


The Language of Entitlement and Crisis of Legitimacy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indonesian Legislators' Statements on Housing Allowance Controversy

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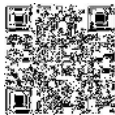
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ABSTRACT

Pada Agustus 2025, Indonesia menghadapi krisis legitimasi setelah DPR menetapkan tunjangan perumahan Rp50 juta per bulan bagi anggotanya. Meski disebut sebagai efisiensi administratif, keputusan ini menuai kontroversi karena alasan legislator dinilai arogan dan tidak berpihak. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan Analisis Wacana Kritis (CDA), menggabungkan model Fairclough dan kerangka sosio-kognitif Van Dijk. Lima pernyataan dianalisis: normalisasi numerik (Adies Kadir), legitimasi hukum (Ahmad Sahroni), normalisasi struktural (Nafa Urbach), minimisasi (Eko Patrio), dan legitimasi berbasis hak (Uya Kuya). Data berasal dari video, media nasional, dan konten media sosial. Hasil menunjukkan semua strategi wacana gagal; pernyataan dipersepsikan sebagai simbol arogansi, keserakahan, atau ketidakmampuan. Politisi karier dikritik karena dianggap teknokratis dan jauh dari publik, sementara politisi selebritas lebih banyak diejek karena identitas hiburannya. Media melabeli pernyataan sebagai arogan atau ngawur, sedangkan meme memperkuat frasa seperti "hak DPR" dan "Rp2,5 juta per hari" sebagai simbol ketidakpekaan elit. Temuan ini menegaskan strategi wacana yang tidak sesuai dengan persepsi publik mempercepat delegitimasi.

In August 2025, Indonesia faced a legitimacy crisis after the House of Representatives (DPR) established a housing allowance of IDR 50 million per month for its members. Although billed as an administrative efficiency measure, this decision sparked controversy because legislators were deemed arrogant and impartial. This study used qualitative methods with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), combining Fairclough's model and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive framework. Five statements were analyzed: numerical normalization (Adies Kadir), legal legitimacy (Ahmad Sahroni), structural normalization (Nafa Urbach), minimization (Eko Patrio), and rights-based legitimacy (Uya Kuya). Data came from videos, national media, and social media content. Results showed all discourse strategies failed; statements were perceived as symbols of arrogance, greed, or incompetence. Career politicians were criticized for being technocratic and out of touch with the public, while celebrity politicians were mocked more for their entertainment credentials. The media labeled statements as arrogant or absurd, while memes amplified phrases such as "DPR's rights" and "IDR 2.5 million per day" as symbols of elite insensitivity. These findings confirm that discourse strategies inconsistent with public perception accelerate delegitimization.



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INTRODUCTION

In August 2025, Indonesia was shaken by a political controversy surrounding the decision of the House of Representatives (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, DPR) to provide a monthly housing allowance of approximately Rp 50 million to its members. This allowance, intended to replace state-owned official residences, was officially framed as a pragmatic measure for efficiency. Yet the policy quickly became a flashpoint of public discontent, sparking nationwide protests, violent clashes, and eventually the suspension or dismissal of several legislators, including high-profile celebrity politicians such as Nafa Urbach, Eko Patrio, and Uya Kuya (Reuters, 2025; The Guardian, 2025). The public perceived the allowance not as administrative efficiency but as an excessive privilege granted to elites at a time of economic hardship, inflation, and unemployment.

The controversy escalated not only because of the substance of the policy but more importantly because of the discourse through which elites attempted to justify it. Public outrage was intensified by statements that were widely interpreted as arrogant, out of touch, and disrespectful to ordinary citizens. DPR Deputy Speaker Adies Kadir sought to normalize the figure by explaining that “Rp 50 million per month is only Rp 2.5 million per working day.” The statement was instantly labeled “ngawur” (nonsensical) in both mainstream and social media. Ahmad Sahroni, another legislator, offered a legalistic defense by stating that the allowance “sudah diatur” (“is already regulated”). Meanwhile, three celebrity politicians defended the policy in ways that generated even more ridicule: Nafa Urbach argued it was “wajar” (reasonable) given the abolition of official housing; Eko Patrio described it as “hanya kompensasi” (only compensation); and Uya Kuya went further by framing the allowance as a rightful “hak” (entitlement) of parliamentarians.

These statements circulated widely across mainstream media and social platforms, triggering cycles of satire, memes, and mass anger. Netizens and civil society organizations reframed the utterances as evidence of elite detachment and greed, constructing them as symbols of a broader legitimacy crisis. What began as a technical financial policy thus evolved into a national debate over representation, empathy, and accountability. This case illustrates how linguistic performances of entitlement can become catalysts for political delegitimation.

