

CHAPTER II

GENERAL OVERVIEW

2.1 The Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG)

2.1.1 Background and History of MBG

Against the backdrop of Indonesia's persistent nutritional challenges as outlined in the preceding chapter, the government of President Prabowo Subianto introduced the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) as a flagship national policy response. The program represents one of the most ambitious social intervention initiatives in the contemporary history of Indonesian public administration, designed to address structural nutritional deficits that intersect across the domains of health, education and economic development. Its launch signals a significant shift in the government's approach to human capital investment, moving from fragmented sectoral interventions toward a centralized, large-scale nutritional program administered by a dedicated national agency (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

Introduced as a flagship campaign promise of the Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka candidate during the 2024 presidential election, the program underwent a significant terminological shift from its original formulation as a "free lunch" initiative (*makan siang gratis*) to free nutritious meal (*makan bergizi gratis*), a rebranding that reflects a broader and more substantive ambition than the provision of meals alone. This terminological evolution signals the government's intent to frame MBG not merely as a welfare distribution program but as a comprehensive nutritional intervention strategy aimed at addressing some of Indonesia's most persistent public health and human development challenges (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

The program was conceived within the broader context of the Asta Cita development agenda, the eight primary development objectives that serve

as the strategic foundation of the Prabowo administration's national development vision. Among these, the fourth Asta Cita mission is most directly relevant: the strengthening of human resource development, science, technology, education, health, sport achievement, gender equality and the empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities. MBG is positioned as a primary instrument for achieving this mission by ensuring that the physical and nutritional foundations necessary for optimal human development are in place from the earliest stages of life (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

The institutional underpinning of MBG was established through the formation of the National Nutrition Agency (Badan Gizi Nasional/BGN) by Presidential Regulation Number 83 of 2024. BGN was created with the primary mandate of fulfilling national nutritional needs through coordinated policy formulations, implementation and oversight and operates directly under the President of the Republic of Indonesia. The formation of dedicated national-level body specifically tasked with nutrition policy represent a significant institutional innovation in Indonesia governance – reflecting the government's recognition that Indonesia's complex nutritional challenges, which span across health, education, agriculture, social welfare and economic development, require a dedicated coordination mechanism that transcends the fragmented jurisdictions of individual line ministries (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

The establishment of BGN is also directly tied to Indonesia's long term development vision. In the medium-Term National Development Plan (RPJMN) 2025-2029, the health sector is identified as a priority area, encompassing effort to accelerates stunting reduction, strengthen nutritional resilience and reduce maternal and infant mortality. Program MBG is explicitly embedded as one of the strategic initiatives within this national

development framework and its implementation is designed to contribute to five of the 83 priority activities listed in the RPJMN, including priority activity 43 (prevention and reduction of stunting), priority activity 46 (provision of nutritious meals for students, santri, pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers and toddlers), and priority activity 47 (strengthening the ecosystem supporting nutritious meal provision). (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

2.1.2 Legal Foundation

The legal architecture governing MBG is built upon a layered hierarchy of regulatory instruments, ranging from constitutional provision down to technical operational guidelines, each serving a distinct function in defining the program's mandate, organizational structure, funding mechanisms and implementation standards. At the highest regulatory level, the establishment of BGN as the primary implementing body of MBG is grounded in Presidential Regulation Number 83 of 2024 concerning the National Nutrition Agency, which defines BGN's mandate, organizational structure, institutional functions and the categories of beneficiaries it is mandated to serve. This presidential regulation was supplemented by Presidential Decree Number 115/TPA/2024, which formally inaugurated Dr. Ir. Dadan Hindayana as the Inaugural Head of BGN, thereby activating the institution's operational capacity. The organizational and procedural details of BGN's internal structure are further regulated by BGN Regulation Number 1 of 2024 concerning the organization and Work Procedures of BGN, which establishes the specific roles, functions and lines of accountability of each structural unit within the agency (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).



