

Economic metaphors in political discourse:
a cognitive linguistic study of Indonesian presidential debates

Radna Tulus Wibisono
Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article history: Received Feb 15, 2026 Revised Mar 10, 2026 Accepted Mar 20, 2026 Keywords: cognitive linguistics corpus analysis discourse metaphor politics	Background: Economic debates in Indonesia’s presidential elections are not merely policy exchanges but discursive contests where metaphors shape public understanding of governance and legitimacy. Objective: The purpose of this study is to examine how economic metaphors frame political discourse in the 2019 and 2024 Indonesian presidential debates. Method: Using a mixed-methods design, the research integrates Cognitive Metaphor Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Corpus Linguistics, drawing data from official KPU transcripts, debate videos, and media reports. Results: The results show, first, that dominant conceptual metaphors include <i>STATE AS FIRM</i> (<i>negara sebagai perusahaan</i>), <i>BUDGET AS FLUID</i> (<i>anggaran sebagai cairan</i>), and <i>ECONOMY AS ENGINE</i> (<i>ekonomi sebagai mesin</i>), which simplify abstract economic policies. Second, ideological positioning is evident, with opposition candidates emphasizing crisis metaphors, incumbents employing growth and stability frames, and both sides using redistribution metaphors to claim moral authority. Third, corpus analysis highlights frequent clusters such as <i>pertumbuhan ekonomi</i>, <i>investasi asing</i>, <i>anggaran bocor</i>, and <i>subsidi tepat sasaran</i>, which anchor economic debates around growth, efficiency, and fairness. Implication: The implications suggest that metaphors function as powerful framing devices that not only clarify but also constrain democratic discourse, shaping voter cognition and perceptions of legitimacy. Novelty: This study shows how economic metaphors function as cognitive and ideological framing devices that structure political contestation and shape public perceptions of governance and legitimacy in electoral debates. <i>This is an open access article under the CC BY-SA license.</i> 

Corresponding Author: Radna Tulus Wibisono Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia Jl. Pancasila, Bulaksumur, Caturtunggal, Kec. Depok, Sleman, Yogyakarta, 55281, Indonesia Email: radnana89@gmail.com
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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia’s presidential debates are high-stakes rituals where economic credibility often decides electability. Candidates compress complex policies into digestible phrases, routinely leaning on economic metaphors—“investment climate,” “leaking budget,” and “engines of growth”—to frame problems and signal competence. Metaphors do cognitive work: they simplify, moralize, and cue judgments about risk, responsibility, and urgency. A growing experimental literature shows that metaphorical frames can shift beliefs and attitudes, making them central to democratic persuasion. Because the debates are broadcast and archived by the election commission’s channel, they provide a uniquely public corpus for tracing how candidates construct economic reality and compete for policy ownership. In today’s national media environment saturated with headlines about growth, investment, inflation, and leakages, understanding the metaphorical architecture of this talk is not optional—it is essential to explaining why some narratives stick,

mobilize voters, and legitimize agendas. This study therefore interrogates the economic metaphors that shape Indonesia's electoral imagination.

Foundational Cognitive Linguistics holds that metaphor structures thought and reasoning, not merely ornamentation [1], [2], [3], [4]. The subsequent political rhetoric research has traced how leaders deploy metaphor to construct moral authority and policy legitimacy [5], [6], [7]. Abdullah et al (2025) documents recurrent persuasive patterns in elite speeches [8]; Musolff (2015) shows how entrenched scenarios organize public inference across debates and crises [6]; Guo's (2025) meta-analytic work confirms reliable framing effects on attitudes [9]. In Indonesia, studies have examined war metaphors and euphemistic strategies around the 2019 election and mapped broader rhetorical moves in the 2024 debate season [8], [10]. Yet two lacunae remain: first, we lack a systematic, corpus-driven profile of economic metaphors as a distinct domain in presidential debates across cycles; second, prior work rarely triangulates cognitive metaphor analysis with discourse-ideology perspective and quantitative corpus tools. This paper addresses those gaps by integrating theory, context, and measurement, operationalized with AntConc for concordance and collocation analytics.

This study has three aims and corresponding questions. First, it identifies and classifies economic metaphors in the 2019 and 2024 presidential debates using Conceptual Metaphor Theory: What source–target mappings (e.g., STATE AS FIRM / NEGARA SEBAGAI PERUSAHAAN, BUDGET AS FLUID / ANGGARAN SEBAGAI CAIRAN, ECONOMY AS ENGINE / EKONOMI SEBAGAI MESIN) structure candidates' economic talk? Second, it quantifies usage using corpus methods: How frequently do key triggers occur, with which collocates, in what segments, and with what dispersion across speakers and episodes? Third, it interprets ideological positioning: How are metaphors mobilized to attribute responsibility, claim competence, or delegitimize opponents within Indonesia's party competition? Data combine certified debate videos/transcripts from the election commission with media transcripts, analyzed in AntConc for concordance, keywords, and collocations, read through a discourse-ideological lens. Sampling covers all debate nights in cycles; the unit of analysis is metaphorical clauses marked by economy-related keywords. Together, these steps produce a map of Indonesia's economic metaphor repertoire in formal debate settings.

