list of news titles that had been collected previously. The main objective was to identify the leading actors in the news and understand how the media portrayed their position and role in shaping the conflict narrative. The actors analyzed included institutional entities and individuals with political or social influence, such as the President, Prabowo, Menteri Dalam Negeri (the Minister of Home Affairs), DPR (the House of Representatives), the media, the people of Aceh, the people of North Sumatra, and other national figures. Narratives or issue positions are identified by phrases that reflect a particular stance or role, such as “Take Over the Dispute,” “Rejection,” “Document Evaluation,” “Demonstration,” and “Criticism of the Minister of Home Affairs.”

In the mapping, blue nodes represent actors, while green nodes indicate narratives related to those actors. Connecting lines between nodes indicate direct links based on co-occurrence in the headlines. Visualization serves as an analytical tool to reveal the political position of the actors, the dynamics of the developing discourse, and the relationship between actors in forming public opinion by the media. This approach can trace how power relations and narrative construction are formed and disseminated in the news space.

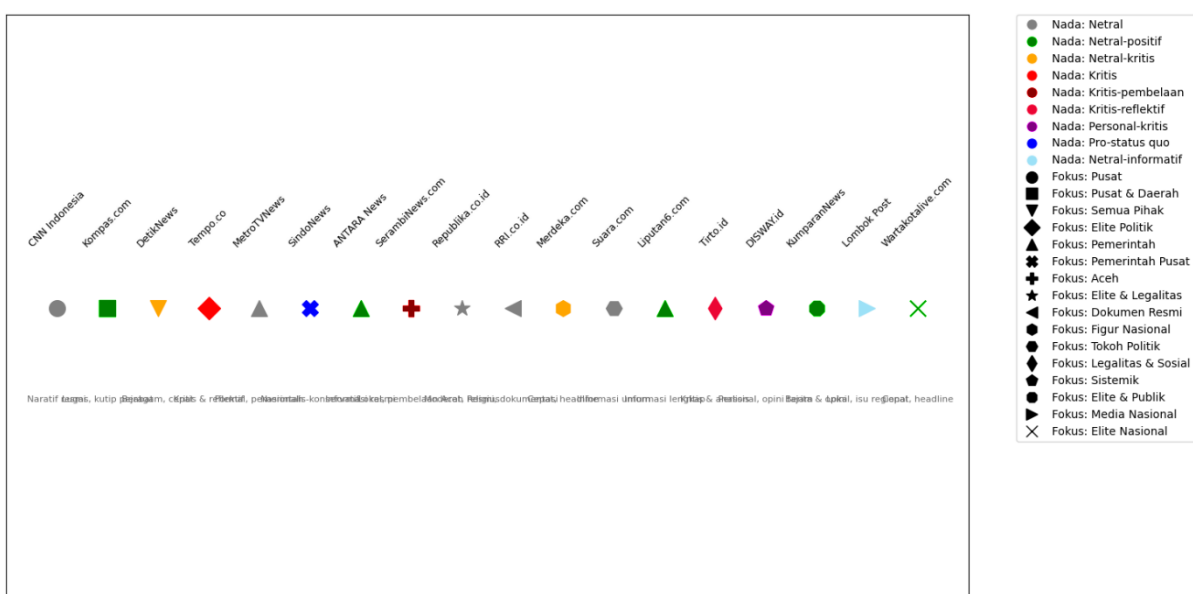


Figure 4. Map of Digital Media Framing Analysis of the Aceh-North Sumatra 4 Islands Dispute

The visualization was created based on a framing analysis of 50 online news articles discussing the dispute over four islands between Aceh and North Sumatra. The aim was to classify and map how each media outlet framed the issue, including the tone of the reporting, the primary focus of the issue, and the actors highlighted. The process was carried out in stages,

starting with manual classification, symbolic coding, and finally, visualization. The visualization results are a way of presenting qualitative data quantitatively using a semiotic and sociopragmatic approach. Each symbol used provides an overview of how the media positioned the issue, who they supported or highlighted, and how the tone of the reporting was used to shape a particular narrative.

Discussion

How did the media construct framing in the Aceh-North Sumatra news coverage?

The media plays a role in shaping public perceptions of the dispute between Aceh and North Sumatra. According to Pan & Kosicki (1993), this can be analyzed through a clear and structured framework. Four elements of framing, namely syntax, script, thematic, and rhetorical, help to see how narratives are formed and the ideological direction they contain.

Syntactically, most news stories begin by placing central actors such as the president, the interior minister, or Prabowo Subianto as the main characters. Examples of headlines include “Prabowo Takes Over Dispute...” or “President to Make Decision...”, it shows a pattern of framing that moves from the center to the regions. The placement of elite actors at the beginning of the narrative creates a cognitive effect that the legitimacy of actions and the authority to resolve issues lies with the central government, not the communities directly affected. This narrative pattern illustrates the prevalence of a top-down structure in news presentations, which follow a classic and hierarchical format.

