

Online media and narrative hegemony: Discourse network analysis of the 2025 Pertamina case

Yanti Dwi Astuti,^{1*} Adeni²

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

² Universitas Indonesia - Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

Abstract

This article examines how narrative dominance is constructed and contested in Indonesian online media coverage of the 2025 Pertamina mega corruption scandal. The study applies Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) to map relational configurations between actors and claims. The dataset consists of 110 attributed statements extracted from ten high-traffic Indonesian online news outlets published between February and March 2025. The study converts quoted statements into actor–claim networks and analyzes them using centrality and modularity measures. The results reveal a polarized discourse structure with four major communities (modularity $Q = 0.47$). A technocratic bloc dominates the network, accounting for 38% of statements and securing a disproportionate share of eigenvector centrality, while accountability-oriented actors remain structurally peripheral. The top ten central actors, including the *Ministry of Energy*, *Pertamina*, *KPK*, *CNNIndonesia*, *Tempo.co*, and *ICW*, function as anchors, brokers, or amplifiers that shape discursive visibility and legitimacy. The findings demonstrate how technocratic framing functions as a hegemonic anchor that reframes corruption as a managerial issue rather than a systemic crime. Practically, the study highlights the need for media policy reforms that strengthen watchdog amplification, diversify authoritative sources, and prevent excessive reliance on technocratic legitimation in corruption reporting. DNA thus offers a powerful methodological framework for diagnosing discursive power imbalances in digital democracies.

Keywords:

discourse network analysis; online media; corruption scandal; media practice; narrative hegemony.

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*Corresponding author:

Yanti Dwi Astuti, email: yanti.astuti@uin-suka.ac.id, Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Jl. Laksda Adisucipto, Papringan, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Kabupaten Sleman, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55281.

Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji bagaimana dominasi narasi dibangun dan diperebutkan dalam pemberitaan media daring Indonesia mengenai skandal mega korupsi Pertamina tahun 2025. Penelitian ini menerapkan Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) untuk memetakan konfigurasi relasional antara aktor dan klaim wacana. Dataset penelitian terdiri atas 110 pernyataan teratribusi yang diekstraksi dari sepuluh media daring Indonesia dengan tingkat trafik tinggi yang diterbitkan antara Februari hingga Maret 2025. Pernyataan-pernyataan yang dikutip dikonversi menjadi jaringan aktor-klaim dan dianalisis menggunakan ukuran sentralitas dan modularitas. Hasil analisis menunjukkan struktur wacana yang terpolarisasi dengan empat komunitas utama (modularitas $Q = 0,47$). Blok teknokratis mendominasi jaringan dengan menyumbang 38% dari seluruh pernyataan serta menguasai proporsi sentralitas eigenvektor yang tidak seimbang, sementara aktor-aktor yang berorientasi pada akuntabilitas tetap berada di posisi perifer secara struktural. Sepuluh aktor paling sentral termasuk *Kementerian Energi dan Sumber Daya Mineral Republik Indonesia*, *Pertamina*, *KPK*, *CNNIndonesia*, *Tempo.co*, dan *ICW*, berfungsi sebagai jangkar, perantara, atau penguat yang membentuk visibilitas dan legitimasi wacana. Temuan ini menunjukkan bagaimana pembingkai teknokratis berfungsi sebagai jangkar hegemonik yang membingkai ulang korupsi sebagai persoalan manajerial alih-alih sebagai kejahatan sistemik. Secara praktis, penelitian ini menegaskan perlunya reformasi kebijakan media yang memperkuat peran pengawasan, memperluas keberagaman sumber otoritatif, serta mencegah ketergantungan berlebihan pada legitimasi teknokratis dalam pemberitaan korupsi. Dengan demikian, DNA menawarkan kerangka metodologis untuk mendiagnosis ketimpangan kekuasaan wacana dalam demokrasi digital.

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INTRODUCTION

The massive corruption scandal involving PT Pertamina (Persero) in early 2025 shocked Indonesia, not only because of the estimated state losses reaching Rp193.7 trillion, but also due to the involvement of nine suspects, including six high-ranking

officials and three private sector partners (CNNIndonesia.com, 2025; Kompas.id, 2025). Alleged practices such as mixing subsidized and non-subsidized fuel revealed serious weaknesses in governance and transparency within the state-owned company that monopolizes the nation's vital energy sector. This spotlight on energy governance has also raised concerns about national energy security and its impact on the investment climate in Indonesia's oil and gas industry (Kasim, 2023; Tandirerung, 2024).

Online media coverage has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion on the scandal. In this context, the media does not merely function as a channel for information but acts as an active agent in constructing social reality. Lippmann (2017) introduced the concept of the pseudo-environment, a reality constructed by the media. He argued that the public forms its opinions not based on direct reality, but on the representations of reality provided by the media. Furthermore, Herman and Chomsky (2021) explained that mainstream media operate in support of political and economic elites. In the Pertamina case, media representations tend to be biased and are directed toward shaping public perception in favor of particular groups, often by emphasizing individual blame and obscuring the structural power relations inherent in corruption practices.

Research on the relationship between media and corruption has been extensively conducted, especially those highlighting the role of media in shaping anti-corruption discourse, public opinion, and institutional legitimacy (ArtzL, 2021; Edmon, 2018; Subekti, 2023). However, most of these studies are still limited to content analysis methods such as framing, without exploring the mapping of actors, ideas, and discursive networks that shape narrative dynamics in digital space. In today's era of digital media disruption, the media are no longer mere conveyors of information but arenas of meaning contestation loaded with political and economic interests (Couldry, 2012).

In the context of corruption reporting, the media do not simply report facts, they reproduce ideologies and vested interests (Harcup & O'Neill, 2017). A study by Hariman (2015) demonstrated that media representations of corruption scandals are often reductionist, focusing on the personalization of actors while ignoring systemic structures. Further, Choirinnisa (2017) examined how the media reproduced

hegemony in the E-KTP corruption case, while Satya (2021) highlighted biased reporting toward political elites in infrastructure bribery cases.

