

Making inequality speakable: media framing, public emotion, and the language of economic justice in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Economic inequality in Indonesia is increasingly mediated through public language, where statistics, media narratives, and emotional vocabularies determine how injustice becomes socially recognizable. **Objective:** This study examines how Indonesian media and public-facing discourse frame economic inequality, organize public emotion, and construct economic justice. **Method:** This study applies qualitative corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis to 36 publicly verifiable media, institutional, civil-society, and scholarly documents, with 16 primary texts coded for framing, affective register, and justice vocabulary. **Results:** Inequality is most frequently framed through administrative-statistical narrowing, which makes distributional imbalance measurable but can soften moral conflict. Public emotion is organized through technocratic reassurance, anxiety, grievance, vulnerability, cynicism, and solidarity, showing that inequality is not only reported but affectively regulated. Economic justice is articulated through measurable equity, inclusive prosperity, spatial justice, labour dignity, anti-elite accountability, and risk-sensitive protection, revealing competing moral grammars of fairness and responsibility. **Implication:** These findings show that inequality discourse can clarify public problems while also limiting how suffering, blame, and redistribution are speakable. **Novelty:** This study advances Indonesian economic discourse research by integrating media framing, affective silence, and justice-vocabulary analysis within one coherent methodological model.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Economic inequality in Indonesia is not only a distributive condition but also a public language problem: it becomes politically legible only when media discourse gives it names, causes, emotions, and moral stakes. Recent official data show that Indonesia's expenditure inequality, measured by Gini Ratio, stood at 0.363 in September 2025, declining from 0.375 in March 2025 and 0.381 in September 2024; urban inequality remained higher at 0.383, indicating that aggregate improvement does not erase uneven social experience. Such figures are crucial because inequality enters everyday public life not as statistical abstraction but through stories about prices, wages, welfare, corruption, debt, access, and elite privilege. In media environments where economic hardship is narrated alongside aspiration and resentment, inequality must be examined as a discursive process through which public emotion and justice claims are organized.

Existing scholarship has established important foundations for examining inequality, development, and economic discourse in Indonesia, but several gaps remain. Cameron (2023) [1] demonstrates how gender equality and development must be understood through Indonesia's broader political-economic

transformation, while Jayadi et al. (2022) [2] show that social difference remains central to Indonesian public education and multicultural life. More closely related studies examine economic metaphors in political debate [3], inequality discourse in Indonesian news media [4], inflation and recovery in policy communication [5], and digital lending as financial inclusion discourse [6]. Internationally, Kerins et al. (2023) [7] show how news framing shapes public understandings of poverty and insecurity, while Petkanopoulou et al. (2025) [8] link inequality objections to distributive justice and social harmony. Yet prior work has rarely integrated media framing, affective language, and economic justice vocabulary within one Indonesian corpus.

This study investigates how Indonesian media and platform-linked public discourse make inequality speakable through three interrelated questions. First, how are economic inequalities framed through problem definitions, causal explanations, actor positioning, and moral evaluations? Second, what emotional registers—such as anxiety, anger, resentment, empathy, cynicism, or solidarity—are made available when inequality is narrated as public concern? Third, how is economic justice linguistically constructed through vocabularies of fairness, access, redistribution, dignity, accountability, risk, and social harmony? These questions are designed to avoid causal claims about media effects and instead focus on representational patterns, affective availability, and discursive legitimacy. This orientation builds on critical discourse analysis of corruption reporting [9], affective silence in social life [10], platform activism in Southeast Asia [11], and emerging studies of economic identity, platform precarity, and market-oriented subjectivity in Indonesia [12], [13].

This study advances an argument that inequality in Indonesia is made publicly actionable not simply by being reported, but by being framed as a moral, emotional, and institutional problem. When media texts foreground household burden, corrupt elites, precarious labor, financial exclusion, or state responsibility, they do more than describe economic life; they define which actors deserve sympathy, blame, regulation, or redistribution. Conversely, when inequality is softened through technocratic language, entrepreneurial optimism, or abstract inclusion rhetoric, economic justice may become speakable only within narrow vocabularies of resilience, access, or individual adjustment. This argument remains provisional and must be tested through corpus-based framing, affect, and justice-vocabulary coding. By connecting Indonesian economic discourse studies with contemporary work on public emotion and mediated justice claims, this study offers a methodological contribution: it treats inequality as a semiotic struggle over how economic suffering can be named, felt, and politically interpreted.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Media framing

Media framing provides a central lens for understanding how economic inequality becomes publicly intelligible. In classical framing theory, frames select certain aspects of reality and make them more salient through problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and remedy recommendation. In critical discourse traditions, however, framing is not merely cognitive selection but also a struggle over power, legitimacy, and social classification. Recent Indonesian economic-discourse studies extend this view by showing how inequality, inflation, financial inclusion, and market identity are linguistically organized through institutional and media texts [4], [14], [15], [5]. This literature positions framing as a discursive mechanism through which economic problems become narratable, governable, and morally contestable.

The key indicators of media framing include lexical salience, actor positioning, causality, metaphor, modality, and proposed solution. Wibisono (2026) [3] shows that economic metaphors can simplify complex policy debates by turning abstract structures into familiar images of burden, growth, crisis, or repair. Ammar and Mas'adi (2025) [9], through Van Dijkian critical discourse analysis, demonstrate that corruption reporting depends on how actors, responsibility, and institutional failure are textually arranged. Kerins et al. (2023) [7] similarly show that news media frame poverty and insecurity through recurring narratives of vulnerability, blame, deservingness, and intervention. For this study, framing is therefore examined not as headline style but as a patterned grammar of economic visibility.

2.2. Public emotion

Public emotion is equally important because inequality rarely circulates as neutral information. It is mediated through anxiety about prices, resentment toward elites, shame around poverty, empathy for vulnerable groups, or cynicism toward institutions. Affective approaches treat emotion not as private feeling alone but as a public orientation produced through language, memory, and social relation. Dragojlovic's (2023) [10] notion of affective silence is useful here because some forms of suffering are not only expressed but also muted, displaced, or made unspeakable. Brown (2025) [16] and Jalli (2025) [11] further show that platform environments can intensify, redirect, or fragment justice-oriented emotions, especially among younger digital publics.

