



ARTICLE

Media Construction of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program Objectives in Online News Coverage

A Focus on What Is Highlighted

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Abstract: This study analyzes the media construction of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program's objectives in online news coverage through the lens of agenda-setting theory. It emphasizes three main dimensions—object salience, attribute salience, and actor salience—to understand how the media shapes issue priorities, policy interpretations, and the dominant voices in public discourse. Using a descriptive qualitative case study design, 150 articles from Kompas.com, Detik.com, and Tempo.co were analyzed via NVivo 15. The results indicate that coverage is dominated by objectives related to nutritional intake and stunting reduction (42.01%); while other objectives, such as food security and economic growth, receive significantly less attention. At the attribute level, the media frames the MBG program primarily as a nutrition-based intervention for vulnerable groups, marginalizing other development dimensions. At the actor level, discourse is dominated by state entities—specifically the National Nutrition Agency (BGN) and various ministries—reflecting a state-centered agenda. These findings highlight the need to position the MBG program as a cross-sectoral policy and strengthen inclusive public communication.

Keywords: Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program; Media Construction; Agenda-Setting; Object Salience; Attribute Salience.

1. Introduction

The Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program, formerly known as the Free School Lunch (MSG) program, is a strategic government policy that took effect on January 6, 2025 (Dirgantara & Yahya, 2023; Presidential Communication Office (Kantor Komunikasi Kepresidenan) of the Republic of Indonesia, 2025). It is integrated into the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2025–2029 via Presidential Regulation No. 12 of 2025 (Perpres No. 12/2025). The program aims to foster a healthy, productive generation as a foundation for Indonesia Emas 2045 by addressing stunting, reducing school dropout rates, and enhancing the welfare of farmers and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (Aulia, 2025; Direktorat Jenderal Anggaran Kementerian Keuangan Republik Indonesia, 2025; Pambudi, 2024; Qomarrullah et al., 2025).

While stunting prevalence is trending downward (Figure 1), national targets—such as 17.8% for 2023 and 14% for 2024 (Nurrahim, 2023; TP2S, 2025)—have frequently been missed. Consequently, the MBG program serves as a policy instrument to achieve a 14.2% target by 2029 (Prasastisiwi, 2024). In the education sector (Figure 2), dropout rates remained high from 2019 to 2023 (high school approximately 22.33%; junior high school 6.97%), accompanied by a decline in PISA scores (reading from 396 to 383; mathematics from 375 to 366; science from 382 to 359), placing Indonesia sixth in ASEAN and 67th globally, and potentially weakening human capital development (Berti & La Vecchia, 2023; Napitupulu, 2023; Prasastisiwi, 2024). The CELIOS survey demonstrates the potential of the MBG program to address these issues by reducing hunger while improving student performance and attendance (Askar et al., 2025).

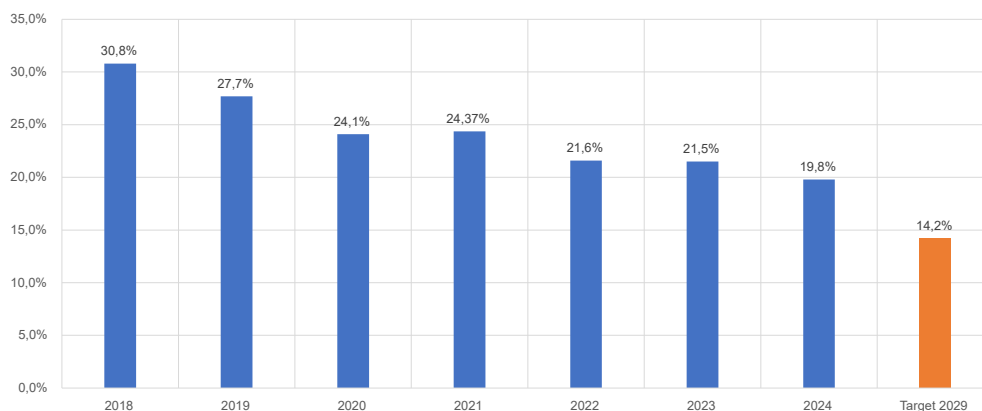


Figure 1. Prevalence of Stunting in Indonesia From 2018 to 2024 and Target for 2029

Source: Nurrahim (2023) and TP2S (2025)

The effectiveness of this program has been demonstrated in various countries. In the United States, through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), approximately 31 million students benefit from the program, which contributes 27–31% of their daily energy needs and leads to improved focus, attendance, and mental health (Cullen & Chen, 2017; Gundersen et al., 2012; Johnson et al., 2016). OECD studies show an increase in participation of up to 40% (Cohen et al., 2021), while in the United Kingdom, Japan, and Finland, similar programs have had a positive impact on health and education (Tanaka & Miyoshi, 2012; Tikkanen & Urho, 2009). A total of 98% of these programs are government-funded and have reached 418 million children (Alderman et al., 2024). Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the government has allocated an initial budget of Rp71 trillion for this initiative, with the potential to increase to hundreds of trillions (Ulya & Carina, 2025). From an economic