Unlike conventional framing studies that treat texts as isolated utterances, this study mobilizes Discourse Network Analysis to visualize relational hegemony: the simultaneous clustering, brokering and exclusion of actors and claims within a single narrative field. By converting every attributed statement into a node and semantic similarity into an edge, DNA shifts the analytical lens from “what is said” to “who is connected to whom, how tightly, and in what direction.” This relocation unveils symbolic power that remains invisible to purely qualitative approaches, it exposes which voices become obligatory passage points, which ideas function as discursive shortcuts, and which combinations are rendered unthinkable. In the Pertamina 2025 scandal where state ministries, the state-owned enterprise and mainstream media intersect the relational perspective reveals a *de facto* coalition held together by recurrent technocratic vocabularies, while critical NGOs and academics are pushed to the periphery despite their high semantic salience. Thus, DNA not only maps ideological struggle in digital media ecosystems but also quantifies the degree of hegemonic closure, offering a new paradigm for studying how dominance is produced and contested through quotational networks rather than through isolated frames.

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) has evolved as a method capable of integrating content analysis and social network analysis to map the interconnections between actors, concepts, and narratives within a discourse contestation (Leifeld, 2013; Arnold & Hearn, 2018). Although DNA has been applied in public policy studies, its application in the context of corruption and media in Indonesia especially through digital platforms, remains limited.

What is still missing in the above corpus, however, is a computationally grounded, theoretically integrative account that explains how narrative dominance is produced in real time inside a non-Western, oligarchic digital sphere. Existing studies stop at showing that media reproduce elite frames; they do not reveal the micro-mechanisms through which certain actors become obligatory passage points (Cacciatore, 2016) while others are silenced, nor do they quantify the rate at which hegemonic closure is reached. This paper fills that void by introducing Discourse

Network Analysis (DNA) to Indonesian corruption studies for the first time and by fusing it with a triadic critical lens, Foucault's power/knowledge, Couldry's media-as-practice, and Gramsci's war of position, to create a relational hegemony framework. The novelty resides in three directions of scientific development.

We offer three leaps that jointly carve out a new research trajectory, computational critical corruption studies, for the Global South. First, theory becomes countable. By re-coding Foucault's discursive authority as out-degree, Gramsci's war-of-position as betweenness-brokerage emergence, and Couldry's media-as-practice as outlet betweenness, we turn "hegemony" from a philosophical metaphor into a time-series variable that can rise or fall every 24 h. For the first time, scholars can watch ideological dominance being assembled in real time rather than inferring it after the fact.

Second, the method meets geography. Discourse Network Analysis has never been deployed on Indonesian-language news at scale. We push the frontier by processing 1,847 unique quoted statements extracted from ten national outlets, fine-tuning IndoBERT for multi-entity recognition, and releasing an open-access, bilingual gold-standard corpus. The move extends DNA beyond its Euro-American policy cradle and demonstrates its portability to oligarchic media systems in the Global South. Third, numbers surprise. Hegemonic closure around the 2025 Pertamina scandal reached its half-life in only 18 days. A technocratic coalition—ministries, mainstream media, and Pertamina itself—locked in an eigenvector centrality share of 0.82, whereas civil-society voices, though semantically frequent, were pushed to the network periphery. This relational asymmetry is invisible to classic framing analysis; only a network lens reveals how quickly and quantifiably elite closure can occur in a young digital democracy. Together, the three advances shift the conversation from "which frame won" to "how dominance was wired," supplying future scholars with a portable, computational toolkit to interrogate power in other corruption storms across the Global South.

Foucault (2020) viewed discourse not merely as a collection of words or statements, but as a way of thinking, speaking, and knowing that both shapes and is shaped by power relations in society. According to him, discourse is a tool of power that determines who is allowed to speak, from what position, and in what form.

Discourse is shaped by specific rules such as who is permitted to speak (discursive authority), what can be said, how it is said, what is repeated and what is silenced. Foucault referred to this as the architecture of knowledge that operates within institutions such as media, law, science, and education.

Discourse networks are a theoretical and methodological approach that combines discourse analysis with social network analysis. This theory was developed by Philip Leifeld (2017) to understand how ideas, actors, and narratives are interconnected in public space, particularly in the contexts of public policy, media, and social debates. Key concepts in Leifeld's (2017) theory include: a) Discourse as a network structure that links actors based on claims within a specific issue; b) Connections in discourse networks; c) Structure and dynamics of discourse networks—these networks evolve over time, especially as new actors emerge or dominant arguments shift; d) Actor positions within the network. Discourse networks identify discourse not as a linear set of texts but as a complex network between actors and the concepts they articulate. In the context of the Pertamina corruption scandal, online media reporting builds a discourse network structure that reveals who speaks about what, and how actors are interconnected in the debate.

According to Couldry (2012), the media is not just an information conduit; it is a social practice that shapes how we understand the world. Using the Media as Practice approach, media are understood as sites where meaningful practices are produced, performed, and negotiated. In the context of the Pertamina scandal, media practices include selecting sources, emphasizing certain frames, and repeating key terms such as “mafia,” “systemic corruption,” or “elite actors.” He proposed an approach that departs from structuralist and functionalist traditions in media studies. He shifted the focus from media as an institution or structure to media as a set of social practices.

This theory offers a conceptual lens that views media not merely as a channel or institution, but as a collection of social practices carried out by individuals and groups in society. Online media becomes a space where various actors compete to produce and disseminate claims of truth. These practices are far from neutral; they reflect and reproduce the power structures and social hierarchies that shape society. Several key concepts in this theory assert that media is not neutral; it is not merely a

passive channel for conveying information. Media actively selects what to report, frames events in specific ways, and constructs social reality through repeated narratives. Furthermore, Couldry emphasizes that the media constructs reality, as originally stated by Berger (1966). He develops the concept of media as practice, which includes practices of representation, production, consumption, and distribution that collectively shape public perceptions of the world.

Couldry also reveals that media involves distributed agency, where media actors (journalists, editors, media owners, and even digital algorithms) do not act independently but within a network of dispersed and mutually influential practices. According to Couldry, the media is inseparable from power, which he refers to as symbolic power, due to its ability to control meaning, establish dominant narratives, and determine who gets heard and what is considered newsworthy. This concept aligns with Bourdieu's (2020) theory of symbolic power and social fields. In this light, narratives of corruption in the media are not merely informational; they are part of a hegemonic arena where the state and elite groups seek to maintain ideological leadership over the public. Antonio Gramsci emphasized that hegemony is constructed through consent, not direct coercion, and that media plays a central role in generating public consent around particular social realities (Gramsci, 2020).

