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## Language, Power, and Environmental Framing in Regional Electoral Discourse: A Critical Study in North Maluku

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### Abstract

Language plays as a powerful political tool that not only communicates policies and ideologies but also shapes public opinion, influences power relations, and directs societal development, particularly in regional electoral contexts. This study aims to investigate the linguistic strategies used by political candidates in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election and to analyze how these discursive practices construct environmental narratives, political legitimacy, and regional development priorities. This research employed a qualitative design applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, encompassing textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. The data consisted of candidates' campaign speeches, debate transcripts, and media reports related to environmental and political issues. The findings reveal that environmental discourse functions not only as a policy instrument but also as a strategic resource for exercising symbolic and political power. Candidates predominantly utilized positive, negative, and ambiguous linguistic constructions to promote sustainability, criticize previous administrations, and project environmental responsibility. Nevertheless, discussions concerning mining governance, corporate accountability, indigenous rights, and environmental licensing remained limited, indicating a significant gap between environmental rhetoric and concrete policy commitments. Furthermore, environmental narratives are frequently employed to legitimize political authority and shape public perceptions rather than to advance transformative environmental governance. The study highlights the intricate relationship between language, power, and environmental governance and underscores the need for more transparent, evidence-based, and policy-oriented political communication to support sustainable regional development and democratic accountability.

**Keywords:** Language, Power, Environmental, Regional Development

### 1. Introduction

Language fundamentally influences social interactions, political discourse, and the decision-making processes that characterize national and regional development (Adnyani and Suwastini 2022; Hickson 2022). Language serves as a potent instrument of communication, facilitating the transmission of political messages, the formulation of policies, and the conveyance of ideologies to the public (Cheng, 2019; Dahal, 2024; Rahmani & Saeed, 2024). In regional governance and elections, language reflects political ideologies and functions as a mechanism for power distribution, serving as a subtle yet powerful tool for shaping public opinion and guiding societal development (Patteti & Rajani, 2024; Warren & Sato, 2024).

North Maluku Province is one of Indonesia's most resource-rich regions, particularly nickel reserves, which is among the largest in the country. (Hasyim et al., 2024; Naryono, 2023). The province hosts several major mining and mineral processing companies, including Weda Bay Nickel (WBN), the Indonesian Weda Bay Industrial Park

(IWIP), and Harita Group, which operates concentrating in Central Halmahera, East Halmahera, and South Halmahera Regencies. The rapid expansion of mining activities has generated significant public concern regarding environmental sustainability, including deforestation, land degradation, pollution, and natural resource governance (Iskandar, 2025; Maskuroh et al., 2022). Consequently, environmental issues emerged as a prominent theme in the 2024 North Maluku gubernatorial election campaign (Yusuf., 2024). Political candidates frequently incorporated environmental narratives into their campaign discourse to address public concerns, articulate development agendas, and position themselves in relation to the socioeconomic and ecological impacts of large-scale mining operations in the province. (Mardhiah et al., 2024). Therefore, the 2024 North Maluku Province General Election serves as an exemplary case study to examine the interplay of language, power, and environmental concerns in regional development. North Maluku, an archipelagic province of Indonesia, is characterized by cultural variety, abundant natural resources, and environmental challenges, rendering it a compelling place for the analysis of the intricate relationship between governance and politics (Bahasoan et al., 2019; Tauda et al., 2026). In multilingual societies, language policies are essential for directing language use in education, government, and public life, aiming to enhance inclusion or advance a predominant national identity (Ashraf et al. 2021). Nonetheless, these policies are frequently biased; they often mirror the power dynamics among various linguistic groups and may result in the marginalization of minority languages (Walker et al. 2019).

