



## **SOCIO-COGNITIVE DIMENSIONS OF DEVELOPMENTALIST DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF THE IBU KOTA NUSANTARA RELOCATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The relocation of Indonesia's national capital from Jakarta to Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) in East Kalimantan has emerged as a prominent developmentalist project that embodies competing visions of national progress, environmental sustainability, and political legitimacy. This study aims to examine how Indonesian online media construct and contest the meaning of the IKN project through discourse. The research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) using Teun A. Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, which integrates textual structures, social cognition, and power relations. A qualitative case study design is applied to news articles published by Tempo.co and Kompas.com between early 2024 and early 2025. The analysis is conducted at three levels: macrostructure (global themes), superstructure (news schemata), and microstructure (lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical features), while also considering mental models and ideological positioning. The findings indicate a consistent pattern of discursive divergence between the two media outlets. Kompas.com predominantly constructs IKN through a developmentalist discourse emphasizing national progress, modernization, and economic opportunity, thereby legitimizing state developmentalist ideology. In contrast, Tempo.co constructs a critical narrative that emphasizes environmental degradation, fiscal risk, and democratic deficits, functioning as discursive resistance to state power. The study concludes that Indonesian media do not merely report the IKN relocation but potentially contribute to the formation of public mental models and social representations of national development. The research implies that critical media literacy is essential for democratic accountability, as*



*large-scale state projects are increasingly legitimized or contested through strategic language use in digital media.*

**Keywords:** Critical discourse analysis; developmentalist discourse; ibu kota nusantara; media representation; political ideology; socio-cognitive approach.

## **Introduction**

Language, media, and power have become increasingly interconnected in Indonesia's post-Reformasi political landscape. The rapid expansion of digital news platforms has strengthened the role of media institutions as influential producers of social reality, particularly in relation to large-scale state development projects. Media organizations not only disseminate information but also construct meanings, shape public perceptions, and influence collective understandings of political and social events (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; KhosraviNik, 2017). One of the most significant and contested contemporary projects in Indonesia is the relocation of the national capital from Jakarta to Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) in East Kalimantan. This policy involves substantial financial investment, environmental transformation, demographic redistribution, and the symbolic reconstruction of national identity.

Recent scholarship has further demonstrated that digital news environments have intensified the ideological function of media discourse. Online news platforms not only distribute information more rapidly but also facilitate the circulation of competing narratives that shape public interpretations of political events. Studies have shown that media organizations frequently employ discursive strategies to legitimize particular political positions while marginalizing alternative viewpoints, reinforcing the role of discourse as a mechanism of ideological production and social influence (Tartory, 2020; Ahlstrand, 2021). Moreover, contemporary digital communication has expanded the reach of political narratives beyond traditional journalism, creating new spaces where meaning, authority, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated (KhosraviNik, 2020).

The IKN relocation has generated extensive public debate among policymakers, academics, environmental activists, and civil society groups. Government officials frequently frame the project as a strategic solution to Jakarta's environmental pressures, regional inequality, and over-centralization of economic activity. Conversely, critics have raised concerns regarding ecological sustainability, fiscal accountability, indigenous rights, and democratic participation in the policymaking process. Such competing interpretations

demonstrate that the relocation is not merely a technical administrative decision but also a discursive arena in which different actors struggle to define the meaning, necessity, and legitimacy of national development (Hajer, 1995; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), public policies become socially meaningful through discourse. Language functions not only as a medium of communication but also as an instrument for constructing legitimacy, exercising power, and reproducing ideology (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008). Consequently, media discourse plays a central role in shaping how large-scale state projects are understood, debated, and normalized within society. Through selective representation, framing, lexical choices, and rhetorical strategies, media institutions contribute to the production of public consent or resistance toward governmental initiatives (Breeze, 2011; Hart, 2014).

The relationship between media discourse and political legitimacy has also attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent years. Research suggests that journalistic narratives contribute significantly to public evaluations of governmental authority, policy credibility, and democratic accountability. Through framing practices and discursive positioning, media institutions can either strengthen or challenge official political narratives, thereby influencing broader processes of opinion formation and political trust (Moon, 2021; Xiong et al., 2021). These findings reinforce the importance of examining how media discourse constructs competing representations of state-led development projects.

