


Rethinking Mass Media as The Fourth Pillar of Democracy in Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesia, as a democratic nation, relies on its executive, legislative, and judicial institutions, along with the mass media, for support. Traditionally regarded as the "fourth pillar" of democracy, our research challenges the assumption that mass media functions as an independent pillar. By examining Indonesia's evolving media landscape and drawing on diverse sources, including academic research and analysis of media mogul involvement in politics, we identify a significant shift in the relationship between mass media and democratic governance. Our findings reveal that mass media has become entangled with political oligarchies, leading to homogenized news content and the prioritization of political interests over democratic values. However, we observe a contrasting trend in new media platforms, such as Twitter and various websites, where the public actively participates in political activism, particularly during pivotal democratic events like the 2019 presidential election. Therefore, we argue for a broader understanding of media, encompassing not only mass media but the entire media ecosystem, as essential to sustaining democratic governance.

Keywords: Media Landscape; Media's Role; Political Activism; Democratic Values.

Introduction

Mass media, often regarded as the fourth pillar of democracy, plays a vital role in governance alongside the executive, legislative, and judiciary institutions. This belief is reinforced by Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the press in Indonesia. Mass media, encompassing print (newspapers, tabloids, magazines) and electronic platforms (television, radio), serves as a crucial conduit for delivering information to a broad audience. It also fulfills a watchdog function, as outlined by McQuail (2010), with an orientation towards public service. As such, the structure of mass media should remain free from domination and ensure diversity in terms of information, opinion, culture, religion, and ethnicity. This diversity reflects Indonesia's national motto, *Bhineka Tunggal Ika* (an old Javanese phrase meaning "unity in diversity"). In a democracy, mass media should actively uphold democratic values and human rights, offering the public opportunities to express their opinions and participate in social and political processes.¹

This framework aligns with the parameters set for mass media by normative theory. It draws inspiration from the 1947 Commission on Freedom of the Press and the social responsibility theory. The theory emphasizes that mass media has a duty to serve the public by delivering accurate, relevant, and objective news, while adhering to ethical standards and professional conduct.² To reinforce the role of mass media as the fourth pillar of democracy, Indonesia has established a code of ethics for its journalists, mandating them to be responsible, professional, fair, and impartial in their reporting. Journalists must avoid disclosing the identities of sexual harassment victims, refrain from spreading false news, and prevent discrimination or biased reporting. They are also obligated to protect and respect the privacy of their sources.³

However, the role of mass media as a pillar of democracy has faced significant challenges and transformations. First, there is the issue of media ownership and its entanglement with political oligarchies in Indonesia. Second, the changing communication habits of the audience,

¹ Denis McQuail, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory* (Sage publications, 2010).

² Retor AW Kaligis, "Implementasi Teori Pers Tanggung Jawab Sosial Dalam Pemberitaan TVRI Pusat," *CoverAge: Journal of Strategic Communication* 9, no. 1 (2018): 26–34.

³ Ido Prijana Hadi, Megawati Wahjudianata, and Inri Inggrit Indrayani, "Komunikasi Massa," *Komunikasi Massa* (CV. Penerbit Qiara Media, 2020), <https://repository.petra.ac.id/19098/>.

particularly in how they access information and express their opinions through emerging technologies like social media. These developments prompt a reassessment of the mass media's function as the fourth pillar of democracy.

Methods

This research employed a descriptive methodology, aiming to provide a comprehensive analysis of the mass media landscape in Indonesia.⁴ Information was gathered from a variety of sources, including academic research papers and official documents outlining the structure of the country's media. Additionally, the study explored the complex relationship between media moguls and Indonesian politics, with particular focus on their involvement during the 2019 presidential election. This likely included examining public records, media coverage, and possibly conducting interviews or surveys to assess the extent and impact of media mogul influence on political dynamics.⁵

The research also investigated patterns of media consumption and political engagement among the public, with a special focus on Twitter activity during the April 2019 election. This involved collecting and analyzing large amounts of Twitter data to identify trends, public sentiments, and levels of political activism among users. By synthesizing data from multiple sources and using a range of methodologies, the study aimed to offer a thorough understanding of the interplay between mass media, political actors, and public engagement in Indonesia, particularly in the context of the 2019 presidential election.⁶

Result And Discussion

1. Mass Media in the Political Oligarchy of Indonesia

The indicators of a democratic country go beyond just democratic procedures, such as periodic elections, to encompass democratic values,

⁴ Elia Ardyan et al., *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif Dan Kuantitatif: Pendekatan Metode Kualitatif Dan Kuantitatif Di Berbagai Bidang* (PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia, 2023).