Power dynamics in political discourse commonly intersect with environmental issues, particularly in areas rich in natural resources (Hickson 2022; Urrea, 2024; Nachibi & Morgan, 2023). The connection among political power, language, and environmental management has gained prominence in current political discussions, as environmental sustainability becomes a pivotal concern in global and regional political agendas (Moinani and Barasa 2021; Sablin and Tripathi 2021; Buonvivere, 2024; Nidhya et al., 2025). The ability to influence public perception about environmental matters, the jurisdiction to govern resource utilization, and the rhetorical techniques utilized in advocacy all play a role in shaping the view of environmental issues among voters and policymakers (Lucrezi 2022; Stecuła and Merkley 2019). Consequently, comprehending the function of language in political campaigns, especially in regional elections, provides significant insights into the framing and addressing of environmental concerns within development rhetoric (Mardhiah et al., 2024; Yustisia et al., 2023). Political ecology recognizes the intrinsic struggles and conflicts stemming from environmental interventions (Svarstad et al. 2018; Hajer & Versteeg, 2005; Yustisia et al., 2023).

The 2024 North Maluku General Election is characterized by distinct geographical attributes, a vibrant cultural legacy, and significant environmental challenges. As the region progresses towards increased autonomy and self-determination, comprehending the role of language in electoral campaigns and political discourse is essential for assessing the exercise of political power and the formulation of regional development agendas (Moinani and Barasa 2021; Samad 2022). Politicians frequently utilize language to influence voters, forge political coalitions, and develop a narrative that resonates with

the interests of particular groups, especially those most impacted by environmental degradation (Shair-Rosenfield et al. 2020).

The 2024 North Maluku General Election provided a chance to examine the influence of language on political discourse and its effects on regional development. This study specifically analyses how candidates employ language to articulate their positions on significant environmental concerns, like deforestation, climate change, and sustainable resource management, while simultaneously negotiating the intricate power dynamics within the region. The political dynamics in North Maluku have historically been influenced by the power struggles among local elites and their power to control resource allocation. (Yusuf. & Hasim, 2026; Djen & Qodir, 2023). Consequently, language serves not merely as an instrument for political campaigns but also as a mechanism for reinforcing and sustaining prevailing power structures, which may subsequently influence the prioritization of environmental issues within development agendas (Adnyani and Suwastini 2022; Edmonds 2021; Kinuthia et al. 2021).

Although many studies have examined the interplay between language, power, and politics, the convergence of these factors with environmental concerns in regional development is still inadequately investigated, especially in the context of Indonesian provincial elections (Afandi et al. 2022; Ashraf et al. 2021; Farhan et al. 2024). The current study predominantly emphasizes national-level politics, with insufficient consideration of how political candidates in regional elections utilize language to tackle environmental issues and, consequently, how this affects regional development. Moreover, a significant portion of the study on language and power has focused on macro-level political speech, neglecting the complex mechanisms through which local political power is enacted and negotiated at the regional level.

The discussion on environmental politics, especially in Indonesia, has similarly overlooked the examination of how environmental issues are articulated within the framework of electoral politics at the provincial and regional tiers. Research has predominantly focused on national policies and international environmental movements, while insufficient emphasis has been placed on the use of language in regional elections to tackle environmental issues, oversee natural resources, and advocate for sustainable development. In North Maluku, a province with distinct environmental issues, there exists a notable deficiency in comprehending the influence of language on the political discourse about the region's growth and its environmental interactions.

Moreover, deficient research rigorously evaluates the distribution of political power via language, especially concerning the framing of environmental matters. Although research on power dynamics and language has examined how elites utilize language to influence public opinion, there is a paucity of studies that focus to investigate the intersection of this process with the governance of environmental challenges. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the use of language in political campaigns in North Maluku and its influence on the framing of environmental issues in regional development.

This study's originality stems from its multidisciplinary methodology in examining the interplay between language, power, and environmental concerns within the framework of regional elections. This paper examines the 2024 North Maluku General Election, offering a distinct opportunity to analyze the use of language as a mechanism of political power and its ramifications for regional development, particularly concerning environmental issues. Although prior research has addressed the role of language in political campaigns, limited studies have investigated the direct relationships among

language, environmental politics, and regional development, particularly within a specific electoral context.

The originality of this study lies on the distinctive physical and environmental of the province, compelling context for analyzing the framing of environmental issues within political discourse. North Maluku, an island rich in natural resources and ecologies susceptible to climate change, confronts considerable challenges in reconciling economic expansion with environmental sustainability (Batiran & Salim 2020; Matuankotta 2020). The linguistic strategies employed by political candidates in the 2024 election to tackle these challenges provide significant insights into the overarching dynamics of regional development and environmental governance in Indonesia.