Our working argument is that economic metaphors are constitutive, not decorative: they provide evaluative yardsticks that guide judgment. “STATE AS FIRM / NEGARA SEBAGAI PERUSAHAAN” privileges efficiency and profitability moralities; “BUDGET AS FLUID / ANGGARAN SEBAGAI CAIRAN” foregrounds vigilance against “leaks”; “ECONOMY AS ENGINE / EKONOMI SEBAGAI MESIN” naturalizes technocratic maintenance and acceleration. If correct, shifts in metaphor selection should predict shifts in policy framing, issue ownership, and perceived competence—especially between challengers, who amplify crisis frames, and incumbents, who favor growth and stability frames. We expect ideological positioning to surface in lexical choices, argument structure, and intertextual references, aligning with socio-cognitive accounts of power, ideology, and discourse. By triangulating cognitive metaphor analysis, discourse analysis, and corpus metrics, the study offers a falsifiable account of how Indonesian candidates make the economy thinkable under campaign time constraints. The implications are practical: clearer diagnostics for journalists and debate moderators, and evidence-based materials for civic education on how framing steers policy judgment and voter reasoning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Conceptual metaphor theory

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) provides the central cognitive framework for analyzing economic metaphors in political debates. Zeng & Ahrens (2023) argue that metaphors are not decorative devices but fundamental to human thought [1], allowing abstract domains such as economics to be understood via more concrete experiences, like motion, construction, or fluidity. Later developments refined this view: Lapka (2021) emphasized the cultural variation of metaphorical mappings [3], while Musolff (2016) introduced the idea of “metaphor scenarios” to highlight dynamic interpretive contexts [6]. Some scholars stress metaphors as universal cognitive mechanisms, while others underscore their sociocultural embeddedness. This diversity of interpretation reflects ongoing debates about whether metaphors are primarily cognitive universals or discursive strategies tied to ideology. In the context of Indonesian presidential debates, these distinctions are crucial, as candidates' metaphor use may reveal both shared cultural understandings of economy and partisan framing. Thus, CMT offers a foundation for identifying and interpreting economic metaphors systematically.

CMT proposes several categories of metaphor, each mapping source domains to target domains. Common classifications include structural metaphors, where one domain structures another (e.g., ECONOMY AS ENGINE / EKONOMI SEBAGAI MESIN), ontological metaphors that objectify abstract concepts (e.g., BUDGET AS FLUID / ANGGARAN SEBAGAI CAIRAN), and orientational metaphors that rely on spatial schemas (e.g., GROWTH IS UP / PERTUMBUHAN ITU KE ATAS). Abdullah et al (2025) adds persuasive metaphors that frame political legitimacy [8]. Prabhakaran et al. (2021) identifies conceptual

frames such as “nation as family” or “state as firm (negara sebagai perusahaan)” as recurrent in political speech [11]. Indicators for detecting these metaphors include recurring lexical triggers (“growth,” “investment,” “leakage”), semantic collocations, and evaluative framing [12], [13], [14]. In presidential debates, structural metaphors often dominate because they provide coherent narratives, such as depicting the economy as a machine requiring constant maintenance. Identifying these categories and their frequency helps researchers understand how candidates conceptualize national issues and persuade audiences through metaphorical reasoning.

2.2. Political discourse analysis

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) serves as the second conceptual framework. Rooted in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), PDA examines how language reflects and reproduces power, ideology, and identity in political communication [15], [16]. Discourse is not neutral: it legitimizes policies, delegitimizes opponents, and mobilizes support. Scholars differ in emphasis—some highlight macro-level ideological reproduction, while others focus on micro-level interactional strategies, such as turn-taking, hedging, and metaphor choice. For instance, Chahbane & Zrizi (2023) argues that political discourse operates through strategic framing and metaphoric simplification [5], while van Leeuwen (2008) stresses legitimation strategies such as authorization or moral evaluation [17]. In the Indonesian context, presidential debates function as both spectacle and deliberation, where discourse shapes voter perceptions of competence and trust. Thus, PDA is indispensable for situating economic metaphors within broader ideological battles, showing not only what metaphors mean cognitively but also how they function politically to gain advantage.

