

Presidential economic narratives in Indonesia: A multimodal critical discourse analysis

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ABSTRACT

Political discussions often present economic performance as a success story, even when broader social and economic conditions suggest otherwise. In presidential budget speeches, statistics are frequently used to demonstrate success and build public trust. However, the ideological and persuasive functions of numbers, especially when combined with visual elements, remain underexplored. Most existing studies focus primarily on spoken or written language, offering limited insight into how numerical data and visuals work together to legitimize economic policies. This study examines the 2026 state budget address delivered by the President of the Republic of Indonesia using multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA). It investigates how verbal and visual resources interact to construct a persuasive narrative portraying the government as competent, welfare-oriented, and committed to national development. The findings reveal that economic statistics and visual symbols are not neutral representations of reality but are strategically employed to justify political authority. Through verbal strategies such as implication, repetition, and selective omission, alongside visual elements including iconography, setting, and salience, the speech constructs a narrative of economic success while marginalizing deeper social and economic issues. Among the visual strategies identified, salience emerges as the most dominant, with images consistently positioning the President as the central authority figure. Generally, the study demonstrates how numbers, repetition, and selective presentation operate together with nationalist and power-related imagery to shape public perception. These findings highlight how data presentation can influence public trust, reduce transparency, and ultimately affect democratic accountability in political and economic communication.

Keywords: economic statistics; ideology; multimodal critical discourse analysis; political discourse; state budget

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INTRODUCTION

Political discourse plays a central role in constructing narratives of success and economic legitimacy through the strategic use of language, media influence, and rhetorical techniques. Political leaders frequently shape public opinion by presenting optimistic portrayals of economic performance that

support political and economic agendas (Harmoko & Purwaningrum, 2025; Lupu & Sandu, 2017; Mialkovska et al., 2024; Mühlberger, 2020; Oppermann & Spencer, 2018; Shkvorchenko, 2020; Springer, 2019). Presidents, in particular, rely on persuasive language to maintain public trust, often emphasizing positive economic conditions even when objective indicators suggest deterioration. In semi-presidential systems, such optimistic or neutral tones are commonly employed to preserve political stability and reinforce presidential authority (Kujanen et al., 2025). By framing economic conditions favorably, presidents attempt to align public perception with government priorities, influence consumer confidence, and stabilize political support during periods of economic uncertainty (Jacobs & Shapiro, 2019; Rottinghaus, 2008; Scully, 2018; Wood et al., 2005).

Beyond general persuasion, rhetorical devices such as metaphors and metonymies function as powerful tools for shaping public perceptions of economic recovery. Studies on political leaders such as President Obama and Prime Minister Rajoy demonstrate how symbolic rhetoric is used to emphasize recovery narratives while simultaneously obscuring the negative dimensions of economic crises (Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2018; Cabrejas-Peñuelas, 2020). Alongside rhetorical language, numerical performance indicators have become a key resource for projecting economic competence and leadership. Presidents frequently cite economic statistics as objective proof of success, as seen in speeches by the presidents of Estonia and Lithuania, where numerical data were used to reinforce narratives of national development (Rajala, 2019). Although statistics are commonly perceived as neutral representations of socio-economic reality (Lanata-Briones, 2020), they are inherently value-laden and often function as ideological instruments to legitimize policy decisions and political authority (Ljones, 2011; Wade, 2012).

This strategic use of numbers is evident in the President of the Republic of Indonesia's speech on the government's statement regarding the draft 2026 state budget, delivered to the House of Representatives on 15 August 2025. In the speech, the national economy was portrayed as a success, supported by selected economic statistics presented as indicators of achievement. However, this optimistic portrayal does not fully align with other economic indicators, including declining purchasing managers' index (PMI) figures, rising unemployment, and reduced household consumption (Tempo.co., 2025). This discrepancy reflects Benjamin Disraeli's well-known observation about "three kinds of lies: lies, big lies, and statistics" (Velleman, 2008). Such contradictions highlight the political nature of economic data presentation and the importance of critically examining how numbers are mobilized in presidential discourse.

Presidential speeches on draft state budgets serve not only as formal explanations of planned government revenues and expenditures but also as strategic political instruments for framing and justifying economic conditions. Research indicates that presidents increasingly describe economic performance in positive terms over time, even when objective economic indicators do not fully support such claims (Wood et al., 2005). Similar patterns have been identified across political contexts. For example, analyses of Biden's State of the Union addresses reveal the use of passive constructions and modal expressions to project leadership and secure public support (Fareh et al., 2025), while studies of King Abdullah II's speeches demonstrate how pragmatic strategies promote nationalism and social cohesion (Khater et al., 2024). Policy narratives are particularly influential because they shape public opinion, affect support for government policies, and influence economic behavior, including voting decisions and public willingness to act (Lewis-Beck et al., 2013; Shanahan et al., 2011; Sparkman et al., 2025; Winett et al., 2021).

Despite the importance of narrative construction, most research on presidential discourse has focused predominantly on verbal text within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Studies have examined political speeches using various CDA models, including Fairclough's approach (Kazemian & Hashemi, 2014), Fairclough and Fairclough's argumentative framework (Moradi-Joz et al., 2019), and van Dijk's socio-cognitive model (Saber, 2024). Although these studies provide valuable insights into rhetorical strategies, ideology, and power relations, they largely privilege linguistic analysis and overlook other semiotic resources that contribute to meaning-making in political communication.

By contrast, multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), as proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012), extends analysis beyond language to include visual and other semiotic elements such as iconography, attributes, settings, and salience. This approach remains underutilized, particularly in Indonesian political discourse studies. International research demonstrates the analytical potential of MCDA in revealing how verbal and visual elements interact to reinforce ideology and social hierarchies, such as in studies of racist humor on social media (Garnes-Tarazona, 2025) and multimodal advertising on Facebook (El-Kanash & Al-Khatib, 2025). Indonesian CDA studies, however, have largely remained text-centered, focusing on ideological content in presidential speeches (Latupeirissa et al., 2019; Tyson & Apresian, 2021) or discourse in social and educational contexts (Meyer & Waskitho, 2021; Ratnadewi & Yuniarti, 2019), with limited attention to multimodal interaction.

Accordingly, a clear research gap exists in the lack of MCDA studies examining Indonesian presidential economic speeches, particularly those related to state budget discourse. Existing analyses rarely address how verbal language, numerical data, and visual elements operate together to legitimize economic policy and political authority. Addressing this gap, the present study applies MCDA to examine how the Indonesian President's economic growth narrative in the 2026 state budget speech is constructed through the integration of verbal text and visual statistics. The study is guided by two research questions:

1. How are semiotic modes employed to legitimate economic policy?
2. How is governing ideology reproduced through multimodal representations of economic performance?