The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary examination of the intersection between language of political discourse, environmental communication, and power relations within the context of the 2024 North Maluku Province General Election, an area that has received limited scholarly attention in regional Indonesian political studies. This study specifically explores how local political candidates strategically employ language to frame environmental issues, legitimize development agendas, negotiate political authority, and influence public perceptions in the resource-rich peripheral region. The study aims to investigate the linguistic strategies applied by political candidates in constructing environmental discourse related to resource management, deforestation, and climate change, and analyze how these discursive practices shape voters' perceptions of regional development priorities, political legitimacy, and environmental governance in North Maluku.

## **2. Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the use of language in political discourse concerning power relations and environmental issues during the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election. It adopted Norman Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional CDA framework, which consists of text analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice as it enables an in-depth exploration of how political language constructs social reality, shapes ideological meanings, and reflects power relations within political and environmental contexts (Fairclough, 1992). Through this qualitative approach, the study tries to interpret the meanings behind the political narratives, campaign rhetoric, and environmental discourses articulated by political candidates during the election process. Furthermore, the study emphasized the interpretation of political and social phenomena within their broader sociocultural and ideological contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The participants of this study consisted of four gubernatorial and vice-gubernatorial candidate pairs who contested in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election, namely: (1) Husain Alting Syah and Asrul Rasyid Ichsan, (2) Aliong Mus and Sahril Taher, (3) Muhammad Kasuba and Basri Salama, and (4) Sherly Tjoanda and Sarbin Sehe. The data of the study consisted of textual and audiovisual political communication materials related to the candidates' visions, missions, campaign speeches, and debate performances concerning environmental and political issues. Those data were obtained from official debate transcripts, televised debate recordings, campaign documents, social media publications, and news reports disseminated through local and national broadcast media. They were selected purposively based on their relevance to the research objectives and their representation of political discourse surrounding environmental governance and power relations in North Maluku.

The data were gathered through several systematic stages. First, the researchers collected political debate videos, campaign documents, and media publications from official government platforms, election commission records, television and candidates' social media accounts. Second, the collected audiovisual materials were transcribed into written texts to facilitate detailed discourse analysis. Third, the researchers organized and classified the data according to themes related to political power, environmental policy, ideology, and public persuasion strategies. Finally, all relevant texts and discourse materials were compiled into a research corpus for further analysis.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis procedures. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is a systematic technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts and communication materials. In this study, the content analysis was utilized to identify recurring linguistic patterns, ideological representations, and discursive strategies employed by the candidates in framing environmental and political issues. The analysis process followed several systematic stages adapted from Krippendorff (2004). The first stage formulated the research questions and determined the focus of the discourse analysis. The second stage selected and organized the relevant discourse materials based on their significance to the study objectives. The third stage segmented the texts into units of analysis, including words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and broader thematic structures relevant to political and environmental discourse.

The fourth stage coded the data by categorizing linguistic expressions, rhetorical strategies, ideological constructions, and representations of environmental issues. The coding combined both deductive and inductive approaches, allowing predetermined categories from CDA theory to be integrated with emerging themes identified from the data. The fifth stage interpreted the coded data through Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework. At the textual level, the analysis focused on vocabulary choices, metaphors, modality, sentence structures, and persuasive language strategies. At the discourse practice level, the analysis examined how political texts were produced, distributed, and consumed through media and public communication channels. At the sociocultural practice level, the analysis explored the relationship between political discourse, power structures, environmental governance, and sociopolitical conditions in North Maluku. Finally, the researchers drew conclusions by interpreting how political actors used language to construct environmental narratives, influence public opinion, legitimize political authority, and shape ideological perspectives regarding environmental governance during the regional election. This comprehensive analytical process aimed to reveal the interconnected relationship between language, political power, and environmental discourse within the context of local democratic practices in North Maluku.

### **3. Results**

#### **3.1. Findings**

##### **3.1.1. Language Use and power in Political Discourse**

The findings reveal that environmental issues emerged as a significant discursive resource in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election, serving not only as a policy concern but also as a strategic instrument through which political actors exercised symbolic power and constructed legitimacy. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, language functions as a mechanism for shaping public perceptions of environmental governance, framing development priorities, and negotiating political authority. The candidates strategically employed linguistic resources to position

themselves as environmentally responsible leaders while simultaneously contesting the credibility of their political rivals.

