

Discourse on Development and Marginalization of Local Communities: A Critical Discourse Analysis of National Strategic Projects in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines how development discourse is constructed, disseminated, and embedded in relations of power and the marginalization of local communities within Indonesia's National Strategic Projects. Using Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study adopts a qualitative critical approach encompassing three dimensions: textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The data consist of online news articles, government statements, policy documents, and related digital content concerning national strategic projects, collected through documentation and literature study and analyzed through textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice analysis. The findings reveal that, at the textual level, national strategic projects development is constructed through positive diction, progressive metaphors, technocratic terminology, and euphemistic expressions that legitimize development while obscuring social conflicts, land disputes, and the experiences of affected communities. At the level of discursive practice, government institutions occupy a dominant position in producing development narratives, while online and mass media facilitate their circulation and reproduction, contributing to the normalization of dominant development narratives and limiting the visibility of alternative perspectives. At the level of social practice, national strategic projects discourse is embedded in broader relations of state power, developmentalist ideology, privileged forms of knowledge, and social inequality, which contribute to the marginalization of local communities. Overall, the study demonstrates that national strategic projects development discourse functions not merely as a means of communicating development policies but also as a discursive mechanism through which meanings of progress are constructed, particular interests are legitimized, and unequal relations of power are reproduced.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, Indonesia has accelerated national development through the implementation of various national strategic projects (*proyek strategis nasional*/PSN), which are designed to strengthen infrastructure, stimulate economic growth, improve connectivity, and enhance national competitiveness. These projects encompass strategic sectors such as transportation, energy, industrial development, and urban infrastructure, including the development of the new Indonesian capital (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Perekonomian Republik Indonesia, 2024). While national strategic projects are officially framed as an instrument for equitable development and national prosperity, its implementation has also generated social concerns, particularly regarding land acquisition, environmental degradation, territorial transformation, and the position of local and indigenous communities. Research on Indonesia's land-acquisition policies has shown that the redefinition of "public interest" in development has contributed to escalating land conflicts and strengthened the state's capacity to acquire land for development purposes (Fitri et al., 2024). Similarly, research on IKN highlights tensions between the goals of capital-city development and concerns related to ecological sustainability, citizenship, and the social consequences of large-scale territorial transformation (Agustino et al., 2024). The development of IKN, for example, has raised concerns about land redistribution, commercialization, community participation, and the potential marginalization of indigenous groups (Aura & Abidin, 2025). These issues indicate that the consequences of strategic development extend beyond physical infrastructure and economic indicators to questions of social inclusion, access to land, participation, and the distribution of power.

Against this background, examining development discourse is important because development is not merely a material process but also a discursive practice through which particular understandings of progress,

modernization, and national prosperity are constructed. Development discourse can articulate particular forms of knowledge and power, thereby shaping how social change and development priorities are understood (Chae, 2008). Moreover, developmentalism has historically constructed development as a linear and seemingly universal pathway toward progress, reflecting particular forms of ideological and political power (Pieterse, 1991). The language used by governments, media institutions, and other dominant actors can therefore frame development as necessary, inevitable, and beneficial while simultaneously determining which perspectives are considered legitimate and which are marginalized (Nilsen, 2016; Rossi, 2004). In this sense, discourse can contribute to the normalization of particular development agendas and shape public perceptions of their social consequences. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is therefore relevant for examining how linguistic choices, representations, and discursive practices are connected to relations of power and ideology. Drawing on Fairclough's critical discourse perspective, development discourse can be understood as part of a broader relationship between textual practices, processes of discourse production and dissemination, and the wider socio-political context. Such an approach makes it possible to examine not only what development projects are intended to achieve but also how their legitimacy is discursively constructed.

Critical Discourse Analysis views language as a social practice that both reflects and shapes social reality, often reproducing particular interests, ideologies, and power relations (Fairclough, 1995). This perspective is further supported by van Dijk (1998), who emphasizes the role of social cognition, including knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies, in the production and interpretation of discourse. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model text, discursive practice, and social practice provides the analytical framework for this study. The textual dimension examines linguistic choices and representations that may construct and legitimize development narratives; discursive practice investigates how these narratives are produced, circulated, and consumed by dominant actors and institutions; while social practice connects discourse to wider structures of ideology and power, including hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) and the relationship between knowledge and power (Foucault, 1980). Through these interconnected dimensions, CDA enables this study to examine how national strategic projects development discourse may legitimize particular policies while potentially marginalizing the interests and experiences of local communities.

Previous studies on development and marginalization can be broadly grouped into several thematic strands. The first strand examines development discourse in relation to media representation and the ideology of developmentalism. Studies of construction discourse in local media, for example, have demonstrated how media narratives may reproduce developmentalist and technocratic understandings of progress while negotiating or limiting spaces for public criticism (Prayoga et al., 2025). A second strand focuses on the socio-spatial consequences of major development projects, particularly the marginalization of indigenous and local communities. Research on IKN has highlighted limited community participation and the potential for development processes to intensify social marginalization and conflict (Bernard et al., 2025), while critical-geographical research has documented processes of territorial capitalization, deforestation, and the commodification of space associated with Indonesia's development agenda (Sukmana & Azizah, 2024). A third strand examines development through the lenses of conflict, exclusion, and administrative power. Research in Bima, for instance, has linked uneven development to social exclusion and weak community participation (Syarif & Firdaus, 2025), while research on social programs in Makassar has shown how dominant administrative discourse can obscure community experiences and contribute to resistance (Mario, 2025). Collectively, these studies demonstrate that development is closely associated with questions of discourse, power, participation, and marginalization.

