

Research Article

Prabowo Subianto's Leadership in His Speech at the 80th UN General Assembly: A Rhetorical Analysis of Ethos, Pathos, and Logos

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Abstract: State speeches in international forums are a strategic arena for the practice of diplomacy and leadership image management. This study analyzes President Prabowo Subianto's rhetorical style in his speech at the 80th UN General Assembly on September 23, 2025. Using Aristotelian theory, namely ethos, pathos, and logos, to understand how rhetoric functions in strengthening political legitimacy, humanitarian solidarity, and international policy arguments. Using a qualitative-descriptive approach, this study examines transcripts of official speeches and identifies quotations that represent each persuasive mode. The analysis shows that Prabowo builds ethos through historical references, concrete actions of Indonesia such as the contribution of peacekeeping troops, and pathos is depicted through narratives of suffering, calls for solidarity, and an emphasis on the future of the younger generation; while logos is demonstrated through the presentation of data, policy plans such as the net-zero target, technical solutions such as sea walls, and systematic cause-and-effect arguments. This combination of ethos, pathos, and logos confirms that the speech was not simply a policy statement but also a rhetorical diplomatic tool that strengthened Indonesia's image as a constructive global actor. These findings contribute to the study of leadership communication and diplomatic rhetoric, particularly in the context of developing countries seeking to enhance the role of multilateralism and soft power.

Keywords: Humanitarian Solidarity; International Diplomacy; Political Legitimacy; Presidential Rhetoric; Rhetorical Strategy

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1. Introduction

Leadership communication on the global stage is not only concerned with how a leader conveys their ideas, but also how they present themselves, their country, and their vision through rhetorical strategies in speeches. In the context of modern diplomacy, public speeches have become one of the most strategic instruments in showcasing a leader's capacity, character, and legitimacy before the world. Through their speeches, a head of state not only conveys foreign policy but also builds a leadership image, reinforces national identity, and affirms their nation's moral standing within international regulations. Global forums such as the United Nations General Assembly (UN) have become symbolic spaces where leadership is tested through words, style, and messages. Similarly, Lane (2023) explains that recent Indonesian political dynamics have shown a shift from symbolic rhetoric to substantive rhetoric, where a leader is required not only to speak but also to display credibility and moral values in public communication.

In the realm of political communication, rhetoric serves as a primary means of persuasion, legitimacy, and the formation of a leadership image. Speech is not simply a medium for conveying messages, but rather an instrument for constructing political and moral meaning that represents a nation's values. Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of finding the best way to persuade an audience through three main modes: ethos, pathos, and logos. Ethos relates to the speaker's credibility, character, and morality; pathos evokes emotional aspects that evoke sympathy, empathy, or solidarity; and logos is based on rationality, logic, and convincing evidence. These three elements, when used in balance, can shape a persuasive and effective leadership communication style across various social and communication contexts. Liu, Chambers, and Moore (2023) emphasize that communication is central to leadership effectiveness because it is through public language that a leader builds trust, moral direction, and global legitimacy.

Within this framework, Prabowo Subianto, President of the Republic of Indonesia, delivered a comprehensive and historic state address at the 80th United Nations General Assembly, held on September 23, 2025, in New York, United States. In his speech, Prabowo highlighted Indonesia's position on global issues such as the humanitarian crisis, economic inequality, and the threat of climate change. This speech not only affirmed Indonesia's stance on various global issues but also demonstrated a national commitment to playing an active role in creating global peace and justice. Therefore, analyzing Prabowo's rhetorical style is crucial for understanding how a national leader from a developing country constructs ethos, pathos, and logos in his communications and how these elements are used to strengthen Indonesia's leadership and diplomatic image.

Historically, Indonesia has been known as a nation that consistently champions peace, anti-colonialism, and international cooperation. Since the era of President Sukarno, the UN General Assembly has been a crucial forum for Indonesia to assert its national identity and champion the principle of equality among nations. This tradition of diplomatic rhetoric continues and has now taken on a new form through Prabowo's leadership style, which is firm, realistic, and based on universal moral values. His speech demonstrates the continuity between national idealism and global pragmatism, showcasing Indonesia's efforts to position itself as a moral force amidst the complexities of global geopolitics. Lane (2023) assesses that Indonesia's current leadership is exhibiting a new trend: political rhetoric is used not only for domestic consumption but also to strengthen its communication position at the international level.