Analysis of the candidates' vision statements and debate performances demonstrates that environmental discourse is closely intertwined with broader narratives of regional development. Candidate Pair 1 (Husain Alting Syah–Asrul Rasyid Ichsan) framed environmental sustainability through local wisdom and traditional ecological values. Their discourse emphasizes the harmonious relationship between communities and nature, portraying environmental protection as a cultural obligation. This linguistic strategy generates a positive and inclusive narrative that sight to establish moral legitimacy and cultural authority. However, the discourse remains largely normative, offering limited details regarding policy implementation, environmental governance mechanisms, or measurable sustainability targets.

Candidate Pair 2 (Aliong Mus–Sahril Taher) adopted a more critical and confrontational discourse by highlighting the environmental consequences of extractive industries, particularly mining activities. Through negative linguistic framing, they emphasized environmental degradation, resource exploitation, and governance failures associated with previous administrations. This strategy functions as a political differentiation, enabling the candidates to construct themselves as agents of reform. Nevertheless, despite the strong critique of environmental problems, the discourse lacked comprehensive explanations regarding concrete regulatory frameworks, environmental monitoring systems, and sustainable economic alternatives.

Candidate Pair 3 (Muhammad Kasuba–Basri Salama) articulated a vision of a “sustainable and preserved environment,” employing highly positive and aspirational language. The discourse projects an image of environmental commitment and future-oriented development. However, the notion of sustainability remains abstract and underdeveloped. The frequent use of broad environmental terminology without operational definitions suggests a discursive strategy aimed at maximizing public appeal while minimizing political risk. As a result, environmental sustainability is presented more as a symbolic ideal than as a clearly defined development agenda.

Similarly, Candidate Pair 4 (Sherly Tjoanda–Sarbin Sehe) promoted environmental preservation through narratives of harmony, progress, and collective prosperity. Their discourse relied heavily on positive language that associated environmental protection with regional advancement and social well-being. While this strategy fosters an optimistic vision of development, it offers few specific policy commitments regarding environmental management, conservation initiatives, or responses to ecological challenges facing North Maluku.

The findings further demonstrate that all candidates utilized environmental discourse as a source of political power. Language was employed not merely to communicate policy positions but to shape social reality and construct ideological meanings surrounding development and environmental governance. Through selective framing, candidates defined which environmental issues deserved public attention and how these issues should be interpreted. This reflects Fairclough's (1995) argument that political discourse is fundamentally linked to power because it influences public understanding, legitimizes particular policy agendas, and marginalizes alternative perspectives.

Three dominant linguistic strategies were identified across the candidates' environmental discourse. First, positive language was employed when discussing greening programs, land rehabilitation, and environmental conservation. Such language emphasized hope, progress, sustainability, and collective responsibility. Second, negative

language was utilized when addressing environmentally harmful industries, particularly mining and resource extraction. This strategy highlighted environmental threats, governance failures, and ecological risks, often serving as a mechanism for criticizing previous administrations. Third, ambiguous language was evident in discussions of green economy-based development. Although candidates frequently promoted sustainable economic growth, they rarely explained how economic expansion would be reconciled with environmental protection in practice.

Beyond these linguistic strategies, the study identified several manifestations of power embedded within environmental discourse. First, there was evidence of *agenda-setting power*, whereby candidates strategically selected environmental issues that aligned with their political interests while avoiding more controversial topics such as mining permits, corporate accountability, and deforestation governance. Second, *legitimizing power* was observed through repeated references to sustainability, environmental protection, and public welfare, which functioned to construct candidates as responsible leaders committed to regional development. Third, *symbolic power* emerged through the use of environmentally friendly terminology that projected an image of ecological concern without necessarily providing substantive policy commitments. Finally, *discursive power* was evident in the candidates' ability to frame environmental challenges as consequences of previous governance failures, thereby positioning themselves as the preferred solution to existing problems.