This study situates the DPR housing allowance controversy within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which views language as a social practice embedded in power relations (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2008). CDA investigates how discourse legitimizes privilege, marginalizes dissent, and constructs ideological positions (Osisanwo, 2024; Chiluwa, 2024). Recent applications of CDA demonstrate its relevance across contexts: Chiluwa (2024) analyzes war discourse in Nigeria, Yasmin (2024) examines delegitimization strategies in the India–Pakistan conflict, and Welker (2025) interrogates far-right discourses surrounding the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Research also highlights how language encodes ideological stances on issues such as abortion (Kamalova, 2023; Blom, 2024) and climate policy (Kranert, 2025).

Within political rhetoric, scholars have identified three key strategies relevant to this study: normalization, which frames extraordinary privileges as ordinary (Schäfer, 2024); minimization, which downplays the significance of a controversial issue (Bates, 2023); and legitimation, which invokes legal, institutional, or moral authority to justify elite practices (Hansson, 2023; Said, 2024). These strategies align with Fairclough’s three dimensions of discourse analysis: textual (word choice such as *wajar*, *hanya*, *hak*), discursive practice (media framing and circulation), and social practice (broader ideological struggles over legitimacy).

The Indonesian case exemplifies all three. Adies Kadir employed normalization through “mathematical” reasoning, reducing Rp 50 million to a per-day cost. Ahmad Sahroni used legal legitimation by emphasizing formal regulation. Nafa Urbach drew on normalization by situating the allowance as a natural consequence of structural changes. Eko Patrio minimized the issue by calling it “only compensation.” Uya Kuya invoked entitlement by labeling the allowance as a legitimate “hak.” Together, these discursive moves illustrate how elite rhetoric can clash with public expectations, producing crises of trust and representation.

A striking feature of this controversy is the involvement of celebrity politicians. Indonesia, like many democracies, has seen entertainers transition into legislative roles (Allen, 2023; Abidin, 2025; Peterson, 2024). In the 2024 election, several public figures entered parliament, including actors, comedians, and television personalities. Scholars note that celebrity politicians are particularly

vulnerable to public scrutiny, as their identities are anchored in entertainment rather than governance (Nasyaya et al., 2025). Public narratives often frame them as opportunistic and incompetent, making them easy targets during controversies.

In the DPR case, while both career politicians (Adies Kadir, Ahmad Sahroni) and celebrities (Nafa, Eko, Uya) defended the allowance, the latter were met with harsher ridicule. Social media memes juxtaposed their entertainment personas with their parliamentary utterances, amplifying perceptions of incompetence and greed. This dynamic resonates with global studies of “politics as fandom” (Allen, 2023) and celebrity politicians (Peterson, 2024; Abidin, 2025), which show that popular culture logics magnify both the appeal and the vulnerabilities of entertainers in politics.

The public anger directed at celebrity politicians in this case aligns with research on populism and outrage. Moffitt (2024) highlights how populist discourse mobilizes anger by constructing a binary opposition between “the people” and “the elite.” Zhang (2024) and Strikovic (2023) demonstrate that digital platforms amplify this logic, intensifying emotional responses and producing viral waves of indignation. Thus, the DPR housing allowance case illustrates how celebrity politicians’ rhetorical choices are particularly susceptible to public reframing as symbols of elite arrogance.

Media played a crucial role in transforming these utterances into flashpoints of delegitimation. National outlets framed Adies Kadir’s calculation as “ngawur,” while headlines emphasized the insensitivity of terms like “wajar” and “hak” (Tempo, 2025; Kompas, 2025). International media situated the controversy within broader narratives of democratic accountability and austerity politics (Reuters, 2025; The Guardian, 2025). On social media, hashtags criticizing the DPR trended for weeks, and satirical content spread virally.

This dynamic reflects what Rahimi (2024) calls the politics of delegitimization in media discourse, where minor utterances can be amplified into symbols of systemic injustice. Studies of online populism further highlight how media logics fuel affective polarization. Kissas (2024) describes how populist politics thrive in mediatised contexts, while Riedl (2023) and Tzelgov (2024) show how social media spaces act as breeding grounds for radicalization and outrage. In Indonesia, memes mocking “Rp 2.5 million per day” or parodying the word hak exemplify how discursive practices migrate across platforms, producing a multi-sited legitimacy crisis.

Scholars of discourse and legitimacy emphasize that political authority is not simply institutional but discursively constructed (Said, 2024; Nartey, 2025). When elite rhetoric fails to resonate with public expectations of empathy and responsibility, legitimacy erodes rapidly (Welker, 2025). In the DPR case, the rhetorical strategies intended to justify the allowance instead deepened cynicism, embodying what Blom (2024) terms the “hostile appropriation” of language. Words like wajar and hak, intended as neutral or justificatory, were appropriated by citizens as symbols of greed and arrogance.

