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FROM CANDIDATE TO PRESIDENT-ELECT: (IM)POLITENESS AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN PRABOWO SUBIANTO'S AL JAZEERA INTERVIEWS

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Abstract:
Political interviews are consequential sites for examining how (im)politeness, power, and political identity are negotiated through interaction. However, existing political (im)politeness research and reciprocity studies have paid limited attention to how reciprocal and non-reciprocal practices change when the same political actor moves across substantially different positions of political authority. This study examines how Prabowo Subianto constructs and negotiates political identity through (im)politeness and how these practices relate to changing power relations in his 2013 and 2024 Al Jazeera English interviews. Using a qualitative comparative design across two time points, the study examines interview transcripts through interactional pragmatic discourse analysis, with the Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity as the primary framework and relational work, rapport management, and identity analysis as complementary lenses. The findings show defensive and cooperative practices in both interviews, alongside differences in the grounds on which authority is claimed: personal integrity and prospective leadership are salient in 2013, while electoral mandate and national interests become explicit resources in 2024. The study contributes to reciprocity-based (im)politeness research by showing how reciprocal practices participate in situated political identity negotiation across two institutional positions, without attributing the observed differences solely to changing political power.

Keywords: *(im)politeness; political identity; political interviews; reciprocity; relational work.*

1. Introduction

Political interviews provide a particularly consequential environment for studying (im)politeness because speakers must simultaneously manage interpersonal relations, public accountability, and the identities they project to multiple audiences. In such encounters, politeness and impoliteness are not adequately understood as fixed linguistic choices or simply as degrees of civility; they are interactional practices through which participants negotiate face, relational expectations, power, and social identity. Contemporary approaches foreground relational negotiation and context-sensitive evaluation in the analysis of (im)politeness (Culpeper & Haugh, 2021; Locher & Watts, 2005) Within this development, the Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity is particularly relevant because it conceptualizes (im)politeness in terms of the matching or mismatching of participants' behaviour, while recognizing the role of morality, context, and power in shaping such expectations (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). This perspective makes political interviews analytically significant: shifts in political status may alter not only what a speaker says, but also how relational behaviour is produced and interpreted.

Recent research demonstrates the value of examining political discourse through interactionally sensitive pragmatic lenses, although studies have tended to emphasize particular communicative settings or strategy inventories. Mulyono

et al. (2025) examine how politeness principles are used in speech acts during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election debate, providing a political-discourse comparison for the present interview study. Juita et al. (2024) examine linguistic politeness in Indonesian female politicians' social-media communication, offering a comparison across political participants and communicative settings. Most importantly for the present study, Culpeper and Tantucci (2021) establish reciprocity as a mechanism through which participants' (im)politeness behaviour is interpreted in relation to one another, including under conditions of unequal power. Culpeper et al. (2025) subsequently test impoliteness reciprocity using matched online and face-to-face datasets, examining differences involving third parties, escalation, sarcasm, and resonance. Together, these studies establish a strong basis for treating (im)politeness as relational and consequential for identity.

However, this literature leaves an important analytical problem unresolved. The political-language studies reviewed here examine politeness strategies in debates and social-media communication (Juita et al., 2024; Mulyono et al., 2025) , whereas the reciprocity studies examine requestive exchanges and matched online and face-to-face interaction (Culpeper et al., 2025; Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). Consequently, we still know comparatively little about how reciprocal and non-reciprocal (im)politeness operates when the political status of the same speaker changes substantially across time. This limitation matters because political power is not merely a contextual variable external to interaction: changing institutional and relational positions may reshape expectations concerning entitlement, accountability, deference, challenge, and resistance. A speaker who must defend legitimacy as a presidential candidate may encounter interactional obligations different from those confronting a president-elect. Treating the two encounters as equivalent therefore risks overlooking how power repositioning reorganizes the pragmatic meaning of politeness, impoliteness, accommodation, resistance, and escalation. A longitudinal analysis is consequently needed to examine how these relational practices participate in the ongoing construction of political identity rather than treating identity as a stable attribute attached to the speaker.

To address this limitation, this study examines how Prabowo Subianto constructs and negotiates political identity through (im)politeness in his 2013 and 2024 *Al Jazeera* interviews, focusing specifically on how reciprocal and non-reciprocal interactional practices relate to changing power relations. The study employs qualitative interactional pragmatic analysis of the interview exchanges, attending to sequences of challenge, resistance, accommodation, mitigation, escalation, alignment, and repair in order to interpret how (im)politeness contributes to identity performance across the two political positions. Its primary contribution is to connect the Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity with political identity negotiation across two time points, examining how continuity and variation in relational practices accompany different claims to authority. Rather than evaluating Prabowo's discourse according to whether it is simply "polite" or "impolite," the study conceptualizes (im)politeness as relational work through which authority, legitimacy, distance, solidarity, and political positioning are negotiated. In doing so, it extends reciprocity-based (im)politeness research into transnational political interview

discourse while contributing a language-centred account of political identity formation.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: From Politeness Strategies to Relational and Reciprocal Practice

