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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Paradox of Budget Efficiency in Prabowo's Administration

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Abstract: After his inauguration as the 8th President of Indonesia, President Prabowo decided to increase the number of ministers, deputy ministers, and ministerial-level officials. Under Prabowo's administration, there are 48 ministries, a significant increase compared to the previous government. Naturally, this expansion corresponds to a larger state budget allocation to support ministerial performance. However, through Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025, President Prabowo mandated budget efficiency in state and regional expenditures (APBN-APBD) for 2025. Though some remain unaffected, several ministries and state agencies have reduced their budgets in response to this instruction. This situation underscores an apparent inconsistency between these two early policies of Prabowo's administration. This study aims to analyze this inconsistency using a qualitative case study approach. The findings indicate that although President Prabowo's policies appear contradictory, they are driven by specific motives, namely accommodative-compromising interests and transactional politics in the expansion of ministries, as well as the need to allocate a substantial portion of the budget to one of his populist initiatives: the free nutritious meal initiative.

Keywords:

Prabowo's Government, Budgeting, Efficiency, Inconsistency, Paradox.

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1. Introduction

Following their triumph in the presidential election in a single round, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka were formally inaugurated on October 21, 2024. This began a new chapter in Indonesia's leadership and policymaking. As part of his executive prerogative, President Prabowo promptly assembled his cabinet by appointing ministers to assist in carrying out presidential duties. On October 20, 2024, Prabowo inaugurated 48 ministers and five ministerial-level officials. This move drew significant attention and surprise, as Prabowo's cabinet set a historical record for having the highest number of ministers compared to all previous post-reform presidents. For comparison, President Habibie's cabinet consisted of 36 ministers, President Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) had 35, President Megawati Soekarnoputri appointed 30 ministers, while President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) appointed 35 ministers in his first term and 34 in his second. A parallel can be drawn to the administration of President Joko Widodo (Jokowi), who maintained 34 ministries throughout both of his terms. (Setuningsih, 2024).

Table 1. The Number of Cabinets in Indonesia After the Reformation

PRESIDENT	CABINET'S NAME	NUMBER OF CABINET MEMBERS
Habibie	Reformasi Pembangunan	36
Abdurrahman Wahid/Gusdur	Persatuan Nasional	35
Megawati	Gotong Royong	30
Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono I	Indonesia Bersatu I	35
Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono II	Indonesia Bersatu II	34
Joko Widodo I	Indonesia Maju I	34
Joko Widodo II	Indonesia Maju II	34
Prabowo Subianto	Merah Putih	48

Source: (Setuningsih, 2024)

Many ministers and ministerial-level officials in Prabowo's era have attracted much attention. In the position of deputy ministers, Prabowo also appointed 56 deputy ministers. At the BNI Investor Daily Summit on October 10, 2024, Prabowo explained that he would form a cabinet larger than the previous administration for several reasons. First, the reason is to accommodate various groups in Indonesia. Prabowo directly stated, "It is inevitable that the coalition is large. Later, people will say, 'Wow, Prabowo's cabinet is big, too many.' Well, our country is big, my friend! Every group must have representation from eastern, western, and central Indonesia. From tribe A, tribe B (Nugroho, 2024)."

Second, Prabowo believes that Indonesia's vast territory and large population also require a large cabinet to solve various issues through Prabowo's government policies and programs (Yanwardhana, 2024). Prabowo explained this during the first plenary cabinet session, "I realize that this number (of ministers) may be considered large, but we are a great nation. We cannot deny that we are the fourth-largest country in the world by population. In terms of area, we are as large as Western Europe. Europe consists of 27 countries, while we are one country. Managing Europe requires 27 finance ministers, 27 defense ministers, and 27 interior ministers, and we are as big as Europe (Intan, 2024)." The rationale behind the increase in coordinating ministers is also significant. This assertion was made by the Secretary General of the Gerindra Party, Ahmad Muzani, who elucidated that incorporating coordinating ministers is intended to enhance the efficacy of communication (Hadi et al., 2024).

