



Representation of National Interest in the Post-Globalization Era: A Semiotic Analysis of the Presidential State Car MV3 Garuda Limousine

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Abstract

The emergence of the MV3 Garuda Limousine as a domestically produced presidential vehicle marks a new chapter in projecting Indonesia's national interest in the post-globalization era. This study aims to analyze the layers of semiotic meaning, encompassing denotation, connotation, and myth, within state visual content. Employing a descriptive qualitative method with Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, the research examines two official documentation photographs uploaded to the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia's Instagram account, representing the convoy following President Prabowo Subianto's inauguration (October 20, 2024) in a domestic-ceremonial context and a diplomatic reception at the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, Philippines (May 7, 2026) in an international-diplomatic context. The findings reveal that in the domestic-ceremonial context, the visual representation of the Garuda Limousine constructs a defense myth rooted in inclusive leadership integration by blending military-grade design with accessible executive gestures. Meanwhile, in the international-diplomatic context, deploying the vehicle projects myths of sovereignty and defense industrial self-reliance, positioning Indonesia as a regional diplomatic power. The synthesis of both photographic contexts naturalizes a geopolitical awareness regarding strategic survival and national strategic autonomy. This study demonstrates that the Garuda Limousine serves as an effective symbolic instrument in asserting national political sovereignty to secure strategic interests in the post-globalization era.

Keywords: Roland Barthes Semiotics; Myth; MV3 Garuda Limousine; National Interest; Post-Globalization

INTRODUCTION

A presidential vehicle can be viewed not merely as a means of transportation, but as a state symbol representing status, authority, identity, and even the direction of national policy. As documented by Picard (2017), heads of state frequently make use of presidential vehicles to fulfill needs of security and prestige, as well as a symbolic function. For instance, the United States presidential car, The Beast, is known as a symbol of military strength and advanced technology (Lakritz & Tecotzky, 2026). Meanwhile, Hongqi, the official presidential car in China, is often associated with the symbol of national industrial resilience (Wang, 2020). Indonesia has a similar precedent in its first presidential vehicle, a confiscated Buick Series 90 Limited used by Sukarno and closely tied to the narrative of independence (Matanasi, 2023). The presidential vehicle, therefore, has always been a visual sign that transcends its practical function (Jones, 2021).

It is within this context that the emergence of the MV3 Garuda Limousine, popularly also known as Maung Garuda, becomes an important milestone. As the first domestically manufactured presidential vehicle, produced by PT Pindad, this vehicle marks a new chapter in the history of Indonesia's official vehicles for the head of state (Taufik & Pertiwi, 2024). Developed from the MV3 4x4 tactical vehicle platform, the Garuda Limousine combines a ceremonial protocol function with a symbol of national pride. As illustrated in Figure 1, this national value is presented through the Garuda emblem on the grille and wheel rims, as well as the batik parang motif, complemented by composite armor protection, B5/B6-level bulletproof glass, and a 199-



horsepower engine (PT Pindad, 2024). In addition, the plan to expand the use of Maung Garuda as an official vehicle for ministers and echelon-I officials further affirms its position as a national symbol (Guritno & Ramadhan, 2024).



Figure 1. Presidential State Car MV3 Garuda Limousine

The representation of the Maung Garuda as the official presidential vehicle does not stop at the vehicle's physical dimension, but is also constructed through digital space, particularly through the official social media accounts of state institutions. In the digital era, official channels of state communication are no longer limited to formal press statements or policy documents, but also encompass social media as a channel for conveying messages (Nugraha, 2025). This makes the uploads related to the MV3 Garuda Limousine on the Instagram account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly the carousel content displaying the vehicle's use at the ASEAN Summit in Cebu as well as the photograph of the convoy following the inauguration toward the State Palace, worthy of specific examination. As an official channel of the executive institution, what is uploaded and selected on that account is not merely event documentation, but a representation that institutionally reflects the direction of government policy. Unlike a personal account, editorial decisions on state content, such as the choice of moment, camera angle, and the context presented within a single upload, have the potential to become a curated representation of a message that the state deliberately intends to convey to the public (Mahmudah, 2021; Sholihah, 2022; Muzzammil, 2023; Dewi et al., 2025).