⁵ Meganusa Ludvianto and Wenny Arifani, "Retorika Persuasif Dalam Debat Calon Presiden Indonesia 2019: Sebuah Analisis Komunikasi Performatif," *E-Sales Promotion Membentuk Impulse Buying Konsumen (Studi Kasus: Digital Payment OVO) Elsie Oktivera, Wisnu Wirawan Camera Branding Calon Walikota Di Media Sosial (Studi Kasus Pihwakot 2015 Paslon Idris-Pradi)* 7, no. 1 (2020): 41.

⁶ Safitri Juanita, "Analisis Sentimen Persepsi Masyarakat Terhadap Pemilu 2019 Pada Media Sosial Twitter Menggunakan Naive Bayes," *Jurnal Media Informatika Budidarma* 4, no. 3 (2020): 552–58.

including civil liberties and political rights.⁷ Civil liberties consist of four key elements: freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of belief, and freedom from discrimination.⁸ Political rights include the right to vote and run for office, participation in decision-making processes, and political oversight. Additionally, the institutional aspects of democracy involve free and fair elections, the role of legislative bodies, political parties, government bureaucracy, and an independent judiciary.⁹

According to Dahl (2000) and Diamond (1999), core democratic values include equality, freedom (such as the freedom to join associations, practice religion, and express opinions), human rights, civil society, and a public sphere enabled by media. Political culture, which involves knowledge of politics, the state system, and political morality, is also essential. These dimensions require the rule of law, participation, competition, accountability, respect for civil liberties, and a commitment to pursuing freedom, equality, and responsiveness.¹⁰

Indonesia, a democratic nation, held its presidential election in 2019. The candidates were: (01) Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin and (02) Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno. Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin were backed by several political parties, including the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), Golkar, the National Awakening Party (PKB), the United Development Party (PPP), the National Democratic Party (NasDem), the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI), the Indonesian Unity Party (Perindo), the Indonesian Justice and Unity Party, and the People's Conscience Party (Hanura). On the other hand, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno received support from the Great Indonesia

⁷ Leonardo Morlino, "Good and 'Bad' Democracies: How to Conduct Research into the Quality of Democracy," in *The Quality of Democracy in Post-Communist Europe* (Routledge, 2017), 5–27, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315874265-1/good-bad-democracies-conduct-research-quality-democracy-leonardo-morlino>.

⁸ Kevin Boyle and Juliet Sheen, *Freedom of Religion and Belief: A World Report* (Routledge, 2013), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9780203411025/freedom-religion-belief-world-report-kevin-boyle-juliet-sheen>.

⁹ Pippa Norris, "Transparency in Electoral Governance," *Election Watchdogs: Transparency, Accountability and Integrity*, 2017, 4–29.

¹⁰ David FJ Campbell, "The Basic Concept for the Democracy Ranking of the Quality of Democracy," 2008, <https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/handle/document/29063>.

Movement Party (Gerindra), the National Mandate Party (PAN), and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS).¹¹

Although mass media plays a crucial role in promoting democratic values, its function often depends on its ownership structure. In Indonesia, media control by moguls has turned mass media into a tool for advancing the interests of its owners, including political ambitions, such as influencing election outcomes.¹² Media ownership in Indonesia is concentrated in 13 major media conglomerates. The issue arises when media moguls become directly involved in politics by forming political parties. For example, Surya Paloh, owner of the Media Group, founded the NasDem Party and serves as its chairman. Similarly, Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the mogul behind the MNC Group, established the Indonesian Unity Party (Perindo) and also holds the position of chairman.¹³