Figure 2.1 Picture of Dr. Ir Dadan Hindayana, The Inaugural Head of BGN 2026

source: Badan Gizi Nasional

At the governance level, the operational framework for MBG's implementation is regulated by Presidential Regulation Number 115 of 2025 concerning the Governance of the Free Nutritious Meal Program, which provides a comprehensive regulatory framework for the program's accountability mechanism, coordination procedures and governance standards. This regulations was further supported by BGN Decree Number 15.1 of 2024 concerning the General Guidelines for The System and Governance of BGN for the Free Nutritious Meal Program, which translates the broad governance framework into concrete operational guidelines applicable to all implementing units and partner organizations. The most detailed operational guidance is contained in BGN Decree Number 401.1 of 2025 concerning the Technical Guidelines for The Implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program for the 2026 fiscal year, which specifies the precise procedures, standards and protocols to be followed in every stage of program implementation from food procurement to distribution and reporting (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

At the budgetary level, the program's funding arrangement is regulated by Law Number 17 of 2025 concerning the 2026 State Budget (APBN), specifically through Article 22 paragraph (3) and its explanation, which establishes that operational funding for educational service delivery includes the nutritious meal program at institutions related to the implementation of both general and religious education. This budgetary provision is further operationalized through Presidential Regulation Number 118 of 2025 concerning the Details of the 2026 Budget State (APBN), which explicitly allocates a total of Rp223,558,490,000 (approximately Rp223,5 trillion) to BGN under the education budget allocation of Rp268 trillion for the same fiscal year (Government of Indonesia, 2025).



Figure 2.2 Picture of National Nutrition Agency (BGN) Symbol

Source: Badan Gizi Nasional

The legal basis for MBG's operation also draws on a range of sectoral regulations that govern specific aspects of its implementation, including the Minister of Finance Regulation Number 168/PMK.05/2015 concerning the Mechanism for the Implementation of Government Assistance Budgets, the Minister of Health Regulation Number 28 of 2019 concerning the Recommended Nutritional Adequacy Figures for the Indonesian Population, and the National Food Agency Regulation Number 1 of 2024 as the reference framework for national food and nutrition program implementation (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

2.1.3 Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives

The strategic direction of BGN and the MBG program is encapsulated in a clearly articulated vision and a set of five institutional missions that guide all aspects of the program's design, implementation and evaluation. BGN's vision is the realization of a quality human capital base for an advanced Indonesia towards *Indonesia Emas 2045*, a vision that positions nutritional adequacy not as a welfare objective but as a foundational investment in the nation's long-term human capital stock. This framing reflects a recognition that the quality of human resources, as measured by health, cognitive capacity and productive potential, is directly conditioned by the adequacy of nutrition from the earliest stages of life (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2024).

To operationalize this vision, BGN has articulated five institutional missions. The first, is to improve access to and quality of nutrition for all segments of society, ensuring that every individual, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers, has sustained and accessible access to safe, healthy and nutritious food. The second, is to optimize integrated nutrition education and promotion, developing comprehensive nutrition education programs from the primary education level upward, to foster lasting behavioural changes in dietary habits and nutritional awareness. The third mission is to strengthen governance and coordination in national nutrition fulfilment, developing and implementing effective policies and regulations in the governance of national nutrition, while strengthening coordination among ministries, institutional and regional government. The fourth mission is to build strategic partnerships for national nutrition improvement, by increasing cooperation with international organisation, non-governmental organisation, the private sector and academics to strengthen nutrition-related efforts in Indonesia. The fifth and final mission is to monitor and evaluation system to ensure that nutrition programmes are

running according to target and delivering measurable positive impacts (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025).

