PUBLIC AFFECTIVE RESPONSES TOWARD THE FREE NUTRITIOUS MEALS POLICY (MAKAN BERGIZI GRATIS/MBG): EVIDENCE FROM CENTRAL KALIMANTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores public affective responses to the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Central Kalimantan following Indonesia's 2024 presidential election. Although MBG was promoted as a flagship welfare policy to improve child nutrition and ease household burdens, its implementation generated diverse public reactions. Drawing on Affective Intelligence Theory, the study examines how emotions—particularly enthusiasm, anxiety, and anger—shape public evaluations of welfare policy beyond rational performance assessments. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines survey data from 50 respondents with in-depth interviews with 10 informants to capture both patterns of affective response and contextual experiences. The findings show that public support for MBG remains conditional: enthusiasm for its objectives coexists with anxiety over food safety, nutritional quality, and program sustainability, alongside anger directed at implementation failures rather than the policy concept itself. Anxiety encourages critical engagement and information-seeking, while anger reflects demands for accountability. Overall, the study highlights the emotionally complex nature of welfare policy evaluation in a politically supportive region and underscores the importance of affective dynamics in post-electoral governance in Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary democratic politics, public policy is no longer evaluated solely through rational calculations of cost-benefit or institutional effectiveness. Instead, emotional reactions and affective judgments increasingly shape how citizens interpret, accept, or reject government interventions. This shift reflects a broader transformation in political behavior, where emotions such as enthusiasm, anxiety, and anger play a decisive role in shaping public

opinion, political loyalty, and policy support (Kyselá, 2018; Marcus, 2013; Marcus et al., 2011, 2019). In this context, social welfare policies particularly those framed as pro-people or redistributive often function not only as instruments of social protection but also as powerful affective symbols within electoral and post-electoral politics.

Indonesia's 2024 presidential election illustrates this dynamic vividly. The landslide victory of Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka was accompanied by the prominence of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (Makan Bergizi Gratis, MBG), a flagship policy proposal aimed at reducing stunting and improving nutritional outcomes for children and pregnant women. Beyond its stated technocratic objectives, MBG became a central political narrative that symbolized state care, social justice, and national commitment to welfare provision. Similar to populist social policies in other democratic contexts, MBG can be interpreted as a program that appeals to "the people" by promising direct and tangible benefits, particularly to vulnerable groups (Chueri, 2022; Pratiwi et al., 2025).

However, the implementation of MBG after the election has generated significant public debate and controversy. Budgetary reallocation to finance the program has affected other public sectors, while reported cases of food poisoning, inconsistent nutritional standards, and uneven implementation have raised concerns about program quality and governance (Akbar, 2025). Investigations by civil society organizations revealed deficiencies in food safety and nutritional adequacy in several regions, triggering negative media coverage and public scrutiny. These developments highlight a crucial paradox: while MBG initially generated widespread enthusiasm and political support, its implementation has also produced anxiety and anger among segments of the public.

Understanding public responses to MBG therefore requires moving beyond conventional analyses of policy effectiveness and administrative performance. Public opinion is not a static or purely rational construct; rather, it is a dynamic process shaped by media framing, elite discourse, social identity, and emotional experience (Diermeier & Schnabel, 2025). Previous studies demonstrate that emotional reactions often precede cognitive evaluations and significantly influence how citizens process policy-related information, especially under conditions of uncertainty or perceived risk (Bally & Sebi, 2025; Krishna et al., 2025).

Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) provides a useful analytical framework for examining these dynamics. AIT posits that political judgment is guided by two interacting emotional systems: the disposition system, associated with enthusiasm and anger that reinforce existing political loyalties, and the surveillance system, associated with anxiety that encourages information-seeking and critical reassessment (Mackie et al., 2024; Marcus, 2013; Marcus et al., 2011, 2019; Roseman, 2025). From this perspective, social policies like MBG may initially activate enthusiasm among supporters, but implementation failures can trigger anxiety or anger, potentially shifting public attitudes from blind loyalty toward more reflective evaluation.

This affective dimension becomes particularly salient in regions where political support for the governing coalition is electorally dominant. Central Kalimantan offers a compelling case in this regard. In the 2024 presidential election, Prabowo-Gibran secured an overwhelming majority of votes in the province, far surpassing competing candidates (Muliawati, 2024). Such electoral dominance raises an important analytical question: does strong political support translate into unconditional acceptance of post-election policies, or do citizens develop more critical and evaluative affective responses once policies are implemented?

