

Representing Social Actors in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Controversies

Hannafirsta Seroja Mujapasa¹, Jamilah²

Universitas Islam Bandung¹, Universitas Islam Negeri Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi², Indonesia¹⁻²

Email Korespondensi: hanafirstaa@gmail.com

Article received: 22 Januari 2026, Review process: 11 Februari
Article Accepted: 25 April 2026, Article published: 07 Mei 2026

ABSTRACT

The FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 generated global controversies related to migrant workers' rights and LGBTQ+ representation, attracting extensive international media coverage. This study aims to investigate how social actors were represented in the coverage of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies by The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and The Jakarta Post. This research employed a qualitative approach using Critical Discourse Analysis and Theo van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework. The data consisted of sixteen online news articles published during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The findings revealed that all three news outlets employed both exclusion and inclusion strategies in representing social actors. The Guardian predominantly portrayed FIFA and Qatar critically through the discourse of human rights and discrimination. Al Jazeera tended to reduce criticism against Qatar through suppression and passive constructions, while The Jakarta Post maintained a relatively balanced representation. Activation emerged as the most dominant inclusion strategy across the three media outlets. The study concludes that media discourse is ideologically constructed and significantly influences public perceptions of controversial international events.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, social actor representation, media discourse, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, ideology.*

ABSTRAK

Piala Dunia FIFA Qatar 2022 menimbulkan kontroversi global terkait hak pekerja migran dan representasi LGBTQ+ yang menarik perhatian media internasional secara luas. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana aktor sosial direpresentasikan dalam pemberitaan kontroversi Piala Dunia FIFA Qatar 2022 oleh The Guardian, Al Jazeera, dan The Jakarta Post. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode Critical Discourse Analysis dan teori representasi aktor sosial Theo van Leeuwen. Data penelitian berupa enam belas artikel berita daring yang dipublikasikan selama Piala Dunia FIFA Qatar 2022 berlangsung. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ketiga media menggunakan strategi eksklusif dan inklusi dalam merepresentasikan aktor sosial. The Guardian cenderung merepresentasikan FIFA dan Qatar secara kritis melalui isu hak asasi manusia dan diskriminasi. Al Jazeera cenderung mengurangi kritik terhadap Qatar melalui strategi suppression dan konstruksi pasif, sedangkan The Jakarta Post menampilkan representasi yang relatif seimbang. Strategi activation menjadi strategi inklusi yang paling dominan pada ketiga media. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa wacana media bersifat

ideologis dan berpengaruh terhadap pembentukan persepsi publik terhadap isu internasional kontroversial.

Kata Kunci: Analisis Wacana Kritis, representasi aktor sosial, wacana media, Piala Dunia FIFA Qatar 2022, ideologi.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital media has transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of news on a global scale. Online news platforms not only provide immediate access to information but also play a significant role in shaping public understanding of political, social, and cultural issues. Despite claims of objectivity, media discourse is rarely neutral because news institutions construct realities through specific linguistic and ideological choices. Through the inclusion, exclusion, and framing of particular actors, media discourse becomes a site where power, ideology, and representation are continuously negotiated (Fairclough, 1995).

Within this context, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers an important framework for examining the relationship between language and ideology. Fairclough and Wodak argue that discourse does not merely reflect reality but actively constructs social meanings, dominant perspectives, and relations of power (Fairclough & Wodak, 2008). Similarly, van Dijk (1993) emphasizes that discourse plays a significant role in shaping public cognition and ideological perspectives. In media discourse, the representation of social actors is particularly important because linguistic choices may legitimize certain groups while marginalizing others. Consequently, the way actors are represented in news reporting influences how audiences interpret controversial social and political issues.

One of the most controversial global events in recent years was the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. As the first World Cup hosted by a Middle Eastern country, the tournament attracted worldwide attention not only because of its sporting significance but also due to controversies surrounding migrant workers' rights and LGBTQ+ issues. International media extensively reported allegations of labor exploitation, unsafe working conditions, and restrictions on expressions of sexual identity during the tournament. At the same time, responses toward these controversies differed considerably across media institutions, reflecting broader ideological and cultural tensions between Western and non-Western perspectives.