Within PDA, several categories guide analysis. Van Dijk (1993) outlines strategies such as polarization (us vs. them), positive self-presentation, and negative other-presentation, all detectable through metaphor choice [15]. Bachryj (2024) highlights metaphors as legitimation tools, distinguishing categories like moral legitimacy (“clean economy”), pragmatic legitimacy (“efficient budget”), and emotional appeals (“people’s suffering”) [18]. Fairclough (1995) proposes analyzing discourse across three dimensions: text (linguistic features such as metaphors), discursive practice (how texts are produced and consumed), and social practice (the socio-political context) [16]. Indicators for PDA thus include evaluative adjectives, metaphoric framing of crises or growth, and intertextual references to policy documents or media [19]. In Indonesian debates, for example, opposition candidates may use crisis metaphors (“bangkrut,” “krisis”) to delegitimize incumbents, while incumbents employ stability metaphors (“pondasi ekonomi,” “tumbuh kuat”) to legitimize their governance. These categories illuminate how discourse transforms abstract metaphors into political positioning strategies.

2.3. Corpus linguistics

Corpus Linguistics (CL) constitutes the methodological backbone for quantifying metaphor usage. Defined by Zeng & Ahrens (2023) as the systematic study of language through large electronic collections of texts, CL enables frequency, collocation, and concordance analyses [1]. It is particularly suited for identifying patterns that might escape intuitive reading. Scholars disagree on its epistemological role: some treat CL as purely empirical, while others argue it must be theory-driven, integrated with frameworks like CDA or CMT [20]. In metaphor research, CL supports both bottom-up discovery (finding unexpected clusters) and top-down verification (testing conceptual mappings). Recent advances, such as semantic tagging and computational metaphor detection, extend its reach [11]. In this study, CL is not a theory of meaning but a set of tools—AntConc, keyword analysis, and collocation searches—that provide robust evidence for the distribution and salience of economic metaphors in Indonesian presidential debates.

CL offers multiple analytic categories for metaphor studies. Frequency counts reveal which metaphoric terms dominate political debates, such as “pertumbuhan ekonomi” or “investasi asing.” Collocation analysis shows semantic associations, for instance how “anggaran” frequently co-occurs with “bocor” (leakage) or “efisiensi” (efficiency). Concordance lines contextualize each instance, enabling interpretation of metaphorical usage in situ. Keyword analysis identifies statistically salient terms in the debate corpus compared to reference corpora, revealing how economic discourse differs from general political speech. Dispersion measures show how evenly metaphors are distributed across candidates or debate sessions, highlighting ideological contrasts. Prabhakaran et al. (2021) note that such categories allow both micro-level linguistic analysis and macro-level discourse profiling [11]. For this research, indicators include the number of metaphor tokens, their collocational patterns, and their pragmatic roles in framing crises versus growth. Together, these categories ensure that metaphor analysis is empirically grounded and replicable.

3. METHOD

The unit of analysis in this research is the metaphorical clause or phrase containing economic imagery used by presidential candidates during official debates. These include expressions such as “investment climate,” “budget leakage,” “economic engine,” and similar economy-related metaphors (*iklim investasi*,

kebocoran anggaran, mesin ekonomi). Each instance is treated as a discursive unit representing a conceptual mapping between a source and a target domain. The choice of metaphor as the unit of analysis is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, which posits that metaphors structure thought and shape reasoning [19]. By focusing on this unit, the study is able to capture both micro-level linguistic choices and macro-level ideological positioning within the debates. This focus is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where televised debates function as both policy communication and performative politics, making metaphors critical tools for framing economic issues and persuading diverse electorates.

Tabel 1. Corpus Data

No	Unit of Analysis	Type of Data	Example of Corpus Data	Source / Repository
1	Metaphorical clauses related to <i>investment (iklim investasi, modal asing, investor)</i>	Debate Transcript	Candidate: “ <i>We must maintain a stable investment climate to attract foreign capital.</i> ”	Official debate transcripts from KPU RI, YouTube KPU channel
2	Metaphorical clauses related to <i>budget and finance (anggaran bocor, defisit, APBN)</i>	Debate Transcript & Video	Candidate: “ <i>The state budget is leaking everywhere; we must plug these holes to be efficient.</i> ”	KPU RI archives, TVRI, Kompas TV
3	Metaphorical clauses related to <i>growth and stability (pertumbuhan ekonomi, stabilitas, pondasi ekonomi)</i>	Debate Transcript & Video	Candidate: “ <i>Our economy has a strong foundation; growth will continue steadily.</i> ”	KPU RI, official YouTube debates
4	Metaphorical clauses related to <i>crisis or collapse (ekonomi ambruk, rakyat bangkrut, krisis nasional)</i>	Debate Transcript & Media Coverage	Opposition: “ <i>People are bankrupt; the economy is collapsing under current leadership.</i> ”	Media coverage: Kompas, Tempo, CNN Indonesia, The Jakarta Post
5	Metaphorical clauses related to <i>policy solutions (subsidi tepat sasaran, beban rakyat, efisiensi anggaran)</i>	Debate Transcript & Media Coverage	Candidate: “ <i>Subsidies must be targeted correctly, otherwise they become a burden on the people.</i> ”	KPU RI transcripts, reputable media outlets
6	Non-verbal emphasis accompanying economic metaphors (intonation, repetition, stress)	Video Recordings	Candidate emphasizing “ <i>leakage, leakage everywhere</i> ” with raised tone and hand gestures	Video archives: KPU RI, Kompas TV, YouTube official debate recordings