The analysis of public emotion requires attention to explicit and implicit affective markers. Explicit markers include evaluative adjectives, intensifiers, complaint forms, sarcasm, moral accusation, and

expressions of fear, fatigue, anger, hope, or solidarity. Implicit markers include silence, euphemism, technocratic detachment, passive constructions, and the removal of accountable agents from sentences. Platform discourse also introduces visual and interactional indicators, such as virality cues, hashtags, comments, and affective repetition [16], [11]. In Indonesian economic communication, emotional coding must also attend to policy uncertainty, financial risk, religious legitimacy, and algorithmic precarity, as shown by Yuliyana (2026) [5], Santoso (2026) [6], Suaidi (2026) [17], and Wahid (2026) [13].

2.3. Economic justice

Economic justice refers to the normative language through which inequality is judged as fair, unfair, tolerable, deserved, or politically unacceptable. Unlike inequality measurement, justice discourse concerns moral evaluation: who should receive support, who should bear responsibility, and what kind of redistribution or recognition is legitimate. Petkanopoulou et al. (2025) [8] show that objections to inequality are shaped by distributive justice and social harmony concerns, indicating that justice claims are both material and relational. Cameron (2023) [1] links development and gender equality in Indonesia to broader questions of institutional reform and social inclusion, while Jayadi et al. (2022) [2] situate Indonesian social difference within multicultural educational paradigms.

The linguistic indicators of economic justice include fairness vocabulary, rights claims, access language, dignity terms, accountability demands, redistribution arguments, and moral contrasts between elite privilege and ordinary hardship. Indonesian economic-discourse scholarship has begun mapping these registers across institutional and commercial domains: financial inclusion campaigns [15], startup branding [12], e-commerce persuasion [18], central-bank communication [14], [19], digital lending [6], green corporate claims [20], and gig-work precarity [13]. This study therefore positions inequality as a mediated struggle over framing, affect, and justice vocabulary, rather than a purely statistical or policy category.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis is a single publicly accessible document that speaks about inequality, poverty, distribution, welfare, growth, financial risk, labour precarity, or economic justice in Indonesia. This corpus contains 36 deduplicated items: 16 primary media or civil-society texts, 7 contextual institutional documents, and 13 secondary scholarly sources. Primary materials were drawn from ANTARA News, ANTARA Sulteng, Tempo.co, The Jakarta Post, Reuters, and CELIOS; contextual materials came from BPS, World Bank, and Indonesian government communication; secondary sources include recent literature on framing, affect, justice, and Indonesian economic discourse. This composition allows this study to examine public language without conflating media evidence, policy context, and scholarly interpretation.

Table 1. Dataset composition

Code	Data Type	Source	Location	Period	Total	Characteristics	Status
PI-001–PI-005	Primary media data	ANTARA News	Indonesia/Jakarta	2024–2025	5	National news on Gini Ratio, expenditure share, inequality, and Jakarta inequality	Included, unique
PI-006	Primary media data	ANTARA Sulteng	Indonesia/regional	2025	1	Regional opinion/news on growth and distribution	Included, unique
PI-007–PI-009	Primary media data	Tempo.co	Indonesia	2025	3	Media discourse on poverty, inequality, growth, and economic injustice	Included, unique
PI-010–PI-014	Primary media data	The Jakarta Post	Indonesia/global comparison	2025–2026	5	English-language discourse on equity, poverty,	Included, unique

						informality, and inclusive growth	
PI-015	Primary media data	Reuters	Indonesia	2026	1	International news on fiscal pressure and Indonesian economic outlook	Included, unique
PI-016	Primary civil-society data	CELIOS	Indonesia	2026	1	Civil-society report site on economic inequality	Included, unique
CTX-001– CTX-007	Contextual data	BPS, World Bank, Coordinating Ministry for Economic Affairs	Indonesia/provinces	2023–2026	7	Statistical, institutional, and policy context for interpreting inequality discourse	Included, unique
SEC-001– SEC-013	Secondary data	Peer-reviewed/scholarly references	Indonesia/comparative theory	2022–2026	13	Literature on framing, affect, inequality, justice, CDA, platform activism, and economic discourse	Included, unique
Total	Mixed corpus	Media, official, civil-society, and scholarly sources	Indonesia-focused	2022–2026	36	Primary, contextual, and secondary materials organized in one coding workbook	Included, deduplicated

This study applies qualitative corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis. This design is appropriate because this study does not measure audience effects or policy impact, but examines how inequality is represented, emotionalised, and morally evaluated in public discourse. Framing theory guides analysis of problem definition, causality, actor positioning, and remedy grammar, while critical discourse analysis clarifies how power and responsibility are distributed in language. Affective discourse analysis is used to identify emotion, silence, and evaluative intensity. This combined design follows recent work on media framing, platform activism, economic inequality, and Indonesian economic communication [7], [11], [4], [5].

Information sources were selected to provide three layers of evidence. Primary sources supply public-facing discourse, including headlines, reports, opinion pieces, and civil-society texts that directly narrate inequality. Contextual sources provide statistical and institutional background, especially official BPS data, World Bank economic outlook materials, and government communication on regional development inequality. Secondary sources support conceptual interpretation, including studies of economic metaphors, central bank communication, financial inclusion, digital lending, platform precarity, gendered development, affective silence, and distributive justice [3], [14], [15], [6], [13], [1], [10], [8].