This significance grows stronger considering that the presidential vehicle is not merely a means of transportation, but a symbol that connects the physical vehicle as an artifact with the figure of the head of state in the public space. In the case of the MV3 Garuda Limousine, this symbolic logic carries a more specific weight. Through the deployment of a vehicle manufactured by the domestic defense industry during President Prabowo Subianto's inauguration, the message conveyed is not merely the leader's personal image, but the state's commitment to strategic industrial self-reliance (Taufik & Pertiwi, 2024). Empirically, this study focuses on two key moments: the convoy following the inauguration of President Prabowo Subianto (October 20, 2024), when the Maung Garuda was introduced for the first time as a presidential vehicle, and the use of the Maung Garuda at the 48th ASEAN Summit in Cebu, Philippines (May 7, 2026), when the vehicle was deployed abroad for the first time. The presence of these two photographs within a single carousel upload by the Instagram account @sekretariat.kabinet directly juxtaposes the domestic-ceremonial and international-diplomatic contexts within a single narrative frame (Sekretariat Kabinet Republik Indonesia, 2026).

To read these layers of meaning, this study employs Roland Barthes' semiotics, which dissects signs at the level of denotation (literal meaning), connotation (cultural meaning), and myth (an ideological construction that appears natural) (Dianthi et al., 2025). Semiotic studies of the official social media content of government institutions have so far been dominated by explicitly designed graphic objects, such as logos (Muzzammil, 2023), campaign posters (Dewi et al., 2025; Sholihah, 2022), and digital comics (Mahmudah, 2021). Yet Barthes himself emphasized the crucial role of photography as a medium that carries connotation through pose, lighting, and socio-cultural context (Huda et al., 2018). Consequently, photography-based content within government social media channels, which serves as one of the historical starting points of Barthes' theory and holds more implicit layers of meaning, remains relatively unexamined from a semiotic perspective.

On the other hand, semiotic inquiries specifically examining presidential state cars as primary research objects remain absent. Generally, semiotic studies on vehicles outside the context of commercial advertising remain very sparse. Nevertheless, notable exceptions exist, such as the study by Elers and Elers (2020), who analyzed Western Australia Police patrol vehicles adorned with Indigenous cultural designs using Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. Yet, analyzing vehicles as semiotic artifacts has strong theoretical roots tracing directly back to Barthes himself. In his essay collection *Mythologies* (1957/1972), Barthes analyzed the Citroën DS automobile to unpack how modern society redirects its spiritual awe toward material objects. By comparing the vehicle's futuristic design to a Gothic cathedral, he demonstrated that industrial commodities are now consumed like sacred, magical objects, where the practical function of the vehicle is superseded by the cult of status and aesthetics (Sumi, 2020).

Based on this research gap, the main problem in this study is focused on how ideological messages and political legitimacy are constructed through the visual representation of the MV3 Garuda Limousine in the Instagram uploads of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the layers of semiotic meaning, encompassing denotation, connotation, and myth, within this state content, both in the domestic-ceremonial and international-diplomatic contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach aimed at presenting an in-depth description and interpretation of the representation of the MV3 Garuda Limousine as a presidential vehicle within digital space. The data corpus in this study consists of the carousel-format upload material on the official Instagram account of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia (@sekretariat.kabinet) that features the presidential vehicle (Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2026). The data material was selected purposively based on two main contexts of the vehicle's use: (1) the moment of the convoy following the inauguration of the President of the Republic of Indonesia (October 20, 2024), representing the domestic-ceremonial context, and (2) the moment of receiving the President at the ASEAN Summit in Cebu (May 7, 2026), representing the international-diplomatic context. Data were collected through digital documentation techniques in the form of downloading visual material files, as well as a literature review of relevant sources.