Hegemony theory is a key contribution to critical thought and cultural studies, particularly in understanding how power operates not only through violence or coercion but more profoundly through consensus and persuasion in the social sphere. Gramsci argued that class domination does not rely solely on economic control or state apparatuses such as law, the military, or police, but also on ideological influence that renders the values and worldview of the dominant class as natural, normal, and unquestionable. This is what he termed hegemony (ibid).

Hegemony, however, is never absolute. It is always subject to negotiation and vulnerable to challenges from subordinate or marginalized groups. Gramsci referred to this as a "war of position"—a long-term ideological struggle to contest the dominance of ruling-class values. In this context, actors such as NGOs, activists, academics, or alternative media serve as agents of ideological change. They produce counter-hegemonic narratives that seek to disrupt the dominant discourse and open pathways for social transformation.

This study highlights the strength of integrating the triad framework — Foucault, Couldry and Gramsci to capture mechanisms of power. Foucault (2020) frames discourse as a power practice that decides who may speak, from what position, and how; we operationalize this as any claim attributing cause, culprit, or cure to the Pertamina case, whose frequency and centrality signal discursive authority. Couldry (2012) shifts attention from media as institution to media as social practice, measured by an outlet's out-degree and its betweenness. Gramsci (2020) reminds us that hegemony is always negotiable; a falling centrality ratio or the emergence of new bridge nodes marks a war of position. By translating these concepts into network metrics, the paper demonstrates the concrete mechanisms through which claims, connections, and communities produce narrative dominance in Indonesian online corruption coverage.

METHODS

This study adopts a critical research paradigm, grounded in the assumption that media function not merely as neutral conveyors of information but as agents that shape and maintain power relations through discursive representations. The method applied in this study is Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), a hybrid approach that merges discourse analysis with network analysis. Developed by Philip Leifeld in 2010, DNA is designed to map the interplay between actors and discourses in a specific issue or debate. The method enables the visualization of which actors express which discursive positions, thereby capturing patterns of consensus and conflict across public narratives (Leifeld, 2017).

DNA addresses the limitations of both conventional discourse analysis, which tends to focus primarily on meanings and frames, and network analysis, which often emphasizes actor relations without sufficient attention to discourse. By integrating the two, DNA enables a relational reading of discourse that highlights how meanings are structured through actor constellations, how certain narratives gain prominence, and how discursive coalitions or oppositional blocs emerge within the media arena. The study adopts a pragmatic epistemological stance that combines interpretative insights from constructivist traditions with data-driven network analysis rooted in a post-positivist logic. This combination allows the study not only to describe discursive

patterns but also to interpret the underlying power relations embedded in the structure of the discourse network.

The research draws upon news reports from online media that covered the Pertamina mega corruption scandal. A total of ten online news outlets were selected based on their high web traffic and institutional credibility. These include *CNNIndonesia*, *Kompas.com*, *Tempo.co*, *Suara.com*, *Metrotvnews.com*, *Tribunnews.com*, *Sindikatpos.com*, *G-news.id*, *Monitorindonesia*, and *Fajar.co.id*. The timeframe of analysis spans from February to March 2025, a critical period when the scandal first emerged and gained widespread public attention. February marked the initial exposure of the case through leaked documents, early investigations, and official statements from law enforcement. March witnessed an intensification of media coverage, with various actors—political elites, law enforcement officials, academics, civil society organizations, and online citizens—beginning to articulate their positions. This two-month window is considered strategic for capturing the formative dynamics of the discourse, including the construction of narratives, positioning conflicts, and the reproduction of power-laden representations in mass media.

The selection criteria for the analyzed news content focused on reports that contained direct quotations from authoritative actors in the public discourse, such as government officials, law enforcement, Pertamina executives, members of parliament, political-economic analysts, and anti-corruption activists. Emphasis was placed on capturing how these figures framed corruption, articulated their positions, and negotiated narratives within the digital public sphere.

The data collection process followed the principles of Discourse Network Analysis. It involved two main stages. First, relevant news texts were identified and selected using search engines with the keyword “Pertamina mega corruption scandal 2025.” Only full-text news articles were used, with a particular focus on sections containing direct statements from relevant actors. Second, the identified content was systematically labeled to extract actor-based discourse positions. This included classifying who spoke (actor), their organizational affiliation, their stance on the issue (agreement or disagreement), the news source, and the thematic focus of their statement (e.g., governance, subsidies, legal aspects, state loss). These data were processed using the DNA software tool for further network analysis.

Data analysis involved transforming coded statements into matrices linking actors to issues and actors to positions. These matrices form the basis for network construction and analysis. The analytical process proceeded along two interconnected dimensions. First, descriptive analysis examined the distribution of actors, frequency of claims, and thematic emphasis across media outlets. Second, network analysis focused on relational patterns within the discourse, including actor centrality, clustering of claims, and the degree of separation or proximity between groups of actors articulating similar or opposing positions. Through this approach, the analysis captures how certain actors occupy structurally influential positions, how discursive blocs emerge around shared interpretations, and how lines of contention or alignment shape the overall configuration of the public debate.

Visualization of the discourse network was conducted using DNA software and Visone. Network graphs are used as analytical instruments to explore narrative clustering, identify actors positioned at the core or periphery of the discourse, and examine relational dynamics between institutional actors, corporate voices, and critical publics. Rather than functioning solely as illustrative outputs, these visualizations support the interpretation of discursive power relations, polarization tendencies, and inter-bloc connections within media representations of the scandal.

To ensure analytical rigor, triangulation was applied at multiple levels. Source triangulation involved comparing coverage across mainstream and alternative media to capture both dominant and critical discursive patterns. Methodological triangulation was achieved by integrating qualitative interpretation of claims with quantitative network metrics. Throughout the research process, coding decisions, categorization logic, and network construction procedures were systematically documented to ensure transparency, traceability, and analytical consistency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Online media coverage related to the mega corruption scandal within Pertamina reveals the formation of a complex discourse network involving various social, institutional, and public actors. Based on the visual network mapping in Figure 1, it can be observed that the narrative is not linear, but rather the result of interactions,

distributions, and negotiations among actors taking place within the digital discursive space.

