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We reject then accept: The rhetoric of defeat in Anies-Muhaimin's post-2024 presidential election

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Abstract: This study aims to analyse the defeat speeches of Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar following their loss in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Employing Aristotelian rhetorical theory, it examines six speeches delivered between February and March 2024 to identify the rhetorical patterns and strategies used. The findings indicate that these speeches were not merely formal acknowledgments of defeat but carefully crafted political strategies to sustain credibility, maintain political relevance, and frame the loss as part of an ongoing moral–democratic struggle. The sequential pattern—rejecting the results, criticising the process, and accepting with objections—enabled both leaders to navigate the political transition without losing support. The analysis also reveals that their rhetorical choices were influenced by Asian and Muslim cultural values, particularly collectivism, social harmony, and saving face. This study contributes to political communication scholarship and offers practical implications for reducing post-election polarization in culturally collectivist contexts.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis pidato kekalahan Anies Baswedan dan Muhaimin Iskandar pasca kekalahan dalam Pemilihan Presiden Indonesia 2024. Menggunakan teori retorika Aristotelian, penelitian ini menelaah enam pidato yang disampaikan pada Februari–Maret 2024 untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan strategi retorika yang digunakan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pidato tersebut bukan sekadar pengakuan kekalahan, melainkan strategi politik yang dirancang untuk mempertahankan kredibilitas, relevansi politik, dan membingkai kekalahan sebagai bagian dari perjuangan moral-demokratis. Pola retorika—menolak hasil, mengkritik proses, dan menerima dengan keberatan—memungkinkan kedua tokoh melewati transisi politik tanpa kehilangan dukungan. Temuan ini juga mengungkap bahwa pilihan retorika mereka dipengaruhi nilai-nilai budaya Asia dan Muslim, khususnya kolektivisme, harmoni sosial, dan saving face. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian komunikasi politik dengan menunjukkan adaptasi elemen retorika klasik dalam kerangka budaya kolektif, serta menawarkan implikasi praktis untuk meredakan polarisasi pasca-pemilu.

INTRODUCTION

Post-election rhetoric encompassing victory speeches and concession statements is pivotal in the electoral process. These speeches shape the public's response to the announcement of election results, often featuring narratives of triumph or concession. While victory speeches celebrate success, concession speeches are intended to acknowledge defeat and provide an opportunity for national reconciliation graciously. Ideally, these speeches contribute to maintaining political stability by fostering unity.

In the Indonesian context, concession speeches have, on certain occasions, been deliberately withheld as a strategic measure to prevent political polarisation or provocation. Rather than serving as instruments of reconciliation, such speeches can, under specific circumstances, exacerbate political unrest—particularly when segments of the electorate regard the election outcome as illegitimate. In these situations, a concession may amplify dissatisfaction with the results and risk entrenching political divides. This consideration informed the drafting of Indonesia's Presidential Election Bill 2008, in which the requirement for a formal defeat speech was omitted. The legislative intent was to minimise the potential escalation of political tension by redirecting post-election reconciliation efforts toward alternative mechanisms—such as mediated dialogue and inclusive political engagement—that could promote stability without inflaming partisan sentiment (Zahra, 2008). Subsequent Indonesian electoral laws likewise made no provision for concession speeches. This reflects a legislative preference for formal reconciliation mechanisms and political dialogue over symbolic practices that risk negative perceptions, leaving concession

speeches as an unenforceable political convention.

The lack of official concession speeches to prevent political unrest lacks a valid rationale. Post-election political intensification frequently emerges from an electoral process perceived as unfair and unreliable, with the losing party typically ascribing this to such circumstances. Among supporters of losing candidates, distrust toward the electoral process is often rooted in lingering memories of authoritarian governance (Muhtadi, 2020). In political discourse, this narrative is frequently used by those who feel disadvantaged in elections and can reflect dissatisfaction with democratic processes that are perceived as unfair. The absence of a defeat speech in a democratic contest is akin to a player leaving the field after losing a match without shaking hands with the opponents. This defeat speech serves to assess the level of political maturity among elites and society, rather than acting as a catalyst for political unrest (Jati, 2022). In addition, concession speeches play a pivotal role in upholding the legitimacy of the election process. In the context of Indonesian democracy, which is facing challenges, one of which is due to weakening trust in democratic institutions (Pepinsky, 2024), concession speeches based on logic, which emphasize objective data and facts, are paramount in restoring that trust, especially in the face of concerns about election fraud.

Contemporary political discourse demonstrates that rhetoric shapes public opinion and reinforces a politician's credibility both in victory and in defeat. One of the most famous theories in the study of rhetoric is Aristotle's rhetoric, which has formed the basis for analyzing political speech. Hence, rhetoric is finding the best way to convince an audience. There are three main elements in rhetoric,

according to Aristotle: *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic), which are used simultaneously by speakers to convey their message effectively (Lord, 2013; Mohamad, 2022). These elements can be applied in various contexts, including defeatist concession speeches after elections.