Existing scholarship on welfare populism suggests that while social assistance programs can consolidate political loyalty, they also risk eroding trust if implementation fails to meet public expectations (Moise, 2021; Morrell et al., 2022). Moreover, research on affective polarization indicates that intense emotional attachment to political leaders may initially suppress criticism, but negative experiences can later generate frustration and disillusionment (Phillips, 2024). These insights underscore the importance of examining not only whether citizens support MBG, but how they feel about it after direct exposure to its outcomes.

Despite the growing literature on public perception and welfare policy in Indonesia, studies that explicitly analyze affective responses to policy implementation remain limited. Most existing research emphasizes cognitive

perceptions such as effectiveness, fairness, or efficiency while underestimating the role of emotions in shaping policy acceptance and political behavior. This gap is particularly evident in post-electoral contexts, where policy implementation may challenge pre-existing political loyalties.

This article addresses that gap by examining the affective responses of the public in Central Kalimantan toward the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program after the 2024 presidential election. Drawing on Affective Intelligence Theory and supported by mixed-methods empirical evidence, the study explores whether public responses remain characterized by uncritical enthusiasm or evolve into more nuanced, evaluative, and emotionally ambivalent judgments. By focusing on affect rather than perception alone, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how welfare policies function not only as instruments of redistribution but also as emotional and political experiences in contemporary Indonesian democracy.

METHOD

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to analyze public affective responses toward the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Central Kalimantan following the 2024 presidential election. The mixed-methods approach was chosen to capture both the measurable patterns of affective responses across the population and the contextual meanings underlying citizens' emotional evaluations of public policy. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study allows for triangulation and provides a more comprehensive understanding of political emotions in post-electoral policy implementation contexts (Creswell & Inoue, 2025).

The research was conducted in Central Kalimantan Province, with a primary focus on urban and semi-urban areas, particularly Palangka Raya City and parts of Kotawaringin Timur. Central Kalimantan was selected due to its strong electoral support for the Prabowo-Gibran ticket in the 2024 presidential election, which makes it a critical site for examining whether affective political loyalty translates into unconditional support for post-election welfare policies (Muliawati, 2024). This geographical context provides analytical leverage to assess affective dynamics within a politically dominant support base.

Quantitative data were collected through a structured survey administered to 50 respondents using stratified random sampling based on key socio-demographic characteristics, including gender, education level, income, and direct exposure to the MBG program. This sampling strategy was employed to ensure proportional representation and reduce selection bias across different social groups. The survey instrument was developed based on Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT) and operationalized four key dimensions: enthusiasm, anxiety, anger, and perceived policy quality. Enthusiasm captures emotional support and optimism toward MBG; anxiety reflects concern and uncertainty related to food safety, distribution, and program continuity; anger represents dissatisfaction and frustration with implementation failures; and perceived policy quality assesses evaluations of nutritional adequacy, fairness, and effectiveness. All items were measured using Likert-scale questions adapted to the Indonesian policy context following established practices in political emotion research (Marcus et al., 2019).

Instrument reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to assess internal consistency across affective dimensions. All scales exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold ($\alpha > 0.70$), indicating that the instrument was psychometrically reliable and suitable for inferential analysis (Cooksey, 2020). Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify dominant affective patterns and inferential techniques, including association tests and regression analysis, to explore relationships between emotional responses and respondents' socio-demographic characteristics. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software.

To complement the survey findings and deepen contextual understanding, qualitative data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants selected via purposive sampling. Informants included parents of MBG recipients, teachers, caregivers, and individuals indirectly affected by the program, allowing

the study to capture diverse experiential and emotional perspectives. Interviews focused on personal experiences with MBG implementation, emotional reactions toward the program, and the influence of social environment and political identity on policy evaluation. The number of interviews was determined based on the principle of theoretical saturation, where additional data no longer generated new substantive themes (Sim et al., 2018).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis following the analytical framework proposed by Miles and Huberman. This process involved data reduction, thematic coding, pattern identification, and interpretative synthesis to uncover recurring emotional narratives and meaning structures embedded in respondents' account. Qualitative findings were subsequently used to contextualize and explain quantitative patterns, particularly in understanding how affective responses evolved from initial enthusiasm toward more reflective, ambivalent, or critical evaluations of policy outcomes.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative data was conducted at the interpretation stage through side-by-side comparison, enabling affective trends identified in survey data to be interpreted alongside narrative evidence from interviews. This integrative approach enhances analytical coherence and strengthens the validity of conclusions regarding public affective responses to MBG implementation (Creswell & Inoue, 2025). All research procedures adhered to ethical research standards, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, and respondents were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