The theoretical development of politeness research provides the foundation for understanding (im)politeness as an interactional resource rather than a fixed property of linguistic forms. Brown and Levinson's (1987) influential model conceptualizes politeness principally through the management of face-threatening acts (FTAs), distinguishing positive politeness, which attends to solidarity and approval, from negative politeness, which attends to autonomy and non-imposition. The model also proposes that strategic choices are conditioned by power, social distance, and the ranking of imposition. Although this framework remains foundational, its universalist orientation has been extensively questioned for treating face and politeness as relatively stable categories that can be predicted from social variables. Subsequent scholarship has therefore emphasized the evaluative, situated, and culturally embedded nature of politeness (Locher & Watts, 2005). From this perspective, the analytical focus shifts from whether a particular linguistic form is inherently polite to how participants evaluate behaviour in context. Such a shift is particularly important for political interviews, where apparently similar expressions may perform different relational functions depending on sequential position, interlocutors, institutional expectations, and changing power relations.

The concept of relational work provides a particularly useful bridge between classical politeness theory and contemporary interactional pragmatics. Locher and Watts (2005) argue that politeness should not be equated with FTA mitigation because interaction includes polite, impolite, and merely appropriate behaviour. Relational work encompasses the broader effort through which participants negotiate interpersonal relationships and social positioning. This perspective is compatible with Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach to identity, in which identity is understood as an emergent product of linguistic and semiotic practices rather than a fixed attribute that exists prior to interaction. Identity is consequently relationally constructed through processes involving similarity and difference, genuineness and artifice, and authority and delegitimacy (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In political interviews, relational work can therefore be examined as a mechanism through which speakers simultaneously manage the relationship with the interviewer and perform publicly recognizable identities such as candidate, military figure, statesman, or national leader. This theoretical position avoids reducing political identity to a pre-existing demographic or institutional category and instead treats it as something accomplished through discourse.

2.2 Impoliteness, Identity, and the Principle of Reciprocity

The contemporary study of impoliteness further strengthens this interactional perspective. Culpeper (2011) treats impoliteness as context-dependent and evaluative. Culpeper and Haugh (2021) examine the metalanguage of offence and show that its meanings are shaped by linguistic and cultural context. Together,

these perspectives support examining evaluations of potentially offensive behaviour rather than assigning impoliteness solely from linguistic. This is particularly relevant to political discourse because challenges, accusations, dismissals, sarcasm, and confrontational responses may simultaneously threaten another participant's face and strengthen the speaker's projected authority. Consequently, an utterance that appears aggressive from one evaluative position may be interpreted as assertive, authentic, or legitimate from another. The analytical task is therefore not simply to identify impolite forms but to reconstruct how their interactional meanings emerge within particular sequences.

This orientation is developed most directly by Culpeper and Tantucci's (2021) Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity (PIR). The principle proposes that (im)politeness is shaped by the expectation of reciprocity: participants tend to respond to interactional behaviour in ways that create a balance, or perceived imbalance, between their respective contributions. Reciprocity is therefore not equivalent to mechanical behavioural repetition. Rather, it concerns how participants interpret what they owe or are entitled to receive from one another and how these expectations generate pragmatic inferences. Importantly, Culpeper and Tantucci (2021) connect reciprocity to morality and demonstrate its interaction with contextual factors, including power. This makes PIR particularly valuable for political interaction because political interviews are inherently asymmetrical yet simultaneously organized around expectations of accountability and responsiveness. A challenge from an interviewer may invite resistance from a politician; resistance may generate further challenge; and mitigation, accommodation, or escalation may subsequently recalibrate the relationship. Culpeper et al. (2025) extend this proposition empirically by testing the applicability of reciprocity to impoliteness in online and face-to-face interaction. Their analysis shows that impoliteness may be reciprocally matched, escalated, redistributed through third-party intervention, or shaped by interactional mechanisms such as sarcasm and dialogic resonance. This development is theoretically significant because it moves the study of impoliteness from individual acts toward chains of interactional response. For political discourse, the implication is that an apparently impolite utterance should not be interpreted in isolation. Its pragmatic significance depends partly on what precedes it, how the recipient responds, and whether subsequent interaction reinforces, resists, mitigates, or transforms the initial relational positioning. The reciprocity perspective therefore complements relational work by supplying a more explicitly sequential account of how interpersonal meanings are dynamically negotiated.

2.3 Thematic Synthesis: Rapport, Culture, Power, and Identity

A further theme emerging from the literature is the relationship between (im)politeness and rapport management. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) framework expands the analysis beyond face by conceptualizing rapport through three interconnected dimensions: face sensitivities, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. Rapport may consequently be enhanced, maintained, neglected, or challenged depending on how participants evaluate their treatment and whether interactional expectations are met. This framework is especially relevant to political interviews because the interaction involves competing goals. The interviewer seeks information and accountability, whereas

the political actor may seek to defend legitimacy, maintain credibility, redirect a question, or project authority. A response that challenges rapport at the interpersonal level may nevertheless serve an important institutional or identity-related goal. Rapport management therefore helps explain why political speakers may tolerate, resist, or strategically reciprocate confrontational behaviour rather than simply seeking interpersonal harmony.