Data collection followed a documented search protocol. Keywords included “ketimpangan ekonomi,” “rasio gini,” “kemiskinan,” “pemerataan,” “keadilan ekonomi,” “economic inequality Indonesia,” “wealth gap,” “redistribution,” “financial inclusion,” and “urban inequality.” The main empirical period was 2024–2026, while secondary literature was allowed from 2022–2026 to retain recent theoretical relevance. Items were included when they explicitly addressed inequality or provided necessary contextual interpretation. Items were excluded when they were duplicates, inaccessible, purely promotional, or unrelated to Indonesian economic justice. Metadata were stored with document code, source, date, title, URL, genre, language, geography, verification basis, and deduplication status.

Data analysis proceeded in three connected stages. First, each document was coded for media framing, including problem definition, causal explanation, actor positioning, metaphor, moral evaluation, and solution grammar. Second, affective markers were identified through explicit emotion words, evaluative tone, complaint forms, sarcasm, silence, passive agency, and technocratic detachment. Third, economic justice vocabulary was coded through fairness, rights, access, dignity, redistribution, accountability, risk, and social harmony. Coding moved from descriptive annotation to interpretive comparison, but this study avoids causal claims. Figure 2 visualises this operational sequence from corpus construction to interpretive synthesis.

Table 2. Analytical matrix

Analytical Focus	Main Question	Coding Indicators	Methodological Function
Media framing	How is inequality made publicly intelligible?	Problem definition, actor positioning, causal attribution, moral evaluation, metaphor, proposed remedy	Identifies dominant and competing frames
Public emotion	What affective registers accompany inequality discourse?	Anxiety, anger, resentment, empathy, cynicism, solidarity, silence, technocratic detachment	Maps how economic hardship becomes emotionally available
Economic justice vocabulary	How is justice linguistically constructed?	Fairness, access, rights, dignity, redistribution, accountability, risk, social	Explains how inequality is morally and politically evaluated

harmony

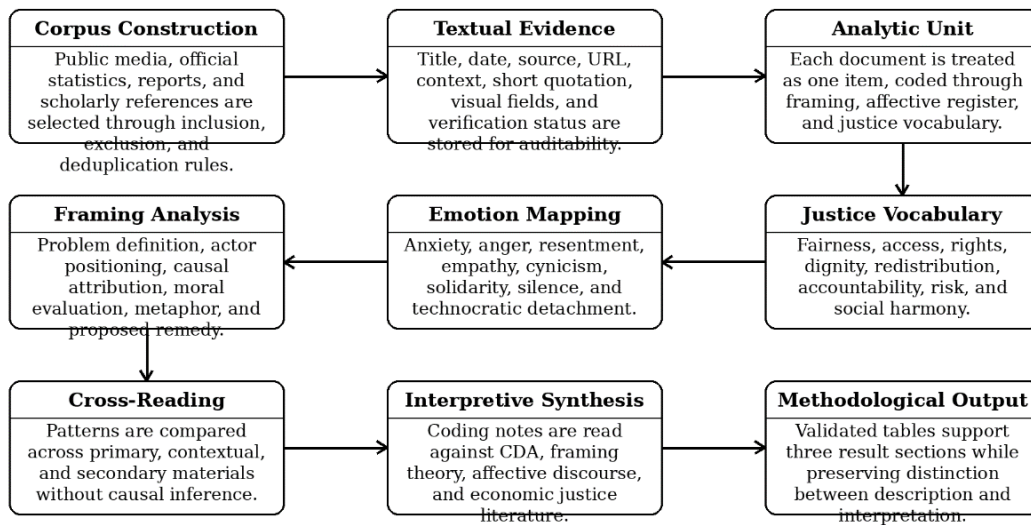


Figure 1. Operational matrix of analysis

4. RESULTS

4.1. Media frames of inequality and responsibility attribution

Indonesian inequality discourse in this corpus is organized around competing ways of making distributional imbalance publicly intelligible. Rather than appearing through one stable narrative, inequality is framed through measurement, growth, place, labour, fiscal allocation, and elite concentration. Administrative-statistical narrowing forms the largest category, accounting for 5 of 16 primary items, followed by growth and shared-prosperity tension with 4 items and spatial or urban disparity with 3 items. This distribution indicates that inequality is not only narrated as deprivation or injustice, but also as a governable statistical object. Such framing aligns with Hadziqi's (2026) [4] sociolinguistic concern with inequality discourse and Kerins et al.'s (2023) [7] argument that public problems are shaped through definitional, causal, moral, and remedial frames.

Table 3. Media frames of inequality and responsibility attribution

Main Category	Subcategory / Specific Frame	Indicators	Causal Logic	Actor Positioning	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Phrase	Data Codes
Administrative-statistical narrowing	Gini decline, historical-low comparison, bottom-40 expenditure improvement, poverty decline with narrowing inequality	Numerical indicators, temporal comparison, official measurement, expenditure-share language	Inequality is framed as measurable distributional movement captured by official indicators	BPS/statistical authority as evaluator; citizens and income groups as measured population	5	31.25%	ANTARA News; The Jakarta Post	"rasio gini ... 0,379"; "ketimpangan ... 0,375"; "terendah sepanjang 2019–2025"; "40 persen terbawah ... 18,65 persen"; "poverty rate hits historic low"	PI-001; PI-002; PI-003; PI-004; PI-011
Growth and shared-prosperity tension	Growth-equity balance, growth captured by few, growth without equity, global inclusive-prosperity frame	Contrastive terms: growth/equity, prosperity/inclusion, beneficiaries/exclusion	Macroeconomic growth is questioned when distributional benefits remain narrow or uneven	Government, opinion writers, and global-development voices as evaluators; public positioned as uneven beneficiaries	4	25.00%	ANTARA Sulteng; Tempo.co; The Jakarta Post	"pemerataan tidak berhenti sebagai slogan"; "hanya dirasakan segelintir orang"; "growth without equity"; "prosperous, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable"	PI-006; PI-008; PI-010; PI-014
Spatial and urban disparity	Jakarta inequality, regional	Urban/rural distinction, Jakarta concentration, regional	Distributional inequality is tied to place,	Urban residents, lower classes,	3	18.75%	ANTARA News; Tempo.co;	"gap pengeluaran penduduk	PI-005; PI-