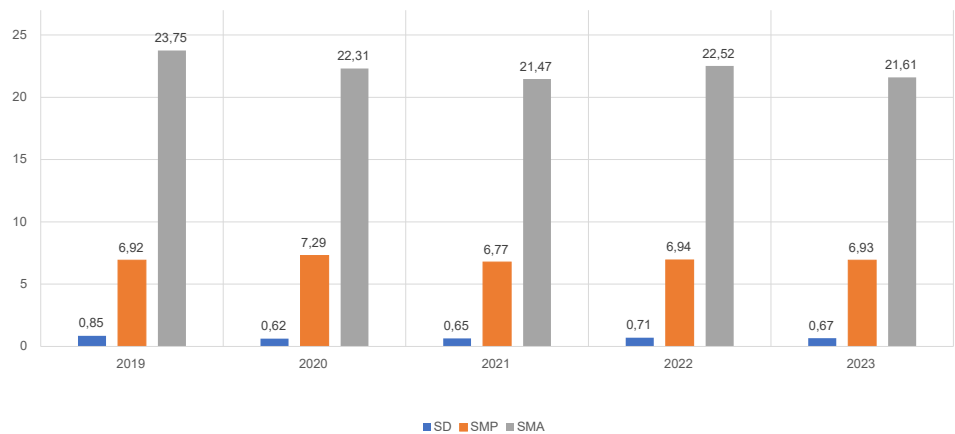


Figure 2. Dropout Rates by Education Level (2019–2023)

Source: Central Statistics Agency (BPS) 2024

perspective, the MBG program is projected to increase GDP by Rp4,510–Rp18,958.8 trillion in 2025–2029 and strengthen the SME sector (INDEF, 2024).

The magnitude of these social and economic impacts has prompted various researchers to study the MBG program. Based on previous research, most studies have focused on evaluating implementation, operational challenges in the field, budget feasibility, and strategic challenges in human capital development (Aji, 2025; Rahayu, 2025; Shiddiq & Effendi, 2025). Additionally, the dynamics of public opinion have been extensively studied through sentiment and discourse analysis on social media, particularly regarding online public responses, polarization, and policy legitimacy (Juditha & Darmawan, 2025; Ludina et al., 2025; H. F. Maulana & Arroyan, 2025). Furthermore, research has also explored framing analysis and critical discourse analysis examining media constructions of pro-and-con issues, budget cuts, media political bias, technical implementation in specific regions, and political campaign communication styles (Aditya & Rorong, 2025; Azzahra et al., 2025; M. Fikri & Rahma, 2025; Hatta et al., 2025; Khasanah & Siroj, 2025; H. Maulana & Lukmantor, 2025; Sumardi et al., 2025).

Although a number of studies have examined the MBG program in media coverage, a significant research gap remains. To date, no study has systematically analyzed how the MBG program’s objectives are presented, interpreted through specific attributes, and linked to the actors shaping them in online news coverage. As a primary arena for the formation of public opinion, the media plays a strategic role in determining issue priorities and may influence public perceptions, which ultimately affect the legitimacy of government policies based on how the public understands them (Cacciatore et al., 2016; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 2010). Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by employing an agenda-setting perspective developed by McCombs (2005).

The choice of the agenda-setting approach is based on its ability to explain how the media shapes issue priorities (*first-level agenda setting*) while simultaneously influencing how issues are understood through the highlighting of specific attributes (*second-level agenda setting*) (McCombs, 2005). As a theoretical framework for analyzing media constructions regarding the objectives of the MBG program, this study emphasizes three main dimensions: object salience, attribute salience, and actor salience as complementary factors. Operationally, object salience is derived from the MBG program objectives in the RPJMN 2025–2029, which include: (1)

nutritional intake and stunting reduction; (2) human capital development; (3) food security; and (4) economic growth.

This study aims to analyze how the MBG program objectives are constructed in media coverage by identifying patterns of dominance and marginalization among objectives through issue distribution, attribute framing, and actor dominance in the discourse. The main contribution of this study lies in strengthening the agenda-setting approach through the integration of the actor dimension, as well as providing a comprehensive mapping of the relationship between objectives, attributes, and actors in media constructions regarding public policy.

2. Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the narrative construction of the Free Nutritious Food (MBG) program in online news coverage in Indonesia. The choice of a qualitative approach is based on its ability to interpret deeper meanings within texts and social discourse (Creswell, 1998). Theoretically, this study is grounded in agenda-setting theory developed by McCombs (2005), operationalizing three dimensions of analysis: object salience, attribute salience, and actor salience. The study focuses on three prominent national online news outlets: Kompas.com, detikcom, and Tempo.co.

The selection of online news outlets is based on the 2025 Digital News Report from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, as cited by Katadata.co.id. These three outlets are among the ten most popular online news outlets in Indonesia, with weekly usage rates of 37% for Kompas.com, 46% for detikcom, and 16% for Tempo.co (Santika, 2025; Steele, 2025). Additionally, the same survey indicates that Indonesians’ trust in various news outlets is relatively high; for example, 62% trust Kompas.com, 59% trust detikcom, and 53% trust Tempo.co; meaning that more than half of respondents consider these outlets fairly trustworthy (Steele, 2025). Furthermore, based on social media popularity (Table 1), Kompas.com has a 15.34% share, detikcom 19%, and Tempo.co 4.27%, indicating a fairly high level of exposure and interaction across various digital platforms.

Table 1. Percentage of Online News Outlet Followers on Social Media Platforms

Online News Outlet	Instagram	Facebook	TikTok	YouTube	Twitter (X)	Total (%)
Kompas.com	10.63%	20.89%	15.17%	10.14%	16.62%	15.34%
detikcom	23.19%	10.06%	8.47%	4.54%	45.64%	19.00%
Tempo.co	6.28%	4.75%	4.23%	2.80%	4.39%	4.27%
Mediaindonesia.com	2.97%	0.41%	2.99%	0.46%	3.25%	1.77%
Kumparan.com	10.15%	3.80%	9.52%	4.03%	2.10%	4.86%
Okezone.com	4.18%	5.13%	4.59%	3.14%	3.44%	4.04%
Tribunnews.com	5.80%	16.90%	10.93%	28.18%	2.67%	14.01%
Liputan6.com	11.11%	17.47%	9.87%	4.22%	8.79%	10.31%
Merdeka.com	2.44%	8.55%	5.64%	6.39%	0.96%	5.04%
CNBC Indonesia	4.38%	0.31%	1.35%	5.62%	0.40%	2.18%
Antarane.ws	1.37%	1.86%	5.64%	0.14%	2.29%	2.03%
Suara.com	2.71%	7.79%	6.70%	1.96%	0.06%	3.72%
Sindonews.com	2.21%	2.09%	8.54%	5.07%	0.79%	3.39%
CNN Indonesia	12.56%	0.01%	6.35%	23.32%	8.59%	10.03%