The literature also demonstrates that pragmatic evaluations are culturally and contextually conventionalized. Leech and Larina (2014) argue that politeness cannot be adequately understood without recognizing variation in social distance, hierarchy, and culturally specific expectations. Terkourafi (2015) similarly emphasizes conventionalization, showing that pragmatic meanings emerge through recurrent relationships between linguistic expressions and contexts rather than through universal mappings between forms and politeness values. These insights caution against interpreting political behaviour through a single culturally neutral standard. For the present interviews, expectations concerning respect, hierarchy, and appropriate public conduct are treated as possible contextual considerations that require evidence from the interaction, rather than as established properties of Indonesian political communication. The significance of a confrontational response must therefore be interpreted in relation to the interactional norms within which it occurs rather than judged solely against an abstract universal notion of civility. Cultural context, however, should function as an interpretive resource rather than a deterministic explanation: not every Indonesian political utterance can be attributed to a single cultural value.

A further theme concerns the relationship between (im)politeness and identity performance. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) conceptualize identity as produced through linguistic interaction, while Swann et al. (2009) examine the negotiation of self-views and others' evaluations in organizational settings. Identity negotiation has also been studied in other settings: Sunesti et al. (2018) examine agency and religious identity among young Salafi-niqabi women in Surakarta, and Xian et al. (2021) investigate women's negotiation of successor and leadership roles in Chinese family businesses. These studies provide contextual comparisons for identity negotiation; they do not directly establish how politeness operates in political interviews. The link between (im)politeness and political identity in the present study is therefore developed through relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) and the analysis of Taken together, these themes indicate that power should not be treated merely as a background variable. Brown and Levinson (1987) operationalize power as one contextual factor influencing strategic choice, whereas relational and reciprocity-based approaches allow power to be examined as something that is also enacted and negotiated through interaction. A politician does not simply possess power; the interaction can display, contest, or recalibrate the degree of authority that the politician is able to claim. This distinction becomes particularly important when the same speaker is examined across different political roles. The pragmatic meaning of assertiveness, resistance, accommodation, or deference may change when the speaker moves from a politically contested candidate to an office-holder with greater institutional legitimacy.

2.4 Critical Evaluation and the Present Analytical Position

Despite substantial theoretical development, three limitations remain important. First, much politeness

research still operationalizes (im)politeness through identifiable strategies or categories, which can encourage analysts to classify individual utterances without sufficiently reconstructing their sequential development. Relational work and PIR address this limitation by emphasizing participant evaluation and reciprocal interaction, but their implications for political identity across changing political roles remain insufficiently explored. Second, Culpeper et al. (2025) find that impoliteness reciprocity applies in both online and face-to-face interaction, while its distribution varies with features including third-party participation, escalation, sarcasm, and resonance. Political interviews represent a distinct institutional setting in which the interaction is dyadic, publicly accountable, highly mediated, and asymmetrical in access to institutional authority. Findings from online exchanges therefore cannot simply be transferred to televised or transnational interviews. Third, the studies reviewed here leave room for closer integration of sequential (im)politeness analysis with political identity negotiation across different institutional positions. The present study addresses this intersection. It treats political identity as interactionally achieved (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005) , (im)politeness as relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) , and reciprocity as a mechanism through which relational expectations are confirmed, challenged, or recalibrated (Culpeper et al., 2025; Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). Rapport management provides an account of face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), while conventionalization directs attention to relationships among expressions, contexts, and speakers (Terkourafi, 2015).

This integrated position produces a more precise analytical framework for examining Prabowo Subianto's 2013 and 2024 *Al Jazeera* interviews. The study does not assume that Prabowo possesses a stable political identity that is merely expressed differently across the two interviews. Instead, identity is treated as an interactional accomplishment emerging through responses to challenges, the management of disagreement, the balancing of mitigation and assertion, and the reciprocal organization of (im)politeness. The longitudinal comparison is consequently theoretically meaningful because the two interviews represent different configurations of political authority. The analytical focus is not whether Prabowo became "more polite" or "less polite" over time, but how changes in reciprocal relational practices correspond to changing claims to authority, legitimacy, solidarity, and distance. This approach also permits a more nuanced interpretation of escalation: escalation is not automatically equivalent to greater impoliteness, because its pragmatic meaning depends on sequential uptake, reciprocal expectations, power relations, and the identity being performed.The resulting framework places reciprocity at the intersection of relational work, rapport management, power, and political identity, providing a basis for examining continuity and variation in identity positioning across the two interviews.

3. Research Method

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive research design grounded in interactional pragmatic and discourse-analytic approaches to examine how (im)politeness participates in the construction and negotiation of political identity. A qualitative orientation is appropriate for interpreting contextual meanings rather than estimating the

frequency of linguistic forms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) The specific focus on relational meaning is informed by Locher and Watts (2005) Accordingly, lexical choices, prosody, pauses, laughter, hesitation, overlap, emphasis, and sequential positioning are considered resources through which participants signal stance, alignment, resistance, and relational positioning.