This study adopts Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA, which conceptualizes discourse, cognition, and society as mutually interconnected dimensions of communication (van Dijk, 1998, 2008). Unlike approaches that focus primarily on textual structures or social practices, the socio-cognitive model emphasizes the mediating role of mental models, social representations, and ideological beliefs in the production and interpretation of discourse. News discourse is therefore understood as a product of institutional cognition shaped by political interests, professional norms, and broader socio-cultural contexts. The increasing complexity of contemporary communication environments also requires greater attention to digital platforms as sites of knowledge construction and information dissemination. Nasution (2024) highlights how technology-enhanced environments influence user engagement, information processing, and acceptance of mediated content. Although situated within educational settings, these findings suggest broader implications for understanding how audiences interact with digitally mediated political discourse and public communication.

To contextualize this framework within Indonesia, the study also draws upon Purnomo's concept of *kuasa bahasa* (the power of language), which highlights how grammatical structures, lexical density, and linguistic complexity can function as mechanisms of symbolic dominance in political communication (Purnomo, 2019). This perspective complements van Dijk's emphasis on access to discourse as a form of elite power by illustrating how linguistic choices may naturalize authority, legitimize policy decisions, and marginalize alternative perspectives.

Although previous studies have examined media representations of development projects, political communication, and state ideology in Indonesia, limited attention has been devoted to understanding how competing media institutions construct the discourse surrounding the IKN relocation through socio-cognitive processes. Given the project's political significance and long-term implications for Indonesian society, investigating media representations of IKN provides valuable insight into the relationship between discourse, ideology, and public opinion formation.

Therefore, by comparing news coverage published by Tempo.co and Kompas.com, this study seeks to explain how language is employed to legitimize state authority, contest hegemonic development narratives, and negotiate competing visions of Indonesia's future. Through a socio-cognitive CDA framework, the study contributes to broader discussions on media power, ideological reproduction, and the discursive construction of national development in contemporary Indonesia.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Critical Discourse Analysis and the Socio-Cognitive Approach***

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) conceptualizes language as a form of social practice through which power relations, ideological assumptions, and social inequalities are produced and reproduced (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). Rather than viewing discourse as a neutral medium of communication, CDA investigates how linguistic structures contribute to the maintenance or transformation of social power. Scholars have increasingly applied CDA to examine media discourse because news texts often serve as sites where political ideologies and institutional interests are negotiated and disseminated (Breeze, 2011; Hart, 2014).

Among the major CDA traditions, Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach is distinctive because it introduces cognition as the mediating dimension between discourse and society (van Dijk, 2008). According to van Dijk, social structures do not directly influence discourse; instead, they are interpreted through cognitive representations held by social actors.

Consequently, discourse analysis should account not only for textual characteristics and social contexts but also for the mental processes through which individuals construct meaning and ideological understanding.

The socio-cognitive framework has been widely employed in studies of media representation, political communication, migration discourse, and ideological polarization because it provides a comprehensive explanation of how discourse influences public knowledge and collective beliefs (KhosraviNik, 2017; Hart, 2014). Through repeated patterns of representation, media institutions contribute to the formation of shared social cognition that shapes public attitudes toward political issues and social groups.

### ***Van Dijk's Tripartite Model of Discourse Structure***

Van Dijk (1980, 2008) proposes three interconnected levels of discourse analysis that facilitate systematic examination of news texts.

Macrostructure refers to the global meaning of a discourse. It encompasses the central themes, topics, and overall interpretations that readers derive from a text. Headlines, leads, and thematic organization frequently indicate the macrostructural orientation of news reports.

Superstructure concerns the schematic organization of discourse. In news reporting, this includes the arrangement of headlines, background information, quotations, explanations, and conclusions. The organization of information can influence how readers evaluate the importance and credibility of particular events or actors.

Microstructure focuses on local linguistic features such as lexical selection, syntactic patterns, modality, presupposition, metaphor, and rhetorical devices. These linguistic elements play a significant role in constructing ideological meanings and framing social realities.

Together, these three analytical dimensions reveal how ideology becomes embedded within both the content and structure of discourse. They also provide a methodological framework for identifying patterns of representation and legitimization in media texts.

### ***Social Cognition, Mental Models, and the Ideological Square***

A central concept in van Dijk's socio-cognitive theory is the notion of mental models, defined as subjective cognitive representations of events stored in episodic memory (van Dijk, 1998). Mental models guide how individuals interpret information, evaluate social actors, and construct narratives about social reality. Media discourse can influence these models through



framing strategies, lexical repetition, evaluative language, and selective presentation of information.