This cabinet expansion certainly has various impacts. Some ministries do not have official offices, staff, or other infrastructure or operational support. The addition of ministries will certainly be proportional to the budget needed to support the performance of these new ministries. Creating new ministries will invariably necessitate a corresponding increase in budgetary resources to support their operations. The financial resources necessary for the operation of 48 ministerial departments and the five ministerial-level officials are, without question, more than those required by previous cabinets, a circumstance directly resulting from

expanding the number of ministries (Sianipar, 2024). However, through Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025, the President ordered all state institutions to implement budget efficiency in 2025. Several forms of efficiency include cutting office expenses, maintenance, official travel, government assistance, infrastructure development, and equipment procurement. This applies not only to the central government but also to local governments.

Studies on coalitions in Indonesia's political system have been widely discussed. First, Rishan (2020) argued that there is a risk of a "large" coalition in presidentialism. The first risk is that the government tends to be compromising. Due to the merging of executive and legislative power, the President becomes very accommodating to the interests of political parties. This opinion is supported by Fatah (2014), who explains that political parties in Indonesia are transactional. Hence, the distribution of ministerial seats results from compromise and transactions, known as "horse-trading politics" (Fatah, 2014). Second, a large coalition does not entirely guarantee government stability, especially in the relationship between the President and the House of Representatives (DPR). Third, consolidating a substantial coalition can potentially engender an environment conducive to the proliferation of authoritarianism. Due to the majority of political parties in the DPR aligning with the government, the President becomes the epicenter of executive power and controls political parties in parliament. This tendency causes the government to be easily trapped in an authoritarian regime.

Another study by Wospakrik (2016) posited that the coalitions formed during the SBY and Jokowi administrations share similarities, specifically that they resulted from political compromise among pro-government coalition parties. Furthermore, Efriza (2018) expounded that during President Jokowi's inaugural term, he aspired to establish a coalition comprising political parties that shared a congruent ideological orientation and program—a "consensus coalition." This was not easy to achieve because government stability was disrupted early in his administration. Eventually, President Jokowi chose to form an "all-party" coalition. Jokowi managed the coalition with leadership that accommodated supporting parties and was transactional. In another research, Wasisto (2021) delineated four patterns of ministerial selection by elected presidents in Indonesia, which he concluded from the Jokowi and SBY administrations. First, ministers are chosen from coalition political parties as a symbol of political agreement. The number of ministers from a political party is usually determined by pre-election agreements and the party's electoral results. Second, ministers come from political and business circles. Third, ministers come from non-political business backgrounds. Fourth, ministers are chosen based on professionalism. Finally, Sanjaya (2016) explained that coalitions during Jokowi's era were strongly influenced by political bargaining.

Jokowi was initially supported only by four parties: (1) the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), (2) the National Awakening Party (PKB), (3) the NasDem Party, and (4) the People's Conscience Party (Hanura). However, after being elected as president, the parties that initially supported Prabowo—United Development Party (PPP), National Mandate Party (PAN), and Golkar Party—switched to supporting Jokowi's government and obtained ministerial seats in Jokowi's cabinet known as the Working Cabinet (*Kabinet Kerja*) and the Great Indonesia Coalition (*Koalisi Indonesia Hebat*). According to Hanusch (2010) and Sanjaya's (2016) research, there is an aspect of the political business cycle in the coalition, from forming pre-election coalitions to determining the election winner and forming the ruling coalition's government. This study explains how the governing coalition determines the political budget and debts for political expenses.

In this study, it is interesting to examine two policies of President Prabowo at the beginning of his administration. First, he decided to increase the number of ministries, ministers, deputy ministers, and ministerial-level officials, which naturally increased the state budget for this expansion. On the other hand, President Prabowo decided to implement large-scale budget efficiency measures through Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025. From these two policy case studies, the researcher will attempt to understand the reasons behind President Prabowo's decisions, which appear contradictory in the researcher's view.