In terms of measurable success indicators, BGN has established performance targets at both the macro and operational levels. At the macro level, the program aims to reduce the stunting rate by 5,0% and reduce school absenteeism by 5,0% by 2025 in areas covered by MBG. At the programmatic outcome level, the program targets a 2.5% annual improvement in nutritional literacy score and a 2.5% annual improvement in the nutritional status of beneficiary groups. The program is implemented on the ground through a network of Nutrition Service Unit (SPPG), each of which serves as the frontline operational unit responsible for the procurement, preparation and distribution of nutritious meals. As of January 2026, a total of 21,102 SPPGs were operational nationwide, reaching approximately 59.86 million beneficiaries (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2026).

2.1.4 Budget Trajectory and Policy Controversy

The budgetary trajectory of MBG has undergone substantial transformation from its initial conceptualization as a campaign promise to its current status as the single as largest budgetary allocation among all government ministries and agencies in Indonesia. During the 2024 presidential campaign period, the Prabowo-Gibran transition team, together with the Ministry of Finance and the Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs, established an initial budget ceiling of Rp71 trillion for the first phase of implementation in 2025. This initial figure was calculated with careful attention to fiscal sustainability, targeting a deficit range of 2.29%-2.82% of GDP and was designed to cover a more limited beneficiary scope focused primarily on students in quintiles 1 and 2 socioeconomic status in remote, frontier and outer (3T) areas of Indonesia (Center for Indonesia's Strategic Development Initiatives, 2024).

In the 2025 State Budget (APBN 2025), the government formally allocated Rp71 trillion to BGN for the first year of MBG implementation, which officially commenced on 6 January 2025. However, as the program began to scale, the government also prepared a standby fund of Rp100 trillion to accommodate potential expansion, bringing the theoretical maximum available budget for 2025 to Rp171 trillion. In practice, budget absorption proceeded more modestly. Based on data from Ministry of Finance, MBG spending realization for 2025 reached Rp51.5 trillion, equivalent to 72.5% of the Rp71 ceiling, serving 56.13 million beneficiaries as of 7 January 2026 (Kementerian Keuangan RI, 2025). Of the total Rp99 trillion that was processed, Rp70 trillion was returned to the President at the end of the fiscal year due to non-absorption, reflecting the infrastructural constraints, particularly the limited of operational SPPGs, that constrained rollout velocity in the program's inaugural year (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025).

For the 2026 fiscal year, the government enacted a dramatic budgetary expansion. Under Law Number 17 of 2025 concerning the 2026 State Budget (APBN) and its implementing regulation, Presidential Regulation Number 118 of 2025, BGN was allocated a base budget of Rp268 trillion, making it the single largest recipient of budgetary resources among all government ministries and agencies in Indonesia, surpassing even the Ministry of Defence (Rp187.10 trillion) and the National Police (Rp146.05 trillion). With the addition of a Rp67 trillion reserve fund drawn from the State Treasury's contingency budget (Dana Standby BA BUN), the total available budget for MBG in 2026 amounts to Rp335 trillion (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025). This represent a near five-fold increase from the 2025 allocation of Rp71 trillion, with a target of reaching 82.9 million beneficiaries and delivering approximately 21 billion meal portions across the year (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2026).

The policy controversy that forms the central empirical context of this research arises specifically from the manner in which BGN's Rp268 trillion budget was classified in the 2026 State Budget (APBN). Under the functional classification of the budget, 83,4% of BGN's allocation, amounting to Rp223.5 trillion, was categorized under the education function, with the remaining 9.2% (Rp24.7 trillion) allocated to the health function and 7.4% (Rp19.7 trillion) to the economic function (Badan Gizi Nasional, 2025). This classification effectively positions MBG as a component of Indonesia's constitutionally mandated 20% education budget allocation, a designation grounded in Article 22 paragraph (3) of Law Number 17 of 2025, which explicitly includes nutritious meal programs at educational institutions within the scope of operational funding for educational service delivery. The total education budget in the 2026 APBN amounts to approximately Rp763 trillion, representing exactly 20% of total state expenditure.