The design is particularly suited to the study's conceptualization of (im)politeness as relational and reciprocal practice. Rather than assuming that linguistic forms possess fixed politeness values, the analysis examines how their pragmatic force emerges through interaction and participant uptake (Locher & Watts, 2005). The central analytical principle is Culpeper and Tantucci's (2021) Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity (PIR), which directs attention to how participants respond to one another's (im)politeness and to whether interactional behaviour is reciprocated, mismatched, mitigated, or escalated. Relational work provides an account of interpersonal negotiation (Locher & Watts, 2005), while rapport management addresses face, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Political identity is consequently treated as an interactional accomplishment rather than a stable attribute: Prabowo's identities as candidate, military figure, statesman, or president-elect are examined through the linguistic and relational practices through which these positions are enacted and negotiated.

The study therefore combines micro-level interactional analysis with context-sensitive interpretation. At the micro level, attention is given to individual turns and sequences of interaction; at the interpretive level, these sequences are related to changing political roles, institutional power, sociocultural expectations, and the transnational media setting. This approach enables the analysis to explain not merely whether Prabowo uses polite or impolite language, but how particular practices become meaningful within the unfolding interaction and how their meanings may change as his political position changes.

3.2 Data Source and Context

The dataset consists of two English-language interviews with Prabowo Subianto broadcast by Al Jazeera English, conducted in 2013 and 2024. The selection is theoretically motivated rather than intended to constitute a statistically representative corpus. The two interviews provide analytically contrasting interactional contexts in which the same political actor occupies substantially different political positions. The 2013 interview presents Prabowo as a presidential candidate operating within a contested political environment and responding to questions concerning his political ambitions, military past, and democratic credentials. The 2024 interview represents a later stage in his political trajectory, when he was positioned as president-elect and addressed issues associated with national leadership, governance, and Indonesia's international position.

The two interviews therefore constitute a longitudinal comparative case. The eleven-year interval between the interviews permits a comparison of interactional behaviour across two political positions, although it does not reveal the intervening developmental process. The comparison does not assume that political power mechanically determines linguistic behaviour. Rather, political position is treated as an important contextual condition that may reshape participants' expectations concerning entitlement, accountability, authority, deference, and challenge. This distinction is important to a pragmatic analysis because the same linguistic behaviour may perform different

relational functions when produced from different positions of institutional authority.

The selection of *Al Jazeera English* is also significant. As an international news organization, the interviews place an Indonesian political actor within a transnational media environment in which local expectations concerning political conduct interact with the norms of international political journalism. The interviews consequently provide a productive setting for examining how Prabowo negotiates the competing demands of authority, credibility, accountability, and relational appropriateness. The dataset is analyzed as naturally occurring mediated interaction rather than as elicited responses, allowing the study to examine how (im)politeness emerges under conditions of public scrutiny.

3.3 Data Collection and Transcription

The analysis presented here uses speaker-labelled transcripts of two publicly available Al Jazeera English interviews. The excerpts retain lexical content, sequential order, and the supplied turn markers. Jefferson (2004) provides conventions for representing interactional delivery, but the excerpts reproduced here do not support claims about timed pauses, overlap, laughter, or emphasis unless those features have been independently checked against the recordings. The transcript presentation supports analysis of question design, response formulation, and subsequent uptake. Delivery-dependent interpretations require additional audiovisual verification. Timestamps are treated as supplied turn markers, and duplicated markers are not taken as evidence of overlap.

Each interview was subsequently segmented into interactionally meaningful sequences, particularly exchanges involving challenge, resistance, accommodation, mitigation, escalation, alignment, distancing, or repair. This sequencing is essential to the application of PIR because reciprocity cannot be adequately established from isolated utterances. An utterance is interpreted in relation to the preceding action, the recipient's uptake, and subsequent interactional development. Thus, the unit of analysis is not simply the individual sentence but the interactional sequence in which (im)politeness is produced, responded to, and potentially transformed.

3.4 Analytical Framework and Procedure

The analysis follows a four-stage procedure integrating (im)politeness reciprocity, impoliteness, relational work, and identity performance. The theoretical hierarchy is deliberate. Culpeper and Tantucci's (2021) PIR constitutes the principal analytical framework, while Culpeper's (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021) impoliteness model, Locher and Watts's (2005) relational-work perspective, and Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management framework provides complementary analytical resources.

Stage 1: Identification of interactional (im)politeness. The transcripts were first examined to identify potentially relevant episodes involving politeness, impoliteness, mitigation, confrontation, challenge, alignment, distancing, or resistance. Culpeper's (2011) contextual and evaluative account informed the identification of potentially face-aggravating practices; classifications such as sarcasm or mock politeness require supporting contextual and participant evidence. Brown and Levinson's (1987) framework was used selectively to identify face-oriented mitigation and positive or negative

politeness where relevant. These categories were not treated as predetermined meanings; rather, they functioned as initial descriptive tools for locating potentially significant interactional episodes.

Stage 2: Reciprocity analysis. Each identified episode was then examined through the Principle of (Im)politeness Reciprocity (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021). The analysis asked how one participant responded to the (im)politeness of another and whether the response represented reciprocity, mismatch, mitigation, accommodation, resistance, or escalation. Particular attention was paid to sequences in which an interviewer challenge was followed by defensive resistance, counter-challenge, accommodation, or reformulation. This stage also draws on Culpeper et al. (2025) , whose work tests impoliteness reciprocity and examines escalation in online and face-to-face interaction. The objective was not to classify every exchange as reciprocal or non-reciprocal, but to establish how reciprocal expectations shaped the development of particular interactional sequences.