Another influential concept is the ideological square, which explains how discourse reproduces group-based ideologies. The ideological square operates through four discursive strategies: emphasizing positive characteristics of the in-group, emphasizing negative characteristics of the out-group, de-emphasizing negative aspects of the in-group, and de-emphasizing positive aspects of the out-group (van Dijk, 2006). These strategies frequently appear in political and media discourse, where competing actors attempt to legitimize their own positions while delegitimizing alternative perspectives.

Within the context of development discourse, the ideological square is particularly relevant because media institutions often construct contrasting representations of progress, modernization, environmental concerns, and political accountability. Such representations shape public perceptions of whether large-scale development projects are viewed as beneficial national achievements or problematic exercises of state power.

### ***Developmentalist Discourse and Media Representation***

Developmentalist discourse refers to the representation of economic growth, modernization, infrastructure expansion, and technological advancement as inherently desirable and necessary for national progress (Escobar, 1995). In many developing countries, state institutions frequently employ developmentalist narratives to justify large-scale projects and secure public support. These narratives often emphasize efficiency, competitiveness, innovation, and future prosperity while marginalizing alternative viewpoints concerning environmental sustainability, social justice, or democratic participation.

Media institutions play a crucial role in reproducing or contesting developmentalist discourse. Through framing practices and strategic language choices, news organizations can either reinforce state-sponsored narratives of progress or provide critical perspectives that question dominant assumptions (Carvalho, 2007; Wodak, 2021). Consequently, the analysis of media representations of IKN offers an opportunity to examine how developmentalist ideology is constructed, negotiated, and challenged within contemporary Indonesian public discourse.

### ***The Power of Language in the Indonesian Context***

Purnomo's concept of *kuasa bahasa* (the power of language) provides a contextual perspective for understanding discourse and power relations in Indonesia. Purnomo (2019)



argues that linguistic structures are not merely communicative tools but also mechanisms through which authority, legitimacy, and social hierarchy are constructed and maintained. His discussion of grammatical intricacy and lexical density demonstrates how complex linguistic forms can create perceptions of expertise and institutional authority while simultaneously obscuring agency and responsibility.

This perspective complements van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach by highlighting the micro-level linguistic mechanisms through which ideological meanings become naturalized in discourse. In the context of media reporting on IKN, lexical selection, syntactic organization, and rhetorical emphasis may contribute to the legitimization of governmental policies or, alternatively, facilitate critical resistance to dominant narratives.

## **Methods**

### ***Research Design***

This study employs a qualitative case study design situated within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A qualitative approach is appropriate because the study seeks to interpret meanings, ideological positions, and power relations embedded in media discourse rather than measure variables quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design enables an in-depth and context-sensitive examination of a bounded discursive phenomenon, namely Indonesian online media representations of the relocation of the national capital to Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN).

The analysis is grounded in Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA, which conceptualizes discourse as a multidimensional phenomenon involving the interrelationship of text, cognition, and society (van Dijk, 1998, 2008). This framework is particularly suitable for investigating how media discourse contributes to the construction of public knowledge, ideological beliefs, and social representations regarding major political and developmental projects.

### ***Research Instrument***

Consistent with qualitative research traditions, the primary research instrument is the researcher, who is responsible for collecting, organizing, interpreting, and critically analyzing textual data through a theoretically informed perspective (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance analytical rigor and consistency, the study employs a theory-driven analytical framework consisting of the following components.

1. Van Dijk's discourse structure model:
  - Macrostructure (global themes and topics),
  - Superstructure (schematic organization of news discourse),
  - Microstructure (semantic, syntactic, lexical, and rhetorical features).
2. Socio-cognitive analytical categories:
  - Mental models,
  - Social representations,
  - Ideological square (positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation).
3. Linguistic indicators adapted from Purnomo's concept of *kuasa bahasa* (the power of language):
  - Grammatical intricacy (complex sentence structures, clause embedding, and nominalization),
  - Lexical density (the use of technical, formal, and authoritative vocabulary).

These theoretical dimensions function as analytical categories that guide the systematic coding, interpretation, and comparison of discourse features across the selected texts.