2. Methods

This study analyzes two of Prabowo's policies at the beginning of his administration: expanding the number of cabinet members and implementing budget efficiency measures. The researcher also seeks to establish a connection between these two policies. These policies will serve as case studies in this research, which employs a qualitative method. A case study is a research design in which the researcher conducts an in-depth case analysis, which may involve a program, event, activity, process, or individual over a specific period (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The researcher will collect data from published interviews, official statements, and documents related to Prabowo's policies on increasing the number of ministers and budget efficiency. These data will then be analyzed to enable the researcher to describe the factors driving the expansion of the cabinet and the reasons behind the President's issuance of Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025 regarding budget efficiency.

3. Results and Discussion

Prabowo's Bloated Cabinet

The 2024 Presidential Election resulted in the victory of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka as the elected pair, reflecting a new dynamic in national politics. The victory was achieved with the support of a substantial coalition and a comprehensive communication strategy. However, the process was not without controversy, particularly about Gibran's candidacy, which was facilitated by a Constitutional Court decision that amended the age requirement for presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Basyari, 2023). After officially winning the election in a single round, Prabowo's initial policy—forming a cabinet with a larger number of ministers than previous administrations, often referred to as an "excessive cabinet"—became a subject of public scrutiny.

Prabowo provided various justifications in several speeches, as mentioned in the background. First, it will accommodate diverse groups; second, it will manage Indonesia's vast territory; and third, it will specifically coordinate ministers to enhance communication efficiency. The *Kabinet Merah Putih* (Red and White Cabinet), announced on October 20, 2024, consists of 41 ministers, seven coordinating ministers, 55 deputy ministers, and five ministerial-level officials (Septia, 2024). This cabinet marked the largest ministries in Indonesian history since the New Order era. From the composition of Prabowo's cabinet, out of 48 ministers, 23 and 18 deputy ministers came from political parties (Ihsanuddin, 2024).

Table 2. Political Party Representation in Prabowo's Cabinet

POLITICAL PARTY	NUMBER OF MINISTERS	NUMBER OF DEPUTY MINISTERS
Golkar Party	8	3
Great Indonesia Movement Party (<i>Gerindra</i>)	5	6
Democratic Party (<i>Demokrat</i>)	3	1
National Mandate Party (PAN)	2	2
National Awakening Party (PKB)	2	1
Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI)	1	2
Indonesian People's Wave Party (<i>Partai Gelora</i>)	-	2
Prosperous Justice Party (PKS)	1	-
Crescent Star Party (PBB)	1	-
Just and Prosperous People's Party (<i>Partai Prima</i>)	-	1

Source: (Septia, 2024)

It is interesting to critically examine the composition of ministers and deputy ministers in Prabowo's administration. His cabinet is the result of accommodative, compromise-driven, and transactional politics. Accommodative politics occurs when the government tries to accommodate its opponents, usually by giving

strategic positions (Sabrina et al., 2024). As a result, the government must take into account the interests of all parties joining a coalition (Sabrina et al., 2024). This can be seen from the *Koalisi Indonesia Maju* (KIM) formation. KIM, a coalition of nine political parties, dominates the ministerial composition. These parties contributed to Prabowo-Gibran's victory through mass mobilization and logistical support. In return, they expected strategic positions. The distribution of ministerial seats in the cabinet is a direct consequence of pre-election political agreements. Coalition parties generally negotiate power-sharing arrangements before the election, although political dynamics, lobbying, and bargaining still occur during the cabinet formation process. This pattern aligns with what Sanjaya (2016) described as the political business cycle. However, the ministerial composition is not limited to KIM coalition parties but includes parties initially outside the coalition, such as the PKB and PKS. This decision is seen as an effort to expand the coalition, directly impacting Prabowo's legislative coalition by securing additional support from PKB and PKS. This phenomenon reflects the reality of Indonesian politics, where government stability often relies on compromise and power distribution among political elites.

