

Populist Technocracy: Deconstruction of Bahlil Lahadalia's Political Rhetoric at the 2023 Investment Coordination Meeting

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana retorika politik digunakan sebagai instrumen konstruksi legitimasi negara dalam pidato Menteri Investasi, Bahlil Lahadalia, pada Rapat Koordinasi Nasional (Rakornas) Investasi 2023. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan analisis wacana retoris berbasis teori Aristoteles (ethos, pathos, logos) dan perspektif komunikasi politik modern, penelitian ini mengkaji struktur argumentasi, strategi framing, serta fungsi politis dari pidato tersebut. Data penelitian berupa transkrip pidato yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa retorika Bahlil didominasi oleh logos melalui penggunaan data empiris, diperkuat oleh ethos melalui legitimasi kekuasaan presiden, serta pathos yang membangun resonansi emosional terkait akhir masa pemerintahan. Lebih jauh, retorika tersebut berfungsi sebagai instrumen political branding dan legitimasi kebijakan investasi pemerintah. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa komunikasi politik modern tidak hanya berfungsi informatif, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme strategis dalam mengamankan legitimasi negara di ruang publik.

kata kunci: *Bahlil Lahadalia; komunikasi politik modern; retorika pidato;*

Abstract

This study analyzes how political rhetoric is used to construct state legitimacy in the speech of the Minister of Investment, Bahlil Lahadalia, at the 2023 National Investment Coordination Meeting (Rakornas). Using a qualitative approach grounded in Aristotle's rhetorical theory (ethos, pathos, logos) and a modern political communication perspective, the study examines the speech's argumentation structure, strategic framing, and political function. The research data consist of speech transcripts analyzed thematically. The results show that Bahlil's rhetoric is dominated by logos, supported by empirical data, reinforced by ethos through the legitimacy of presidential power, and complemented by pathos that builds emotional resonance related to the end of the government's term. Furthermore, the rhetoric functions as a political instrument for branding and legitimizing government investment policies. These findings confirm that modern political communication serves not only as an informational tool but also as a strategic mechanism for securing state legitimacy in the public sphere.

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Keywords: *Bahlil Lahadalia; modern political communication; speech rhetoric.*

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Introduction

Political rhetoric is an important instrument in modern political communication, especially in the context of public officials who must account for their institutional performance before the head of state and other stakeholders. In the context of Indonesia, Bahlil Lahadalia, serving as Minister of Investment/BKPM from 2019 to 2024, is known as a figure who employs a combined communication style: technocratic, straightforward, yet still rhetorical and political. Bahlil's speech at the 2023 National Investment Coordination Meeting is particularly interesting to analyse because this speech was crafted in the context of the final evaluation of the 2019–2024 cabinet period, thus laden with messages of performance, legitimacy, and strategic political framing. Through the following excerpt of his speech, this research focuses on analysing how Bahlil constructs arguments and legitimacy through narrative.

“Mr President, allow us to report on this event... This investment coordination meeting has been a tradition from year to year to evaluate... since we were inaugurated... I still remember because this is the last coordination meeting during the 2019–2024 cabinet period as a form of evaluation of what was instructed by Mr President to us as the Minister of Investment... investments must be of quality... the distribution of investments... since the third quarter of 2020 until the fourth quarter, investments outside Java Island have been larger than those within Java.”

This speech not only delivers a technical report but also constructs a narrative of success, compliance with the presidential mandate, and policy consistency. Therefore, the rhetoric used is within the framework of modern political communication that combines symbolism, data, and the reinforcement of legitimacy. This is particularly interesting because the phenomenon of narrative processing can influence political discourse (Harari, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon of Bahlil Lahadalia's speech is dissected using Aristotle's rhetorical theory, which includes ethos, logos, and pathos. Additionally, modern political communication encompassing political branding, framing, and agenda-building is considered. Hence, this research argues that political rhetoric in technocratic speeches functions not only as a means of delivering administrative

reports but also as a strategic communication practice that plays a role in constructing state legitimacy and strengthening public policy narratives.

Bahlil Lahadalia's Speech Rhetoric

In a democracy, political speeches play a crucial role not only in elections but also in governance. They are viewed as more than just words; they are actions that influence audiences. Specialists in rhetoric and political communication highlight that well-organized messages, delivery styles, and the use of particular symbols can greatly impact public perception. By employing rhetorical approaches like ethos, pathos, and logos, a politician can enhance credibility, foster emotional connection, and present arguments logically. This makes speeches powerful tools for persuasion (Aristotle, 1954).