Ethos plays a vital role in political speeches, as the speaker's credibility often decides whether or not the audience receives the message (Mshvenieradze, 2013). *Ethos* is not only about one's appearance or speaking ability but also involves the speaker's reputation, experience, and commitment to specific values (Lutzke & Henggeler, 2009). In the context of a concession speech, the *ethos* ensures that, despite losing an election, the politician giving the speech is still respected by his supporters and the wider public. A solid *ethos* reflects the speaker's moral character and increases the audience's trust in the delivered message (Howell, 1968). In this case, losing politicians should accept the election results gracefully and still respect the democratic process.

Research on gubernatorial elections in Jawa Timur shows that candidates' *ethos* is often reinforced by their public service track record and involvement in local communities. In concession speeches, politicians must commit to society and democratic values to maintain their image as responsible leaders, even if they lose (Sujoko, 2021). A good concession speech can strengthen politicians' *ethos*, showing their integrity, even amid defeat. Meanwhile, *pathos* is an element that evokes the audience's emotions (Lutzke & Henggeler, 2009). In concession speeches, *pathos* is often used to express disappointment and sadness, becoming defeated while providing hope

for the future. *Pathos* allows the speaker to connect emotionally with the audience, helping them feel sympathy and solidarity. Using *pathos* in concession speeches can help build a sense of community among supporters, which is essential to maintaining a political support base (Forsberg, 2013).

Carmack and DeGroot (2018) analyze the rhetorical strategies employed by Hillary Clinton in her concession speech following the 2016 U.S. presidential election. The researchers highlight how Clinton effectively utilized *pathos* to convey her personal disappointment while simultaneously inspiring hope among her supporters. Despite the emotional weight of her message, Clinton maintained a coherent structure that allowed her audience to empathize with her sentiments and remain optimistic about the future. Similarly, Hall (2021) examines the emotional appeals embedded within Donald Trump's post-defeat rhetoric. Hall demonstrates that Trump frequently invoked strong emotional themes—such as patriotism, injustice, and betrayal—to foster a sense of collective identity and solidarity among his base. In this context, *pathos* serves not only to generate sympathy but also to mobilize supporters who felt alienated by the election outcome. By contrast, critiques from Setianto (2023) and Tarish et al. (2022) caution that while *pathos* can strengthen emotional bonds and solidarity, its excessive or manipulative use may exacerbate political polarization. These studies suggest that although emotional appeals remain a potent rhetorical device in concession speeches, their misuse can hinder democratic reconciliation. However, an effective concession speech relies on more than *pathos* or *ethos*; it also requires firm *logos*. In Aristotle's rhetoric, *logos* refers to

the logic and evidence that support the speaker's argument. In concession speeches, *logos* provide logical reasons behind defeat and acknowledge the opposing party's victory rationally and respectfully. Using *logos* in modern political speeches helps balance emotion and rationality, which is especially important in stressful political contexts such as elections (Jörke, 2014). It is highlighted that *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* do not work in isolation. Instead, these three elements complement each other to create an effective speech. Successful concession speeches usually combine *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* to make a balanced message (Ritter & Howell, 2001). This combination ensures the speech is emotionally appealing, rational, and credible. For example, in the 2014 presidential election, some candidates utilized *ethos* to cultivate an image of trustworthiness, *pathos* to elicit emotions from their supporters, and *logos* to present logical reasons for their electoral defeat (Hartono, 2016).

Other research highlights the importance of thoughtful concession speeches in maintaining political stability after elections. Concession speeches that emphasize democratic principles and electoral integrity can strengthen the legitimacy of the democratic process and demonstrate the political maturity of candidates (Esaiasson et al., 2023). On the contrary, overly emotional or accusatory concession speeches can exacerbate political polarisation and undermine public trust in the democratic system.

The challenge is understanding how concession speeches influence long-term political stability, especially in regions like Asia and Africa that have been less explored. Most research has concentrated on other parts of the world, leaving a gap in how these speeches function in countries with diverse cultural and political contexts.

This research seeks to understand how concession speeches function in countries with Asian values.

In many Asian contexts, collectivist values prioritise group harmony, making public admissions of defeat socially challenging. For instance, Singaporean cultural norms encourage peaceful, integrative solutions over open concessions to preserve unity and trust (Lim, 2009). Research on Chinese culture similarly highlights an “other-focused” orientation, where fulfilling collective responsibilities and maintaining harmony outweigh overt conflict or personal confession of loss (Dong et al., 2023). These findings illustrate how collectivist frameworks shape the rhetoric and reception of political concession.

Studies from Indonesia and Southeast Asia further indicate that collectivist pressures often lead individuals to suppress personal needs to avoid disrupting harmony, favouring mutual face-saving, compromise, or indirect resolution over public surrender (Kim & Park, 2015; Virdiyanti, 2025). The cultural importance of face and honour further discourages concession, as defeat may be perceived as both personal and communal loss. In much of Asia, saving face is integral to social relationships, making admission of defeat socially and emotionally costly (Cheng & Rossner, 2023; Ho et al., 2004). This is reinforced by the heightened salience of shame in many Asian societies, which encourages avoidance of behaviours that could lead to dishonour (Bedford, 2004).