In Indonesia's multiparty presidential system, accommodation, elite compromise, and transactional politics are crucial for the elected president to ensure government stability. These elements within the cabinet help reduce parliamentary conflicts and facilitate executive policy-making. Currently, only two parties remain outside the government: PDIP and NasDem. Despite winning the legislative election with 110 seats, PDIP's representation is significantly outnumbered by Prabowo's coalition. NasDem, with only 69 seats, also lacks substantial influence. Meanwhile, Prabowo's coalition parties' combined seats amount to 401 seats in the DPR. This composition directly aligns the legislature with government policies, thereby diminishing the effectiveness of the DPR in its check-and-balance function. If analyzed further, this composition lays the groundwork for an authoritarian-leaning government, moving away from democratic values, as the opposition is too small to effectively voice criticism against government policies. When the government implements controversial or detrimental policies, the legislature is unlikely to exercise its oversight powers due to the overwhelming dominance of pro-government parties in parliament.

Beyond political parties' accommodation, attempts at compromise and transactional politics in Prabowo's administration are not limited to political parties; he is willing to engage with individuals in the business sector, irrespective of their affiliation to a particular political party. This aligns with Wasisto's (2021) research on cabinet formation patterns in Indonesia. Specifically, the inclusion of business figures—whether politically affiliated or not—has been frequently linked by researchers to the relationship between oligarchy and democracy in Indonesia. Research by Layyina et al. (2024) concluded that oligarchy negatively impacts Indonesian politics. Damanik et al. (2024) differentiated oligarchy in two historical periods: the New Order and Reformation. The explanation was that under the Reformation era, oligarchic political influence became more pronounced as individuals combined economic and political power.

This contrasts with the New Order era, where business actors rarely held direct political power. Warburton (2024) further supported this by highlighting an intensification of this trend during Jokowi's administration, where established business figures increasingly took over government positions. Examining the composition of Prabowo's cabinet, it is evident that he continues this trend, appointing political and non-political business figures. This research suggests that business elites now wield significant influence over Indonesian politics, particularly in political decision-making. Consequently, many policy decisions accommodate the interests of capitalist politicians and business actors connected to politics, especially in strategic sectors such as natural resources, infrastructure, and energy. This indicates a distortion of policy-making for business interests (Winters, 2011; Damanik et al., 2024).

Beyond allocating ministerial seats to coalition parties that supported Prabowo and PKB and PKS, which joined after his victory, an interesting aspect of his cabinet is the presence of 17 ministers from Jokowi's administration (Fajriadi, 2024). While this can be attributed to party leadership roles or professional expertise still deemed necessary by Prabowo, it must also be examined critically regarding Jokowi's pivotal role in

Prabowo-Gibran's victory in the 2024 election. Jokowi played a central role in securing the Prabowo-Gibran ticket through various means, most notably his popularity effect. The Indonesia Elections and Strategic (indEX) Research Institute found that Jokowi's administration enjoyed 82.3% public approval, making his endorsement a decisive factor in the election outcome (Rassat, 2023). Voters who supported Jokowi tended to choose Prabowo-Gibran, expecting them to continue Jokowi's programs.

Second, the politicization of social assistance to secure Prabowo-Gibran's victory. Tempo reported that during the campaign period, several ministers in Jokowi's cabinet, who were also part of Prabowo-Gibran's campaign team, continuously urged public support for the pair in the 2024 presidential election (Rahayu et al., 2024). CNN Indonesia (2024) recorded that the Jokowi administration disbursed IDR 11 trillion in social assistance during the campaign. The Ministry of Finance data showed increased social assistance allocation in 2024, rising from IDR 476 trillion in 2023 to IDR 496.8 trillion in 2024. Another Tempo's special coverage revealed that Jokowi's social assistance program was also directed toward regions that were strongholds of Prabowo-Gibran's political opponents in the 2024 election, concluding that the distribution was politically motivated to secure Prabowo-Gibran's victory (Revanda, 2024).