The data analysis procedure was carried out by operationalizing Roland Barthes' semiotic framework, which comprises three levels of signification (Ribi re, 2008). At the level of denotation (first-order meaning), the analysis identifies the literal visual elements of what is explicitly visible within the photographic frame, such as the physical form of the MV3 Garuda Limousine, the individuals or personas within the photograph, and the setting of the event. At the level of connotation (second-order meaning), the analysis dissects the secondary meaning arising from cultural associations, social values, and the symbolic content attached to it. Subsequently, at the level of myth (second-order semiological system), the analysis unpacks how this connotative meaning is ideologically constructed to legitimize state socio-political discourse so that it appears natural and taken for granted, or naturalized, within society (Ribi re, 2008; Tinarbuko, 2016).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Semiotic Analysis of the MV3 Garuda Limousine Photograph in the Domestic-Ceremonial Context

In this section, the analysis focuses on the representation of the symbolic meaning of the MV3 Garuda Limousine as the presidential vehicle of the Republic of Indonesia during the moment of the convoy following the President's inauguration on October 20, 2024. This moment was chosen to dissect the construction of meaning within the domestic-ceremonial context through the three stages of Roland Barthes' semiotics: denotation, connotation, and myth.



Figure 2. The President Using the Maung Garuda Vehicle During the Convoy after the Inauguration

Denotative Analysis

The photograph in Figure 2 documents the moment of President Prabowo Subianto's convoy following his inauguration on October 20, 2024, in the area of Jalan Jenderal Sudirman-Thamrin, Central Jakarta (Firmansyah, 2024). The photograph was taken around midday from an eye-level angle at medium-shot distance, placing the President and the presidential vehicle as the main center of attention. The President stood through the sunroof of the white MV3 Garuda Limousine, wearing traditional Betawi Ujung Serong attire, sunglasses, and a navy-blue cap while waving to the crowd of citizens (Egeham, 2024).

This vehicle, bearing the license plate "Indonesia 1," has a firm, sturdy, and large-bodied angular build, clad in bulletproof composite armor, bulletproof glass, and 21-inch Run-Flat tires (Priyantoro & Kurniawan, 2025). On the exterior, a small red-and-white flag is mounted at the front, along with the Garuda emblem on the grille, wheel rims, and badge, as well as a batik parang motif ornament on the grille slats (Ryan, 2025). Behind the MV3 Garuda Limousine, a white jeep driven by the Presidential Security Detail (Paspampres) can be seen as part of the convoy. A number of Paspampres personnel are seen alertly securing the President by riding motorcycles on both sides of the Maung MV3 Garuda Limousine, while a police officer directs and manages convoy traffic at the front. A Military Police (TNI) motorcycle can also be seen escorting from the front. Along the sidewalk area behind the entourage, crowds of citizens are seen filling the roadside, most of whom are carrying umbrellas under the blazing sun.

Connotative Analysis

The choice of white for the MV3 Garuda Limousine, as seen in Figure 2, can be said to deviate from the customary presidential vehicle color, which is usually black. This seems to signal the renewal that President Prabowo intends to bring, departing from the customs of previous leaders. As affirmed by design expert Yannes Pasaribu, the meaning of the white color on the MV3 Garuda Limousine is associated with purity, transparency, and peace, so that this choice can be read as a message of openness and the government's desire to be closer to the people (Rahadiansyah, 2024). The boxy shape of the Maung Garuda,

resembling a Hummer, is also no coincidence, since the vehicle was indeed developed from a military tactical-vehicle platform under the direct direction of President Prabowo, so that its fierce appearance is structurally embedded (Anwar, 2024). The use of this rather militaristic design for the state vehicle gives the impression that the President has a strong concern for national defense, something closely related to the doctrine of national self-reliance and resilience. The Garuda emblem on the MV3 Garuda Limousine further associates elements symbolizing strength and dynamic movement (Rahadiansyah, 2024), while the batik parang motif on the grille adds an even deeper layer of meaning, since this motif is historically a forbidden batik that could only be worn by kings and warriors when going to war, believed to multiply the wearer's strength while symbolizing authority and an unyielding attitude (Bagu et al., 2024). The small red-and-white flag mounted on the vehicle's body also carries its own meaning, since the red on the Indonesian flag symbolizes courage against colonizers, while white symbolizes the purity of intent of the heroes in the struggle for independence (Sunardi et al., 2021).