On an international scale, particularly in America, which has been the patron of democratic countries, there has been a noticeable turbulence in the quality of democracy (Why the United States Must Spread Democracy | Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, 2025). This turbulence is evidenced by Donald Trump frequently delivering rhetoric that often employs populist politics and controversial paradoxes in public communication, leading to a descent into post-truth. This cycle is reflected in the practical application of contemporary concepts regarding patterns of thinking and styles of expression, which indicate a shift designed to respond to various paradoxes in public communication and to foster new dynamics in the United States. His consistently controversial statements have subsequently given rise to the term 'post-truth era', a situation where statements lacking factual basis are constructed in such a way that they appear to be true. As a result, Trump's victory in the US presidential election triggered upheaval in global politics due to concerns over the controversial policies he might implement (Koerniadi, n.d.).

In the context of Indonesia, political speeches have their own characteristics because they relate to cultural diversity, societal pluralism, and complex political dynamics. Political speeches often become important moments in campaigns, state sessions, political declarations, or government responses to public issues. Similarly, President Prabowo Subianto has also delivered a national speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly in 2025, where he not only reaffirmed Indonesia's position regarding its commitment to multilateralism and global humanitarian issues but also strengthened Indonesia's diplomatic stance through rhetoric involving ethos, pathos, and logos. This underscores that political communication in

international forums can serve as a strategic instrument to build legitimacy and enhance the nation's image (Anwar & Nur 'Aini, 2025).

The political language used in speeches often contains narratives of nationalism, legitimacy of power, and commitments to meaningful development agendas. Political language is not merely a tool for communication but also a strategy to shape collective identity, mobilise political support, and reinforce hierarchies of power. In the context of global political discourse, especially related to issues of national identity, immigration, and economic policy (Kasman et al., 2025), political language in the rhetoric delivered by politicians can also take the form of symbols, such as billboards. Therefore, political identity is constructed by emphasising various aspects of rhetoric, sometimes with identities built through rhetoric, where political figures create political marketing products that are then offered to the public to be preventive in nature through support and political choices (Pamungkas, 2022). Often, in the discourse of debates among political actors, in the context of gaining support from the voter market, they utilise sharp rhetoric characterised by their respective traits, according to the relevance of circumstances and the dynamics of the times..

As in the 2024 election candidate debate, the pair number 01, Anies Baswedan and Muhaimin Iskandar, used rhetoric focused on change and reform; pair number 02, Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming, used rhetoric focused on stability and national security; while pair number 03, Ganjar Pranowo and Mahfud MD, focused on innovation and technological advancement (Syafitri Ramadhani et al., 2024). It should be noted that in rhetoric, there is often an interest from the communicator to hegemonise the opponent in order to co-opt them as a means of articulating ideas and ideological positions. In line with this, Fairclough (1995) in Marzuki et al. explains that the use of language in political discourse contains an ideological and power network. Therefore, rhetorical strategies in political debates are inseparable from hegemonic interests that the speaker aims to realise (Marzuki et al., 2025).

Currently, the unique style of speech used by Bahlil is characterised by its repetition of street narratives, but with straightforward meaning. Often, snippets of speeches used by Bahlil have shaken the world of organisational activism due to their connotations, which tend to imply submission to authority, be it group or individual aimed at obtaining something in a material sense, such as positions or a sense of security. Based on the researcher's review of the Instagram account @kanda.bahlil, particularly the video post dated 11 April

2025, the post highlights Bahlil using narratives such as “enter the goods,” “this stuff is getting hotter,” “playing with the goods, isn’t it,” “we can control this stuff,” etc. As a result, a public perception has emerged in the comment section, with some relating it to narratives about gaining power, others linking it to the interests of certain organisations, and so on. Interestingly, the content is presented in the form of memes, which are market-appropriate and appeal to young people.

The phenomenon above indicates that political rhetoric does not solely rely on direct communication, but is also influenced by how the message is received and understood within the digital space (Marzuki et al., 2025). Moreover, the former Minister of Investment and Maritime Affairs (BKPM) also has a candid character in delivering his speeches, tending to be to the point or, scientifically, referred to as low context communication, which is often carried out by Indonesian political elites, similar to Joko Widodo when he first assumed the presidency of Indonesia. His communication is explicitly straightforward, giving an impression of being deep, open, dominant, attentive, friendly, and enthusiastic (Makmur, 2016). Along with that, when Bahlil delivers rhetoric in the form of low-context communication, it embodies the essence of effective direct communication. According to Croucher, as cited by Pablo Lamino and John Diaz, low-context communication can minimize misinterpretation (Dhia et al., 2021) (Croucher and Diaz, 2024).

