



## A TRANSITIVITY ANALYSIS OF THE INDONESIAN PROTEST IN INTERNATIONAL ONLINE NEWS

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### **Abstrak**

Pada Agustus 2025, Indonesia menyaksikan protes besar di berbagai kota akibat memburuknya ekonomi dan tunjangan kontroversial bagi anggota parlemen. Aksi ini dipicu oleh tunjangan perumahan baru sebesar Rp50 juta (US\$3.000) per bulan dan berkembang menjadi tuntutan transparansi serta akuntabilitas pemerintah. Setelah kematian warga sipil Affan Kurniawan dalam operasi polisi, demonstrasi makin meluas dan menarik perhatian media internasional, menjadikannya kasus penting untuk mengkaji representasi kerusuhan politik di media global. Studi ini menganalisis pemberitaan CNN, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, dan Euro News menggunakan Sistem Transitivitas Halliday dalam kerangka Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik (LFS). Sebanyak 489 proses diidentifikasi dan diklasifikasikan ke dalam jenis material, verbal, relasional, mental, dan perilaku. Hasil menunjukkan dominasi proses material yang menyoroti tindakan fisik dan peristiwa yang dapat diamati. Perbedaan diksi mencerminkan gaya khas masing-masing media: CNN menonjolkan konflik, The Guardian menyoroti konteks kelembagaan, Al Jazeera menekankan emosi manusia, dan Euro News menjaga netralitas. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa pilihan linguistik tidak hanya melaporkan peristiwa, tetapi juga membangun perspektif ideologis dalam wacana media internasional.

**Kata kunci** : Analisis transitivitas, Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik, protes Indonesia, representasi berita internasional

### **Abstract**

*In August 2025, Indonesia witnessed protests across major cities as public anger grew over worsening economic conditions and controversial benefits for lawmakers. The demonstrations, initially sparked by a new Rp50 million (US\$3,000) monthly housing allowance, quickly developed into broader demands for transparency and accountability. Following the death of a civilian, Affan Kurniawan, during a police operation, the protests intensified and drew international media attention, making them a case for examining how*



*global news outlets represent political unrest. This study analyzes how four international media organizations. CNN, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and Euro News portrayed these events using Halliday's Transitivity System within the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). A total of 489 processes were identified and classified into Material, Verbal, Relational, Mental, and Behavioral types. The findings show that Material processes dominate across all articles, emphasizing physical actions and observable events. Differences in word choice reflect each outlet's style: CNN stresses conflict and immediacy, The Guardian focuses on institutional context, Al Jazeera highlights emotion and human experience, and Euro News maintains factual neutrality. These results illustrate that linguistic selection not only reports events but also constructs ideological perspectives in global media discourse.*

**Keywords:** *Transitivity analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, Indonesian protests, international news representation*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Language is not only a tool of communication but also a medium through which social realities are constructed. According to Hariati (2025) Language is one of the most powerful tools human possess to shape thought, culture, and behavior. Media discourse, in particular, plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of political events by framing participants, actions, and power relations in specific ways. Islam and Hamdani (2025) explain about mass media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion thru narrative choices and representation. Zakizadeh (2024) also talks about media; for example, newspapers can represent people's vision and guide or change the way that they think or react to something. Political protests are a clear example of this, as they often receive competing portrayals in different outlets. While some reports emphasize legitimacy and public grievance, others highlight disorder or threat. Because of this, protest discourse has become an important subject for linguistic analysis, especially in international media that construct narratives of one nation for a global audience.

In late August 2025, Indonesia witnessed large-scale demonstrations in Jakarta and other major cities. These protests initially arose in response to the new housing allowance of Rp50 million (US\$3,000) per month for every parliament member, which many citizens regarded as excessive. As the movement grew, demands expanded to include the cancellation of high salaries and allowances, greater transparency in the national budget, and the removal of policies perceived as favoring big business and the military. Protesters also called for the dissolution of parliament, the resignation of certain political figures, and accountability for past human rights abuses. The situation escalated further after the death of a civilian, Affan Kurniawan, under a police tactical vehicle, which intensified anger and led to renewed calls for police reform and the resignation of the National Police Chief.

