

## Rhetorical Analysis of Prabowo Subianto's Political Speech in the Presidential Debate

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**Abstract:** Political debates play a significant role in democratic elections because they enable candidates to communicate policy proposals, demonstrate leadership, and persuade the public. This study analyzed the rhetorical strategies employed by Prabowo Subianto during the 2024 Presidential Debate based on Aristotle's rhetorical theory of ethos, pathos, and logos. This study employed a qualitative descriptive design using a content analysis approach. The data consisted of the official debate transcript and video recording obtained from the General Election Commission (KPU RI). The speech was segmented into rhetorical units and classified into ethos, pathos, and logos based on Aristotle's rhetorical framework. The findings identified 52 rhetorical units, comprising 10 ethos, 17 pathos, and 25 logos, indicating that logos was the most dominant rhetorical strategy. Ethos was reflected in statements emphasizing credibility and leadership, pathos was used to evoke hope, unity, gratitude, and national pride, while logos appeared through logical reasoning, factual evidence, constitutional principles, and policy-oriented arguments. The findings indicate that Prabowo Subianto strategically integrated the three rhetorical appeals to strengthen political persuasion, with logical reasoning serving as the primary persuasive strategy. This study demonstrates that Aristotle's rhetorical theory remains relevant for analyzing contemporary political communication and highlights the influence of communicative context on the prominence of rhetorical appeals.

**Keywords:** *Ethos, Logos, Pathos, Political rhetoric*

### INTRODUCTION

Political communication plays a fundamental role in democratic elections because it enables political candidates to communicate their visions, policy agendas, and leadership qualities while persuading citizens to support them (McNair, 2018). Among various forms of political communication, presidential debates represent one of the most influential arenas of public persuasion because candidates are required to defend their ideas, respond to national issues, and demonstrate leadership under public scrutiny (Sujoko & Widodo, 2023). Unlike campaign speeches or political advertisements, presidential debates require candidates to construct persuasive arguments in real time, making rhetorical competence an essential factor in shaping public perception (Ludvianto & Arifani, 2020). Consequently, the effectiveness of political communication depends not only on the substance of political messages but also on how those messages are strategically delivered to establish credibility, evoke emotional responses, and present logical arguments.

Aristotle's rhetorical theory provides a comprehensive framework for analysing persuasive political communication through the interaction of ethos, pathos, and logos (Sulistyarini & Zainal, 2020). Ethos establishes the speaker's credibility and



trustworthiness, pathos appeals to the audience's emotions, and logos persuades through logical reasoning and evidence. Rather than functioning independently, these rhetorical appeals complement one another in influencing audience perceptions and strengthening persuasive messages. Therefore, Aristotle's rhetorical framework remains relevant for examining contemporary political discourse, particularly presidential debates where candidates must simultaneously demonstrate credibility, emotional engagement, and logical argumentation.

In the Indonesian political context, presidential debates organized by the General Election Commission (KPU) constitute an important component of the election campaign because they provide candidates with opportunities to communicate policy proposals, demonstrate leadership capacity, and influence public opinion (Ludvianto & Arifani, 2020). During the 2024 Presidential Election, Prabowo Subianto attracted considerable public attention because of the noticeable transformation of his communication style compared with previous election periods (Ramadhani et al., 2024). While his performances in the 2014 and 2019 presidential elections were generally characterized by a firm and confrontational style, his communication during the 2024 debates became more inclusive, moderate, and persuasive (Jelita et al., 2025). This transformation reflects the dynamic nature of political communication, in which rhetorical strategies evolve to respond to changing political contexts and public expectations. Consequently, Prabowo Subianto's speeches in the 2024 Presidential Debate provide an important context for examining persuasive rhetorical strategies.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that Aristotle's rhetorical framework remains relevant for analysing contemporary political communication across different political contexts. Ben Ghanem et al. (2021) found that presidential candidates in the Tunisian televised debate strategically combined ethos, pathos, and logos to strengthen arguments, respond to opponents, and persuade voters. Likewise, Kamaruzaman and Song (2025) reported that persuasive effectiveness in the 2024 United States presidential campaign depended on candidates' ability to integrate credibility, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning according to different political and social contexts. Similar evidence has also been reported in Indonesia. Manik et al. (2024) identified the use of ethos, pathos, and logos in the speeches of Anies Baswedan, Ganjar Pranowo, and Prabowo Subianto, with ethos emerging as the dominant rhetorical appeal in Prabowo's speech. Collectively, these studies indicate that successful political persuasion relies on the strategic integration of rhetorical appeals rather than the dominance of a single persuasive element.