### ***Data Collection***

The data consist of online news articles, opinion pieces, and editorials concerning the IKN relocation published by Tempo.co and Kompas.com. These media outlets were selected through purposive sampling because of their substantial influence on Indonesian public discourse and their contrasting editorial orientations (Patton, 2015). Tempo.co is widely recognized for its investigative and critical approach toward public policy, whereas Kompas.com is generally associated with a more institutional and developmentalist perspective.

The data collection period extends from early 2024 to early 2025, encompassing several significant political and social developments, including:

- The 79th Indonesian Independence Day ceremony held in Nusantara,
- The presidential leadership transition from Joko Widodo to Prabowo Subianto,
- Public debates concerning environmental impact, investment realization, and policy continuity.

Articles were selected according to the following criteria:

1. Explicit discussion of the IKN project or its implications;
2. High relevance to national political and developmental discourse;



3. The presence of evaluative language, framing strategies, or ideological positioning related to development, environmental issues, or governance.

All selected texts were archived, classified according to media outlet and publication date, and prepared for systematic discourse analysis.

### ***Data Analysis***

The analysis follows an iterative and abductive process that moves recursively between theoretical concepts and empirical observations (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). The analytical procedure consists of five interconnected stages.

#### 1. Macrostructure Analysis

The analysis begins with the identification of dominant themes and global meanings within each article. Particular attention is paid to headlines, subheadings, and lead paragraphs because these textual elements often signal the primary interpretive framework offered by the media outlet (van Dijk, 1980). This stage examines how the IKN relocation is framed through themes such as modernization, national development, environmental concern, political legitimacy, or policy failure.

#### 2. Superstructure Analysis

The second stage focuses on the schematic organization of news discourse. The analysis investigates how information is structured and prioritized, including the sequencing of background information, attribution of sources, inclusion or exclusion of alternative perspectives, and the arrangement of evaluations and consequences. Such organizational choices may function ideologically by legitimizing or contesting particular interpretations of the IKN project.

#### 3. Microstructure Analysis

At the micro level, the analysis examines detailed linguistic features, including:

- Lexical choices used to characterize actors, institutions, and actions;
- Syntactic structures, including agency assignment, active and passive constructions, and nominalization;
- Rhetorical strategies such as metaphor, repetition, emphasis, and evaluative language.

Particular attention is given to how grammatical intricacy and lexical density contribute to the construction of authority, legitimacy, and responsibility in accordance with Purnomo's linguistic framework.

#### 4. Socio-Cognitive Interpretation

The textual findings are subsequently interpreted through the lens of social cognition. This stage explores how discourse may shape readers' mental models and social representations of national development, governance, and state authority. Van Dijk's ideological square is employed to identify recurring patterns of in-group and out-group representation, including strategies of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation (van Dijk, 1998, 2006).

#### 5. Contextualization within Social Structure

The final stage situates the findings within the broader political, institutional, and historical context of Indonesia. This contextual interpretation examines how media access, elite influence, ideological contestation, and resistance practices shape the production and circulation of discourse surrounding the IKN relocation.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study employs theoretical triangulation by integrating CDA theory, Indonesian linguistic scholarship, and empirical textual evidence (Flick, 2018). Furthermore, the analysis adopts a reflexive and critical stance consistent with CDA's commitment to uncovering ideological processes, power asymmetries, and mechanisms of discursive legitimation in public communication.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Textual Dimensions of the IKN Discourse***

The analysis of media coverage of the Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) project reveals a substantial ideological divergence reflected in the textual structures of Tempo.co and Kompas.com. This divergence extends beyond differences in opinion and represents competing efforts to shape public interpretations of the significance of the capital relocation. Following van Dijk's framework, the findings are organized into three levels of discourse analysis: macrostructure, superstructure, and microstructure. Together, these levels demonstrate how media discourse contributes to the construction of distinct social realities surrounding the IKN project.

### Macrostructure: Competing Thematic Constructions

The macrostructure analysis focuses on the dominant themes and topics that organize the overall meaning of news discourse. The findings indicate that Kompas.com and Tempo.co prioritize fundamentally different dimensions of the IKN relocation.

For Kompas.com, the dominant theme centers on national progress, modernization, and economic opportunity. The project is consistently represented as a strategic step toward achieving the vision of “Golden Indonesia 2045,” with emphasis placed on infrastructure development, investment achievements, and future economic growth.