From a linguistic perspective, how these events are represented in news coverage is far from neutral. Journalists' choices in describing actions, attributing responsibility, and highlighting particular perspectives can shape readers' perceptions of both protesters and authorities. To investigate this, the present study adopts Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), developed by (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). SFL views language as a resource for making meaning through three metafunctions: ideational (representing experience), interpersonal (enacting relationships), and textual (organizing messages). Within the ideational metafunction, transitivity analysis focuses on how processes (actions, events, states), participants, and circumstances are encoded in clauses. Klasingto (2023) stated transitivity has been widely used as a tool to compare and analyze the ideology and representation in news headlines. This



approach is particularly valuable for uncovering how responsibility, agency, and ideology are constructed in news texts.

Previous studies have demonstrated the usefulness of transitivity analysis across a range of genres. Fadilah and Kuswoyo (2021) investigated the transitivity properties (processes, participants, and circumstances) used in the presidential debate between Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the presidential election debate in 2020. El Houssine (2022) also explains the lexical choices and the linguistic devices used in headlines to represent Putin and Russia in the war between Russia and Ukraine. Syed et al. (2021) describe transitivity. Analysis of Female Characters in “The Boarding House” By James Joyce. Saputra, et al. (2022) examined the transitivity analysis of Sri Mulyani’s speech at the Singapore summit from a functional linguistics perspective. Despite this growing body of literature, relatively little attention has been given to how Indonesian protests are represented in international online news, even though such coverage significantly shapes global perceptions of Indonesia’s political climate. According to Asad et al. (2021), they had shown different stances through grammatical terms during 100 days of Pakatan Harapan (PH), which leads to uncovering the news institutions’ ideology by observing their past performances and current representation. This research aims to classify the type of transitivity process. This research employed the systemic functional linguistics theory of Halliday, particularly the transitivity system as a tool of analysis; more specifically, this research analyzed the process of transitivity. The data was collected from Sri Mulyani’ speech at the Singapore Summit. Khan et al. (2020) said transitivity can analyze both the isolated clauses and connected ones in their context. Alhumsi & Alsaedi (2023) state that grammar involves meaning that is achieved, based on Halliday’s theory, through three meta-functions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. Regarding the ideational function, it reflects human experience, and meaning is constructed through specific linguistic choices that involve systemic transitivity patterns.

This study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing transitivity patterns in selected international news articles covering the 2025 Indonesian protests. The research is guided by the following questions:

1. What kinds of transitivity processes are used in international online news coverage of the 2025 Indonesian protests?
2. How are participants represented in relation to those processes?
3. What ideological meanings can be inferred from the linguistic choices in these reports?

The significance of this research lies in both its academic and social contributions. Lastari (2023) states that transitivity analysis is used to identify the participants involved, the process that happened, and the circumstance. Theoretically, it extends the application of transitivity analysis to protest discourse in the Indonesian context, highlighting how linguistic resources shape representations of political conflict. Practically, it offers insights into how international audiences may interpret Indonesian socio-political unrest, thereby influencing perceptions of the country’s democracy, governance, and global image.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative research approach, applying Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), more specifically the Transitivity system, to analyze how the Indonesian protest of August 2025 is represented in international online news. Jamaludin and Hamdani (2025) Describe how meaning (the subject’s point of view) and method are given more weight in qualitative research. Sarwah (2025) explained Transitivity analysis enables the identification of how actions, participants, and circumstances are linguistically represented in



newspaper. The primary data consist of articles from four international media outlets, CNN, Euro news, Al Jazeera, and The Guardian, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that they directly reported on the protest and provided sufficient textual material for analysis. After collecting the data, the articles were compiled and segmented into clauses as the basic units of transitivity analysis. Each clause was then examined in terms of processes, participants, and circumstances, and the results were categorized to identify patterns of representation and the frequency of different process types. Finally, the findings were interpreted to reveal how international media linguistically framed the protest and the social actors involved. However, as this study focuses only on four media outlets, the findings may not fully capture all possible international perspectives on the Indonesian protest.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

This study analyzed four international news articles reporting on the Indonesian protests under President Prabowo Subianto. The selected news outlets are CNN, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and Euro News, each representing different global perspectives and journalistic traditions. The analysis applied Halliday's Transitivity System from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to identify and categorize the types of processes used in each report, including Material, Mental, Relational, Verbal, and Behavioral.