Despite these contributions, important gaps remain in the existing literature. First, much of the research on Indonesian development focuses on its material consequences, such as economic change, environmental degradation, land conflict, and social marginalization, rather than systematically examining how these consequences are discursively represented and legitimized. This limitation is important because infrastructure and megaprojects are not only material interventions but also political and discursive processes through which particular development priorities and power relations are constructed (Kooy, 2008; Delphine et al., 2022). Second, studies that address discourse tend to focus on particular media texts, local conflicts, or specific development programs, leaving the broader discursive construction of national strategic projects relatively underexplored. Existing research demonstrates that development discourse can legitimize particular development agendas while privileging specific forms of knowledge and political authority (Thompson, 2004). Third, discourse-oriented studies have not sufficiently connected textual representations with the institutional and socio-political conditions in which development discourse is produced and circulated. This is particularly significant in the context of Indonesian national strategic projects, where megaprojects have been shown to operate through institutional restructuring, recentralization of authority, and changing power relations across scales (Talitha, 2026). Consequently, the relationship between language, dominant actors, power, ideology, and the representation of affected communities remains insufficiently examined at the national strategic projects level. Addressing this gap requires an approach that connects textual analysis with the processes through which development discourse is produced and disseminated and with the wider social context in which such discourse operates.

This study therefore examines the construction of development discourse surrounding Indonesia's national strategic projects through a critical discourse analysis perspective. Specifically, it aims to investigate how development discourse is constructed within national strategic projects, how dominant actors participate in its production and dissemination, how local communities are represented or marginalized, and how these discursive practices are related to power and ideology. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) How is development discourse constructed within the narrative of national strategic projects in Indonesia? (2) How do dominant actors, particularly the government and media, participate in the production and dissemination of development discourse, and how are power and ideology reflected in these discursive practices? (3) How does development discourse represent or marginalize local communities within the context of Indonesia's socio-political development?

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design within a critical paradigm to examine the construction of development discourse and its relationship with power, ideology, and the marginalization of local communities in Indonesia's national strategic projects. A qualitative approach was adopted because the study seeks to develop an in-depth interpretation of textual representations and their relationship to the socio-political context rather than measure variables quantitatively (Creswell, 2014). The critical paradigm provides the epistemological orientation for examining how discourse may reproduce particular forms of power, dominance, inequality, and ideological positioning. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model, which conceptualizes discourse simultaneously as text, discourse practice, and social practice.

The object of this study was development discourse surrounding Indonesia's National Strategic Projects, while the unit of analysis consisted of publicly available texts through which national strategic projects was represented and discussed. The corpus comprised three categories of texts: (1) online news articles reporting and discussing national strategic projects, (2) official government statements and press releases concerning national strategic projects, and (3) policy and other official documents related to the planning, implementation, and social consequences of national strategic projects. These sources were selected because news media and government institutions constitute important sites for the production, circulation, and legitimization of public development discourse.

The texts were selected using purposive sampling based on predetermined inclusion criteria. First, each text had to explicitly discuss national strategic projects, its implementation, objectives, impacts, or related development policies. Second, the text had to be publicly accessible and published within the specified data-collection period. Third, the text had to contain substantive discussion of development, infrastructure, economic growth, land, communities, environmental issues, or other dimensions relevant to national strategic projects discourse. Texts that only mentioned national strategic projects incidentally, duplicated reports, advertisements, and texts without sufficient substantive content for discourse analysis were excluded from the corpus. This selection procedure ensured that the corpus directly addressed the research questions and contained relevant linguistic and contextual evidence.

2.2. Data Collection

Data were collected through systematic documentation. First, relevant national strategic projects -related texts were identified through searches using keywords such as "National Strategic Projects," "Proyek Strategis Nasional," "PSN," "development," "infrastructure," "land acquisition," "local communities," and "indigenous communities." Second, potentially relevant texts were screened according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Third, the selected texts were downloaded or archived and organized according to source, publication date, text type, title, and URL. Each text was assigned a unique identification code to facilitate systematic coding and analysis. For example, news articles were coded as N01, N02, and so forth, government statements as G01, G02, and so forth, and policy documents as P01, P02, and so forth.

In addition to the primary corpus, secondary sources consisting of peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy reports, and relevant government publications were consulted to establish the theoretical and contextual background of the study. These sources were not treated as primary units of CDA analysis but were used to contextualize the findings and support the interpretation of the discourse.

2.3. Data Analysis and Coding

Data analysis followed Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, consisting of textual analysis, discourse practice, and social practice. The analysis was conducted iteratively, with the researcher moving between the textual evidence and the broader discursive and socio-political contexts.

At the textual level, each selected text was coded for linguistic and representational features relevant to the research questions. The coding focused on: (1) lexical choices used to describe development and national strategic projects; (2) metaphors and evaluative expressions; (3) transitivity and the representation of social actors; (4) modality and expressions of certainty, obligation, or necessity; (5) active and passive constructions; (6) patterns of inclusion and exclusion; and (7) representations of development, government, local communities, and other relevant actors. These codes were used to identify recurring patterns through which national strategic projects was constructed as beneficial, necessary, inevitable, problematic, or contested.

At the discourse-practice level, the analysis examined how the texts were produced, circulated, and consumed. Particular attention was given to the identities and institutional positions of the producers of discourse, the sources quoted or cited in news reports, the selection of voices included or excluded from the texts, and the ways in which government statements and media narratives reproduced, negotiated, or contested dominant development narratives. The analysis also compared representations across media and government sources to identify similarities and differences in the construction and dissemination of national strategic projects discourse.

At the social-practice level, the textual and discourse-practice findings were interpreted in relation to the broader socio-political context of Indonesian development. The analysis considered how development discourse was connected to state power, developmental ideology, economic interests, national development priorities, land and territorial governance, and the participation or marginalization of local communities. This stage enabled the study to move beyond describing linguistic patterns toward explaining how discourse may contribute to the reproduction or contestation of particular power relations and ideological positions.