In contrast, Tempo.co foregrounds themes related to environmental degradation, fiscal concerns, and democratic accountability. Its coverage frequently highlights construction delays following the presidential transition, ecological consequences, and questions regarding policy sustainability.

**Table 1.** Macrostructural themes and narrative orientations in the media representation of Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN).

Media Outlet	Primary Global Theme (Macrostructure)	Narrative Orientation
Kompas.com	Modernization and Economic Development	IKN is portrayed as a symbol of national progress, innovation, and investment potential.
Tempo.co	Environmental and Fiscal Concerns	IKN is portrayed as a project associated with ecological risk, public expenditure concerns, and governance challenges.

This thematic divergence functions as an important mechanism of agenda formation. By emphasizing investment achievements and development milestones, Kompas.com directs attention toward anticipated benefits and long-term national aspirations. Conversely, Tempo.co prioritizes environmental impacts, governance issues, and implementation challenges, thereby maintaining critical scrutiny of the project within public discourse.

### Superstructure: Schematic Organization and Information Prioritization

The superstructure analysis demonstrates that both media outlets organize their news reports in ways that reinforce their respective interpretive frameworks.

Kompas.com generally adopts a legitimizing schema that begins with optimistic headlines and lead paragraphs highlighting governmental achievements, investment agreements, or infrastructure milestones. Background sections often emphasize Jakarta’s



longstanding challenges, including congestion, overpopulation, and environmental pressures, thereby providing justification for the relocation. Sources quoted in these reports predominantly include government officials, policymakers, and business representatives, contributing to an impression of institutional support and policy continuity.

In contrast, Tempo.co frequently employs a critical or oppositional schema. Articles often begin with observations concerning implementation difficulties, policy shortcomings, or unresolved controversies. For example, the article “*The IKN Should Stop Here*” structures its narrative around project stagnation and the broader implications of political decision-making. Background information commonly refers to debates surrounding the formulation of the IKN Law, environmental concerns, and public criticism. Subsequent sections emphasize potential consequences, including biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, and the marginalization of indigenous communities.

The organization of information within each outlet therefore plays a significant role in shaping readers’ evaluations of the project. Through different patterns of inclusion, exclusion, and prioritization, both media organizations construct distinct interpretive frameworks regarding the legitimacy and desirability of the capital relocation.

#### Microstructure: Lexical Choice and Syntactic Representation

The most explicit evidence of ideological positioning emerges at the microstructural level, where lexical selection, syntactic patterns, and rhetorical devices contribute to the construction of meaning.

#### Semantic Detail and Lexical Selection

Kompas.com frequently employs positive lexical choices such as *pioneer*, *milestone*, *synergy*, and *modernization*. Detailed information regarding infrastructure progress and investment figures, including references to investment commitments reaching IDR 51.35 trillion, is regularly provided. Environmental concerns, while acknowledged, tend to receive less extensive elaboration.

Tempo.co frequently utilizes critical evaluative language that emphasizes uncertainty, inefficiency, and policy risk. Its reports often include specific details regarding environmental impacts, including references to reports of large-scale forest clearing within the IKN development area within the government center area, as well as discussions of ecological vulnerability and planning concerns.

These contrasting lexical patterns contribute to the formation of different evaluative perspectives on the same policy initiative.

#### Syntax, Agency, and Responsibility

Syntactic structures play a significant role in the attribution of responsibility within the discourse.

Tempo.co frequently employs active constructions that explicitly identify political actors responsible for policy decisions and their consequences. Statements such as “*Jokowi used his authority as president to launch flagship projects...*” directly associate actions with identifiable actors, thereby foregrounding agency and accountability.

In contrast, Kompas.com often employs passive constructions and nominalizations, such as “The development of Nusantara continues to progress.” Such structures place greater emphasis on the development process itself while reducing attention to individual decision-makers. This linguistic pattern contributes to the representation of the project as an ongoing national initiative rather than a contested political decision.

#### Metaphors and Rhetorical Strategies

Metaphorical expressions are frequently used to simplify complex political and economic issues and make them more accessible to readers.

Kompas.com often represents IKN through metaphors associated with guidance, transformation, and national advancement, portraying the project as a central component of Indonesia’s future development. Tempo.co employs contrasting metaphors emphasizing uncertainty, unrealized promises, and potential risks. Through these rhetorical choices, both outlets construct distinct symbolic meanings that reinforce their broader interpretive frameworks.