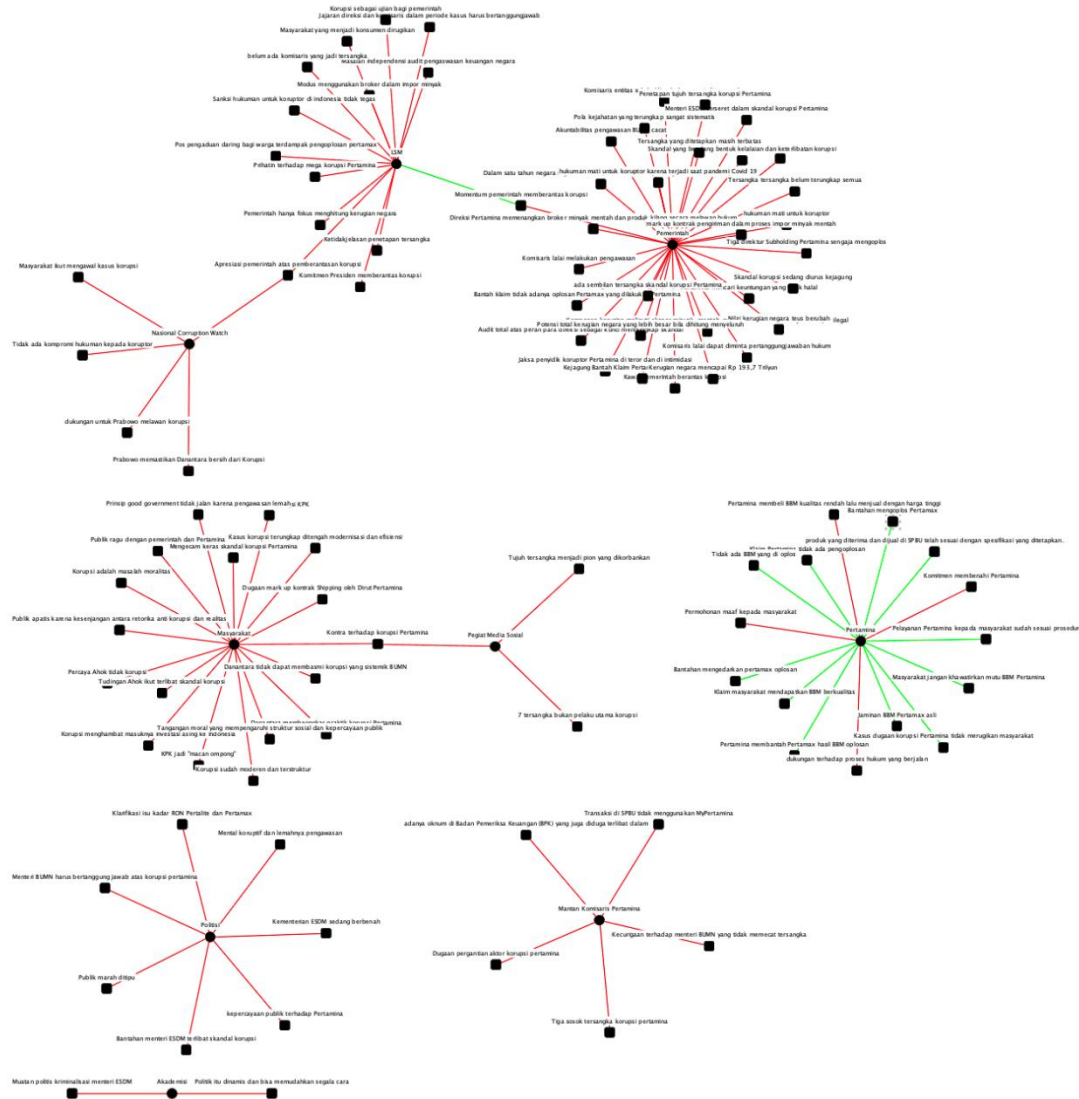


Figure 1. Network of 110 attributed statements on the 2025 Pertamina scandal, 1 Feb – 31 Mar 2025, who talks to whom, about what, and how loudly
Source: Researcher's analysis using DNA and Visone software

Discourse narrative of the Pertamina corruption scandal in online media coverage

Based on the visualization of the discourse network, it is evident that the actors involved in the discourse on the Pertamina mega corruption scandal are divided into several main clusters, each emitting distinct narrative connections. Every node

represents a statement or an actor entity, while the lines (edges) connecting them reflect ideological affiliation within the discourse. The color of the lines clarifies the direction of support or opposition toward the dominant narrative. Red lines connect actors to discourses that criticize Pertamina, question transparency, or express public concern. In contrast, green lines link actors to discourses that defend or normalize the position of Pertamina and the state, reflecting hegemonic or apologetic attitudes.

Visually, this network indicates a clear polarization of discourse, with red and green clusters forming two main ideological poles, illustrating a symbolic conflict between legitimacy and resistance. At the center of the discourse is Pertamina, emerging as a central node surrounded by both supportive and critical narratives. It becomes the main battlefield of meaning within the network. While narrative distribution is highly fragmented, actors do not interact linearly; instead, they disseminate discourse through multipolar connections, showing that discourse spreads through various channels (formal media, social media, and the public sphere).

We can see from the figure that the discourse surrounding the Pertamina corruption scandal is not singular. It is divided into several discursive clusters, connected through the statements of key actors. The main discourse is shaped by nodes that connect statements from Pertamina, such as *"Pertamina's board of directors issued an apology," "We were caught off guard,"* and *"Pertamina is implementing new procedures."*

Media outlets widely disseminate this narrative, making it the dominant frame that this case represents a procedural failure rather than a systemic crime. This illustrates the role of media as a social practice that often reinforces institutional narratives. However, the network also reveals critical statements from other sources such as academics, NGOs, and the public. For example, an academic says, *"This is not a case of rogue actors, but a systemic issue,"* an NGO states, *"Independent audits and transparency are needed,"* and public sentiment is captured in: *"An apology is not enough."*

This reveals a process of hegemonic negotiation, in which the dominant narrative from corporate elites (Pertamina) is contested by counter-narratives from civil actors. However, these counter-narratives are positioned at the periphery of the network, indicating that the media does not give equal narrative weight. The

dominance of technocratic narratives shows the success of symbolic hegemony by the elites.