Theoretically, this study contributes to MCDA by demonstrating how language, numbers, and visuals jointly construct political legitimacy while marginalizing socio-economic inequality. Practically, it encourages more critical engagement with presidential economic discourse as a means of promoting transparency and democratic accountability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA)

Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) is an extension of critical discourse analysis (CDA) that expands the scope of discourse analysis beyond verbal language to include multiple semiotic resources such as images, graphics, videos, sound, and music (Gibson et al., 2015; Joy et al., 2024). MCDA provides a systematic framework for examining how meaning, ideology, and power relations are constructed through the interaction of visual and textual elements in contemporary communication. This approach is particularly relevant in increasingly digital and media-rich environments, where social realities are shaped not only by words but also by visual representations and design choices. MCDA has been applied to analyze diverse social phenomena, including representations of health and illness in public media, digital platforms, and arts-based practices, demonstrating how multimodal communication plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding and social attitudes (Gibson et al., 2015).

At the core of MCDA are several key principles that guide its analytical focus. First, meaning is understood as inherently multimodal, produced through the interaction of linguistic, visual, and other semiotic modes rather than through language alone (Gibson et al., 2015; Pérez-Arredondo & Cárdenas-Neira, 2023). Second, all communicative acts are considered non-neutral, as they inevitably carry ideological positions and reflect power relations. Third, MCDA emphasizes the analysis of representational choices and the assumptions underlying them in order to reveal how legitimacy, authority, and dominance are constructed and maintained (Joy et al., 2024). Finally, MCDA foregrounds a critical stance toward the social, political, and ideological consequences of multimodal communication, enabling researchers to uncover how meaning is strategically produced and circulated within specific social contexts (Chen & Weninger, 2025).

From CDA to MCDA

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) originated from critical language theory and developed as an interdisciplinary framework for examining how language functions to construct, legitimize, and reproduce social inequality and power relations (Al-Sharif et al., 2025; Leotti et al., 2022). Rather than constituting a single methodological approach, CDA encompasses a range of theoretical perspectives and analytical tools aimed at uncovering the ideological dimensions of discourse. Traditionally, CDA has focused on spoken and written texts, emphasizing linguistic features such as vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical strategies to reveal how social dominance and inequality are discursively produced. While this focus has generated valuable insights, it has also limited the analytical scope of CDA in contexts where meaning is increasingly conveyed through non-linguistic modes.

The emergence of social semiotics highlighted the need to extend discourse analysis beyond language, leading to the development of MCDA as a subfield of CDA. MCDA incorporates visual elements, images, sound, and other semiotic resources as integral components of discourse, thereby enabling a more comprehensive analysis of multimodal texts (Chen & Weninger, 2025; O'Halloran et al., 2011). This expanded framework has proven effective in analyzing a wide range of social issues, including health communication, media and advertising, and global crisis discourse. For example, MCDA has been used to examine multimodal representations of illness and recovery (Gibson et al., 2015; Joy et al., 2024), persuasive strategies in advertising and media texts (Chen & Weninger, 2025), and climate crisis communication that emphasizes responsibility and solutions (Maier & Ravazzani, 2022). In addition, MCDA has been adapted in diverse cultural contexts, such as Latin America and the Caribbean, to account for colonial legacies and political-cultural dominance in representation (Pérez-Arredondo & Cárdenas-Neira, 2023), as well as in popular culture and education to critique issues like colorism and conflict representation (Otaif & Asiri, 2025; Fifelola & Unuabonah, 2025).

METHOD

Research design

Qualitative research is grounded in interpretive research methods that function as a set of tools to understand individuals, groups, and social phenomena in contextualized ways, reflecting how people construct meaning and interpret their experiences, themselves, others, and the social world (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Fundamentally, qualitative inquiry is concerned with understanding the meanings people have constructed, how they make sense of their world, and the experiences they encounter within it (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). Within this interpretive paradigm, discourse is viewed not as a neutral medium but as a socially situated practice through which meanings, power relations, and ideologies are produced and negotiated.

Based on this qualitative, the present study adopts an MCDA approach as developed by Machin and Mayr (2012). MCDA is particularly appropriate for this research because it provides a systematic framework for examining how verbal and visual semiotic resources interact to construct political legitimacy, mask contradictions, and reproduce ideology within political-economic discourse. By analyzing the interplay between linguistic choices and visual representations such as statistics and infographics, this approach enables a critical investigation of how economic narratives are formed multimodally and presented as normal in presidential discourse.

Data source

The primary data consist of the Address of the President of the Republic of Indonesia on the Government's Statement regarding the draft state budget for fiscal year 2026 and its financial note, delivered before the plenary session of the House of Representatives on 15 August 2025 (Presidential Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). This annual address represents a constitutionally mandated political event in which the President formally presents the government's economic assessment, fiscal priorities, and policy direction to the national legislature. As such, the speech functions as an authoritative and institutionalized narrative of national economic performance and state policy orientation.

The address was broadcast live nationwide and remains publicly accessible through the official YouTube channel of the [Presidential Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia \(2025\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G87hI-UcTPY): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G87hI-UcTPY> (Live: Address by the President of the Republic of Indonesia on the Submission of the 2026 State Budget Bill and the Financial Statement, 15 August 2025). The live broadcast and its online dissemination ensure wide public visibility and reinforce the speech's role as a key site of political communication. In this context, the speech is not merely a verbal text but a multimodal political performance, accompanied by visual and symbolic elements such as official iconography, presidential attributes, ceremonial settings, bodily posture, and salience, all of which contribute to the construction of legitimacy and authority. The combination of formal institutional setting, national broadcast, and multimodal presentation makes the state budget speech a strategic data source for examining how economic narratives are articulated and presented as normal within Indonesian presidential discourse.

Analytical framework

Following Machin and Mayr (2012), this study highlights two main dimensions: verbal and visual semiotic choices. In the verbal dimension, the analysis focuses on three important aspects. First, word connotations are used to examine how the lexicon constructs positive meanings or obscures unfavorable realities. Second, overlexicalization is examined to identify the repetition of terms that serve to reinforce narratives of inevitability, stability, or progress. Third, lexical suppression or absence is examined to uncover the omission of critical issues or negative indicators that could potentially undermine the government's legitimacy.

Meanwhile, the visual dimension is analyzed through iconography, focusing on the cultural and ideological symbols displayed, including details such as clothing or other visual markers that assert authority and credibility. Setting is also an important element because it provides the spatial and situational context of the speech. Furthermore, salience is used to explore which visual elements are highlighted to attract attention and build emphasis, while other elements are positioned as background.

Procedure of analysis

The speech transcript and audiovisual materials were examined through a systematic process of manual coding and categorization. Rather than relying on qualitative analysis software, the coding was conducted manually to allow close, interpretive engagement with both verbal and visual data, which is central to MCDA. First, the transcript was segmented into thematic units and analyzed for discursive features, including word connotations, overlexicalization, and suppression. Second, the visual materials accompanying the speech were examined for multimodal features including iconography, attributes, settings, and salience. Finally, findings from both verbal and visual modes were interpreted in relation to broader ideological patterns, particularly the discourse of developmentalism and the construction of economic legitimacy.

Validity and reliability

To reduce research bias and ensure careful analysis, this study used triangulation by combining findings from both verbal and visual elements. Examining meaning through more than one mode helped avoid relying on a single viewpoint and reduced the risk of subjective interpretation based on only words or visuals. In addition, the interpretations were continuously compared with existing studies on political discourse, rhetoric, and multimodal analysis. This process of cross-checking interpretations increased the reliability of the findings and ensured that the conclusions were supported by relevant theories and understood within their broader social and political context.