The coding process was conducted in three stages. First, the researcher conducted initial coding by identifying recurring words, expressions, representations, and discursive patterns in the corpus. Second, related codes were grouped into broader analytical categories, such as development as progress, development as national necessity, governmental authority, economic benefit, public participation, community marginalization, environmental concern, and resistance or contestation. Third, these categories were interpreted according to Fairclough's three-dimensional framework to establish relationships between textual features, discourse practices, and wider social practices. The coding categories were refined through repeated comparison across texts until the researcher identified consistent patterns and theoretically meaningful relationships.

2.4. Data Trustworthiness

The credibility of the findings was strengthened through source triangulation by comparing representations of national strategic projects across different types of sources, particularly online news media, government statements, and official policy documents (Moleong, 2017). Comparing these sources enabled the researcher to identify converging and conflicting representations and to avoid relying on a single institutional or media perspective. The researcher also maintained a systematic record of the selected texts, coding categories, analytical decisions, and interpretations throughout the analysis process. Thick description was employed to provide sufficient textual and contextual evidence for the interpretation of discourse (Geertz, 1973). These procedures were intended to ensure that the findings were grounded in the corpus and that the interpretation of the relationship between discourse, power, ideology, and community marginalization was transparent and analytically accountable.

3. Results and Discussion

The textual analysis reveals that national strategic projects development discourse is constructed through a consistent pattern of positive, legitimizing, and technocratic linguistic choices. As presented in Table 1, the texts employ metaphors, positive lexical choices, euphemisms, technocratic expressions, and normative formulations to frame development as necessary, beneficial, and closely associated with national progress. For example, the expression "national strategic projects as a driving force of national economic growth" uses the metaphor of a "driving force" to represent national strategic projects as the engine of economic progress, thereby foregrounding its developmental benefits. Similarly, the expression "equitable development for the welfare of the people" employs morally positive terms such as "equitable" and "welfare" to construct development as socially legitimate and oriented toward public interests. However, this positive representation may simultaneously background inequalities experienced by communities affected by development projects. The euphemistic expression "relocation of inhabitants for the benefit of the nation" further illustrates how potentially contentious practices of displacement are linguistically reframed as legitimate actions undertaken in the national interest. Likewise, the technocratic expression "optimization of land for strategic development" presents land-use decisions as rational and administratively necessary, potentially obscuring underlying agrarian conflicts and competing claims over land. Finally, the phrase "economic transformation towards a more advanced Indonesia" employs normative and futuristic language that reinforces the ideology of modernization by positioning economic transformation and national advancement as desirable and seemingly inevitable. Taken together, these textual patterns demonstrate that national strategic projects discourse does not merely describe development but actively constructs a particular version of reality in which progress, economic growth, national

welfare, and modernization are foregrounded, while social inequality, displacement, and conflict tend to be backgrounded.

Table 1. Text Analysis of National Strategic Projects Development Discourse

No.	Textual Evidence	Linguistic Feature	Discursive Function	Ideological Implication
1	"national strategic projects as a driving force of national economic growth"	Metaphor ("driving force") and positive diction	Constructs national strategic projects as the main engine of national economic progress	Foregrounds economic benefits and represents development as a source of national progress
2	"Equitable development for the welfare of the people"	Positive and moralized lexical choices ("equitable," "welfare")	Constructs development as socially beneficial and morally legitimate	Legitimizes development policies while potentially backgrounding existing social inequalities
3	"Relocation of inhabitants for the benefit of the nation"	Euphemistic representation of relocation	Reframes displacement as a necessary action undertaken for national interests	Reduces the visibility of eviction, community loss, and potential public resistance
4	"Optimization of land for strategic development"	Technocratic terminology ("optimization," "strategic development")	Constructs land-use decisions as rational, technical, and administratively necessary	Potentially obscures agrarian conflict and competing claims over land
5	"Economic transformation towards a more advanced Indonesia"	Normative and futuristic expression	Constructs development as a pathway toward modernization and national advancement	Reinforces modernization ideology and positions progress as desirable and seemingly inevitable

The textual analysis demonstrates that development discourse surrounding Indonesia's National Strategic Projects is constructed through recurring linguistic strategies that foreground progress, economic growth, public welfare, modernization, and administrative rationality. As summarized in Table 1, five prominent textual patterns were identified: (1) the metaphorical construction of national strategic projects as a driving force of national economic growth, (2) the use of moralized expressions to associate development with equity and public welfare, (3) the euphemistic representation of relocation, (4) the use of technocratic terminology in relation to land, and (5) the use of normative and futuristic expressions associated with national advancement. These patterns indicate that national strategic projects is not simply represented as a set of infrastructure projects but is discursively constructed as a necessary and desirable pathway toward national progress. At the same time, social costs such as inequality, displacement, and agrarian conflict tend to be backgrounded or represented in less confrontational terms. This finding is consistent with Fairclough's (1995) argument that textual choices are not neutral linguistic features but are connected to broader processes of meaning-making, ideology, and power.

The first pattern is the construction of national strategic projects as a driving force of national economic growth, as reflected in the expression "national strategic projects as a driving force of national economic growth." The metaphor "driving force" assigns national strategic projects an active role as the mechanism that moves the national economy forward. The metaphor consequently constructs development as a process of movement and acceleration, with national strategic projects positioned as the force that enables such progress. This finding corresponds closely with Suhandano et al. (2024), who found that Indonesian media discourse surrounding the Jogja-Solo toll road repeatedly associated infrastructure development with national growth, progress, and the government's development agenda. Their analysis also demonstrated that lexical repetition and institutional agency helped rationalize and legitimize infrastructure development as a valid national priority. Similarly, the present study shows that economic growth is not merely presented as one possible outcome of national strategic projects but is linguistically foregrounded as its primary justification. The metaphor of a "driving force" strengthens this construction by making national strategic projects appear indispensable to national advancement. Thus, the language of economic growth contributes to what can be understood as a developmentalist logic in which accelerating infrastructure development becomes synonymous with accelerating national progress.