According to records from PT Pindad, the sunroof that allowed the President to stand and wave directly to the public was only added three days before the inauguration, a modification that actually contradicts the vehicle's original design, which was intended to provide full protection (Rahadiansyah, 2026). This intention of the President to greet the public directly connotatively affirms a leader figure who deliberately wishes to blend in with his people. The President's appearance with sunglasses and a cap, aside from responding to the heat of that afternoon, also adds an impression of firmness and readiness to face any field conditions. As analyzed by fashion expert Lisa Fitria, President Prabowo's choice of the traditional Ujung Serong attire further reinforces this layer of meaning by representing the value of the struggle to build the nation, given that during the colonial era this attire was worn by Betawi officials who in fact played a role in resistance against colonialism (Sahla, 2024). Furthermore, the eye-level, medium-distance camera angle makes the President and the Maung appear fused as a single center of attention, rather than separated from the surrounding crowd, thereby further reinforcing the meaning of closeness and unity (Sanni et al, 2016). Finally, the neat and precise escort formation of the Paspampres and Military Police adds an impression of the alertness and discipline of state security forces, while the umbrellas carried by citizens who had been waiting since before the inauguration ended affirm public enthusiasm and acceptance of the new regime despite the scorching sun.

Mythical Analysis

On the surface, the photograph in Figure 2 appears merely as documentation of a customary state convoy, a newly inaugurated president greeting citizens on his way to the palace. However, all the elements outlined in the connotation stage can be read as a single unified sign forming a particular myth. The use of a vehicle manufactured by PT Pindad in place of the foreign-manufactured vehicles customarily used by previous presidents occurred precisely at the moment of a power transition that was widely scrutinized by the public. This moment can be interpreted as a visual representation of the new regime's commitment to domestic industrial self-reliance, a policy direction aligned with the reassertion of national interest amid the shifting global order. As stated by Cunliffe (2025) in *The National Interest: Politics After Globalization*, the collapse of the globalist order and free-market interdependence demand that states reclaim their political agency through the prioritization of national interest. In this context, the use of the Maung Garuda naturalizes this paradigm shift: it affirms resistance to the logic of the free market, which has long positioned developing countries merely as consumption markets for the manufacturing industries of developed nations. The Ujung Serong attire, which carries the historical context of resistance to colonialism, further reinforces this reading, since this attire allows the nation's present-day self-reliance to be interpreted as a continuation of the spirit of the independence struggle, even though the form of the challenge faced has now shifted from physical colonization toward dependence on foreign technology.

The elements of strength and openness that appear together in this photograph can also be read as a unified meaning that, as stated by Sjamsoeddin et al. (2023), constitutes a model reflecting transformational bureaucratic leadership and guardian leadership. The rugged impression arising from the Maung's military

tactical-vehicle base, along with the batik parang motif historically worn by warriors in battle, blends harmoniously with the open impression created by the white color and the sunroof opening that enables direct interaction with citizens. The alertness of the Paspampres and Military Police escort formation around the public creates the impression that this strength is organized, operational, and protective, rather than merely decorative. From the perspective of national defense policy, a strategic leadership figure embodying the ethos of public stewardship (*pamong*) requires the presence of discipline, integrity, and exemplary conduct (*ing ngarso sung tulodo*) that unites the structure of leadership with the people it protects. This is in line with the Total People's Defense and Security System (Sishankamrata) doctrine embraced by Indonesia, in which national defense is not solely the domain of security forces and the primary weapons system, but a collective strength that totally involves all components of the people, security forces, and national leadership (Murfi & Suharyo, 2024).