Speeches are an important instrument in activities of a political nature. This is because politics itself is heavily characterized by the battle of narratives to influence audiences (Fauzi & Sabardila, 2023). Political speeches are one of the most strategic communication tools in modern political practice. Through speeches, political actors not only convey ideas, visions, and work programs, but also build images, influence public opinion, and consolidate political support. In the context of democracy, political speeches serve as a medium to strengthen the relationship between leaders and the community, ensure transparency of political agendas, and provide space for articulating public interests. Therefore, analysis of political speeches cannot be separated from the dynamics of power, social context, and the communication strategies employed.

In the context of politicians' rhetoric as communicators delivering their speeches in various ways, the distinguishing factor lies in their techniques of persuasion. In this case, the researcher observed Bahlil's rhetoric during the 2023 National Investment Coordination Meeting, using the Rhetoric Theory

proposed by Aristotle. According to Aristotle, the theory of rhetoric is based on two main assumptions. First, an effective communicator must be able to understand and consider the characteristics of their audience. Second, a good speaker needs to include various forms of proof or evidence in their message delivery. In practice, speaking before the public, Aristotle emphasized the importance of recognizing the relationship between the speaker and the audience as part of the persuasive communication process. Involving external or non-artistic evidence refers to evidence not created by the speaker, such as witness observations and empirical evidence (Dhia et al., 2021).

Then, in the second assumption underlying Aristotle's theory related to the consideration of three rhetorical proofs: *logos* (logic), *ethos* (ethics and credibility), and *pathos* (emotion) (Dhia et al., 2021). Aristotle's Rhetoric theory, or what can be called Artistic Proofs. According to Herrick in Meidy Aisyah, *logos* is the study of the logic of arguments used in practical decision-making, *pathos* involves the discussion of emotional psychology aimed at understanding the emotional responses faced in the speech's purpose, while *ethos* pertains to how a speaker should emphasise intelligence and common sense, virtue, and good intentions (Aisyah, 2022).

This research dissects the structure of the speech delivered by Bahlil during the 2023 National Coordination Meeting (Rakornas) of BKPM using Aristotle's rhetorical theory, namely *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*. In the context of *ethos*, it is struck by the narrative 'Mr. President, allow us to report on this event... This investment coordination meeting has been a tradition year after year to evaluate,' which means that in this semiotic narrative, Bahlil as the communicator, personalizes himself as the Minister and implicitly as a representative of BKPM, to make the audience more confident in his credibility in delivering the report in accordance with his capacity and capabilities. Then, the *pathos* is evident in the narrative 'since we were inaugurated... I still remember because this is the last coordination meeting during the 2019–2024 cabinet period as a form of evaluation of what was instructed by Mr. President to us as investment ministers,' which explicitly reminds the audience emotionally that the Rakornas held is part of the final period of President Joko Widodo's leadership, proceeding according to the President's directives. Lastly, *logos* is explained in the narrative 'investment must be of quality... the distribution of investment... since the third quarter of 2020 until the fourth quarter, investment outside Java has been larger than in Java,' which is intended

as what Bahlil conveys based on reports and data collected by the Ministry of Investment or BKPM.

The excerpt of Bahlil's speech clearly illustrates the use of ethos, logos, and pathos, as outlined in Aristotle's rhetorical principles. Ethos is demonstrated by reaffirming his credibility as a minister implementing the president's directives; logos is shown through data, figures, and investment success metrics; and pathos becomes evident when he states that the National Coordination Meeting (Rakornas) is the final one during the current cabinet's term. These three components together reveal how Bahlil employs a well-structured rhetorical approach to foster persuasion, trust, and legitimacy among the President and stakeholders..

