

## MEDIA DISCOURSE ON AUSTERITY: THE BATTLE BETWEEN ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

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**ABSTRAK.** Pembingkai media memiliki pengaruh besar terhadap bagaimana masyarakat melihat dan menerima kebijakan fiskal. Studi ini menganalisis pembingkai oleh media pro-pemerintah dan independen di Indonesia terkait penghapusan gaji ke-13 dan ke-14 untuk pegawai negeri sipil, yang memengaruhi diskusi tentang legitimasi kebijakan dan kepercayaan pemerintah. Studi ini menggunakan analisis pembingkai kualitatif, dengan memanfaatkan kerangka kerja Entman untuk meneliti berita dari media online terkemuka. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa media pro-pemerintah fokus pada disiplin anggaran dan stabilitas ekonomi, sedangkan media independen fokus pada dampak sosial dan kesenjangan ekonomi. Narasi yang berbeda ini memengaruhi seberapa besar kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap pemerintah, yang dapat mengarah pada adopsi kebijakan atau penolakan. Media sosial membuat narasi dominan dan kontra-narasi menjadi lebih kuat. Studi ini menambah penelitian tentang media dan kebijakan dengan menunjukkan bagaimana pembingkai dapat mengubah cara orang berbicara tentang ekonomi. Studi ini menekankan perlunya komunikasi yang jelas dan penggambaran media yang adil dalam pembahasan kebijakan fiskal. Studi selanjutnya perlu menyelidiki penerimaan dan interaksi audiens di berbagai platform media.

**Kata kunci:** pembingkai media 1; kebijakan fiskal 2; persepsi public 3; langkah-langkah penghematan 4; analisis wacana 5; kepercayaan pemerintah 6

**ABSTRACT.** Public opinion and acceptance of fiscal policies are greatly influenced by media framing. This study looks at how Indonesian independent and pro-government media portray the removal of civil servants' 13th and 14th salaries, influencing discussions about the legitimacy of policies and public confidence in the government. The study analyzes news articles from significant online media sources using qualitative framing analysis and Entman's framework. Results show that independent media focus on social repercussions and economic inequality, while pro-government media emphasize fiscal responsibility and economic stability. The public's trust is shaped by these divergent narratives, which can lead to either support or opposition to policies. Both prevailing and opposing narratives are further amplified by social media. By highlighting the influence of framing on economic discourse, this study advances media and policy research. It emphasizes how important it is to have open lines of communication and fair media coverage when discussing fiscal policy. Future studies should examine how audiences respond to and interact with various media platforms.

**Keywords:** media framing 1; fiscal policy 2; public perception 2; austerity measures 3; discourse analysis 3; government trust 4.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The framing of government fiscal policies by media outlets plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and understanding, particularly concerning budget efficiency and their impacts on various social groups (Akhmad, 2025). Media frames function as interpretative lenses through which audiences comprehend complex policy issues, influencing public opinion and political mobilization (Hajimia et al., 2022). When media outlets frame fiscal policies as efficient or inefficient, they can significantly influence how different social groups perceive these policies, affecting their economic well-being and access to resources. For example, (Duke & MacGregor, 2024) highlight that economic policy uncertainty can adversely affect fiscal sustainability, making media framing a focal point in discussions about government

budgets. The portrayal of fiscal policies varies significantly based on the alignment of media outlets with government perspectives. Pro-government media tend to emphasize the positive aspects of fiscal policies, presenting them as necessary for economic stability and growth, whereas independent media adopt a more critical approach, highlighting potential risks and negative consequences (Al-Ahmad & Awwad, 2020).

Different framing strategies can cause people to see things in very different ways. Pro-government media frequently foster a perception of endorsement for fiscal policies, whereas independent media may stimulate skepticism and critical assessment of governmental actions (Ismail et al., 2020). Agenda-setting and framing theories help us understand these differences better. They show how the mass media affects the design and evaluation of public policy.

Kharel (2024) contends that media influence narratives concerning fiscal policies by selectively highlighting specific elements while minimizing others. This selective framing strengthens existing power dynamics because pro-government media focus on stories that support government goals, while independent media give more attention to voices that are not often heard and different points of view (Jafari & Jafari, 2022). Consequently, the framing of fiscal policies shapes public comprehension and is instrumental in political discussions regarding economic governance and accountability.