The empirical findings of this study are based on survey data collected from 50 respondents and in-depth interviews with 10 informants in Central Kalimantan. The majority of survey respondents were directly exposed to the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG), either as parents of recipients or as household members of beneficiary students. Specifically, 90% of respondents reported direct involvement with MBG, while only 10% indicated no direct exposure. In terms of socio-demographic characteristics, respondents were predominantly married (86%), female (48%), and highly educated, with 60% holding a diploma or higher education degree. Monthly household income was largely concentrated in the middle-income range, with 80% earning between IDR 1 million and IDR 5 million per month. These characteristics indicate that the data largely represent experiences and evaluations from urban and semi-urban middle-income households in Central Kalimantan.

Dimension	Number of Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's α	Dominant Pattern
Enthusiasm	7	2.11	0.76	0.856	Critical Positive
Anxiety	6	1.95	0.83	0.823	High Uncertainty
Anger	6	2.18	0.86	0.798	Situational
Perceived Quality	4	1.93	0.74	0.702	Skeptical Positive
Overall	23	2.04	0.75	0.891	Cautious Support

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Analysis

Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha demonstrated strong internal consistency across all affective dimensions measured in the survey instrument. The enthusiasm scale, consisting of seven items, yielded a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.856, indicating very high reliability. The anxiety dimension, measured through six items, produced

an Alpha coefficient of 0.823, while the anger dimension, also comprising six items, recorded a value of 0.798, both of which fall within the acceptable to high reliability range. The perceived policy quality scale, measured through four items, showed an Alpha value of 0.702, which meets the minimum acceptable threshold. The overall instrument reliability reached 0.891, confirming that the survey instrument consistently captured affective responses toward MBG.

Descriptive analysis of affective responses reveals that enthusiasm toward MBG remains present but is not unqualified. The mean score for the enthusiasm dimension was 2.11 (SD = 0.76), indicating moderate positive affect. Items measuring optimism about program continuation and emotional support for the policy received generally positive responses; however, these responses were frequently accompanied by conditional statements regarding the need for improvements in implementation. Approximately two-thirds of respondents (66.7%) expressed agreement that MBG should be continued, but emphasized that significant improvements in food quality, safety, and distribution were necessary. This pattern suggests that enthusiasm coexists with evaluative caution.

The anxiety dimension recorded a mean score of 1.95 (SD = 0.83), reflecting a relatively high level of concern among respondents. Survey items related to food safety, nutritional adequacy, and uncertainty regarding program sustainability elicited notable levels of agreement. When confronted with negative information about MBG, such as reports of food poisoning or substandard meals, respondents did not predominantly react with rejection or indifference. Instead, the average response score for information-seeking behavior was 2.10, indicating a tendency to seek additional information and verification rather than immediately dismissing or defending the program. This finding points to an active engagement with policy-related information rather than passive acceptance.

Anger toward MBG implementation was present but situational in nature. The anger dimension yielded a mean score of 2.18 (SD = 0.86), slightly higher than both enthusiasm and anxiety. Responses indicating frustration and dissatisfaction were particularly pronounced in items related to inconsistent food quality and unequal implementation across schools. However, anger did not manifest as outright rejection of the program. Rather, expressions of anger were often linked to specific incidents or perceived failures, suggesting that negative affect was directed at implementation practices rather than the policy idea itself.

Perceived policy quality showed a mean score of 1.93 (SD = 0.74), reflecting a cautiously positive yet skeptical evaluation. Respondents generally acknowledged the intended benefits of MBG, particularly in reducing household food expenditure and improving children's access to meals at school. At the same time, doubts were raised regarding nutritional standards, menu variation, and oversight mechanisms. The convergence of moderate enthusiasm, elevated anxiety, and situational anger indicates a complex affective configuration rather than a singular emotional orientation.