The narrative directly guides the reader's understanding through a predetermined path rather than organically (Sami et al., 2023). Thus, readers are led to the resolution desired by the author, reflecting the media's dominance in shaping the audience's view of the issue (Levi et al., 2023). However, Telenkov & Katerynych (2024) note that television news production employs hierarchical and modular structures tailored to editorial needs, allowing the narrative to be shaped from the top down for the editor's benefit.

The narrative pattern (script) in the news constructs the conflict not as a clash of identities or regional history but as an administrative issue that the central government seeks to resolve through formal state mechanisms. The pattern tends to be repetitive: the state recognizes the conflict, intervenes, assesses and evaluates, and then decides. Political media framing tends to simplify the conflict and reduce the community's aspirations to mere administrative matters. Dawson (2025) states that the media rewrites political reality into a straightforward narrative that is easy to consume, thereby distorting the actual dynamics of the situation. (Mühlberger, 2020) notes that strategic narratives create a controlled reality, reducing social differences to a single version of "truth." Thus, such narratives limit a deep understanding of complex political issues.

In terms of thematic dimensions, the issues raised primarily addressed formal legal aspects, such as "document evaluation," "new evidence findings," or "changes to ministerial decisions." Themes reflecting cultural identity, the history of the Helsinki Agreement, or the aspirations of the Acehnese people were almost absent from the media framing. The lack of themes such as cultural identity, the Helsinki Agreement, and Acehnese aspirations in media framing suggests that the conflict is portrayed primarily as an issue of state bureaucracy rather than a socio-political matter that warrants public engagement. Gurushkin et al. (2024) demonstrate that the media often portrays political conflicts as administrative matters rather than as social conflicts of interest, thereby shifting the public's focus from active involvement to dependence on state institutions. Kolba & Chadayeva (2021) make a similar argument, criticizing the institutional approach that frames conflict solely as a regulatory matter. They argue that this perspective limits the understanding of conflict as a form of social expression that calls for extensive public participation. In this framing, history, collective identity, and local aspirations are sidelined, with the state portrayed as the sole rational actor. Such narratives simplify conflicts while weakening the community's political legitimacy to voice their opinions in the public sphere.

Rhetorically, words such as takeover, decision, evaluation, and dispute are used consistently in the headlines and content of the news. This wording strengthens the narrative that conflict resolution relies on the state and that conflicts can be managed through technocratic control. Conversely, words that potentially voice public resistance, such as “demonstration,” “reject,” or “neutral,” appear very rarely (only 1–2 times), indicating that the representation of civil society is reduced or silenced in the news discourse.

To support these findings, quantitative analysis of the wordlist data shows that the word "dispute" appears 37 times, "take" (10x), "transfer" (8x), and "decision" (4x). On the other hand,

words such as "demonstration," "reject," and "neutral" only appeared once or twice. These patterns in word usage confirm that media framing tends to favor the perspective of state institutions rather than serving as a channel for the expression of aspirations or rejections from affected communities.

The analysis conducted by Pan and Kosicki reveals that the media constructs a narrative that reinforces the central authority as the sole resolver of conflicts while obscuring the social, historical, and local identity dimensions that are at the heart of the problem. Media framing not only simplifies the issue but also reproduces power relations that place the Acehnese people in a passive and symbolically marginalized position in the public discourse arena.

The findings of the current study, in conjunction with those of Wang et al. (2024), reveal a sharp contrast between CNN, which emphasizes the humanitarian aspect, and CCTV, which highlights the strategic political aspect, representing the interests of the media's country of origin. A study by Arif & Hayat (2018) also demonstrates that the framing of the conflict by international media outlets, such as the BBC and Al Jazeera, reflects their respective national biases in reporting on domestic issues in China. This additional reference confirms that framing is not merely a narrative structure but an ideological mechanism that filters reality for specific interests.

The CDA approach not only views the rhetorical structures described by Pan and Kosicki as mere linguistic tools but also as part of social practices that shape power relations. For example, words such as "take over," "decision," or "evaluation" are not merely framing techniques but also ideological strategies that, according to Fairclough, reinforce the dominance of state discourse. Framing helps us understand how specific ideas and perspectives are presented and shaped in communication. At the same time, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) examines the underlying reasons why these methods of presenting information continue to support and reinforce existing power structures.

How do the media frame disputes and construct power in the conflict over the four islands of Aceh-North Sumatra?

The previous analysis applied Pan and Kosicki's (1993) framing framework to explain how narrative structures are developed and presented in news coverage of the Aceh-North Sumatra conflict. To deepen our understanding of the impact of this discourse in the context of power relations, the following section uses a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach. This approach complements the framing analysis by examining how these narratives originate, are shared, and are used to maintain power in society.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is not neutral but a social practice that both shapes and reflects power and ideology. Fairclough (1992) offers a three-dimensional model for analyzing discourse: (1) text, (2) discursive practice, and (3) social practice. These three dimensions explain how digital media shapes perceptions and power relations in the conflict between Aceh and North Sumatra over four islands.