In the context of political communication, leadership rhetoric serves not only to convey policies but also to build trust among the international community. According to Miao (2021), a country's soft power is determined by its leader's ability to build an image and influence through discourse with universal values and a humanitarian orientation. Through his speech at the UN, Prabowo sought to portray Indonesia as not only politically sovereign but also morally responsible for world peace. In this regard, his rhetorical communication becomes an instrument of soft power diplomacy that strengthens Indonesia's role on the global stage.

Previous empirical studies also support the importance of a rhetorical approach in the study of leadership communication. Mohamad (2022) shows that in many academic and political discourses, elements of logos and pathos are often dominant, while ethos serves as the basis for moral legitimacy. Arrianie ((2023) argues that modern government communication requires a combination of these three elements with leadership values. Meanwhile, Senn (2025) adds that a leadership-oriented rhetorical style is characterized by a high intensity of ethos and a balance between pathos and logos. A similar view is expressed by Utzinger (2025), who explains that a leader's communication not only influences audience cognition but also shapes collective emotions and behaviors that form the foundation of social legitimacy.

The importance of this research is also supported by the findings of Ariyanti, Sudar, and Tusino (2022), who analyzed the speeches of world figures at the UN General Assembly, demonstrating that cross-cultural rhetorical strategies can reveal universal leadership values. However, such research is still limited to non-Indonesian contexts. Therefore, an analysis of Prabowo Subianto's speech can enrich the study of Southeast Asian political rhetoric and broaden understanding of how leaders from developing countries use rhetoric to build a global image.

In addition to expanding empirical research, this research also contributes to a conceptual understanding of communication as leadership capital. In the era of globalization and digital media, every speech by a leader represents the nation's image, broadcast widely and immediately interpreted by the global public. Liu et al. (2023) emphasize that leadership effectiveness depends heavily on the leader's ability to build authentic and credible communicative relationships with international audiences. In this regard, Prabowo's speeches are not only a representation of political ideas, but also a form of moral and emotional articulation that resonates with global values such as peace, justice, and solidarity.

Furthermore, rhetoric in leadership communication can be understood as a process of image management. Through the use of ethos, pathos, and logos, a leader can build perceptions of their personal character, competence, and moral orientation. Prabowo Subianto, through his speeches, demonstrated ethos as a credible and integral leader, pathos as a figure with empathy for human suffering, and logos as a rational leader who constructs arguments based on data and analysis. The integration of these three creates a strong and humanistic leadership image, while also demonstrating the substantive and solution-oriented nature of Indonesian diplomatic communication. Miao (2021) asserts that a nation's strength in global diplomacy often lies not in its military might, but in its leaders' ability to articulate moral values that unite humanity.

Previous research on political rhetoric in Indonesia has generally focused on domestic contexts, such as state addresses, election campaigns, or national commemorations (Anindita et al., 2024; Saputra, 2023). However, studies examining the rhetoric of Indonesian leaders in international diplomatic forums using an Aristotelian framework are still very limited. This research gap reinforces the urgency of this study, which seeks to systematically analyze Prabowo Subianto's rhetorical strategies in his speech at the 80th UN General Assembly. Thus, this research not only enriches the academic discourse on leadership rhetoric but also strengthens the understanding of Indonesian diplomacy in an increasingly complex global era.

Methodologically, this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, analyzing the text of Prabowo Subianto's speech based on the official transcript from the YouTube channel "(Sub Ina Eng) President Prabowo's Speech at the 80th UN General Assembly, New York, September 23, 2025." The analysis was conducted by identifying quotations representing ethos, pathos, and logos, then interpreting them based on rhetorical and leadership communication theories. This approach allows for in-depth interpretation of the symbolic and moral meanings that shape the construction of a global leadership image.

Thus, this study is based on the assumption that rhetoric is the core of leadership communication, not merely linguistic decoration. Through the combination of ethos, pathos, and logos, a leader builds moral authority, emotional closeness, and rational coherence that form the basis of international legitimacy. Prabowo Subianto's speech at the 80th UN General Assembly demonstrates how rhetorical strategies can transform political statements into effective diplomatic instruments, reflecting both national identity and global responsibility. Therefore, this study is important to understand the relationship between rhetoric, leadership image, and diplomacy in the context of Indonesia as a country that seeks to strengthen its role as a moral and constructive actor in the contemporary world.