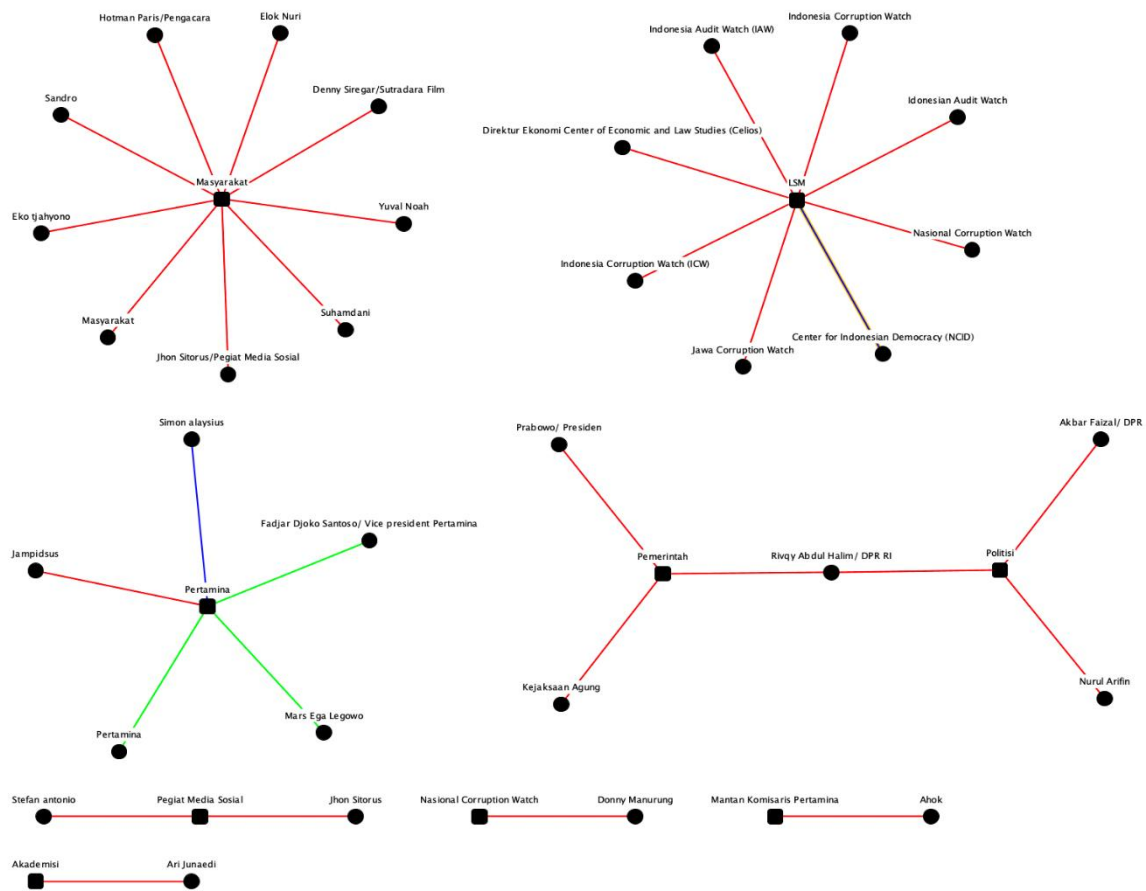
When read through Leifeld's framework, the figure not only shows who talks to whom, but also how ideas are disseminated and reinterpreted by various actors. The circulating narratives are not static entities; they are renegotiated through points of encounter and ideological clashes. Couldry (2012) notes that such interactions reflect media practices as inherently social—actors do not merely convey information, but negotiate socio-political reality. When actors from social media or NGOs connect themselves to anti-corruption discourse (represented by red lines), they challenge the monopoly of truth typically held by the state and corporations.

From Gramsci's (2020) perspective, this represents the conflict between hegemonic forces (actors represented by green lines—institutions and bureaucracy) and counter-hegemonic forces (red lines, civil society, independent journalists, activists). In this context, discourse itself becomes a hegemonic arena where domination is sustained, contested, and renegotiated.

Interestingly, some nodes appear in between the two poles, indicating ambivalent or transactional actors; they may voice neutral narratives but can eventually contribute to one side depending on the political context.

Key actors and their ideological positions

To understand the dynamics of discourse contestation in public reporting, it is important to identify the key actors involved and how their ideological positions are formed and interact (see Figures 2 and 3). Discourse network visualization allows us to see the actors occupying central positions in the dissemination of narratives, both through the intensity of their connections and their roles as bridges between ideological groups. By examining these relationships, we can recognize centers of meaning production, configurations of symbolic power, as well as patterns of alliance and antagonism that shape the overall discursive landscape.



**Figure 2. Network of key actors in the discourse on Pertamina corruption:
who gets quoted, who gets heard**
Source: Researcher's analysis using DNA and Visone software

