

## **PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION TOWARD THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS PROGRAM ON SOCIAL MEDIA ‘X’: A STUDY DURING THE PRABOWO-GIBRAN ADMINISTRATION**

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### **Abstract**

Public opinion encompasses the views, attitudes, and collective reactions of society toward an issue in the public sphere. In the digital era, social media facilitates rapid interaction and information exchange, enabling public opinion to form and spread quickly through online discussions. One of the most discussed public issues in Indonesia is the Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG), launched during the Prabowo-Gibran administration. The program sparked significant attention and conversations, especially on the platform ‘X’. Although the policy was introduced with positive intentions, such as reducing malnutrition and supporting local farmers, it also raised concerns related to budget, implementation quality, and readiness. This study uses a descriptive quantitative method through an online survey to explore how the public perceives the MBG program on platform ‘X’. A total of 400 respondents were selected using purposive sampling. The questionnaire was based on Abelson’s public opinion theory, covering belief, attitude, and perception. The findings indicate that public opinion on platform ‘X’ leans toward cautious or passive disagreement. Most respondents recognize the good intentions behind the program but remain sceptical about its execution and long-term sustainability. Average scores for belief, attitude, and perception dimensions fall below the threshold of strong agreement. In conclusion, the MBG program is yet to gain widespread public trust on social media. Although not fully rejected, the program’s reception reflects ongoing critical evaluation and hesitant support from users, shaped by both its perceived shortcomings and the dynamic public discourse occurring online.

**Keywords:** *Public Opinion, Free Nutritious Meals, Social Media ‘X’, Political Communication*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the modern societies, public opinion plays a significant role in influencing and shaping public policy. It refers to the collective attitudes, judgments, and responses of individuals toward issues that affect society. According to Cutlip (in Hamson et al., 2021), public opinion is a collection of views from various individuals about the same issue, which includes the direction of the opinion, the level of intensity, its stability, and the presence of informational or social support. This shows that public opinion is not just about whether people agree or disagree, but also about how they feel, how long they hold that opinion, and whether they feel supported by others or by facts. Meanwhile, Dan Nimmo (in Wahid, 2016) explains that public opinion reflects the mix of thoughts, feelings, and positions citizens express, especially during periods of political tension, debate, or policy conflict. These expressions are often driven by concerns over how government actions align with public expectations and societal values. In such context, public opinion not only critiques the content of policy but also reflects broader anxieties about governance, fairness, and democratic accountability. Public opinion does not emerge in a vacuum. It is shaped and reshaped by information flow, interaction, and exposure to collective discourse. In the digital age, the formation and dissemination of public opinion has become increasingly rapid and far-reaching. As Qadri (2020) argues, social media platforms today are more than spaces for expression—they act as amplifiers that can drive narratives, mobilize support, or spark criticism. Unlike traditional media, social media allows for real-time interaction and dynamic conversation, making it easier for opinions to spread, evolve, or polarize quickly. Additionally, social media acts as a participatory space where individuals not only consume content but also actively contribute to shaping public narratives. Users can react, share, comment, and generate their own interpretations, which adds to richness and complexity of public discourse. This

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decentralization of opinion formation challenges top-down models of political communication and empowers citizens to become part of the decision-making landscape. This transformation is especially evident in platforms that support microblogging formats and fast-paced content sharing. Liani & Rina (2020) note that media like X (formerly Twitter) enable users to deliver quick opinions and join broader discussions using features like replies, reposts, and hashtags. With millions of active users, X has become a powerful platform for public deliberation, where government policies, controversies, and societal issues are evaluated in real time by a diverse and participatory audience.