This study adopts a qualitative-quantitative mixed-methods design, integrating Cognitive Linguistic analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Corpus Linguistics. The qualitative strand emphasizes interpretation of conceptual metaphors and their ideological functions, while the quantitative strand measures frequency, dispersion, and collocational patterns. The design follows Creswell’s (2011) explanatory sequential model, beginning with corpus-driven mapping and followed by in-depth discourse analysis [21]. The rationale is twofold: first, corpus methods ensure replicability and empirical robustness; second, discourse analysis contextualizes metaphor use within ideological struggles. Similar designs have been successfully applied in political communication studies [7], [8], showing the value of triangulation between methods. In the Indonesian context, this design ensures that both the density of economic metaphors and their rhetorical force are systematically captured [22]. The ultimate aim is to balance interpretive depth with empirical breadth, producing findings that are both theoretically grounded and data-driven.

The primary sources of information are official debate transcripts and video recordings from the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU), covering presidential debates in 2019 and 2024. These sources are publicly available through KPU’s official YouTube channel and national television archives (e.g., TVRI, Kompas TV). Supplementary data include media transcriptions and reporting from reputable outlets such as Kompas, Tempo, CNN Indonesia, and The Jakarta Post, which provide additional verification and context. Using multiple sources increases validity by cross-checking accuracy and capturing nuances that may be lost in official transcripts alone. Media articles also highlight salient excerpts that resonate in public discourse, offering insights into how economic metaphors circulate beyond the debate stage. Following best practices in discourse studies [23], triangulation of multiple sources ensures reliability and completeness. Thus, the corpus represents both the immediate debate discourse and its mediated afterlife in Indonesian political communication.

Data collection proceeds in three stages. First, certified transcripts of debates are downloaded and segmented into speech turns by candidate. Second, the transcripts are imported into AntConc, a corpus analysis software, where economy-related keywords (e.g., *pertumbuhan*, *investasi*, *krisis*, *bocor*) are identified through keyword-in-context (KWIC) searches. Candidate utterances containing these terms are extracted as units of analysis. Third, video recordings are consulted to cross-check accuracy, intonation, and emphasis, ensuring that metaphor identification is not solely reliant on text but also considers prosody and emphasis. To minimize researcher bias, a metaphor identification procedure (MIPVU) is applied [19]. Each instance is coded for source-target mapping, speaker identity, debate round, and thematic context. The resulting database contains both qualitative annotations and quantitative metadata, enabling robust cross-analysis. This systematic process aligns with established protocols in metaphor and discourse research, ensuring replicability and transparency in data handling.

Data analysis combines three methodological layers. First, Cognitive Metaphor Analysis identifies conceptual mappings such as STATE AS FIRM (*negara sebagai perusahaan*), BUDGET AS FLUID (*anggaran sebagai cairan*), and ECONOMY AS ENGINE (*ekonomi sebagai mesin*), enabling classification of metaphor types. Second, Corpus Linguistics tools (AntConc) are used to measure frequency, collocation, and dispersion, highlighting dominant metaphors and their semantic networks. Third, Discourse Analysis interprets metaphors in terms of ideological positioning, contrasting how incumbents emphasize growth and stability metaphors, while challengers employ crisis and failure frames. This multi-layered approach ensures that metaphors are not only identified but also contextualized within broader socio-political struggles. The analytic sequence proceeds from descriptive (frequency counts), to interpretive (conceptual classification), to critical (ideological function). By integrating these methods, the study produces a comprehensive map of how economic metaphors frame Indonesian presidential debates, shaping public perception of economic governance.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Conceptual metaphors and economic framing

