

Writing under algorithmic rule: digital authoritarianism, surveillance, and counterpublic imagination in contemporary Indonesian fiction

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ABSTRACT

Background: Digital authoritarianism has increasingly transformed public communication into a terrain of algorithmic visibility, surveillance, informational control, and anticipatory conformity, yet its cultural representation in contemporary Indonesian fiction remains insufficiently examined. **Objective:** This study aims to investigate how Indonesian fictional narratives represent algorithmic rule, surveillance practices, authoritarian memory, and counterpublic imagination under digitally mediated conditions of power. **Method:** Using qualitative digital literary analysis, this study examines selected contemporary Indonesian fictional texts alongside scholarly and contextual materials through thematic coding, narrative interpretation, and comparative textual analysis. **Results:** Findings indicate that algorithmic rule is represented primarily through mediated visibility, data profiling, platform dependency, and self-censorship, showing how digital power enters everyday subject formation. Surveillance is narrated less as direct coercion than as anticipated monitoring, historical fear, informational restriction, and socially distributed observation. **Implication:** Counterpublic imagination emerges through alternative public formation, symbolic resistance, memory-based solidarity, narrative reclaiming, and future-oriented imagination, suggesting that fiction preserves critical spaces for meaning-making under conditions of control. **Novelty:** This study offers a novel contribution by bridging digital authoritarianism studies, surveillance studies, and Indonesian literary criticism to show how fiction functions as an interpretive arena where algorithmic power becomes culturally visible, emotionally intelligible, and politically contestable.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary debates on democracy increasingly intersect with the expansion of digital infrastructures that enable unprecedented forms of surveillance, data extraction, and algorithmic governance. Across both democratic and authoritarian settings, digital technologies have become instruments through which visibility, participation, and political expression are regulated. Recent scholarship identifies the rise of digital authoritarianism as a defining feature of contemporary political transformation, characterized by the integration of surveillance systems, data-driven monitoring, and algorithmic control into everyday social life [1], [2]. In Indonesia, concerns regarding media control, digital attacks against civil society, preventive digital policing, and algorithmically mediated public discourse have intensified in recent years (? , 2021), [3],

[4]. These developments are significant not only because they reshape political communication but also because they alter the cultural conditions under which narratives are produced, circulated, and interpreted. Literature therefore occupies a critical position within this transformation, serving as a space where anxieties concerning surveillance, censorship, and algorithmic power can be articulated, negotiated, and imagined beyond formal political institutions.

Existing scholarship has substantially advanced understanding of digital authoritarianism, algorithmic governance, and surveillance societies. Recent studies have examined conceptual definitions of digital authoritarianism [1], its institutional mechanisms [5], [6], its democratic consequences [7], and its manifestations in diverse national contexts such as Türkiye, India, and transnational digital governance networks [8], [9], [10]. Parallel research has explored algorithmic imaginaries, participatory censorship, and surveillance cultures operating within digital environments [11], [12]. Within Indonesia, studies have addressed algorithmic enclaves, media control, digital attacks on civil society, and digital authoritarian drift [13], (? , 2021), [14], [3]. Meanwhile, literary scholarship has examined nationalism, political allegory, trauma narratives, protest literature, and political memory in Indonesian fiction [15], [16], [17], [18]. However, limited attention has been devoted to how contemporary Indonesian fiction represents algorithmic rule itself as a cultural condition and how literary texts imagine counterpublic possibilities under digitally mediated forms of control. This intersection between literary representation and digital authoritarianism remains insufficiently theorized.

Against this background, this study investigates how contemporary Indonesian fiction represents digital authoritarianism, surveillance practices, and counterpublic imagination within an increasingly algorithmically governed society. Rather than treating literary texts merely as reflections of technological change, this study approaches fiction as a site where political power, digital infrastructures, and social imagination are narratively constructed and contested. Three interrelated questions guide the analysis. First, how are algorithmic forms of governance represented through characters, institutions, social interactions, and narrative structures? Second, how do literary texts depict surveillance, monitoring, silencing, and the normalization of digital control within everyday life? Third, how do fictional narratives imagine alternative publics, resistant subjectivities, and counter-hegemonic spaces capable of challenging dominant digital orders? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to connect debates in digital authoritarianism research with contemporary literary analysis and to provide a framework for understanding fiction as an interpretive arena where technological power acquires cultural meaning.