Both Paloh and Tanoesoedibjo, as chairmen of their respective political parties and media groups, served on the advisory board for the Jokowi-Ma'ruf national campaign. Additionally, Erick Thohir, owner of Mahaka Group, was appointed as the chairman of the Jokowi-Ma'ruf national campaign team. Moreover, several journalists were also recruited into key positions on the campaign team.¹⁴

Political parties controlled by media moguls become part of the political oligarchy in Indonesia. They extend their power not only in economic profit by controlling the media business but also extending their power in political positions. Their political affiliation influences towards independence and impartiality of mass media. Instead, mass media becomes a supporting system for maintaining status-quo. It is difficult for the media to uphold the principle of freedom and equality in journalism activity during the Indonesian presidential election 2019.¹⁵

Republika (Mahaka Group) does not indicate independence in the news reporting about the presidential election 2019. It does not conduct cover-both-sides. *Republika* (and other media), according to the research

¹¹ Muhamad Nastain et al., "The Failure of the Islamic Party in Indonesia to Winning the 2004-2019 Direct General Elections," *Politicon: Jurnal Ilmu Politik* 5, no. 2 (2023): 195–226.

¹² Muhamad Mufid, *Komunikasi & Regulasi Penyiaran* (Prenada Media, 2010).

¹³ Yanuar Nugroho, Dinita Andriani Putri, and Shita Laksmi, "Memetakan Lansekap Industri Media Kontemporer Di Indonesia," *Centre for Innovation Policy and Governance*, Jakarta, 2012, https://www.academia.edu/download/31581151/Pemetaan-Industri%20-Media_FINAL_IND_052013.pdf.

¹⁴ Ahmad Hasan Ubaid and Muhammad Hidayaturrehman, "Mengapa MADURA Mengalahkan JOKOWI," *EduLitera*, 2022.

¹⁵ Sugeng Sugeng, "Gagasan Pembatasan Kekuasaan Dan Pengendalian Oligarki," *Jurnal Demokrasi Dan Politik Lokal* 5, no. 1 (2023): 70–84.

of make reporting about Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin more than Prabowo-Sandiaga.¹⁶ Totally, mass media coverage of Jokowi-Ma'ruf Amin was 906, and Prabowo-Sandiaga 590.¹⁷

It is parallel with The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) research. EIU reveals the 2019 global democracy index, including the democracy index in Indonesia. EIU uses five dimensions to measure the democracy index: electoral process and pluralism, functioning of government, political participation, political culture, and civil liberties. EIC assesses Indonesia's index for civil liberties in Indonesia is the lowest (5.59) among democracy dimensions. Other indexes are electoral process and pluralism (7.92), functioning of government (7.14), political participation (6.11), and political culture (5.63). The overall score of the democracy index in Indonesia is 6.48. With this score, the type of Indonesian regime is *a flawed Democracy* (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2020). As a flawed Democracy, Indonesia has free and fair elections even if there are problems such as infringements on media freedom. However, there are significant weaknesses in other aspects of democracy, including problems in governance, an underdeveloped political culture, and low levels of political participation. The score contributing to the regime type as *a flawed Democracy* is the low civil liberties. It demonstrates that media freedom and freedom of speech in Indonesia are declining. Indonesia's democracy is in a position of regression and stagnation.¹⁸

2. New Media: New Hope for Democracy?

The emergence of new communication technology has a disruptive impact on old mass media, not only print-based technology, e.g., newspapers, magazine but also broadcasting (television). The emergence of new technology communication threatens mass media in Indonesia. Some print media in Indonesia have gone bankrupt, e.g., "*Sinar Harapan*," "*Jakarta Globe*," "*Harian Jurnal Nasional*," "*Tabloid Bola*," "*Majalah Fortune*," "*Majalah Otomotif*". Recently, one of the television channels in Indonesia belonging to the MNC group (RCTI) filed a lawsuit against the broadcasting law in Indonesia (U.U. No. 32

¹⁶ Rayyan Sofyan, "Analisis Framing Model Muray Edelman Pada Pemberitaan Pemilihan Presiden 2019 Di Serabinews. Com Dengan Republika. Co. Id" (PhD Thesis, Universitas Islam Negeri Ar-Raniry, 2020), <https://repository.ar-raniry.ac.id/id/eprint/30421/>.