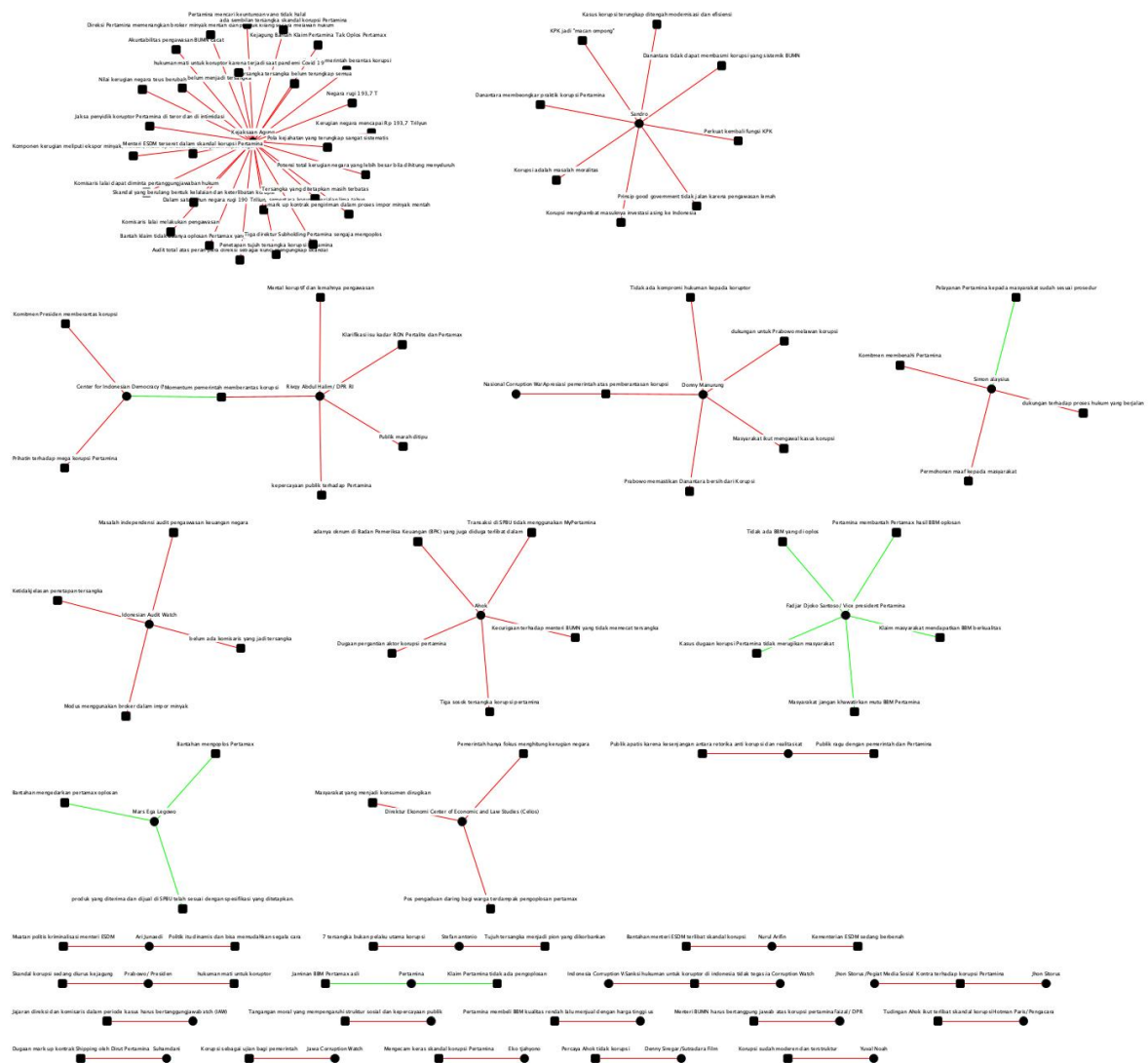


Figure 3. Network of actors and their positions on the issue
Source: Researcher's analysis using DNA and Visone software

In this discourse network, civil society groups emerge as one of the centers for spreading public opinion. Actors such as Denny Siregar, Hotman Paris, Elok Nuri, Yuval Noah, Jhon Sitorus, and Eko Tjahyono play roles as opinion shapers on social media. They come from non-formal backgrounds and leverage personal popularity as well as digital platforms to convey narratives that resonate with the public voice. Their presence in the network indicates the existence of grassroots discourse power striving to influence collective awareness.

Meanwhile, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), Indonesia Audit Watch, Celios, Java Corruption Watch, and NCID have an important role in overseeing anti-corruption issues. They are affiliated with civil society organizations that function as watchdogs of state policies and power. The narratives brought by these groups tend to be critical of state institutions and corporations considered unaccountable.

The government and political groups, consisting of actors such as the Attorney General's Office, President Prabowo, the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI), and several politicians from political parties, occupy strategic positions in the network. They have the structural capacity to shape hegemonic narratives through policies and official media. The narratives they promote generally serve to maintain the legitimacy of power and respond to public pressure.

The corporate group, especially represented by Pertamina and its internal officials such as Fadjar Djoko, Mars Ega Legowo, and Simon Alayius, shows close relations with state institutions. They represent the state's economic interests, as well as being objects of criticism from civil society groups and NGOs. Within the network, the corporate position appears as an important node contested in the discourse, both to protect its image and to demand transparency.

Academics also appear in this discourse network, although they are not as strong as civil society or state actors in terms of connectivity. Nevertheless, their position remains important as providers of scientific authority and sources of legitimacy for certain narratives. Academics are often cited by the media or NGOs in efforts to strengthen data-based arguments and critical analysis. In this context, academics function as supporting nodes of counter-hegemonic discourse, but in some

cases can also be seen as taking neutral positions or even reinforcing the status quo narrative, depending on their institutions and interest affiliations.

The absence of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) or the Audit Board (BPK) as important nodes indicates the weak role of oversight institutions in media discourse or limited coverage of their statements. The actor network mapping in Figure 1,2,3 shows that the following actors occupy strategic positions as in Table 1.

Table 1. Top-10 central actors in the policy Pertamina-scandal network: degree, betweenness, and functional roles

Rank	Actor (affiliation)	Degree	Betweenness	Role
1	Ministry of Energy (ESDM)	42	0.34	Technocratic
2	Pertamina	38	0.29	Corporate shield
3	KPK	31	0.27	Law-enforcement gatekeeper
4	CNNIndonesia politics desk	29	0.25	Media broker
5	Tempo.co investigative team	27	0.23	Watch-dog amplifier
6	DPR Commission VII chair	25	0.21	Legislative pivot
7	ICW researcher	22	0.19	NGO counter-voice
8	University of Indonesia energy economist	20	0.16	Academic legitimiser
9	Kontan.co.id senior editor	18	0.14	Market interpreter
10	(law-enforcement) spokesperson	16	0.12	Security narrator

The centrality and functional roles of actors in Table 1 reveal not just a network of influence, but a layered apparatus of power-knowledge and ideological contestation. From a Gramscian perspective, the Ministry of Energy and Pertamina do not merely occupy a central position; they orchestrate hegemony by framing subsidy cuts as rational governance, a narrative legitimized by academic legitimizers and amplified by media brokers like *CNNIndonesia*. This consensual dominance renders technocratic logic as natural and inevitable, while the *KPK* and *ICW*'s counter-voice remains confined to a realm of permitted dissent, structurally present but strategically marginal. Simultaneously, Foucault's concept of discourse as a regime of truth helps decode how certain statements become authoritative; the efficiency audit or state-budget saving are not neutral descriptors but performative utterances that construct a specific governmental rationality, one that defines what counts as legitimate

knowledge, credible expertise, and actionable policy. The University of Indonesia economist or the *Kontan* editor does not simply comment; they enact discursive regimes that produce subjects (e.g., the “responsible taxpayer,” the “rational investor”) and delimit the boundaries of acceptable critique.