Furthermore, the capacity for speech delivered in a straightforward manner, directly addressing the core issues, and employing low-context communication also demonstrates a characteristic feature of political communication styles in the contemporary or modern era. Such communication styles are now increasingly dominant among public officials, especially in delivering performance reports or strategic policies. The aim is to create messages that are easy to understand, efficient, and unambiguous, and at the same time reinforce the professionalism of ministers in executing their technocratic functions. Modern political communication becomes a subsequent discussion after rhetorical analysis is conducted. The integration of both is important to produce a comprehensive understanding of how political messages are constructed, framed, and strategically delivered by a state official. Rhetorical approach provides a philosophical foundation regarding the persuasive structure of speeches, while the modern political communication perspective offers an analytical framework concerning the political, symbolic, and strategic functions of the messages. Thus, combining these two approaches makes the research more academically relevant, while also capable of providing the necessary theoretical contributions to understand the communication models of public officials within the context of contemporary governance.

Modern Political Communication

Modern political communication is a rapidly developing field of study, evolving alongside the increasing complexity of political dynamics, changing patterns of public interaction, and the growing role of technology in the process of delivering political messages. In the context of contemporary governance, political communication is no longer understood merely as the exchange of

information between political actors and society, but also includes image management strategies, narrative construction, public opinion formation, and the measured use of rhetorical devices to gain legitimacy. These developments require modern political communication to be more professional, strategic, and adaptable to changes in social environments and technology..

The emergence of digital media and interactive communication platforms has made political communication patterns more open, responsive, and participatory. Political actors are now required to craft messages that are not only informative but also persuasive through approaches that can touch on emotional, rational, and public identity aspects. At this point, political rhetoric becomes a very important communication instrument in influencing perceptions and shaping political positions amidst increasingly intense discourse competition. Rhetoric is not only seen as the art of speaking but also as a communication strategy that combines argumentation, symbols, language styles, and message delivery linked to specific political objectives.

From a modern political communication perspective, political actors strategically develop branding, framing, and agenda-setting to effectively convey messages to the public. This strategy helps them shape a positive image, influence public perception of issues, and set discussion priorities nationally. Positions like Bahlil Lahadalia are crucial, employing political rhetoric strategies in key forums like the 2023 National Investment Coordination Meeting (Rakornas).

The 2023 National Investment Conference served as a key platform for political communication. Bahlil delivered an investment performance report while also crafting strategic messages aimed at building public trust, enhancing policy legitimacy, and strengthening the government's stance on promoting the national investment climate. His rhetoric was both informative and persuasive, with symbolic elements that reflect modern political communication's focus on message effectiveness and public acceptance.

Through an analysis from the perspective of modern political communication, the study of Bahlil Lahadalia's political rhetoric at the 2023 Investment National Coordination Meeting becomes important to reveal how communication strategies, choice of diction, narrative construction, and rhetorical style used contribute to shaping political image, influencing stakeholder perceptions, and supporting government agendas in the field of investment. This analysis also provides a broader picture of how modern

political communication operates in the practice of contemporary Indonesian governance, especially when political actors must navigate challenges related to information, public expectations, and the need for policy legitimacy in an era that is fast-paced and digital..

Today, communication plays a crucial role in shaping public perception. Often, the public even acts as the ultimate judge of whether information from different sectors of life, including politics, is accurate. In political communication, this influence ties to power, which can be built and strengthened through mechanisms like gathering high-value information to determine who can access certain data, evaluating its completeness and significance, controlling access to sources of information, analyzing and verifying the truth of the information, and sometimes manipulating the information within the bounds of existing facts (Cecep Suryana, 2019).

The discussion of political communication, when understood through a philosophical paradigm, forms the term 'philosophy of political communication'. The philosophy of political communication is a thinking process that utilises ideas and thoughts to convey information about facts related to governance issues (Dewi, 2023). Broadly speaking, it can be understood as the level of the communicator's understanding of political issues being highly dependent on how engagingly the communicator delivers their message. The attitude and psychological condition of the communicator also influence the audience's response and have certain impacts on them. Therefore, an engaging message, adequate space, and the use of appropriate media are essential elements that every communicator must consider when engaging in political activity. Additionally, it is also important to ensure that the message benefits the audience and can elicit positive responses, thereby fostering a communicative relationship (Dewi, 2023).