One policy that has generated a lot of talk on X is the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme, launched by the Prabowo-Gibran administration in October 2024. The program, which evolved from the “Free Lunch” campaign proposal, aims to combat stunting and malnutrition among schoolchildren by distributing healthy meals. It also supports local farmers and small enterprises through its supply chain strategy (Indrawan, 2024). While its goals have received praise, critics have voiced concerns over funding reallocations from the health and education sectors (Karina, 2025), and questioned the nutritional value and execution of the meals (Fajri, 2024). These concerns illustrate a broader trend of scepticism in public reaction to large-scale government programmes, especially when financial transparency and implementation logistics are not clearly communicated. The MBG programme thus becomes a case study not only in public health and education policy, but also in political trust, administrative efficiency, and state-society relations. This issue has become increasingly discussed on social media, with the hashtag used more than 14 million times in 24 hours as a form of criticism towards the government’s budget policy (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Many users on X have expressed their opinions about the MBG programme in a wide range of views. In recent months, there have been thousands of posts discussing MBG with a variety of sentiments. Some users supporting MBG as a valuable investment in public health and education, while others criticized its implementation, questioning the nutritional quality of the meals and the sustainability of its funding model. This widespread public engagement signals the increasing importance of digital platforms in shaping policy discourse and public accountability. As highlighted by Jungherr (2016), the use of hashtags and viral content on platforms like X can serve as digital indicators of public sentiment, providing both policymakers and researchers with valuable insights into the evolving landscape of public opinion. This development underscores the need for a more structured and empirical investigation into how such online discourse reflects broader public tendencies and policy reception.

Given the widespread attention and mixed responses to MBG programme, it is important to understand how public opinion is forming on social media platforms. This study is especially relevant now, as social media plays a bigger role in shaping how people view government policies, particularly at the beginning of a new administration. The Prabowo-Gibran government, which introduced the MBG as one of its key programs, is now being closely watched by the public, and this scrutiny is happening live on platform like X. Although there is a lot of discussion happening online, most of it is scattered and based on individual posts or viral content. There is still a lack of structured, data-based research that shows the overall trend of public opinion. This study helps fill that gap by collecting and analysing data from actual users to provide a clearer picture of how the program is being received. It also adds to academic discussions on how digital media influences political communication and public response, especially in times of political change. By doing so, this research can support better governance by highlighting the importance of public trust and digital feedback in making policies more effective and accepted. Despite the high volume of user-generated content on X regarding the MBG programme, anecdotal posts do not fully represent the overall public sentiment. A study by Mukhroman et al., (2024) on public opinion during the 2024 presidential election revealed that social media discourse played a significant role in shaping candidate perception, often outweighing traditional campaign strategies. Similarly, Maulana & Hastuti (2022) found that public opinion on platform like X can be influenced and even steered through the presence of political buzzers, demonstrating the strategic use of digital narratives in shaping public discourse. Moreover, these findings highlight the dual nature of public opinion on social media—it is both a reflection of genuine citizen sentiment and terrain for strategic communication. As such, analysing public opinion on digital platforms must account for organic user engagement as well as orchestrated efforts by interest groups for political actors. Without this dual awareness, interpretations may become skewed or superficial.

To fill this gap, this study aims to explore the general tendency of public opinion toward the MBG programme as reflected in user interactions on X, focusing on how the programme is broadly received by the public in the digital space. The aim is to see whether public opinion tends to be supportive or critical, without focusing on specific emotional tone or detailed sentiment levels. The data collected will help describe how the programme is being received by the public on social media. This method allows for a clearer picture of collective public response in the digital space and contributes to broader discussions about how government programmes are perceived in online environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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This research uses two main theoretical foundations to analyse the formation of public opinion regarding the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme on social media, particularly on the platform X. These theories are political communication theory and public opinion theory.

## Political Communication

Political Communication Theory explains how political information is delivered, received, and interpreted by the public. Communication, derived from the Latin *communicare*. Thus, communication can be understood as a shared understanding in the transmission of thoughts, meanings, or messages (Wahid, 2016). This basic concept lays the foundation for understanding how messages are formed and exchanged in political context. Mulyana (in Wahid, 2016) further explains that communication definitions may vary across scholars, but each remains valuable as long as it helps explain social phenomena and offers useful analytical tools. Rather than being contradictory, the diversity of definitions enriches our understanding of how communication functions in different contexts. Building on this, Budiardjo (2024) highlights that in the political realm, communication plays a strategic role—particularly in how political parties channel public aspirations into concrete policy proposals. Political communication thus becomes a critical link between society's needs and the decision-making process of the state.