Stage 3: Relational and rapport interpretation. The identified reciprocal patterns were subsequently interpreted as forms of relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005). The analysis considered whether participants' practices constructed solidarity, maintained distance, challenged the interlocutor, defended face, or renegotiated authority. Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport-management framework provided an additional interpretive layer by considering face sensitivities, sociality rights and obligations, and interactional goals. This stage prevents the analysis from equating impoliteness with interpersonal failure: a confrontational response may simultaneously threaten rapport and accomplish an identity-related or institutional goal.

Stage 4: Political identity and longitudinal comparison. Finally, interactional patterns were interpreted in relation to political identity and changing power relations. Following Bucholtz and Hall (2005) , identity is conceptualized as relationally produced through discourse rather than simply expressed through it. The analysis therefore examines how Prabowo's responses position him as, for example, a defensive candidate, authoritative leader, statesman, nationalist, or diplomatic actor. The 2013 and 2024 interviews are then compared to identify shifts in reciprocal (im)politeness practices and their relationship to changing political roles. The central analytical question is not whether Prabowo became more or less polite, but how the interactional meaning and relational consequences of (im)politeness change as his political authority changes.

Analytical claims are presented through timestamped, speaker-labelled sequences so that readers can inspect the relationship between the transcript evidence and the interpretation. Interpretive claims were grounded in timestamped, speaker-labelled transcript excerpts so that conclusions concerning reciprocity, escalation, identity, and power could be traced directly to observable interactional evidence. The use of theoretical triangulation further enabled the researcher to distinguish the identification of an (im)politeness practice from its relational interpretation and its subsequent relevance to political identity.

3.5 Limitations and Methodological Scope

The study's principal limitation is the small and purposively selected dataset of two interviews. The longitudinal design provides analytical depth but does not support statistical generalization to

Prabowo's entire communicative repertoire or to Indonesian politicians more generally. The findings should therefore be understood as theoretically informed interpretations of two consequential interactional encounters. Future research could extend the approach through a larger corpus incorporating debates, domestic interviews, campaign speeches, and other media settings.

A second limitation concerns the English-mediated nature of the data. Because both interviews occur in English within an international media environment, the study primarily captures political identity performance through English-language interaction. It therefore cannot provide a comprehensive account of Indonesian- or Javanese-language politeness practices, including locally specific pragmatic systems such as *unggah-ungguh*. This limitation is analytically productive as well as restrictive because it enables focused examination of how an Indonesian political actor negotiates identity and authority in transnational English-language media.

Finally, qualitative interpretation inevitably involves researcher judgement. Rather than treating subjectivity as eliminable, the study addresses it through transparency in transcription, sequential analysis, repeated engagement with the audiovisual data, theoretical triangulation, and evidence-based interpretation. Most importantly, the analysis avoids inferring intention solely from linguistic form. Claims about politeness, impoliteness, reciprocity, and identity are grounded in the interactional sequence and its observable uptake. This methodological position is consistent with contemporary pragmatic approaches that regard (im)politeness as contextually evaluated and relationally constructed rather than as an inherent property of linguistic expressions (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021; Locher & Watts, 2005).

4. Results And Discussion

The comparison identifies both continuity and contextual variation in Prabowo Subianto's management of accountability, authority, and affiliation. Defensive responses occur in both interviews, and cooperative responses are also present in both. The evidence therefore qualifies a straightforward transition from a confrontational candidate in 2013 to a reassuring president-elect in 2024. A more defensible distinction concerns the grounds on which authority is claimed: personal integrity and prospective leadership are salient in the earlier interview, while an electoral mandate and national interests become explicit resources in the later interview. These are situated identity performances; the comparison does not establish a comprehensive change in personality or communicative style.

The excerpts below reproduce selected passages from the supplied transcripts. V identifies Veronika Pedrosa in 2013, J identifies Jessica Washinton, the 2024 interviewer, and P identifies Prabowo. Timestamps are source-transcript turn markers, normalized to HH:MM:SS; they are not independently verified onset times. Where several turns have the same marker, the supplied sequence is retained without inferring simultaneity. […] marks editorial omission, whereas unbracketed ellipses reproduce the supplied text. Numbering identifies extract lines rather than original transcript lines. The analysis makes no claims about intonation, laughter, interruption, or precisely timed pauses that cannot be established from these scripts. Examples are illustrative, not a frequency sample.

4.1 Accountability challenges and defensive reciprocity across both interviews

The 2013 interview links Prabowo's proposed leadership identity to allegations concerning his military career. The interviewer's follow-up makes denial an explicit matter for response.

Excerpt 1 Military allegations and denial in 2013

01 V [00:08:59]: You talk about honesty and cleanliness. And there have been some accusations against you about alleged abductions when you were at the top of the chain of command, for example. About atrocities that occurred in East Timor during the time when you were leading Kopassus. Can you explain those in the interest of this being the clean and honest leader that you mentioned?