The key economic metaphors are distributed in Indonesian presidential debates (2019 and 2024). The table represents three dominant conceptual mappings derived from the corpus: STATE AS FIRM (*Negara sebagai Perusahaan*), BUDGET AS FLUID (*Anggaran sebagai Cairan*), and ECONOMY AS ENGINE (*Ekonomi sebagai Mesin*). Each metaphorical category is illustrated with representative lexical items frequently used by candidates. For example, “investment,” “capital,” and “market” cluster under STATE AS FIRM, reflecting a managerial framing of governance. Meanwhile, terms such as “leakage,” “flow,” and “drainage” appear under BUDGET AS FLUID, signaling vigilance and control. Finally, “growth,” “foundation,” and “engine” dominate the ECONOMY AS ENGINE cluster, portraying the economy as a dynamic system that can accelerate or stall. This evidence provides a baseline picture of how metaphors are strategically deployed to frame economic governance.

Table 1. Distribution of economic metaphors in Indonesian presidential debates

Conceptual Metaphor	Representative Terms	Excerpts from Debate Utterances	Frequency (Tokens)
STATE AS FIRM (<i>Negara sebagai Perusahaan</i>)	investment, capital, market, management	“We must maintain a stable investment climate so foreign capital feels safe.” (<i>Kita harus menjaga iklim investasi agar stabil.</i>)	34
BUDGET AS FLUID (<i>Anggaran sebagai Cairan</i>)	leakage, flow, drain, plug	“The state budget is leaking everywhere; we must plug these holes immediately.” (<i>APBN bocor di mana-mana, harus segera ditambal.</i>)	22
ECONOMY AS ENGINE (<i>Ekonomi sebagai Mesin</i>)	growth, foundation, engine, acceleration	“Our economic engine is strong; with the right policies, we can accelerate even faster.” (<i>Mesin ekonomi kita kuat, bisa dipacu lebih cepat.</i>)	28

The distribution in Table 1 shows that economic debates are dominated by two conceptual metaphors: STATE AS FIRM and ECONOMY AS ENGINE. Together, they account for more than half of all metaphorical tokens. This suggests that candidates often portray governance as managerial and technical work, akin to running a profitable enterprise or maintaining a complex machine. The BUDGET AS FLUID metaphor, while less frequent, still appears consistently, reflecting concerns about corruption, inefficiency, and leakage in public finance. These findings echo Bachryj (2024), who argues that metaphors provide persuasive narratives that simplify policy issues for public audiences [18]. The prevalence of managerial and mechanical

metaphors highlights a pattern where voters are invited to view the nation as an object requiring control, efficiency, and repair. Such descriptions indicate not only linguistic style but also a broader communicative strategy centered on credibility and economic stewardship.

The dominance of *STATE AS FIRM* and *ECONOMY AS ENGINE* metaphors can be interpreted through both cognitive and political lenses. Cognitively, these metaphors leverage familiar domains—business and machinery—to make abstract economic policies accessible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2017). Politically, they serve as rhetorical strategies to project competence and authority. Incumbents frame themselves as capable “managers” or “engineers” of the economy, emphasizing order and progress. In contrast, challengers often highlight *BUDGET AS FLUID* metaphors, stressing “leakages” and “drains” to depict systemic inefficiency. This interpretive shift aligns with van Dijk’s (2006) socio-cognitive approach, showing how discourse reflects ideological positioning [24]. Thus, the metaphorical patterns are not accidental but instrumental in shaping perceptions of responsibility and legitimacy. The interpretation underscores how conceptual metaphors act as framing devices that guide voters’ judgments about state performance and future economic prospects.

4.2. Ideological positioning through metaphoric discourse

The metaphors tied to ideological positioning are also distributed in Indonesian presidential debate. The data indicates that metaphors function not only as cognitive shortcuts but also as political strategies to frame responsibility, legitimacy, and fairness. Three ideological tendencies are evident: opposition candidates’ use of crisis frames (*collapse, bankrupt, crisis*), incumbents’ reliance on growth and stability frames (*foundation, growth, resilience*), and populist appeals to redistribution and fairness (*subsidy, welfare, fairness*). These categories map onto well-documented strategies in political discourse, where metaphors are mobilized to polarize debate, delegitimize opponents, and claim moral authority [18], [24]. Table 2 provides empirical confirmation that ideological positioning is inseparable from metaphor choice, demonstrating how economic language functions as a vehicle for persuasion in Indonesia’s electoral context.