The second pattern concerns the representation of national strategic projects through the language of equitable development and public welfare, illustrated by the expression "equitable development for the welfare of the people." The lexical choices "equitable" and "welfare" carry strong positive and moral connotations, positioning development as an activity undertaken for the collective good. Such wording establishes a moral relationship between national strategic projects and public interest: if development is represented as equitable and welfare-oriented, its legitimacy becomes difficult to challenge without appearing to oppose the broader interests of society. This finding resonates with Wardana and Darmawardana (2024), who conceptualize national strategic projects as a development process that operates through several forms of exclusion, including legitimacy. Their analysis demonstrates that the claim that national strategic projects serves the public interest

can facilitate passive consent while weakening resistance among affected communities. The present study extends this argument by demonstrating how legitimacy is also produced at the level of language. The expression “welfare of the people” universalizes the beneficiaries of development and constructs the nation as a homogeneous public, while potentially concealing the unequal distribution of development’s costs and benefits. In this sense, the language of equity can function paradoxically: it represents development as universally beneficial while making differentiated experiences of inequality less visible.

The third pattern is the euphemistic representation of relocation, particularly through the expression “relocation of inhabitants for the benefit of the nation.” The lexical choice “relocation” provides a less confrontational representation of a process that may involve displacement, loss of livelihood, or disruption of community life. The subsequent phrase “for the benefit of the nation” further legitimizes the action by placing it within a broader national-interest framework. The combination of euphemism and national-interest discourse therefore shifts attention from the experience of affected residents to the presumed collective benefits of development. This finding is particularly significant when considered alongside Wardana and Darmawardana’s (2024) argument that national strategic projects can operate through exclusionary mechanisms and alongside research on the Bener Dam national strategic projects, where development discourse has been shown to construct “public interest” as a hegemonic justification for continuing the project (Achyansyah & Djujandi, 2026). The present analysis adds a linguistic explanation to these findings: potentially contentious practices can be normalized through lexical choices that soften their social consequences. The term “relocation” does not explicitly deny displacement, but it removes much of its conflictual force and presents the process as an administrative and manageable component of development. Consequently, the linguistic representation can contribute to reducing the discursive visibility of resistance and the lived experiences of affected communities.

The fourth pattern involves the use of technocratic terminology, particularly in the expression “optimization of land for strategic development.” The term “optimization” frames land primarily as a resource whose use can be technically improved according to predetermined development objectives. Similarly, the adjective “strategic” connects land-use decisions to broader national priorities, thereby giving them institutional and technical legitimacy. Through this terminology, a fundamentally political question who controls land, whose interests determine its use, and who bears the consequences of land transformation is reframed as a technical question of efficiency and optimization. This finding is strongly supported by Kodir (2026), who identifies the privileging of technocratic expertise and the assumption of state neutrality as important problems within national strategic projects governance. Rather than treating technocracy as merely an administrative feature, the present study demonstrates how technocratic rationality is reproduced linguistically. The use of terms such as “optimization” can make political choices appear objective and inevitable because they are presented as technical solutions to development needs. This also complements Talitha’s (2026) argument that national strategic projects megaprojects are associated with institutional restructuring and the recentralization of state authority. At the textual level, technocratic language provides an important discursive mechanism through which such authority can be represented as rational, professional, and necessary rather than political and contested.

The fifth pattern is the construction of development through normative and futuristic expressions, as exemplified by “economic transformation towards a more advanced Indonesia.” The phrase “more advanced Indonesia” constructs a desirable future against which the present is implicitly evaluated as less developed. Development is consequently represented as a linear movement from the current condition toward an advanced national future. This formulation reflects the ideology of modernization because it establishes “advancement” as an unquestioned goal and positions economic transformation as the appropriate route toward achieving it. The finding is consistent with Suhandano et al. (2023), who identified tensions between “growth” and “sustainability” in discourse surrounding Indonesia’s capital relocation and showed how economic and developmental meanings can become more salient than environmental concerns. It also corresponds with Meka et al. (2025), whose corpus-assisted CDA of Detik.com reporting on IKN found that institutional, symbolic, and technocratic discourse emphasized state authority and development success while marginalizing representations of society. The present finding extends these studies by showing that modernization is embedded not only in the broader narrative but also in seemingly ordinary expressions such as “more advanced Indonesia.” Such formulations make development appear teleological: progress is represented as a direction that the nation should naturally and continuously pursue.

Taken together, the five patterns reveal that national strategic projects development discourse is constructed through a coherent combination of economic legitimization, moral legitimization, euphemization, technocratic rationalization, and modernization. These strategies perform different but mutually reinforcing functions. The metaphor of a “driving force” establishes national strategic projects as the engine of economic progress; the language of “equity” and “welfare” establishes moral legitimacy; the euphemism “relocation” softens the representation of displacement; the term “optimization” transforms contested land relations into technical management; and the phrase “more advanced Indonesia” establishes modernization as a desirable future. The combination of these strategies produces a dominant representation in which development appears simultaneously economically necessary, morally justified, technically rational, and nationally inevitable.

This pattern also helps explain the relationship between the present findings and previous research on national strategic projects. Previous studies have demonstrated that national strategic projects can generate exclusion, environmental injustice, institutional restructuring, and marginalization (Kodir, 2026; Talitha, 2026; Wardana & Darmawardana, 2024). Other studies have shown that media discourse can reproduce developmentalist and technocratic representations of infrastructure and IKN (Meka et al., 2025; Suhandano et al., 2024). The present study brings these strands together by identifying the linguistic mechanisms through which such developmentality is constructed. In other words, exclusion and marginalization are not only consequences of development policies or institutional arrangements; they may also be facilitated by discourse that systematically privileges economic growth, national welfare, technical rationality, and modernization while backgrounding competing experiences and interests.