These contrasting narratives demonstrate that media outlets construct different ideological positions through discourse. Western media organizations frequently emphasized human rights violations and discrimination, whereas other outlets criticized Western countries for cultural hypocrisy and political bias. Such differences indicate that media representation is closely connected to institutional ideology and sociopolitical context. In this regard, Theo van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework becomes relevant for analyzing how discourse strategically includes or excludes social actors in order to support particular perspectives (van Leeuwen, 2008). Through strategies such as suppression, backgrounding, activation, passivation, assimilation, and nomination, discourse may foreground certain actors while simultaneously reducing the visibility of others.

Previous studies on social actor representation have primarily focused on political discourse, refugee representation, Islamophobia, and media portrayals of minority groups. For instance, Poorebrahim and Zarei (2013) examined the representation of Islam in Western media, while Al-Saaidi and Matrood (2018) investigated the representation of Iraqi refugees in media discourse. Other studies have highlighted how discourse constructs ideological narratives through linguistic representation (Maalej, 2012; Widdowson, 2000). However, limited attention has been given to comparative analyses of international media coverage surrounding the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies, particularly involving Western, Middle Eastern, and Southeast Asian media perspectives. Therefore, this study examines how The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and The Jakarta Post represented social actors in their coverage of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies. By analyzing exclusion and inclusion strategies within selected news articles, this study seeks to demonstrate how media discourse reflects ideological positioning and shapes public perceptions of controversial international events.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using Critical Discourse Analysis CDACDACDA. Qualitative methods are appropriate for investigating meanings, representations, and ideological constructions embedded within texts. CDA was selected because the study focuses on how media discourse constructs representations of social actors in controversial sociopolitical contexts. The data consisted of sixteen online news articles published by The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and The Jakarta Post during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The selected articles focused specifically on controversies regarding migrant workers and the OneLove armband issue. The articles were published between November 19 and December 4, 2022. The researcher collected news articles from the official websites of the three news outlets. Articles were selected based on the following criteria: 111 the articles explicitly discussed FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies, 222 the articles focused on migrant workers or LGBTQ+ controversies, and 333 opinion and editorial articles were excluded. The data were analyzed using Theo van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework. The analysis involved identifying phrases, clauses, and sentences containing exclusion and inclusion strategies, categorizing the data, and interpreting how linguistic choices represented social actors and reflected media ideology.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research results showed that all three news outlets employed both exclusion and inclusion strategies in representing social actors related to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies. However, each media outlet demonstrated different ideological tendencies through the frequency and function of the strategies used. Inclusion strategies appeared more frequently than exclusion strategies, indicating that the media actively constructed representations of actors rather than completely omitting them from discourse.

Table : 1 Findings of Exclusion and Inclusion Strategies

New s Portal	Sup pression	Back ground ing	Activ ation	Passiv ation	Assim ilation	Assoc iation	Indeter mination	Diffe rentiati on	Nomin ation
The Guardi an	4	1	16	2	3	2	2	3	10
Al Jazeera	10	1	14	2	4	4	2	2	3
The Jakarta Post	2	1	11	1	1	2	2	1	6

The findings indicate that activation was the most dominant inclusion strategy across the three media outlets. Through activation, social actors such as FIFA officials, football teams, activists, and government representatives were represented as active participants responsible for particular actions and decisions. The Guardian frequently activated actors involved in protests and human rights campaigns, which reflected its critical stance toward FIFA and Qatar. In contrast, Al Jazeera often activated Western actors in discussions concerning criticism against Qatar, thereby positioning Western countries as central actors in the controversy. Meanwhile, The Jakarta Post employed activation more moderately and tended to present actions descriptively without strongly evaluative language.

Exclusion strategies were also identified in all three media outlets, particularly through suppression and backgrounding. Al Jazeera demonstrated the highest frequency of suppression strategies. Passive constructions such as “had also been widely viewed as a protest” and “might be booked” obscured the actors responsible for sanctions and controversial regulations. These linguistic choices reduced direct criticism toward FIFA and Qatar by minimizing institutional accountability. Conversely, The Guardian used suppression primarily through nominalization to foreground controversial events while maintaining a generally critical tone toward FIFA and Qatar.

Table : 2 Example of Suppression Strategy in The Guardian

Excerpt
“It was a calculated act of defiance against FIFA...”
“Protests have included street demonstrations...”
“...make a point, or a statement in Qatar...”