Rush & Althoff, as cited in (Wahid, 2016) define political communication as the process through which important political information is conveyed from one part of the political system to another, as well as between the social system and the political system. In the context of social media, political communication becomes two-way and highly interactive. Platforms like X allow the public not only to receive political messages but also to respond, express their opinions, and collectively shape public discourse. This makes political communication in the digital era more participatory, dynamic, and central to the way public opinion is formed. Recent studies also highlight that political communication today is increasingly complex and evolving. Blumler (2015) reinforces that his process changes continuously due to media shifts and technological advancement. Lin & Yang (2024) add that political communication involves the negotiation of meaning within a political community through feedback and response. Together, these perspectives illustrate how digital platforms have reshaped political discourse and amplified the role of citizens in that process.

In this context, social media platforms such as X represent not only channels of message delivery but also spaces where political meaning is actively constructed. This illustrates the evolution of political communication into a more networked and decentralized practice, where public participation plays a central role in shaping the narrative landscape. Bruns & Highfield (2016) argue that Twitter (now X) creates ad hoc publics—temporary communities formed around hashtags and trending topics. These publics play a crucial role in disseminating and challenging official narratives, making the platform an arena of symbolic and ideological contestation. Political communication on X is therefore not merely top-down but contested, negotiated, and co-constructed by its users. Political communication also refers to the transmission and exchange of information related to political activities, actors, and public policies. It is not merely a combination of “communication” and “politics,” but a field of study with its own conceptual framework. According to Lasswell's classical model, communication involves key components: who says what, to whom, through which channel, and with what effect. In the context of political communication, this translates into how political actors disseminate messages, the mediums used, and the resulting public response. As Wahid (2016) highlights, political communication influences public thinking, shapes social relationships, and functions as a bridge between the government and society.

In the digital era, political communication has evolved significantly due to the emergence of social media platforms. These platforms enable rapid and interactive dissemination of political messages, making them a powerful tool for both political elites and citizens. Platforms like X (formerly Twitter) have become key arenas where political discourse unfolds, allowing citizens to express opinions, challenge authority, and participate in policy discussions. Political communication now goes beyond traditional media and is deeply embedded in everyday digital interactions. This shift creates opportunities for more inclusive engagement but also presents challenges, such as misinformation and polarization. Therefore, understanding political communication today requires examining how digital media shapes the flow and influence of political messages in real-time, participatory contexts.

## Public Opinion

Public opinion provides a framework to understand how collective attitudes toward policies are formed and expressed. Public opinion emerges through the interaction of individual beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes within a community. According to Blumer, public opinion is a collective judgment about a particular issue, shaped by direction, intensity, stability, and social support (Cutlip in Wahid, 2016). Similarly, Tabroni (2023) defines public

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opinion as a result of ongoing debate and dialogue among individuals within a social group. In the political realm, public opinion often arises amid disagreement and conflict, as noted by Dan Nimmo (in Wahid, 2016), who views it as the product of personal thoughts and emotions expressed during policy debates. To analyse how public opinion forms, Abelson (1968, as cited in (Soemirat & Ardianto, 2010)) explains that public opinion is not formed simply, but consists of three interrelated elements, known as 'opinion molecules: belief, or a person's conviction about an issue; attitude, which reflects emotional evaluations and behavioural tendencies; and perception, or how individuals interpret information based on cultural background, values, and media exposure. These elements interact over time and are shaped by media and public figures.