## **2. Socio-Cognitive Analysis**

Beyond textual structures, the discourse surrounding IKN functions as a mechanism through which media institutions influence public cognition and shape social representations of national development. This level of analysis examines how discourse contributes to the formation of collective understandings and power relations within society.



### The Ideological Square in Media Representation

The findings demonstrate the operation of van Dijk's ideological square within both media outlets.

Kompas.com emphasizes positive representations of governmental leadership, national development, and modernization while giving comparatively less attention to negative consequences associated with the project. This pattern contributes to the legitimization of the state's developmental agenda and promotes favorable interpretations of the relocation policy.

Tempo.co, meanwhile, places greater emphasis on policy shortcomings, environmental concerns, fiscal challenges, and governance issues. At the same time, it provides visibility to critical voices, including journalists, academics, environmental advocates, and civil society actors. This framing constructs an alternative narrative that challenges dominant policy representations.

The contrast between these two discursive strategies illustrates how media organizations selectively emphasize particular aspects of reality in accordance with their editorial orientations.

### Mental Models and Social Representations of the Nation

Media discourse concerning IKN contributes to the formation of competing social representations of Indonesia's national future.

Kompas.com constructs a representation of Indonesia as an emerging global actor characterized by technological innovation, sustainable urban development, and increasing international competitiveness. This representation aligns closely with the national vision of "Golden Indonesia 2045" and seeks to foster optimism regarding the country's developmental trajectory.

In contrast, Tempo.co constructs a representation of a nation confronting significant environmental, economic, and governance challenges. Within this framework, concerns regarding transparency, sustainability, and public accountability occupy a central position. These competing representations influence how citizens interpret state policies, evaluate political leadership, and position themselves in relation to future development initiatives.

### Access to Discourse and Elite Influence

The findings further highlight the importance of access to discourse as a significant source of social power. Consistent with van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework, actors who



possess greater access to public communication channels are better positioned to shape collective understandings and public opinion.

In the context of the IKN debate, governmental actors appear to enjoy substantial visibility within mainstream news coverage, particularly through official statements, policy announcements, and institutional events. Such access facilitates the dissemination of official interpretations of the project to broader audiences.

Nevertheless, the presence of critical media outlets such as Tempo.co, together with increasing forms of digital participation and online activism, demonstrates that discursive power remains contested. Alternative perspectives continue to circulate within the public sphere, creating opportunities for resistance, debate, and the negotiation of competing interpretations of national development.

### ***The Power of Language in Political Transformation***

The findings of this study illustrate how media discourse functions as a site where competing ideological perspectives are negotiated within contemporary Indonesian society. By integrating Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework with Purnomo's concept of *kuasa bahasa* (the power of language), the analysis provides a deeper understanding of how linguistic choices contribute to the construction of political legitimacy, public knowledge, and social representation. Consistent with the assumptions of Critical Discourse Analysis, discourse does not merely reflect social reality but actively participates in shaping and reproducing it (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

### ***Discursive Legitimation of Developmentalist Ideology***

The discourse identified in Kompas.com demonstrates how media representations can contribute to the legitimation of large-scale development projects. The dominant emphasis on investment, modernization, innovation, and national progress reflects what scholars describe as developmentalist discourse, in which economic growth and infrastructural expansion are represented as necessary pathways toward national advancement (Escobar, 1995; Carvalho, 2007).

At the macrostructural level, this legitimation is achieved through thematic emphasis on development achievements and future economic opportunities. At the superstructural level, information is organized around governmental milestones, policy achievements, and institutional support. At the microstructural level, linguistic features such as positive lexical



choices, nominalization, and passive constructions contribute to the representation of the project as a continuous and broadly accepted national undertaking.

These findings support van Dijk's (2008) argument that discourse contributes to the formation of mental models through which audiences interpret social and political events. They also align with Purnomo's perspective that lexical density and grammatical complexity can function as mechanisms of symbolic authority by presenting policy discourse in a manner that appears technically informed and institutionally legitimate.

### ***Discursive Resistance and the Role of Critical Journalism***

The discourse identified in Tempo.co illustrates the role of critical journalism in challenging dominant policy narratives. Rather than emphasizing anticipated developmental benefits, Tempo.co foregrounds environmental concerns, fiscal implications, governance issues, and the experiences of affected communities. This pattern reflects what CDA scholars describe as counter-hegemonic discourse, in which alternative interpretations are introduced to contest dominant representations of social reality (Fairclough, 2010; Reisigl & Wodak, 2016).