	disparity, urban hardship after poverty decline	comparison, continuing urban pressure	metropolitan concentration, and uneven territorial development	and regional publics positioned as unevenly exposed to growth pressure			The Jakarta Post	kelas atas dan kelas bawah semakin lebar”; “kemiskinan ... turun, ketimpangan naik”; “urban struggles persist”	007; PI-012
Labour precarity and protest grievance	Economic injustice as protest root; informality behind headline improvement	Protest vocabulary, wage grievance, informality, hidden vulnerability	Inequality is framed as social tension produced by weak labour security and uneven economic protection	Workers, protesters, and informal labourers positioned as aggrieved or vulnerable publics	2	12.50%	Tempo.co; The Jakarta Post	“ketidakadilan ekonomi ... akar demo”; “at the cost of rising informality”	PI-009; PI-013
Fiscal targeting and social support	Targeted support under fiscal pressure	Subsidy design, fiscal pressure, policy targeting, poorest-40 language	Inequality is framed as a policy-management issue requiring sharper allocation of public support	World Bank as evaluator; poorest 40 percent positioned as target group	1	6.25%	Reuters	“shifting toward more targeted support”	PI-015
Oligarchic wealth concentration	Elite accumulation and worsening inequality	Wealth concentration, rich/worker contrast, moral criticism of accumulation	Inequality is framed as concentration of economic power among top wealth holders	Richest groups positioned against workers and broader public	1	6.25%	CELIOS	“inequality is getting worse and harder to justify”	PI-016

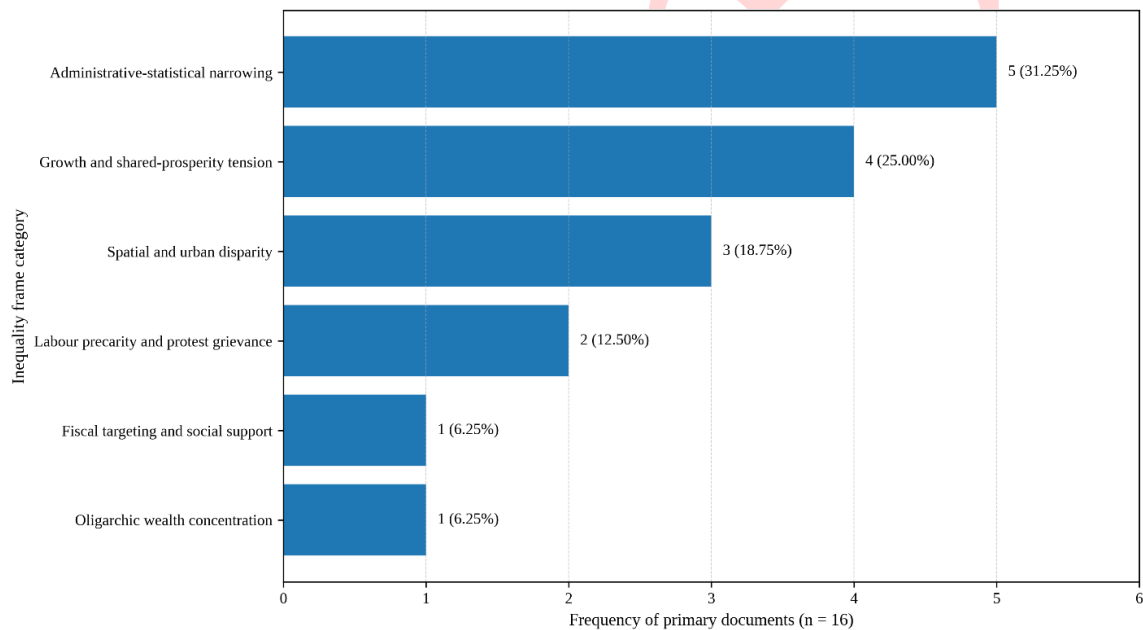


Figure 2. Distribution of inequality frames in primary corpus

The dominant pattern is a tension between reassuring measurement and unresolved social experience. Officially mediated items foreground improvement through phrases such as “rasio gini ... 0,379,” “ketimpangan ... 0,375,” “terendah sepanjang 2019–2025,” and “40 persen terbawah ... 18,65 persen.” These expressions create a technocratic frame in which inequality becomes visible through monitored decline. Yet other items interrupt this reassurance by stressing that prosperity is “hanya dirasakan segelintir orang,” that “urban struggles persist,” or that improvement occurs “at the cost of rising informality.” The corpus therefore shows a split representational field: statistical progress is legible, but lived vulnerability re-enters through urban pressure, labour precarity, protest grievance, and elite concentration.

These patterns suggest that inequality becomes speakable when discourse links numbers to responsibility, beneficiaries, and moral evaluation. Statistical frames make inequality administratively knowable, but they may mute anger, resentment, or dignity-based claims when citizens appear only as measured groups. By contrast, growth-without-equity, protest, informality, and oligarchic-concentration frames widen economic language from measurement toward justice. This supports Wibisono’s (2026) [3]

emphasis on economic metaphors, Yuliyana's (2026) [5] concern with uncertainty in policy communication, and Petkanopoulou et al.'s (2025) [8] finding that objections to inequality are shaped by distributive justice and social harmony. This study therefore treats media framing as a grammar of public legibility: it determines whether inequality is read as progress, pressure, grievance, or injustice.

4.2. Public emotion and affective silence in inequality discourse

Economic inequality in the primary corpus is not narrated through affective intensity alone; it is also organised through controlled emotional registers that determine whether inequality appears alarming, manageable, unjust, or morally unresolved. The distribution shows that technocratic reassurance is the most frequent affective register, appearing in 5 of 16 documents, while anxiety and insecurity and moral grievance each appear in 3 documents. Empathy, cynicism, and solidarity are present but less dominant. This pattern indicates that public emotion is unevenly distributed across document types: official and institutional reporting tends to stabilise concern, while media commentary and civil-society texts allow stronger grievance, scepticism, and vulnerability to surface. This distinction is consistent with Dragojlovic's (2023) [10] argument that affect can also operate through silence, displacement, and muted expression.