Source: Data processing results (June 2025)

Furthermore, they represent a spectrum of editorial orientations, with Kompas.com adopting a reflective-structural approach (Gasa et al., 2025), detikcom focusing on speed and public interest (Kinoshita, 2020), and Tempo.co upholding the tradition of critical investigative journalism toward those in power (Kunia & Othman, 2019; Prayudi et al., 2025). Overall, the selection of these three outlets indicates that they possess high levels of visibility, credibility, and audience reach, as well as substantial differences in their coverage of the MBG program.

In addition to these factors, the data collection process also technically evaluated the selection of outlets using web scraping techniques. Google Colab supported this process to ensure efficiency and overcome hardware limitations (Erama, 2025; M. R. Fikri et al., 2022). The keyword employed for this technique was “Makan Bergizi Gratis” (“Free Nutritious Meal”); data were collected chronologically backward from June 20, 2025, on and before that date, with a limit of 50 articles per outlet, resulting in a total of 150 articles across all outlets. The search results show different time ranges for the backward search, with detikcom starting from May 17, 2025, Kompas.com from June 9, 2025, and Tempo.co from April 21, 2025, as shown in Table 2. These differences in time ranges result from the intensity of coverage by each outlet regarding the keyword employed in the web data collection process.

Table 2. Sources and Number of Online News Articles

No.	Online News Outlet	Website	Publication Period	Total
1	detikcom	https://detikcom/	17 May 2025–20 June 2025	50
2	Kompas.com	https://kompas.com/	9 June 2025–20 June 2025	50
3	Tempo.co	https://www.tempo.co/	21 April 2025–20 June 2025	50
Total				150

Source: Processed data

To ensure data validity and maintain a focus on text-based news, manual verification was conducted to filter out duplicate data, video content, and opinion columns, and to replace data using the NCapture feature. Data analysis was conducted using NVivo 15 software with a deductive approach, in which the coding categories were derived from the MBG program’s strategic objectives in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2025–2029, namely, (1) nutritional intake and stunting reduction, (2) human capital development, (3) food security, and (4) economic growth, which were positioned as the primary categories for object salience.

The unit of analysis in this study is the news article as a whole, while the coding process was conducted at the level of relevant text segments (sentences or paragraphs) within each article. A single article may be categorized under more than one program objective if it contains substantive discussion related to several objectives. In such cases, all relevant text segments are coded according to their respective categories without limitation to a single dominant category, thereby allowing a more comprehensive representation of issue distribution. To ensure reliability, given that this study employed a single coder, each category of MBG objectives was accompanied by a clear conceptual definition to guide the coding process and minimize potential bias.

Furthermore, this study operationalizes three dimensions of analysis within the agenda-setting framework. First, object salience, which refers to the frequency and distribution of the four MBG objectives in coverage, was analyzed using a crosstab query. Second, attribute salience was analyzed using word frequency, word cloud and word tree features to identify how each objective is constructed narratively.

Third, actor salience refers to the identification of dominant actors in the coverage and their involvement in discussing the MBG program objectives. This was measured based on the frequency of actors’ appearances in the text to explain the structure of issue dominance, which is formed through the roles of authoritative figures in media discourse construction. These analytical features were combined to address the limitations of this study in capturing the contextual meaning.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Object Salience in the Distribution of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program Objectives

From an agenda-setting perspective, object salience refers to the degree to which an issue or object stands out in media coverage, thereby determining the extent to which that issue is considered important by the public (McCombs, 2005). In other words, the more frequently a policy objective appears in the news, the greater the likelihood that it will be perceived as a top priority in public policy. Therefore, the analysis in this section focuses on identifying the distribution and intensity of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program objectives in online news coverage. The results indicate that the representation of MBG program objectives in online news coverage is not balanced, as shown in Figure 3, illustrating variations in emphasis among news outlets in their framing of the MBG program’s policy direction.

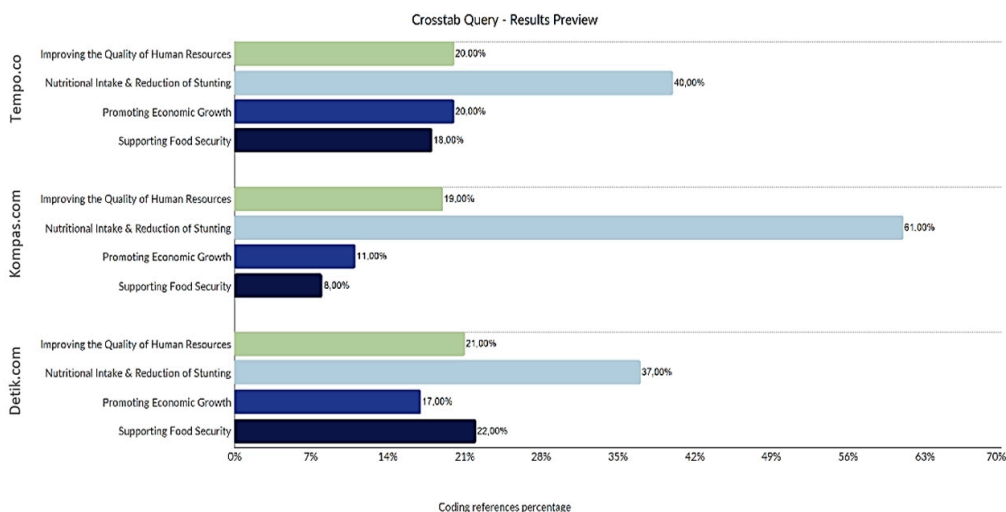


Figure 3. Distribution of MBG Program Objectives in Online News Coverage Using Crosstab Query in NVivo 15