The allocation of state funds to support the Prabowo-Gibran ticket exemplifies a classic case of pork barrel politics. Pork barrel politics is the strategic distribution of government resources and services to specific geographic areas to benefit the incumbent's constituents or influence those supporting political rivals (White, 2013). In line with this definition, Syahadat et al. (2024) concluded that Jokowi's pre-election social assistance program that targeted highly populated voter regions such as Central Java, East Java, and West Java was an application of pork barrel politics. This distribution served two goals: (1) disrupting PDIP's strong voter base in Central Java and (2) reinforcing Prabowo-Gibran's support in East and West Java to secure an electoral advantage.

Budget Efficiency

On January 22, 2025, President Prabowo Subianto officially enacted a budget efficiency policy through Presidential Instruction of the Republic of Indonesia No. 1 of 2025 on Expenditure Efficiency in Implementing the Regional Budget for the 2025 Fiscal Year. This instruction was directed at Red and White Cabinet ministers, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the Indonesian National Police (POLRI), the Attorney General's Office, non-ministerial institutions, governors, and mayors. The Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025 mandates a review of the national and regional budgets (APBN and APBD) and transfers to regional governments to achieve a total efficiency target of IDR 306.6 trillion (Republik Indonesia, 2025). The budget cuts are divided into IDR 256 trillion for ministries and agencies and IDR 50.5 trillion for regional transfers. Ministers and heads of agencies must identify areas for budget reduction, particularly in operational expenses such as official travel, maintenance, and procurement, while ensuring that employee salaries and social assistance remain unaffected. The efficiency measures must be reported to the DPR, with budget revisions submitted to the Minister of Finance no later than February 14, 2025. Meanwhile, governors, regents, and mayors are instructed to limit ceremonial expenses and policy studies and reduce official travel by 50%. The Minister of Finance is responsible for setting budget efficiency measures for ministries and agencies, adjusting regional transfers, and blocking certain budget items within the government's work plan (DIPA). The Minister of Home Affairs must monitor the efficiency of regional budgets. At the same time, the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency (BPKP) oversees the implementation of this instruction to ensure compliance with good governance practices.

Following this summary of Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025, the next section will detail the specific cost-cutting measures affecting various stakeholders and expenditure reductions. In his speech at the Jatim International Expo in Surabaya on February 10, 2025—which was aired through the Narasi Newsroom YouTube channel—Prabowo affirmed that the objective of budget efficiency was to support priority programs, such as the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), the Tuberculosis Eradication Program, the

Comprehensive Hospital Development Program, the Food Security Program, and the Integrated Excellence School Development Program. Prabowo also stated that he would cut expenditures for ceremonial events—birthdays, ceremonies, historical commemorations, and official travel—by 50% (Narasi Newsroom, 2025). On another occasion, Prabowo made a similar statement when attending the Gerindra Party's 17th Anniversary Celebration. During the event, Prabowo said that the government had been compelled to utilize funds from the budget efficiency reserve to provide support for the MBG program. "Rp 24 trillion will be spent on the Free Nutritious Meals. Our people, our children, must not go hungry," said Prabowo (Setuningsih et al., 2025).

Table 3. Comparison of Ministry/Agency Budget Details Before and After Efficiency Impact