Research focusing specifically on Prabowo Subianto's political communication

further supports this perspective. Isa (2024) found that Prabowo simultaneously employed ethos, pathos, and logos during the first 2024 Presidential Debate by combining personal credibility, emotional engagement, and logical reasoning. Meanwhile, Arfa et al. (2024) observed that Prabowo's rhetorical style evolved from a confrontational approach in the 2019 election into a more empathetic, inclusive, and persuasive communication style during the 2024 Presidential Election. Although these studies demonstrate the importance of rhetorical appeals in Prabowo's political communication, they primarily focus on identifying rhetorical elements, examining public perception, or comparing rhetorical styles across election periods. Consequently, limited attention has been devoted to explaining how ethos, pathos, and logos function as integrated rhetorical strategies throughout Prabowo Subianto's speech during the 2024 Presidential Debate.

Addressing this gap, the present study aims to analyse the rhetorical strategies employed by Prabowo Subianto during the 2024 Presidential Debate based on Aristotle's concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos. Specifically, this study seeks to explain how Prabowo establishes credibility, appeals to audience emotions, and constructs logical arguments to persuade the public during the debate. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: What rhetorical strategies are used in Prabowo Subianto's speech during the 2024 Presidential Debate.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design using a content analysis approach. Qualitative descriptive research aims to describe and interpret phenomena based on textual data without manipulating the research object (Sugiyono, 2020). Content analysis was applied to identify and classify the rhetorical strategies used by Prabowo Subianto during the 2024 Presidential Debate based on Aristotle's rhetorical theory.

The primary data consisted of the transcript and video recording of Prabowo Subianto's speech in the 2024 Presidential Debate, obtained from the official YouTube channel of the General Election Commission (KPU RI). The transcript and video were analyzed simultaneously to ensure the accuracy of the rhetorical context, including intonation, emphasis, and the communicative purpose of each statement.

The unit of analysis in this study was the rhetorical unit. A rhetorical unit refers to a sentence, clause, or complete statement containing a single persuasive idea. Each rhetorical unit was identified, coded, and classified into one of Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, or logos.

Table 1 Rhetorical Coding Framework Based on Aristotle's Theory

| Categories | Indicators                                                                                                                |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ethos      | Credibility, competence, experience, integrity, moral character, responsibility, leadership, goodwill toward the audience |
| Pathos     | Audience emotions (empathy, hope, pride, worry, sympathy) audience character (closeness to the people, solidarity, unity) |
| Logos      | Logical and systematic arguments, general statement or principle, and cause-effect relationship.                          |

Source: Adapted from Aristotle's rhetorical theory (Maarif, 2015).

The data were analyzed through four stages: (1) reviewing the debate transcript and video, (2) segmenting the speech into rhetorical units, (3) classifying each rhetorical unit into ethos, pathos, or logos by comparing its primary persuasive function with the coding indicators presented in Table 1, with each unit assigned to the category that best represented its dominant rhetorical appeal, and (4) interpreting the findings descriptively to explain Prabowo Subianto's rhetorical strategies during the debate.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

The results of the study showed that Prabowo Subianto's rhetorical statements in the 2024 Presidential Debate contained the three Aristotelian rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. Through the content analysis, the researcher identified a total of 52 rhetorical units, consisting of 10 ethos statements, 17 pathos statements, and 25 logos statements. These rhetorical strategies were employed to communicate political ideas, propose policies, and respond to various national issues discussed during the debate.

The distribution of rhetorical strategies is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of Rhetorical Strategies Used by Prabowo Subianto

| Rhetorical Strategy | frequencies | %    |
|---------------------|-------------|------|
| Ethos               | 10          | 19,2 |
| Pathos              | 17          | 32,7 |
| Logos               | 25          | 48,1 |
| Total               | 52          | 100  |

Source: Data processing results

Table 2 shows that logos was the most frequently employed rhetorical strategy, accounting for 25 rhetorical units (48.1%). This finding indicates that Prabowo Subianto predominantly relied on logical reasoning, factual evidence, policy explanations, and systematic arguments to persuade the audience. Pathos ranked second with 17 rhetorical units (32.7%), demonstrating that emotional appeals also played an important role in strengthening political messages. Meanwhile, ethos appeared in 10 rhetorical units (19.2%), reflecting Prabowo's efforts to establish credibility, leadership, and commitment to national values throughout the debate.



Figure 1. 2024 Presidential Debate  
Source: <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/>

The findings suggest that although all three rhetorical appeals were integrated into Prabowo Subianto's political discourse, logical argumentation constituted the dominant persuasive strategy during the debate. This indicates that the speaker attempted to convince the audience primarily through rational explanations while simultaneously reinforcing his credibility and creating emotional engagement.

### ***Ethos Analysis***

The ethos appeal was identified in statements emphasizing Prabowo Subianto's credibility, integrity, leadership responsibility, and commitment to constitutional values and public service. Based on the analysis, 10 rhetorical units were classified as ethos.