The use of active constructions, critical evaluative language, and detailed references to environmental consequences increases the visibility of agency and accountability within the discourse. Such linguistic strategies encourage readers to consider alternative perspectives regarding the costs and implications of the relocation project.

From a socio-cognitive perspective, these discursive practices contribute to the construction of competing mental models. While Kompas.com tends to reinforce interpretations associated with national development and modernization, Tempo.co promotes representations that emphasize accountability, sustainability, and democratic participation. The coexistence of these contrasting perspectives demonstrates that media discourse remains a contested arena in which competing social actors seek to influence public understanding.

### ***Policy Legitimacy, Public Trust, and Discursive Contestation***

An important finding of this study concerns the relationship between policy implementation and discursive contestation. Several reports analyzed in Tempo.co, as well as discussions within broader public discourse, raise concerns regarding planning processes, environmental assessments, and public participation. These concerns contribute to the emergence of competing interpretations of the legitimacy and sustainability of the IKN project.

From the perspective of discourse theory, policy legitimacy is not established solely through legal or administrative procedures but is continuously negotiated through public communication and media representation (Habermas, 1996; van Leeuwen, 2007). Consequently, differences in media framing become significant because they influence how citizens evaluate governmental decisions and interpret national priorities.

The findings suggest that public trust is closely connected to transparency, accountability, and the perceived credibility of official narratives. In this regard, language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a resource through which legitimacy is constructed, maintained, and contested within democratic societies.

### ***The Multimodal Future of Political Communication***

The findings also point to broader transformations in contemporary political communication. As digital media ecosystems continue to evolve, political discourse increasingly extends beyond written news texts into multimodal environments that combine language, images, video, and interactive content.

Purnomo's discussion of multimodal stance-taking is particularly relevant in this context because political authority is now communicated through multiple semiotic resources simultaneously. Governmental narratives regarding IKN are disseminated not only through traditional news reports but also through social media platforms, digital campaigns, and visual representations of future urban development. Recent studies by Hidayah et al. (2025) demonstrate that visual elements function as powerful semiotic resources that shape meaning beyond verbal language alone.

This shift creates new opportunities for public engagement while also increasing the complexity of discourse production and interpretation. Visual narratives, digital activism, and algorithmically mediated communication increasingly influence how citizens construct knowledge about political issues. Consequently, future studies of political discourse in Indonesia would benefit from incorporating multimodal approaches capable of examining the interaction between textual, visual, and digital forms of communication (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2021).

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the debate surrounding IKN is not merely a policy discussion but also a discursive struggle over the meaning of national development, environmental responsibility, and Indonesia's future identity. Through competing



representations, media institutions participate actively in shaping public understandings of these issues and influencing broader socio-political processes.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the relocation of Indonesia's capital to Ibu Kota Nusantara (IKN) is not merely an infrastructural or administrative project but also a highly contested discursive process through which power, ideology, and national identity are negotiated. Drawing upon Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to Critical Discourse Analysis and incorporating Purnomo's concept of the power of language, the study reveals that Indonesian online media actively construct social realities rather than simply reporting events.

The findings indicate that Kompas.com predominantly functions as a vehicle of legitimation discourse by representing IKN as a symbol of modernization, national progress, and economic opportunity. In contrast, Tempo.co constructs a discourse of critique that emphasizes environmental consequences, fiscal concerns, and issues of democratic accountability. These contrasting representations contribute to the formation of different mental models and social representations of national development among audiences.

The study contributes theoretically by demonstrating how socio-cognitive mechanisms operate within Indonesian media discourse and by illustrating the relevance of integrating global CDA perspectives with localized linguistic frameworks. This combination provides a context-sensitive approach for examining discourse, ideology, and power relations in Southeast Asian political communication.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study focuses exclusively on two major online news outlets and does not incorporate audience reception, social media interactions, or multimodal elements such as images, videos, and visual design. Furthermore, the qualitative approach prioritizes interpretive depth rather than broad generalization across the Indonesian media landscape.

Future research may extend this work by incorporating multimodal discourse analysis, audience-centered approaches, and comparative studies involving regional or international media. Longitudinal investigations examining shifts in media discourse across different political administrations may also provide deeper insight into the evolving relationship between media, power, and national development in Indonesia.



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