The protests that followed illustrate how discourse can become a material force. Demonstrators did not merely oppose the allowance as policy; they opposed the language through which elites legitimized it. This confirms CDA’s central insight that language is both constitutive and consequential: it shapes social realities and, in moments of crisis, can mobilize resistance (Osisanwo, 2024; Chiluwa, 2024). The Indonesian housing allowance controversy thus reveals the fragility of parliamentary legitimacy in contexts where linguistic performances fail to align with democratic expectations.

This study applies Critical Discourse Analysis to the statements of Indonesian legislators during the 2025 housing allowance controversy, focusing on three questions: how DPR members framed and justified the allowance, how career politicians and celebrity politicians differed in their rhetoric, and how media and the public contested these utterances. The analysis contributes to three areas of scholarship. First, it advances CDA on political rhetoric by examining elite discourse in Southeast Asia (Osisanwo, 2024; Yasmin, 2024; Welker, 2025). Second, it extends research on celebrity politicians by highlighting their heightened vulnerability in times of crisis (Nasyaya et al., 2025; Abidin, 2025; Allen, 2023). Third, it enriches theories of legitimacy and public anger by showing how entitlement rhetoric can trigger protests and destabilize institutions (Moffitt, 2024; Zhang, 2024; Nartey, 2025). Ultimately, the case demonstrates that the DPR housing allowance controversy illustrates the language of entitlement as a mechanism of delegitimation, with rhetorical strategies that inadvertently undermined legitimacy in a mediatised political environment.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate the discursive strategies employed by Indonesian legislators during the 2025 housing allowance controversy and how these utterances were reframed in media and public discourse. The focus of CDA on the interplay between language, power, and ideology makes it an appropriate approach for analyzing how elite language attempts to legitimize privilege but instead produces delegitimation in a democratic context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research follows an interpretive qualitative design that treats political statements not as isolated quotes but as discursive events: they are produced by political actors, circulated through media, and reinterpreted by publics. CDA is used not merely to describe these utterances but to uncover the underlying ideological work they perform, the rhetorical strategies they embody, and the social consequences of their circulation.

The design is comparative in two respects. First, it contrasts different types of rhetorical strategies (normalization, minimization, and legitimation). Second, it distinguishes between career politicians (Adies Kadir, Ahmad Sahroni) and celebrity politicians (Nafa Urbach, Eko Patrio, Uya Kuya), allowing us to examine how identity shapes both production and reception of discourse.

Data Sources

The dataset consists of five high-profile utterances that triggered public debate during the housing allowance controversy. These utterances were selected through purposive sampling based on their prominence in both mainstream media and social media discourse. Selection criteria included (1) direct quotation from legislators, (2) widespread circulation in mainstream outlets, and (3) viral uptake in public debate.

Politician	Utterance (Key Phrase)	Discursive Strategy	Intended Effect	Media/Public Reception	Source Link
Adies Kadir (Deputy Speaker of DPR)	“Rp 50 million per month is only Rp 2.5 million per working day.”	Numerical normalization	Normalize allowance by reframing into smaller daily cost	Media labeled as <i>ngawur</i> (absurd); viral memes compared with ordinary wages	YouTube , Wikipedia
Ahmad Sahroni (DPR legislator)	“It is already regulated”	Legal legitimation	Frame as lawful, inevitable by regulation	Media framed as evasive; publics judged it technocratic and arrogant	Kompas TV
Nafa Urbach (Celebrity politician)	“It is (reasonable) since no official residence is provided.”	Structural normalization	Present allowance as natural replacement for lost benefits	Mocked as naïve; media emphasized celebrity identity; memes linked to acting career	YouTube , Kompas TV
Eko Patrio (Celebrity politician)	“only compensation.”	Minimization	Downplay policy as neutral substitution	Media criticized as dismissive; publics parodied remark as “bad joke” tied to comedian persona	Kompas TV
Uya Kuya (Celebrity politician)	“It is a (entitlement).”	Rights-based legitimation	Frame allowance as rightful claim of legislators	Media contrasted “hak DPR vs hak rakyat miskin”; memes amplified conflict	Kompas TV

To contextualize these utterances, supplementary materials were collected: headline framing from national newspapers (Tempo, Kompas), international coverage (Reuters, The Guardian), and social media artifacts (hashtags, memes, user comments). These materials were used to trace how discourse circulated and was reinterpreted across platforms.