An additional finding concerns the relationship between environmental discourse and resource politics in North Maluku. Despite the province's dependence on extractive industries and the growing environmental challenges associated with mining expansion, none of the candidates presented a coherent and comprehensive discourse regarding sustainable resource governance. Issues such as environmental licensing, community participation in environmental decision-making, corporate social responsibility, ecological restoration, and long-term environmental monitoring received limited attention. Instead, environmental issues were frequently framed as general development concerns rather than structural governance challenges requiring transformative policy interventions.

Overall, the findings suggest that environmental discourse in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election functioned as a strategic arena where language and power intersected in the construction of regional development narratives. While candidates consistently expressed support for environmental sustainability, their discourse was characterized by varying degrees of specificity, ideological framing, and political positioning. Environmental issues serve not only as policy topics but also as discursive instruments through which candidates sought to acquire legitimacy, mobilize voter support, and reinforce their political authority. Consequently, the study highlights how language operates as a powerful mechanism for shaping environmental governance debates, influencing public perceptions of development, and reproducing power relations within democratic electoral processes.

The findings presented below illustrate how candidates employed language as an instrument of power in articulating their visions, missions, and speeches during the candidate debate sessions.

**Tabel 1.** Finding of Language Use and power in Political Discourse

<b>Linguistic Evidence</b>	<b>Power Dimension</b>	<b>Discursive Function</b>
Strategically highlighting reforestation and land rehabilitation initiatives while refraining from addressing issues associated with mining permits	Agenda-Setting Power	Controlling the issues that enter the public sphere
Using the terms <i>sustainability, green economy, and environmental preservation.</i>	Legitimizing Power	Constructing the candidate's image as a responsible leader
Using environmental jargon without clear policy indicators	Symbolic Power	Creating a positive public perception without substantive commitment
Linking Economic Development with Environmental Sustainability	Ideological Power	Normalizing a particular development model
Attributing environmental degradation to the previous administration	Blame Attribution Power	Shifting responsibility and gaining political advantage
Using emotionally charged expressions such as <i>future generations, environmental protection, and community welfare.</i>	Persuasive Power	Building Emotional Support Among Voters
Limiting discussion of indigenous communities, land conflicts, and the impacts of mining activities	Discursive Exclusion	Excluding certain perspectives from public discourse.

### 3.1.2. Language, Power, and Environmental Issue in North Maluku Province

North Maluku Province is currently facing severe environmental challenges associated with the rapid expansion of extractive industries, particularly mining activities and deforestation. According to the Ministry of Environment and Forestry (KLHK, 2023), the province experiences an annual forest loss of approximately 12,500 hectares, reflecting the growing ecological pressure caused by resource exploitation. Similarly, the

Mining Advocacy Network (JATAM) highlighted the environmental and social consequences of mining expansion through its report *Pilkada Membawa Petaka* (“Regional Elections Bring Disaster”), which reveals how political decisions regarding mining permits have contributed to environmental degradation, land conflicts, and socio-economic inequalities in local communities.

The environmental crisis in North Maluku cannot be separated from the political power dynamics. Several candidates participating in the 2024 gubernatorial election directly or indirectly connected to the mining industry. These relationships illustrate how economic interests and political authority intersect in shaping environmental governance. From a Critical Discourse Analysis perspective, such connections are significant because political language is not merely a medium of communication but also an instrument through which power relations are legitimized, contested, and reproduced.

The first candidate pair, Husain Alting Syah and Asrul Rasyid Ichsan, had no a documented history related to mining licenses. This absence creates a distinct discursive position within the electoral contest. Their environmental discourse tends to emphasize general principles such as sustainability, public welfare, and ecological preservation without directly addressing the structural issues associated with mining expansion. Linguistically, their discourse relies on abstract and normative expressions that project an image of environmental responsibility. However, the unspecific references to mining governance may also indicate a strategic avoidance of controversial environmental issues. This demonstrates how political language can function as a mechanism for constructing legitimacy while simultaneously limiting accountability.

In contrast, the second candidate pair, Aliong Mus and Sahril Taher has a strong association with mining expansion. During Aliong Mus’s tenure as Regent of Taliabu Island, numerous mining permits were issued, covering substantial portions of Taliabu and Mangoli Islands. Despite this track record, their campaign discourse frequently employed reformist language characterized by criticism of previous administrations, promises of development, and commitments to public prosperity. Such linguistic strategies reflect the operation of power through discourse, where political actors seek to redefine public perceptions of environmental governance. The use of evaluative and persuasive language functions to legitimize their political authority while obscuring the environmental consequences associated with mining expansion. This illustrates that discourse serves as a site where power relations are negotiated and ideological interests are naturalized.