Table 4. Affective registers in inequality discourse

Main Category	Subcategory / Affective Register	Indicators	Emotional Logic	Discursive Positioning	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Phrase	Data Codes
Technocratic reassurance	Statistical calm and administrative confidence	Numerical improvement, official comparison, measurement vocabulary, decline narrative	Inequality is emotionally softened through evidence of monitored improvement	Statistical institutions and official media voices appear as stabilising interpreters of public concern	5	31.25%	ANTARA News; The Jakarta Post	"rasio gini ... 0,379"; "ketimpangan ... 0,375"; "terendah sepanjang 2019–2025"; "poverty rate hits historic low"	PI-001; PI-002; PI-003; PI-004; PI-011
Anxiety and insecurity	Cost pressure, urban hardship, fiscal uncertainty	Pressure vocabulary, urban struggle, fiscal constraint, household burden	Inequality is made affectively visible through insecurity about living costs, city survival, and uncertain support	Urban residents and lower-income groups appear as publics exposed to economic pressure	3	18.75%	Tempo.co; The Jakarta Post; Reuters	"urban struggles persist"; "shifting toward more targeted support"; "kemiskinan ... turun, ketimpangan naik"	PI-007; PI-012; PI-015
Moral grievance	Economic injustice, protest roots, elite criticism	Injustice vocabulary, protest reference, blame language, moral contrast	Inequality is framed as a violation of fairness rather than merely a distributional gap	Protesters, workers, and ordinary citizens are positioned as morally aggrieved actors	3	18.75%	Tempo.co; CELIOS	"ketidakadilan ekonomi ... akar demo"; "inequality is getting worse and harder to justify"; "hanya dirasakan segelintir orang"	PI-008; PI-009; PI-016
Empathy and vulnerability	Lower-income groups, poorest 40 percent, informal workers	Vulnerability terms, bottom-income categories, informality, welfare targeting	Inequality becomes speakable through concern for exposed groups and precarious livelihoods	Poor households, informal workers, and targeted beneficiaries appear as objects of social concern	2	12.50%	ANTARA News; The Jakarta Post	"40 persen terbawah ... 18,65 persen"; "at the cost of rising informality"	PI-004; PI-013
Cynicism and distrust	Prosperity captured by few, policy optimism questioned	Contrastive phrasing, elite-benefit vocabulary, sceptical evaluation	Public emotion is organised as distrust toward claims of broad prosperity	Economic elites and policy optimism are positioned as objects of scrutiny	2	12.50%	ANTARA Sulteng; Tempo.co	"pemerataan tidak berhenti sebagai slogan"; "hanya dirasakan segelintir orang"	PI-006; PI-008
Solidarity and shared prosperity	Inclusive development and collective future	Inclusion vocabulary, shared prosperity, sustainability, social harmony	Inequality is softened by aspirational language that imagines collective benefit	Publics are positioned as members of a shared national or developmental project	1	6.25%	The Jakarta Post	"prosperous, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable"	PI-014