Analytical Framework

Level	Focus	Analytical Tools	Illustrative Example
Micro (Textual)	Linguistic features of utterances	Lexical markers, modality, presupposition, rhetorical devices	Adies Kadir's "only Rp 2.5 million/day" as normalization through minimization
Meso (Discursive practice)	Production and circulation	Media framing, memes, recontextualization	Headlines calling utterances <i>ngawur</i> ; memes mocking <i>hak DPR</i>
Macro (Social practice)	Ideological/political significance	Legitimacy, populism, symbolic conflict	<i>Hak DPR vs hak rakyat miskin</i> as symbol of inequality
Cross-cutting (Socio-cognitive)	Cognitive schemata & ideologies	van Dijk's socio-cognitive model	Public reframes <i>hak</i> from entitlement → greed

Analytical Procedure

Stage	Focus of Analysis	Example	Analytical Insight
Coding discursive strategies	Identifying rhetorical type: normalization, minimization, or legitimation	- Adies Kadir: "Rp 50 million/month is only Rp 2.5 million/day" → Normalization - Eko Patrio: " <i>hanya kompensasi</i> " → Minimization - Uya Kuya: " <i>hak</i> " → Legitimation (rights-based)	Classified utterances into distinct discursive strategies that attempt to defend privilege
Media framing analysis	Examining headlines and reports for evaluative and identity-based framing	- Adies's "Rp 2.5 million/day" labeled <i>ngawur</i> (nonsensical) - Nafa Urbach's <i>wajar</i> tied to her identity as an actress (<i>artis DPR</i>)	Showed how media reframed utterances into delegitimation, often amplifying celebrity identity
Public uptake analysis	Studying social media recontextualization and affective amplification	- Memes of <i>hak DPR vs hak rakyat</i> - Parodies of <i>hanya kompensasi</i> as "bad joke"	Revealed how language traveled beyond institutional setting and became a symbol of elite arrogance
Comparative analysis	Contrasting career vs. celebrity politicians in discourse reception	- Career politicians (Adies, Sahroni): criticized as arrogant/technocratic - Celebrity politicians (Urbach, Eko, Uya): mocked as naïve, greedy, or incompetent	Demonstrated harsher backlash against celebrity politicians due to lack of political capital

Reliability and Validity

To enhance reliability, the dataset was triangulated across multiple sources: official statements (video and text), mainstream media coverage, and social media responses. The triangulation ensured that interpretations were not based on isolated quotations but on discursive events widely recognized in public discourse. Validity was reinforced by grounding the analysis in two established CDA frameworks (Fairclough, Van Dijk).

Ethical Considerations

All data analyzed were derived from publicly available sources, including official interviews, media reports, and open-access social media posts. No private or restricted communications were accessed. The analysis focused on discourse as public performance rather than individual morality. By anonymizing citizen responses and focusing only on public figures, the study adhered to ethical guidelines for discourse research.

Adies Kadir — Mathematical Normalization

Utterance: “Rp 50 million per month is only Rp 2.5 million per working day.”

At the textual level, Adies Kadir employed a numerical breakdown strategy, reframing a large monthly allowance into smaller daily units. The lexical marker *only* (*hanya*) minimized the perceived scale, aiming to make the figure appear modest.

The discursive reception diverged sharply. Media framing immediately labeled the statement “*ngawur*” (nonsensical). Headlines foregrounded the absurdity of suggesting Rp 2.5 million per day was reasonable in a country where the median monthly income is far below this figure. Public uptake on social media translated the phrase into viral memes contrasting “Rp 2.5 million/day” with teachers’ monthly salaries or factory workers’ daily wages.

The implication is that the attempt at normalization backfired. Rather than mitigating outrage, it crystallized public anger, becoming the single most cited symbol of elite detachment and arrogance during the controversy.

Ahmad Sahroni — Legal Justification

Utterance: “*It is already regulated*” (*sudah diatur*).

Sahroni’s rhetorical move was legal legitimation, invoking existing regulations as the basis for the allowance. The brevity and categorical modality projected certainty, effectively closing down debate.

Media framing described the remark as evasive, emphasizing that legality was being used as a shield. Unlike Kadir’s numerical claim, the statement did not go viral as a meme. Yet public uptake still judged it as evidence of technocratic elitism: rather than addressing fairness, the politician hid behind rules.

The implication is that legality without moral resonance is fragile. The utterance reinforced the perception that parliamentarians prioritize institutional self-interest over public accountability.

Nafa Urbach — Structural Normalization

Utterance: “*It is wajar (reasonable) since no official residence is provided.*”

Nafa Urbach deployed structural normalization, presenting the allowance as a natural replacement for lost benefits. The lexical choice *wajar* carried connotations of fairness and proportionality.

Media framing emphasized her identity as a former actress, highlighting the perceived mismatch between her entertainment background and her political authority. Public uptake was harsher: memes juxtaposed images from her acting career with her defense of privilege, mocking her as naïve and politically inexperienced.