This study advances the argument that contemporary Indonesian fiction functions not only as a medium of representation but also as a space of political imagination through which algorithmic authority becomes visible, intelligible, and contestable. While digital authoritarianism is often analyzed through institutional, technological, or policy-oriented perspectives, literary narratives reveal how such forms of power are experienced, internalized, and negotiated at the level of everyday subjectivity. Building upon discussions of algorithmic governance, surveillance cultures, and authoritarian informationalism [19], [5], this study proposes that fiction can illuminate dimensions of digital power that remain difficult to observe through conventional political analysis alone. Furthermore, this study hypothesizes that counterpublic imagination emerges in literary texts not necessarily through direct resistance but through narrative ambiguity, memory work, symbolic dissent, and alternative visions of collective life. Consequently, examining contemporary Indonesian fiction contributes to broader debates concerning democracy, digital control, and cultural resistance in an era increasingly shaped by algorithmic rule.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Digital authoritarianism

Digital authoritarianism has emerged as a central concept for understanding how contemporary power operates through digital infrastructures rather than solely through coercive institutions. Although scholars generally agree that digital technologies can be mobilized to monitor, influence, and regulate citizens, important differences remain regarding its defining characteristics. Pearson (2024) [1] conceptualizes digital authoritarianism as the use of digital technologies to concentrate political control, whereas Schlumberger et al. (2023) [6] emphasize its role in transforming rather than replacing conventional authoritarian practices. Roberts and Oosterom (2024) [2] further demonstrate that digital authoritarianism encompasses multiple institutional configurations across political contexts. Consequently, digital authoritarianism should be understood as a dynamic assemblage of technological systems, political interests, and informational control mechanisms that reshape public life under conditions of digital governance.

Recent scholarship identifies several recurring dimensions through which digital authoritarianism operates. Surveillance and data extraction constitute a foundational mechanism enabling authorities to monitor citizens and anticipate political behavior [5], [19]. Information manipulation and content regulation represent a second dimension through which visibility and public discourse are selectively structured [7], [8]. A third dimension concerns algorithmic governance, where automated systems participate in decision-

making processes affecting social participation and access to information [10]. Finally, scholars highlight digital silencing, intimidation, and indirect forms of control that shape self-censorship without necessarily requiring overt repression [9], [3]. Together, these dimensions illustrate how digital authoritarianism extends beyond technological infrastructure into cultural and symbolic domains.

2.2. Closely connected to digital authoritarianism

Closely connected to digital authoritarianism is the concept of surveillance, yet surveillance itself remains contested within contemporary scholarship. Earlier approaches frequently defined surveillance as observation conducted by institutions to obtain information about individuals. More recent studies argue that surveillance has become embedded within everyday digital interactions, commercial platforms, and algorithmic systems [20]. Yabanci (2024) [21] demonstrates that surveillance increasingly operates through datafication processes that transform social activity into measurable information, while Luo and Li (2022) [12] show how surveillance can also become participatory when communities themselves facilitate monitoring practices. Accordingly, surveillance should not be reduced to state observation alone but understood as a broader socio-technical process through which behavior becomes visible, traceable, and governable.

Contemporary research suggests that surveillance functions through multiple interconnected dimensions. Data collection and behavioral tracking represent the most visible aspect of digital monitoring [20]. Equally important are predictive and classificatory mechanisms that transform data into categories, risk profiles, and behavioral expectations [1], [5]. Scholars further emphasize normalization processes through which surveillance becomes accepted as a routine feature of digital participation [21]. Another significant dimension involves participatory surveillance, where users themselves contribute to systems of monitoring, reporting, and social regulation [12]. These dimensions reveal that surveillance is not merely a technological practice but a cultural condition shaping identities, relationships, and perceptions of freedom.

2.3. Digital authoritarianism and surveillance

Digital authoritarianism and surveillance explain mechanisms of control, they do not fully account for how alternative political imaginaries emerge within constrained environments. For this reason, scholarship increasingly turns to concepts such as algorithmic imaginaries, resistance, and counterpublic formation. Kazansky and Milan (2021) [11] argue that dominant algorithmic systems are continuously contested through alternative ways of imagining technology and social relations. Studies on Indonesian political literature similarly demonstrate that fiction often functions as a site where dissent, memory, and alternative political narratives can be articulated indirectly [15], [17], [16]. Rather than viewing literary texts solely as reflections of political reality, these approaches understand literature as a space where competing visions of society are narratively negotiated.