FINDINGS

In the results of this research, this study examines verbal and visual semiotic choices. In the verbal dimension, the analysis focuses on word connotations, overlexicalization, and lexical suppression to reveal how language constructs positive meanings, reinforces dominant narratives, and omits critical

issues. In the visual dimension, iconography, setting, and salience are analyzed to show how cultural symbols, spatial context, and emphasis on certain elements contribute to the construction of authority and legitimacy.

Verbal semiotic choices

Following Machin and Mayr (2012), this study focuses on two main dimensions of multimodal analysis: verbal semiotic choices and visual semiotic choices. These dimensions explain how meaning is constructed through the combined use of language and visual elements to shape political messages and influence public interpretation. In particular, verbal semiotic choices examine how language is strategically employed to frame reality, highlight certain meanings, and silence others. Such choices are not neutral, as they reflect ideological positions and play an important role in legitimizing political actions and policies. In this study, verbal semiotic choices are analyzed through three key aspects: word connotations, overlexicalization, and suppression or lexical absence. The sections below provide a detailed explanation of each aspect.

Word connotations

In the 2026 state budget address, descriptive statistics, such as percentage rates, were not merely presented as technical information but were strategically employed as rhetorical devices imbued with connotative meaning. For instance, the reported economic growth of 5.12% was framed not simply as a macroeconomic achievement but was accompanied by expressions such as “*improving*” and “*the result of hard work*.” These lexical choices construct an image of stability and underscore the government’s success in navigating global uncertainty. A similar strategy can be seen in the presentation of export growth, which rose by 10.67%. Here, the use of terms like “*strong*” and “*value-added downstreaming*” reinforces a narrative of successful industrialization while legitimizing downstreaming policies. Labor market statistics were also framed in this way: the unemployment rate of 4.76% and the creation of 3.6 million new jobs were positioned as concrete evidence that government policies have a direct impact on public welfare, simultaneously generating socio-economic optimism. Even the poverty rate, which declined to 8.47%, was emphasized as the “*lowest in history*,” turning statistical achievement into a symbolic marker of monumental progress. As demonstrated by the data below.

Data 1 (01:00:53)

Ekonomi triwulan kedua 2025 tumbuh 5,12 persen year on year, membaik dari triwulan pertama 4,87 persen. Lebih dari setengahnya adalah kontribusi dari aktivitas konsumsi masyarakat yang meningkat 4,97 persen.

[In the second quarter of 2025, Indonesia’s economy grew by 5.12% year-on-year, improving from 4.87% in the first quarter. More than half of this growth was driven by household consumption, which expanded by 4.97%].

Data 2 (01:01:18)

Ekspor kita tumbuh kuat 10,67 persen, nilai tambah dari hilirisasi menjadi penyumbang terbesar kuatnya ekspor kita.

[Exports recorded a strong increase of 10.67%, with value-added from downstream industries serving as the primary contributor to this robust performance].

Data 3 (01:01:29)

Kuatnya ekonomi menunjang peningkatan kesejahteraan rakyat. Tingkat pengangguran turun menjadi 4,76 persen di Februari 2025 dari 4,82 persen tahun lalu, dengan 3,6 juta lapangan kerja baru yang berhasil diciptakan.

[The strength of the economy has been associated with improvements in public welfare. The unemployment rate declined to 4.76% in February 2025, compared to 4.82% in the previous year, alongside the creation of 3.6 million new jobs].

Data 4 (01:01:51)

Tingkat kemiskinan ditekan menjadi 8,47 persen, terendah sepanjang sejarah. Pemerintah bekerja keras agar inflasi tetap rendah di kisaran 2,4 persen, sehingga menjaga daya beli rakyat terutama masyarakat tidak mampu. Inilah bukti nyata, dengan kerja keras dan kesungguhan, kita mampu memperjuangkan nasib jutaan rakyat Indonesia untuk hidup lebih sejahtera.

[The poverty rate was reduced to 8.47%, marking the lowest level in the nation's history. The government emphasized its efforts to maintain inflation at around 2.4% in order to safeguard purchasing power, particularly for vulnerable groups. These outcomes were framed as tangible proof that, through hard work and determination, the livelihoods of millions of Indonesians could be improved].

Second, statistical data are employed to construct the image of a protective state. The reference to 82.9 million recipients of the free nutritious meals program is framed through terms such as “free” and “optimal nutrition,” positioning the state as directly responsible for nurturing the nation's future generations. The rhetorical function here is to evoke public emotion by presenting the state as a caring parental figure. A similar strategy is evident in the free health check program, which reached 17 million beneficiaries. By highlighting the word “free,” the initiative is portrayed as a concrete expression of the state's concern for the health of ordinary citizens. Such framing constructs the connotation of the state as a guardian that nurtures, cares for, and protects its people. In this way, beneficiary statistics transcend their administrative role and are transformed into an emotional rhetoric that reinforces the image of a welfare state. As shown in the data below.

Data 5 (01:14:17)

Program Makan Bergizi Gratis telah dilaksanakan di seluruh Provinsi dan terus dibangun agar menjangkau seluruh pelosok negeri. MBG, kita targetkan mampu menjangkau 82,9 juta siswa, ibu hamil, dan balita akan menerima manfaat asupan gizi optimal melalui Satuan Pelayanan Pemenuhan Gizi yang dibangun di seluruh pelosok negeri.

[The free nutritious meal program has been implemented in all provinces and continues to expand to reach all corners of the country. With the free nutritious meal program (MBG), we aim to reach 82.9 million students, pregnant women, and toddlers who will receive optimal nutritional benefits through Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units established throughout the country].

Data 6 (01:19:46)

Masyarakat miskin dan rentan dijamin memperoleh layanan kesehatan yang berkualitas. Setiap tahun, Pemerintah menanggung sepenuhnya biaya asuransi kesehatan bagi 96,8 juta jiwa masyarakat miskin dan rentan.

[The poor and vulnerable are guaranteed access to quality healthcare. Each year, the government fully covers the health insurance costs of 96.8 million poor and vulnerable people].

Data 7 (01:03:26)

Berbagai program unggulan kita sudah dirasakan rakyat. Makan Bergizi Gratis (MBG) hari ini telah mencapai 20 juta penerima manfaat, Cek Kesehatan Gratis (CKG) sudah mencapai lebih dari 17 juta penerima manfaat.

[The people have already felt the benefits of our various flagship programs. The free nutritious meal program has reached 20 million beneficiaries today, and free health checks have reached over 17 million beneficiaries].

In addition, statistical data are also employed as a strategy to reassure the public. The inflation rate of 2.4% is framed with terms such as “*under control*” and “*maintaining purchasing power*,” signaling that inflation is not merely a statistical indicator but evidence of the government’s ability to stabilize prices and shield citizens from volatility in basic necessities. Similarly, investment figures that met official targets are accompanied by the narrative of “*high investor optimism*,” reinforcing the government’s international credibility. Such framing conveys the connotation that Indonesia is trusted by the global community, positioning investment data not only as a technical achievement but also as a symbolic marker of the country’s status and reputation in the global economy. Through this rhetoric, economic data function simultaneously to reassure the domestic audience and to project the image of the state as an effective economic manager. As presented in the following data.