The implication is that identity shaped reception. While the strategy resembled Adies Kadir’s normalization, Urbach’s celebrity status amplified skepticism and ridicule, showing how cultural capital affects discursive credibility.

Eko Patrio — Minimization through “Only Compensation”

Utterance: “*It is hanya kompensasi (only compensation).*”

Eko Patrio relied on minimization, downplaying the allowance as a neutral substitution. The marker *hanya* reduced its perceived significance, implying triviality.

Media framing portrayed the remark as dismissive, highlighting its insensitivity. Public uptake on social media turned the phrase into a punchline: memes compared “Rp 50 million compensation” with tiny subsidies given to ordinary citizens. Many users referred to the statement as a “bad joke,” drawing on Eko’s background as a comedian.

The implication is that minimization eroded credibility rather than restoring it. Instead of calming outrage, Eko's words were reinterpreted as sarcastic, deepening public resentment.

Uya Kuya — Rights-Based Legitimation

Utterance: “It is a hak (entitlement).”

Uya Kuya advanced rights-based legitimation, presenting the allowance as an inherent entitlement of legislators. The lexical choice *hak* invoked normative claims usually reserved for constitutional rights.

Media framing contrasted “DPR rights” with citizens’ unmet rights to housing, health care, and education. Public uptake amplified this contrast, spawning viral memes labeled “hak DPR vs hak rakyat miskin.” Instead of legitimizing the allowance, the phrase crystallized symbolic conflict between elites and citizens.

The implication is that rights-based discourse, when used to defend elite privilege, can be inverted into a powerful tool of delegitimation. Uya’s utterance became shorthand for greed and tone-deafness.

Cross-Case Synthesis

Three patterns emerge across the five utterances.

1. Universal failure of strategies. Normalization (Kadir, Urbach), minimization (Eko), and legitimation (Sahroni, Uya) all failed to persuade. Instead, each was reframed as arrogance, detachment, or greed.
2. Celebrity vulnerability. While career politicians (Kadir, Sahroni) were criticized for arrogance or evasiveness, celebrity politicians (Urbach, Eko, Uya) faced harsher ridicule tied to their entertainment identities, reinforcing the perception of incompetence.
3. Amplification through media ecology. Mainstream headlines labeled utterances with evaluative terms like *ngawur* or *arogan*. Social media memes extended and parodied these labels, transforming individual phrases into viral symbols of illegitimacy.

Together, the results indicate that discursive attempts to defend parliamentary privilege in Indonesia not only failed but actively deepened the legitimacy crisis. Language intended as justification was reappropriated as resistance, with celebrity politicians particularly vulnerable to intensified backlash.

Table 1. Discursive Strategies, Media Framing, and Public Uptake

Politician	Utterance (Key Phrase)	Strategy	Intended Effect	Media Framing	Public Uptake	Implication
Adies Kadir	“Only Rp 2.5 million per day”	Mathematical normalization	Normalize large figure as modest daily cost	“Ngawur” (absurd)	Viral memes comparing to workers’ wages	Backfired; symbol of arrogance
Ahmad Sahroni	“It is already regulated” (sudah diatur)	Legal legitimation	Present as lawful and inevitable	Evasive, technocratic	Criticized as hiding behind rules Mocked as naïve;	Reinforced elitism
Nafa Urbach	“It is wajar (reasonable)”	Structural normalization	Natural replacement for lost residence	Celebrity angle, naïve	memes linking to acting past Parodied as	Identity undermined credibility
Eko Patrio	“It is hanya kompensasi (only compensation)”	Minimization	Downplay as substitution	Dismissive, arrogant	a “bad joke”; subsidy comparisons Viral memes:	Trivialized outrage
Uya Kuya	“It is a hak (entitlement)”	Rights-based legitimation	Frame allowance as rightful claim	Greedy, tone-deaf	“hak DPR vs hak rakyat miskin”	Crystallized symbolic conflict

Discussion

The analysis of Indonesian legislators' utterances during the 2025 housing allowance controversy demonstrates that discursive strategies intended to legitimize privilege—whether through normalization, minimization, or rights-based framing—systematically failed. In this section, we interpret these findings by situating them within the broader scholarship on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), political communication, populism, and celebrity politics.