Within the Muslim cultural contexts of Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei, face-saving practices among political leaders are also shaped by religious–doctrinal values that emphasise dignity, patience, and the preservation of communal harmony, as prescribed in the Qur’an and the sunnah, and manifested in

the Muslim Malay tradition of modesty and respect in communication (Bakar & Nordin, 2017). Even in professional settings, indirect communication and non-confrontation are valued for maintaining harmony, further discouraging open concessions (Kim & Park, 2015).

In addition to cultural factors, elite-based political systems further constrain concession. In many Asian countries, leaders operate within patronage networks where electoral defeat threatens legitimacy, patron–client ties, and access to resources (Ahmed, 2025; Kwong, 2007; Scott, 1972). For example, in India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, clientelistic systems rooted in colonial and indigenous structures bind elites and supporters, making any sign of weakness—such as concession—liable to fracture networks and reduce leverage (Ahmed, 2025). Similarly, in Indonesia and Malaysia, party politics and resource distribution are dominated by oligarchic actors, with losers often refusing to concede to retain influence (Herman & As'ad, 2019). Meanwhile, governing coalitions in Hong Kong depend on rewarding loyalty and avoiding perceived weakness, where conceding risks elite defection or public unrest (Trystanto, 2023). Moreover, ethnically or religiously fragmented societies often reframe concession as betrayal of group interests. Across Southeast and Central Asia, losing candidates face pressures to resist conceding, as doing so could be interpreted as disloyalty to their constituencies (Berenschot et al., 2017). In contexts such as the Philippines and Malaysia, political clientelism and elite dominance are reinforced through appeals to ethnic and religious solidarity, with group leaders suffering reputational costs if perceived to yield to rivals from other groups

(Pagliawan & Tamondong, 2025). Consequently, within these plural societies, failure to contest results can be weaponised as evidence of weakness, incentivising persistent resistance to admitting defeat (Giang & Nhi, 2025).

This study offers a novel approach by critically analyzing defeat speeches in a post-election context marked by identity tensions and populist narratives. Unlike previous studies that view concession speeches merely as formal gestures of accepting election results and ensuring a peaceful transition of power, this research sees them as pivotal moments for managing political stability and social cohesion. Within this framework, the 2024 political defeat speech holds significant social implications for the future of democracy in Indonesia and across Asia.

The researcher expects to contribute to a deeper understanding of political rhetoric in a post-defeat context, especially within the framework of Indonesia's dynamic and identity-sensitive political landscape. By examining how rhetorical strategies are used in times of political transition, this research offers insights into the broader implications of political communication for social cohesion and polarization. In addition, this research also enriches the scholarly discourse on the rhetorical practices of contemporary Indonesian political figures and their impact on public perception and political discourse.

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative rhetorical analysis to examine how Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar constructed their defeat speeches during the post-2024 Indonesian presidential election period. Rhetorical analysis, grounded in classical Aristotelian theory, is

concerned with how speakers use language to persuade audiences through appeals to *ethos* (credibility), *pathos* (emotion), and *logos* (logic) (Foss, 2018; Mshvenieradze, 2013). Within the context of political discourse, this method enables the examination of how rhetorical strategies serve to legitimize defeat, mobilize support, and position political actors within a contested democratic landscape.

The analysis began with the purposive selection of six speeches delivered by Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar between 14 February and 27 March 2024. This period—from the official election day to the formal announcement of results by the General Elections Commission—marks a critical post-electoral transition in Indonesia, characterised by heightened political

sensitivity and strategic communication aimed at shaping legitimacy, responding to evolving narratives, and influencing public perception. The key features of each speech are summarised in Table 1.

Each speech, exceeding two minutes in duration, was transcribed verbatim to preserve linguistic integrity and ensure consistent analytical depth. The close-reading process identified rhetorical markers such as tone, structure, and thematic shifts, followed by open coding to categorise segments according to dominant persuasive functions. These codes were then grouped into broader thematic clusters—such as rejection of results, legal positioning, and conditional acceptance—reflecting consistent rhetorical strategies across the corpus.

Table 1
Anies Muhaimin Selected Speeches

ID	Title	Date	Media	Duration
P01	Keterangan Anies-Muhaimin Terkait Hasil Quick Count Pemilu 2024	February 14, 2024	Kompas TV	10:18
P02	Kalah di Quick Count Anies Beri Wejangan ke Pendukungnya	February 15, 2024	eranational.com	02:00
P03	Pesan Anies Baswedan untuk Relawan dan Pendukung	February 15, 2024	Anies Baswedan's official YouTube account	02:11
P04	Anies-Muhaimin Konpers Persiapan Langkah Hukum Hadapi Perkara Pemilu 2024	February 20, 2024	Kompas TV	18:23
P05	Pernyataan Lengkap Anies-Muhaimin Soal Hasil Pilpres 2024	March 21, 2024	Kompas.TV	11:11
P06	Pernyataan Anies di Sidang MK Keras Sindir Jokowi Soal Kecurangan Pemilu 2024	March 27, 2024	merdeka.com	11:40