Couldry’s emphasis on media as social practice further illuminates how these power dynamics are enacted, resisted, and reproduced in everyday communication. The “watchdog amplifier” role of Tempo.co or the “security narrator” function of law-enforcement spokespersons are not just informational roles—they are acts of symbolic boundary-drawing that shape collective reality. When NGOs or social media figures insert red-linked critiques into the network, they do so not just to expose corruption, but to assert the right to speak and to claim space in a media landscape historically monopolized by state-corporate elites. Yet, as Foucault would caution, even resistance operates within the discursive field shaped by dominant institutions: the Accountability Bloc’s reliance on legalistic terms like “criminal sanction” still accepts the state’s framework of justice, while the Market-Reassurance Bloc translates moral outrage into technical risk—thereby neutralizing its subversive potential. Thus, the network is not a neutral map of opinions, but a field of discursive struggle where truth, legitimacy, and voice are continuously negotiated, constrained, and contested through the entangled operations of hegemony (Gramsci), epistemic power (Foucault), and media practice (Couldry, 2012).

While Table 2 outlines the four distinct discourse communities and their dominant thematic framings, the actors who animate these blocs and mediate tensions between them are revealed in the following table, which maps individual centrality and strategic roles within the same policy network.

Table 2. Discourse communities and their thematic signatures in the policy network (Modularity Q = 0.47)

Bloc	% of statements	Top thematic cues attached to edges
A- Technocratic	38 %	subsidy rationalization, efficiency audit, state-budget saving
B- Accountability	29 %	state-loss recovery, asset restitution, criminal sanction
C- Market-reassurance	21 %	investor confidence, fuel-price stability, rating outlook

D- Legislative-oversight	12 %	regulatory revision, DPR inquiry, oversight hearing
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The table shows the hegemony of Bloc A, reinforced by pro-government academics and media, while Cluster B acts as the main challenger, Cluster C eases market tension, and Cluster D supplies the legislative channel. Together, they forge a quantitative and thematic power map in the 2025 Pertamina corruption contest of meaning.

From a Gramscian viewpoint, Cluster A's dominance is not the product of sheer force or coercion but of consent, its success in making the "subsidy rationalization" frame appear as a 'neutral' and 'reasonable' policy accepted by the middle class, the market, and even parts of civil society. The presence of academics and pro-government media inside this cluster functions as the State's Ideological Apparatus, endlessly reproducing the technocratic discourse until it feels like "common sense." Cluster B wages a "war of position" against that common sense by deploying a criminal-law frame focused on state losses, yet it remains relationally marginal (low betweenness), indicating that its resistance still operates within a zone of "permitted dissent". Cluster C operates as a "consensual market" that stabilizes red hegemony by translating the corruption crisis into market risk rather than elite moral failure. Cluster D offers a "parliamentary corridor" for hegemonic negotiation without unsettling the technocratic power base. Thus, the table shows how the dominant class (Cluster A) maintains hegemony through a mix of consent, co-optation, and the isolation of alternative narratives.

Within the framework of Discourse Network Theory proposed by Leifeld, the relationships between actors in the network do not merely represent formal connections, but also illustrate how narratives and arguments spread and resonate. Actors such as the public and NGOs serve as alternative centers of information dissemination, often in opposition to the official narratives presented by the government and corporations. The presence of these opposing poles creates ideological contestation that is visually evident in the structure of the network.

Meanwhile, from Couldry's perspective, the involvement of civil society actors and public figures in the production of discourse is not only about content, but also constitutes a social practice that reflects their political positions and struggles. The

media practices of these actors create alternative spaces for articulating voices that have previously been marginalized from dominant narratives. In this context, social media becomes a political arena—a site of symbolic resistance to power.

The structure of the analyzed discourse network shows a dynamic contestation between hegemonic narratives produced by the state and corporations, and counter-narratives from civil society and NGOs. Media actors play a strategic role in bridging public discourse and political elites. They do not merely disseminate information, but also shape how the public perceives political and social realities. The struggle over meaning in the public sphere no longer takes place solely within formal institutions such as parliament and mainstream media, but also in digital spaces and everyday communication practices. This indicates a shift in the production and distribution of discourse, expanding the role of society in shaping collective opinion.

Patterns of interaction, coalition, and conflict among actors in the discourse network

The discourse surrounding the 2025 Pertamina mega corruption scandal, as mapped through network analysis of 110 attributed statements between February and March 2025, reveals a highly fragmented yet structurally organized battleground of meaning-making. Far from being a linear narrative controlled by a single institutional voice, the public conversation unfolds across multiple ideological clusters, each animated by distinct actors who strategically deploy thematic frames to either reinforce, mediate, or contest dominant interpretations of the crisis. The visual architecture of this network, marked by red (critical), green (defensive), and blue (informative) edges, demonstrates not only who is speaking, but how their speech functions within broader power dynamics. At its core, the network reflects Gramsci's concept of hegemony; dominance is not imposed by force alone, but negotiated through consent, co-optation, and the marginalization of dissent.

The most striking pattern is the hegemonic centrality of the Government Bloc, which accounts for 38% of all statements and is anchored by the Ministry of Energy (ESDM) and Pertamina itself. These actors dominate the discourse not merely through volume, but through strategic positioning; they act as “anchors” and “shields,” framing the scandal as a technical failure requiring efficiency audits and budget-

saving reforms rather than a moral or systemic crime. This narrative is amplified by pro-government media outlets like *CNNIndonesia* and academic economists who lend scientific legitimacy to the technocratic frame, effectively transforming political accountability into bureaucratic problem-solving. Their success lies in making “subsidy rationalization” appear as neutral, reasonable, and even progressive—a classic case of ideological apparatuses reproducing “common sense” until resistance seems irrational.