CDA and the Fragility of Legitimation

The Indonesian case highlights the fragility of legitimation strategies when viewed through the lens of CDA. At the textual level, the utterances of Adies Kadir, Ahmad Sahroni, and Uya Kuya exemplify three recurring strategies: normalization through numerical breakdown, bureaucratic legitimation through appeals to regulation, and rights-based framing through the invocation of hak. As Osisanwo (2024) shows in his study of militant rhetoric, such strategies are often used by elites to present claims as self-evident truths, naturalized through linguistic form. Similarly, Hansson (2023) and Kamalova (2023) demonstrate that government discourse frequently relies on categorical formulations to close down debate. Yet, as Bates (2023) notes in the context of immigration rhetoric, these strategies collapse when their presuppositions conflict with everyday realities. In Indonesia, the claim that Rp 2.5 million per day was a modest amount clashed directly with citizens' lived experience of economic inequality. Liu's (2025) study of the Chinese "996" overwork discourse shows a similar dynamic: once discourse diverges from public schemas of fairness, it is swiftly rejected as illegitimate.

At the discursive practice level, the role of media was decisive. Headlines labeling Adies's calculation as *ngawur* exemplify how journalistic discourse reframes elite statements through evaluative labeling, a pattern also observed in antagonistic political discourse elsewhere (Said et al., 2024; Chiluya, 2024). Comparative studies reinforce this observation. In Montenegro, Četković (2024) found that elite strategies of "fortifying otherness" were rapidly delegitimized in media coverage. In Ghana, Nartey (2025) shows how activist discourses reframed governmental self-legitimation into delegitimation. Kranert (2025), in his study of net-zero policy debates, similarly demonstrates how attempts at scaling and normalization become targets of media skepticism. Taken together, these studies underscore that discursive practices beyond elite control are crucial in determining whether language consolidates or undermines legitimacy.

At the social practice level, the Indonesian case illustrates how discourses of privilege easily become symbols of injustice when circulated in contentious socio-political contexts. Welker's (2025) analysis of far-right geopolitical narratives and Yasmin's (2024) study of India-Pakistan conflict discourse both show how legitimating claims are inverted into delegitimation when publics perceive them as arrogant or exclusionary. In Indonesia, the language of entitlement activated entrenched social schemas of inequality, intensifying perceptions of elitism. Blom (2024) highlights a similar mechanism in the appropriation of feminist slogans, where claims meant to assert rights were reframed as hostile. Likewise, research on the normalization of far-right populism (Discourse & Society, 2022) illustrates that once discourse becomes detached from "common sense" frames, it transforms into a rallying point for opposition.

Across these levels, the Indonesian case confirms a central CDA insight: legitimacy is never inherent but discursively constructed, and therefore precarious. Once elite language collides with public notions of fairness and common sense, discourses of legitimation invert into powerful instruments of delegitimation. This finding not only supports but also extends CDA scholarship by showing how even simple lexical choices (only, wajar, hak) can carry disproportionate weight in mediatized political contexts. It suggests that in polarized democracies, the fragility of legitimation is not an exception but a systemic condition of discourse.

Delegitimation, Protest, and Populist Anger

The Indonesian housing allowance controversy illustrates with unusual clarity how discourse can become the spark for collective protest. Memes contrasting hak DPR with hak rakyat miskin epitomize what Kissas (2024) calls "populist everyday politics": the routinization of anger where ordinary linguistic performances by elites are reframed as triggers for indignation. This resonates with Zhang's (2024) study of Chinese populist discourses on social media, where the construction of us versus them narratives is central to sustaining digital populism. Tzelgov (2024) similarly identifies Twitter as a

breeding ground for radicalization, showing how antagonistic dichotomies not only circulate but intensify in online spaces. The Indonesian memes functioned in precisely this way: they recoded entitlement claims into symbols of elite greed, transforming administrative discourse into a populist rallying point.

This pattern confirms insights from the protest paradigm literature, which emphasizes that media play a decisive role in amplifying delegitimation. Headlines calling elite utterances *ngawur* or *arogan* parallel findings by Kim (2025) on South Korea's candlelight protests, where journalistic framing reshaped grievances into symbols of systemic injustice. Likewise, *Current Sociology* (2023) documents how protesters gain legitimacy by inverting elite discourse into public critique. In Indonesia, the viral spread of ridicule gave protesters a unifying discursive resource, consolidating anger that might otherwise have remained fragmented.

The case also echoes broader CDA findings on the recontextualization of conflict discourse. Chilwa (2024) shows how war rhetoric in Africa is reappropriated to mobilize resistance, while Bates (2023) demonstrates how immigration rhetoric in Europe can backfire, transforming legitimation into stigmatization. Housing discourses display similar patterns: the special issue *This is not a housing crisis* (2025) argues that housing rhetoric often encodes ideological struggles over rights and privilege. In Indonesia, the allowance debate mirrored these dynamics, with elite justifications rejected and reinterpreted as evidence of structural injustice.