¹⁷ Adelinta Pristia Defi, "Framing Berita Deklarasi Kampanye Jokowi-Makruf Dan Prabowo-Sandi Pada Pilpres Tahun 2019 Di Media Online," *Jurnal Ekonomi, Sosial & Humaniora* 1, no. 01 (2019): 32–38.

¹⁸ Amanatus Sholihah, "Buzzer: Politic's Interest And Maslahah:-," *Politea: Jurnal Politik Islam* 5, no. 2 (2022): 40–84.

2002) to the constitutional court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*). They regard the regulation causes different treatment between conventional broadcasting operators using radio frequencies and broadcasting operators using the internet, such as YouTube and Netflix.

Mass media's income is declining. It is because the presence of online media (news portal) and social media are popular in the community, especially among young people. They access news in news portals via the internet on their mobile gadgets. Internet users in Indonesia continue to increase. The Indonesian Internet Service Provider Association survey shows that the number of Internet users in Indonesia reached 171.17 million individuals out of a total population of 264 million. Millennials (15-19) are dominant internet users, with a penetration rate of 91% (APJII, 2019). This growth indicates that Indonesians who have internet access continue to increase. In Indonesia, according to research in 2018, the smartphone ownership rate is around four in ten (Pew Research, 2019). Indonesia Ministry of Communication and Information Technology says that internet users in Indonesia are 150 million people, with a penetration rate of 56% in all regions. Mobile internet users are 142.8 million, with a penetration rate of 53% (Ministry of ICT, 2019). A survey of the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (5900 Samples, MoE \pm 1,28%, level of confidence 95%) demonstrates that Indonesia internet users use the internet to access chat services (89.35%): WhatsApp, Line, and Telegram; social media (87.13%): Instagram, Twitter, Path, and Facebook; search engine (74.84%): Google (APJII, 2019). Moreover, the use of mobile devices to access the internet also continues to increase exponentially. This trend becomes a threat to the future of print-based mass media. Philip Meyer estimates that newspapers will stop printing by 2043.

Because it became part of the political oligarchy, the impasse in voicing opinions through the mass media encourages the public to look for other media/communication technologies to express their voices. The public only hopes a little from the media as a channel for their voice regarding their political choice. The emergence of new communication technology gives new hope for Democracy in Indonesia, especially in the element of civil liberties. One of the new communication technologies is Twitter. It has been used for many purposes, including politics. In the 2019 presidential election context, the public uses Twitter for political purposes. It can be identified by using a hashtag during the presidential election. A hashtag ("#") is a tool or address for discussing something. On Twitter, hashtag helps in finding certain information. By using it, Twitter users can send messages widely. Publics can read their message without becoming followers or having

no Twitter account. Messages accompanied by a hashtag can be accessed via Twitter, Google, trending sites, e.g., "*What the Hashtag?*", or hashtag.org (Small, 2011).

Hashtags that the public used during April 2019 based on political preference can be grouped into two groups: (1) hashtag supporting a presidential candidate (Joko Widodo) and his vice running mate (Ma'ruf Amin); (2) hashtag supporting a presidential candidate (Prabowo Subianto) and his running mate, Sandiaga Uno. Hashtags containing support for Joko Widodo built the opinion that inhabitants in regions Jokowi visited voted for him. The hashtags are Peoples in Palembang city give vote for Jokowi ("*#WongKitoCoblosJokowi*"), people in regency of Ngawi vote for Joko Widodo-Amin ("*#NgawiNyoblosJokowiAmin*"), peoples of Papua vote for Joko Widodo ("*#KitongPapuaCoblosJokowi*"), peoples in northern Java want advancement together with Joko Widodo ("*#PanturaMajuBarengJokowi*").

