

# Alleged Government Gaslighting Discourse in Jokowi's Speech about the Protests against the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*

## Critical Discourse Analysis

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### ABSTRACT

On October 9, 2020, President Jokowi made an official statement regarding *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. Through his speech, he clarified several elements in the law and argued that the protest against *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* was motivated by disinformation and hoaxes on social media. This study attempts to reveal the truth of the gaslighting element in the speech from the point of view of critical discourse analysis. The method used is qualitative, while the analytical model referred to Fairclough's conception of critical discourse analysis. Based on the results of the study, the speech represents the indication of gaslighting. This result indicates that the gaslighting is characterized by the government's efforts to convince the public of the importance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* continuously through hedges and clarification of points that are not entirely following what the protestors are arguing.

**Keywords:** *Critical discourse analysis, gaslighting, speech, Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja protest.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Gaslighting is known as one of the most complex and dangerous psychological manipulation techniques. The concept of gaslighting first appeared in Patrick Hamilton's theater in 1939 entitled *Angel Street*, which was later adapted into a film with the title *Gaslight* in 1944. In general, gaslight is understood as a brainwashing technique that can weaken or destroy the victim's mental functions so that the victim obeys the perpetrator. As a result, the victim begins to question his or her own memory, validity, perception, or reality. That way, the victim can trust and accept the perpetrator's decision (Dorpat, 1996).

Although more widely used in the psychology field, gaslighting is also known in the political area. Gaslighting in politics is also defined as a manipulation technique the perpetrator uses to weaken the victim by constantly reminding the victim of his own mistakes or shortcomings. As a result, the victim easily believes what the perpetrators say and doubt their own credibility. Eltis (2020) reveals that political gaslighting has deeper historical roots as a tool of authoritarian control. Rulers use this technique to deceive and

mislead others. The ultimate goal of gaslighting is to create public dependence on the perpetrators. That way, the gaslighters can strengthen their position in the political world because no one can deny their role.

The most famous case is the gaslighting of Donald J. Trump, the 45th president of the United States. The case was revealed by the Instagram account *soyouwanttotalkabout* (2020) with the title "How Donald Trump Gaslight America". The issue of gaslighting discourse also exists in Indonesia. This can be seen from the upload of Idris (2020) in *theconversation.com* media with the title *Ada Hoaks di Balik Demo: Membedah Keberhasilan Strategi Gaslighting Pemerintah* (There are Hoaxes behind the Protest: Dissecting the Success of the Government's Gaslighting Strategy). In this case, President Jokowi's speech regarding the protest of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* or the Omnibus Law on Job Creation contained gaslighting with indications of a change in the flow of conversation in the media. Before the speech, the public voiced their disapproval. However, after the President clarified several issues regarding the substance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* and said the demonstration was motivated by disinformation and

hoaxes on social media, the public began to talk about the credibility of the information they understood.

The word *discourse* is often used in various disciplines, such as language studies, psychology, sociology, communication, politics, literature, and so on. Badudu (2000 as cited in Eriyanto, 2001) said that discourse is a series of interrelated sentences, connecting proportions with one another and forming a unity so as to create harmony in meaning between these sentences. Buchari (2020 as cited in Zahra, 2020) stated that gaslighting is a manipulation technique that involves rhetoric to scapegoat other parties in various ways to achieve something. Victims will be manipulated and ultimately feel incompetent. The intention of gaslighting is to confuse the public over an event in the government's interest. This opinion is reinforced by Brabazon (2019), in that gaslighting is used by politicians to make people question the facts and doubting the actual situation.

The *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* is a law that was passed in Indonesia on October 5, 2020, using the Omnibus Law concept. Omnibus law is a new concept used in the Indonesian law. This concept is often referred to as an all-encompassing law because it is able to replace several legal norms in one regulation. (Hanifah, 2021). In Indonesia, the origin of omnibus law originated from President Jokowi who wanted to simplify regulations that hinder job creation. Efforts are needed to revise the laws so that there is no overlapping of laws and can improve the quality of rules in Indonesia. Therefore, it is hoped that a pro-investment climate will be created to ease business permits (Setyawan, 2020). This research was conducted to reveal the facts behind the alleged gaslighting in the spoken discourse.