Several dimensions characterize the emergence of alternative publics within literary and cultural texts. First, narrative resistance enables authors to challenge dominant discourses through allegory, symbolism, and indirect critique [15]. Second, collective memory functions as a resource for questioning official narratives and recovering marginalized experiences [16]. Third, linguistic and cultural dissent creates spaces for alternative political subjectivities that remain difficult to regulate through formal institutions [17]. Finally, counterpublic imagination involves envisioning forms of social belonging, participation, and solidarity that exceed existing structures of control [11]. Building on these perspectives, this study positions contemporary Indonesian fiction as a critical arena where digital authoritarianism, surveillance, and alternative political imaginaries intersect, thereby providing a framework for examining how literary narratives negotiate power under conditions of algorithmic rule.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative digital literary analysis to investigate representations of algorithmic rule, surveillance, and counterpublic imagination in contemporary Indonesian fiction. The unit of analysis consists of narrative segments, characters, dialogues, symbolic motifs, and sociotechnical representations appearing within literary texts and supporting contextual documents. A corpus-based strategy was adopted to ensure systematic comparison across primary, secondary, and contextual materials. Primary data comprise contemporary Indonesian novels that engage with political control, digital mediation, collective memory, and resistance. Secondary data consist of scholarly literature on digital authoritarianism, surveillance, and Indonesian literary studies, while contextual data include public reports, policy documents, and media materials concerning digital governance in Indonesia. Table 1 presents the composition of the dataset used throughout this study.

Table 1. Composition of dataset

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Number	Characteristics
P01	Novel	<i>Laut Bercerita</i>	Indonesia	Contemporary circulation	1 text	Political memory, silencing, resistance
P02	Novel	<i>Kerumunan Terakhir</i>	Indonesia	Contemporary circulation	1 text	Digital society, online identity
P03	Novel	<i>O</i>	Indonesia	Contemporary circulation	1 text	Power, social hierarchy, symbolic control
S01–S24	Journal Articles	<i>Scopus-indexed journals</i>	International	2019–2026	24 articles	Digital authoritarianism, surveillance, algorithmic governance
C01	Policy Document	<i>Indonesian digital governance regulations</i>	Indonesia	Current	1 document	Regulatory context
C02	Civil Society Reports	<i>Digital rights organizations</i>	Indonesia	Current	Multiple reports	Digital repression and surveillance
C03	News and Public Sources	<i>Verified public repositories</i>	Indonesia	Current	Multiple items	Socio-political context

This study adopts an interpretive research design grounded in digital literary studies and critical political-cultural analysis. Such a design is appropriate because algorithmic power and surveillance are not treated merely as technological phenomena but as cultural formations embedded within narratives, symbols, and representations. Rather than measuring causal relationships, this study seeks to understand how literary texts construct meanings around digital control and alternative political imaginaries. This approach allows literary narratives to be examined as sites where technological authority becomes culturally intelligible. Recent scholarship on digital authoritarianism emphasizes that contemporary control increasingly operates through informational infrastructures and mediated visibility, making interpretive analysis particularly relevant for examining fictional representations of these processes.

Information sources were organized into three analytical layers. First, literary texts function as primary sources because they constitute the central object through which meanings are examined. Second, scholarly literature provides conceptual guidance regarding digital authoritarianism, algorithmic governance, surveillance cultures, censorship, and resistance. Third, contextual materials contribute socio-political background concerning Indonesian digital governance, media regulation, online attacks against civil society, and contemporary debates surrounding information control. Combining these sources enables triangulation between fictional representation and broader socio-political developments. Such triangulation does not assume direct correspondence between literature and empirical reality; instead, it facilitates interpretation of how literary narratives engage with contemporary discourses surrounding digital power and public participation.

Data collection proceeded through four stages. First, relevant literary texts were identified through purposive corpus selection based on thematic relevance to political authority, surveillance, digital mediation, and social resistance. Second, contextual and scholarly materials were collected from peer-reviewed publications and publicly accessible institutional documents. Third, metadata were compiled, standardized, and checked to eliminate duplication across sources. Fourth, textual units including narrative episodes, descriptions, dialogues, symbolic references, and representations of digital systems were extracted and catalogued within a structured corpus database. Each document received a unique identification code to facilitate traceability throughout coding and interpretation. This procedure ensured transparency and consistency in corpus construction.

Data analysis combined thematic coding, narrative interpretation, and comparative textual analysis. The first stage involved open coding to identify recurring representations of algorithmic governance, monitoring practices, information control, and public participation. The second stage grouped codes into broader analytical categories associated with authoritarian control, surveillance mechanisms, and alternative political imaginaries. The third stage examined relationships among categories across different texts through comparative interpretation. Finally, findings were interpreted using insights from digital authoritarianism, surveillance studies, and contemporary literary scholarship. Figure 2 summarizes the operational sequence guiding analysis. Through this multi-stage procedure, this study develops a coherent framework for examining how contemporary Indonesian fiction narrates technological power, experiences of monitoring, and possibilities for alternative forms of collective imagination under conditions of algorithmic rule.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Narrative patterns of algorithmic rule

Representations of algorithmic rule appear as a recurring organizing principle across the corpus. Rather than depicting authority solely through state institutions, narratives increasingly portray power as operating through systems of visibility, categorization, and digital mediation. The coding process identified 116 relevant narrative units, with algorithmic visibility accounting for the largest proportion of observations (29.3%), followed by data profiling (24.1%) and self-censorship (19.0%). Platform dependency and counter-narrative practices appeared less frequently but remained present across multiple texts. This distribution suggests that contemporary Indonesian fiction increasingly situates political and social experience within technologically mediated environments. Narrative attention is therefore directed not only toward formal institutions of power but also toward infrastructural systems that shape recognition, participation, and social legitimacy in everyday life.