When read within a broader geopolitical context, this visualization can also represent the logic of Offensive Realism as developed by John Mearsheimer (2001) in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Within an anarchic and uncertain international system, states can never feel secure merely by depending continuously. They are driven to continually pursue the accumulation of relative power, particularly military capacity and the domestic defense industry, in order to guarantee survival and the defense of state sovereignty. The myth constructed within the symbol of the domestically made car is also a symbolic resistance to the logic of neocolonial dependency (Irhandayaningsih, 2012). The batik parang motif as a symbol of struggle, the red-and-white flag carrying a philosophy of courage, and the Ujung Serong attire rooted in the history of local resistance are recontextualized to mark a new struggle, namely proof that a postcolonial nation such as Indonesia is capable of producing its own presidential vehicle. Ultimately, this photograph represents the courage to secure national interests through defense industry self-reliance, transformative leadership fused with the people, and a firm assertion of the capacity and effort of a postcolonial nation to break free from the grip of global dependency.

Semiotic Analysis of the MV3 Garuda Limousine Photograph in the International-Diplomatic Context

In this section, the analysis focuses on the representation of the symbolic meaning of the Maung vehicle as the presidential vehicle of the Republic of Indonesia during the President's reception at the ASEAN Summit in Cebu (May 7, 2026). This moment was chosen to dissect the construction of meaning within the international-diplomatic context through the three stages of Roland Barthes' semiotics: denotation, connotation, and myth.



Figure 3. The Maung Garuda Vehicle Awaiting the President in Cebu, Philippines

Denotative Analysis

The photograph in Figure 3 documents the arrival of President Prabowo Subianto at the airport apron area in Cebu, Philippines, during the 48th ASEAN Summit on May 7, 2026 (Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2026). The photograph was taken from an eye-level angle, with a composition that places President Prabowo as the main center of attention. President Prabowo is seen wearing sunglasses, a cream-colored safari suit, and a black peci, walking on a red carpet while giving a military salute to a row of the honor guard standing at attention with long-barreled weapons. On the left, an honor officer holds the Indonesian and Philippine flags side by side. In the background, the presidential aircraft bearing the inscription "Republik Indonesia," with the Garuda Pancasila emblem, and the aircraft stairs decorated with a floral wreath, can be seen. On the right-front side of the image, the white MV3 Garuda Limousine is seen parked, captured from a three-quarter front angle. The presence of this vehicle marks the first time a domestically produced official vehicle has been used during an official state visit abroad (Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2026).

Connotative Analysis

The presence of the MV3 Garuda Limousine in Cebu carries a connotative weight far greater than mere transportation function, since the moment in Figure 3 is the first time the vehicle has appeared outside Indonesian territory in its capacity as a presidential vehicle. This moment connotatively represents the projection of Indonesia's national identity onto the international stage. Connotatively, if in the convoy photograph after the inauguration the Maung Garuda "spoke" to the domestic public, then in this photograph in Cebu the Maung "speaks" to the world. The juxtaposition of the inscription "Republik Indonesia" on the body of the presidential aircraft with the presence of the Maung Garuda on the airport apron of another country forms a powerful visual frame regarding state sovereignty beyond its territorial boundaries, while also implying a continuity between sovereignty in the air (the presidential aircraft) and sovereignty on land (the Maung Garuda). The Indonesian flag flying side by side with the Philippine flag reinforces the bilateral-regional diplomatic context, while President Prabowo's military salute gesture before the honor guard affirms the principle of equality between states and respect for international protocol.

This connotative weight is reinforced by the red carpet on which the President walks. Historically, the red carpet has been a symbol of the highest honor for state guests since ancient Greece up to modern state protocol (Baker, 2016), so that the position of the Maung Garuda parked at the end of the carpet is also legitimized as part of the diplomatic honor ritual. The choice of the three-quarter front camera angle, commonly used in automotive photography to highlight a vehicle's form and readiness, makes the Maung Garuda appear not merely passively parked, but as though actively welcoming and standing ready to escort the President. In a diplomatic context generally dominated by delegation vehicles in the form of European-made luxury sedans or SUVs, the presence of this domestically produced official presidential vehicle becomes a symbolic statement that Indonesia does not intend to remain forever dependent on imported standards of prestige.