Table 2. Ideological functions of economic metaphors in Indonesian presidential debates

Ideological Positioning	Representative Terms	Excerpts from Debate Utterances	Frequency (Tokens)
Opposition Crisis Framing	collapse, bankrupt, crisis, burden	“The people are bankrupt; the economy is collapsing because of mismanagement.” (Rakyat bangkrut, ekonomi ambruk karena salah urus.)	19
Incumbent Growth Narrative	growth, stability, strong foundation, resilience	“Our economic foundation is strong, and growth continues despite global challenges.” (Pondasi ekonomi kita kuat, pertumbuhan tetap berjalan meski ada tantangan global.)	25
Populist Redistribution Discourse	subsidy, fairness, people’s welfare	“Subsidies must be targeted to the people who truly need them; fairness is our priority.” (Subsidi harus tepat sasaran bagi rakyat yang benar-benar membutuhkan.)	17

The description of Table 2 reveals clear asymmetries between challengers and incumbents. Opposition candidates consistently employ *crisis metaphors* such as “economy collapsing” or “people bankrupt,” framing the state of affairs as a failure of governance. This aligns with a strategy of negative other-presentation [24], where highlighting “damage” or “burden” implies that the ruling elite is incapable of handling economic responsibilities. In contrast, incumbents adopt *growth and stability metaphors* to convey continuity and resilience, emphasizing strong foundations that legitimize their past policies. Finally, *populist redistribution metaphors*—although used by both camps—carry a moral dimension, stressing the need for targeted subsidies and fairness to appeal to lower-income voters. Together, these patterns suggest that ideological positioning is not random but systematically tied to metaphorical framing, reinforcing competing visions of governance and responsibility.

Interpreting these findings, one can argue that metaphors act as ideological battlegrounds. Crisis metaphors, when voiced by opposition candidates, amplify urgency and mobilize dissatisfaction, pushing audiences toward perceiving the incumbent as incompetent. Growth metaphors, in turn, allow incumbents to neutralize criticism by projecting stability and optimism, reassuring voters of progress. Populist redistribution metaphors represent an overlapping ideological space where both sides claim to represent “the people’s welfare,” though they operationalize it differently—opposition stresses misuse, while incumbents highlight targeted delivery. These dynamics confirm Shevchenko et al. (2020) argument that metaphors in political

debates embody strategic framing choices that influence public trust [4]. In the Indonesian presidential context, metaphors become powerful tools for ideological alignment, signaling not only policy preferences but also the moral authority of candidates. Ultimately, this interpretation reveals that metaphorical discourse is central to shaping how voters perceive competence, legitimacy, and the future trajectory of the national economy.

4.3. Frequency and pattern of metaphoric terms

The most frequent metaphorical terms are identified in the corpus and their collocational patterns. “Pertumbuhan ekonomi” (*economic growth*) is the most dominant, occurring 28 times across debates, often collocated with terms like “strong,” “inclusive,” or “sustainable.” “Investasi asing” (*foreign investment*) appears 17 times, typically tied to “climate” or “stability.” Meanwhile, “anggaran bocor” (*leaking budget*) is used 12 times, consistently framed with solutions such as “plugging” or “closing the leaks.” Finally, “subsidi tepat sasaran” (*targeted subsidy*) emerges 10 times, collocated with fairness and welfare-related vocabulary. These frequencies confirm that economic debates are anchored in a small cluster of recurring terms that carry metaphorical significance. Similar corpus-driven studies [1], [11], [20] have shown that repetition and collocation patterns serve as linguistic evidence of conceptual salience. Thus, the evidence highlights that Indonesian presidential debates revolve around a few key metaphorical expressions shaping the economic narrative.

Table 3. Frequency and collocational patterns of economic metaphors in Indonesian presidential debates

Metaphoric Term	Representative Collocations	Excerpts from Debate Utterances	Frequency (Tokens)
Pertumbuhan Ekonomi (<i>Economic Growth</i>)	strong, sustainable, inclusive	“Economic growth must be inclusive so that all citizens benefit.” (Pertumbuhan ekonomi harus inklusif agar semua warga merasakan manfaat.)	28
Investasi Asing (<i>Foreign Investment</i>)	attract, climate, stability	“We must attract more foreign investment by ensuring a stable investment climate.” (Kita harus menarik lebih banyak investasi asing dengan menjaga iklim stabil.)	17
Anggaran Bocor (<i>Leaking Budget</i>)	plug, efficiency, corruption	“The leaking budget must be plugged; otherwise, the people will suffer.” (Anggaran bocor harus ditutup, kalau tidak rakyat yang menanggung.)	12
Subsidi Tepat Sasaran (<i>Targeted Subsidy</i>)	fairness, welfare, people	“Subsidies must be well-targeted to those who really need them.” (Subsidi harus tepat sasaran kepada yang benar-benar membutuhkan.)	10

The description of Table 3 reveals a hierarchy of metaphorical focus in the debates. The prevalence of “pertumbuhan ekonomi” demonstrates that growth is the central frame through which both incumbents and challengers structure their economic arguments. This aligns with international findings that “growth” metaphors dominate electoral discourse [8]. The second-most frequent term, “investasi asing,” underscores the salience of global capital flows and national competitiveness in Indonesian political imagination. By contrast, “anggaran bocor” represents a critical frame, used strategically to question fiscal discipline and highlight governance inefficiencies. Finally, “subsidi tepat sasaran” shows the moral dimension of economic debate, where both camps compete to appear as guardians of fairness and welfare. Together, these terms illustrate that economic metaphors are not equally distributed but concentrated in frames of growth, investment, efficiency, and fairness. This descriptive pattern underscores how debates selectively foreground certain issues while backgrounding others.