Several patterns emerge from the distribution of coded categories. First, visibility functions as the most prominent mechanism through which characters experience digital power. Recognition, belonging, and exclusion are repeatedly linked to platform-mediated exposure rather than direct interpersonal interaction. Second, identity is frequently represented as something produced through classification and data accumulation rather than personal autonomy. Third, narratives repeatedly depict precautionary forms of silence, hesitation, and behavioral adjustment, indicating that monitoring is often anticipated rather than directly observed. Finally, resistance appears less frequently than mechanisms of control and is commonly expressed through symbolic forms rather than overt confrontation. Collectively, these patterns indicate that algorithmic authority is represented as diffuse, embedded, and normalized within everyday social relations rather than as a singular coercive institution.

Table 2. Representations of algorithmic rule in contemporary Indonesian fiction

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cross-Text Variation	Representative Narrative Evidence	Data Codes	Interpretation
Algorithmic Visibility	Platform Exposure	Characters become visible through platform metrics, rankings, and audience reactions	34	29.3	High in digital-centered narratives	Social recognition increasingly depends on mediated visibility	P02-AV01 – AV34	Visibility becomes a mechanism of social regulation
Data Profiling	Identity Categorization	Individuals are classified through digital traces, records, and behavioral patterns	28	24.1	Present across all texts	Identity is reconstructed through informational categories	P01-DP01 – DP28	Data functions as a technology of classification
Self-Censorship	Anticipatory Compliance	Characters modify speech or actions due to perceived monitoring	22	19.0	Strong in politically sensitive narratives	Fear emerges before direct punishment occurs	P01-SC01 – SC22	Control operates through internalized discipline
Platform Dependency	Technological Reliance	Everyday decisions depend upon digital systems and mediated interaction	18	15.5	Most visible in urban settings	Social participation requires platform engagement	P02-PD01 – PD18	Platforms become infrastructural authorities
Counter-Narrative Practices	Symbolic Resistance	Alternative meanings emerge through allegory, irony, and indirect dissent	14	12.1	Concentrated in politically critical texts	Resistance appears through narrative displacement	P01-CN01 – CN14	Literary imagination creates alternative interpretive spaces