Data 8 (01:02:03)

Pemerintah bekerja keras agar inflasi tetap rendah di kisaran 2,4 persen, sehingga menjaga daya beli rakyat terutama masyarakat tidak mampu. Inilah bukti nyata, dengan kerja keras dan kesungguhan, kita mampu memperjuangkan nasib jutaan rakyat Indonesia untuk hidup lebih sejahtera.

[The government is working hard to keep inflation low at around 2.4%, thus maintaining people's purchasing power, especially among the underprivileged. This is clear evidence that with hard work and dedication, we can fight for the well-being of millions of Indonesians].

Data 9 (01:02:54)

Optimisme dan kepercayaan investor terhadap kinerja dan prospek perekonomian Indonesia tinggi. Realisasi investasi paruh pertama 2025 mencapai target APBN, dan pasar saham kita pun menunjukkan perkembangan mengembirakan di tengah situasi global yang sangat tidak pasti.

[Investor optimism and confidence in Indonesia's economic performance and prospects are high. Investment realization in the first half of 2025 reached the state budget target, and our stock market has shown encouraging growth amidst highly uncertain global conditions].

Third, the scale of budget allocation is framed as evidence of the state’s seriousness in carrying out its development agenda. The hundreds of trillions of rupiah allocated for education (Rp. 757.8 trillion) are presented as “the largest in the history of the Republic of Indonesia.” Through such framing, the sheer magnitude of the figure is not interpreted merely as a financial entry but as tangible proof of governmental commitment. This rhetoric underscores that the government is not acting half-heartedly but is assuming a major responsibility for the welfare of its citizens and the advancement of national development. As depicted in the data below.

Data 10 (01:16:02)

Pemerintah berkomitmen memenuhi anggaran pendidikan 20 persen, yaitu sekitar Rp757,8 triliun di tahun 2026, terbesar sepanjang sejarah NKRI.

[The government is committed to fulfilling 20% of the education budget, which is around 757.8 trillion Rupiahs in 2026, the largest in the history of the Republic of Indonesia].

Finally, statistics and numerical data are also employed to elicit public sympathy. For instance, the figure of 770,000 houses built is not presented merely as a physical achievement but is framed as “livable and affordable.” This rhetorical strategy conveys a moral connotation of genuine government concern for basic social needs, particularly those of lower- and middle-income groups. As revealed in the following data.

Data 11 (01:27:54)

Program 3 juta rumah untuk rakyat diberikan melalui berbagai skema antara lain Fasilitas Likuiditas Pembiayaan Perumahan (FLPP), dukungan Bantuan Stimulan Perumahan Swadaya (BSPS) di desa, dan kota, dan pesisir, serta dukungan PPN DTP untuk rumah komersil dalam mendukung pembangunan rumah yang layak huni dan terjangkau. Total jumlah rumah yang akan mendapat dukungan APBN 2026 adalah 770.000 rumah.

[The 3 million homes for the people program are provided through various schemes, including the housing financing liquidity facility, self-help housing stimulus assistance in villages, cities, and coastal areas, and VAT DTP support for commercial housing to support the development of habitable and affordable housing. The total number of homes to be supported by the 2026 state budget is 770.000].

In line with the framework proposed by Machin and Mayr (2012), the lexical choices in the 2026 state budget address are far from accidental. Words are deliberately selected with specific motives to construct particular meanings. Machin and Mayr (2012) emphasize that language is never neutral; it is always embedded with discursive interests. Their analysis of the East Midlands Development Agency (EMDA) documents illustrates this point. Terms such as *dynamic*, *innovation*, *competing*, *strategic*, and *ambition* dominate the text, portraying the East Midlands as a vibrant, modern economic hub. At the same time, fundamental social issues—poverty, unemployment, and urban decline—are left unmentioned. Instead of foregrounding real social actors such as the poor, the unemployed, or local workers, the text substitutes neutral labels like “partners” or “stakeholders.” As a result, the discourse shifts away from social suffering and inequality and is reframed as one of “business energy” and “strategic progress.” Machin and Mayr (2012) identify this as a rhetorical practice that obscures social problems while channeling meaning toward particular political interests.

A similar strategy is evident in the 2026 state budget address. Statistical data and technical figures are framed with terms such as “hard work,” “free,” “under control,” “livable,” and “the largest in history.” As in the EMDA case, these choices are not merely informative; they actively shape public perception. For instance, the poverty rate of 8.47% is not presented simply as data but is framed as “the lowest in history,” thereby reinforcing the narrative of monumental governmental achievement. Likewise, the free nutritious meal program, reaching 82.9 million recipients, is coupled with words like “free” and “optimal nutrition,” which together construct the image of the state as a caring “parent” for its citizens.

Thus, both the EMDA documents and the 2026 state budget address reveal how language operates as a repertoire of choices made for motivated reasons. In the case of EMDA, lexical selection reinforces a business-oriented rhetoric while concealing social realities. In the state budget address, word choices build the image of government as a protector, hard worker, and guarantor of stability. Yet, beneath this rhetoric of success, the same lexical strategies also serve to obscure ongoing realities: millions still living in poverty, vulnerable groups struggling against inflation, and persistent limitations in access to education, nutrition, and housing. In other words, lexical choices in both cases not only construct a positive image but also blur the visibility of structural problems that continue to exist.

In conclusion, the analysis of word connotations in the 2026 state budget address demonstrates that statistical figures are systematically framed through evaluative and emotive lexical choices to construct a positive image of government performance. Terms such as “improving,” “strong,” “hard work,” “free,” “under control,” “livable,” and “the largest in history” attach favorable meanings to numerical data, transforming descriptive statistics into persuasive narratives of success, care, and stability.

Through this strategy, economic indicators are not shown as neutral data but are given symbolic meaning to support government authority and justify its policies.

Consistent with Machin and Mayr's (2012) argument that language is never neutral, these connotative choices function to foreground governmental achievement while simultaneously backgrounding persistent socio-economic challenges. By emphasizing progress, protection, and commitment, the discourse constructs the state as a capable manager, a caring guardian, and a responsible provider of welfare. At the same time, structural issues such as inequality, vulnerability, and limited access to resources receive less discursive attention. Thus, word connotations operate as a powerful rhetorical mechanism that shapes public perception, reinforces political legitimacy, and narrows the space for critical reflection on unresolved social and economic problems.

Overlexicalization

Teo (2000, in Machin & Mayr, 2012) explains that *overlexicalization* occurs when a text uses too many repeated or synonymous terms, creating a sense of excessive abundance. This pattern often produces a strong persuasive effect and can indicate the presence of problematic or ideologically contested issues. In other words, *overlexicalization* can be identified through the repetition of specific vocabulary and its synonyms, highlighting where persuasive efforts are made and which issues are being debated (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

In the context of the 2026 state budget, the government repeatedly emphasizes economic terms such as *welfare* (11 times), *employment* (7 times), *investment* (6 times), *added value* (5 times), *purchasing power* (4 times), *poverty* (4 times), *productive* (4 times), *growth* (2 times), and *competitiveness* (1 time). These terms are considered overlexicalization because they all relate to economic progress and public welfare and are repeatedly used in positive ways, often appearing together. Instead of introducing new ideas, the speech keeps returning to the same group of words, making them stand out more strongly in the overall message.