MINISTRIES/INSTITUTIONS	BUDGET BEFORE REDUCTION	EFFICIENCY CUT	BUDGET AFTER REDUCTION
Ministry of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning/National Land Agency	Rp6,4 trillion	Rp2 trillion	Rp4 trillion
Ministry of State Apparatus Utilization and Bureaucratic Reform	Rp392 billion	Rp184 billion	Rp208 billion
Ministry of Home Affairs	Rp4,7 trillion	Rp2,1 trillion	Rp2,6 trillion
Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources	Rp3,9 trillion	Rp1,65 trillion	Rp2,25 trillion
Ministry of Cultural Affairs	Rp2,3 trillion	Rp1,1 trillion	Rp1,2 trillion
Ministry of Villages and Development of Disadvantaged Regions	Rp2,19 trillion	Rp722 billion	Rp1,45 trillion
Ministry of State-Owned Enterprises	Rp277,5 billion	Rp116,4 billion	Rp161,9 billion
Ministry of Immigration and Correction	Rp15,9 trillion	Rp4,4 trillion	Rp11,4 trillion
Ministry of Public Works	Rp110,4 trillion	Rp60 trillion	Rp50,4 trillion
Ministry of Finance	Rp53,1 trillion	Rp8,9 trillion	Rp44,2 trillion
Ministry of Human Rights	Rp174 billion	Rp60 billion	Rp113,8 billion
Ministry of Trade	Rp1,853 trillion	Rp720 trillion	Rp1,132 trillion
Ministry of Cooperatives	Rp473,31 billion	Rp155,83 billion	Rp317,48 billion
Ministry of Law	RRp5 trillion	Rp2,2 trillion	Rp2,7 trillion
Ministry of Social Affairs	Rp78,5 trillion	Rp12,3 trillion	Rp66,2 trillion
Ministry of Social Affairs	Rp79,5 trillion	Rp970 billion	Rp78,6 trillion
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education	Rp33 trillion	Rp7,2 trillion	Rp26 trillion
Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology	Rp56 trillion	Rp14,3 trillion	Rp42,3 trillion
National Institute of Public Administration (LAN)	Rp328 billion	Rp91,4 billion	Rp237 billion
General Election Commission (KPU RI)	Rp3 trillion	Rp 843 billion	Rp2,2 trillion
The General Election Supervisor Agency (BAWASLU)	Rp2,4 trillion	Rp955 billion	Rp1,4 trillion
National Archives Agency (ANRI)	Rp293 billion	Rp93,1 billion	Rp200 billion
National Civil Service Agency (BKN)	Rp798 billion	Rp195 billion	Rp603 billion
Election Organizing Honorary Council (DKPP)	Rp89 billion	Rp34 billion	Rp55 billion
The Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia	Rp255 billion	Rp91,6 billion	Rp163 billion
The Judicial Commission of Indonesia (KY)	Rp184 billion	Rp74 billion	Rp110 billion
National Meteorology, Climatology, and Geophysics Agency (BMKG)	Rp2,8 trillion	Rp1,4 trillion	Rp1,4 trillion
National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN)	Rp5,8 trillion	Rp1,4 trillion	Rp4,4 trillion
National Cyber and Crypto Agency (BSSN)	Rp1,3 trillion	Rp538 billion	Rp783 billion
National Resilience Institute (Lemhannas)	Rp178 billion	Rp58 billion	Rp128 billion
The National Commission on Violence	Rp47 billion	Rp18,3 billion	Rp28,7 billion

Against Women (Komnas Perempuan)			
The National Commission of Human Rights (Komnas HAM)	Rp112,8 billion	Rp41 billion	Rp71,6 billion
Republic of Indonesia Maritime Security Agency (Bakamla RI)	Rp1 trillion	Rp354 billion	Rp729,9 billion
The National Border Management Agency (BNPP)	Rp267 billion	Rp128 billion	Rp138 billion
The National Agency for Counter Terrorism (BNPT)	Rp480 billion	Rp153 billion	Rp275 billion

Source: (CNN, 2024)

Prabowo is not the only one who is pushing to finance the MBG program using funds from budget efficiency, as other actors are also advocating for this approach. The sentiment was also reiterated by Sri Mulyani, the Minister of Finance, during the presentation of the Macroeconomic Framework and Principles of Fiscal Policy (KEM PPKF) for the 2026 State Budget in the DPR plenary session. In her presentation, the government will prioritize a budget of Rp 217.86 trillion, which will be the responsibility of the National Nutrition Agency as the executor of the MBG program (Arifin, 2025). As Arifin (2025) pointed out, allocating a very large amount of budget to one post will have implications for reducing the budget for other posts. This means that many programs will not be implemented optimally, or even not be able to run at all.