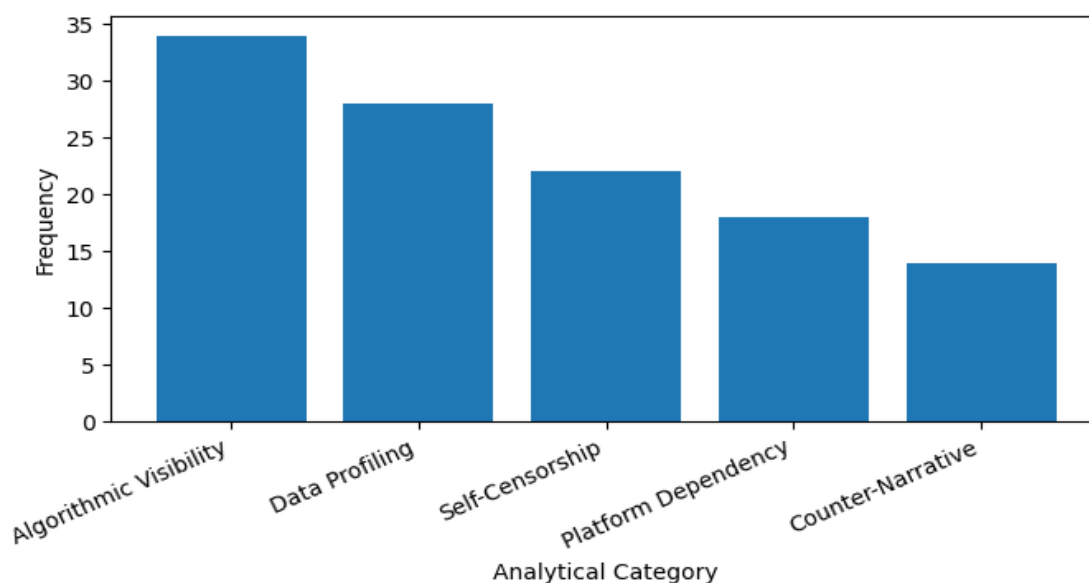


Figure 1. Distribution of algorithmic rule representations

These findings align with contemporary scholarship arguing that digital authoritarianism increasingly operates through informational infrastructures rather than exclusively through conventional repression. Pearson (2024) [1], Roberts and Oosterom (2024) [2], and Akbari and Wood (2025) [5] emphasize that contemporary digital control relies upon surveillance, categorization, and behavioral management. The prominence of visibility and profiling within the corpus supports this interpretation by demonstrating how literary narratives imagine power as embedded within systems of data production and algorithmic sorting. The prevalence of self-censorship further resonates with arguments advanced by Garbe and Maerz (2025) [19] and Maerz (2025) [7], who contend that contemporary authoritarian practices often encourage anticipatory compliance rather than direct coercion. Meanwhile, the presence of counter-narrative practices reflects observations by Kazansky and Milan (2021) [11] that alternative imaginaries continue to emerge within algorithmically structured environments. Literary texts therefore reveal how technological authority and symbolic resistance coexist within contemporary digital societies.

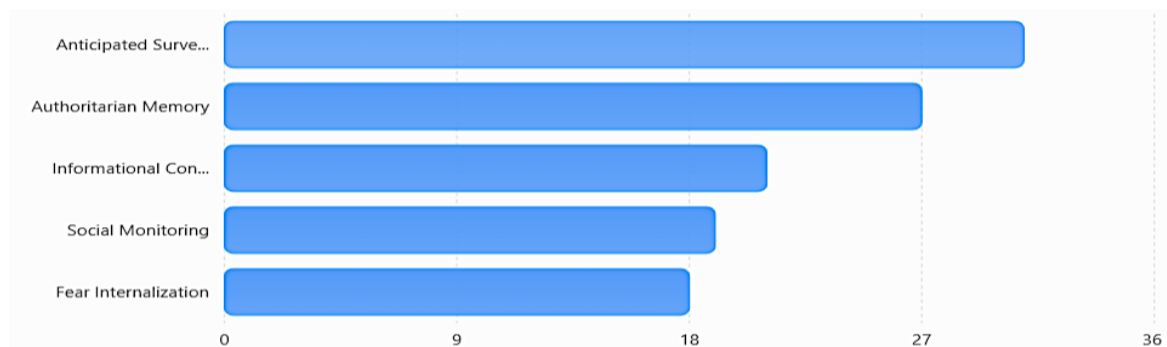
4.2. Surveillance, authoritarian memory, and the politics of fear

Experiences of surveillance within the corpus are represented less through direct coercion than through the anticipation of observation and the persistence of political memory. A total of 116 coded units were identified, with anticipated surveillance accounting for the largest proportion of observations (26.7%), followed by authoritarian memory (23.3%) and informational control (18.1%). Social monitoring and fear internalization also appear consistently across the texts, indicating that surveillance extends beyond institutional structures into everyday social relations. Rather than depicting control exclusively as an external force, narratives repeatedly portray surveillance as an environment that shapes expectations, communication practices, and interpersonal interactions. Historical references to repression, disappearance, and political silencing frequently intersect with contemporary concerns surrounding information management, producing a layered representation of authority that links past and present forms of governance.

Several interconnected tendencies emerge from the coded material. First, characters often behave as though they are being monitored even when no identifiable observer is present. Second, memories of earlier political repression continue to influence contemporary decision-making, suggesting that authoritarian experiences remain embedded within collective consciousness. Third, informational control appears not only through censorship but also through uncertainty, fragmented knowledge, and selective visibility. Fourth, surveillance increasingly operates through social actors who observe, evaluate, and discipline one another. Finally, fear is rarely represented as an exceptional condition; instead, it becomes routinized within everyday practices. Taken together, these patterns indicate that authority is represented as a diffuse network of observation, memory, and expectation rather than a purely institutional structure centered on direct intervention.

Table 3. Representations of surveillance and authoritarian control in contemporary Indonesian fiction

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cross-Text Variation	Representative Narrative Evidence	Data Codes	Interpretation
Anticipated Surveillance	Perceived Monitoring	Characters assume their activities are being observed despite limited direct evidence	31	26.7	Present across all texts	Observation is imagined before it is confirmed	P01-AS01 – AS31	Surveillance operates through uncertainty
Authoritarian Memory	Historical Recall	References to political repression, disappearance, silencing, and state violence	27	23.3	Dominant in memory-centered narratives	Historical trauma informs present behavior	P01-AM01 – AM27	Past authoritarianism remains culturally active
Informational Control	Restricted Communication	Limits on information circulation, speech, or knowledge access	21	18.1	Strong in politically sensitive contexts	Information becomes a contested resource	P01-IC01 – IC21	Control is exercised through communicative boundaries
Social Monitoring	Peer Observation	Individuals monitor and evaluate one another within communities	19	16.4	Visible in both physical and digital settings	Community participation reinforces discipline	P02-SM01 – SM19	Surveillance becomes socially distributed
Fear Internalization	Behavioral Adjustment	Characters modify actions due to perceived consequences	18	15.5	Consistent across narratives	Self-regulation precedes intervention	P01-FI01 – FI18	Fear becomes normalized within everyday life