Abelson also emphasizes that public opinion may not always align with an individual's true attitude, as attitudes are latent while opinions are expressed responses. In the digital era, social media accelerates the formation of public opinion. Suhendra & Selly Pratiwi (2024) noted that rapid information flow, high interactivity, and visible social feedback (such as likes and reposts) contribute to the quick formation of public opinion, but also make it more volatile. On platforms like X, public opinion spreads quickly and widely but is also shaped by algorithmic structures and user behaviours. This makes public opinion on social media a unique blend of personal beliefs, social influence, and digital mechanisms. Furthermore, public opinion in online settings is not static, it evolves with the flow of information and collective reactions. According to McCombs & Shaw (1961), the media do not tell people what to think, but what to think about. In the social media era, this process is further intensified as algorithms and trending topics steer users' attention toward specific issues. This mechanism can significantly influence the salience of public issues, including how people perceive and evaluate government programmes in general.

The way content is presented and shared on social media can significantly impact how the public perceives any issue or policy. Posts that are emotionally charged or visually compelling often attract more engagement, shaping the dominant narratives circulating online. These narratives, once amplified through reposts and interactions, may influence broader public interpretation even if they do not fully represent the program's complexities. Moreover, online public opinion is constantly evolving as users interact, reinterpret, and respond to emerging information. The openness of digital platforms enables both individual and collective responses to policy topics, making it a space where perceptions are actively shaped in real time. While some narratives may dominate temporarily, others continue to compete for attention, creating a dynamic and contested space for public dialogue. Together, these two theories help explain how public opinion about the MBG programme is formed and expressed in digital environments. Political communication theory provides insight into how messages are structured and distributed, and public opinion theory focuses on the psychological, social, and technological processes that drive collective attitudes toward public policies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method employed in this study is a descriptive quantitative approach using a public opinion survey. This study applies a descriptive quantitative research design using a survey method to explore the general tendency of public opinion toward the Free Nutritious Meal (MBG) programme on the social media platform X. According to Sugiyono (2018), quantitative research is a scientific procedure used to gather data systematically to describe phenomena and test hypotheses. A descriptive method is used to describe a phenomenon factually and accurately, and in this context, it aims to identify whether there is a general tendency in public opinion on X related to the MBG programme. Quantitative methods allow for the elaboration of empirical data derived from structured instruments like questionnaires, enabling researchers to systematically examine public perceptions and attitudes. This is also in line with Creswell & Creswell (2018), who states that quantitative methods help researchers explain trends among variables and test the strength of relationships within populations.

In this study, measurements were conducted to examine public opinion toward a policy issue by utilizing a structured public opinion survey instrument. The use of a descriptive quantitative method ensures that the phenomena observed are described factually, clearly, and in a structured manner. By applying a survey technique, this research seeks to identify whether there is a general tendency in public opinion expressed in social media discourse. This survey was distributed online through Google Forms, enabling efficient data collection from a wide audience of social media users. The sample population consisted of individuals who had interacted with social media content related to the policy in question. Since the actual number of users engaging with this topic was unknown, the population is considered infinite. To address this, a non-probability sampling technique was applied using purposive sampling, which ensures that the respondents selected have experienced or interacted with relevant online content. The sampling process followed a calculation using the Lemeshow formula for an unknown population size:

Description:

$n$  is the minimum required sample size



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Z is the Z-value for a 95% confidence level (1.96)

p is the estimated proportion of the population (0.5, assuming maximum variability)

d is the margin of error (0.05)

Based on this formula, the following calculation is obtained:

$$n = 84,16 \approx \text{or rounded } 385$$

From the result above, the calculated minimum sample size was 385 respondents. To increase data accuracy and account for potential incomplete or invalid responses, the sample size was rounded up to 400 respondents. The selection criteria for respondents were based on their engagement with social media content—whether by viewing, reading, liking, commenting, reposting, or participating in online discussions regarding the policy issue. This ensured that the survey targeted individuals with relevant exposure to the topic, which enhanced the credibility of the responses collected. To analyse public opinion, the study adopted Abelson's framework, which identifies three key dimensions of opinion: belief, attitude, and perception. Each of these dimensions was represented through five questionnaire items. Respondents evaluated the statements using a 4-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The Likert scale was selected because of its ability to measure attitudes and perceptions in a nuanced manner (Suryadi et al., 2019), and because it is effective for social research involving subjective assessments. Using Likert-scale data allows ordinal responses to be converted into quantitative values, making it possible to analyse public opinion trends through percentages and frequency distributions.