02 P [00:09:02]: Yes. When you serve as a soldier in the highest echelons, you will always be subject to accusations, charges, defamation of character. That's the risk of your profession. […] But most of these charges, nearly all, are defamation of character. They are designed to destroy my integrity. […] But the Indonesian people, they are not that stupid. That's why I'm getting strong support now.

03 V [00:10:30]: So do you deny those accusations outright?

04 P [00:10:42]: Of course, I've denied many times. On record, I've been accused of planning a coup d'etat.

The initiating question juxtaposes honesty with allegations, making consistency between Prabowo's public claims and past conduct relevant. His response does not initially treat the allegations as separate factual questions. Instead, "risk of your profession" normalizes being accused, while "defamation of character" recategorizes allegations as attacks on integrity. The reference to popular support introduces a public constituency as a competing source of evaluation. These are observable strategies of legitimacy defence; they do not establish the truth or falsity of the allegations.

Through PIR (Culpeper & Tantucci, 2021), the sequence can be read as a negotiation of reciprocal accountability: the interviewer solicits an explanation, while Prabowo challenges the legitimacy of the accusatory frame. Line 03 provides important evidence of the interviewer's uptake. The explicit request for denial shows that the earlier account has not settled the interviewer's demand for clarification. "Of course" and "many times" then present the answer as already available and potentially repetitive. This supports an interpretation of resistance to the terms of questioning, but not an automatic classification of the entire exchange as reciprocal impoliteness. The interviewer's institutional obligation to scrutinize allegations remains an alternative basis for understanding the challenge.

A comparable defensive pattern remains available in 2024, despite Prabowo's changed political position.

Excerpt 2 Electoral mandate and military identity in 2024

01 J [00:20:01]: There is a segment of the population, Mr President-elect, that has expressed some concern on the basis of not your time as Defence Minister, but your past in the military. That they have concerns about that and accountability. How would you ensure that they also feel that you are a president for them?

02 P [00:20:22]: You talk about democracy. The people have decided. Full stop. What concerns? […] I was a general. I'm a proud general. I served my people, served my country. […] I've been accused of so many things. It's called demonization. That is called character assassination. It's part of the tools of politics.

03 J [00:21:11]: For the people who didn't vote for you, what would your message be to them?
04 P [00:21:15]: I told them that they will see. I'm a man of my word. […] But in the end, I feel the mandate. I will work for my people. Even those who do not vote for me, I will defend them.

The response in line 02 contests the question's premise through "What concerns?" and invokes the election as a warrant for closing debate: "The people have decided. Full stop." The repeated first-person declarations also affirm a military identity rather than distancing the speaker from it. "Demonization" and "character assassination" closely resemble the earlier recategorization of allegations as defamation. Defensive legitimacy work therefore persists across the two encounters.

The difference lies partly in the authority resource mobilized. In Excerpt 1, popular support is invoked to bolster a candidate's credibility; in Excerpt 2, a completed electoral decision is invoked as a mandate. Through Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) identity perspective, this is an attempt to authorize the speaking self as an elected national representative. Electoral victory is not evidence that accountability concerns have disappeared; it is a resource Prabowo deploys to answer them.

The interviewer's next turn reformulates the issue around non-voters, and Prabowo responds with an inclusive commitment. This local shift from defensive closure to reassurance shows why identity analysis must follow sequences rather than assign a single persona to an entire interview. Rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008) helps distinguish the challenge to the accountability frame in line 02 from the later promise to protect a wider constituency. The sequence supports coexistence of defence and inclusion, rather than the replacement of one by the other.

4.2 Counter challenges and contested rights to question

Resistance also concerns who may assess the relevance or adequacy of an interviewer's question. The 2013 exchange about Prabowo's exclusion from the United States illustrates a contested analogy.

Excerpt 3 A challenged analogy in 2013

01 V [00:11:12]: The track record, though, has also led to your being blacklisted from the US, hasn't it?
02 P [00:11:19]: Well, Nelson Mandela was blacklisted from the United States at one time. Am I not in good company?
03 V [00:11:19]: But you're not Nelson Mandela either.
04 P [00:11:26]: I'm not, but he was, at one time, blacklisted. Many, many were blacklisted. It's part of the defamation campaign.

Prabowo answers the potentially discrediting reference to blacklisting with a counterexample and the rhetorical question "Am I not in good company?" The comparison challenges the inference that exclusion itself establishes discredit. The interviewer's "But" explicitly resists the identity association made available by that comparison. Prabowo concedes non-equivalence through "I'm not," then preserves the narrower analogy about blacklisting.

PIR directs attention to this successive adjustment: a challenge is answered by a counter-framing, which is itself challenged and then partially conceded. This is reciprocal contestation of evaluative positioning. Without audiovisual delivery or explicit participant evaluation, the exchange does not establish mock politeness, sarcasm, or equivalent degrees of offence. Relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005) nevertheless makes visible the

negotiation of credibility and the interviewer's resistance to a favourable association. The repeated 00:11:19 marker cannot establish overlap.

The 2024 Papua discussion provides stronger evidence that confrontational reciprocity remains part of Prabowo's repertoire.