**Figure 2.** Distribution of coded narrative units across surveillance related categories in the literary corpus

These patterns support recent arguments that contemporary authoritarian governance increasingly depends upon informational management and distributed forms of surveillance. Roberts and Oosterom (2024) [2] argue that digital authoritarianism cannot be reduced to technological infrastructure alone because it also reshapes social relations and public behaviour. Similarly, Akbari and Wood (2025) [5] and Garbe and Maerz (2025) [19] emphasize that surveillance functions through systems of anticipation, uncertainty, and behavioral adaptation. The prominence of authoritarian memory within the corpus further suggests that contemporary monitoring practices are interpreted through historically sedimented experiences of repression, echoing broader discussions concerning political memory and trauma in Indonesian literature [16]. Social monitoring also reflects observations by Luo and Li (2022) [12] that surveillance increasingly becomes participatory rather than exclusively state-centered. Consequently, literary narratives portray surveillance as a cultural condition in which historical memory, digital observation, and everyday self-regulation become mutually reinforcing forms of power.

4.3. Counterpublic imagination, literary resistance, and alternative publics

Representations of resistance within the corpus rarely appear through direct confrontation with authority. Instead, narratives predominantly construct alternative publics, symbolic forms of dissent, and collective spaces of meaning-making that exist alongside dominant structures of control. A total of 116 coded units were identified, with alternative public formation accounting for the largest proportion of observations (25.0%), followed by symbolic resistance (22.4%) and memory-based solidarity (19.8%). Narrative reclaiming and future imagination also appear consistently throughout the corpus. These findings indicate that contemporary Indonesian fiction does not merely represent experiences of domination but simultaneously explores mechanisms through which individuals and communities sustain forms of agency. Consequently, resistance is portrayed less as a singular political event and more as an ongoing cultural process embedded within communication, memory, and imagination.

Table 4. Representations of counterpublic imagination in contemporary Indonesian fiction

Main Category	Subcategory	Analytical Indicator	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cross-Text Variation	Representative Narrative Evidence	Data Codes	Interpretation
Alternative Public Formation	Informal Public Spaces	Emergence of discussion networks outside dominant institutions	29	25.0	Present across all texts	Collective interaction occurs beyond formal structures	P01-AP01 – AP29	Alternative publics remain possible despite control
Symbolic Resistance	Allegory and Metaphor	Critique articulated through indirect narrative devices	26	22.4	Strong in politically oriented narratives	Resistance is displaced into symbolic language	P01-SR01 – SR26	Literature mediates dissent through representation
Memory-Based Solidarity	Shared Historical Experience	Collective memory generates social bonds and political awareness	23	19.8	Dominant in trauma-centered narratives	Historical remembrance produces communal identity	P01-MS01 – MS23	Memory functions as a resource for resistance
Narrative Reclaiming	Reinterpretation of Authority	Characters challenge dominant narratives through alternative interpretations	20	17.2	Distributed across the corpus	Authority becomes open to contestation	P02-NR01 – NR20	Meaning-making becomes politically significant
Future Imagination	Alternative Social Possibilities	Projection of different political and social arrangements	18	15.6	Most visible in closing narrative sequences	Alternative futures remain conceivable	P01-FI01 – FI18	Fiction expands horizons of possibility