#### **Extract 1:**

*"Saya telah mengangkat sumpah untuk membela Pancasila dan Undang-Undang Dasar 45."* ("I have taken an oath to defend Pancasila and Constitution 45.")

This statement is categorized as ethos because it shows the speaker's commitment to the constitution and the basic values of the country. By emphasizing that he has taken the oath, Prabowo builds an image as a leader who has integrity, responsibility, and loyalty to the nation.

#### **Extract 2:**

*"Saya pertaruhkan nyawa saya, jiwa saya untuk membela demokrasi, hukum, dan HAM."* ("I risked my life, my soul to defend democracy, the law, and human rights.")

This statement is categorized as ethos because it shows the sacrifice, courage, and moral commitment of the speaker in defending democracy, law, and human rights.

#### **Extract 3:**

*"Harus memberi contoh."* ("The leader is Ingarso Sung Tulodo. We have to set an example.")

This statement includes ethos because it affirms the value of leadership based on example. By quoting these leadership principles, the speaker builds an image as a leader who understands the moral responsibility to be an example for the community.

### ***Pathos Analysis***

The pathos appeal was identified in statements designed to evoke emotions such as hope, gratitude, solidarity, compassion, and national pride. The analysis identified 17 rhetorical units representing the use of pathos.

**Extract 4:**

*"Kita harus bersyukur di tengah dunia yang penuh tantangan ketidakpastian."* ("We should be grateful in the midst of a world full of challenges and uncertainty.")

This statement is categorized as pathos because it evokes gratitude and optimism in the midst of a challenging global situation.

**Extract 5:**

*"Kita butuh persatuan dan kesatuan."* ("We need unity and unity.")

This statement is categorized as pathos because it evokes a sense of unity, solidarity, and togetherness among the community as the basis for maintaining the integrity of the nation.

**Extract 6:**

*"Indonesia akan melompat menjadi negara hebat, negara maju, negara makmur, negara adil."*  
("Indonesia will jump to become a great country, a developed country, a prosperous country, a just country.")

This statement is categorized as pathos because it arouses a sense of pride, optimism, and hope for Indonesia's future through a positive picture of the nation's progress.

### **Logos Analysis**

Among the three Aristotelian rhetorical appeals, logos emerged as the most dominant strategy, with 25 rhetorical units identified throughout the debate.

**Extract 7:**

*"Dalam demokrasi kekuasaan tertinggi ada di rakyat."* ("In a democracy, the ultimate power is in the people.")

This utterance is categorized as logos because it presents a general principle of democracy that sovereignty ultimately belongs to the people. The statement persuades the audience through rational reasoning based on democratic principles.

**Extract 8:**

*"Masalah Papua adalah rumit karena terjadi gerakan separatisme."* ("The problem of Papua is complicated because of the separatist movement.")

This speech is categorized as logos because it explains the causes of the complexity of Papua's problems through cause-and-effect relationships.

**Extract 9:**

*"Rencana saya adalah menegakkan hukum, memperkuat aparat, dan mempercepat pembangunan ekonomi."* ("My plan is to enforce the law, strengthen the apparatus, and accelerate economic development.")

This speech is categorized as logos because it conveys solutions that are

systematically prepared to overcome problems.

**Extract 10:**

*"Anggaran DKI sekitar 80 triliun dengan penduduk 10 juta."* ("Jakarta's budget is around 80 trillion with a population of 10 million.")

This speech is categorized as logos because it uses quantitative data on the budget and population as evidence to support the argument.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study revealed that Prabowo Subianto employed all three Aristotelian rhetorical appeals ethos, pathos, and logos throughout the 2024 Presidential Debate. A total of 52 rhetorical units were identified, consisting of 10 ethos, 17 pathos, and 25 logos units, indicating that logos was the most dominant rhetorical strategy. This distribution suggests that Prabowo primarily relied on logical reasoning to persuade the audience while using credibility and emotional appeals to strengthen the overall effectiveness of his political communication. Rather than functioning independently, the three rhetorical appeals complemented one another throughout the debate.

The identification of 10 rhetorical units categorized as ethos indicates that credibility functioned as an important foundation for persuasion, although it appeared less frequently than logos and pathos. Ethos was reflected in statements emphasizing Prabowo Subianto's commitment to constitutional values, democracy, leadership, and public responsibility. These findings support Aristotle's view that audiences are more likely to accept persuasive messages when they perceive the speaker as trustworthy and morally credible. However, the present findings differ from those of Manik et al. (2024), who identified ethos as the dominant rhetorical appeal in Prabowo Subianto's political speech. This difference may be explained by the different communicative contexts examined. Political speeches generally provide greater opportunities for candidates to construct their personal image and leadership identity, whereas presidential debates require candidates to defend policy proposals, respond to criticism, and demonstrate competence in solving national problems. Consequently, credibility functions as a persuasive foundation, while logical argumentation becomes more prominent during debates.