Source: Result of data analysis

In applying this framework, the analysis focuses on how each rhetorical appeal manifests in the candidates' public statements. *Ethos* is reflected in how the speakers construct their credibility, often through expressions of moral integrity,

political consistency, and commitment to democratic values. *Pathos* captures the emotional dimension of the speeches, particularly through language that conveys disappointment, gratitude, or hope—eliciting empathy and sustaining collective

morale among supporters (Grapă & Mogoș, 2023). Meanwhile, *logos* is examined through the use of logical reasoning, factual claims, and legal narratives that justify their stance and frame the defeat within a broader argument for electoral fairness and institutional accountability (Davoudi et al., 2019). This iterative interpretive process connected textual patterns with broader discursive intentions, allowing the researcher to trace shifts in rhetorical style across the post-

election timeline and to situate these within Indonesia's wider democratic discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis

Analysing Anies-Muhaimin's six speeches post-election reveals a strategic use of rhetorical techniques to communicate critical messages about democratic values, electoral integrity, and leadership.

Table 2

Themes and strategies of using rhetorical elements in Anies-Muhaimin's speeches

Main Theme	Rhetorical Element Strategy	Citation example	Interpretation	Social and Political Context
Theme 1: Credibility through Democracy (<i>Ethos</i>)	Emphasize credibility and integrity in democracy.	"We will respect the results arising from the people's aspirations... respecting the people's decision is our democratic principle." (ID P01, Minute: 2:58-3:30)	Demonstrate commitment to democracy and the integrity of the candidate.	Maintain trust in the electoral process as part of a healthy democracy.
Theme 2: Emotion through Solidarity and the Spirit of Change (<i>Pathos</i>)	Using emotions to build solidarity and a spirit of change.	"Change is inevitable... Our struggle does not end here." (ID P01, Minute: 8:16-8:35)	Emotional solidarity strengthens public support.	People's aspirations for change amid political discontent.
Theme 3: Logic through Honesty and Justice in Democracy (<i>Logos</i>)	Promote honesty and justice as the logic of democracy.	"Elections must be conducted with honesty... to produce a properly functioning government." (ID P04, Minute: 4:31-5:12)	Honesty is the basis of government legitimacy.	The importance of fairness in elections to maintain public trust.
Theme 4: Moral Leadership amid Defeat (<i>Ethos</i>)	Demonstrate moral leadership in the face of defeat.	"We respect the people's decision and will continue to be part of the movement for change." (ID P03, Minute: 1:45-2:09)	Leadership is demonstrated through the grace of accepting defeat	Leaders maintain stability and struggle

Source: Result of data analysis

Table 2 outlines the principal rhetorical themes of the speeches, demonstrating how appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos were mobilised to frame narratives of electoral integrity, political change, and moral leadership in defeat. These strategies collectively reinforced the overarching message and embedded the rhetoric within its broader sociopolitical context.

Theme 1: Credibility through Democracy (*Ethos*)

In this defeat speech, Anies-Muhaimin attempted to establish their *ethos* as leaders who respect the election results, even though they were not as expected. Anies Baswedan, in his remarks, emphasized the importance of respecting election results and the legitimacy of the democratic process. On various occasions, he expressed his commitment to respect the decision of the KPU as the official organizing body. For example, in one of his critical statements, Anies said, *'We will respect and appreciate the election results that were raised from the aspirations of the people'* (ID P01, Minute: 2:58-7:00). In his speech, Anies not only talked about the vote counting process but also highlighted the importance of maintaining the spirit of democracy amidst the uncertainty of the election results. This reflects a strong use of *ethos* to maintain an image as a leader committed to democratic principles despite facing defeat. On the other hand, it also confirms a consistent political position to preserve the legitimacy of the electoral process as the basis of a just rule of law. In addition, Anies also strengthened his credibility by stating, *"We must protect our democracy. Although tough, this process must be carried out honestly and openly. Without that, people will lose confidence in the system we built"* (ID P01, Minute: 4:20-5:00). This statement not only

cements his position as a leader who values fairness in democracy but also reflects a concern that without a clean process, people's trust in the political system will erode. Meanwhile, Muhaimin Iskandar focuses more on the religious approach to building his credibility. Muhaimin stated: *"Remain grateful for whatever results are obtained because all is the will of Allah SWT"* (ID P02, Minute: 1:12-1:30). He stated that every result in an election, whether winning or losing, is part of God's plan. This approach attracts attention because Muhaimin emphasizes the spiritual and moral aspects, in contrast to Anies, who focuses more on the technical aspects of democracy. Muhaimin places his credibility in the eyes of religious supporters by attributing the election results to divine will, showing that he remains steadfast and stoic in the face of all possibilities.

Research by Esaiasson et al. (2023) shows that the message of acceptance of defeat is critical in maintaining political stability, which is relevant to Anies' strategy on respect for the democratic process. Although elections as part of the democratic process will be considered unfair and fair for the losing party, they will still be recognized by emphasizing the heroic narrative that they are the real gatekeepers of democracy.