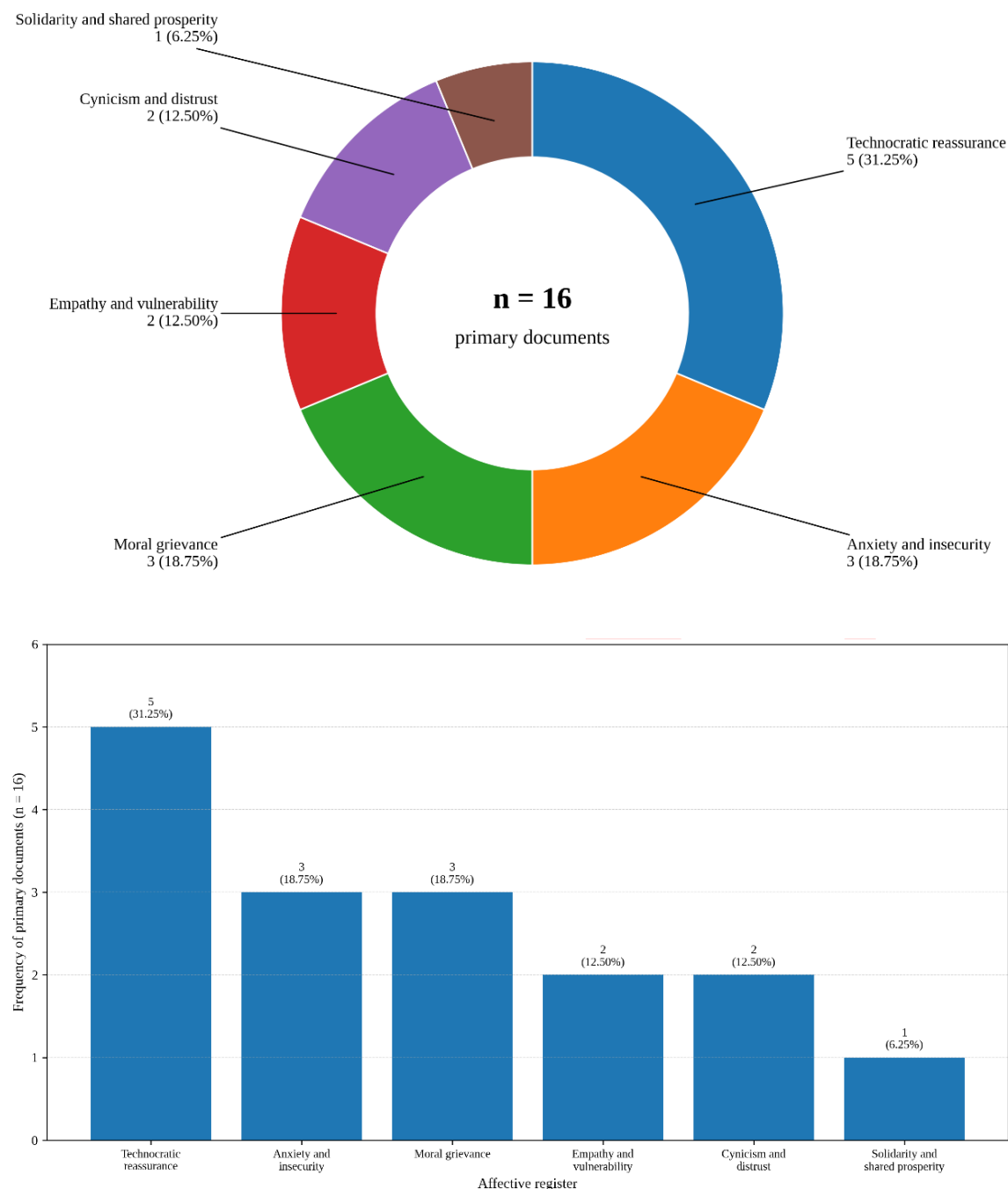


Figure 3. Affective registers in inequality discourse

The dominant pattern is the coexistence of affective restraint and social unease. Statistical items rely on phrases such as “rasio gini ... 0,379,” “ketimpangan ... 0,375,” “terendah sepanjang 2019–2025,” and “poverty rate hits historic low,” which transform inequality into a controlled administrative object. However, other texts reactivate emotional pressure through expressions such as “urban struggles persist,” “ketidakadilan ekonomi ... akar demo,” “at the cost of rising informality,” and “hanya dirasakan segelintir orang.” These phrases do not merely describe conditions; they assign emotional orientation to inequality. Anxiety appears when economic improvement remains fragile, grievance appears when prosperity is morally questioned, and cynicism appears when distribution is represented as captured by limited groups.

This affective pattern matters because it shows how inequality can be made speakable without always being made politically disruptive. Technocratic reassurance reduces emotional volatility by foregrounding measurement, comparison, and policy manageability, but it may also narrow the language through which suffering, resentment, and dignity claims can appear. Conversely, grievance-oriented and vulnerability-oriented texts expand inequality discourse toward justice by naming exposed groups, informal labour, protest, and elite concentration. Brown (2025) [16] and Jalli (2025) [11] suggest that platform and youth-oriented

publics often intensify justice claims through affective circulation, while Petkanopoulou et al. (2025) [8] show that reactions to inequality are shaped by distributive justice and social harmony concerns. In this corpus, emotion operates as a gatekeeping mechanism: it decides whether inequality is felt as progress, pressure, betrayal, or shared responsibility.

4.3. Economic justice vocabulary and remedy grammar

Economic justice in this corpus is articulated through several vocabularies that translate inequality into questions of fairness, recognition, protection, and accountability. Measurable equity is the most frequent vocabulary, appearing in 4 of 16 documents, followed by inclusive prosperity and spatial justice, each appearing in 3 documents. Labour dignity, anti-elite accountability, and social protection appear in 2 documents each. This distribution shows that justice is not expressed through a single redistributive language. Instead, Indonesian media discourse moves between statistical fairness, territorial imbalance, precarious work, elite concentration, and targeted welfare. This pattern extends Hadziqi's (2026) [4] concern with inequality discourse by showing that economic justice is not only named through inequality itself, but through the remedies and moral relations attached to it.

Table 5. Economic justice vocabulary and remedy grammar

Main Category	Subcategory / Justice Vocabulary	Indicators	Remedy Grammar	Moral Positioning	Frequency	Percentage	Data Variation	Evidence Phrase	Data Codes
Measurable equity	Distributional fairness through statistical indicators	Gini Ratio, expenditure share, decline/increase comparison, income-group measurement	Monitoring, comparison, statistical reporting, policy evaluation	Justice is framed as measurable improvement or deterioration in distributional balance	4	25.00%	ANTARA News	"rasio gini ... 0,379"; "ketimpangan ... 0,375"; "terendah sepanjang 2019–2025"; "40 persen terbawah ... 18,65 persen"	PI-001; PI-002; PI-003; PI-004
Inclusive prosperity	Shared growth, equitable development, collective prosperity	Inclusion vocabulary, growth-equity contrast, public benefit, sustainability	Growth must be distributed, widened, and made socially meaningful	Justice is framed as growth that should be felt beyond narrow beneficiary groups	3	18.75%	ANTARA Sulteng; The Jakarta Post	"pemerataan tidak berhenti sebagai slogan"; "growth without equity"; "prosperous, inclusive, peaceful and sustainable"	PI-006; PI-010; PI-014
Spatial justice	Urban/rural difference and metropolitan inequality	Jakarta inequality, urban struggle, regional imbalance, territorial comparison	Development must respond to uneven exposure across places	Justice is framed as territorial balance and recognition of urban hardship	3	18.75%	ANTARA News; Tempo.co; The Jakarta Post	"gap pengeluaran penduduk kelas atas dan kelas bawah semakin lebar"; "kemiskinan ... turun, ketimpangan naik"; "urban struggles persist"	PI-005; PI-007; PI-012
Labour dignity	Precarious work and protest grievance	Informality, protest root, wage pressure, worker vulnerability	Economic order must protect work, stability, and dignity	Justice is framed as recognition of labour insecurity and protest legitimacy	2	12.50%	Tempo.co; The Jakarta Post	"ketidakadilan ekonomi ... akar demo"; "at the cost of rising informality"	PI-009; PI-013
Anti-elite accountability	Elite capture and concentration of benefit	"Segelintir orang," rich/worker contrast, wealth concentration, moral criticism	Economic power must be scrutinised, justified, or redistributed	Justice is framed as accountability for unequal accumulation	2	12.50%	Tempo.co; CELIOS	"hanya dirasakan segelintir orang"; "inequality is getting worse and harder to justify"	PI-008; PI-016
Social protection and risk targeting	Poverty reduction and targeted support	Poverty decline, poorest-40 language, fiscal pressure, subsidy targeting	Support must be directed toward vulnerable groups under fiscal constraint	Justice is framed as risk-sensitive protection for those most exposed	2	12.50%	The Jakarta Post; Reuters	"poverty rate hits historic low"; "shifting toward more targeted support"	PI-011; PI-015