Source: Processed data

In Figure 3, Kompas.com shows a very high concentration of objectives relating to nutritional intake and stunting reduction, accounting for 61.11%. This figure far exceeds those of other categories in this outlet. Meanwhile, the objective of human capital development accounts for 19.44%, while food security (8.33%) and economic growth (11.11%) appear in relatively small proportions. These findings indicate that Kompas.com predominantly frames the MBG program as a nutrition-based intervention policy.

Unlike Kompas.com, detikcom shows a more even distribution. Although the category of nutritional intake and stunting reduction remains the highest (37.93%), the difference compared to other categories is not particularly significant. Food security accounts for 22.76%, human capital development at 21.38%, and economic growth at 17.93%. This pattern indicates that detikcom tends to present the MBG

program as a more multidimensional policy. Meanwhile, Tempo.co also shows a relatively proportional distribution, with nutritional intake and stunting reduction accounting for 40.91%, followed by economic growth and human capital development, each accounting for 20.45%, and food security at 18.18%. This indicates that Tempo.co tends to present more balanced coverage of the various objectives of the MBG program.

Table 3. Total Distribution of MBG Program Objectives From detikcom, Kompas.com, and Tempo.co

MBG Program Objectives	detikcom	Kompas.com	Tempo.co	Total
Food Security	22.76%	8.33%	18.18%	19.33%
Economic Growth	17.93%	11.11%	20.45%	17.84%
Nutritional Intake and Stunting Reduction	37.93%	61.11%	40.91%	42.01%
Human Capital Development	21.38%	19.44%	20.45%	20.82%

Source: Processed data

Overall, Table 3 shows that the objectives of nutritional intake and stunting reduction were the most prominent, accounting for a total of 42.01% of the MBG program’s coverage, followed by human capital development (20.82%), food security (19.33%), and economic growth (17.84%). The prominence of nutrition-related issues in the MBG program indicates that nearly half of the coverage positions the program as both a nutrition-based intervention policy and an instrument for accelerating stunting reduction. This finding aligns with various studies showing that school feeding programs are generally more closely associated with nutrition interventions because of their relevance to human capital development, particularly in supporting cognitive development, educational attainment, and long-term productivity (Ren & Zhou, 2025; Stein et al., 2008).

Within the framework of object salience, this pattern suggests that the media not only reflects policy priorities but also shapes issue salience by revealing a hierarchy of issues that may steer public attention toward particular objectives of the MBG program (McCombs, 2005). If one objective, in this case, the nutritional aspect, dominates coverage of the MBG program, that objective may shape public perceptions of the program’s primary focus, while other objectives become less visible (Cacciatore et al., 2016; Geiß, 2022). This situation may narrow public understanding of the MBG program, which is designed as a multidimensional policy in the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2025–2029, and may affect perceptions of policy legitimacy in the public sphere (Schmidt, 2008).

This situation may also weaken the narrative of the MBG program as a cross-sectoral initiative. Therefore, the government needs to communicate the objectives of the MBG program more comprehensively to the public by emphasizing their relevance to the cross-sectoral development agenda and their broader impacts, including, where relevant, linkages to sustainable development goals. The government also needs to improve the quality and intensity of media coverage, particularly in mainstream media, so that public legitimacy for the MBG program can be strengthened while broadening public understanding of the program’s contribution to national development goals and the achievement of sustainable development targets.

3.2. Attribute Salience in the Narrative Construction of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

To analyze this dimension, the study used the word frequency, word cloud, and word tree features in NVivo to identify word patterns, semantic associations, and narrative

Zainul Munasichin of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI):

“Personally, I hope we continue to receive these free nutritious meals. Why? Because we have a program to accelerate the response to stunting,” said Zainul Munasichin (Mawardi, 2025).

This statement indicates that the media frames nutritional adequacy as a public policy instrument that directly contributes to accelerating stunting reduction. Within the framework of attribute salience, this means that the attribute of “gizi” does not stand alone, but is linked to broader national development objectives. Furthermore, the word tree analysis reveals the emergence of other attributes such as “efektivitas penyaluran” (“distribution effectiveness”), “keberlanjutan manfaat” (“sustainability of benefits”), and “prinsip pemerataan” (“principle of equitable distribution”), which indicates that nutritional adequacy is constructed as part of a structured long-term policy strategy. Thus, the media emphasizes not only outcome aspects, but also process attributes and policy principles.

Conceptually, the emphasis on vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and children indicates that the media links nutrition to critical growth phases, particularly during the first 1,000 days of life, which play a crucial role in preventing stunting (Martorell, 2017). Furthermore, various studies indicate that school-based food programs contribute to improved nutritional status and cognitive development in children (Cohen et al., 2021; Ren & Zhou, 2025; Richter et al., 2017).

Thus, within the framework of attribute salience, nutritional adequacy and stunting reduction within MBG program coverage are constructed through three main attributes: (1) nutritional quality and composition as the dominant attribute; (2) vulnerable target groups as the contextual attribute; and (3) stunting reduction as the strategic attribute. The dominance of the nutritional quality attribute indicates that the media frames the MBG as an intervention oriented toward standards, quality, and sustainability, and is understood not merely as a food distribution program, but as a public policy instrument integrated into the national development agenda.