This study employed both primary and secondary data collection methods, with primary data obtained from online questionnaires and secondary data sourced from academic literature to support the conceptual framework. After reviewing and excluding incomplete responses, the valid data were analysed using descriptive statistics—such as frequencies, percentages, and averages—to illustrate the overall tendency of public opinion without making generalization beyond the sample. Although the results do not represent all social media users, they offer valuable insight into how a segment of engaged individuals responded to the issue, contributing to a broader understanding of public opinion formation in digital spaces and serving as a foundation for future research and communication strategies.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study based on data collected from 400 respondents on platform X, with participant selection based on their interaction with content related to the government's Free Nutritious Meals Program (MBG). The demographic profile of the respondents shows a diverse representation across age, gender, profession, and region. The majority of participants were between the ages 17-25 (53.1%), and followed by 26-34 (24.4%). This age distribution indicates a dominance of young adults, an age group often characterized by high social media usage, civic awareness, and active engagement with government discourse online. The gender distribution leaned slightly toward female respondents but remained relatively balanced. Professionally, students represented the largest group, followed by employees, freelancers, and others. This occupational spread reflects the profile of platform X's primary user base, where educational communities and early-career professionals are notably active in shaping online public opinion. Although MBG itself targets school-aged children as beneficiaries, the youth and young adults' respondents in this study represent a digitally active group that frequently engages with policy discussion on social media, making their perspective on MBG valuable in understanding broader public opinion. In terms of regional background, responses came from across major islands of Indonesia, although urban areas such as Jakarta, Bandung, and Surabaya were more prominent. This urban concentration suggests that the MBG discourse is especially visible and discussed in digital-savvy metropolitan contexts. However, the inclusion of voices from diverse provinces helps ensure a geographically inclusive overview of public opinion, contributing to the representativeness of study's findings.

### Belief Dimension

The belief dimension reflects the cognitive aspect of respondents' opinions toward MBG. With a mean score of 62.43% based on the Table 1, it indicates a generally hesitant stance. Respondents appear to recognize the good intention behind the program, yet they are uncertain about its structure, planning, and evidence base. This supports

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the notion that MBG and other government programs are often met with scepticism when lacking clarity or transparency in execution, particularly when public communication is limited or inconsistent.

**Table 1.** Belief Dimension Questionnaire Result

Belief									
Item	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Number	Score	Percentage	Category
		1	2	3	4				
1	I believe MBG is a positive step against malnutrition	76	124	117	83	400	1007	62,94%	Agree
2	I believe government planned MBG thoroughly	106	141	81	72	400	919	57,44%	Disagree
3	I believe MBG is designed to benefit the broader society	67	99	164	70	400	1037	64,81%	Agree
4	I believe MBG helps raise awareness about healthy eating habits	55	135	126	84	400	1039	64,94%	Agree
5	I believe MBG is based on real data and public needs	83	124	111	82	400	992	62,00%	Disagree
Mean								62,43%	Disagree

The results from the belief dimension indicate a nuanced pattern of public trust toward the MBG program. While a majority of respondents agreed that MBG is a positive step against malnutrition, designed to benefit society and raise awareness about healthy eating habits, they simultaneously expressed disagreement about the program being thoroughly planned or grounded in real data and public needs. This suggests that while the public may resonate with program’s moral and social intentions, they remain sceptical of its technical execution and policy design. As Abelson (1968) emphasized, belief is a fundamental component in the formation of public opinion, shaping how consistently and confidently individuals respond to policy initiatives. Furthermore, trust in the planning process significantly influences the strength of public belief. As stated by Nurrafi et al., n.d. (2024), belief plays an important role in forming opinions, a person with strong belief toward an issue or idea is more likely to have a clear and consistent opinion about it.