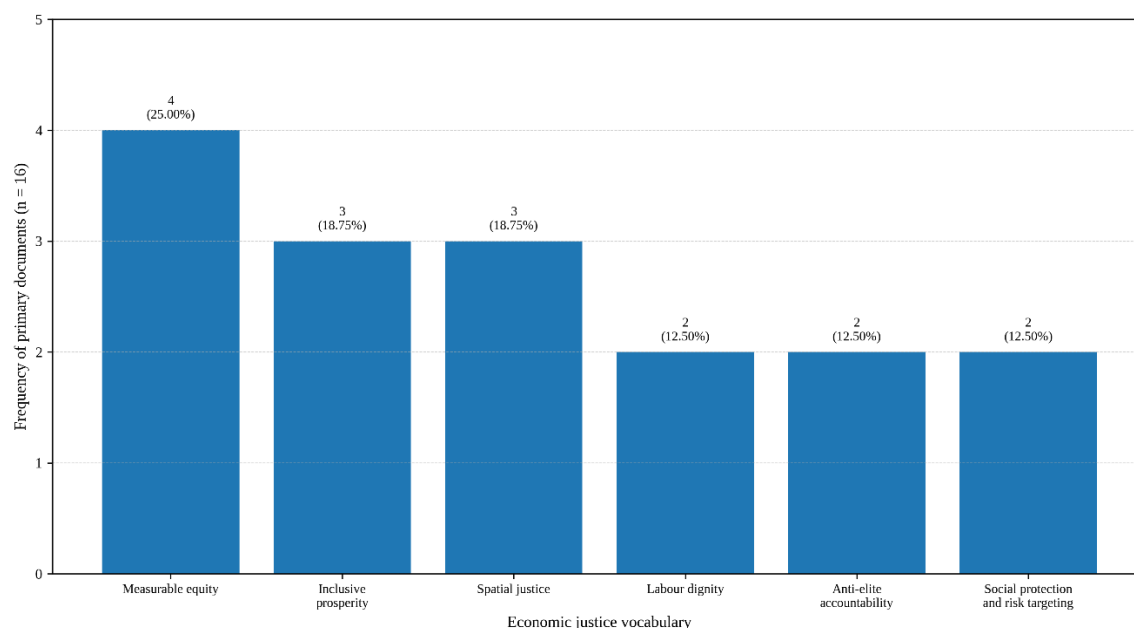


Figure 4. Economic justice vocabulary in primary corpus

The dominant pattern is the transformation of justice into measurable and managerial language, while stronger moral vocabularies appear in more critical or interpretive texts. Phrases such as “rasio gini ... 0,379,” “ketimpangan ... 0,375,” and “40 persen terbawah ... 18,65 persen” define fairness through distributional indicators. However, other expressions move beyond measurement: “pemerataan tidak berhenti sebagai slogan” frames justice as shared development, “ketidakadilan ekonomi ... akar demo” links justice to protest grievance, and “hanya dirasakan segelintir orang” marks prosperity as morally unequal. Spatial justice appears when texts describe widening gaps between upper and lower classes or continuing urban struggles. Labour dignity emerges when improvement is qualified by “rising informality,” indicating that better aggregate indicators may coexist with precarious lives.

This vocabulary pattern shows that economic justice becomes speakable when discourse connects distribution to deservingness, exposure, and responsibility. Statistical fairness makes inequality governable, but it can also narrow justice into measurable decline or improvement. Inclusive prosperity and spatial justice broaden this language by asking who benefits, where hardship is concentrated, and whether growth is socially shared. Labour dignity and anti-elite accountability introduce a sharper moral grammar because they identify vulnerable workers, protest, and concentrated wealth as signs of unresolved injustice. This reading is consistent with Petkanopoulou et al. (2025) [8], who link inequality objection to distributive justice and social harmony, and with Santoso (2026) [6], Wahid (2026) [13], and Sumadi (2026) [15], who show that Indonesian economic discourse often turns access, inclusion, and precarity into contested moral vocabularies.

5. DISCUSSION

The first major implication concerns how inequality becomes publicly manageable when it is framed through administrative-statistical language. In the corpus, the most frequent framing pattern converts inequality into a problem of measurement, comparison, and monitored movement. This has a functional value: it allows public discourse to anchor inequality in verifiable indicators, reducing ambiguity and preventing purely moral or partisan interpretation. However, this function also contains a dysfunction. When inequality is primarily narrated through Gini decline, expenditure share, or poverty-rate improvement, social suffering may become visible only when it can be translated into official measurement. This finding extends Hadziqi's (2026) [4] sociolinguistic argument that inequality discourse is shaped by how economic categories are linguistically stabilized. It also resonates with Kerins et al. (2023) [7], who show that media framing can narrow poverty into selected problem definitions. Thus, statistical framing clarifies inequality while potentially limiting the moral vocabulary through which hardship is publicly recognized.

This framing pattern emerges from an underlying structure in which official knowledge, journalistic authority, and developmental optimism intersect. Statistical discourse offers institutional legitimacy because it appears neutral, comparable, and policy-relevant. Yet neutrality is not merely technical; it is discursive. By foregrounding decline, ranking, and measurable improvement, media texts can position state institutions as interpreters of progress while placing citizens as categorized populations rather than speaking subjects. This does not mean that official indicators are false or unimportant. Rather, this study shows that their public

circulation carries representational consequences. Yuliyana's (2026) [5] work on uncertainty in Indonesian policy communication is useful here because policy language often manages anxiety by presenting economic conditions as controllable. Wibisono's (2026) [3] analysis of economic metaphors similarly suggests that complex economic realities become speakable through simplified linguistic forms. The structural relation, therefore, lies between measurement and governability: what can be counted becomes easier to manage, but not always easier to contest.