Excerpt 4 Counter questioning during the Papua discussion in 2024

01 J [00:14:46]: Incidents seem to be concentrated, though, in Papua rather than throughout the country.
02 P [00:14:52]: How do you know that? Have you been there? Why didn't you go there?
03 J* [00:14:56]: Well, it's very difficult, actually, for foreign media to enter Papua.
04 P* [00:15:00]: You talk Papua as if... I'm not defending all incidents we will deal with seriously. But, you know, your question is a bit one-sided. Why don't you open the YouTube or the channels of these so-called Papua independence movement? On their channel, you can see how they mistreat their own people.

The source leaves the speaker cells for lines 03–04 blank. J* and P* are editorial attributions inferred from the exchange and require recording verification.

Line 01 challenges the preceding geographical contextualization of abuses. In response, three interrogatives shift the accountability burden onto the interviewer's access and knowledge. Subject to confirmation of the inferred speaker label, the explanation about media access in line 03 displays uptake of the counter-question before the discussion returns to the substantive issue. Line 04 then evaluates the question as "a bit one-sided." Although "a bit" mitigates the evaluation, the accusation contests journalistic balance and therefore has face-aggravating potential.

This sequence supports an interpretation of interactional intensification: a claim about the distribution of incidents develops into a challenge to the questioner's epistemic and professional standing. Such intensification is not a measured increase in impoliteness. Within PIR, the relevant observation is that the response redirects scrutiny toward the initiating participant, prompting an account from her. The analytical link to identity is consequently grounded in an observable redistribution of questioning rights, rather than an inferred desire to appear strong.

Excerpt 5 Journalistic balance and national authority in 2024

01 J [00:16:33]: I think perhaps the indignation is for both sides, just for people to live safely, Mr. President-elect.
02 P [00:16:38]: Oh yeah, we will secure the safety of our people. They've been attacking civilians many, many times. And you guys don't report that.
03 J [00:16:44]: Well, we try to report the full story.
04 P [00:16:47]: It's there. They propagate it.
05 J [00:16:50]: There is a perception from some human rights groups in Indonesia that perhaps what the situation needs is less militarisation.
06 P [00:16:58]: This is our national territory. We are not guided by NGOs. We will be guided by our national interests.

The opening turn presents concern for civilian safety as a potentially shared orientation. Prabowo initially aligns with safety, but then disputes the adequacy of reporting. The interviewer's defence of "the full story" displays her orientation to the accusation as professionally consequential. This uptake provides firmer grounds for identifying contested journalistic face than the analyst's judgement of directness alone.

The later move from NGO concerns to "our national territory" and "our national interests" changes the basis on which the issue is evaluated. The first-person plural positions the speaker as a representative

of a national collective while contesting external actors' entitlement to determine policy. This supports a situated performance of sovereign leadership, but it does not demonstrate that the interviewer accepts the boundary or that institutional authority gives Prabowo unrestricted control of the encounter. The preceding defence of reporting shows that competing institutional claims remain active.

4.3 Alignment and reassurance as resources available in both periods

Cooperation is not confined to the later interview. The 2013 discussion of consensus provides a useful counterexample to a uniformly defensive candidate identity.

Excerpt 6 Consensus and pragmatic leadership in 2013

01 V [00:22:30]: What I've noticed is your personal and your public personas and how they kind of intersect. […] But the system and circumstances and the world are such that one needs to build consensus often in order to come to a point where you can actually deliver what you need to deliver.
02 P [00:22:59]: Of course. You need to get bills through Parliament. Consensus building is very important
03 V [00:23:03]: So, let me ask you this. Where is that desire to build a consensus coming from, to be a pragmatic man who wishes to do business, someone that the world can do business with?
04 P [00:23:16]: You know, I've come to the conviction that life is compromise. But there are certain sets that we cannot compromise. We cannot compromise on corruption. We cannot compromise on stealing the resources of the people because these resources are needed for the livelihood of so many millions.

Prabowo accepts consensus as a relevant leadership requirement and supplies an institutional justification concerning parliamentary bills. The interviewer's next question takes up consensus as a feature of a pragmatic political identity, and his response develops that framing while maintaining limits around corruption. Identity positioning is therefore jointly developed rather than produced by the politician alone.

In PIR terms, the shared orientation is sustained across successive turns. This is evidence of alignment, but alignment should not automatically be classified as marked politeness: within an interview it may constitute appropriate, unmarked relational work. The extract nevertheless establishes that pragmatic accommodation and commitment to cooperation were already available in 2013. It weakens the claim that governability emerges only after electoral victory.

Excerpt 7 Reassurance about indigenous communities in 2024

01 J [00:10:10]: How will you address the concerns about how this project may affect the indigenous communities? There are some NGOs that estimate some 20,000 indigenous people may have to be relocated to make way for infrastructure for the capital. What can be done for them?
02 P [00:10:25]: The interest, the security, and the future of all the indigenous people are highest priority in my view. We have to protect them, we have to secure their livelihood, and we have to do a lot of planning and research that we do not displace too many people, and if we do, we must compensate and we have to guarantee their well-being.
03 J [00:11:02]: Because this is a theme that comes up not only in terms of the new capital, but whenever there are major development projects, for example, the Mandalika Circuit, Lombok, there are indigenous communities who feel they don't receive the benefits of these major infrastructures.
04 P [00:11:17]: Ya, I would like to repeat that in my life, in my commitment,

that I will defend the interests of my people, indigenous people included. We will defend them. My strongest support is from those who are weak.