This finding reinforces the idea that belief is not merely shaped by intention or messaging, but also by the perceived credibility of implementation. In the context of MBG, even though the majority of respondents support its broader goals, doubts about the program’s foundation and planning may hinder full alignment with the initiative. Such cognitive dissonance—between approval of purpose and mistrust in execution—can result in fragmented or inconsistent public stances. Moreover, the gap between agreement on values and disagreement on strategy underscores a challenge often faced by government programs: a lack of visible; evidence-based policy communication. When technical details are either unclear or inaccessible, even well-meaning programs risk being

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seen as superficial or performative. To strengthen public belief, future communication about MBG must emphasize planning transparency and data accountability, making it easier for the public to align their values with institutional actions.

**Attitude Dimension**

The attitude dimension reflects how respondents emotionally engage with and evaluate the MBG program. The score of 62.35% according to Table 2, suggest cautious support where people may not oppose the initiative but do not yet feel personally connected to it either.

**Table 2.** Attitude Dimension Questionnaire Results

<b>Attitude</b>									
Item	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Number	Score	Percentage	Category
		1	2	3	4				
6	I feel happy that MBG shows concern for public nutrition	66	136	118	80	400	1012	63,25%	Agree
7	I am interested in the implementation process of MBG	50	104	138	108	400	1104	69,00%	Agree
8	I see MBG as a policy worth appreciating	93	125	112	70	400	959	59,94%	Disagree
9	I feel MBG is a good initiative that deserve support	84	140	103	73	400	965	60,31%	Disagree
10	I feel optimistic MBG will bring positive change to society	102	128	90	80	400	948	59,25%	Disagree
Mean								62.35%	Disagree

The results from the attitude dimension reflect a cautious yet emotionally open response from the public toward the MBG program. While agreement was relatively low on statements suggesting full support—such as viewing the program as worthy of appreciation, deserving of support, or being optimistic about its potential impact—higher agreement was found in more observational and emotionally lighter statements, like recognizing MBG’s concern for public nutrition and interest in its implementation. This contrast suggests that although the public is not yet ready to fully endorse the program, they are emotionally engaged and curious about its development. According to Abelson (1968), attitude involves an individual’s emotional evaluation and behavioural tendency toward a stimulus, in this case, a public policy. While the public exhibits an openness to learn about MBG, they show hesitation in expressing stronger emotional commitments such as pride, support, or optimism. This gap indicates that although the surface-level emotional response is activated, deeper affective alignment has yet to form. Respondents may feel that it is too early to declare the program worthy of recognition or to anticipate transformative societal fluctuating narratives in

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the media—ranging from implementation challenges to critical commentary—may subtly influence public caution, reinforcing a wait-and-see attitude among respondents. This aligns with early observations by McCombs and Shaw (1961), who found that public salience of an issue is often shaped by how consistently and prominently it is portrayed in the media, regardless of the actual substance of the policy.

These findings suggest that public attitude toward MBG is still in a formative stage—where emotional engagement is present, but not yet accompanied by conviction. Strengthening this dimension would require more than information dissemination; it would demand consistent emotional reinforcement through storytelling, success narratives, and meaningful participation that allows individuals to move from observers to supporters. As Dennison (2024) highlights, persuasive communication must appeal to both the cognitive and emotive layers of public opinion to foster stable and favourable attitudes.

## Perception Dimension

Perception measures how respondents judge the effectiveness, fairness, and real-world implementation of MBG. At 59.48% based on the Table 3, this was the lowest of all dimensions, suggesting that most respondents remain sceptical about MBG's actual performance.