## 2. METHOD

The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. The discourse analysis model used is Fairclough's conception of critical discourse analysis. Fairclough divides discourse analysis into three dimensions, i.e., text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice. In the Fairclough model, the text is analyzed by looking at three elements, namely (1) representation; how a person, group, action, or activity is described in the text, (2) relations; how participants in the media relate to and are described in the text, (3) identity; how the identity of media participants is described in the text. After that, the text is analyzed by connecting it with discourse outside the text which is called intertextual analysis. While discourse practice focuses on the production and consumption of texts, the sociocultural practice focuses on how the social context outside the media affects the emerging discourse (Eriyanto, 2001).

This study followed 3 (three) stages of analysis. First, description, which describes the content and analyzes the text descriptively. The text is explained without relating it to other aspects. Second, interpretation, which is interpreting the text and relating it to the practice of discourse. At this stage, the text is not analyzed descriptively but is related to how the text production process is made. Third, explanation, which is looking for an explanation of the results of the interpretation in the second stage. This explanation can be obtained by linking the production of the text with the sociocultural practice in which the discourse appears.

The type of data used is a video from KompasTV YouTube channel published on October 9, 2020 entitled *Pernyataan Presiden Jokowi Soal UU Cipta Kerja* (President Jokowi's Statement on the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*) and documentation data from various sources relevant to the research. The main data source is the discourse of President Jokowi's speech on the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. The data from the article entitled *Hoaks di Balik Demo: Membedah Keberhasilan Strategi Gaslighting Pemerintah* (Hoaxes behind the Protest: Dissecting the Success of the Government's Gaslighting Strategy) by Idris (2020) on the conversation.com.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1. Text

In his speech, the President chose vocabularies whose meanings could only be understood by certain parties, i.e., *reformasi* (reformation), *transformasi* (transformation), *regulasi* (regulation), *disinformasi* (disinformation), *substansi* (substance), *komersialisasi pendidikan* (education commercialization), *konsolidasi lahan* (land consolidation), *reforma agraria* (agrarian reform), and *resentralisasi kewenangan* (recentralization of authority). President Jokowi also used the words *sangat-sangat mendesak* (very, very urgent) and *perlu mendorong* (need to push) to picture the urgency of the creation of new employment as the main priority between variety of problems that need to be solved. This gives the impression that the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* can solve these problems.

The President used conjunctions in the form of heightening which is indicated by the presence of the word *karena-maka* (because-then) and *sehingga* (so that). The use of these conjunctions creates a cause-and-effect relationship. In this case, the conjunction used strengthens President Jokowi's explanation of the need for existence of *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*.

The sentences that are combined with the first sentence support the previous statement and strengthen

the argument that *the Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* can provide benefits to the community. There are several advantages of the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* based on the series of sentences, namely it can provide job opportunities, facilitate business regulations and licensing, and support the prevention and eradication of corruption.

The forms of relations found in the text of President Jokowi's speech include three participant relationships, namely Jokowi and government, Jokowi and the people, and the government and the community. The relationship between Jokowi and the government relates to the process of drafting up to the ratification of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*; and the drafting of Government Regulations and Presidential Regulations. The relationship between President Jokowi and the community is illustrated through Jokowi's position as a head of state who answers public concerns regarding the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. Then, the relationship between the government and the community based on the content of the speech text can be seen from the role of the government in serving and providing for the needs of the community. In addition, the government is also a party that receives input from the public regarding the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*.

Jokowi's identity as president can be seen in the use of the word *saya* (I). In this case, Jokowi positioned himself as president when he emphasized the need for a *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* and clarified some misinformation circulating in the community regarding the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. In addition, Jokowi also showed his identity as president when explaining that the protests were motivated by disinformation and hoaxes on social media. Jokowi's identity as a government can be seen from the use of the word *kita* (we). Jokowi positions himself as the government when describing tasks or jobs, such as simplifying company procedures and preparing Government Regulations and Presidential Regulations; describe expectations regarding the increase in the number of cooperatives in Indonesia; and invite the community and regions to submit their inputs regarding the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. Based on this explanation, it can be seen that Jokowi used the word *saya* (I) to show and convince the public that he is firm in clarifying disinformation related to the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* circulating in the community. In addition, the word *kita* (we) was used when he described the tasks that were completed and accounted for by the government.