Similarly, the third candidate pair, Muhammad Kasuba and Basri Salama, faced discursive challenges arising from their involvement in issuing six nickel mining permits during Muhammad Kasuba’s leadership in South Halmahera. Their campaign narratives frequently emphasized sustainable development, economic growth, and community welfare. However, the coexistence of sustainability rhetoric and a history of resource extraction create a discursive contradiction. The language of sustainability functions as a legitimizing discourse intended to reconcile environmental concerns with economic development agendas. Consequently, environmental responsibility is framed as compatible with extractive industrial expansion, demonstrating how political language can be employed to normalize potentially conflicting policy objectives

The fourth candidate pair, Sherly Tjoanda and Sarbin Sehe, occupied a unique position due to their financial and familial connections to mining enterprises. Sherly Tjoanda inherited substantial mining-related assets and shares in companies involved in large-scale gold mining operations. This economic background influenced the interpretation of their environmental discourse. Although their campaign rhetoric promoted

environmental protection and regional development, public perceptions may be shaped by concerns regarding potential conflicts of interest. In this context, language functions as a strategic resource for managing political legitimacy. Through carefully constructed narratives of development and prosperity, environmental concerns are reframed within broader economic discourses that prioritize investment and growth.

Across all candidate pairs, environmental issues emerged not only as policy concerns but also as discursive resources within electoral competition. The candidates employed various linguistic strategies including promises, evaluative statements, reformist narratives, and sustainability rhetoric to construct favourable political identities and gain public support. These discursive practices reveal how power operates through language by shaping public understandings of environmental problems, determining which issues are prioritized, and influencing perceptions of political responsibility.

The findings demonstrate that environmental discourse in the 2024 North Maluku gubernatorial election was deeply intertwined with power relations and economic interests. Rather than functioning solely as a means of communicating environmental policies, political language served as a mechanism for legitimizing authority, managing public perceptions, and negotiating competing interests surrounding natural resource governance. The discrepancy between environmental rhetoric and candidates' historical involvement in mining activities highlights the ideological role of discourse in electoral politics. The study confirms that language functions as a powerful instrument through which political actors construct, maintain, and contest power in the context of regional development and environmental governance in North Maluku.

The following evidences illustrate the language and power dimension manifested in the discourse employed by each candidate.

**Table 2.** finding of Language, Power, and Environmental Issue

Candidate Pairs	Linguistic Features (Language)	Power Dimension	Environmental Implication
Husain Alting Syah – Asrul Rasyid Ichsan	Use of abstract terms such as <i>sustainability, environmental protection, and public welfare</i>	Construction of legitimacy through moral authority rather than industrial influence	Avoidance of direct discussion of mining governance and environmental accountability
Aliong Mus – Sahril Taher	Reformist rhetoric, criticism of previous governments, promises of development and prosperity	Exercise of political power through discursive rebranding despite strong mining connections	Potential masking of environmental consequences of mining expansion
Muhammad Kasuba – Basri Salama	Sustainability discourse combined with economic development narratives	Legitimation of extractive policies through developmental	Normalization of mining activities as compatible with sustainability

		language	
		Economic power transformed into political legitimacy through language	Environmental concerns reframed as secondary to economic progress
Sherly Tjoanda – Sarbin Sehe	Development-oriented discourse, investment and growth narratives		

### 3.2. Discussion

#### 3.2.1. Language Use and power in Political Discourse

The findings reveal that environmental discourse functions not merely as a communication tool but as a strategic mechanism for constructing political legitimacy, exercising symbolic power, and influencing public perceptions of regional development. Consistent with Fairclough’s theory of Critical Discourse Analysis, language operates as a social practice through which power relations are produced, maintained, and legitimized within political contexts. The candidates in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election strategically utilized environmental narratives to position themselves as environmentally responsible leaders while simultaneously enhancing their political credibility.