3.2.2. Attribute Salience in Human Capital Development

Based on the word cloud visualization in Figure 5, human capital development in news coverage of the MBG program is not highlighted as a primary stand-alone attribute, but is instead constructed through dominant attributes such as program instruments and nutrition-based interventions. This is reflected in the high frequency of “program” (28), “mbg” (23), “bergizi” (18), “makan” (“eating/meal”) (17), and “gizi” (13), while the term “sdm” (“human resources”) appears relatively

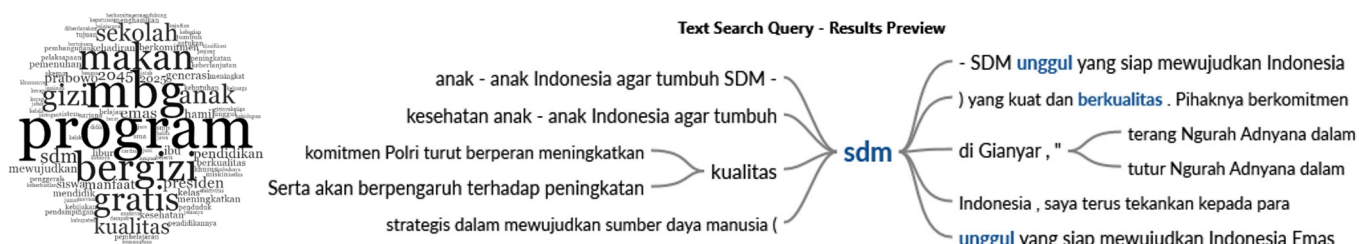


Figure 5. Word Cloud and Word Tree for the Word “SDM” Generated Using NVivo 15 Analysis

infrequently (8). This pattern indicates that the concept of human capital development is reduced to a consequence of meeting nutritional needs rather than as an independent policy dimension.

Findings from the word tree analysis also indicate that educational attributes are represented by words such as “pelatihan” (“training”), “sekolah” (“school”), “kualitas” (“quality”), and “pendidikan” (“education”), but remain subordinate to nutrition-related attributes. Thus, the media tends to portray human capital development as a byproduct of nutrition-based interventions. On the other hand, long-term attributes are represented through terms such as “Indonesia Emas 2045”, “generasi” (“generation”), and “emas” (“gold”), indicating that the media also frames this issue within the national strategic development horizon. The word tree further reinforces this through the emergence of phrases such as “SDM unggul” (“excellent human resources”) and “[generasi] berkualitas” (“high-quality generation”), which affirm a visionary orientation in the construction of meaning.

This point is reinforced by a statement from Tigor Pangaribuan, Deputy for Systems and Governance at the National Nutrition Agency (BGN):

“If they are given enough to eat and proper nutrition, hopefully the number of street fights will decrease in 20 years’ time,” said Tigor (Akbar, 2025).

This statement indicates that the media frames human capital development through causal attributes linking nutrition to social stability and future human capital outcomes. Within the framework of attribute salience, this means that “gizi” serves as the primary lens through which human capital issues are understood. However, another attribute that also emerges is the quality of program implementation, as highlighted in the following statement:

“In line with the National Police’s commitment to helping improve the quality of Indonesia’s human resources, I continue to emphasize to SPPG heads that standards and quality must be maintained. Furthermore, SPPG’s unique focus on food security is essential to preventing undesirable incidents,” stated the Chair of the National Police Task Force for MBG, Commissioner General Dedi Prasetyo (Santoso, 2025).

This statement indicates that institutional attributes and implementation quality are also part of the construction of meaning. Therefore, attribute salience in human capital development reflects both an outcome and a process dependent on the effectiveness of policy implementation. The human capital literature emphasizes that early investment in nutrition and health is a primary foundation for long-term human capital improvement (Hoddinott et al., 2008; Ren & Zhou, 2025; Stein et al., 2008).

However, this pattern may oversimplify the complexity of human capital issues, which should also encompass the dimensions of education and skills. Thus, this analysis shows that the media constructs the objective of human capital development through three main attributes: (1) nutrition-based intervention as the dominant attribute; (2) long-term vision as a supporting attribute; and (3) implementation quality as an operational attribute. This pattern confirms that in media coverage, the meaning of human capital development is more often

understood as an effect of nutrition programs, while other dimensions tend to receive less emphasis.

3.2.3. Attribute Salience in Food Security

Based on the word cloud visualization in Figure 6, the term “makanan” (“food”) appears 4 times, indicating that the issue of food security remains present in news coverage, albeit with relatively limited frequency. This frequency is lower than that of program- and consumption-oriented terms such as “program” (33), “mbg” (32), “makan” (“eating/meal”) (26), “sppg” (“Nutrition Fulfillment Service Unit”) (26), “bergizi” (21), “pangan” (“foodstuff”) (20), “gizi” (16), and “pemuhan” (“fulfillment”) (12). This pattern indicates that the dominant attributes in news coverage do not focus on the broader food security system, but rather on the operational aspects of meeting consumption needs and distributing nutrition. Furthermore, media framing also emphasizes the implementation dimension through terms such as “sekolah” (8) and “siswa” (“student”) (3), indicating that food security is represented primarily as a mechanism for channeling program benefits to target groups rather than as a structural issue within the food system.