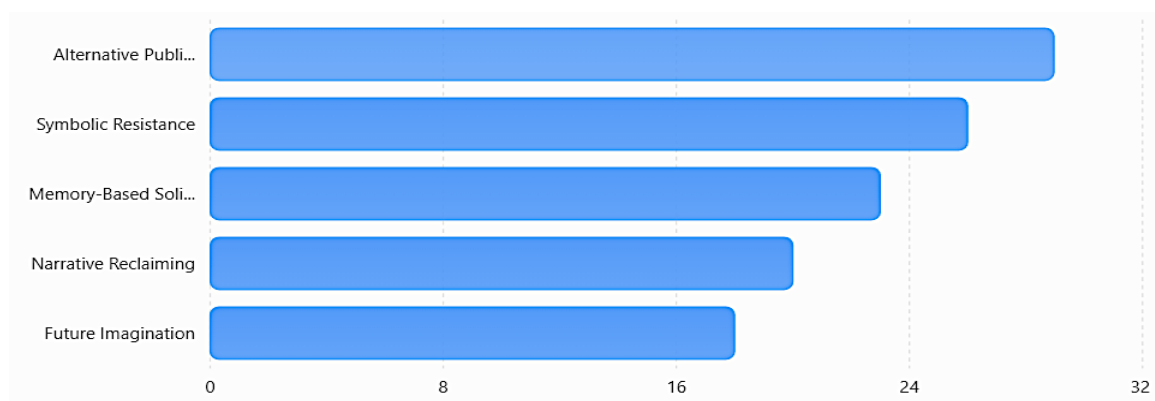


Figure 3. Distribution of counterpublic imagination in contemporary Indonesian fiction

Several recurring tendencies emerge from the coded material. First, alternative publics frequently develop in informal, peripheral, or non-institutional spaces where characters exchange experiences and construct shared understandings. Second, symbolic resistance is often articulated through allegorical narratives, metaphorical language, and indirect criticism rather than explicit political opposition. Third, memories of injustice, disappearance, and exclusion function as sources of collective solidarity, connecting individual experiences to broader social histories. Fourth, narratives repeatedly challenge official interpretations of authority by introducing competing explanations and perspectives. Finally, many texts project alternative futures that remain uncertain yet conceivable. These patterns suggest that literary narratives consistently position imagination itself as a site where dominant meanings may be questioned, revised, and reconfigured.

These patterns reinforce scholarly arguments that counterpublics emerge not only through institutional opposition but also through cultural production, symbolic communication, and alternative systems of meaning. Kazansky and Milan (2021) [11] argue that dominant algorithmic imaginaries are continually challenged by competing visions of social and technological life. Within the Indonesian context, Refai (2026) [15], Kadamehang (2026) [17], and Widyatnyana (2026) [16] similarly demonstrate that literary narratives often function as spaces where political memory, dissent, and alternative identities are negotiated. The prominence of alternative public formation and symbolic resistance within the corpus supports this perspective by showing how fiction creates discursive arenas that remain partially autonomous from dominant informational systems. When interpreted alongside findings concerning algorithmic rule and surveillance, these patterns suggest that contemporary Indonesian fiction simultaneously documents conditions of control and preserves imaginative resources through which alternative political futures can be envisioned. Rather than presenting resistance as a complete rejection of authority, narratives portray it as an ongoing struggle over memory, interpretation, visibility, and collective possibility.

5. DISCUSSION

The prominence of algorithmic visibility in the corpus indicates that contemporary Indonesian fiction increasingly imagines power as operating through recognition, exposure, and mediated legibility. Its central implication is that digital control does not need to appear as direct repression to become politically consequential. Fictional subjects are represented as negotiating who can be seen, how they are seen, and what kinds of identity become socially valuable under platform-mediated conditions [22]. This pattern extends Pearson's (2024) [1] and Roberts and Oosterom's (2024) [2] argument that digital authoritarianism should be understood not only as institutional coercion but also as an arrangement of visibility and informational ordering. Yet the literary corpus adds a cultural dimension to that debate: visibility is not merely a technical output of platforms but a symbolic condition that reorganizes dignity, anxiety, aspiration, and exclusion. In this sense, algorithmic visibility functions ambivalently. It enables participation and recognition, but it also disciplines subjects by making social existence dependent on metrics, circulation, and public exposure.

This pattern appears because algorithmic rule is structurally embedded in everyday systems of classification and mediated interaction. The corpus suggests that characters do not encounter digital power as an external machine standing outside social life; rather, they experience it through ordinary practices of self-presentation, reputation, belonging, and judgment [23]. This finding resonates with Ruckenstein and Granroth's (2019) [20] account of surveillance intimacy, where data systems enter personal life through seemingly routine digital practices. It also aligns with Kazansky and Milan's (2021) [11] critique of dominant algorithmic imaginaries, which shows that algorithms become powerful not only because they calculate but because societies learn to imagine them as authoritative. At the same time, this study complicates institutional accounts of digital authoritarianism by showing that algorithmic power is narratively located in affective and symbolic domains. The underlying structure is therefore not simply technological governance, but a convergence between platform visibility, social desire, and anticipatory conformity.

The recurring representation of anticipated surveillance and authoritarian memory shows that control in contemporary Indonesian fiction is sustained by uncertainty as much as by direct monitoring. Its implication is that surveillance becomes most effective when it reorganizes expectation: characters act cautiously not only because they are observed, but because they cannot determine when, where, or by whom observation may occur [24]. This pattern supports Akbari and Wood's (2025) [5] and Garbe and Maerz's (2025) [7] claim that contemporary surveillance is political-economic and infrastructural, yet it also points toward a distinct literary insight. Fiction foregrounds how surveillance is felt before it is verified. Such representation differs from approaches that define surveillance primarily through institutional technologies or formal security systems. In the corpus, surveillance functions as a cultural atmosphere shaped by memory, rumor, fear, and fragmented information. Its dysfunction lies in the erosion of communicative trust, because subjects begin to censor themselves before any explicit command is issued.