The President's personal attributes further complete this construction of meaning. The cream safari suit and black peci worn by the President link his appearance to the style of independence-era heroes. As explained by Hadiwijaya (2019), the black peci functions as a symbol of national identity representing the historical record of the nation's struggle, while the cream color of the suit gives an impression of authority that nonetheless remains close to the people. Through this combination of attire, the President constructs the image of a leader who carries the spirit of historical struggle into the stage of contemporary diplomacy, while also maintaining his Indonesian identity before the international public. This is in line with the official statement of the Cabinet Secretary that the presence of the Maung at the ASEAN Summit forum represents a symbol of self-reliance, national self-confidence, and the progress of Indonesia's national industry (Sekretariat Kabinet RI, 2026).

Mythical Analysis

Bringing a domestically manufactured state vehicle on foreign visits is often associated with countries seeking to project national prestige and industrial capability, as seen in the United States' The Beast, Russia's

Aurus Senat, and China's Hongqi. By bringing the MV3 Garuda Limousine to Cebu, as seen in Figure 3, Indonesia symbolically places itself within the ranks of a practice long identified with these superpowers, an aspiration to be regarded as equal among developed nations, rather than merely a developing country still dependent on imported state vehicles. This reading finds theoretical grounding in John Mearsheimer's (2001) Offensive Realism, in which the display of defense industrial capacity, or latent power projection, is understood as a rational step for a state to build bargaining power and survival amid an anarchic international system. This action also embodies the thinking of Philip Cunliffe (2025), who emphasizes the importance of national interest amid the ebb and flow of the globalist order. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the forum in question was not a meeting with major world powers, but the ASEAN Summit, a forum also attended by fellow developing nations, including the Philippines as host. In this context, the presence of the Maung is not entirely accurately read as resistance to developed-nation standards alone, but is more relevantly interpreted as an assertion of Indonesia's position and influence at the regional level.

This reading can be extended further into Indonesia's effort to build and strengthen its influence in Southeast Asia, positioning itself not merely as one member of ASEAN, but as a major country seeking to take on a leadership role within it. As the country with the largest population and territory in the region, Indonesia, through the symbol of its defense industry self-reliance, appears to affirm its capacity to lead the ASEAN narrative as a strong and self-reliant region. Indonesia itself holds a strategic geopolitical position to play a regional leadership role through strengthened diplomacy and defense industry self-reliance (Sugiharto et al., 2025). The presence of the MV3 Garuda Limousine thus does not speak solely of Indonesia's self-reliance, but also projects a message to fellow ASEAN states that the region collectively possesses the capacity to be self-reliant and equal before the world's major powers, with Indonesia positioning itself as the principal driver of this narrative. The defense industry self-reliance that, in the inauguration photograph, was interpreted as the collective strength of the people and the state, is now, in the Cebu photograph, interpreted as symbolic capital positioning Indonesia as a leading and reckoned-with power in the region, while also affirming that self-reliance and progress are things that can also be jointly achieved by ASEAN countries, not the sole monopoly of superpowers.

CONCLUSION

The semiotic analysis of the visual representation of the MV3 Garuda Limousine in the Instagram uploads of the Cabinet Secretariat of the Republic of Indonesia concludes that this presidential vehicle functions as an effective symbolic medium in constructing the narrative of Indonesia's strategic autonomy and national interest. In the domestic-ceremonial context, the Maung Garuda constructs a defense myth based on inclusive leadership integration through the blending of a rugged militaristic tactical-vehicle character with an open national leadership gesture that remains close to the public. In the international-diplomatic context, the deployment of the Maung on the global stage projects a myth of sovereignty and defense industry self-reliance, positioning Indonesia as a regional diplomatic power with the courage to break away from the tradition of dependence on foreign-manufactured vehicles. The integrated juxtaposition of both photographic contexts successfully naturalizes a geopolitical awareness of the urgency of survival and national self-reliance, which reaffirms the state's political sovereignty in securing the nation's strategic interests in the post-globalization era. As a recommendation for future research, subsequent studies could be directed toward an analysis of the extent to which the effectiveness of the symbol of self-reliance constructed through this government digital communication can directly influence public perception and collective awareness.

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