From a Faircloughian perspective, therefore, the textual patterns identified in this study constitute more than isolated lexical or rhetorical choices. They contribute to the production of a particular social reality in which national strategic projects is positioned as the legitimate pathway to national progress. The findings suggest that the dominant development discourse works by making certain meanings highly visible growth, welfare, strategic necessity, efficiency, and national advancement while rendering other meanings less salient, including displacement, inequality, agrarian conflict, and community resistance. This textual asymmetry is important because it demonstrates how ideology can operate through apparently positive and neutral language. The discourse does not necessarily need to explicitly reject critical voices; instead, it can privilege a particular definition of progress so strongly that alternative understandings become less visible within the dominant narrative. Thus, the first research question is answered by showing that national strategic projects development discourse is constructed through a set of interconnected linguistic strategies that naturalize development as beneficial, necessary, and future-oriented while simultaneously limiting the discursive visibility of its social costs.

3.1. Discursive Practice in the Production and Dissemination of National Strategic Projects Development Discourse

The analysis of discursive practice shows that national strategic projects development discourse is produced and circulated through a predominantly government-led process, with online and digital media playing an important role in reproducing the dominant narrative. As shown in Table 2 this process also shapes public consumption of development discourse while limiting the visibility of alternative and critical voices.

Table 2. Analysis of Discursive Practice

No.	Dimension of Discursive Practice	Dominant Actor/Process	Discursive Pattern	Implication
1	Production	Government institutions	Government positioned as the primary producer of national strategic projects narratives	Institutional power shapes the dominant development narrative
2	Distribution	Online and digital media	Repeated circulation of government-oriented narratives	Limited visibility of criticism and alternative perspectives
3	Consumption	Public/community audiences	Dominant development narratives are repeatedly encountered and normalized	Development ideology may become internalized as common sense
4	Media Role	News media and digital platforms	Positive framing and reproduction of dominant narratives	Media contributes to the reinforcement of development ideology
5	Alternative Discourse	Local communities and critical voices	Limited representation of alternative perspectives	Unequal access to public discourse and marginalization of critical voices

The analysis of discursive practice shows that national strategic projects development discourse is produced and circulated through a predominantly government-led process, with online and digital media functioning as important channels for reproducing and amplifying the dominant narrative. As shown in Table 2, the production of discourse is characterized by strong governmental dominance, while its distribution occurs largely through online and digital media. At the consumption level, repeated exposure to the dominant narrative contributes to the normalization of development as a desirable and necessary process. Meanwhile, the limited presence of alternative discourse indicates unequal access to the public communicative space. These findings suggest that the dominance of national strategic projects discourse is not produced solely through particular linguistic choices but also through the institutional processes that determine who can produce, circulate, and gain visibility within public discourse.

The first finding concerns the government's dominant position in the production of national strategic projects development discourse. The analysis indicates that government institutions are positioned as the primary actors responsible for defining the meaning, objectives, and legitimacy of national strategic projects. Government-produced statements and official narratives tend to foreground national development, economic growth, public welfare, and strategic necessity. This finding is consistent with Talitha's (2026) analysis of national strategic projects governance, which argues that megaprojects in Indonesia are associated with institutional restructuring and the recentralization of authority. From this perspective, governmental dominance in discourse production reflects a broader institutional concentration of authority: the actors who possess greater institutional power also have greater capacity to define what development means and which priorities are presented as nationally important. The present study extends this argument from the institutional sphere to the discursive sphere by demonstrating that governmental authority is also manifested through control over the production of development narratives.

This finding is also relevant to van Dijk's (1998) conceptualization of discourse and ideology. For van Dijk (1998), dominant groups are able to reproduce ideological positions partly through privileged access to communicative resources and discourse production. In the context of national strategic projects, governmental institutions possess institutional authority, access to official communication channels, and the ability to issue statements that can subsequently become sources for media reporting. Consequently, government discourse can acquire greater visibility and legitimacy than the discourse of local communities. This does not necessarily mean that all media texts simply reproduce government positions; rather, it indicates that government discourse enters the public communication process from a structurally privileged position.

The second finding concerns the role of online and digital media in the distribution of national strategic projects discourse. The data indicate that digital media provide an important mechanism through which government-oriented development narratives reach wider audiences. The media therefore function not simply as neutral channels of information but as discursive intermediaries that select, frame, reproduce, and circulate particular representations of development. This finding is supported by Suhandano et al. (2024), who found that Indonesian mass-media discourse surrounding the Jogja-Solo toll road frequently associated infrastructure development with the government's development agenda. Their analysis demonstrated that institutional agency contributed to the rationalization and legitimation of infrastructure development. Similarly, Meka et al. (2025) found that Detik.com's reporting on IKN was dominated by institutional, symbolic, and technocratic discourse, with the state, presidential leadership, and development success receiving substantial discursive prominence. These studies support the present finding that digital media can become important sites for the reproduction of dominant development narratives.

However, the role of media should not be reduced to a simple government-media relationship in which the media automatically reproduces state discourse. Media organizations have their own institutional practices, editorial conventions, and professional norms that influence how development issues are represented. This is demonstrated by Said and Ridho (2025), whose CDA of Tempo.co and Kompas.com coverage of the Wadas conflict found differences in the way the two media organizations represented the conflict: Tempo.co tended to give greater visibility to affected residents, whereas Kompas.com used more formal and relatively neutral language. This comparison is important for interpreting the present findings because it indicates that media can function both as a channel for reproducing dominant discourse and as a potential space for contesting it. Therefore, the dominance observed in the present study should be understood as a tendency within the broader discursive field rather than as evidence that all media organizations uniformly support government narratives.

The third finding concerns the consumption and normalization of development discourse. The analysis indicates that repeated circulation of national strategic projects narratives contributes to the construction of development as an ordinary, desirable, and apparently necessary feature of national life. Expressions related to economic growth, national welfare, modernization, and strategic development are repeatedly encountered across institutional and media discourse, creating a coherent narrative in which development is associated with national advancement. This finding can be interpreted through van Dijk's (1998) account of ideological reproduction, in which discourse contributes to the formation and reinforcement of socially shared representations. When similar representations are repeatedly circulated through authoritative and widely accessible sources, they may become normalized as common-sense understandings of development.