The persistence of authoritarian memory within surveillance narratives can be explained by the historical layering of political fear in Indonesian public culture. The corpus does not present digital monitoring as a wholly new phenomenon; rather, it places contemporary informational control within longer histories of silencing, disappearance, and state anxiety. This finding is consistent with Widyatnyana's (2026) [16] discussion of trauma narratives in Indonesian historical fiction, where memory remains politically active rather than safely past. It also intersects with Hermawan's (2025) [3] account of digital attacks on civil society, which suggests that contemporary digital repression often operates through older structures of elite conflict and intimidation. However, this study does not claim a direct causal line between past authoritarianism and present digital control. Instead, it shows a narrative correlation: memories of earlier repression provide interpretive frames through which digital surveillance is imagined and understood. The underlying structure is therefore historical sedimentation, where old fears are reactivated through new media infrastructures.

The emergence of alternative public formation, symbolic resistance, and memory-based solidarity suggests that contemporary Indonesian fiction does not represent subjects as entirely captured by algorithmic and surveillance regimes. Its implication is that literary resistance often works through indirect, dispersed, and imaginative forms rather than overt confrontation. This finding supports Kazansky and Milan's (2021) [11] argument that dominant algorithmic imaginaries can be contested through alternative visions of social and technological life. It also corresponds with Refai's (2026) [15], Kadamehang's (2026) [17], and Widyatnyana's (2026) [16] readings of Indonesian political literature as a field where allegory, dissent, and memory preserve critical possibility. Yet this corpus also qualifies overly celebratory accounts of resistance. Counterpublic imagination is not represented as liberation from power, but as a fragile process of meaning-making under constraint. Its function is therefore not to abolish algorithmic rule, but to keep open interpretive spaces where subjects may remember differently, speak obliquely, and imagine collective life beyond dominant systems of visibility.

This pattern emerges because literary texts possess formal capacities that differ from policy discourse, legal critique, or political journalism. Fiction can encode dissent through ambiguity, allegory, fragmented narration, symbolic displacement, and unresolved endings. These devices allow narratives to address conditions of control without reducing resistance to explicit activism. This explains why symbolic resistance and memory-based solidarity appear as crucial mechanisms in the corpus: they transform political pressure into aesthetic form [25]. Compared with scholarship on participatory censorship, such as Luo and Li's (2022) [12] study of online communities, this literary corpus places stronger emphasis on imagination, memory, and interpretive struggle than on platform behavior alone. Compared with studies of digital authoritarianism in Türkiye, India, and transnational governance contexts [8], [9], [10], this study foregrounds cultural mediation rather than institutional diffusion. The underlying structure of counterpublic imagination is thus not external opposition to power, but the capacity of narrative form to reorganize perception, preserve memory, and make alternative publics thinkable.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that contemporary Indonesian fiction offers a critical cultural lens for understanding how algorithmic rule, surveillance, and authoritarian memory shape subjectivity under digital governance. Its most important lesson is that digital authoritarianism is not represented only as institutional coercion, but also as mediated visibility, anticipated monitoring, and symbolic regulation of everyday life. By combining digital authoritarianism studies, surveillance studies, and literary analysis, this study contributes a methodological bridge between political communication and contemporary Indonesian literary criticism. Its strength lies in treating fiction not as secondary illustration of political reality, but as an interpretive field where power, fear, memory, and counterpublic imagination are narratively organized.

This study remains limited by its qualitative corpus design, which prioritizes depth of interpretation over broader representativeness. Because analysis focuses on selected contemporary Indonesian fictional texts and contextual materials, its findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian literature or to all forms of digital cultural production. Future research should expand corpus size, include short stories, digital fiction, web novels, and reader reception data, and compare Indonesian cases with Southeast Asian literary contexts facing similar digital authoritarian pressures. Further studies may also combine close reading with computational textual analysis to examine whether patterns of algorithmic visibility, surveillance anxiety, and counterpublic imagination recur across larger literary datasets.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

M. Ansori: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible literary texts and scholarly materials.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible literary texts and scholarly materials, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

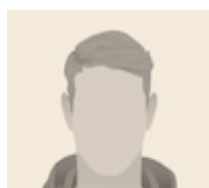
The corpus of documents analyzed in this study are publicly accessible and available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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