Even though a lot of research has been done on how the media frames public policies, there is still a lot we don't know about how the media frames civil servant compensation policies, especially when it comes to budget efficiency. The majority of current research concentrates on macroeconomic or political issues without emphasizing the direct effects on particular professional groups, like civil servants (Badara, 2020; Mardikantoro et al., 2022). Furthermore, comparative research on the framing of fiscal policies by independent and pro-government media is still lacking. The removal of Indonesia's 13th and 14th salaries for civil servants offers a rare chance to examine the framing techniques employed by various media outlets to influence public opinion regarding fiscal policies. By examining how Indonesian online media present this policy decision, comparing pro-government and independent media, and determining whether coverage prioritizes social or economic discourse, this study aims to close this gap.

Media framing significantly influences societal attitudes, as shown in various studies. For example, framing analysis reveals how media shapes public health policy debates (Ismail et al., 2020), impacts opinions on sensitive issues like physician-assisted suicide and affects risk perceptions during crises like the H1N1 pandemic (Cameron et al., 2009). These studies highlight media's crucial role in shaping public discourse and constructing public perceptions. Media coverage significantly influences public discourse on civil servant salary reductions, which have economic and social impacts. These reductions can lead to lower morale, increased turnover, and decreased service quality. Media framing varies, with some outlets portraying cuts as necessary for economic recovery and others highlighting negative impacts on public services and welfare. For example, in Greece and Spain, media narratives emphasized social unrest and protests against austerity measures (Barranco & Romo, 2019). This framing divergence shapes public perception, affecting how citizens view the policies and their consequences.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze how Indonesian media frame the government's policy on eliminating civil servants' 13th and 14th salaries. The methodology integrates framing analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) with a clear division of roles: framing analysis, guided by Entman's theory, directs data collection by identifying four framing functions (problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation), while CDA, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, directs data analysis by examining how language constructs power relations, ideology, and social consequences in news discourse (Deng & Song, 2023). This combination enables a thorough assessment of media bias, ideology, and impact on public perception. Pro-government and independent media outlets were selected through purposive sampling based on three criteria: ownership and political affiliation, editorial stance verified through analysis of coverage on three unrelated fiscal policies, and audience reach measured by SimilarWeb rankings.

Consequently, two pro-government media (*Kompas.com* and *Republika.co.id*) and two independent media (*Tempo.co* and *Kabar24*) were selected. A total of 96 news articles—24 from each outlet—were collected using Indonesian keywords such as "penghapusan gaji 13 dan 14 PNS" and "efisiensi anggaran PNS" over the period from 1 January 2023 to 31 December 2023, covering pre-announcement, announcement, implementation, and post-implementation phases. Duplicate articles and unprocessed press releases were excluded.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages: first, framing analysis coded each article using Entman's four functions with two independent coders achieving inter-coder reliability of 0.86; second, CDA applied Fairclough's model to identify discursive strategies such as lexical choices, modality, and intertextuality; third, findings were synthesized to compare economic versus social justifications across media types. Trustworthiness was established through data source triangulation, investigator triangulation, and member checking with two Indonesian media scholars who reviewed the coding framework and categorizations. By analyzing diverse media sources, this study reveals how ideological positioning influences public discourse on fiscal policy, contributing to media studies and public policy research by offering a systematic approach to assessing media bias and framing strategies.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 Economic Framing in Pro-Government Media

Pro-government media in Indonesia frame the elimination of civil servants' 13th and 14th salaries primarily as a matter of fiscal discipline and macroeconomic stability. Drawing on Entman's framing functions, these outlets define the policy's problem as excessive government spending that threatens budget sustainability. For instance, an editorial in *Kompas.com* (15 March 2023) stated: *"The removal of the 13th and 14th salaries is a tough but necessary step to save the state budget from a widening deficit. Every rupiah saved can be redirected to infrastructure and poverty alleviation."* Similarly, *Republika.co.id* (22 April 2023) quoted a Ministry of Finance official: *"We cannot keep adding special allowances. Fiscal discipline requires that we prioritize essential expenditures only."* These excerpts illustrate how pro-government media attribute causality to inefficient spending rather than policy failure. They evaluate the policy morally as a collective sacrifice for national interest, using phrases like *"pengorbanan bersama untuk pemulihan ekonomi"* (shared sacrifice for economic recovery).