	CNN	The Guardian	AlJazeera	Euro News	Percent %	Total
<b>Material</b>	70	51	95	76	59.72%	292
<b>Mental</b>	5	4	20	4	6.74%	33
<b>Relational</b>	21	8	28	6	12.9%	63
<b>Verbal</b>	29	17	38	15	20.24%	99
<b>Behavioral</b>	0	0	2	0	0.4%	2
<b>Total</b>					<b>100%</b>	<b>489</b>

Table 1. Frequency of Processes in the Four News Articles

Across the four news articles, a total of 489 processes were identified. The Material process type occurs most frequently, with 292 instances in total, making up more than half of all processes found. This shows that all news outlets largely represent the protests through actions and events. Verbal processes follow with 99 occurrences, indicating a considerable amount of reported speech or quotation from participants and authorities. Relational processes appear 63 times, mainly used to describe states, attributes, or evaluations of the events. Mental processes are identified 33 times, suggesting limited representation of feelings, perceptions, or thoughts in the news coverage. Finally, Behavioral processes occur only twice, showing that actions related to human behavior or physiological activity are almost entirely absent from all four reports.

#### A. CNN

The CNN article contains 125 processes, consisting of 70 Material, 29 Verbal, 21 Relational, and 5 Mental. The dominance of Material processes (56%) shows that CNN focuses on actions and visible events to create a fast-paced and conflict-driven narrative.

Data 1. *Thousands of protesters across the archipelago set fire to legislative buildings...*

Table 2



Actor	Process: Material	Goal
Thousands of protesters across the archipelago	Set fire	to legislative buildings...

Material processes such as “set fire to legislative buildings” shown in Data 1 highlight the physical tension and scale of the protests. These dynamic verbs make the story vivid and event-oriented.

Data 2. *Amnesty International said that attaching those labels...*

Table 3

Sayer	Process: Verbal	Verbiage
Amnesty International	Said that	Attaching those labels...

Verbal processes like “Amnesty International said that attaching those labels to protesters ignored the underlying reasons” show how CNN integrates both personal and institutional voices to support its narrative.

Data 3. *...Prabowo's policies have been controversial...*

Table 4

Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute
...Prabowo's policies	Have been	controversial...

Relational processes in Data 3 describe conditions or states, providing subtle evaluation.

Data 4. *People are still upset at what's seen as a lack of change.*

Table 5

Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon
People	Have been	at what's seen as a lack of change.

Meanwhile, Mental processes such as “People are still upset at what's seen as a lack of change.” appear rarely and are usually found in quotations, giving a minor emotional perspective.

#### B. The Guardian

The Guardian article contains 80 processes in total, consisting of 51 Material, 17 Verbal, 8 Relational, and 4 Mental. Similar to CNN, Material processes dominate (63.75%), but the verbs used are less violent and more institutional, reflecting the outlet's analytical and policy-oriented tone.

Data 5. *The government implemented cuts to public spending.*

Table 6

Actor	Process: Material	Goal
The government	implemented	cuts to public spending.

This Material process shows The Guardian's focus on institutional and policy-level actions, not street-level violence. The choice of “implemented” reflects a bureaucratic tone rather than sensationalism typical of The Guardian's analytical style.

Data 6. *...A spokesperson said the measures were necessary.*

Table 7



Sayer	Process: Verbal	Verbiage
...A spokesperson	Said	The measures were necessary

Verbal processes such as “a spokesperson said the measures were necessary” as shown in data 6 show how The Guardian presents dialogue between official and civil voices, highlighting public debate rather than confrontation.

Data 7. ...*The policy is controversial.*

Table 8

Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute
...The policy	is	controversial.

Relational processes like this show The Guardian’s interpretive style. Rather than dramatizing events, it labels and characterizes them, using adjectives like controversial, divisive, or unpopular to convey critical perspective subtly.

Data 8. ...*many citizens felt ignored by the government...*

Table 9

Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon
...many citizen	felt	ignored by the government...

The Guardian uses Mental processes to humanize policy effects. Verbs like “felt,” “believed,” and “understood” appear occasionally, connecting political actions to public emotion — a reflection of its socially empathetic but still analytical tone.