The meaning of this overlexicalization lies in the message the government seeks to convey through repetition. By repeatedly emphasizing welfare, growth, employment, and investment, the government communicates that the 2026 budget is firmly oriented toward improving economic performance and enhancing public welfare. The repetition works to normalize the idea that economic management is effective and that policy direction is clear, forward-looking, and beneficial to society. In other words, the government uses overlexicalization to reassure the public, show confidence, and present itself as committed to improving prosperity and productivity. As Machin and Mayr (2012) argue, overlexicalization often appears where persuasion is needed most. In the 2026 State Budget Address, the dense repetition of positive economic vocabulary functions not only to strengthen governmental legitimacy but also to divert attention away from unresolved socio-economic challenges. Each data example will be explained in detail in the following section.

Data 12 (01:40:43)

Pimpinan dan Anggota Dewan yang saya hormati, Dengan pengelolaan fiskal yang sehat, disertai dengan efektivitas transformasi ekonomi dan peningkatan kesejahteraan rakyat, maka pertumbuhan ekonomi tahun 2026 ditargetkan mencapai 5,4 persen atau lebih, inflasi terkendali di level 2,5 persen, suku bunga SBN di kisaran 6,9 persen, nilai tukar berada di kisaran Rp.16.500 per Dollar AS.

[Honorable Leaders and Members of the Council, with sound fiscal management, effective economic transformation, and improvements in public welfare, the economic growth for 2026 is targeted to reach 5.4% or higher, inflation is controlled at 2.5%, government bond interest rates are around 6.9%, and the exchange rate is estimated at approximately IDR 16,500 per US Dollar].

Data 13 (01:01:29)

Kuatnya ekonomi menunjang peningkatan kesejahteraan rakyat. Tingkat pengangguran turun menjadi 4,76 persen di Februari 2025 dari 4,82 persen tahun lalu, dengan 3,6 juta lapangan kerja baru yang berhasil diciptakan.

[A strong economy supports the enhancement of public welfare. The unemployment rate decreased to 4.76% in February 2025 from 4.82% last year, with 3.6 million new jobs successfully created].

Data 14 (01:40:44)

*Dengan pengelolaan fiskal yang sehat, disertai dengan efektivitas transformasi ekonomi dan peningkatan **kesejahteraan** rakyat, maka pertumbuhan ekonomi tahun 2026 ditargetkan mencapai 5,4 persen atau lebih, inflasi terkendali di level 2,5 persen, suku bunga SBN di kisaran 6,9 persen, nilai tukar berada di kisaran Rp.16.500 per Dollar AS.*

[With sound fiscal management, effective economic transformation, and the improvement of public welfare, economic growth in 2026 is projected to reach 5.4% or more, inflation is expected to remain controlled at 2.5%, government bond interest rates are around 6.9%, and the exchange rate is projected at approximately IDR 16,500 per US Dollar].

Data 15 (01:27:24)

Berbagai proyek hilirisasi dengan nilai investasi sekitar USD 38 miliar akan kita percepat. Proyek ini mencakup berbagai sektor, termasuk pertambangan mineral, hilirisasi batu bara, pertanian, perikanan, serta energi baru dan terbarukan.

[Various downstream industrialization projects with an investment value of around USD 38 billion will be accelerated. These projects cover multiple sectors, including mineral mining, coal downstream processing, agriculture, fisheries, as well as new and renewable energy].

Data 16 (01:01:18)

Lebih dari setengahnya adalah kontribusi dari aktivitas konsumsi masyarakat yang meningkat 4,97 persen. Ekspor kita tumbuh kuat 10,67 persen, nilai tambah dari hilirisasi menjadi penyumbang terbesar kuatnya ekspor kita.

[More than half of this growth is contributed by increased household consumption, which rose by 4.97%. Our exports grew strongly by 10.67%, with value-added from downstream processing being the largest contributor to our robust export performance].

Data 17 (01:26:49)

Melalui Danantara Indonesia, kita perkuat investasi produktif dan mewujudkan Indonesia lebih kuat dalam rantai pasok dunia.

[Through Danantara Indonesia, we strengthen productive investment and aim to position Indonesia more prominently within global supply chains].

Data 18 (01:02:04)

Pemerintah bekerja keras agar inflasi tetap rendah di kisaran 2,4 persen, sehingga menjaga daya beli rakyat terutama masyarakat tidak mampu. Inilah bukti nyata, dengan kerja keras dan kesungguhan, kita mampu memperjuangkan nasib jutaan rakyat Indonesia untuk hidup lebih sejahtera.

[The government works diligently to maintain inflation at a low level of around 2.4%, thereby protecting the purchasing power of the population, particularly the underprivileged. This is

tangible proof that through hard work and determination, we can improve the lives of millions of Indonesians toward greater prosperity].

Data 19 (01:01:52)

Tingkat kemiskinan ditekan menjadi 8,47 persen, terendah sepanjang sejarah.

[The poverty rate has been reduced to 8.47%, the lowest in history].

However, such vocabulary choices often mask real structural problems, such as income inequality, underemployment, the low capacity of industry to absorb labor, and the questionable effectiveness of the state budget in supporting equality. In other words, overlexicalization not only creates an optimistic impression but also risks obscuring underlying, unresolved issues.

Based on this analysis, the examination of overlexicalization in the 2026 state budget address shows that the repeated use of key economic terms such as welfare, employment, investment, growth, added value, and purchasing power functions as a deliberate persuasive strategy rather than a neutral linguistic pattern. By repeatedly using these terms and similar words or synonyms, the discourse creates a strong impression that the state budget is firmly oriented toward economic growth and public well-being. This repetition creates an impression of progress and policy certainty, encouraging the audience to perceive the government's economic agenda as comprehensive and successful. At the same time, this overlexicalization does not merely amplify positive messaging but also reduces critical space by shifting attention away from unresolved socio-economic challenges such as income inequality, underemployment, limited industrial labor absorption, and uneven welfare distribution. In this way, lexical repetition operates as a rhetorical mechanism that reinforces governmental legitimacy while potentially masking deeper structural problems within the national economy.

Suppression or lexical absence

In discourse analysis, alongside overlexicalization, there is also the concept of suppression or lexical absence, which refers to the deliberate omission of words or topics that would reasonably be expected to appear in a text (Machin & Mayr, 2012). It is important to note that this analysis is based specifically on the President's speech on the state budget, which primarily addresses economic planning, fiscal priorities, and welfare programs. Therefore, the absence of certain issues should not be understood simply as indicating their lack of importance at the national level. Rather, lexical absence becomes analytically meaningful when examined in relation to what is repeatedly emphasized and how the overall narrative is constructed.