Here Prabowo accepts the relevance of protection and responds with commitments formulated through "have to," "must," and "guarantee." The interviewer broadens the concern, and he reiterates the protective commitment. This response sustains engagement with the concern rather than counter-questioning the interviewer's entitlement to raise it. The contrast with Excerpts 4–5 occurs within the same interview, demonstrating the importance of topic and sequential environment.

Rapport management helps interpret protection and compensation as orientations to affected communities' rights and welfare. The identity implication is a projected protector of vulnerable citizens. These are discursive commitments, not evidence of policy implementation or audience approval. They also concern third parties: reassurance about indigenous communities cannot simply be equated with politeness toward the interviewer. PIR contributes here by locating the response relative to the initiating concern and its subsequent reformulation, without requiring every cooperative sequence to instantiate politeness matching.

4.4 Deferral and the limits of apparent accommodation

Excerpt 8 Repeated deferral concerning international observers in 2024

01 J [00:17:05]: There was an earlier, perhaps not a commitment, but something like a promise that the Jokowi administration would allow some observers from the UN to enter Papua to take a look at the situation. But that visit did not happen. Do you see that as something that should happen so that perhaps there can be fewer questions about what is going on?

02 P [00:17:30]: I will study the situation. I will study the situation.

03 J [00:17:33]: And perhaps a visit could take place under your administration?

04 P [00:17:37]: I will study the situation. But as I said, we will think about our national interests.

"I will study the situation" acknowledges the issue while withholding a decision. The interviewer pursues a more specific commitment, displaying an orientation to the first response as insufficiently specific. Prabowo repeats the formulation and adds a national-interest condition. The response does not reciprocate confrontation in the manner of Excerpt 4, but neither does it grant the requested position.

The sequence is best interpreted as commitment deferral combined with a claim to decision-making authority. Calling it politeness solely because it avoids an explicit refusal would conceal its resistant function. PIR makes the mismatch between the projected answer and the actual response analytically relevant; rapport management distinguishes avoidance of direct confrontation from satisfaction of the interviewer's information goal. The transcript supports neither an attribution of a conciliatory intention nor a conclusion that rapport was successfully restored.

4.5 Continuity and change in political identity and power

Across these extracts, sequential responses include counter-framing, counter-questioning, partial concession, sustained alignment, reassurance, and repeated deferral; their relevance to PIR depends on the relational expectations negotiated in each sequence. The contribution of PIR is to direct analysis toward the relationship between initiating actions and responses, including the recipient's uptake. Culpeper et al.'s

(2025) findings on impoliteness reciprocity are relevant to the counter-challenges, but these dyadic interviews do not establish that the mechanisms identified in their online and face-to-face datasets operate identically in broadcast interaction.

The comparison supports continuity in legitimacy defence. Both interviews contain the recategorization of allegations as politically motivated attacks, appeals to the people, and assertions of entitlement to leadership. The later interview additionally provides explicit formulations of electoral closure and national authority. The most defensible claim is therefore a rearticulation of available authority resources in these encounters, rather than a demonstrated replacement of defensive reciprocity by institutionalized politeness. The completed election provides a warrant that is unavailable in the same form to the earlier candidate, while the defensive practice itself remains recognizable.

Relational work and rapport management help explain why these practices cannot be placed on a single scale from impolite to polite. A response can align with civilian safety while attacking the press, acknowledge a question while withholding commitment, or endorse compromise while asserting non-negotiable principles. Similarly, Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) framework directs attention to how leadership identities are proposed, authorized, and contested through particular exchanges. Identity labels such as protector, candidate, or sovereign representative are analytical interpretations of these observable positionings, not independent explanations of the language.

Alternative explanations constrain the longitudinal interpretation. The interviews involve different interviewers, questions, and topical distributions. The 2024 transcript itself shows that the same speaker can offer reassurance about development and counter-challenge questions about Papua. Thus, topic sensitivity and the design of preceding questions are plausible explanations alongside changed political status. Media experience, preparation, and the selection or editing of broadcast material may also matter, but these transcripts do not isolate their effects. Two observations eleven years apart cannot establish the timing or durability of a career-wide transformation.

The extracts also do not warrant a general account of Indonesian or Javanese politeness norms. In the 2024 discussion, national territory and national interests are explicitly invoked and can therefore be analysed as participants' resources. Claims that behaviour reflects rukun, hormat, or a culturally more mature leadership style require additional evidence connecting those categories to the encounter. Cultural identity should not be inferred directly from the speaker's nationality or from the presence of mitigation.

5. Conclusion

These two interviews show that confrontation, cooperation, and authority claims remain available across different political roles. Political position matters as a discursive resource, especially when electoral mandate and national representation are explicitly invoked, but its effects are mediated by topic, question design, and sequential uptake. The evidence supports a context-sensitive account of identity negotiation and qualifies any general claim that increased political authority necessarily produces greater politeness.

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