Muhaimin, whose political credibility is closely tied to religious themes, also encounters significant challenges. In the political arena, the interplay between spiritual symbolism and public perception is pivotal for sustaining electoral support (Hamza & Nordin, 2024). Nevertheless, attributing electoral defeat to divine will may elicit skepticism among more rational or secular-minded constituents. As noted by Farhan et al. (2024), such a strategy can be effective within highly religious communities but

risks alienating voters who expect leaders to respond to defeat with concrete policy proposals rather than spiritual rhetoric.

Adopting either of these rhetorical approaches may preserve credibility in the short term; however, it also risks deflecting attention from the underlying causes of political discontent. Hall (2021) cautions that excessive reliance on populist or religious rhetoric may foster dissatisfaction among supporters who demand substantive structural reforms. In this respect, both strategies can function as mechanisms for avoiding a deeper and more critical engagement with the realities of electoral loss.

Theme 2: Emotion through Solidarity and the Spirit of Change (Pathos)

In the *Pathos* theme, Anies-Muhaimin used emotion to evoke solidarity and the fighting spirit among their supporters. Anies stated: *"I am proud, and I think all those involved are also proud. This defeat does not reduce the value of what we have achieved together"* (ID P02, Minute: 0:29). In this statement, Anies attempts to evoke collective pride among his supporters, stating that defeat does not mean failure. He emphasized that the struggle carried out has its moral value, regardless of the election results. The election process is not short in vain; all parties involved in supporting him have fought with all their energy, so that even though they lost, pride is still embedded in their hearts and minds.

The questioning continued by emphasizing that *"This defeat is not a failure, but the first step towards a better change. We have shown the world that we can unite and fight together"* (ID P02, Minute: 3:15-3:45). With this statement, Anies changed the narrative of defeat into

part of a long journey toward change. He shifts the attention of his supporters from disappointment to a spirit of optimism for the future, showing that defeat is just one step in a big journey toward moral victory. Meanwhile, Muhaimin Iskandar emphasized solidarity by saying, *"We have not lost the struggle; we will stay together to fight for the interests of the people"* (ID P03, Minute: 2:05-2:30). In this case, Muhaimin connects the disappointment over the defeat with the long-term commitment to continue fighting for the people's interests. Muhaimin emphasizes that defeat will not separate them from the ultimate goal of the struggle and that unity among supporters remains the key to continuing their political journey. Muhaimin also added, *"As long as we stay united, this defeat is just a small obstacle. The future is ours if we keep fighting"* (ID P03, Minute: 3:45-4:15). Muhaimin clearly states that the struggle is far from over and that defeat should not stop the spirit of his supporters. This is an example of how Muhaimin uses *pathos* to build an emotional connection with his supporters, reminding them that collective spirit and perseverance will lead to victory in the future.

In the *Pathos* theme, Anies's rhetorical strategy tends to make supporters feel proud of the joint efforts made. This approach provides a solid emotional boost that soothes disappointment and galvanizes the collective spirit to keep fighting. This optimistic speech model can strengthen supporters' morale, but it is not always enough to overcome more profound disappointments (Spiker, 2022). Anies' approach of focusing on moral pride can be seen as a way to avoid discussing the more substantial causes of defeat. Emotion and passion built through *pathos* can only gain

relevance if followed by concrete strategies that can answer supporters' expectations in the future. Furthermore, Carmack and DeGroot (2018) note that defeat narratives are often used to remobilize support, particularly in uncertain contexts. However, if the mobilization is based solely on solidarity, it will not be enough to maintain a long-term support base. An approach that overemphasizes unity without concrete action can lead to the demoralization of supporters.

Theme 3: Logic through Honesty and Justice in Democracy (*Logos*)

The *logos* theme focuses on how Anies and Muhaimin use logical arguments to emphasize the importance of honesty and fairness in the democratic process. Anies Baswedan highlighted that *"Without a credible process, the legitimacy of the elected candidate will cause doubts. Our democracy cannot survive if there is no fairness in this process"* (ID P05, Minute: 0:21-1:19). With this statement, Anies constructs an argument that democracy can only function properly if the outcome is based on a transparent and fair process. He seeks to emphasize that political legitimacy cannot only be based on victory but also on the fairness underlying the electoral process.

He also emphasized that *"We must fix this system. We cannot allow our democracy to be taken over by illegitimate interests"* (ID P05, Minute: 2:00-2:30). This statement shows Anies' concern about the potential damage to the democratic system that can occur if honesty is not maintained. Anies uses *logos* to reinforce the idea that an honest and transparent election process is a prerequisite for the sustainability of a healthy democracy. On the other hand, Muhaimin Iskandar added arguments that focused more on legal channels to correct any injustices during the election. *"We will take all legal*

channels to ensure that the existing fraud is corrected because this concerns the future of our democracy" (ID P03, Minute: 3:45-4:15). Muhaimin uses *logos* to emphasize that the legal process must be followed to correct injustices and maintain the legitimacy of democracy in the future.