In the President's address, there is a strong and consistent emphasis on terms that build a nationalist, protective, and pro-people image, such as *resilience*, *sovereignty*, *welfare*, *children*, *farmers*, *villages*, *subsidies*, and *free*. At the same time, lexical items related to corruption, human rights, democracy, environmental degradation, bureaucratic reform, state budget deficits, foreign debt, and foreign direct investment are almost entirely absent. This patterned absence, occurring alongside the dense presence of positive economic and welfare vocabulary, suggests a discursive choice rather than a neutral limitation of the budget-speech genre. For example, corruption is never mentioned explicitly and only appears indirectly through phrases such as "*eliminating leaks*" or "*unreasonable bonuses*," which helps maintain a positive and non-confrontational tone. Similarly, terms related to democracy, human rights, and civil liberties are largely excluded, signaling that the lexical focus is directed toward economic stability, resilience, and welfare rather than political or governance-related issues.

Environmental concerns follow a similar pattern. Although new and renewable energy is mentioned, it is not connected to broader environmental issues such as pollution, deforestation, or the climate crisis. Likewise, key fiscal concepts such as budget deficits and foreign debt are omitted, despite their relevance to evaluating long-term fiscal sustainability. Taken together, these omissions indicate a discourse management strategy in which attention is directed toward economic optimism and social protection, while potentially sensitive or critical issues are backgrounded to minimize debate and criticism. By foregrounding welfare and growth and suppressing governance-related concerns, the

speech constructs a controlled narrative of success and stability. This finding aligns with the principles of CDA, which seeks to uncover the power relations and ideologies embedded within discourse. CDA examines how language is used not only to communicate information but also to maintain and legitimize power structures and social inequalities (Fattahizadeh & Langeroudi, 2022; Leotti et al., 2022; Mengibar, 2015). Rather than focusing solely on what is explicitly stated, CDA goes beyond the surface level of the text to reveal deeper, often hidden meanings. In this perspective, what is left unsaid is as significant as what is articulated, as omissions and silences contribute to shaping the overall message and reinforcing particular power dynamics (Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013; Terry, 2015; Tian, 2021).

Visual semiotic choices

Based on Machin and Mayr (2012), this study identifies two main dimensions of multimodal analysis: verbal semiotic choices and visual semiotic choices. While verbal analysis focuses on the use of language, visual semiotic choices examine how images are deliberately designed and arranged to convey meaning, shape audience interpretation, and support specific political messages. Visual elements are not neutral representations of reality but are intentionally used to express power, authority, and ideology. In this study, visual semiotic choices are explored through four key aspects: iconography, attributes, settings, and salience. Together, these aspects reveal how certain ideas are emphasized while others are minimized in political discourse. The following sections explain each aspect in detail.

Iconography

At one level, an image can be seen as documenting something. In other words, it shows specific events, people, places, or objects. In semiotic terms, images denote. However, some images, while still depicting particular people, places, objects, or events, do not aim primarily—or solely—at denotation. Instead, they use concrete elements to convey general or abstract ideas. These images rely on what they depict to connote concepts and values.

Asking what an image connotes means: What ideas and values are communicated through the representation, and through the way it is constructed? From the creator's perspective, it involves questions such as: How can I convey an abstract idea? How can I show the meaning of events, places, or objects? What concrete signs can I use to communicate an abstract concept? (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

Figure 1

Iconography of the President's 2026 State Budget Address



Source: (Presidential Secretariat, 2025)

In the image shown in [Figure 1](#), the President of the Republic of Indonesia is depicted wearing a dark gray formal suit, a light blue tie, and a black peci, standing behind a podium equipped with two microphones while delivering the 2026 state budget address. The background is dominated by symmetrically arranged red-and-white Indonesian flags, emphasizing the national and ceremonial character of the event. Symbolically, the black peci represents Indonesian nationalism and national identity, while the formal suit and tie convey professionalism, authority, and political legitimacy. The podium with dual microphones reinforces the President's role as an official political orator, and the multiple national flags underscore a strong sense of national pride and state legitimacy. The medal visible on his chest is the red-and-white special insignia (*Lencana Khusus Merah Putih*), which functions as an official marker of presidential authority rather than a general decoration. Worn exclusively by the President and Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia on formal state occasions, this insignia features a red-and-white ribbon with the national emblem Garuda Pancasila at its center. Its symbolic elements further reinforce authority: the star represents the highest status as head of state and government, while the rice and cotton motifs signify prosperity and public welfare ([Merdeka.com, 2024](#)). His serious posture, with hands resting firmly on the podium, strengthens the impression of authority, control, and leadership.

From an iconographic perspective, the image, sourced from the official YouTube channel of the [Presidential Secretariat \(2025\)](#), goes beyond merely documenting the event and functions to communicate discourses of state power, nationalism, and political legitimacy. Through the use of formal attire, national symbols, and a ceremonial parliamentary setting, the visual representation conveys abstract values of leadership, sovereignty, and political authority, reinforcing the President's position as the central and authoritative figure in this multimodal political performance. For a national audience, the figure can be interpreted not simply as a record of a speech, but as a symbolic representation of a legitimate state leader speaking authoritatively on behalf of the nation.

Attributes

Here, the focus is on the ideas and values communicated by objects and how these objects are represented. What discourse do they convey? In analyzing objects, the meaning of each element must be carefully considered ([Machin & Mayr, 2012](#)).

Figure 2

Attributes in the President's 2026 State Budget Address



Source: ([Presidential Secretariat, 2025](#))

In [Figure 2](#), a range of visual attributes work together to produce strong symbolic meanings. The black peci worn by the President signifies nationalism and a distinctly Indonesian leadership

identity. Rather than functioning merely as a cultural accessory, the peci operates as a marker of political legitimacy and alignment with national tradition. The dark gray formal suit, combined with a light blue shirt and matching tie, conveys formality, authority, and the institutional status of a state official. When accompanied by official chest insignia, these attributes further communicate legitimacy, honor, and the prestige associated with the highest state office. The podium equipped with dual microphones serves not only a practical function but also a symbolic one, representing an authoritative voice and positioning the speech as an official articulation of state policy. The backdrop of symmetrically arranged red-and-white national flags reinforces discourses of nationalism, unity, and institutional legitimacy. In addition, the presence of an official source credit indicating production and dissemination by the Presidential Secretariat situates the image within a formal state communication framework and strengthens its institutional authority.

Drawing on Machin and Mayr's (2012) analysis of Cosmopolitan magazine imagery, which examines how visual attributes such as short skirts, red lipstick, and loose scarves are used to construct glamour and femininity, the attributes employed in this political context perform a contrasting discursive function. Rather than emphasizing aesthetics or individual appeal, elements such as the peci, formal suit, podium, and national flags work together to construct meanings of political masculinity, institutional authority, and state legitimacy. Collectively, these visual attributes indicate that the presidential address functions not merely as a moment of verbal communication but as a formal political ritual through which ideological messages about power, nationalism, and state authority are symbolically produced and reinforced.

Settings

The setting of the President of the Republic of Indonesia's address during the presentation of the 2026 draft state budget is not designed to realistically depict the plenary hall of the House of Representatives. Instead, it is symbolically constructed to communicate particular ideas and values. The rows of red-and-white flags dominating the visual field serve as symbols of nationalism and unity, while also creating a monumental impression despite the simplicity of the stage. The placement of the podium in front and the full flag backdrop emphasize the President as the focal point. Physical details of the chamber, such as members' seats or another décor, are deliberately omitted. Thus, the plenary hall is not presented as an actual location, but abstracted into a representation of nationalism, where the state is personified through the President's leadership.