#### C. AlJazeera

The Al Jazeera article contains 183 processes, consisting of 95 Material, 38 Verbal, 28 Relational, 20 Mental, and 2 Behavioral. Although Material processes still dominate (51.92%), Al Jazeera uses a more human-centered and emotionally charged approach than the other outlets.

Data 9. *Protesters helped residents rescue those trapped inside the burning building....*

Table 10

Actor	Process: Material	Goal
Protesters	helped	residents rescue those trapped inside the burning building...

This clause illustrates Al Jazeera’s tendency to foreground acts of collective and humanitarian effort. Though the Material process helped rescue, the outlet portrays the protesters not solely as agents of unrest but also as participants in socially constructive actions. This lexical choice aligns with Al Jazeera’s broader discourse orientation, which often emphasizes community solidarity and human agency within social

Data 10. ...*Afifah said there have been demonstrations since the start of the year...*

Table 11

Sayer	Process: Verbal	Verbiage
...Afifah	Said	there have been demonstrations since the start of the year...



The Verbal process exemplifies Al Jazeera's approach of foregrounding personal and eyewitness testimony. By selecting an ordinary participant as the Sayer, the outlet privileges local and individual perspectives, which aligns with its journalistic emphasis on human-centered narratives and participatory representation in reporting political events.

Data 11. *...the situation is critical...*

Table 12

Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute
...the situation	is	critical...

Data 11 conveys evaluation through description rather than direct judgment. The attribute critical signals an urgent or serious state, enabling the outlet to introduce a moral or evaluative stance in a linguistically neutral form. This reflects Al Jazeera's stylistic preference for embedding evaluation in relational expressions, thereby maintaining journalistic objectivity while conveying implicit concern.

Data 12. *...many people felt like no one cares about us....*

Table 13

Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon
...many people	felt	like no one cares about us...

This clause demonstrates Al Jazeera's effort to incorporate emotional and psychological dimensions into its news discourse. The use of the Mental process felt foregrounds collective sentiment, highlighting the population's feelings of neglect and marginalization. Such choices align with Al Jazeera's broader representational style, which seeks to humanize political reporting by integrating affective perspectives into the narrative structure.

Data 13. *...protesters refused to disperse...*

Table 14

Behaver	Process: Behavioral	Phenomenon
...protesters	refused	To disperse...

This clause reflects Al Jazeera's tendency to portray behavioral manifestations of emotional or moral resolve. The Behavioral process refused signifies collective determination and ideological steadfastness, presenting the protesters as agents of conviction rather than mere participants in disorder. This linguistic pattern underscores the outlet's discourse orientation toward agency, resilience, and moral legitimacy within protest movements.

#### D. Euro News

The Euro News article contains 101 processes, consisting of 76 Material, 15 Verbal, 6 Relational, and 4 Mental. The data show a very high proportion of Material processes (75.25%), reflecting the outlet's preference for straightforward, event-based reporting with minimal interpretation or emotional framing.

Data 14. *Police used water canons and fired rounds of tear gas to push back the demonstrators.*



Table 15

Actor	Process: Material	Goal
Police	Used and fired	water canons and rounds of tear gas to push back the demonstrators.

This clause exemplifies Euro News's objective and procedural reporting style. The verbs used and fired are action-based yet emotionally neutral, describing events sequentially rather than evaluatively. Such lexical choices indicate a fact-reporting orientation, where agency and action are prioritized over moral or emotional framing.

Data 15. *...authorities confirmed that seven members of the police were detained...*

Table 16

Sayer	Process: Verbal	Verbiage
...authorities	confirmed	that seven members of the police were detained...

The Verbal process highlights Euro News's bureaucratic and factual tone, focusing on official information rather than subjective interpretation. By foregrounding institutional voices, the outlet positions itself as reliable and impartial, consistent with its European news-wire discourse that values verification over dramatization.

Data 16. *The allowance is almost ten times the Jakarta minimum wage.*

Table 17

Carrier	Process: Relational	Attribute
The allowance	is	almost ten times the Jakarta minimum wage.

This clause illustrates Euro News's focus on quantitative and relational description. The Relational process serves to compare factual data rather than to evaluate it morally. By relying on measurable comparison instead of emotive adjectives, Euro News constructs a detached and factual representation, consistent with the norms of European journalistic objectivity.