Muhaimin also emphasizes that *"If we give up now, we will lose the nation's future"* (ID P03, Minute 5:00-5:30), showing how he links legal channels with a better future for democracy. Therefore, Muhaimin positions himself as a leader who focuses on concrete solutions through the law to maintain justice in a democracy.

Although the view of fair processes is a prerequisite for political legitimacy (Esaiasson et al., 2023), overemphasizing systemic fairness for legitimacy can oversimplify the problem. Public trust depends on fair electoral processes and whether politicians can respond to people's needs and expectations. Relying on narratives about electoral justice can be perceived as a distraction from more significant structural issues that may not have been addressed well enough during the campaign.

Muhaimin's approach, which focuses on legal processes, seems more pragmatic. However, as Robertson's study (2024) reveals, legal processes are only sometimes sufficient to restore public trust if tangible reforms accompany them. Simple, promising legal measures can raise unrealistic expectations among supporters, especially if they do not see concrete results from such efforts. In addition, while a transparent political system is essential, more than transparency is needed to stabilize a chaotic political situation (Invernizzi & Ting, 2024). Anies's more theoretical approach to the importance of a fair democracy could be confronted with the reality that more profound institutional reforms are needed to genuinely rebuild public trust. Similarly, Muhaimin's

strategy could be considered nothing more than a short-term tactic without a more comprehensive vision for improving the political system.

Theme 4: Moral Leadership Amid Defeat

The theme of moral leadership became essential in Anies and Muhaimin's speeches. Anies Baswedan emphasized the importance of maintaining ethical values in the democratic process, stating, "*We will not let irregularities pass without correction... because if it is not corrected, then this will become a habit and eventually become the character of the nation*" (ID P05, Minute: 6:53-7:14). This statement highlights that for Anies, political defeat is not only about results but also about how to improve the democratic process to ensure justice.

He then continued, "*We must maintain morality and honesty in all these processes because that is what will determine the future of our democracy*" (ID P05, Minute: 7:30-8:00). Here, Anies shows that moral leadership is inseparable from politics and that defeat should not be an excuse to lower ethical standards.

Muhaimin Iskandar supports this narrative by emphasizing the importance of patience and perseverance. Muhaimin states: "*Patience is our key in fighting for what is right because without it, our struggle will lose its way*" (ID P03, Minute: 5:00-5:20). In this statement, Muhaimin emphasizes that moral values such as patience and perseverance are the foundation for facing political defeat and that moral victories are more important than political victories alone.

Muhaimin also added, "*If we stay true to these values, we will come out as moral winners, even if we lose politically*" (ID P03, Minute: 6:15-6:45). This

statement emphasizes that victory should not always be measured through election results but also through how one stays true to the moral principles one believes in.

Spiker (2022) highlighted the importance of moral rhetoric in concession speeches, which is often used to maintain political credibility post-defeat. However, in the case of Anies and Muhaimin, there is a risk that this rhetoric is used to avoid more substantive discussions about why they lost. While effective in the short term, the public could perceive this kind of moral rhetoric as a way to prevent introspection or real responsibility for campaign failures.

The moral approach emphasized by Muhaimin, which attributes defeat to a test of fortitude and perseverance, may inspire some supporters. However, according to Warns (2024), such a spiritual narrative could undermine the leader's legitimacy among more rational supporters who expect concrete solutions. Although spirituality can raise morale among core supporters, it can be a deterrent for those who want a more pragmatic, results-based leader.

In a broader context, Vavilova and Galieva (2023) highlighted that the importance of morality in politics cannot be underestimated. Still, leaders who rely solely on morality without providing real solutions to structural political problems risk losing relevance in the long run. Anies and Muhaimin, with their moral approach, can be seen as failing to offer concrete strategies for real political change, thus creating a distance between their rhetoric and the reality faced by supporters.

Stage analysis

This research highlights the structuring of concession speeches as a rhetorical rite in presidential defeat. Unlike previous studies that focus primarily on

rhetorical elements, this study examines the sequential stages in Anies–Muhaimin's

post–Quick Count statements, which can be conceptually categorised as follows:

Table 3
Stages of Anies–Muhaimin's consent speech

Stage	Dominant Rhetorical Elements	Citation Example	Context and Objectives
Rejecting the results	<i>Pathos, Ethos</i>	"We still have a long way to go; keep guarding the votes. I will remain in this movement of change and will not move an inch" (ID P01, Minute: 02:00-02:45).	Arouse emotions and solidarity among supporters to continue supporting the cause despite unfavorable quick count results.
Criticising the election process	<i>Logos</i>	"We found that the biggest problem is not in the polling stations, but in the pre-TPS, where there are activities that influence the election results and do not reflect the people's aspirations" (ID P04, Minute: 05:13-05:45).	Developing arguments that the election results are invalid or flawed to prepare a logical basis for legal challenges.
Accepting with objections	<i>Ethos, Logos</i>	"We choose legal channels to ensure that democracy is well maintained" (ID P04, Minute: 06:39-09:17)	It shows that even if the election results are accepted, the legal process will continue to fight for democracy's integrity.
	<i>Ethos, Pathos</i>	"We chose to stay on the legal path because justice cannot be achieved without a constitutional process" (ID P06, Minute: 09:00-09:40)	Ensuring that supporters remain supportive of the legal steps that will be taken, strengthening Anies' image as a leader who acts based on legal and constitutional principles.