Comparative cases highlight how widespread this dynamic has become. Arias Álvarez (2025) documents how graffiti and urban protest in Latin America transform elite narratives into counter-discourses inscribed on city walls. Bozdağ (2025) demonstrates that in Turkey, populist dichotomies articulated by elites are often flipped by publics into weapons of resistance. Strikovic's (2023) study of online appeals to "the people" further illustrates that populist framing thrives in digital spaces where collective outrage is cultivated as affective capital. The Indonesian memes thus fit within a global trend: discourses of entitlement rapidly become discourses of delegitimation in the mediated public sphere.

In sum, the Indonesian case confirms that protest is discursively catalyzed rather than merely materially triggered. The allowance policy itself may have been objectionable, but it was the rhetoric defending it—phrases like only Rp 2.5 million per day or *hak DPR*—that crystallized discontent. CDA provides the tools to trace this transformation: at the textual level, rhetorical devices encoded privilege; at the discursive level, media amplified evaluative framings; at the social practice level, publics recontextualized language into memes that fueled mobilization. The result is a paradigmatic example of what Rahimi (2024) calls the politics of discursive resistance, where legitimacy and illegitimacy are not properties of institutions but outcomes of discursive struggle.

Celebrity Politicians and the Burden of Persona

Findings reveal sharper backlash toward celebrity politicians. Nafa Urbach's *wajar* and Eko Patrio's *hanya kompensasi* were judged not only semantically but through their entertainment identities. This resonates with global research showing that celebrity politicians face distinct discursive vulnerabilities (Allen, 2023; Abidin, 2025; Peterson, 2024). Online ridicule, such as framing Eko's utterance as a "bad joke," mirrors patterns documented in Vietnamese, Malaysian, and Southeast Asian celebrity politics (Driskell, 2025; "Hate content in Vietnamese social media," 2025).

As Celebrity Studies research emphasizes (*Governing Asian Celebrity*, 2025), visibility magnifies both credibility and ridicule. In Indonesia, the entertainment background functioned as a lens for delegitimation, confirming Inwood and Zappavigna's (2023) insight that celebrity identity is discursively co-constructed through commentary.

Media Ecology and Reframing

The controversy also underscores the role of media ecology. Mainstream media amplified outrage through evaluative headlines, while social media recontextualized language into memes and hashtags. This dynamic has been noted in multiple contexts: populist visual communication (Moffitt, 2024; *Political Studies Review*, 2025), online radicalization (Tzelgov, 2024), and digital populism (Cao, 2023; Bozdağ, 2025).

As Page (2024) and Ädel (2023) note, government discourse online is dialogically reframed by publics rather than passively received. The Indonesian case adds to this by showing how simple lexical choices (*only*, *wajar*, *hak*) were appropriated and inverted. This confirms Rahimi's (2024) argument that media and publics act as active sites of resistance, shaping discourse beyond elite control.

Legitimacy, Housing, and the Politics of Entitlement

Finally, the controversy illustrates the fragility of legitimacy in policy areas tied to material inequality. Housing allowance debates connect to broader scholarship on legitimacy and urban transformation (Brenner, 2024; “This is not a housing crisis,” 2025; Arias Alvarez, 2025). Just as welfare and housing discourses are often sites of contestation (Dalle-Nogare, 2024; Schäfer, 2024), the Indonesian allowance became a flashpoint because citizens perceived elites as insulating themselves from shared hardship.

By invoking *hak*, Uya Kuya inadvertently crystallized symbolic conflict, echoing Scotti’s (2024) analysis of illiberal border discourses and McCaffrey’s (2025) study of anti-woke discourse: in both cases, claims to rights or values become sites of polarization.

Theoretical and Empirical Contributions

Theoretically, the study advances CDA by integrating Fairclough’s multi-level model with socio-cognitive approaches, while also highlighting the role of identity as a mediating factor in discursive uptake. Empirically, it extends comparative work on celebrity politicians and populism in Southeast Asia (Abidin, 2025; Driskell, 2025) by showing how entertainment personas intensify ridicule during crises. It also enriches research on legitimacy by linking language of entitlement to protest dynamics (Kim, 2025; *Current Sociology*, 2023).

Conclusion of Discussion

In short, the DPR housing allowance controversy illustrates how language can transform administrative policy into a legitimacy crisis. Discursive strategies that sought to normalize or justify privilege were swiftly inverted through media and public discourse, fueling protest and delegitimation. By situating this case within broader CDA and populism scholarship, the study underscores that words themselves can be decisive political events, especially in mediatized democracies where elite discourse is under constant scrutiny and reinterpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the 2025 DPR housing allowance controversy in Indonesia through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), focusing on five key utterances by both career politicians and celebrity legislators. The results reveal that rhetorical strategies of normalization, minimization, and legitimation systematically failed. Instead of defusing criticism, these strategies were reframed by media and publics as symbols of arrogance, insensitivity, and greed.