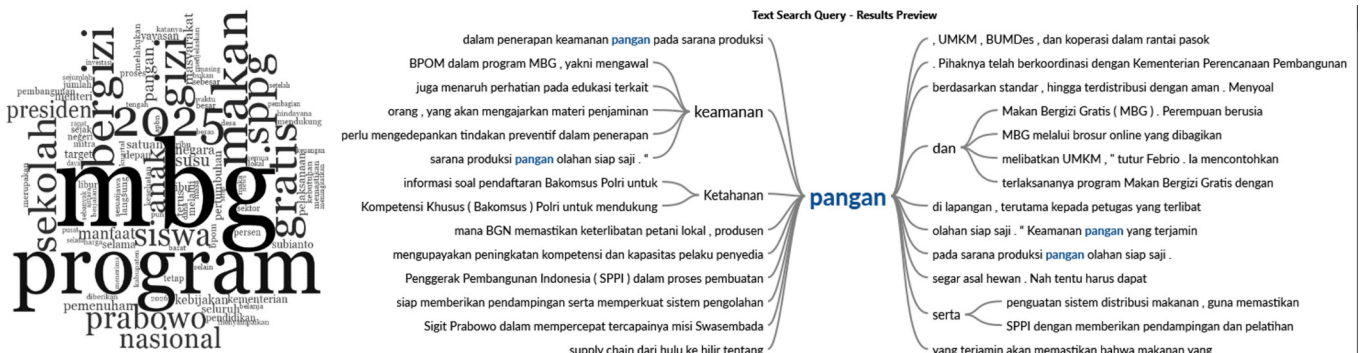


Figure 6. Word Cloud and Word Tree for the Word “Pangan” or “Ketahanan Pangan” Generated Using NVivo 15 Analysis

Nevertheless, attributes related to the structure of the food system—specifically production, distribution, access, and system resilience—also appear through terms such as “makan” (26), “lokal” (“local”) (11), “beras” (“rice”) (10), “produksi” (“production”) (5), “pertanian” (“agriculture”) (5), “petani” (“farmers”) (4), “distribusi” (“distribution”) (6), “rantai” (“chain”) (5), “pasok” (“supply”) (4), “ketahanan” (“resilience”) (4), “sistem” (“system”) (4), and “nasional” (“national”) (5). However, these salient attributes still position the MBG program’s objective of food security primarily in terms of meeting basic needs through the provision of raw materials for program implementation.

These findings are supported by the word tree analysis, which shows that the term “pangan” most frequently appears in contexts such as “ketahanan pangan” (“food security”), “sarana produksi” (“means of production”), “penguatan sistem distribusi” (“distribution system strengthening”), “swasembada” (“self-sufficiency”), and “supply chain dari hulu ke hilir” (“upstream–downstream supply chain”). These attributes position food security as a technical outcome of program implementation with direct community impacts. This finding is reinforced by a statement from Tigor Pangaribuan, Deputy for Systems and Governance at BGN:

“It creates jobs, opens up opportunities to purchase agricultural supplies in villages, and also motivates farmers,” said Tigor (Febiola, 2025).

This statement emphasizes that the MBG program serves as a catalyst for increasing activity in the agricultural sector and the rural economy by raising demand for local products. It further suggests that the MBG program may help address future crises, according to Epi Taufik, a member of BGN’s Dairy Products Expert Team and a lecturer at IPB:

“During the COVID-19 pandemic, all countries were hoarding their food reserves. It was hard for us to buy anything. If we had our own production, we could survive. The MBG is one path toward food self-sufficiency,” said Epi Taufik (Safitri & Prabowo, 2025).

This statement is supported by empirical data showing increased activity in the agricultural sector. The Central Statistics Agency (BPS) recorded 4.93% growth in the agricultural sector in the third quarter of 2025, with significant increases in the food crop (9.94%) and livestock (6.51%) subsectors (Baihaqi, 2025; Masitoh, 2025). This growth is linked to rising demand for commodities such as rice, eggs, and chicken meat to support implementation of the MBG program (Andrianto, 2025; Baihaqi, 2025). These findings align with previous research indicating that school-based nutrition programs can bridge nutritional needs with local food production by strengthening sustainable agricultural communities that utilize locally produced food from farmers, livestock breeders, and fishers (Mendonça & Rocha, 2015; Wilson, 2021).

However, these salient attributes do not clearly highlight the dimensions of production-system reform, price stability, and national food governance, which receive less emphasis. Thus, this analysis indicates that food security in MBG program coverage is constructed through three primary attributes: (1) meeting consumption needs as the dominant attribute; (2) local economic impacts as a supporting attribute; and (3) food self-reliance as a normative attribute. The dominance of the consumption attribute indicates that the media tends to frame food security as part of the distribution of program benefits rather than as a long-term vision of food sovereignty.

3.2.4. Attribute Saliency in Economic Growth

Based on the word cloud visualization in Figure 7, the narrative regarding economic growth is still dominated by core program terms such as “program” (27), “bergizi” (20), “mbg” (20), “makan” (18), and “gratis” (14), indicating that these attributes are an integral part of the MBG program’s identity. Specifically, for the

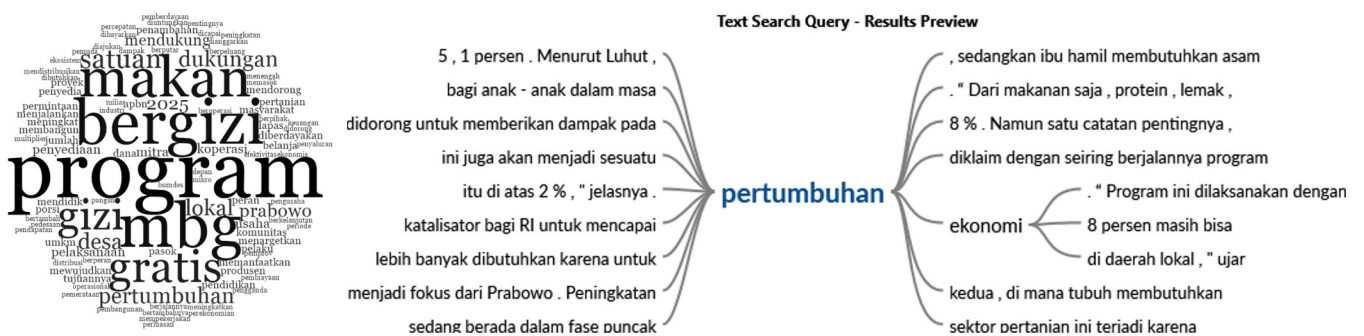


Figure 7. Word Cloud and Word Tree for the Word “Pertumbuhan” or “Ekonomi” Generated Using NVivo 15 Analysis