Modern political communication is a contextualisation of political communication in the modern era, literally characterised by two-way, interactive communication influenced by the acceleration of digital information flow (Anitha Nurchalisah Thaha & Qudratullah Qudratullah, 2025). The rhetoric delivered by Bahlil during the 2023 BKMP National Coordination Meeting is embedded within an interactive direction, operating in an era of massive digital information flow. Based on this, there are two aspects that become the researcher's analysis, namely the implications of political framing and techno-political strategies;

1) Framing Politics

Framing is the structuring of language and news that is commonly part of news presentation practices in the media or political rhetoric (Pangeran Siagian & Mara Untung Ritonga, 2024). According to Shobur, framing can also be described as the process of selecting and emphasising certain aspects of an event fragment, which can influence how people interpret and understand information (Sobur, 2004). Framing involves choosing rhetorical elements, facts, or perspectives that imply a particular political solution is needed, often used by parties to promote ideological tendencies. In the media, this includes syntactic structures such as headlines, leads, quotations, and news sources to shape the audience's understanding of political events (Rina, 2021). Framing analysis aims to make messages more prominent, influence public opinion on issues such as elections, although it can be considered manipulative if it emphasises only one side. Framing analysis helps to understand how political news shapes perceptions, especially in complex events (Ardinata et al., 2024). In this context, it means that the rhetoric used by Bahlil during his speech could influence how someone interprets the communication he delivered.

2) Technology and Politics Strategy

Political technology combines technological innovation with political activity to enhance efficiency, transparency, and participation in modern democracy, from traditional eras to the current era of big data (KPU KAB-TOLIKARA - What is Political Technology?, 2025). The aim is to balance technical and political messages. In this context, Bahlil employs rhetorical speech using technological instruments in the form of digital presentations that emphasise data visualization.

Based on the above explanation, it can be understood that modern political communication not only functions as a medium for conveying information but also as a strategic instrument in shaping perceptions, images, and political legitimacy. Through an analysis of Bahlil Lahadalia's rhetoric in the 2023 Investment Coordination Meeting, it is evident that the use of classical rhetorical elements, ethos, pathos, and logos effectively combines with modern political communication approaches such as framing, political branding, and agenda building. This integration demonstrates that contemporary political actors must be able to merge argumentative strength with technological sophistication and the ability to read public dynamics.

Bahlil's speech demonstrates how a government official can utilise data, narratives, and presentation technology to emphasise policy achievements while also strengthening the government's communication strategy in the investment sector. Through a straightforward, data-driven style supported by measured rhetoric, the speech serves as a concrete example of how modern political communication operates: interactive, legitimacy-oriented, and sensitive to transparency demands in the digital era.

Thus, this analysis affirms that the effectiveness of political communication is not only determined by the content of the message but also by how the message is constructed, presented, and projected in the public sphere. The study of Bahlil's rhetoric in this strategic forum provides an overview that the success of modern political communication depends on the ability of political actors to combine technocratic intelligence, rhetorical precision, and the utilisation of technology in a synergistic manner. This finding also opens up opportunities for further research into how public officials in Indonesia use rhetoric and digital communication technology to strengthen policy legitimacy within the context of contemporary governance.

Conclusion

This research indicates that Bahlil Lahadalia's political rhetoric during the 2023 National Investment Coordination Meeting reflects modern political communication practices that combine elements of classical rhetoric with contemporary communication strategies. Bahlil's speech not only serves as a report on technocratic performance but also as a political instrument designed to build legitimacy, influence public perception, and strengthen the government's position in promoting the national investment agenda.

Through the use of ethos, Bahlil affirms his credibility as the executor of the president's mandate; through logos, he presents empirical data and measurable investment achievements; and through pathos, he builds emotional resonance by highlighting the final moments of the cabinet's tenure. These three rhetorical elements are effectively integrated with modern political communication approaches such as framing, political branding, and agenda building, enabling the political message to reach the audience in a more systematic, persuasive, and strategic manner.

The analysis also shows that Bahlil's rhetoric operates within a straightforward and direct low-context communication framework, in line with

the character of public officials in the digital era who are required to be adaptive, responsive, and professional. The use of presentation technology, data visualisation, and interactive communication patterns reinforce the speech's position as part of a techno-political strategy that is a main feature of contemporary government communication.

Thus, it can be concluded that modern political communication is not merely about conveying information, but is a process of meaning construction involving narrative management, diction selection, the use of symbols, and the utilisation of technology to secure policy legitimacy. The study of Bahlil Lahadalia's speech emphasises that the success of political communication in the digital era heavily depends on the ability of political actors to integrate rhetoric, content strategies, and technological tools simultaneously. This finding opens up further research opportunities regarding the communication patterns of public officials in facing the challenges of information disruption and transparency expectations in the future.

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