At the textual level, lexical markers such as *only*, *wajar*, *hanya*, and *hak* encoded implicit attempts to normalize or justify privilege. At the discursive practice level, media headlines and reports reframed these utterances with evaluative labels such as *ngawur* (nonsensical), amplifying negative interpretations. At the social practice level, the statements contributed to a broader crisis of legitimacy, as citizens contrasted elite entitlements with their own economic struggles. This confirms the central CDA insight that language is not neutral but constitutive: it shapes and reshapes political realities.

The study also highlights the role of identity in shaping discursive credibility. Career politicians such as Adies Kadir and Ahmad Sahroni were criticized for arrogance and technocracy, but celebrity politicians—Nafa Urbach, Eko Patrio, and Uya Kuya—faced disproportionately harsh ridicule. Their entertainment backgrounds were mobilized in memes and commentary to undermine their political authority. This finding extends research on celebrity politicians, showing how cultural capital can become a liability in moments of crisis, intensifying delegitimation.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to CDA in three ways. First, it demonstrates the value of combining Fairclough’s three-dimensional model with Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach: this integration allows for an analysis that moves from micro-level linguistic choices, through media circulation, to macro-level ideological struggles, while also explaining how utterances activate public mental models. Second, it underscores the need for CDA to incorporate identity as a mediating factor, as discursive uptake is shaped not only by words but also by who speaks them. Third, it illustrates how rights-based discourse (*hak*) can be inverted into delegitimation when publics perceive elite claims as illegitimate.

In relation to scholarship on populism, the findings demonstrate how elite discourse can catalyze populist anger. As Moffitt (2024) argues, populism thrives on anger directed at elites, and in this case,

anger was triggered not only by material inequality but also by linguistic performance. Memes contrasting “hak DPR” with “hak rakyat miskin” exemplify how discourse becomes a rallying point for protest. The case therefore illustrates how language functions as both a symbolic and material driver of legitimacy crises.

The study has practical implications for political communication in Indonesia and beyond. Legislators must recognize that strategies of normalization, minimization, and entitlement are risky in contexts of economic inequality. Language that trivializes or legalizes privilege may exacerbate rather than resolve discontent. Politicians—especially those with celebrity backgrounds—must be aware that their identities shape reception, making credibility a fragile resource. Training in empathetic and accountable communication may be necessary to prevent rhetorical missteps from escalating into legitimacy crises.

Like all qualitative studies, this research has limitations. The focus was restricted to five high-profile utterances and their immediate reception in media and social discourse. A broader dataset could include parliamentary debates, long-term media coverage, and public opinion surveys to triangulate findings. Future research could also compare Indonesia with other Southeast Asian democracies, examining whether celebrity politicians elsewhere face similar vulnerabilities, or whether these patterns are culturally specific. Moreover, quantitative corpus-based methods could complement CDA by systematically tracing discursive patterns across larger datasets.

In conclusion, the DPR housing allowance controversy demonstrates that the language of entitlement is a double-edged sword. While elites deploy it to normalize or justify privilege, publics may reinterpret it as arrogance, turning language into a weapon of delegitimation. CDA reveals how this process unfolds across levels of text, media, and ideology. The study thus contributes to understanding the fragile nature of legitimacy in contemporary democracies, where linguistic performances are subject to constant scrutiny, circulation, and contestation. In Indonesia, as elsewhere, political legitimacy is not only about policy but also about words—and words can either sustain authority or bring it to crisis.

This study has shown that the quarter-life crisis (QLC) among Indonesian emerging adults is not only a psychological condition but also a linguistic phenomenon. By applying Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and the Appraisal framework, Likert-scale responses were reinterpreted as semiotic resources, revealing how anxieties, insecurities, and resilience are discursively performed in educational contexts.

Three key patterns were identified. First, anxiety and insecurity were pervasive, expressed through negative affect with high intensity. Second, interpersonal trust and social comparison posed major challenges, with respondents often attributing doubt to peers and social media. Third, religiosity emerged as a dominant coping discourse, realized through modalized statements of certainty that stabilized identity during crisis. These findings extend Arnett’s (2015) and Erikson’s (1968) theories of emerging adulthood, enrich Marcia’s (1980) identity status paradigm, and contribute to SFL research by linking linguistic choices with psychosocial experience.

Practically, the study highlights the importance of recognizing linguistic cues of crisis in education and counseling. Teachers can identify risk through evaluative language, and SFL-based pedagogy can help students reframe deficit discourses into narratives of growth. Counselors, in turn, can validate religious expressions as culturally meaningful resilience strategies. Although limited by a small sample size and closed-ended responses, the study underscores the need for localized, culturally sensitive frameworks of emerging adulthood and calls for future research using larger samples, open-ended discourse, and longitudinal designs.

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