

## Failed persuasion: the linguistic dynamics of dpr's public addresses and their role in escalating civil unrest

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas kegagalan persuasi politik dalam wacana publik dengan menelaah strategi bahasa yang digunakan dalam pernyataan anggota Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) Indonesia saat kerusuhan sipil pada 25–28 Agustus 2025. Melalui pendekatan *Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA), studi ini menganalisis bagaimana pilihan kata, ekspresi penilaian, penggunaan modalitas, serta posisi ideologis dalam ujaran politik justru memicu kemarahan masyarakat alih-alih menghasilkan efek persuasif. Data penelitian meliputi pernyataan publik yang telah diverifikasi, transkrip media, serta kutipan resmi yang beredar selama masa eskalasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegagalan persuasi terjadi karena adanya ketidaksesuaian diskursif antara narasi politik elit dan kondisi sosial-ekonomi masyarakat. Temuan ini memperkaya kajian wacana politik dengan memandang kegagalan persuasi sebagai proses linguistik yang dipengaruhi oleh ketimpangan kekuasaan, kurangnya sensitivitas konteks, dan perbedaan ideologis.

**Kata Kunci:** analisis wacana kritis; wacana politik; kegagalan persuasif; ideologi; keresahan sosial

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the failure of political persuasion in public discourse by examining the language strategies used in statements by members of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR) during the civil unrest on August 25–28, 2025. Using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, this study analyzes how word choice, expressions of judgment, use of modality, and ideological positions in political speech actually fuel public anger rather than producing a persuasive effect. The research data includes verified public statements, media transcripts, and official quotations circulating during the escalation period. The results show that the failure of persuasion occurred due to a discursive mismatch between elite political narratives and the socio-economic conditions of society. These findings enrich the study of political discourse by viewing the failure of persuasion as a linguistic process influenced by power imbalances, lack of context sensitivity, and ideological differences.*

**Keyword:** critical discourse analysis; political discourse; persuasive failure; ideology; social unrest

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language plays a crucial role in political communication, particularly in shaping public perception, legitimizing authority, and negotiating social consensus. Political discourse is not merely a tool for information delivery but a mechanism through which power relations and ideological positions are constructed and maintained. In democratic contexts, effective political communication depends on the ability of political actors to align institutional narratives with citizens' lived experiences.

The Indonesian civil unrest that occurred between August 25 and 28, 2025, highlights the consequences of communicative failure in political discourse. Several public statements made by members of

the House of Representatives (DPR), particularly remarks trivializing income and salary increases, were perceived as insensitive toward citizens experiencing economic hardship. These statements rapidly circulated through digital media platforms and triggered widespread public anger, demonstrations, and acts of violence.

Previous studies in political discourse analysis have largely focused on persuasive strategies, rhetorical success, and ideological reproduction in political speeches (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Al-Khawaldeh et al., 2023). However, limited attention has been given to persuasive failure as a linguistic phenomenon, especially within crisis situations where economic inequality and power asymmetry are highly visible.

This study addresses that gap by examining how linguistic choices in DPR public statements contributed to the breakdown of persuasive communication. Rather than treating social unrest solely as a political or economic issue, this research positions language as a central factor in the escalation process.

This study is guided by research questions that seek to identify the linguistic features characterizing DPR public statements during the August 2025 unrest, to examine how these features construct ideological distance between political elites and citizens, and to analyze how discursive misalignment contributes to persuasive failure and social escalation.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. *Political Discourse and Power*

Political discourse functions as a site where power relations are produced and negotiated. According to (Fairclough, 1995), political language naturalizes ideology by presenting dominant interests as common sense. Linguistic choices such as modality, evaluation, and agency play a central role in legitimizing authority.

### B. *Critical Discourse Analysis*

*Critical Discourse Analysis* (CDA) views discourse as a form of social practice embedded within historical and institutional structures (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). CDA emphasizes the relationship between textual features, discursive practices, and broader social contexts.

### C. *Persuasion and Persuasive Failure*

Persuasion in political discourse aims to influence attitudes through rhetorical and pragmatic strategies. However, when linguistic constructions contradict audience realities, persuasion may fail and instead generate resistance. Persuasive failure remains underexplored in discourse studies, particularly in non-Western political contexts.

## 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design using *Critical Discourse Analysis* as its analytical framework. According to (Sugiyono, 2012), descriptive qualitative research is a method used to study an object or phenomenon with the aim of providing a systematic, factual, and accurate description of the facts and phenomena being examined, without attempting to explain cause-and-effect relationships or test hypotheses.

### A. *Data Source*

The data consist of public statements issued by DPR members between August 25 and 28, 2025, obtained from verified national news portals, official public transcripts, and recorded statements circulated through mainstream digital media. Statements were selected based on their frequency of circulation and relevance to public economic commentary.

### B. *Unit of Analysis*

The linguistic units analyzed include lexical selection, modality and evaluative expressions, pronoun use and agency construction, ideological presuppositions, and contextual framing.

### C. *Data Analysis Procedure*

The analysis followed four stages: data reduction and categorization, textual analysis of linguistic features, discursive practice analysis focusing on production and circulation, and interpretation of social practice linking discourse to socio-economic conditions. Analytical validity was ensured through pattern recurrence and cross-text comparison.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of this research found four types of linguistic features contributing to persuasive failure: trivialization through lexical choice, evaluative misalignment, modality and authority construction, and ideological distance and social escalation.