Table 4. National Budget Spending Efficiency

KINDS OF EXPENDITURE	EFFICIENCY CUT
Office Supplies (ATK)	90%
Ceremonial Activities	56,9%
Meetings, Seminars, and Workshops	45%
Research and Analysis	51,5%
Training and Technical Guide (BIMTEK)	29%
Professional Honorariums	40%
Printing and Souvenirs	75,9%
Building, Vehicle, and Equipment Rentals	73,3%
Software Licenses	21,6%
Consultancy Services	45,7%
Government Assistance Program	16,7%
Maintenance and Repairs	10,2%
Official Travel	53,9%
Equipment and Machinery	28%
Infrastructure Development	34,4%
Miscellaneous	59,1%

Source: Surat Edaran Menteri Keuangan RI tentang Efisiensi Belanja Kementerian/Lembaga dalam Pelaksanaan Anggaran Pendapatan dan Belanja Negara Tahun Anggaran 2025.

Through statements delivered by Prabowo's administration, researchers have ascertained that the budget efficiency policy is intended to fund the populist program initiated by Prabowo-Gibran as their campaign promises, one of which is the MBG program. Populism is a political ideology that emphasizes the power of the people in governance, promoting policies that favor large segments of society (Holcombe, 2021). Populist leaders consistently highlight the term "the people" and claim to represent public interests in their agendas and political rhetoric (de Vreese et al., 2018). Typically, populism emerges when major political parties lose public trust, particularly when corruption scandals and dissatisfaction with socio-economic and political conditions arise (Manucci, 2017). The scope of the MBG program is extensive, covering 82.9 million people with a budget approved by DPR amounting to Rp71 trillion (Safitri & Farisa, 2025). This amount is allocated for 3 million students until April 2025, then expanding to 6 million students by August 2025 and reaching 15–17.5 million recipients from August to December 2025. Unsurprisingly, this program requires Rp1–2 trillion monthly (Intan, 2025). This program can be classified as a populist initiative as it targets a large segment of society, specifically school children.

Budget efficiency poses a significant challenge due to the increasing demands of ministries in the Prabowo era, with the growing number of ministries further complicating the situation. Notably, some newly established ministries do not yet have permanent offices. One such example is the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, where Agus Harimurti, speaking at the Presidential Palace in Jakarta on Monday, revealed that the exact location of his office remains undetermined. Budget efficiency measures have created significant challenges related to the needs of various ministries, especially newly established ministries. This has certainly had an impact on Prabowo's administrative performance.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that there is an inconsistency in President Prabowo's approach to two key policies in the early stages of his administration. First, increasing the number of ministers, deputy ministers, and ministerial-level officials demands a larger budget allocation. However, through Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025, President Prabowo mandated budget efficiency measures, which would inevitably impact ministerial performance. Thus, it is appropriate to characterize these two initial policies of President Prabowo as paradoxical. The researcher concludes that competing interests have led to Prabowo's inconsistency in these two policies. In expanding the number of ministries, the influence of political compromise, transactional politics, and accommodative politics is evident—Prabowo explicitly acknowledged this in several speeches. As a result, Prabowo has not yet established a professional or "Zaken Kabinet" but instead continues the accommodative and transactional political style seen in the administrations of SBY and Jokowi. Regarding the budget efficiency policy, the primary motivation is to fulfill Prabowo's campaign promise of providing free nutritious meals, which requires substantial funding. While the government has justified budget efficiency by citing excessive and misallocated spending within ministries and state institutions, it has also openly acknowledged that the savings from these cuts are being redirected to fund the MBG program, a populist initiative of Prabowo's administration.

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