In Jokowi's speech, it was found some presupposition words in the form of *akan memudahkan* (will make easier), *akan mendukung* (will support), *berkeyakinan* (have faith in), and *dapat memperbaiki* (can fix). In addition, there were also forms of negation used repeatedly, that is *ini tidak benar* (this is not true) and another negation, that is *tidak melakukan* (not do)

and *tidak ada perubahan* (no change). These forms actually reflect Jokowi's doubts and lack of commitment to the certainty of the information he conveyed. This is because the forms of supposition and negation were stated in hedges. Hedges are words or phrases that make the meaning behind the words or phrases blurry or slightly blurred. The function of hedges is to provide maximum protection for their users and minimize the possibility of getting criticism from people who disagree with their statements (Lakoff, 1972; Salager-Meyer, 1997). However, to obscure his doubts, Jokowi made a statement containing *irony*. The use of this sentence gives a convincing impression that the information produced by Jokowi regarding the benefits and advantages derived from the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* is accurate.

The President's speech has spawned various discourses in the form of news, scientific reports, articles, discussions in public spaces, and other protests in multiple regions. The main focus of the topics from these various discourses is to point out the benefits and importance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* for the community. However, the public still rejects the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* through protests.

### 3.2. Discourse Practice

Discourse practice analysis focuses on the production, distribution, and consumption of texts. The president's speech on the protests of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* was presented on October 9, 2020 to quell public protests against the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. This speech was broadcast live on various television channels, such as Kompas TV, tvOne, and Metro TV. The speech was also uploaded to YouTube by the television channel and various media coverage, such as CNBC Indonesia, IDN Times, Tribunnews, and others. In addition, speeches were also published in various online newspapers, such as national.tempo.co, national.kompas.com, minded people.com, and others. The large number of media reporting and covering the speech facilitated the dissemination of the contents of the speech to the general public.

The speeches delivered by President Jokowi caused various reactions from the public. Prior to the speech, the public voiced their rejection of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. However, after the speech was released, the focus of the news centered on the benefits and importance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. In addition, the public discussion also led to the president's statements arguing that the protests was motivated by the issue of hoaxes and disinformation on the substance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. This can be seen in people's comments on social media. One of them can be seen in the comment column of the president's speech on the Kompas TV YouTube channel. In their

comments, many netizens questioned the issue of hoaxes and public understanding of the contents of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. The public also expressed many requests for the government to strengthen sanctions for corruptors. In this case, the public discussion did not lead to the rejection of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. In other words, President Jokowi's speech was able to change the flow of public conversation on social media. However, this in fact did not completely dampen the action of protestors to protest the rejection of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*.

### 3.3. Sociocultural Practice

The public highlighted the many different versions of the work creation bill circulating with different number of pages. However, the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* was still passed on October 5, 2020. However, after it was ratified, it seems that the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* was still undergoing a revision process. This, of course, led to more protests from the public.

Various actions were taken by the community to reject the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* from taking to the streets to enlivening social media with the hashtag *#tolakomnibuslaw* (reject omnibus law), generating 252 thousand posts. The actions that took to the streets were carried out in a number of cities, such as Semarang and Bekasi on October 7, 2020; Bandung and Banten on October 6, 2020; and Jakarta, Surabaya, Yogyakarta, and Makassar on October 8, 2020. The action ended in chaos by burning tires, damaging police cars, and destroying government office gates. To stem the number of protests and rejections, President Jokowi was present and gave information in the form of a speech. Through his speech, the president clarified several articles that were considered problematic and assured the public of the importance of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. However, the speech did not dampen the action of rejection. Students and workers continued to hold demonstrations against the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* in November 2020 at the DPR (People's Representative Council) building.

In the midst of the rush of hoax news, the mainstream media is a source of information with higher credibility because there are legal institutions that regulate it. Therefore, people keep seeking and trusting more information that comes from mainstream media. However, from an economic perspective, the media in Indonesia are still not free from the intervention of their owners. Media freedom is also influenced by economic forces from external parties, especially companies that advertise. Various pressures from media owners to editors will determine the news produced. They will tend to sort and choose which news interests people, so they will place advertisements in the media they manage for the survival of the media.