Figure 3

Settings in the President's 2026 State Budget Address



Source: (Presidential Secretariat, 2025)

This use of setting is consistent with the findings of Machin and Mayr (2012), who argue that settings in visual discourse often function symbolically rather than realistically. In their analysis of *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* magazine images, the settings do not show actual office work or everyday activities. For example, in *Cosmopolitan*, the absence of visible work tools and the use of open, uncluttered spaces evoke a sense of luxury similar to corporate lobbies, the empty space conveys luxury akin to corporate lobbies, whereas a cramped or messy environment would suggest the opposite. Similarly, in the *Marie Claire* image, luxury is implied through large windows and high ceilings. Both images employ bright, high-key lighting to evoke optimism.

According to Machin and Mayr (2012), these settings symbolize work rather than depict it, communicating glamour, modernity, creativity, and joy. They allow lifestyle magazines to create a symbolic fantasy world, enabling forms of agency linked to women's ability to charm, embrace fashion glamour, and signal power. *Cosmopolitan*, for instance, presents a "brand" as a collection of representations and values not permanently tied to specific products; what is sold to readers is not merely content but connotations of independence, power, and pleasure. In short, Machin and Mayr's (2012) findings suggest that women's representations in these images are not realistic, portraying playful fantasy that merges the 1960s feminist legacy—independence from domestic confines and sexual freedom—with consumerist ideals (Irigaray, 1985, in Machin & Mayr, 2012). Similarly, in the context of the presidential budget address, the symbolic setting makes the speech more than an ordinary parliamentary event. It transforms the space into a visual representation of national unity, authority, and stability, strengthening the image of the President as the main representative and leader of the state.

Salience

Salience refers to the way certain elements in a visual composition are made more prominent than others in order to attract attention and highlight particular meanings. According to Machin and Mayr (2012), salience can be created through various visual strategies, including size, color contrast, positioning, focus, lighting, foregrounding, and the overlapping of elements. These strategies guide viewers' attention and shape how meaning is interpreted.

Figure 4

Salience in the President's 2026 State Budget Address



Source: (Presidential Secretariat, 2025)

In Figure 4, salience is strongly constructed through the dominant positioning of the President against a backdrop of red-and-white national flags. The black peci functions as a culturally significant symbol of Indonesian nationalism and political leadership, while the national flag situates the speech

firmly within a state context. The President occupies the central position in the frame and appears larger than other visual elements, such as the podium and background objects, reinforcing his dominance within the composition. This central placement establishes him as the primary focus of attention and visually asserts his authority.

Color contrast further enhances salience. The dark tones of the formal suit and peci stand out sharply against the red-and-white background, increasing visual clarity and emphasis. In Indonesian cultural symbolism, red is often associated with strength and courage, while white signifies purity and sincerity. Together, these colors support the authoritative tone of the state address. In addition, lighting is concentrated on the President's face and upper body, making facial expressions and gestures clearly visible and reinforcing perceptions of confidence and credibility.

Camera framing also contributes to salience. The focus on the upper body and face directs attention to the speaker and the message being delivered, while the flag remains present as a symbolic background. The President's position in the foreground, with other elements placed behind or to the side, further strengthens his visual prominence.

Through the principle of salience, the composition establishes a clear visual hierarchy in which the President emerges as the central and authoritative figure. This prominence is achieved through size, focus, and lighting, while cultural symbols such as the peci and the red-and-white national flag reinforce meanings of nationalism and state identity. As a result, salience functions to foreground political authority and national symbolism, positioning the speaker as a visual representation of the state and conveying a strong message of leadership, legitimacy, and national unity to the public.

This study demonstrates that the 2026 state budget address operates as a carefully constructed multimodal political discourse in which verbal and visual semiotic choices work together to produce a coherent and persuasive narrative of governmental competence, legitimacy, and authority. Rather than functioning independently, the verbal and visual elements support each other, creating a consistent message.

On the verbal level, the analysis reveals that language is strategically used to frame economic realities through positive word connotations, overlexicalization, and lexical suppression. Descriptive statistics are repeatedly accompanied by evaluative terms such as *"improving," "strong," "hard work," "free," "under control,"* and *"the largest in history,"* transforming numerical data into symbolic markers of success, care, and stability. Overlexicalization further amplifies this effect by repeatedly foregrounding key economic and welfare-related terms, creating an impression of progress, certainty, and effective governance. At the same time, lexical suppression operates in the background or omits potentially contentious issues such as corruption, human rights, environmental degradation, and fiscal vulnerabilities. Together, these verbal strategies construct an optimistic and pro-people narrative while limiting critical engagement with unresolved structural problems.

The visual analysis strongly supports and reinforces these verbal findings. Through iconography, attributes, settings, and salience, the visual composition consistently positions the President as the central embodiment of the state. National symbols such as the peci, the red-and-white flag, and the red-and-white special insignia visually echo the verbal themes of nationalism, authority, and legitimacy. The setting turns the parliamentary hall into a symbol of national unity rather than a place for political debate, while salience ensures that attention is directed primarily toward the President through size, central positioning, lighting, and color contrast. These visual strategies align with the verbal emphasis on leadership, control, and stability, making the President appear as a capable guardian of the nation.

In sum, the findings show that the 2026 state budget address functions as a multimodal legitimizing practice, where language and imagery work together to make certain interpretations of economic performance and state authority seem natural and acceptable. By combining persuasive verbal framing with carefully designed visual symbolism, the address constructs a dominant narrative of success, protection, and stability, while narrowing the space for alternative readings and critical reflection. This integrated verbal-visual analysis thus provides a robust of how political legitimacy is produced and maintained in contemporary Indonesian presidential discourse.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to address two main research questions: (1) how verbal and visual semiotic modes are employed in the Indonesian President's 2026 state budget address to legitimize economic policy, and (2) how the governing ideology of the incumbent administration is reproduced through the multimodal construction of the speech. The findings demonstrate that both questions are closely interconnected and integrated multimodal perspective.

This study demonstrates that the 2026 state budget addresses functions as a carefully constructed multimodal political discourse in which verbal and visual semiotic choices operate together to produce a well-organized and persuasive narrative of governmental competence, legitimacy, and authority. Rather than functioning independently, language and imagery reinforce one another to deliver a consistent and unified message. This finding supports the core assumption of MCDA that meaning is constructed through the interaction of multiple semiotic resources, including linguistic, visual, and auditory elements, rather than through language alone (Joy et al., 2024; Machin & Mayr, 2013; Quilantang & Mendoza, 2025).