2. Literature Review

Previous research by Mohamad (2022) entitled "Analysis of Rhetorical Appeals to Logos, Ethos, and Pathos in ENL and ESL Research Abstracts" found that logos and pathos are often dominant, while ethos tends to be stable across groups. Arriani's (2023) research entitled "Government Political Rhetoric and Communication in the Contemporary Era" also states that government rhetoric and communication combine the concepts of ethos, pathos, and logos with leadership values. Senn's (2025) research entitled "Mapping Rhetorical Styles in Political Crisis Communication" shows that a "leadership-oriented" rhetorical style is characterized by a high intensity of ethos and moderation of pathos and logos. The study shows that in political speeches and diplomatic communication, the balanced use of these three modes can strengthen the effectiveness of rhetoric in leadership. Based on the above framework, this study focuses on how Prabowo Subianto uses ethos, pathos, and logos in his speech at the UN General Assembly.

Aristotle's theoretical basis for rhetoric explains that persuasion in speech consists of three main modes:

Ethos

Ethos is a way of establishing a leader's credibility, character, and authority. In this article, ethos demonstrates Prabowo Subianto as a competent, authoritative, and trustworthy leader.

Pathos

Pathos is the language of emotion, empathy, solidarity, suffering, hope, and moral needs. In this article, pathos demonstrates Prabowo Subianto's strengths, especially in the areas of humanity, Gaza, injustice, and the future of the younger generation.

Logos

Logos is a method of convincing an audience through logic, facts, evidence, and rational reasoning. Logos was widely used in Prabowo Subianto's speech at the 80th UN General Assembly, particularly in the areas of data, solutions, reasons, and cause-and-effect relationships.

3. Materials and Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, analyzing the speech text from beginning to end. The data source is a transcript of Prabowo Subianto's speech at the UN General Assembly, taken from Prabowo Subianto's YouTube channel, titled "(Sub Ina Eng) President Prabowo's Speech at the 80th UN General Assembly, New York, September 23, 2025." The data analyzed are relevant quotations, demonstrating elements of ethos, pathos, and logos.

4. Results and Discussion

Ethos

In his official address to the United Nations General Assembly, Prabowo Subianto strategically established an ethos as a humble, inclusive leader committed to universal moral values. Early in his speech, he stated, "It is indeed a great honor for me to stand in this August General Assembly Hall among leaders and representatives who represent almost all of humanity" (Prabowo Subianto YouTube, 0:15-0:25), demonstrating a deep awareness of his role and responsibility as a leadership figure. This strengthened his moral credibility by projecting a respectful and unarrogant self-image, while also emphasizing the value of ethos as a foundation for building trust among international audiences.

Prabowo Subianto emphasized human unity amidst diversity by stating, "We differ in race, religion, and nationality. Yet we gather together today as one human family" (Prabowo Subianto YouTube, 0:25-0:35). This approach reflects an inclusive ethos, where he respects plurality and emphasizes solidarity, thus demonstrating himself as a leader capable of bridging

differences to achieve harmony. He also referred to fundamental principles such as human equality and the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and happiness, which uphold universal moral values. In doing so, Prabowo Subianto asserted his ethical credibility as a leader adhering to humanitarian norms, providing a strong foundation for his argument for global leadership.

An analysis of Indonesian history also served to strengthen his ethos. Prabowo Subianto described centuries of colonialism, oppression, and slavery experienced by the Indonesian people, where they were treated as if they were less than animals in their own homeland. This recognition demonstrated moral credibility based on firsthand experience of injustice, thus positioning Indonesia as a legitimate entity to speak on global morality. He also highlighted the support of the United Nations (UN) during the independence struggle, including vital assistance from the Security Council and the General Assembly, reflecting a leadership ethos that values history and international service. This attitude builds trust by demonstrating a grateful character and not forgetting the contributions of others.

Prabowo Subianto used Indonesia's current position as a nation on the verge of shared prosperity and greater dignity to assert his authority as a strong national leader. He expressed a firm commitment to internationalism, multilateralism, and efforts to strengthen global institutions like the United Nations, demonstrating a diplomatic ethos and adherence to the international order. His use of a quote from the classical philosopher Thucydides, "The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must. We must reject this doctrine" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube channel 2:00-2:15), to reject this doctrine, demonstrated his intellectual competence and mastery of geopolitical literature. This bolstered his moral argument with classical authority while emphasizing his rejection of unjust domination.

Prabowo Subianto also highlighted Indonesia's concrete contributions, such as being one of the largest contributors to United Nations peacekeeping forces, which lent him strong credibility as a leader who "walks the talk." He even declared his readiness to deploy up to 20,000 personnel to secure peace in Gaza or other regions, demonstrating his ethos as a decisive, courageous, and responsible figure. While acknowledging domestic challenges, he emphasized the global need for a strong United Nations, reflecting honesty, realism, and a commitment to international responsibility.