The prevalence of positive linguistic constructions such as *sustainability*, *green economy*, *environmental preservation*, and *future generations* demonstrates the use of legitimizing discourse aimed at generating public trust. This finding supports recent studies indicating that political actors increasingly employ environmental rhetoric as a source of political capital. For instance, Moinani and Barasa (2021) found that environmental language in political debates often functions symbolically to establish moral authority rather than communicate detailed environmental policies. Similarly, research by Farhan et al. (2024) demonstrated that political discourse frequently relies on persuasive environmental narratives to shape favorable public perceptions without necessarily presenting actionable policy frameworks. The current findings correspond with Robbin (2012) and Home et al. (2026) which examine how political language mirrors the fundamental power systems.

The findings further indicate that environmental discourse possessed a high degree of ambiguity. Although all candidate pairs expressed support for sustainability, none articulated comprehensive environmental governance strategies. This observation aligns with recent scholarship on political communication and environmental discourse. According to Bittner- & Weicht (2020), sustainability-related discourse is often strategically constructed to maximize public acceptance while minimizing political accountability. Such discursive ambiguity allows political actors to appeal to diverse voter groups without committing to specific policy measures that may generate political controversy.

From a power perspective, the study identified agenda-setting power, symbolic power, legitimizing power, and discursive exclusion. These findings reinforce argument that political discourse functions as a mechanism through which certain issues are prioritized while others are marginalized (Dodge & Metze, 2024; Roslyng & Dindler, 2022). The candidates strategically highlighted reforestation, land rehabilitation, and environmental preservation but avoided discussing politically sensitive issues such as mining permits, environmental licensing, corporate accountability, and indigenous land rights. This selective representation reflects that as ideological control through discourse, where dominant actors influence public understanding by determining which issues

become visible and which remain excluded from public debate (Dias & Siqueira, 2025; Rimordiaz & Suswanta, 2025).

An important finding concerns the use of blame attribution strategies. Candidate Pair 2, for example, frequently associated environmental degradation with previous mal-administrations while presenting themselves as reform-oriented alternatives. This result is consistent with recent findings by Ricks (2023), arguing that political actors often employ negative framing to construct political differentiation and mobilize voter support. However, unlike Ricks', the present study reveals a contradiction between discourse and historical political actions. Several candidates who criticized environmental degradation had previously been involved in policies facilitating extractive industries (Alim et al., 2024). This contradiction suggests that environmental discourse may function more as a political branding strategy than as a reflection of genuine environmental commitment. (Dunlap et al., 2024). The findings also extend contemporary discussions on environmental communication by demonstrating how environmental issues become ideological resources within electoral politics (Rubab & Rehman, 2025). While previous studies largely focused on national environmental narratives, this study reveals that environmental discourse in regional elections operates as a site where political legitimacy, resource governance, and electoral competition intersect. Consequently, environmental discourse should be understood not merely as a reflection of environmental concerns but as a political instrument through which candidates negotiate authority, construct identities, and shape development narratives.

### **3.2.2. Language, power, and Environmental Issue**

The second major finding demonstrates that environmental discourse in North Maluku cannot be separated from the political economy of natural resource extraction. North Maluku's dependence on mining activities creates a complex relationship between environmental sustainability, economic development, and political power. The study found that candidates frequently promoted environmental protection while simultaneously maintaining direct or indirect associations with mining industries. This finding supports the central assumptions of Political Ecology, which argues that environmental conflicts are fundamentally linked to struggles over power, resources, and economic interests (Svarstad et al., 2018; Billon, 2021; Vuola & Simpson, 2024).

The findings reveal a significant discrepancy between environmental rhetoric and environmental governance practices. Candidate pairs with historical involvement in mining permit issuance often employed sustainability discourse to justify development-oriented agendas. This pattern is consistent with a recent research by Urrea (2024), which argues that political actors frequently utilize environmental language to legitimize extractive development while minimizing public resistance. Similarly, studies on environmental governance in resource-rich regions suggest that sustainability discourse is increasingly used to reconcile economic growth with environmental concerns without fundamentally challenging extractive development models.