economic growth attribute, keywords include “pertumbuhan” (“growth”) (6), “desa” (“village”) (6), “lokal” (6), and “dukungan” (“support”) (6), indicating that the media portrays the MBG program as a driver of the local economy. This attribute is reinforced by terms such as “usaha” (“enterprise”) (3), “koperasi” (“cooperative”) (3), “mitra” (“partner”) (3), and “umkm” (“MSMEs”) (2), as well as supply-chain terms such as “pertanian” (2), “produsen” (“producer”) (2), and “pasok” (2), which place the program within the context of empowering small- and medium-scale economic actors. Thus, media coverage frames the MBG program by highlighting its role as a driver of the local economy. Additionally, fiscal attributes also emerge through terms such as “apbn” (“state budget”) (2), “dana” (“funds”) (2), and “belanja” (“spending”) (2), indicating the use of budget allocations within the MBG program. Nevertheless, macroeconomic attributes appear only to a limited extent through the terms “multiplier” (1), “multiplier effect” (1), and “ekonomi” (“economy”) (1). This implies that the MBG program may generate a multiplier effect, although this receives limited emphasis in coverage. This is further supported by a statement from then-Minister of Finance of the Republic of Indonesia, Sri Mulyani Indrawati:

“This program is implemented in collaboration with educational institutions, businesses, and local communities to ensure effectiveness and accountability, as well as to maximize the multiplier effect on the economy,” said Sri Mulyani (Estherina, 2025).

In addition, the word tree analysis shows that the term “pertumbuhan” is frequently associated with figures such as “5,1 persen”, “2 persen”, and “8 persen”, as well as phrases such as “katalisator bagi RI” (“catalyst for Indonesia”) and “fokus” (“focus”), indicating that the legitimacy of economic growth is established through quantitative claims and national projections. This is consistent with a statement by Mukhamad Misbakhun, a member of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI):

“President Prabowo decided early in the campaign that he wanted the Free Nutritious Meal program to be available to the public. There will be community kitchens that will be managed by local communities in the future, and community members will supply the rice, vegetables, meat, and eggs, so that this program will also stimulate the local economy,” said Mukhamad Misbakhun (Setiawan, 2025).

Empirically, economic growth indicators are further supported by data showing the MBG program’s contribution to economic performance. According to the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) (Andrianto, 2025; Masitoh, 2025), the MBG program coincided with 5.04% year-over-year economic growth in the third quarter of 2025. The impact is reflected in growth in the agricultural sector, particularly, the food crop subsector (9.94%) and livestock (6.51%), as well as in the food and beverage industry (approximately 6.48%). Household consumption also grew by 4.89% and remained the main pillar of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while the unemployment rate fell to 4.85% (Andrianto, 2025; Baihaqi, 2025; Masitoh, 2025). At the regional level, the West Java Provincial Statistics Agency (BPS Jabar) recorded growth of 5.20% year-on-year, supported by thousands of Nutrition Fulfillment Service Units

(SPPGs) that stimulated manufacturing and consumption (BPS-Statistics Jawa Barat Province, 2025).

These findings are consistent with the literature, which indicates that food-based programs not only have social impacts but are also capable of generating a double multiplier effect through the strengthening of local sectors and increased community income (Estender et al., 2022; Guan et al., 2025; Lundborg et al., 2022). Thus, within the framework of attribute salience, economic growth in MBG program coverage is constructed through three main attributes: (1) strengthening of the local economy as the dominant attribute; (2) distributive impacts on small economic actors as a supporting attribute; and (3) macroeconomic projections as a legitimizing attribute. This pattern indicates that the media tends to frame the MBG program as a community-based and real-sector economic stimulus, although discussion of macroeconomic dimensions remains relatively limited.

3.3. Actor Salience in the Construction of the Objectives of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) Program

News coverage of the MBG program not only reveals differences in the prominence of policy objectives and their interpretation through specific attributes, but also highlights which actors appear and what roles they play in shaping these constructions as part of actor salience (McCombs, 2005). Thus, the construction of MBG program objectives in news coverage cannot be separated from the actors emphasizing the objectives of President Prabowo Subianto’s strategic program.

Table 4. Distribution of Actors in the MBG Program on Kompas.com, detikcom, and Tempo.co

Actor	detikcom	Kompas.com	Tempo.co	Total	Ranking
National Nutrition Agency (BGN)	7.27%	55.00%	27.50%	22.61%	1
Ministries of the Republic of Indonesia	18.18%	5.00%	32.50%	20.87%	2
Local Governments	20.00%	5.00%	5.00%	12.17%	3
Kitchens and SPPG Managers	7.27%	25.00%	7.50%	10.43%	4
National Armed Forces and Police	18.18%	0.00%	0.00%	8.70%	5
President Prabowo Subianto	5.45%	0.00%	15.00%	7.83%	6
Supervisory and Control Institutions	3.64%	0.00%	10.00%	5.22%	7
School Communities	9.09%	0.00%	0.00%	4.35%	8
Non-Structural Institutions	3.64%	0.00%	2.50%	2.61%	9
Legislative Institutions	3.64%	0.00%	0.00%	1.74%	10
Private Sector	1.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.87%	11
Foreign Countries	1.82%	0.00%	0.00%	0.87%	12
State-Owned Enterprises	0.00%	5.00%	0.00%	0.87%	13
Academics, Observers, and NGOs	0.00%	5.00%	0.00%	0.87%	14

Source: Processed data

Based on Table 4, MBG program coverage reveals a state-centered agenda, in which state actors dominate policy framing and present the program in a positive light. BGN holds the highest share (22.61%), followed by ministries (20.87%) and local governments (12.17%). At the outlet level, Kompas.com features BGN very prominently (55.00%), reflecting a tendency to use formal and authoritative sources in explaining public policy, in line with its editorial style (Kinoshita, 2020; Putranto et al., 2024). These findings indicate that BGN contributes significantly to emphasizing the objectives of the MBG program through high coverage intensity, as it is the primary implementing institution.