Nevertheless, the finding should not be interpreted as demonstrating that communities simply or passively "accept" the national strategic projects narrative. The available discourse data can demonstrate discursive normalization, but they cannot by themselves establish individual audience acceptance or internalization unless supported by interviews, audience studies, surveys, or other reception data. Therefore, the more defensible interpretation is that the repeated circulation of dominant narratives creates conditions in which particular understandings of development may become normalized, rather than claiming that all members of the public internalize them. This distinction is important for maintaining methodological consistency between the CDA data and the conclusions drawn from them.

The fourth finding highlights the media's role in strengthening dominant development narratives through framing. The data indicate that positive framing can amplify the association between national strategic projects and economic progress, national welfare, and modernization. This finding is consistent with Meka et al. (2025), who found that Detik.com's representation of Ibu Kota Nusantara emphasized institutional, symbolic, and technocratic discourses and tended to marginalize representations of society. Suhandano et al. (2024) similarly found that infrastructure discourse in Indonesian media constructed development in relation to progress and growth while employing inclusion and exclusion strategies in representing environmental impacts. These findings suggest that media framing can influence which aspects of development become salient and which remain less visible. In the present study, positive framing is particularly significant because it complements the government's production of discourse: government institutions provide authoritative development narratives, while media circulation can increase their visibility and repetition in the public sphere.

The fifth finding concerns the limited visibility of alternative discourse. The analysis indicates that perspectives questioning or challenging dominant national strategic projects narratives appear less prominently than government-oriented representations. Alternative voices, particularly those associated with local communities and potentially affected groups, therefore have less discursive visibility within the dominant narrative. This finding corresponds with Wardana and Darmawardana's (2024) argument that national strategic projects operates through mechanisms of exclusion, including legitimacy and coercion. Their analysis demonstrates that the public-interest justification of national strategic projects can facilitate passive consent while weakening resistance. The present study complements this political-economic perspective by showing that exclusion also has a communicative dimension: when government narratives receive greater institutional and media access, alternative perspectives may struggle to achieve comparable visibility.

The marginalization of alternative voices is also evident in research on specific national strategic projects conflicts. Said and Ridho (2025), for example, demonstrate that media representations of the Wadas conflict differ according to the institutional and editorial characteristics of the media involved, while their CDA identifies the importance of institutional structures and social forces in the production and dissemination of news discourse. This finding is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that alternative perspectives are not necessarily absent from media discourse; rather, their visibility is shaped by the discursive and institutional conditions under which news is produced. The present study therefore conceptualizes marginalization not simply as complete exclusion from discourse but also as unequal access to discursive visibility.

All in all, the five dimensions identified in Table 2 demonstrate a sequential process through which national strategic projects development discourse gains dominance: the government occupies a privileged position in discourse production; digital media facilitate its circulation; repeated circulation contributes to normalization; positive media framing reinforces the dominant narrative; and alternative perspectives receive comparatively limited visibility. This process is consistent with Fairclough's (1995) view that discourse practice mediates between textual production and wider social structures. Discourse is produced within institutional contexts, circulated through particular channels, and consumed within social relations that are themselves shaped by unequal access to communicative resources. From this perspective, the dominance of national strategic projects discourse cannot be explained solely by the persuasive power of individual words or expressions identified at the textual level. It is also sustained by the institutional conditions through which some actors possess greater opportunities to produce and circulate authoritative representations than others.

The findings further demonstrate that power operates through both production and circulation. Governmental institutions have greater institutional capacity to define national strategic projects and provide authoritative information, while media organizations possess the capacity to select, frame, and disseminate these representations to wider audiences. This relationship does not necessarily imply a direct or uniform reproduction of government ideology, as differences among media outlets and journalistic practices remain possible. Rather, it suggests that the structure of discourse production gives dominant actors greater opportunities to shape the terms of public debate. As van Dijk (1998) argues, control over discourse is closely related to the ability to influence socially shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideological representations. In the context of national strategic projects, this means that discursive power is exercised not only by explicitly controlling what people are allowed to say but also by influencing which interpretations of development receive greater institutional authority, repetition, and public visibility.

Overall, the findings answer the second research question by demonstrating that dominant actors participate in the production and dissemination of national strategic projects discourse through an interconnected process of institutional production, media circulation, discursive normalization, positive framing, and unequal access to alternative voices. The contribution of the present study lies in connecting these processes to the textual findings. While the textual dimension shows how national strategic projects is linguistically constructed as progressive, beneficial, and necessary, the discursive-practice dimension explains how such representations gain circulation and dominance. The combination of the two dimensions therefore indicates that the ideological power of national strategic projects discourse is produced not only through

language itself but through the institutional and communicative conditions that enable particular representations of development to become more visible and authoritative than others.

3.2. Social Practice in the Production and Dissemination of National Strategic Projects Development Discourse

The analysis of social practice examines how national strategic projects development discourse is embedded in broader relations of power, ideology, knowledge, and social inequality. As shown in Table 3, the dominant development narrative is closely associated with state power, developmentalist ideology, the privileging of official knowledge, the marginalization of local communities, and unequal access to the benefits and decision-making processes of development.