Source: Result of data analysis

Table 3 illustrates the stages of Anies–Muhaimin's concession speech, beginning with rejecting the results through appeals to pathos and ethos, moving to a critique of the electoral process grounded in logos, and concluding with acceptance accompanied by objections that combine ethos, logos, and pathos. This sequence reflects a deliberate rhetorical strategy to mobilise emotions, construct rational arguments, and reinforce political legitimacy.

Stage 1: Rejecting the Results

At this early stage, Anies Baswedan focused on rejecting the election results (in this case, the quick count) by relying on *ethos* and *pathos*. He used *ethos* to build his image as a leader who stands firm on democracy and justice, and *pathos* to keep his supporters' spirits up amid disappointment with the provisional election results.

One of the key quotes that reflect the *ethos* and *pathos* approach is, "We want to continue this movement of change,

not just about campaigns or elections, but about a better democracy" (ID P01, Minute: 01:30-01:55). In this statement, Anies is trying to reinforce his commitment to the long-term struggle to improve democracy, regardless of the provisional election results. Here, he emphasizes that the change movement has a bigger goal than just winning elections, which is to fight for a more civilized democracy.

Anies also used *pathos* when he said, *"We still have a long way to go, keep guarding the votes. I will remain in this movement of change and will not shift a bit"* (ID P01, Minute: 02:00-02:45). With this expression, he raised the spirits of his supporters, instilling a sense of optimism that the struggle was not over even though the initial results were not as expected. The element of *pathos* is vital in encouraging the audience to remain united and calm in the face of initial pressure. In addition, when Anies stated, *"All of you, keep fighting. Our struggle is not finished; our struggle is still long"* (ID P02, Minute: 00:09-00:30), he reaffirms his position as a leader who does not give up. In these early speeches, even though the quick count results from survey agencies predicted their defeat, Anies-Muhaimin tried to raise the morale of their supporters and voters, encouraging and stating that the struggle is still long. This statement emotionally connects him with the audience, inviting them to remain energized to face challenges.

Stage 2: Criticising the Election Process

After rejecting the initial results, Anies began to criticize the election process, which was considered complete with irregularities. At this stage, *logos* becomes dominant, and he relies on logical arguments and evidence to show the

existence of fraud in the election process, especially in the pre-TPS phase. *Ethos* is used to show his commitment to fighting for justice through legal channels.

Anies' criticism of the election process is seen in his statement, *"We found that the biggest problem is not at the polling station, but at the pre-TPS, where there are activities that affect the election results and do not reflect the aspirations of the people"* (ID P04, Minute: 05:13-05:45). This quote reflects the use of *logos*, where Anies explained the results of his legal team's investigation into fraud that occurred before the vote. He seeks to build a rational argument that the resulting election results are invalid because interventions contaminate them before voters enter the polling stations.

Furthermore, he emphasizes the importance of clean elections by stating that *"Free, honest, and fair elections are the pillars that give strong legitimacy to the elected government"* (ID P05, Minute: 04:30-04:50). Here, he uses *logos* to build an argument that fairness in elections is not just a technical matter, but also about the moral legitimacy of the government. A government that is not honestly elected will lose public legitimacy.

He also revealed a cautious approach to dealing with this fraud by stating, *"We chose the legal path to ensure that democracy is well maintained"* (ID P04, Minute: 06:10-06:50). This statement's *ethos* is powerful, as Anies emphasized that although he was aware of the irregularities, he was not rash. This shows a commitment not to create unnecessary polemics but to take legal channels to demand justice.

Stage 3: Accepting with objections

In the last stage, Anies accepts the election results but notes that the democratic process must be corrected to be cleaner in the future. Here, *ethos* and *pathos* again dominate, with Anies reinforcing his position as a leader who still respects the law, even as he highlights the injustices that undermine the integrity of the election.

One of the critical statements at this stage was, "*We will not let this deviation pass without correction. This deviation of democracy must be fought for the future of our nation*" (ID P05, Minute: 07:00-07:45). With this statement, Anies emphasizes that although he accepts the election results, he will still fight for a better democracy. *Ethos* is evident here, with Anies reinforcing his image as a figure who still stands on principles despite losing.

Furthermore, he stated, "*We accept the election results, but we must keep violations from becoming a habit that will damage our democracy*" (ID P05, Minute: 08:10-08:50). Anies uses *pathos* to touch the feelings of his audience by showing that acceptance of the election results is not the end of the struggle. He asked for support so that they remain together to improve the electoral system in the future, because allowing irregularities will become a rotten culture that damages democracy.

Anies closed the speech with a message of hope: "*We choose to stay on the legal path because justice cannot be achieved without a constitutional process*" (ID P06, Minute: 09:00-09:40). Here, *ethos* becomes dominant, with Anies emphasizing that he will stick to the legal process and not be provoked to take actions that are not by democratic principles.