The analysis also identified 17 rhetorical units categorized as pathos, making emotional appeal the second most frequently employed rhetorical strategy. Prabowo Subianto employed emotional appeals to evoke hope, unity, gratitude, compassion, harmony, and national pride, thereby strengthening the psychological connection between the speaker and the audience. This finding is consistent with Arfa et al. (2024), who reported that Prabowo adopted a more inclusive, empathetic, and persuasive communication style

during the 2024 Presidential Election. Nevertheless, whereas Arfa et al. mainly described the evolution of Prabowo's rhetorical style across different election periods, the present study demonstrates how these stylistic changes were realized through specific emotional appeals during the debate. These findings indicate that pathos not only evokes emotional responses but also creates a favourable communicative environment that enhances audience acceptance of subsequent political arguments and policy proposals.

Among the three rhetorical appeals, *logos* emerged as the dominant persuasive strategy, accounting for 25 rhetorical units. Logical reasoning was reflected in statements presenting constitutional principles, democratic values, factual information, statistical evidence, causal explanations, and systematic policy proposals related to law enforcement, corruption eradication, Papua, agriculture, and economic development. This finding is consistent with Arfa et al. (2024), who reported that Prabowo increasingly relied on structured reasoning and policy-oriented arguments, as well as with Nasihah and Ni'Mah (2024), who argued that logical reasoning enhances the persuasive quality of political communication. However, the present study extends these findings by demonstrating that *logos* served not only to present factual information but also to justify policy proposals, respond to opposing arguments, and reinforce perceptions of leadership competence. This suggests that logical argumentation functions simultaneously as an informational and persuasive strategy in presidential debates.

The predominance of *logos* may also be understood from the communicative characteristics of presidential debates. Unlike campaign speeches, debates require candidates to explain policy proposals, respond to criticism, and provide evidence-based solutions within a limited time. Under these conditions, audiences tend to evaluate candidates based on the coherence, consistency, and rationality of their arguments. As a result, logical reasoning becomes the most effective persuasive strategy because it demonstrates competence, preparedness, and the ability to address complex national issues. This finding indicates that the distribution of rhetorical appeals is influenced not only by the speaker's communication style but also by the communicative demands of the debate itself.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce Aristotle's proposition that effective persuasion is achieved through the integration of *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* rather than through reliance on a single rhetorical appeal. More importantly, this study demonstrates that the relative prominence of each rhetorical appeal is shaped by the communicative context. In presidential debates, where candidates are expected to justify policies, respond to criticism, and provide rational solutions, *logos* naturally becomes the

dominant persuasive strategy, while ethos and pathos function to strengthen audience trust and emotional engagement. Therefore, this study extends the application of Aristotle's rhetorical theory by showing that rhetorical appeals are not static persuasive elements but flexible strategies that are adapted to the objectives and constraints of contemporary political communication.

Overall, this study contributes to the literature on political rhetoric by providing empirical evidence that persuasive effectiveness in presidential debates depends on the strategic integration of credibility, emotional appeal, and logical reasoning. While previous studies primarily identified the presence of Aristotelian rhetorical appeals or compared rhetorical styles across election periods, the present study explains how these appeals function collectively within the context of the 2024 Presidential Debate. Accordingly, this research contributes to a broader understanding of Aristotle's rhetorical theory by demonstrating that the effectiveness of ethos, pathos, and logos depends not only on the speaker but also on the communicative context in which political persuasion takes place.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Prabowo Subianto employed the three Aristotelian rhetorical appeals ethos, pathos, and logos throughout the 2024 Presidential Debate. The analysis identified 52 rhetorical units, consisting of 10 ethos, 17 pathos, and 25 logos, with logos emerging as the most dominant rhetorical strategy. The findings indicate that Prabowo primarily relied on logical reasoning, factual evidence, and policy-oriented arguments to persuade the audience, while ethos was used to establish credibility and leadership, and pathos was employed to strengthen emotional engagement through appeals to hope, unity, compassion, gratitude, and national pride.

The findings also demonstrate that the effectiveness of Prabowo Subianto's political communication resulted from the integration of the three rhetorical appeals rather than the dominance of a single persuasive strategy. While logos served as the primary means of justifying political arguments and policy proposals, ethos reinforced audience trust and pathos fostered emotional engagement. However, this study is limited to the analysis of Prabowo Subianto's speech during the 2024 Presidential Debate. Therefore, future research is recommended to compare the rhetorical strategies of other presidential candidates, examine different debate sessions, or apply other rhetorical and discourse analysis frameworks to provide a broader understanding of persuasive strategies in contemporary political communication.

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