The second implication concerns public emotion. Inequality discourse in this corpus does not simply intensify anger or sympathy; it distributes emotion unevenly across textual genres. Technocratic reassurance dominates, while anxiety, grievance, vulnerability, cynicism, and solidarity appear in more limited but meaningful ways. This matters because public emotion determines whether inequality is understood as progress, pressure, betrayal, or shared responsibility. The functional role of affective restraint is that it prevents economic discourse from becoming unstable or excessively antagonistic. Its dysfunction is that it may domesticate grievance by translating structural hardship into calm administrative narration. Dragojlovic's (2023) [10] concept of affective silence helps explain this pattern: public emotion may operate not only through what is said, but through what is muted, softened, or displaced. Brown (2025) [16] and Jalli (2025) [11] show that digital publics can amplify justice-oriented emotion, yet this corpus indicates that mainstream and institutional discourse often contains such emotional escalation.

The affective structure underlying this pattern is shaped by the tension between social unease and communicative discipline. Economic inequality is emotionally charged because it touches household security, urban survival, labour dignity, and elite privilege. However, Indonesian media discourse often channels this charge into acceptable registers: concern, reassurance, policy targeting, or moderated criticism. This produces a discursive correlation between genre and emotional intensity. Official and statistics-based texts tend to reduce volatility, while opinion, civil-society, and interpretive media texts allow stronger grievance and distrust. This is not a causal claim about audience response; it is a textual observation about how emotion is made available. Petkanopoulou et al. (2025) [8] argue that objections to inequality are shaped by distributive justice and social harmony concerns, which helps explain why Indonesian discourse may balance critique with social-order language. Emotion, therefore, becomes a regulated public resource: it enables moral recognition, but only within boundaries set by institutional authority and communicative propriety.

The third implication concerns the vocabulary of economic justice. The corpus shows that justice is not articulated only as redistribution; it also appears as measurable equity, inclusive prosperity, spatial balance, labour dignity, anti-elite accountability, and risk-sensitive protection. This is analytically important because it expands how economic justice can be studied in Indonesian discourse. Justice is not always voiced as radical redistribution or direct class conflict. It may appear in softer terms such as access, inclusion, targeting, fairness, shared prosperity, or regional balance. This finding supports Sumadi's (2026) [15] analysis of financial inclusion campaigns and Santoso's (2026) [6] critique of digital lending discourse, both of which show that inclusion can function as an attractive but ambiguous moral vocabulary. The dysfunction is that inclusion language may obscure unequal risk, precarious labour, or concentrated wealth. Thus, justice vocabulary can open public debate while also narrowing it into policy-friendly and market-compatible terms.

The deeper structure behind this justice vocabulary is Indonesia's broader negotiation between developmentalism, market aspiration, welfare responsibility, and social harmony. Economic justice is made speakable when it can be aligned with recognized public values: growth should be shared, poverty should be reduced, regions should not be left behind, workers should retain dignity, and elites should be accountable. Yet these values do not always produce the same political grammar. Qosim (2026) [12] and Wulandari (2026) [18] show how market-oriented discourse can transform identity and aspiration into economic language, while Wahid (2026) [13] demonstrates how platform discourse can normalize precarity through entrepreneurial subjectivity. Cameron (2023) [1] reminds us that development in Indonesia is inseparable from gendered and institutional inequality, while Jayadi et al. (2022) [2] situate social difference within multicultural public life. This study therefore contributes a theoretical position: inequality becomes speakable through a negotiated vocabulary that links measurement, emotion, and justice, but this negotiation remains uneven, contested, and politically consequential.

6. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that economic inequality in Indonesia becomes publicly speakable through the interaction of media framing, public emotion, and economic justice vocabulary. Its most important lesson is that inequality is not only reported as a distributional indicator but also translated into moral and affective language that shapes how responsibility, vulnerability, and remedy are imagined. Statistical framing makes inequality administratively legible, yet affective and justice-oriented vocabularies expose tensions between measured improvement and lived insecurity. This study contributes to economic discourse research by

integrating framing analysis, affective discourse analysis, and justice-vocabulary coding within one Indonesian corpus, thereby refining questions about how inequality is named, felt, and politically interpreted.

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available media, institutional, civil-society, and secondary texts; therefore, it cannot claim direct audience effects, policy influence, or citizens' actual emotional states. Its corpus also privileges documented discourse and may underrepresent oral, local, vernacular, or algorithmically circulated expressions of inequality outside searchable public sources. Future research should expand this design through audience reception studies, interviews, comment-thread analysis, regional-language corpora, and longitudinal comparison across election cycles or economic shocks. Further work could also compare Indonesian inequality discourse with Southeast Asian cases to examine whether similar patterns of statistical reassurance, affective restraint, and justice vocabulary appear across different media systems.

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Imam Masrur: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, writing – original draft, writing – review and editing.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Author states no conflict of interest.

AI USE DECLARATION

The author used artificial intelligence tools to assist with the generation of illustrative figures and with the formatting and layout of this manuscript. AI was not used to generate the substantive content, conceptualization, data, analysis, or conclusions of the research, all of which remain the sole responsibility of the author.

INFORMED CONSENT

Not applicable – this study did not involve direct human participants. Data consisted solely of publicly accessible media, institutional, civil-society, and scholarly materials from Indonesian and international sources.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research did not involve human or animal subjects; it analyzed publicly accessible media, institutional, civil-society, and scholarly materials from Indonesian and international sources, and therefore no institutional review board approval was required. Where research does involve human subjects, the author affirms that such research would be conducted in full compliance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies, in accordance with the tenets of the Declaration of Helsinki, and would be approved by the author's institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

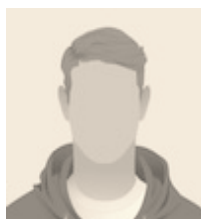
The corpus of publicly accessible media, institutional, civil-society, and scholarly materials analyzed in this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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