In addition, another factor that can influence the media is politics. Political institutions can influence the policies carried out by the media and limit the news production process. So, it is not impossible that there are events or information that should be conveyed to the public, but they are forced not to be reported because they can endanger the position of the media. This can form the existence of ideas that are deliberately created for political purposes. After Jokowi's speech appeared, there were various types of information published by the media, and among them were the benefits and advantages of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. The news could strengthen the arguments claimed by the government that the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* is very much needed and can provide benefits.

As a country that adheres to a democratic system, Indonesia is synonymous with freedom of opinion, including freedom of the press. In this case, the media (press) can convey information or opinions related to something that can be consumed by the public. In this way, the press is able to influence public thinking. This is no exception in political matters. Every political event is considered having news values, such as the impact of government policies or public reactions to these policies. The media are competing to dominate the public space and create public opinions that can be proof of the acceptance of their ideas in society.

Now, the press is not just a medium for conveying information, but can indicate siding with certain parties. This can raise suspicions against other parties who are considered opposition, especially in the political arena in Indonesia. This is evident from the variety of reports in the mass media that clearly support one political party, but on the other hand it also seems to bring down the other political parties. In fact, based on the results of a 2017 Kompas poll involving 548 respondents aged 17 years in 14 major cities in Indonesia, 41.6% of respondents admitted that they could not distinguish which media are official and are bound by a journalistic code of ethics, and which ones only publish sensational, lying, and provocative news. This is also influenced by the education level of the respondents. The lower the education, the more difficult they are to distinguish the types of media. The low level of education is inseparable from the economic conditions of the Indonesian people. This also affects the selection of media as news sources. Because economic conditions are not yet fully prosperous, people generally choose free news over paid ones. This certainly affects the quality of people's reading.

To summarize, President Jokowi's speech regarding the demonstration of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* from one side does indicate a gaslighting discourse. This can be seen from the government's efforts to convince the public of the benefits and importance of the

*Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* continuously by using hedges. However, the media also had freedom in disseminating the information the president conveyed in his speech. Therefore, the gaslighting that occurs can also be caused by the media that lead to public opinion about the contents of President Jokowi's speech. On the other hand, the public does not seem to be so affected by the president's speech. Although the area of discussion in the media has changed and is more about the urgency and hoaxes and disinformation behind the demonstrations, the public still rejects the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. This was manifested in a demonstration in November, 2020.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The presentation of President Jokowi's speech regarding the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* shows the use of vocabulary whose meaning can be understood only by some parties. This indicates that President Jokowi's speech only targets certain parties instead of the general public. In addition, the president often used vocabulary that describes the urgency of job creation to emphasize the purpose of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. Concurrently, Jokowi used the word *saya* (I) to show and convince the public that he was firm in clarifying the disinformation of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*, while the word *kita* (we) was used to describe the tasks that must be completed and accounted. In the speech, it was also found that the use of hedges reflected President Jokowi's doubts and lack of commitment to the certainty of the information he conveyed. However, to blur his doubts, Jokowi made a statement containing irony. The use of irony sentences could convince the public of the benefits and advantages of the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*.

On the other hand, President Jokowi also clarified several articles in the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. However, the points of clarification were not fully in accordance with what was being questioned by the community, the articles in the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* itself, and the Government Regulations. President Jokowi's speech about the protests of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja* was produced after the protests against the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*. The speech was broadcast through various media easily accessed by the public. However, the President's speech was not enough to stem the mass action in rejecting the existence of the *Undang-Undang Cipta Kerja*.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1 (Talitha Sahda Laili) conducted data collection, analysis of discourse practices, data reduction, and concluding. Author 2 (Endang Nur'aeni Farida Kusumah) conducted data collection, text analysis, sociocultural practice, and data reduction. Author 3 (Rifky Abdillah Putra Gunawan) conducted

data collection, analysis of sociocultural practices, and data reduction. Author 4 (Jatmika Nurhadi) conducted data collection, intertextual analysis, and data reduction.

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