This budgetary arrangement generated significant political contestation in the national legislature. Members of the Indonesia Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) faction in the House of Representation (DPR), including Commission X member Ardian Napitupulu, argued that classifying MBG expenditure under the education budget envelope effectively diverts resources that should be directed toward core educational programs such as teacher welfare, school operational grants (BOS) and educational infrastructure. Conversely, the Golkar faction, represented by Commission IX Deputy Chair Yahya Zaini, defended the arrangement as the outcome of a legitimate DPR-Government agreement, framing MBG as a historically grounded investment in student human capital analogous to school meal programs in Japan (137 years), Brazil (71 years) and South Korea (70 years). Beyond the legislature, a coalition of civil society organizations filed a judicial review (Uji Materi) petition with the Constitutional Court (MK)

challenging the constitutionality of the education budget classification in Law Number 17 of 2025, arguing that the legal basis for this classification was insufficiently clear and that its fiscal implications adversely affected education, health and regional transfer budget. It is this policy controversy, the rationalisation of the education budget for MBG in the 2026 APBN, that constitutes the subject of public opinion expressed on X (formerly twitter) and analysed in this research.

It is this contested budgetary arrangement, specifically the classification of MBG funding within the constitutionally mandated education budget, that forms the substantive policy context of this research, and which is examined in greater detail in the following section through the lens of Indonesia's constitutional education financing framework.

2.2 The Rationalisation of the Educational Budget in the 2026 State Budget (APBN)

2.2.1 Indonesia's Constitutional Mandate on Education Expenditure

The relationship between MBG and the national education budget does not emerge in a regulatory vacuum but is rooted in Indonesia's constitutional framework. Article 31 paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945) mandates that the state priorities the education budget by allocating at least 20% of the State Budget (APBN) and regional Budgets (APBD) to meet the needs of national education. This constitutional provision has been consistently interpreted as a binding fiscal floor, requiring that no less the one-fifth of public expenditure be directed toward education at both the national and subnational levels.

In the 2026 State Budget (APBN), as established by Law Number 17 of 2025, the total education budget allocation amounts to approximately Rp763 trillion, representing 20% of total state expenditure. This allocation is

distributed across multiple institutions and mechanism, including line ministries, transfer to regional governments and off-budget, totalling Rp223.5 trillion, as a component of the education budget is grounded in the legal argument that MBG, by improving the nutritional status of school-age children and student, directly supports the condition necessary for educational service delivery (Government of Indonesia, 2025).

The constitutional imperative of the 20% education mandate has been the subject of ongoing legal interpretation, particularly regarding which expenditures may legitimately be counted toward this allocation. Critics of the MBG budget classification argue that Article 31 paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution was intended to guarantee a minimum allocation for core educational activities — including teacher welfare, school operational grants (BOS), educational infrastructure, and learning quality improvement — and that its inclusion of nutrition programmes constitutes an expansive reinterpretation that dilutes the constitutional guarantee. The Constitutional Court has previously addressed disputes regarding the scope of the education budget allocation, establishing jurisprudential precedents that inform the current controversy (Media Indonesia, 2026).

2.2.2 The Policy of Education Budget Rationalisation for the Free Nutritious Meal Program

The term “rationalisation” as used in the context of this research refers specifically to the policy decision by the Indonesian government to reclassify and structurally adjust portion of the education budget in the 2026 APBN in order to accommodate the operational funding requirements of the MBG program. This term is deliberately distinguished from “budget cut” (*pemangkasan*), which implies a reduction In total expenditure, and reallocation, which implies a shift across budget line, in that rationalisation donates a compositional adjustment in the structure of education spending.

Under this arrangement, MBG expenditure is categorised under the education budget envelope, a classification justified by the government on the basis that nutritional provision at educational institutions constitutes a form educational service delivery as defined in Article 22 paragraph (3) of Law Number 17 of 2025 (Government of Indonesia, 2025).