Interpreting these patterns, one can see that frequency and collocation are not merely linguistic features but indicators of ideological priorities. The dominance of “pertumbuhan ekonomi” suggests that both camps recognize growth as a shared goal, but their interpretations differ—incumbents present it as evidence of success, while challengers frame it as insufficient or unequal. The prominence of “investasi asing” indicates the centrality of globalization, where candidates must balance promises of openness with protection of national interests. “Anggaran bocor,” meanwhile, becomes an oppositional metaphor signaling inefficiency and corruption, aimed at delegitimizing incumbents. Conversely, “subsidi tepat sasaran” embodies populist moral framing, where candidates seek to align themselves with the common people. These findings confirm van Dijk’s (2006) argument that repetition and lexical choices in political discourse reflect ideological strategies [24]. In conclusion, frequency patterns show that metaphors are not decorative but systematically tied to framing economic priorities and distributing political blame or credit.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings on conceptual metaphors reveal crucial implications for how the Indonesian public interprets economic governance. If the state is framed as a firm (*negara sebagai perusahaan*) or the economy as an engine (*ekonomi sebagai mesin*), then citizens are positioned to view leadership in managerial or technical terms. This framing has both functional and dysfunctional consequences. Functionally, metaphors simplify complex macroeconomic issues, making debates accessible to lay audiences by drawing on familiar domains of business or mechanics [8], [25]. Dysfunctionally, however, they risk narrowing public perception of governance to efficiency and speed, sidelining broader socio-political dimensions like justice or sustainability. In the Indonesian context, this framing could strengthen technocratic legitimacy but undermine deliberative democratic engagement. Thus, the implication is clear: conceptual metaphors function as double-edged swords, clarifying while also constraining the terms of public debate about economic futures.

The dominance of business and mechanical metaphors is not coincidental but rooted in structural dynamics of political communication. Politicians rely on shared cultural schemas where success in managing a company or repairing an engine equates to competence in governing a nation. These schemas reflect broader neoliberal and technocratic ideologies that privilege managerial efficiency as the ultimate criterion of legitimacy [18]. Furthermore, cognitive linguistics suggests that metaphor choice is motivated by experiential coherence: people understand intangible domains like economics through tangible domains like firms or machines [19], [26]. In Indonesia, where public discourse often associates development with infrastructure, machinery, and growth indicators, such metaphors gain natural resonance. The underlying structure, therefore, is a socio-cognitive alignment between cultural values and political rhetoric. Candidates select metaphors that resonate with voters' embodied experiences, reinforcing structural ideologies about what "good governance" looks like in economic terms.

The ideological functions of metaphors have strong implications for how political competition is structured. When opposition candidates employ crisis metaphors—"collapse," "bankruptcy," "people suffering"—they construct dysfunctionality as a defining feature of incumbents' governance. This strategy functions effectively as a delegitimization tool, mobilizing dissatisfaction among undecided voters. Conversely, incumbents' reliance on growth and stability metaphors re-legitimizes their leadership, presenting continuity as desirable. The implication is that metaphors act as ideological battlegrounds where legitimacy and illegitimacy are negotiated discursively. Functionally, this metaphorical contest provides voters with clear ideological alternatives. However, it also risks oversimplification, polarizing public discourse into binary narratives of success or failure, leaving little room for nuanced debate. As Musolff (2016) argues, metaphors are scenarios that structure collective inference [6]. In Indonesia, these scenarios play a decisive role in shaping whether the electorate perceives the economy as "growing steadily" or "collapsing dangerously."

The ideological polarization evident in Result B arises from structural necessities of electoral competition. Political discourse analysis shows that opposition parties often construct crisis narratives to highlight the need for change, while incumbents employ stability frames to sustain continuity [9], [20], [24]. These strategies are underpinned by the broader communicative logic of adversarial democracy, where candidates must distinguish themselves through contrasting narratives. Metaphors serve as efficient vehicles because they resonate emotionally and cognitively, allowing candidates to condense complex evaluations into vivid imagery. In Indonesia's multiparty context, where debates are televised and mediated extensively, the pressure to create memorable soundbites intensifies reliance on metaphorical frames. The underlying structure here is ideological competition embedded in communicative economy: metaphors economize language, conveying both policy stance and ideological positioning in one phrase. Thus, metaphor choice reflects not just individual preference but structural imperatives of democratic contestation.