### A. *Trivialization through Lexical Choice*

“Anggota Dewan itu kan enggak orang Jakarta semua, guys.”

Source: <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/08/26/09004551/tingkah-laku-dan-pernyataan-anggota-dpr-yang-buat-rakyat-marah?page=all>

The statement “Anggota Dewan itu kan enggak orang Jakarta semua, guys” illustrates trivialization through lexical choice because it uses casual and informal language to address a serious public issue. The inclusion of the word “guys” creates a relaxed and almost joking tone, which reduces the seriousness of the social and political context being discussed. Rather than acknowledging public anger and criticism, the statement shifts attention to an irrelevant detail—regional background—thereby minimizing citizens’ broader concerns about governance and economic conditions. This choice of wording reflects an elite viewpoint that appears detached from the lived realities of the public, as it downplays genuine grievances and frames them as issues that do not require a serious response.

This statement reflects an elite perspective that seems disconnected from the public’s real experience, aligning with the concept of trivialization through lexical choice, where casual or humorous language is used to downplay serious phenomena.

Statements employing casual or humorous lexical items minimized economic hardship, constructing an elite-centered worldview detached from public experience.

### **B. Evaluative Misalignment**

“Catat nih, orang yang cuma mental bilang ‘bubarin DPR’, itu adalah orang tolol se-dunia.”

Deputy Chair of Commission III, Ahmad Sahroni

Source: <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/08/26/09004551/tingkah-laku-dan-pernyataan-anggota-dpr-yang-buat-rakyat-marah?page=all>

In terms of evaluative misalignment, Deputy Chair of Commission III, Ahmad Sahroni, stated, “Catat nih, orang yang cuma mental bilang ‘bubarin DPR’, itu adalah orang tolol se-dunia.” This illustrates a misalignment between the DPR’s self-perception and citizens’ lived experiences. From a modality perspective, the statement asserts authority and presents the speaker’s judgment as absolute. In evaluation, the DPR portrays itself positively while framing public critics negatively, disregarding citizens’ frustrations over economic conditions and policy decisions. Regarding agency, Sahroni acts as the dominant speaker, while the public is positioned as passive objects, reinforcing social hierarchies. The ideological effect is a clear disconnect between elite perspectives and public reality, reflecting how lexical and evaluative choices can minimize citizens’ concerns while maintaining elite dominance.

Positive self-evaluation and minimization of hardship contradicted citizens’ lived realities, producing ideological dissonance.

### **C. Modality and Authority Construction**

“itu adalah orang tolol se-dunia.”

Deputy Chair of Commission III, Ahmad Sahroni

Source: <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/08/26/09004551/tingkah-laku-dan-pernyataan-anggota-dpr-yang-buat-rakyat-marah?page=all>

The statement “the dumbest people in the world” demonstrates strong epistemic modality because it frames the speaker’s judgment as an absolute truth rather than a personal opinion that could be questioned or debated. By using such definitive and evaluative language, the speaker positions himself as an unquestionable authority whose interpretation is presented as final, instead of engaging as an equal participant in public discussion. This high level of modality effectively shuts down dialogue with citizens and reinforces a top-down power relationship, where political elites claim control over meaning rather than responding to public concerns. As a result, the outright dismissal of criticism through absolute language does not encourage understanding but instead fuels public resistance and escalates social tension.

Strong epistemic modality positioned speakers as unquestionable authorities, reducing dialogic engagement and intensifying resistance.

### **D. Ideological Distance and Social Escalation**

Eko Patrio dancing to the sound of *Horeg* and claiming that there was no problem, even though the public was already furious over previous statements made by DPR members that had hurt people’s feelings.

Source: <https://nasional.kompas.com/read/2025/08/26/09004551/tingkah-laku-dan-pernyataan-anggota-dpr-yang-buat-rakyat-marah?page=all>

The utterance “Enggak ada (maksud apa-apa). Malah jauh banget itu (tafsirnya)” reflects a denial and minimization of public concern from an elite perspective. The speaker frames the public’s reaction as a misunderstanding, while citizens’ anger is rooted in their lived social and economic realities. This mismatch reveals an ideological distance between political elites and the public. Rather than calming the situation, such statements may intensify social escalation, as people feel their grievances are dismissed and their experiences are not taken seriously.

The cumulative effect of these features widened the symbolic distance between political elites and citizens, transforming persuasion into provocation. These findings support CDA claims that linguistic form is inseparable from social consequence, particularly within contexts of inequality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that persuasive failure in political communication is not accidental but linguistically constructed. DPR public statements during the August 2025 unrest reveal how lexical choice, modality, and ideological framing can intensify rather than resolve social tension. By conceptualizing persuasive failure as a discursive process, this research extends the application of *Critical Discourse Analysis* within Indonesian political contexts. Furthermore, the findings highlight the importance of examining language use critically, as subtle linguistic strategies can shape public perception and influence the escalation of conflict.

Future studies may expand the data scope or integrate multimodal analysis to further examine political communication in digital environments.

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