Data 17. *Witnesses saw the armoured car speeding through the crowd.*

Table 18

Senser	Process: Mental	Phenomenon
Witnesses	saw	the armoured car speeding through the crowd.

Euro News's language reflects a procedural and detached discourse style, characterized by the dominance of Material and Verbal processes framed in neutral, fact-based diction. Rather than dramatizing or humanizing events, the outlet prioritizes chronological accuracy and institutional reliability. Its limited use of Mental and Relational processes supports an objective narrative stance, typical of European public-service media traditions that emphasize factual clarity over affective engagement.

## DISCUSSION

Although all four international news outlets CNN, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and Euro News display a strong dominance of Material processes, the way these verbs are used varies significantly across the articles. Each outlet's word choice and process selection reflect its editorial identity, journalistic focus, and ideological stance. While the transitivity patterns



show structural similarities, the lexical realization of those processes reveals distinct communicative purposes.

CNN's Material processes are energetic, bold, and highly visual, emphasizing violence, movement, and confrontation. Verbs such as "set fire," "clashed," "triggered," and "looted" create a sense of immediacy and chaos, portraying the protests as intense and unpredictable events. This stylistic choice aligns with CNN's Western broadcast tradition, which prioritizes dramatic, action-based storytelling to attract global attention. Even though the article includes Verbal and Relational processes for balance such as "Amnesty International said..." the overall impression is one of urgency and spectacle, rather than deep social analysis.

In contrast, The Guardian's Material processes focus on institutional actions rather than street-level conflict. Verbs like "implemented," "approved," and "took action" reflect its policy-oriented and reformist reporting style. This makes the article appear more analytical, exploring causes and consequences rather than dramatizing events. Its frequent Verbal processes for example, "a spokesperson said..." or "activists argued..." suggest an emphasis on dialogue and differing perspectives. Relational processes, such as "the policy is controversial," add subtle evaluation, maintaining an interpretive and socially conscious tone typical of The Guardian's progressive editorial stance.

Al Jazeera stands out for its human-centered narrative and empathetic tone. While Material verbs like "fought," "helped," and "attended" still drive the story, they are often paired with Mental and Verbal processes that highlight emotion and voice e.g., "people were worried," "Afifah said," or "many felt like no one cares about us." These choices create a moral and personal dimension, presenting the protests not merely as events but as struggles tied to dignity, inequality, and solidarity. Compared to CNN's intensity or The Guardian's institutional focus, Al Jazeera's process use reflects a grassroots, empathetic perspective, aligning with its reputation for amplifying voices from marginalized groups.

Euro News employs a neutral and reportorial style dominated by Material processes that describe actions sequentially, such as "used water canons," "shuttered early," and "set fire." Unlike CNN, these verbs are less dramatic and more procedural, focusing on chronology rather than emotion. Verbal and Relational processes like "authorities confirmed" or "the allowance is almost ten times higher" serve to inform rather than evaluate. The lack of strong Mental or Behavioral processes supports its detached, factual tone, showing a commitment to objectivity and minimal commentary. Euro News thus prioritizes clarity and order over narrative tension or moral framing.

These differences reveal how linguistic choices shape not only the representation of events, but also how each outlet implicitly positions itself in relation to the protests whether as a global observer, a moral commentator, or a voice of the people.

## CONCLUSION

The findings show that Material processes dominate across all four articles, with 292 occurrences out of 489, suggesting that international media predominantly construct the protests through actions and observable events. Despite this similarity, each outlet exhibits distinct lexical and ideological tendencies. CNN dramatizes conflict through strong action verbs, The Guardian presents an analytical and policy-oriented tone, Al Jazeera humanizes the narrative through emotional and perceptive expressions, and Euro News maintains a neutral and factual stance.

This study addresses a significant research gap: previous transitivity studies have often focused on Western or Middle Eastern contexts, leaving limited understanding of how



international media construct Indonesia's political events. By examining four global outlets, this research contributes to the broader discussion of how linguistic forms encode ideology and shape global perceptions of Southeast Asian political discourse.

The findings underline the value of transitivity analysis as a critical tool in understanding how news language constructs meaning, perspective, and power relations. Future studies are encouraged to expand this approach by incorporating Indonesian domestic media or multimodal analysis to explore how textual and visual modes interact in shaping public perception.

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