The findings reveal that The Guardian frequently employed suppression through nominalization in reporting controversies related to FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. In the excerpt “It was a calculated act of defiance against FIFA,” the phrase “act of defiance” transformed a process into a noun phrase, thereby obscuring the social actors responsible for the action. According to van Leeuwen (2008), nominalization functions to reduce the visibility of actors and redirect emphasis toward events or actions themselves. In this context, the linguistic construction foregrounded the symbolic significance of resistance against FIFA rather than focusing on the individuals or groups carrying out the protest.

A similar pattern can be observed in the phrase “Protests have included street demonstrations.” The use of the noun “protests” concealed the identities of the protesters and shifted the focus toward the broader movement. Instead of emphasizing who organized or participated in the demonstrations, the discourse highlighted the existence and scale of public resistance surrounding the tournament. This strategy strengthened the narrative that the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies had become a significant international issue.

The excerpt “make a point, or a statement in Qatar” also demonstrated suppression through nominalization. The actions of protesting or criticizing were represented abstractly as “a point” or “a statement,” thereby minimizing direct references to political activism. Although the actors were not explicitly mentioned, the discourse implicitly referred to football teams and players involved in the OneLove armband controversy. Through these linguistic choices, The Guardian maintained its critical stance toward FIFA and Qatar while simultaneously emphasizing the symbolic and political dimensions of the controversies.

Overall, The Guardian used suppression strategically not to eliminate criticism entirely, but rather to foreground broader themes such as protest, resistance, and human rights discourse. The newspaper consistently represented controversies as socially and politically significant issues, reflecting its ideological orientation toward liberal and human rights perspectives.

Table 3. Example of Suppression Strategy in Al Jazeera

Excerpt
“...had also been widely viewed as a protest...”
“...might be booked, or even forced to leave...”
“...sent off the field...”

The analysis showed that Al Jazeera employed suppression strategies more intensively than the other two news outlets. Most suppression strategies appeared in the form of passive constructions that obscured institutional agency and reduced the visibility of actors responsible for controversial policies. In the excerpt “had also been widely viewed as a protest,” the passive structure concealed who considered the OneLove armband initiative to be controversial. As a result, responsibility for criticism and sanctions became vague and indirect.

The excerpt “might be booked, or even forced to leave” similarly removed the institutional actors capable of enforcing punishment. FIFA was not explicitly represented as the authority responsible for imposing sanctions on players. Instead, the discourse foregrounded the consequences faced by players while backgrounding the governing institution behind those actions. Such linguistic choices minimized direct confrontation and softened criticism against FIFA.

Another example can be found in the phrase “sent off the field,” where the passive structure again obscured agency. The sentence emphasized the risk experienced by players rather than the authority exercising disciplinary control. According to van Leeuwen (2008), suppression strategies often function ideologically by concealing responsibility and redirecting audience attention. In this case, Al Jazeera’s discourse appeared to mitigate direct criticism toward Qatar and FIFA while presenting controversies as procedural or regulatory issues.

Furthermore, Al Jazeera frequently framed Western criticism as politically motivated or culturally biased. By suppressing institutional accountability and foregrounding abstract controversies, the newspaper constructed a discourse that positioned Qatar as a target of excessive criticism from Western countries. This representation reflects Al Jazeera’s broader ideological positioning as a Middle Eastern media outlet that frequently challenges dominant Western narratives.

In terms of inclusion strategies, nomination and differentiation also played important roles in constructing ideological narratives. The Guardian frequently nominated prominent figures such as Gianni Infantino and Harry Kane to personalize accountability and criticism. Additionally, differentiation strategies highlighted distinctions between Western activists, football teams, FIFA authorities, and Qatari officials. Such linguistic choices reinforced broader narratives surrounding human rights, discrimination, and cultural conflict.

Table 4. Example of Representation Strategy in The Jakarta Post

Excerpt
“Under FIFA pressure, seven European captains ditched the OneLove armband...”
“Teams focused on World Cup, not politics, had easier passage...”
“Germany shocked by Japan after armband protest...”

The Jakarta Post displayed comparatively fewer exclusion strategies and generally maintained a more balanced representation of the controversies. Unlike The Guardian and Al Jazeera, which demonstrated clearer ideological positioning, The Jakarta Post tended to employ more descriptive and moderate language in reporting the controversies surrounding FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. The newspaper frequently used activation and nomination strategies to present social actors explicitly while avoiding highly confrontational expressions.