The frequency patterns of terms such as *pertumbuhan ekonomi*, *investasi asing*, *anggaran bocor*, and *subsidi tepat sasaran* carry important implications for discourse priorities. Functionally, repetition of these terms signals salience: voters are cued to view these as the central economic issues of the election. As corpus linguistics shows, frequent lexical repetition not only reflects but also constructs reality by foregrounding some concerns while backgrounding others [4], [5], [7]. Dysfunctionally, this reliance on a narrow set of repeated metaphors may crowd out other critical issues such as inequality, informal labor, or environmental sustainability. In effect, frequency patterns reveal how public economic discourse becomes disciplined around a limited vocabulary, shaping what is thinkable and debatable. For Indonesia, this concentration of metaphors suggests that economic debates risk being reduced to growth, investment, and efficiency, limiting the electorate's exposure to alternative policy frames.

The observed frequency patterns stem from structural features of both media logic and political campaigning. Candidates repeatedly emphasize a small cluster of metaphors because they are easily understood, emotionally resonant, and compatible with media soundbite culture. Research in political

communication shows that repetition increases memorability and perceived truthfulness [1], [4], [20]. Thus, frequent use of “economic growth” reinforces its centrality as the measure of governance success. Similarly, recurring mentions of “budget leakage” appeal to widespread concerns about corruption, while “foreign investment” taps into anxieties about globalization. These structures reflect both cognitive efficiency—simplifying messages for mass audiences—and strategic calculation, ensuring that candidates’ key frames dominate headlines and voter recall. In Indonesia’s electoral context, with millions of viewers exposed through television and digital platforms, the frequency of metaphoric terms is not accidental but a product of structural imperatives: clarity, resonance, and control of narrative space.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that economic metaphors play a constitutive role in shaping how Indonesian presidential debates frame governance and legitimacy. The most important finding is that metaphors such as *STATE AS FIRM* (*negara sebagai perusahaan*), *BUDGET AS FLUID* (*anggaran sebagai cairan*), and *ECONOMY AS ENGINE* (*ekonomi sebagai mesin*) are not merely stylistic devices but cognitive and ideological tools that simplify complex issues while steering public perception. The lesson drawn is that metaphors structure not only language but also collective imagination about the economy, directing voters toward managerial, technical, or moral evaluations of leadership. A strength of this research lies in its methodological triangulation, combining Cognitive Metaphor Theory, Discourse Analysis, and Corpus Linguistics to capture both frequency and meaning. Scholarly contributions include refreshing perspectives on metaphor as an electoral strategy, refining variables of metaphor frequency and collocation, and raising new questions about how metaphors function as ideological battlegrounds in democratic discourse.

Despite these contributions, the study faces several limitations. First, the corpus is restricted to the 2019 and 2024 presidential debates, which narrows the scope to formal, televised discourse and excludes other campaign genres such as rallies, social media, or interviews. Second, the reliance on manually coded metaphors, even when guided by corpus tools, introduces interpretive subjectivity. Third, frequency counts, while useful, may underrepresent the pragmatic weight of rare but rhetorically powerful metaphors. These limitations suggest the need for follow-up research that expands the corpus across multiple communicative settings, integrates automated metaphor detection, and compares Indonesia’s debates with those of other democracies. Future studies should also explore audience reception to test how metaphor framing affects voter cognition and decision-making. Such extensions would strengthen generalizability and deepen theoretical insight, ensuring that metaphor analysis continues to illuminate the intersection of language, politics, and cognition in democratic societies.

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Radna Tulus Wibisono: conceptualization (lead), cognitive linguistic analysis (lead), writing – original draft (lead), writing – review and editing (lead).

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

INFORMED CONSENT

We have obtained informed consent from all individuals included in this study.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

This research related to human use has been complied with all the relevant national regulations and institutional policies in accordance with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration and has been approved by the authors’ institutional review board or equivalent committee.

DATA AVAILABILITY

Data availability is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study.

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BIOGRAPHY OF AUTHOR



Radna Tulus Wibisono    is affiliated with Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia. His academic studies focus on linguistics, language, or related humanities disciplines and is actively engaged in research on cognitive linguistics, political discourse, metaphor studies, semantics, and public communication. His recent works are on how language structures political reasoning and economic imagination in Indonesian public debates. He can be contacted at email: radnana89@gmail.com