Qualitative interview data further illustrate this diversity of affective responses. Among the 10 informants, four expressed predominantly enthusiastic reactions toward MBG, emphasizing gratitude for reduced household expenses and perceived benefits for children. Two informants articulated strong anxiety, focusing on food safety and long-term program sustainability. Two informants conveyed explicit anger, particularly in response to reported cases of food spoilage and perceived lack of accountability. The remaining informants expressed neutral or ambivalent positions, combining support for the program's objectives with critical assessments of its execution.

Teachers and school staff interviewed as informants tended to express higher levels of enthusiasm, especially when schools received MBG consistently and without major logistical issues. Parents and caregivers, particularly mothers responsible for children's daily meals, more frequently articulated anxiety and anger, reflecting their closer involvement in monitoring food quality and children's health. These qualitative patterns corroborate the survey findings, showing that affective responses toward MBG vary according to role, experience, and proximity to implementation outcomes.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that public affective responses toward MBG in Central Kalimantan are characterized by a combination of support, concern, and critique. Enthusiasm remains evident, but it is accompanied by significant anxiety and situational anger related to implementation quality. The empirical data indicate that public support for MBG is neither blind nor uniformly negative; instead, it reflects a nuanced affective orientation shaped by direct experience with the program.

Discussion

The empirical findings indicate that affective responses toward the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Central Kalimantan are structured by the concurrent presence of enthusiasm, anxiety, and anger rather than a single dominant affective orientation. Survey results ($N = 50$) show moderate enthusiasm ($M = 2.11$, $SD = 0.76$, $\alpha = 0.856$), substantial anxiety ($M = 1.95$, $SD = 0.83$, $\alpha = 0.823$), and anger with the highest mean among the affective dimensions ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.86$, $\alpha = 0.798$). The overall reliability of the instrument is strong ($\alpha = 0.891$), indicating that the scales consistently captured variation in political affect. This pattern corresponds with Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), which conceptualizes political judgment as the product of multiple emotional systems operating simultaneously rather than sequentially (Marcus, 2013; Marcus et al., 2011, 2019).

Enthusiasm toward MBG remains empirically evident but does not appear to function as unconditional approval. The enthusiasm mean ($M = 2.11$) suggests sustained positive affect, while two-thirds of respondents (66.7%) indicated support for continuation of the program, accompanied by explicit demands for improvements in food quality, safety, and distribution. In AIT terms, this pattern is compatible with activation of the disposition system, which reinforces support toward familiar policy agendas and actors (Marcus et al., 2019). The persistence of enthusiasm is also situated in respondents' exposure to the program: 90% of survey participants reported direct involvement with MBG as parents or household members of recipients. This implies that positive affect is not solely symbolic but linked to perceived practical benefits, consistent with research on welfare populism suggesting that visible and directly beneficial social programs may sustain affective support beyond strict performance evaluations (Moise, 2021).

At the same time, the presence of anxiety suggests that positive affect did not operate in isolation. Anxiety recorded a mean score of 1.95 ($SD = 0.83$), indicating notable concern related to food safety, nutritional adequacy, and program sustainability. This affective dimension is further supported by respondents' behavioral orientation toward negative information. The mean score for information-seeking in response to negative news was 2.10, indicating a tendency to verify information rather than immediately dismiss or defend the program. In the AIT framework, anxiety activates the surveillance system, which interrupts habitual judgment and increases attention to risk, uncertainty, and policy detail (Marcus, 2013; Marcus et al., 2011). This empirical pattern is consistent with recent findings showing that anxiety can increase cognitive engagement and reduce reliance on partisan heuristics under conditions of uncertainty (Bally & Sebi, 2025; Krishna et al., 2025).

The salience of anxiety is analytically relevant given Central Kalimantan's status as an electorally supportive region. Conventional accounts of political loyalty would anticipate relatively high tolerance for implementation shortcomings. However, the observed anxiety indicates that direct exposure to policy outcomes (given 90% direct involvement) is associated with affective responses that emphasize risk and uncertainty. This supports existing arguments that lived policy experience may shape evaluation even when partisan predispositions are favorable, particularly when policy outcomes involve perceived vulnerability, such as children's health and food safety (Bates et al., 2021).