Table 3. Analysis of Social Practice

No.	Dimension of Social Practice	Finding	Theoretical Interpretation	Social Implication
1	Power Relations	State positioned as the dominant actor	Hegemony through institutional authority and consent	State-centered development discourse becomes dominant
2	Ideology	Developmentalism as the dominant ideological framework	Development ideology shapes how progress and national interest are understood	Development is normalized as necessary and desirable
3	Knowledge and Truth	Official narratives privileged as authoritative knowledge	Power/knowledge relations privilege institutional expertise	Local and alternative knowledge become less visible
4	Social Impact	Local communities are marginalized	Structural inequality is reproduced through development practices	Unequal distribution of social, economic, and environmental burdens
5	Social Justice	Development benefits and participation are unevenly distributed	Justice requires substantive opportunities and capabilities	National strategic projects may reproduce inequality when participation and benefits are uneven

The first finding concerns the relationship between national strategic projects development discourse and state power. The analysis shows that the state occupies a dominant position in defining the meaning, objectives, and legitimacy of national development. This dominance is not limited to formal policy authority but also extends to the ability to establish particular interpretations of development as legitimate and desirable. In this context, national strategic projects is constructed as a national priority whose continuation is associated with economic growth, public welfare, and national advancement. Such a construction can be understood through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, in which domination is sustained not only through coercion but also through the production of consent around particular understandings of social reality. Thus, the power of the state in national strategic projects discourse operates partly by making the development agenda appear compatible with the interests of the nation as a whole.

This finding is consistent with Talitha's (2026) analysis of Indonesia's national strategic projects agenda, which demonstrates that megaprojects can become associated with institutional restructuring and the reorganization of state authority. Rather than treating infrastructure projects merely as physical interventions, Talitha (2026) shows that megaprojects are embedded in broader institutional and political arrangements that shape how development decisions are made. The present study extends this argument by demonstrating that institutional power is also reproduced discursively. The state does not merely implement national strategic projects; it participates in defining what counts as legitimate development and which interpretations of national progress receive greater public visibility.

The second finding concerns the ideological dimension of national strategic projects discourse, particularly the dominance of developmentalism. The analysis indicates that economic growth, modernization, national advancement, and strategic development are repeatedly positioned as desirable objectives. Consequently, development is represented not simply as a policy option but as an apparently necessary direction for the nation. This corresponds to van Dijk's (1998) understanding of ideology as a socially shared system of beliefs that influences how groups interpret social reality. Within the present context, developmentalism provides a framework through which national strategic projects can be understood positively: infrastructure expansion becomes evidence of progress, economic transformation becomes evidence of modernization, and opposition to development can potentially be positioned as resistance to national advancement.

The ideological construction identified here is also supported by recent research on Indonesian development discourse. Meka et al. (2025), for example, found that reporting on IKN in Detik.com was dominated by institutional, symbolic, and technocratic discourse, with strong emphasis on the state, presidential

leadership, and development success. Their findings indicate that media discourse reproduced a hegemonic state narrative and normalized development ideology and national symbolism. This closely corresponds with the present finding that developmentalism operates as a broader ideological framework rather than merely as a collection of positive words. The difference is that the present study extends the analysis from IKN-specific media coverage to the broader national strategic projects discourse, showing how the ideology of development operates across the wider national strategic-project agenda.

The third finding concerns the relationship between knowledge and power. The analysis indicates that official government narratives and institutional forms of knowledge occupy a privileged position in defining national strategic projects and explaining its objectives. Technical, administrative, and policy-based representations of development tend to be treated as authoritative, whereas alternative forms of knowledge originating from affected communities receive comparatively less discursive visibility. This finding can be interpreted through Foucault's (1980) concept of power/knowledge, which emphasizes that power and knowledge are mutually constitutive: institutions with greater authority can influence not only decisions but also which forms of knowledge are recognized as legitimate.

The privileging of official knowledge is particularly important in the context of national strategic projects because development decisions frequently involve land, environment, spatial planning, and community livelihoods. Kodir (2026) similarly identifies the privileging of technocratic expertise and the assumption of state neutrality as important problems within national strategic projects governance. His study argues that environmental injustice in national strategic projects can become embedded in fast-track regulatory mechanisms that marginalize affected communities and neglect plural forms of knowledge. The present findings complement this argument by demonstrating that epistemic inequality is also a discursive phenomenon. When official technical narratives are repeatedly presented as objective or authoritative, community knowledge can be positioned as secondary, subjective, or less relevant to development decision-making.

The fourth finding relates to the social impact of dominant development discourse, particularly the marginalization of local communities. The analysis indicates that communities affected by development occupy a less dominant position within the broader national strategic projects narrative. Their experiences and concerns are less visible than institutional representations of economic growth, strategic development, and national welfare. This pattern is important because marginalization does not necessarily mean that local communities are completely absent from discourse. Rather, they may be present but positioned as objects of development rather than as equal subjects with the authority to define development priorities.

This finding is consistent with recent research on national strategic projects and IKN. Meka et al. (2025) found that representations of society tended to be marginalized in Detik.com's reporting on IKN, while institutional and technocratic discourses received greater prominence. Similarly, Said and Ridho (2025), in their analysis of the Wadas conflict, found that the representation of national strategic projects involved different forms of media positioning, with Tempo.co giving greater attention to affected communities while Kompas.com employed more formal and relatively neutral language. These findings demonstrate that the marginalization of communities is not necessarily absolute; rather, it is produced through differences in discursive access, representation, and framing. The present study therefore conceptualizes marginalization as unequal discursive visibility and unequal participation in defining the meaning of development.

The fifth finding concerns social justice and the unequal distribution of development benefits, burdens, and participation. The discourse of national strategic projects frequently emphasizes national welfare and collective benefits, yet the social-practice analysis indicates that the costs and benefits of development may not be experienced equally across social groups. This creates an important tension between the universal language of national development and the differentiated experiences of communities affected by particular projects. From the perspective of Sen's (1999) capability approach, development should not be evaluated solely through economic growth but also through the expansion of people's substantive freedoms and capabilities. Consequently, a development project cannot be considered socially just merely because it generates aggregate economic benefits if affected communities experience restricted participation, loss of livelihood, displacement, or reduced access to resources.