The speech also touched on broader moral dimensions, such as the importance of setting an example for the younger generation. Prabowo Subianto stated that children learn leadership not from textbooks, but from the choices of leaders, reinforcing his image as a highly ethical figure. He called on developing countries to help each other rise, presenting a moral vision of justice and shared responsibility. Finally, he expressed confidence that the leaders of world civilization would rise according to history's demands, positioning himself as an equal global leader. The speech's closing greeting, "Wassalamualaikum Warahmatullahi Wabarakatuh. Shalom. Santi, santi. Om. May God bless us all" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube channel, 6:45-7:00), affirms a spiritual and inclusive ethos that reflects Indonesia's diversity with dignity, thus strengthening his moral credibility as a wise and universal leader.

An analysis of the ethos in this speech demonstrates how Subianto systematically builds credibility through a combination of self-awareness, historical recognition, commitment to action, and moral values, relevant in the context of political communication and international rhetoric studies. This approach can be further analyzed through the framework of Aristotle's ethos theory, where the speaker's character is the foundation of persuasion.

Pathos

In his official address to the United Nations General Assembly, Prabowo Subianto effectively utilized pathos to evoke emotions in his audience, emphasizing emotional unity and human solidarity. Early in the speech, he stated, "We gather today as one human family" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube video, 0:25-0:35), evoking a sense of warmth and universal connection, reinforcing pathos as a tool for building emotional togetherness amidst global

diversity. This approach reflects the use of the term "human family" to appeal to sympathy and shared humanity.

Prabowo Subianto also illustrated Indonesia's history of suffering with the powerful phrase, "We were treated less than dogs in our own homeland" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube video, 1:00-1:15), evoking deep empathy for the experience of colonialism. The phrase "less than dogs" has a high emotional impact, triggering feelings of anger and solidarity against historical injustice. Furthermore, he highlighted global issues with the statement, "Every day we witness suffering, genocide, and blatant disregard for international law" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube, 1:45-2:00), where words like "suffering" and "genocide" trigger emotions of anger, sadness, and moral urgency, making pathos a classic element for touching the audience's hearts about human rights violations.

Prabowo Subianto provided a strong emotional reinforcement in the statement that we must not give up and must grow closer, not further apart, where the repetition of "we must" provides a tone of optimism and solidarity, evoking collective hope and determination. He further criticized Palestinian injustice with the statement, "We must never be silent while Palestinians are denied that same justice" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube, 2:25-2:35), which uses the phrase "never be silent" to call for moral solidarity, sparking empathy and a stirring in the audience's heart for humanitarian issues.

The use of Thucydides' quote, "The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must... We must reject this doctrine" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube, 2:00-2:15), evokes sympathy for "the weak," while simultaneously attacking injustice with a strong moral tone, creating empathy and emotional resistance to domination. The most emotional part is the rhetorical question of innocent people crying for help, who will save them, who will save the elderly and women, which evokes empathy, guilt, and moral urgency through dramatic repetition. Subianto continues with a description of the suffering of those facing trauma and dying of starvation, which uses imagery to trigger compassion and urgency, reinforcing the pathos based on emotional visualization. He also connects political decisions to the younger generation, stating that our children witness and learn leadership from our choices, which triggers a sense of emotional responsibility and personal connection to the future. Elsewhere, he touches on basic human needs with, "Every person longs to be safe, to be respected, to be loved" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube video, 3:05-3:15), which evokes universal empathy and strengthens emotional bonds with the audience. An optimistic call emerges in, "Let us continue humanity's journey of hope" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube video, 3:15-3:25), where the phrase "journey of hope" sparks idealism and collective morale. Faith in world leaders is expressed in the belief that they will demonstrate great statesmanship and overcome hatred, suspicion, and violence, creating a sense of hope and inspiration.

Furthermore, Prabowo Subianto uses the personification of injustice as a unifying force in, "The sense of injustice... will unite into a strong force that will overcome oppression" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube video, 3:35-3:45), which provides a dramatic and passionate depiction of struggle. At the end of his speech, Prabowo Subianto affirmed his collective resolve by calling on everyone to work towards this noble goal, a journey we must complete, inviting the audience to feel his idealism and moral mission through emotional language.

Overall, the analysis of pathos in this speech demonstrates how Subianto utilizes emotion to reinforce a message of morality and solidarity, relevant to the study of political rhetoric. This approach can be analyzed through the framework of Aristotle's theory of pathos, where emotional persuasion is a primary tool for influencing an audience.