The representation of government actors also reveals a relatively clear division of roles. Ministries and the central government are more frequently associated with policy formulation and strategic direction, whereas local governments (12.17%) and SPPG managers (10.43%) appear more often in the context of MBG program implementation in practice. This pattern indicates that the media constructs a top-down model of policy communication, in which national actors are positioned as decision-makers, while local actors serve as implementers (Sawir et al., 2025).

In contrast, Table 4 shows that non-state actors such as the private sector, academics, and civil society organizations appear in very limited proportions (0.87%). In addition to their low frequency, these findings indicate that such actors also tend to be discursively marginalized, as they are more often treated as supportive voices rather than independent or critical sources. Consequently, policy framing is largely shaped by the government's perspective, while the distribution of program objectives becomes more concentrated on certain dimensions (Table 3) and the diversity of issue attributes featured in the coverage is limited (see Section 3.2).

The dominance of state actors also has the potential to shape public perceptions that the MBG policy process is entirely controlled by government institutions, thereby creating the appearance of minimal public participation (Rasmussen & Reher, 2023). This imbalance results in low visibility of multi-stakeholder engagement and has implications for public perceptions of the transparency and accountability of the MBG program (Birch & Van Ham, 2017; Krlev & Lund, 2020). This is because the involvement of non-state actors is often perceived primarily as an oversight function in policy implementation (Rohmah et al., 2025). In reality, the presence of non-state actors has the potential to enrich issue framing through their diverse backgrounds and perspectives, such as field experience, independent evaluations, and the representation of broader community interests.

A comparison across news outlets also reveals variations in the portrayal of actors in the MBG program (see Table 4). Kompas.com tends to highlight technocratic actors such as BGN as primary sources of policy legitimacy, in line with its coverage approach oriented toward institutional and structural dimensions (Gasa et al., 2025). detikcom presents a more diverse distribution of actors, including security personnel and school communities, reflecting a focus on implementation dynamics and rapid information delivery, in line with its journalistic style (Kinoshita, 2020). Tempo.co shows a narrower range of actors and highlights supervisory and control institutions (10%), which aligns with its investigative journalism style, positioning these institutions as key actors capable of explaining the on-the-ground dynamics of the MBG program (Kunia & Othman, 2019; Prayudi et al., 2025).

These differences indicate that each news outlet has distinct tendencies in framing actors and their roles within the MBG program. Overall, the construction of actor salience in MBG news coverage reveals three main patterns: the dominance of state actors as sources of policy legitimacy, the strengthening of technocratic actors as subject-matter authorities, and the limited representation of non-state actors. These patterns underscore that the media not only determines which issues gain prominence but also shapes who holds the legitimacy to define policy in the public sphere.

4. Conclusion

This study shows that media framing of the objectives of the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) program in online news coverage tends to be unbalanced in terms of issue distribution, highlighted attributes, and the actors receiving coverage. The

dominance of nutritional intake and stunting reduction in object salience confirms that the media consistently positions the MBG program as a nutrition-based intervention policy. This pattern is reinforced in attribute salience, where narratives focus primarily on nutritional quality, vulnerable groups, and health impacts. Meanwhile, human capital development is positioned as a consequence, while food security and economic growth tend to be interpreted more narrowly and marginalized.

At the same time, the actor salience dimension reveals the dominance of state actors, particularly government and technocratic institutions, which shape a state-centered agenda. The limited representation of non-state actors constrains the diversity of perspectives in news coverage. Overall, these three dimensions are intertwined in shaping the structure of media narrative dominance, in which actors determine the attributes that are highlighted, and these attributes reinforce the dominance of specific objectives. Theoretically, these findings extend agenda-setting theory by emphasizing the importance of integrating object salience, attribute salience, and actor salience, and demonstrate that the media agenda is determined not only by the frequency of issues and their attributes but also by the authority of the actors defining them.

From a policy perspective, the dominance of nutrition-focused narratives risks oversimplifying the complexity of multidimensional objectives. This underscores the need for a more balanced communication strategy so that other dimensions, such as food security and economic growth, can receive proportionate attention. Furthermore, expanding the involvement of non-state actors is crucial to enrich perspectives while enhancing policy transparency and accountability. In practical terms, the media is expected to provide more inclusive coverage by broadening the diversity of sources and perspectives. Reliance on government actors risks limiting the space for public discourse; therefore, efforts are needed to present a more balanced narrative in terms of issue distribution, actor representation, and the construction of policy meaning.

5. Limitations

This study on the MBG program is limited to three national online news outlets during a specific publication period; therefore, it does not fully represent the diversity of media narratives in Indonesia, particularly those of local or regional media. Additionally, the analysis focuses solely on text-based news articles and employs text pattern analysis using NVivo. As with qualitative research in general, the data interpretation process is also influenced by the researcher's analytical perspective. Future research is recommended to expand data sources and the observation period and to supplement media analysis with field observations or interviews with beneficiaries and relevant stakeholders to obtain a more comprehensive picture of what is most prominently highlighted in the MBG program.

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