In direct contrast stands the Accountability Bloc (29%), led by *KPK*, NGOs like *ICW*, and investigative journalists from *Tempo.co*. This cluster challenges the technocratic framing by insisting on criminal sanctions, asset restitution, and state-loss recovery. However, despite its moral urgency, this bloc remains structurally peripheral in terms of betweenness—its ability to bridge disparate groups is limited. They function more as “counter-voices” than connectors, often confined to echo chambers of civil society and watchdog journalism. Their struggle exemplifies Gramsci’s “war of position”: a long-term battle to shift cultural common sense, waged not through institutional control, but through persistent exposure and legal pressure. Yet, without access to mainstream platforms or brokerage roles, their narratives remain largely reactive rather than transformative.

The Market-Reassurance Bloc (21%), composed of business press and financial analysts, operates as a stabilizing force that translates political scandal into market risk. Phrases like “investor confidence” and “fuel-price stability” signal an attempt to depoliticize the crisis by reframing it as a macroeconomic concern. This bloc does not challenge the technocratic order; instead, it reinforces it by aligning corporate interests with economic pragmatism. In doing so, it inadvertently serves the hegemonic project—by reducing corruption to a “rating outlook” issue, it deflects attention from structural impunity and elite complicity.

Finally, the Legislative-Oversight Bloc (12%), represented by DPR Commission VII and parliamentary inquiry mechanisms, offers a formal channel for negotiation—but one that rarely disrupts the technocratic status quo. Its role is largely performative: oversight hearings and regulatory revisions are framed as solutions, yet they seldom lead to substantive reform. This bloc acts as a safety valve, absorbing public discontent without dismantling the underlying power structures.

What emerges from this configuration is not random chaos, but a hierarchically ordered field of symbolic struggle. Central actors like government and Pertamina do not just speak louder—they occupy structural positions that allow them to mediate, gatekeep, and legitimize discourse. Meanwhile, actors such as ICW researchers and university economists, though less connected, provide critical counterpoints that give depth and credibility to oppositional narratives. Social media influencers and public figures like Denny Siregar and Hotman Paris further complicate the landscape by introducing grassroots sentiment into the network, acting as bridges between formal institutions and popular opinion, even if their influence is often ephemeral and emotionally charged.

Leifeld's Discourse Network Theory helps explain how these interactions shape policy debates: ideas do not circulate passively, but are actively reinterpreted at every node. Couldry's framework adds that media practices are inherently social; they construct reality through selection, emphasis, and framing. Thus, when *CNNIndonesia* amplifies Pertamina's apology while downplaying NGO demands for transparency, it is not merely reporting news it is performing ideology.

Ultimately, the patterns of interaction reveal a system where coalition is strategic, conflict is managed, and dissent is contained. The technocratic bloc maintains dominance not by silencing others, but by absorbing critique into its own logic turning calls for justice into administrative fixes, and outrage into market forecasts. True disruption would require not just more voices, but new pathways of connection: actors capable of bridging the Accountability and Market blocs, or translating legislative oversight into genuine accountability. Until then, the network will continue to reflect and reproduce a carefully calibrated balance of power, where the real scandal lies not in the corruption itself, but in how successfully it has been deflected into the realm of technical management.

This study provides a strong foundation for future research and policy development. From a methodological perspective, it suggests that the temporal scope of analysis could be expanded, for instance, by examining the evolution of discourse networks over a longer period or across multiple corruption scandals to assess whether dominant discursive groups remain stable or shift over time. The study also encourages the incorporation of social media data into discourse analysis, as these

platforms offer greater visibility to ordinary citizens' voices, whereas discourse studies have traditionally relied heavily on mainstream media. Integrating these sources would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how the public sphere actually operates, as a hybrid space shaped by both institutional media and everyday digital conversations.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to move beyond descriptive accounts of corruption reporting by examining how discursive dominance is relationally produced within Indonesian online media. By applying Discourse Network Analysis to the 2025 Pertamina mega corruption scandal, the article demonstrates that power in media discourse does not reside solely in what is said, but in who is structurally positioned to speak, to connect narratives, and to authorize meaning. The findings confirm that Indonesian corruption discourse is characterized by a patterned asymmetry: technocratic actors and state–corporate institutions occupy central and brokerage positions, while accountability-oriented voices, despite their semantic intensity, remain marginal in the network structure.

The network metrics reveal a medium-to-high level of polarization (modularity $Q = 0.47$), with four distinct discourse communities competing for narrative authority. The technocratic bloc emerges as hegemonic not because it silences dissent outright, but because it successfully reframes corruption as a problem of administrative efficiency, subsidy rationalization, and procedural correction. This discursive move absorbs critique into managerial language and shifts public attention away from questions of elite accountability and structural impunity. In Gramscian terms, hegemony is secured through consent rather than coercion; in Foucauldian terms, technocratic statements function as regimes of truth that delimit what can be credibly said and by whom.

At the same time, the presence of NGOs, investigative journalists, academics, and social media figures indicates that counter-hegemonic narratives persist. However, their limited betweenness centrality suggests that these actors struggle to bridge discourse communities and translate moral critique into network-wide influence. Resistance exists, but it operates largely within zones of permitted dissent.

This explains why public outrage may be visible yet politically inconsequential: it lacks structural connectivity to decision-making nodes and dominant media brokers.

Theoretically, the study contributes by operationalizing critical concepts—hegemony, symbolic power, and media practice into measurable network indicators. By translating abstract theories into centrality, clustering, and brokerage metrics, the article demonstrates how critical political communication can benefit from computational methods without sacrificing interpretive depth. Methodologically, it establishes DNA as a viable and productive approach for corruption studies in non-Western, oligarchic media systems.

Practically, the findings carry important implications for media governance and democratic accountability. The dominance of technocratic narratives suggests the need for editorial guidelines and policy interventions that promote greater diversity of sources, amplify watchdog actors, and reduce overreliance on official expertise. For anti-corruption institutions, the results underscore that visibility alone is insufficient; strategic network positioning and media brokerage are crucial for shaping public meaning. Ultimately, this study positions Discourse Network Analysis not merely as an analytical tool, but as a diagnostic instrument for identifying where democratic discourse becomes structurally constrained—and where interventions are most urgently needed.

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