Asian Values Context in the Defeat Rhetoric of Anies–Muhaimin

The findings of this study demonstrate that the rhetorical strategies employed by Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar in their post-2024 presidential election defeat speeches are deeply intertwined with Asian socio-political values, particularly collectivism, the maintenance of social harmony, and the concept of saving face. In many Asian societies, acknowledging defeat is not merely a political admission but a socially charged event that carries implications for both personal and communal honour (Cheng & Rossner, 2023; Ho et al., 2004). The imperative to save face renders public admission of loss socially and emotionally costly, prompting political leaders to craft defeat rhetoric that preserves dignity for both themselves and their constituencies.

The *ethos*-driven strategies identified in this study—emphasising commitment to democracy, moral integrity, and personal credibility—can be understood as adaptations to the cultural expectations of saving face and collectivist values. As Dong et al. (2023) and Lim (2009) note, harmony motives in collectivist cultures encourage leaders to maintain both their own image and group cohesion, especially in situations that risk sparking conflict. Anies's emphasis on respecting the people's decision and Muhaimin's invocation of patience and divine will not only strengthen political credibility but also operate as mechanisms for safeguarding the collective honour of their support base.

The use of *pathos*—mobilising solidarity and optimism for change—also aligns with collectivist orientations, in societies that prioritise group welfare over individual gain, sustaining shared morale after political defeat becomes a central concern. Forsberg (2013) and Virdiyanti (2025) observe that in Southeast Asian

political contexts, emotional solidarity can function as a stabilising force in post-defeat scenarios and as a form of social capital for future mobilisation. By framing defeat as part of a longer struggle for moral and political transformation, Anies–Muhaimin fostered emotional cohesion that resonates with collectivist ideals of unity and shared purpose. Similarly, the *logos*-based appeals to honesty, fairness, and constitutional channels reflect the realities of elite-dominated patronage systems prevalent in many Asian countries (Ahmed, 2025; Scott, 1972). In such systems, legitimacy is not derived solely from electoral victory but also from the capacity to maintain political leverage within elite networks. By calling for systemic reform and adherence to legal procedures, Anies and Muhaimin projected themselves as guardians of democratic integrity while retaining relevance and alliances within the political establishment.

The rhetorical sequencing identified in this study—from rejecting results, to criticising the process, to accepting with objections—mirrors the indirect communication style characteristic of many Asian cultures (Kim & Park, 2015). This gradual approach functions as a “soft landing” strategy, avoiding abrupt confrontation and allowing time for political and emotional de-escalation among supporters. Such an approach enables leaders to voice criticism of electoral processes without fully severing political relationships that may be leveraged in the future.

By situating these rhetorical choices within the broader framework of Asian values, it becomes clear that the defeat rhetoric of Anies–Muhaimin was not merely a reactive political communication strategy to the 2024 presidential election outcome. Rather, it

reflected deeply embedded cultural norms that prioritise harmony, honour, and the preservation of power networks. These findings contribute to the scholarly understanding of how Aristotelian rhetorical elements—*ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos*—can be deployed adaptively in socio-political contexts where cultural imperatives shape both the form and function of political discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the defeat speeches of Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar after their loss in the 2024 Indonesian presidential election, using Aristotelian rhetorical theory to analyse six speeches delivered between February and March 2024. The findings show that these speeches were deliberate political acts rather than mere formalities, combining *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* to sustain credibility, preserve political relevance, and frame the loss as part of an ongoing moral and democratic struggle. Their rhetoric followed a sequential pattern—rejecting the results, criticising the process, and accepting with objections—allowing both leaders to navigate political transition without alienating supporters or breaking alliances.

The rhetorical choices reflected core Asian cultural values, especially collectivism, harmony preservation, and saving face. *Ethos* safeguarded personal and collective dignity, *pathos* maintained solidarity and optimism, and *logos* legitimised their stance through appeals to fairness and constitutional procedures. This indirect style, characteristic of Asian political discourse, enabled criticism without open confrontation, helping to avoid destabilising power networks and ensuring a stable political handover.

Despite offering novel insights into defeat rhetoric in Indonesia, the study is limited by its focus on a single case within a short time frame. The lack of triangulation with audience reception or cross-country comparisons restricts generalisability. Future research could explore similar rhetoric in other Asian democracies, track shifts across election cycles, or analyse how concession rhetoric interacts with media framing and digital communication to shape public perception.

Theoretically, this research situates rhetorical practice within a culturally

specific framework, showing how classical rhetoric adapts to collectivist, harmony-oriented contexts. Practically, it highlights how defeat speeches, when strategically crafted, can reduce post-election tensions, reinforce legitimacy, and sustain political capital. In polarised societies, such rhetoric can stabilise political climates and reposition leaders for future influence. The Anies–Muhaimin case illustrates that, in Asia, defeat rhetoric functions as a culturally mediated strategy for political continuity, moral positioning, and democratic legitimacy.

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