**Table 3.** Perception Dimension Questionnaire Results

Perception									
Item	Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Number	Score	Percentage	Category
		1	2	3	4				
11	I think MBG has an effective distribution system	83	151	109	57	400	940	58.75%	Disagree
12	I think MBG has potential to expand its coverage	86	98	132	84	400	1014	63.38%	Agree
13	I see MBG as effective in improving people's quality of life	129	97	114	60	400	905	56,56%	Disagree
14	I think MBG is positively supported by social media users	94	148	95	63	400	927	57,94%	Disagree
15	I see MBG as an innovative policy that can inspire other regions or countries	108	98	108	86	400	972	60,75%	Disagree
Mean								59,48%	Disagree

Public perception of the MBG program reflects a tension between hopeful expectations and practical concerns. While many acknowledge the program's potential to reach broader beneficiaries, there remains scepticism regarding its current implementation, particularly in areas such as distribution efficiency, visible outcomes, and public engagement. Previous studies on school-feeding initiatives in other contexts have shown that while such programs



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are generally supported for their social objectives, they often face public doubt when execution appear inconsistent or poorly managed. As discussed by Tamiru et al., (2024), policy support tends to weaken when operational challenges—such as logistical barriers or inadequate resource allocation—overshadow the program's intended impact. In this context, the perception of MBG is shaped less by rejection of its goals, and more by a critical awareness of implementation gaps. These findings suggest that to foster stronger public confidence, policy narratives must be reinforced not only by intention, but also by tangible and transparent outcomes.

This dynamic aligns with Abelson's (1968) view that perception is shaped by how individuals interpret issues based on the information they receive, influenced by cultural background, past experiences, values, and prevailing narratives. These interpretive filters guide how a person constructs meaning from policy initiatives, which in turn affects their belief and attitude formation. In the case of MBG, the perceived disconnect between ambition and execution results in a form of sceptical engagement, where the public does not oppose the program, but remains unconvinced of its current value. This highlights the importance of reinforcing upstream components of opinion to ensure that perception evolves in a more favourable and stable direction. In summary, public opinion toward the MBG program reflects a cautious and critical engagement across all three dimensions; belief, attitude, and perception. While respondents recognize the program's good intentions, lingering doubts remain about its planning, emotional impact, and effectiveness. These hesitations may be reinforced by the lack of visible progress since its implementation began in October 2024, both in real-world outcomes and public narratives. Although rejection is not dominant, full support has yet to form. Strengthening credibility, emotional connection, and transparency will be key to shifting public opinion toward a more favourable direction.

## CLOSING

### Conclusion

This study examined public opinion toward the Free Nutritious Meals (MBG) program through three dimensions—belief, attitude, and perception—based on responses gathered from platform X. The findings suggest that while the public recognizes the program's intended social benefits, there remains considerable hesitation in accepting its structure, implementation, and impact. Belief in the program appears cognitively conflicted, emotional alignment is cautious, and perception is shaped by doubts around real-world execution. These results highlight a gap between policy aspiration and public trust, where support exists more in concept than in conviction.

The research also emphasizes the significance of transparent implementation, emotional engagement, and credible communication in shaping public opinion. In the case of MBG, the slow emergence of tangible results since its rollout in October 2024—paired with inconsistent media narratives—has likely amplified the public's wait-and-see stance. As digital platforms increasingly mediate opinion formation, governments must recognize that favourable public alignment cannot rely on intention alone. Instead, it must be earned through clear planning, inclusive narratives, and visible, measurable outcomes.

### Suggestion

Based on the findings, it is recommended that future implementations of the MBG program prioritize clear and transparent communication strategies to reduce public uncertainty and enhance trust. Engaging the public through digital platforms with accessible information and interactive feedback mechanisms could foster stronger support and participation. Additionally, collaboration with key opinion leaders or digital influencers may help bridge the gap between policymakers and citizens, especially among young social media users. For researchers, future studies could explore sentiment changes over time or investigate the role of media framing in influencing public perception of large-scale social programs.

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# PUBLIC OPINION FORMATION TOWARD THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS PROGRAM ON SOCIAL MEDIA 'X': A STUDY DURING THE PRABOWO-GIBRAN ADMINISTRATION

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