In the headline “Under FIFA pressure, seven European captains ditched the OneLove armband,” FIFA was clearly activated as an institutional actor influencing the decisions of football teams. At the same time, the phrase “under FIFA pressure”

implied institutional authority without excessively condemning FIFA's actions. This representation differed from The Guardian's stronger emphasis on discrimination and human rights violations. The Jakarta Post instead framed the issue more pragmatically as part of tournament regulations and institutional influence.

Another example can be seen in the phrase "Teams focused on World Cup, not politics, had easier passage." This sentence associated political activism with sporting consequences and implied that avoiding political involvement contributed to success in the competition. Through this representation, The Jakarta Post subtly positioned political protests as secondary to sporting objectives. Rather than openly criticizing activism, the newspaper framed the controversy through the perspective of professionalism and tournament performance.

The excerpt "Germany shocked by Japan after armband protest" also demonstrated how political controversy was integrated into sports reporting. The protest was represented as contextual background information connected to Germany's defeat. Unlike The Guardian, which foregrounded ideological resistance, The Jakarta Post maintained a focus on sporting outcomes while still acknowledging the controversy.

Discussions concerning LGBTQ+ issues were also presented cautiously throughout the articles. The newspaper generally avoided strongly evaluative language and did not extensively elaborate on ideological conflict surrounding sexuality and human rights. This cautious representation may reflect Indonesia's sociocultural context, where LGBTQ+ discourse remains sensitive within public discussion. Consequently, The Jakarta Post appeared to prioritize balanced reporting and institutional neutrality while still acknowledging international controversies surrounding the tournament.

Overall, The Jakarta Post maintained a more neutral and balanced tone compared to The Guardian and Al Jazeera. Nevertheless, its linguistic choices continued to reflect cultural considerations and ideological positioning, particularly in relation to political activism and LGBTQ+ representation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that media discourse is deeply ideological. Through exclusion and inclusion strategies, media institutions construct competing narratives, assign responsibility, and shape public perceptions regarding controversial international events. The representation of social actors in the coverage of FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies illustrates how language functions as a tool of ideological negotiation within global media discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the representation of social actors in FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 controversies through the analysis of news articles published by The Guardian, Al Jazeera, and The Jakarta Post. Using Theo van Leeuwen's social actor representation framework, the study identified various exclusion and inclusion strategies employed by the three news outlets. The findings revealed that all three media outlets strategically represented social actors through linguistic choices that reflected particular ideological positions. The Guardian frequently foregrounded human rights concerns and adopted a critical stance toward FIFA and Qatar. Al

Jazeera often minimized institutional accountability through suppression and passive constructions while emphasizing Western hypocrisy. Meanwhile, The Jakarta Post generally maintained a more balanced tone, although sociocultural sensitivities influenced its representation of LGBTQ+ issues. The study demonstrates that media discourse is not neutral. The inclusion and exclusion of social actors significantly shape public understanding of controversial events. Through discourse, media institutions construct legitimacy, assign responsibility, and negotiate ideological positions. This research contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by highlighting how international media outlets construct competing narratives regarding global controversies. Future research may expand the scope by analyzing additional media platforms, incorporating multimodal discourse analysis, or examining audience reception toward media representations.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Al-Faki, I. M. (2014). Political speeches of some African leaders from linguistic perspective.
- Al-Saaidi, A., & Matrood, S. (2018). Representation of Iraqi refugees in media discourse.
- Bernard, H. R. (2018). Research methods in anthropology.
- Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S. (1998). Introduction to qualitative research methods.
- Bonyadi, A. (2010). Critical discourse analysis and media discourse.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.
- Denzin, N. K. (2007). Triangulation in qualitative research.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). Media discourse.
- Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (2008). Critical discourse analysis.
- Fowler, R. (1997). Language in the news.
- Hammerberg, K., Kirkman, M., & de Lacey, S. (2016). Qualitative research methods.
- Hashmi, S. (2012). Al Jazeera and Middle Eastern media representation.
- Leeuwen, T. van. (2008). Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis.
- Maalej, Z. (2012). Critical discourse analysis and ideology.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis.
- Ojala, M. (2021). Media trustworthiness and neutrality.
- Poorebrahim, F., & Zarei, G. (2013). Representation of Islam in Western media.
- Said, E. (1979). Orientalism.
- Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis.
- Widdowson, H. G. (2000). Critical discourse analysis.
- Winata, A. (2014). Online news media and information dissemination.