Logos

Logos, a persuasive approach based on logic, facts, evidence, and rational reasoning, was a dominant element in Prabowo Subianto's speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly. This dominance was evident through the systematic presentation of data,

solutions, cause-and-effect arguments, and policy explanations. In the opening section, he highlighted the paradox of the modern era: "In our era of scientific and technological triumphs... capable of ending hunger, poverty, and environmental ruin... we also continue to face grave dangers and uncertainties" (Prabowo Subianto YouTube, 00:10-00:20). This explanation demonstrates the use of logical reasoning that illustrates the contradictions of today's world reality. He also emphasized that human behavior based on fear, racism, hatred, and acts of oppression can threaten the shared future, thus forming a classic cause-and-effect argument in the analysis of global issues.

Prabowo Subianto also strengthened his argument through the use of historical facts, for example when explaining the role of the UN in the early days of Indonesian independence, which provided crucial legitimacy and support for national development. This historical reference serves as empirical evidence of the effectiveness of this international institution. He then constructs an argumentative structure that begins with an objective diagnosis of the world's conditions, which are still plagued by conflict, injustice, and uncertainty. The definition of the UN's purpose as an institution that guarantees peace, security, justice, and freedom for all humanity is used to underpin normative arguments that strengthen Indonesia's stance on internationalism and multilateralism. This position demonstrates a foreign policy based on rational principles, rather than an emotional approach.

Prabowo Subianto presented empirical facts regarding Indonesia's contribution as one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions: "Indonesia is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube channel, 02:15-02:25; 02:25-02:35). Indonesia's readiness to deploy large numbers of personnel to help maintain peace in conflict areas demonstrates a concrete and action-oriented policy plan. He also emphasized Indonesia's commitment to financial contributions to support peacekeeping missions, which serves as a practical and measurable argument for the country's role in global security mechanisms. The argument of collective security was also used to explain that without the UN, no country could feel secure. This argument demonstrates a clear causal relationship between international stability and the functioning of multilateral institutions. Subianto then reinforced the logos by presenting empirical data, such as the achievement of the highest rice production in history, indicating food self-sufficiency, and scientific evidence of rising sea levels on the north coast of Jakarta. He also presented plans for the construction of a large-scale sea wall as a technical solution to the challenge of climate change, reflecting an evidence-based approach and long-term calculations.

Furthermore, he outlined the national target of achieving net-zero emissions by 2060, the reforestation agenda for millions of hectares of degraded forests, and the increased use of renewable energy as the primary source of new electricity generation. All three plans were supported by concrete figures and rational projections, strengthening the logos foundation of the speech. The strategic goals of lifting all citizens out of poverty and making Indonesia a hub for solutions to food, energy, and water security also demonstrated systematic, goal-oriented argumentation. On the other hand, when conveying the basic human need to live safely, be respected, and be loved, he wrote, "Every person longs to be safe, to be respected, to be loved" (Prabowo Subianto's YouTube channel, 03:05-03:15). Prabowo Subianto consistently uses sentences rooted in universal psychological understanding to construct a rational moral argument. Furthermore, his assertion that peace, prosperity, and progress should be the rights of all humanity, not just a select few, forms the basis for a rational argument regarding global justice. The two-state solution to the Palestinian conflict is presented as the most logical approach to long-term peace. He also asserts that two nations with shared historical roots need to live in reconciliation and harmony, illustrating a logical argument regarding coexistence and international relations.

Overall, the analysis of logos in this speech demonstrates how Prabowo Subianto builds strong persuasion through the integration of facts, data, rational reasoning, and concrete policies. This approach aligns with Aristotle's logos framework, in which the power of logical arguments is the main foundation for building audience trust in the context of international political communication and rhetoric.

5. Conclusion

This research shows that Prabowo Subianto's speech at the 80th UN General Assembly clearly reflects his character and leadership strategy in international forums. Through the use of ethos, Prabowo successfully established credibility as a firm, authoritative, and morally legitimate leader, drawing on Indonesia's historical experience and commitment to global peace. Through pathos, he evoked audience empathy by presenting a narrative of human suffering, global solidarity, and moral urgency, particularly regarding the humanitarian issues in Gaza and the future of the younger generation. Meanwhile, the use of logos was evident in his rationally constructed and data-driven arguments, such as national development achievements, the threat of climate change, and Indonesia's concrete solutions to maintaining world peace.

Overall, the combination of these three rhetorical modes confirms that Prabowo's speech was not merely a political statement, but a leadership strategy that positions Indonesia as a country ready to take an active role in international peace and cooperation. Thus, Prabowo's rhetoric reflects charismatic, humanistic, and solution-oriented leadership, while simultaneously strengthening his image as a key actor in global diplomacy.

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