Presidential Regulation Number 118 of 2025 explicitly position BGN's budget of Rp223,558,960,490,000 under the *Rincian Anggaran Pendidikan* (Detailed Education Budget) of the 2026 APBN. This classification was defended by government and legislature representatives on the grounds that MBG constitutes an integral component of educational services delivery. However, the policy generated significant public debate, particularly among educators, academics, civil society organisations and members of the public, who expressed concern that the reclassification reduces the resources available for core educational programs. This contested perception forms the discursive context within which public sentiment on X (formerly twitter) was formed and expressed and which this research analyses through the lens's of Beetham's (1991) policy legitimacy framework.

The practical implication of this reclassification for core educational programmes is substantial. Of the Rp769.1 trillion total education budget in the 2026 APBN, Rp223.55 trillion, equivalent to 29.07% of the total education allocation, was directed to BGN for MBG operational costs. The resources remaining for conventional educational programmes, including teacher welfare, school operational grants, higher education, and educational infrastructure, were correspondingly reduced relative to what would have been available under a standard education budget without the MBG classification. This structural adjustment is what critics have characterised as a de facto rationalisation of education spending, and it is the perception of this

rationalisation, rather than its technical legal definition, that shapes the public sentiment this research seeks to measure.

2.3 X (Formerly Twitter) as a Digital Sphere in Indonesia

2.3.1 Overview of X as a Platform

Twitter, rebranded as X following its acquisition by Elon Musk in October 2022, is a microblogging and social networking platform that enables users to post short text-based messages, engage in public conversations, share multimedia content, and interact with other users through mechanisms such as replies, retweets and likes. Originally founded in 2006, the platform has evolved from a simple status-update service into one of the world's most prominent public discourse spaces, characterised by its real-time information flow, open network structure and disproportionate influence on mainstream media and political narratives. From a technical standpoint, X (formerly twitter) is structured around the concept of the public timeline, a continuous, algorithmically curated stream of posts generated by accounts a user follow, supplemented by trending and algorithmically recommended content. The platform's open architecture, which allows any user to read and respond to public posts without necessarily following the original author, creates a distinctive conversational environment in which information, opinion and critique can spread rapidly and organically across social networks.

2.3.2 X in the Indonesia Context

Indonesia represents one of the most significant X (formerly twitter) user bases in the world. According to data from We Are Social and Hootsuite's Digital 2024 report, Indonesia ranks among the top 5 countries globally by X (formerly twitter) user population, with an estimated active user base exceeding 24 million individuals. Indonesia X users are known for their high levels of engagement, with the platform frequently serving as the primary

arena for political debate, policy commentary, social movement mobilisation and the formation of trending public narratives that subsequently influence mainstream media coverage. The platform has played a particularly prominent role in Indonesia political life since the democratisation period, functioning as a space where citizen, activist, academics and public officials interact with a degree of directness uncommon in more formally structured public for a. studies on digital democracy in Indonesia have consistently identified X as a key site of policy contestation, where government announcements are rapidly subjected to public scrutiny, counter-arguments are mobilised and collective sentiment is formed and articulated (Lim, 2013; Nugroho & Syarief, 2012).

2.3.3 Relevance of X to this Research

The selection of X (formerly twitter) as the data sources for this research is theoretically grounded in Habermas's (1989) concept of the digital public sphere, which posits that online platforms capable of hosting open, rational-critical public discourse constitute a functional equivalent of the classical bourgeois public sphere. X (formerly twitter) satisfies the key criteria of this framework, it is publicly accessible, it enables multi-directional communication rather than mere broadcast, it hosts substantive discursive exchanges on matters of common concern and it operates as a site where public opinion is formed through deliberative interaction (Habermas, 1989).

In the specific context of the education budget rationalization policy for MBG, X (formerly twitter) emerged as the primary platform through which Indonesian netizens expressed their views, shared information, debated the government's justifications and formed collective responses to the policy. The relatively unrestricted character of discourse on the platform, combined with the searchability and achievability of tweets, makes it a methodologically appropriate source for the lexicon-based sentiment analysis conducted in this research.