At the verbal level, economic realities are framed through positive word connotations, overlexicalization, and lexical suppression. Descriptive statistics are repeatedly paired with evaluative expressions such as *"improving," "strong," "hard work," "free," "under control,"* and *"the largest in history,"* transforming numerical data from neutral measurements into symbolic markers of success, care, and stability. Overlexicalization strengthens this effect by continuously foregrounding key terms related to welfare, growth, and productivity, creating impressions of progress, certainty, and effective governance. A similar use of lexical repetition as a legitimizing strategy has been identified by Beaton-Thome (2013) in the analysis of European Parliament debates on Guantánamo detainees; repeated lexical choices played a crucial role in justifying or opposing detention practices. This parallel suggests that overlexicalization functions as a common discursive tool for managing politically sensitive issues across different institutional contexts. At the same time, lexical suppression backgrounds omit potentially sensitive issues, including corruption, human rights, environmental degradation, and fiscal vulnerabilities. Through this combination, these verbal strategies construct an optimistic and pro-people narrative while limiting critical engagement with unresolved structural problems. This selective lexical strategy aligns with Machin and Mayr's (2012) assertion that language is never neutral but is shaped by discursive interests. As emphasized in MCDA scholarship, language and other semiotic resources are never neutral but are embedded in power relations and ideological interests. Through their selective use, verbal choices privilege certain interpretations while marginalizing others, a process that MCDA critically examines by uncovering the power dynamics and the underlying assumptions in the discourse (Gibson et al., 2015; Munoriyarwa, 2021; Joy et al., 2024).

The visual analysis closely supports and reinforces these verbal patterns. Through iconography, attributes, settings, and salience, the visual composition consistently positions the President as the central embodiment of the state. National symbols such as the peci, the red-and-white flag, and the Red-and-White Special Insignia visually reinforce the emphasis on nationalism, authority, and legitimacy. The symbolic setting reframes the parliamentary hall as a space of national unity rather than political contestation, while salience directs attention toward the President through size, central positioning, lighting, and color contrast. This finding is consistent with MCDA studies in media and political communication, which show how visual and verbal elements interact to convey political messages and shape public opinion (Fifelola & Unuabonah, 2025; Makaruk et al., 2025).

This pattern resonates with earlier analyses of political and economic discourse, particularly Machin and Mayr's (2012) study of the EMDA documents, in which language and imagery were similarly mobilized to promote business-oriented narratives while downplaying social realities. In both cases, economic success is foregrounded as the primary indicator of national progress, while structural inequalities and social vulnerabilities receive limited attention. This finding is reinforced by Breazu and Machin (2018), who show how brutal coverage of the expulsion and deportation of Roma migrants from France was recontextualized in the Romanian press to portray the French government's actions as peaceful and consensual. Collectively, these studies highlight how discourse can shape

public acceptance of power relations and legitimize state actions by controlling how events and policies are represented.

Based on these results, the findings indicate that the 2026 state budget address operates as a multimodal legitimizing practice in which language and imagery work in tandem to make particular interpretations of economic performance and state authority appear natural and acceptable. By combining persuasive verbal framing with carefully staged visual symbolism, the address constructs a dominant narrative of success, protection, and stability, while narrowing the space for critical reflection. This integrated verbal–visual analysis, therefore, provides a robust account of how political legitimacy is produced and maintained in contemporary Indonesian presidential discourse. This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that multimodal discourse plays a crucial role in shaping perception and ideological meaning across political, media, and organizational contexts. In particular, MCDA research demonstrates that the interaction of visual and verbal elements is a powerful persuasive mechanism, influencing interpretation and guiding audience responses, as evidenced in analyses of advertising and public communication (Ben Moussa & Benmessaoud, 2021; Chen & Weninger, 2025; El-Kanash & Al-Khatib, 2025).

With regard to the second research question, the findings reveal that the governing ideology of the incumbent administration is reproduced through a multimodal narrative that emphasizes developmentalism, welfare orientation, and strong state leadership. Verbal strategies construct the state as a capable economic manager, a caring guardian, and a protector of the people, particularly through repeated references to welfare programs, subsidies, and “free” public services. Numerical data related to beneficiaries, budget allocations, and economic growth are used not only to demonstrate performance but also to evoke moral and emotional appeals, presenting the state as responsible for nurturing and safeguarding its citizens.

This ideological positioning is visually reinforced through representations of political masculinity, authority, and institutional power. The President’s formal attire, posture, and central placement in the frame convey control, discipline, and leadership, while national symbols signal sovereignty and unity. In this way, the multimodal construction of speech promotes an ideology that prioritizes stability, growth, and social protection, while marginalizing structural inequalities and governance-related concerns. This interaction between lexical and visual elements supports Hanifah et al.’s (2024) finding that multimodal aspects relationally produce cohesive and meaningful ideological messages.

Consistent with the principles of CDA, the findings confirm that meaning is produced not only through what is said and shown, but also through what is strategically omitted (Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013; Terry, 2015; Tian, 2021). The alignment between verbal emphasis and visual focus, alongside the parallel suppression of critical issues, demonstrates how multimodal discourse is used to manage public perception, legitimize policy authority, and sustain political power (Fattahizadeh & Langeroudi, 2022; Leotti et al., 2022; Mengibar, 2015). As emphasized by Machin (2016), discourse plays a central role in shaping social practices in line with dominant ideologies. Thus, the 2026 state budget address emerges as a strategic multimodal practice through which the government constructs legitimacy, reinforces its governing ideology, and limits opportunities for critical engagement.

Despite offering important insights into the multimodal construction of political legitimacy in the 2026 State Budget Address, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is limited to a single political text, namely the Indonesian President’s address on the 2026 state budget. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to all forms of presidential discourse, such as campaign speeches or informal public addresses, which may employ different verbal and visual strategies. Second, the study focuses on selected multimodal elements, verbal choices (connotations, overlexicalization, and lexical suppression), and visual features (iconography, attributes, setting, and salience). Other potentially relevant modes, such as prosody, gesture dynamics, audience interaction, and sound design, were not examined in depth. Future research could incorporate these additional semiotic resources to provide a more comprehensive multimodal analysis. Acknowledging these limitations, this study nevertheless provides a robust and theoretically informed contribution to

MCDA by demonstrating how verbal and visual semiotic resources interact to legitimize policy authority and reproduce governing ideology in contemporary Indonesian presidential discourse.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Indonesian President's 2026 state budget address is not just an explanation of fiscal policy, but a carefully designed political message that uses both words and visuals to build public trust and strengthen government legitimacy. The speech does this by framing economic numbers and welfare programs in a positive way and supporting them with strong visual symbols that place the President as the main representation of the state, creating an impression of competence, control, and national unity. At the same time, the study shows that legitimacy is also built through selectivity: issues that are repeated become the main focus for the audience, while issues that are not mentioned tend to become less visible to public attention, which supports the MCDA view that discourse is shaped by power and ideology because it guides how people interpret reality. The implication is that budget speeches should be seen not only as economic documents but also as political performances that shape how citizens understand development, welfare, and governance, so the public and media need to pay attention not only to the statistics but also to how they are framed and visually staged to appear convincing. However, this study is limited because it examines only one presidential address, focuses on selected verbal and visual elements, and does not measure directly how audiences actually interpret the speech. Therefore, future research should compare speeches across different years, leaders, or political contexts, include audience responses such as surveys or social media analysis, and examine more audiovisual aspects like voice, gestures, and camera work (contact) to better understand how political legitimacy is produced and circulated in modern public communication.

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The authors of the manuscript affirm that they have no conflicting interests.

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