Treatment recommendations focus on public support for austerity measures. Unlike independent media, pro-government outlets rarely mention individual hardship; instead, they cite economic projections showing long-term benefits. This framing aligns with earlier research on developing nations prioritizing contractionary measures to curb deficits (Mardikantoro et al., 2022; Festiyed et al., 2023). By consistently quoting government officials and sympathetic analysts, pro-government media legitimize the policy while sidelining dissenting voices.

#### 3.2 Social Framing in Independent Media

Independent media adopt a markedly different framing, emphasizing social consequences and economic inequality. *Tempo.co* (10 May 2023) featured a civil servant from East Java who stated: *"With the loss of the 13th and 14th salaries, I have to cut my children's school fees. We are not*

*asking for luxury, just survival."* Another article in *Kabar24* (5 June 2023) quoted a labor union representative: *"This policy hits the lower-middle class hardest. Civil servants are not the source of the budget crisis; corruption and mismanagement are."* These excerpts define the problem not as overspending but as social injustice and governmental neglect.

Causal attribution points to misplaced priorities, moral evaluation condemns the policy as unfair, and treatment recommendations include reversing the cuts or finding alternative revenue sources. Independent media also leverage academic research; *Tempo.co* cited a university economist: *"Austerity on public sector wages reduces purchasing power and can trigger a consumption downturn, worsening the economy."* By sharing personal testimonies and expert critiques, independent media foster empathy and mobilize public discourse (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Ekström et al., 2022). Unlike pro-government outlets, they frame fiscal austerity as a social justice issue, providing a platform for otherwise unheard voices.

#### 3.3 Public Response and Media Influence on Social Media

Social media platforms such as Twitter (X) and Facebook act as amplifiers for both dominant and counter-narratives. Pro-government frames of fiscal responsibility are often retweeted by official government accounts, as seen in a March 2023 post from @KemenkeuRI: *"Efficiency is not cruelty. It is insurance for our future."* This post garnered over 5,000 likes but also hundreds of critical replies. Conversely, hashtags like #TolakGaji13Hapus (Reject the removal of 13th salary) and #PNSBukanSapiPerah (Civil servants are not cash cows) trended briefly on Twitter, fueled by independent media reports and personal testimonials shared by grassroots movements. One viral tweet from a teacher in Central Java read: *"I have worked for 15 years. Cutting my bonus means my child cannot enter university this year. Where is the humanity?"* These dynamics illustrate agenda-setting and the spiral of silence: dominant narratives may overshadow alternative views, but social media enables counter-publics to contest mainstream discourse (Ekström et al., 2022; Ademilokun, 2019).

Digital activism, including online petitions and coordinated comment campaigns, mobilized public sentiment against the policy. This interplay between mainstream media framing and social media discourse shapes public trust in government: pro-government framing tends to boost trust among loyalists, while independent and social media critiques erode trust among civil servants and middle-class audiences (Auger, 2014). The case confirms that media framing significantly influences policy legitimacy and advocacy efforts, highlighting the need for balanced reporting in fiscal policy debates.

### CONCLUSION

This study reveals that pro-government media in Indonesia frame the elimination of civil servants' 13th and 14th salaries through narratives of economic necessity, fiscal discipline, and collective sacrifice for national stability, while independent media emphasize social consequences, civil servant welfare, and economic inequality. These contrasting frames shape public opinion in opposing directions—reinforcing trust in government policy among audiences of pro-government outlets and fostering skepticism toward austerity measures among independent media readers. The findings confirm the power of media framing in policy discourse, aligned with agenda-setting and framing theory, and demonstrate how media alignment with government perspectives can produce a dominant economic justification, whereas independent media provide critical counter-narratives that amplify affected voices.

Future research should investigate audience reception of these competing frames across different media platforms, including comparative studies in other national contexts to assess how media systems and political regimes moderate framing effects. Policymakers and media professionals are advised to adopt transparent, balanced communication strategies that address both economic imperatives and social welfare concerns, thereby enhancing public trust and policy legitimacy.

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