The findings further demonstrate how economic power is transformed into political legitimacy through language. Candidate Pair 4, whose economic background is closely associated with mining enterprises, utilized development-oriented narratives emphasizing investment, economic growth, and prosperity. This observation supports Sablin and Tripathi (2021) who found that political actors often employ development discourse to normalize resource extraction and secure public support for economically beneficial projects. However, unlike Sablin and Tripathi's context of national energy politics, the

present study reveals how such discourse operates within regional electoral competition where candidates seek to balance environmental concerns with economic interests (Caggiano et al., 2024; Schimpf et al., 2021).

Another significant finding concerns the absence of substantive discussions regarding environmental governance mechanisms. Issues such as environmental licensing, ecological restoration, community participation, indigenous rights, and corporate accountability received limited attention throughout the campaign discourse. This finding contrasts with recent environmental governance literature emphasizing participatory and inclusive approaches to sustainable development. For example, the study by Edmonds (2021) highlights the importance of community-centered environmental governance and inclusive environmental communication. The limited attention to these issues in North Maluku indicates the persistence of top-down development narratives that prioritize economic growth over participatory environmental governance (Wibisono et al., 2026; Xie et al., 2019).

Compared to previous studies on environmental political communication, this research contributes a novel perspective from the examination of environmental discourse within a provincial electoral context in Indonesia. While some studies such as Farhan et al. (2024) focused on persuasive political language and Moinani and Barasa (2021) examined environmental communication in ecological debates, the present study demonstrates how environmental narratives function simultaneously as instruments of political legitimacy, ideological control, and resource governance. The findings suggest that environmental discourse in North Maluku serves not only to communicate policy positions but also to reproduce existing power structures associated with natural resource extraction.

Overall, the current study confirms that language, power, and environmental governance are deeply interconnected within regional electoral politics. Environmental discourse functions as a strategic arena where political actors negotiate legitimacy, manage public perceptions, and reconcile competing interests between ecological sustainability and economic development. The persistence of vague sustainability rhetoric, coupled with limited policy specificity and strong connections to extractive industries, indicates that environmental communication in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election was primarily oriented toward political legitimation rather than transformative environmental governance.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study investigated the linguistic strategies employed by political candidates in the 2024 North Maluku Provincial Election to construct environmental discourse and examined how these discursive practices shaped perceptions of regional development, political legitimacy, and environmental governance. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study found that candidates strategically employed positive, negative, and ambiguous linguistic constructions to frame environmental issues such as resource management and sustainability, deforestation, , and regional development. Positive language was primarily used to project images of environmental responsibility and public welfare, negative language served to criticize previous administrations and environmental degradation, while ambiguous language enabled candidates to promote sustainability and green economy narratives without committing to specific policy measures.

The findings demonstrate that these linguistic strategies play a significant role in shaping public perceptions of development priorities and political legitimacy. Through environmental discourse, candidates positioned themselves as credible leaders capable of

addressing ecological challenges while simultaneously reinforcing their political authority. Environmental issues were therefore not merely presented as policy concerns but were strategically framed as instruments for gaining electoral support, legitimizing development agendas, and influencing public understanding of governance priorities in North Maluku.

Furthermore, the study reveals that environmental discourse is closely intertwined with power relations and resource politics. Although candidates consistently emphasized sustainability and environmental protection, discussions concerning mining governance, corporate accountability, indigenous rights, environmental licensing, and community participation remained limited. This indicates that environmental communication often functions more as a mechanism of political legitimation than as a platform for transformative environmental governance. Consequently, a gap persists between environmental rhetoric and concrete policy commitments.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the integration of Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Ecology by demonstrating how language functions simultaneously as a medium of communication, a mechanism of power, and a tool for constructing environmental governance narratives in regional electoral politics. Empirically, it provides evidence from a resource-rich Indonesian province where environmental concerns, political authority, and economic interests intersect. Practically, the findings underscore the need for more transparent, evidence-based, and policy-oriented political communication that enables voters to critically evaluate environmental commitments and promotes accountable environmental governance in regional development. Future research should examine how voters interpret environmental discourse during elections and investigate the extent to which campaign narratives are translated into actual environmental policies and governance practices after electoral contests.

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On behalf of the authors, we would like to convey that we use artificial intelligence (AI Chatgpt) to improve English grammar and language style in writing this article.

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