This interpretation is strongly supported by Kodir (2026), who argues that environmental injustice within national strategic projects operates through distributional, procedural, and epistemic dimensions. In particular, affected communities may experience unequal distribution of development risks, limited participation in decision-making, and insufficient recognition of their knowledge. Wardana and Darmawardana (2024) similarly conceptualize development through national strategic projects as a process that can involve exclusion, particularly when the language of public interest is used to legitimize development while weakening the position of affected communities. Therefore, the present findings indicate that the problem of national strategic projects is not simply whether development occurs, but whose interests define development, whose knowledge is recognized, who participates in decision-making, and who bears its social and environmental costs.

The social-practice findings also need to be understood in relation to the possibility of discursive contestation. Although the dominant national strategic projects discourse is strongly state-centered, it does not mean that alternative interpretations are completely absent. Recent research demonstrates that media discourse can also provide space for contesting development narratives. Nurpadillah et al. (2025), for instance, found differences between Metro News and Kompas.com in representing IKN: the former constructed a more oppositional identity toward government policy, while the latter emphasized government achievements and a progressive development-oriented identity. Likewise, Iffah et al. (2025) found that some online media explicitly represented opposition to IKN development by giving greater visibility to different social actors and community perspectives. These findings are important because they prevent the present analysis from portraying national strategic projects discourse as completely monolithic. Instead, the dominant discourse exists within a contested discursive field in which alternative meanings can emerge, although they may not possess the same institutional resources or visibility.

To summarize, the five dimensions in Table 3 reveal that national strategic projects development discourse is embedded in a broader power–ideology–knowledge–inequality nexus. State power provides institutional authority for defining development; developmentalist ideology frames progress as desirable and necessary; privileged forms of official and technocratic knowledge establish particular interpretations as authoritative; these processes contribute to the marginalization of local communities; and unequal participation and distribution raise questions of social justice. In this sense, the social practice of national strategic projects discourse extends beyond language and media representation to the organization of social relations surrounding development.

The findings therefore complete the three-dimensional analysis of national strategic projects discourse. At the textual level, national strategic projects is linguistically constructed through metaphors of growth, positive welfare-oriented diction, euphemisms for relocation, technocratic terminology, and futuristic modernization. At the discursive-practice level, these representations are produced and circulated through government institutions and media channels, while alternative perspectives receive less visibility. At the social-practice level, the discourse becomes connected to broader relations of state power, developmentalist ideology, privileged knowledge, social marginalization, and unequal access to development benefits and participation. The three dimensions consequently demonstrate that the dominance of national strategic projects discourse is not produced by language alone; it is sustained through the interaction between linguistic representation, institutional communication, and broader structures of power and inequality.

In answering the third research question, the study therefore finds that national strategic projects development discourse functions as part of a broader socio-political process in which state power and developmentalist ideology shape what counts as legitimate knowledge and desirable national progress. While this discourse can provide coherence and legitimacy to national development policy, it can simultaneously reduce the visibility of competing interpretations and the experiences of affected communities. The critical significance of this finding lies in showing that development discourse is itself a site of social struggle: the question is not merely whether Indonesia should develop, but how development is defined, by whom it is defined, whose knowledge informs it, and whose interests are recognized in the process.

3.3. Implications

Based on these findings, several implications can be proposed. Theoretically, this study contributes to Critical Discourse Analysis by demonstrating how development discourse operates across textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice dimensions in the context of Indonesia's national strategic projects. Future research could extend this analysis by combining CDA with ethnographic, interview-based, or policy-analysis approaches to examine how affected communities interpret, negotiate, and respond to development discourse. Practically, government institutions should promote more inclusive development communication by incorporating local perspectives, increasing transparency, and providing meaningful opportunities for community participation in policy formulation and implementation. Media organizations should also strengthen their critical and social-control functions by presenting diverse perspectives and giving greater visibility to communities affected by development projects rather than relying predominantly on official sources. Finally, greater public critical literacy is needed so that citizens can critically evaluate development narratives and participate more effectively in debates concerning development, rights, and social justice. These measures can contribute to a development paradigm that balances economic and infrastructural objectives with participation, social equity, and the protection of affected communities.

3.4. Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the analysis focuses primarily on discourse and therefore does not directly measure how audiences interpret, accept, negotiate, or resist the dominant national strategic projects narratives. Although the findings identify patterns of discursive normalization, claims about audience internalization should therefore be treated cautiously and would require complementary reception data, such as interviews, surveys, or focus groups. Second, the study focuses on

selected textual and discursive representations of national strategic projects and cannot necessarily capture the full diversity of discourse produced across all government institutions, media organizations, regions, and affected communities in Indonesia. Third, CDA involves interpretive analysis, meaning that the identification of ideological meanings and power relations may be influenced by the analytical perspective of the researcher. Although the analysis is grounded in Fairclough's (1995) framework and supported by previous empirical studies, alternative interpretations of particular linguistic choices remain possible. Finally, the study primarily examines the discursive construction of development and does not independently evaluate the actual economic, environmental, or social outcomes of individual national strategic projects. Future research could address these limitations through multimodal and longitudinal CDA, comparative analysis across different media platforms, and the integration of discourse data with interviews or ethnographic research involving affected communities. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how development discourse is produced, contested, and experienced in practice.

4. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how development discourse is constructed, circulated, and embedded in power relations within Indonesia's national strategic projects using Fairclough's (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis. The findings show that national strategic projects discourse is not neutral but shaped by the interaction of language, institutional power, and ideology: positive and progressive diction, technocratic terminology, and euphemistic expressions legitimize development while potentially obscuring social conflicts and community experiences; government institutions dominate discourse production, while media facilitate its circulation and normalization; and these practices reproduce developmentalist ideology, unequal access to authoritative knowledge, and the marginalization of local communities. Overall, national strategic projects discourse functions not only to communicate development policies but also to construct meanings of progress, legitimize particular interests, and shape whose voices and experiences become visible in the public sphere.

Author Contributions

The sole author is entirely responsible for all aspects of a work, including its conception, research, drafting, and accountability for its accuracy and integrity.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Declaration on AI Use

The authors declare that no artificial intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted tools were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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