Anger, while recording the highest mean score ($M = 2.18$), appears to be oriented toward implementation problems rather than the policy concept. Survey responses indicate that anger was concentrated in items related to inconsistent food quality and uneven execution across schools. The qualitative distribution provides further contextual evidence: among 10 informants, two expressed anger primarily in relation to spoilage incidents, inadequate oversight,

and distribution inequality. Within AIT, anger is associated with blame attribution and reinforcement of identity commitments, but it does not necessarily generate opposition to the policy itself unless it becomes generalized and sustained (Marcus et al., 2019). The coexistence of anger with majority continuation support (66.7%) is consistent with this distinction between dissatisfaction with administrative practice and endorsement of normative policy objectives.

Perceived policy quality further reflects a cautious evaluative orientation. The mean score for perceived quality was 1.93 (SD = 0.74, α = 0.702), suggesting that respondents recognized program benefits while maintaining skepticism regarding nutritional standards, menu variation, and monitoring mechanisms. When considered jointly, the overall affective mean across dimensions was 2.04 (SD = 0.75), indicating that respondents' general orientation toward MBG combines support with heightened attentiveness to implementation performance rather than categorical acceptance or rejection.

Qualitative interview data (n = 10) corroborate the coexistence of multiple affective dispositions. Four informants expressed predominantly enthusiastic evaluations, two articulated sustained anxiety, two reported anger, and two expressed neutral or ambivalent positions. Role differentiation was also evident. Teachers and school staff tended to express stronger enthusiasm when delivery was stable, whereas parents and caregivers more frequently articulated anxiety and anger, reflecting proximity to children's daily consumption and perceived responsibility for health-related outcomes. This pattern aligns with the argument that emotional responses to policy are shaped by social role, responsibility, and perceived vulnerability rather than by individual psychological disposition alone.

Taken together, the results suggest that public responses to MBG in Central Kalimantan are not adequately characterized by singular performance-based satisfaction or partisan loyalty. Instead, the measured affective configuration is consistent with AIT's dual-system mechanism: enthusiasm remains moderate (M = 2.11) and corresponds with conditional continuation support (66.7%), anxiety is substantial (M = 1.95) and corresponds with information verification (M = 2.10), and anger is present (M = 2.18) but oriented toward implementation shortcomings. These empirical patterns indicate that support for MBG operates alongside evaluative vigilance and implementation-focused critique, consistent with scholarship emphasizing that contemporary citizens can hold internally differentiated emotional orientations toward public policy (Diermeier & Schnabel, 2025; Marcus et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that public responses to the implementation of the Free Nutritious Meal Program (MBG) in Central Kalimantan are shaped by a complex configuration of political emotions rather than by rational evaluation alone. Despite the province's strong electoral support for the Prabowo–Gibran ticket, public affect toward MBG is not characterized by unconditional acceptance. Enthusiasm for the program's objectives coexists with anxiety and situational anger arising from implementation shortcomings, confirming the relevance of Affective Intelligence Theory in explaining post-electoral policy evaluation as citizens move from campaign narratives to direct policy experience.

The findings show that anxiety plays a central role in encouraging reflective and critical engagement with public policy. Rather than prompting rejection, anxiety stimulates information-seeking behavior and conditional support, indicating emotionally informed citizenship. Anger is directed primarily at administrative failures rather than at the policy idea itself, demonstrating citizens' capacity to distinguish between normative policy goals and their practical execution. This affective differentiation challenges assumptions that welfare policies in politically dominant regions automatically generate passive or depoliticized support.

Theoretically, this study extends the application of Affective Intelligence Theory to welfare policy implementation in a post-electoral context, highlighting how emotional dynamics shift from symbolic promises to

everyday governance. Empirically, it shows that welfare programs function not only as redistributive instruments but also as emotional interfaces between the state and citizens. Policy-wise, anxiety and anger should be read as signals of public concern, underscoring the need to address issues of food safety, nutritional standards, and oversight to sustain trust and democratic accountability.

This study has limitations. The relatively small sample size and focus on a single province limit the generalizability of findings across Indonesia's diverse socio-political contexts. Future research could employ larger comparative designs and longitudinal data to examine how affective responses evolve over time and across regions with differing levels of political alignment.

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