At the textual level, the analysis revealed that words such as take over, decision, evaluation, and dispute dominated the lexical structure of the news. This choice of diction indicates that the primary actors in the media narrative are state institutions, specifically the President, Prabowo, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. In contrast, the people of Aceh and local actors only appear as objects, with passive roles such as "rejecting" or "holding demonstrations." The narrative constructed in media coverage often emphasizes the dominance of power from above without providing adequate space for the voices of local communities, indicating that mainstream media highlights institutional perspectives and overlooks grassroots narratives (Deal, 2020). Ping (2024) asserts that the voices of local communities are often omitted or altered during the reporting process, thereby reinforcing the dominance of elite narratives and obscuring the experiences of local communities.

In terms of discursive practice, an analysis of news production and circulation patterns reveals that the media tends to rely on quotes from state actors as its primary source. There is no representation of narratives from traditional leaders, local NGOs, or affected residents. For example, in the news article "Prabowo Takes Over Island Dispute" (Kompas.com, 2024), there are no quotes from the Acehnese community or local leaders, while Prabowo's statements and those of Ministry of Home Affairs officials form the core of the narrative. A similar imbalance is evident in the news article "President to Make Decision on Territorial Boundaries" (CNN Indonesia), which focuses entirely on administrative evaluations without considering the perspectives of the affected residents.

Such a dynamic creates an exclusive relationship in discourse production, where only state actors are seen as legitimate voices. At the same time, civil society plays a narrative background role with no space to express their voices. State officials and institutions heavily dominate media coverage, while civil society and ordinary citizens are given almost no opportunity to participate in public discourse. This reflects the imbalance in the discourse structure, where the narratives produced by the media more closely align with the interests of the elite and overlook the active role of society (Mulupi & Zirugo, 2023). This phenomenon confirms how the narratives constructed by the media more closely reflect the interests of the institutional elite, thereby sidelining the voices and active role of the wider community.

At the level of social practice, the discourse constructed reflects the structural power relations between the center and the regions. The dominant narrative frames this conflict as a matter of state administration rather than a conflict of identity, regional justice, or post-Helsinki autonomy agreements. The media no longer functions as a deliberative space that voices diverse perspectives but instead acts as a symbolic tool that reproduces the hegemony of the center over the regions. Garison et al. (2024) show that the media reinforces existing power structures through centralized ownership, censorship practices, and manipulation of public opinion, thereby acting more as an instrument of domination than as an open forum for discussion.

The visualization of the actor map from the news corpus reinforces the research findings. Central actors such as the President and Prabowo are at the center of the narrative connections, while the people of Aceh appear sporadically and minimally. The inequality that occurs is not only reflected in the structure of media texts but also demonstrates how the media actively maintains power inequality through the distribution of meaning and representation strategies. Nothias (2020) asserts that journalism is not a neutral means of conveying information but rather a cultural practice that reproduces social and economic domination through narrative choices and the selection of voices that are raised or ignored.

Thus, CDA helps reveal that the Aceh-North Sumatra conflict did not only occur in the legal and territorial spheres but also in the symbolic arena where the state sought to control meaning and establish a dominant version of truth. The media, through selective discursive practices and top-down narrative structures, also played an active role in maintaining the central government's dominance over local narratives.

In line with this, Nahed & Hammond (2018) emphasize the importance of the relationship between framing and political power in conflict coverage, where the frames in news reports are direct representations of the actors who have successfully dominated the public narrative. Framing is not merely a communication structure but also an ideological mechanism that determines who gets a platform, who is silenced, and which version of the truth is legitimized in the public sphere.

CONCLUSION

The study reveals that media coverage of the territorial dispute over four islands between Aceh and North Sumatra is not neutral or objective but somewhat shaped by a discourse structure that reinforces centralized power. By integrating Pan and Kosicki's framing theory and Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study demonstrates how dominant news narratives systematically marginalize local voices and prioritize the legitimacy of state actors. The use of syntactic structures, administrative themes, and technocratic rhetoric in news headlines and leads reinforces the perception that conflict resolution is entirely within the domain of central government authority, leaving little narrative space for local agency, regional identity, or historical context.

Other findings show that the media not only reflects events but actively shapes meanings that legitimize institutional power interests. This is evident in word frequency, actor mapping, and framing visualizations that highlight the dominance of state elites and the symbolic exclusion of grassroots perspectives. This dynamic aligns with global studies on conflict framing, which highlight the media's role in reproducing power structures through seemingly objective narratives. Thus, the Aceh-North Sumatra dispute is not merely a legal-administrative issue but a symbolic contestation over representation and power in public discourse. This research encourages more critical and inclusive media practices, allowing marginalized voices to emerge and fostering a more democratic communication space.

Thus, these findings directly address the objectives and research questions posed, namely how digital media framing shapes conflict narratives, dominates the representation of state

actors, and symbolically reproduces power relations. This study explicitly shows that state actors occupy a dominant space, while local actors tend to be marginalized in news coverage.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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