Joko Widodo often wears the white long-sleeve shirt in political safari/campaign, and his portrait on the ballot wore it, and his running mate did too. The idea of "white" inspired his supporters to make hashtags refer to the white color. The hashtags were: the white was Jokowi ("*#YangPutihItuJokowi*"), whitening Jakarta ("*#PutihkanJakarta*", whitening "Bung Karno sports stadium" ("*#PutihkanGBK*"), white-color shirt of Jokowi ("*#BajuPutihJokowi*"), choose who wears the white-color shirt ("*#PilihYgBajuPutih*"); choose white-color shirt ("*#PilihBajuPutih*"), choose the good man ("*#PilihOrangBaik*"). Other hashtags demonstrated that Jokowi belonged to the religion of Islam ("*#PilihYgJelasIslamnya*"), Jokowi was regarded as a winner in a debate against his political rival ("*#JokowiMenangTotalDebat*", "*#JokowiMenangTotalDebat*"). On April 17, 2020, the hashtag was created to show that Jokowi was the winner and champion in the presidential election 2019 ("*#01TheChampion*", "*#JokoWinElection*"). The hashtags represented that Joko Widodo was a good man (the white color in Indonesian culture is identical to good and holy).

Hashtags representing support for Prabowo Subianto are as follows. Hashtag described support for Prabowo: Prabowo greeted Sumatra Barat ("*#PrabowoMenyapaSumbar*"); myriad peoples supported Prabowo ("*#LautanMassaDukungPrabowo*"), 15 days left for choose "02, the number for Prabowo in ballot" ("*#15HariLagiCoblosCapres02*"), whitening Jakarta ("*#PutihkanJakarta*"), close option number 01 and choose 02 ("*#Tutup01Tusuk02*"), Prabowo was the leader with achievement ("*#PrabowoPemimpunBerprestasi*"), 13 days left was festivity for sensibleness ("*#13HariLagiLebaranAkalSehat*"), Indonesia needed Prabowo ("*#IndonesiaNeedsPrabowo*"), it was a bravery to

choose 02 ([#BeraniPilih02](#)). There was a hashtag informing that Islamic preachers or *Ustaz* chose Prabowo. The hashtags were Abdullah Gymnastiar chose Prabowo ([#AaGymPilihPrabowo](#)), Ustaz Adi Hidayat chose Prabowo ([#UAHPilihPrabowo](#)), Ustaz Abdul Somad was vilified villainously and brutally ([#UASdifitnahKejiDanBrutal](#)), vilifying Abdul Somad would be retaliated in the ballot ([#UASdifitnahKejiBalasDiTPS](#)); Jokowi fans libeled Ustaz Abdul Somad ([#JokowerFitnahKejiUAS](#)); 2 days left ([#02HariLagi](#)), in the name of Allah, Allah willing, Prabowo ([#BismillahInsyaAllahPrabowo](#)), movement to conduct morning/*subuh* prayer ([#GerakanSubuhAkbarIndonesia](#)), tomorrow, choose Prabowo-Sandi ([#BesokTusukPrabowoSandi](#)), victory of Prabowo ([#TheVictoryOfPrabowo](#)), hoax of the championship of Jokowi in debate ([#HoaxJkwMenangTotalDebat](#)). The messages used by sympathizers of Candidate 02 were about campaign activities, claims of superiority/victory, social criticism towards the mainstream media, final voter lists, and enforcement of general election principles. This social criticism was given by those who supported the presidential candidate of 02.

We have identified using websites for political purposes during the presidential election 2019. Candidate 02 (Prabowo Subianto) harnessed <https://prabowo-sandi.com>, <https://roemahdjoeng.com>, <https://www.gelora.co>, <https://adil.makmur.id/>. Other websites used by his supporters were <https://www.oposisi.net>, <https://oppositenews.net>, <https://www.2019gantipresiden.org>, and <https://2019gantipresiden.com>. Candidates of 01 also use websites: <https://www.jokowimaruf.net>, <https://thejokowicenter.or.id/>, <https://community.jokowi.link/>; <https://m.jokowi.link/indonesiamaju>. When writing this article, some webs are inactive.

Discussion

The emergence of new communication technologies raises questions about whether they can provide new hope for democracy as a pillar, along with the decline in the role and function of mass media in society. There are several indicators to answer the democracy prospect in the context of new communication technology. These indicators are: Is there a blockage of social media or other communication platforms due to criticism towards the government or others; is there a restriction on the capacity of communication and information technology networks to handle public criticism towards the government or others? Does the government make efforts to manipulate public opinion, or

does the government make new rules to increase censorship and surveillance against the public? Does the government take repressive actions against users of new communication technologies because of differences in political orientation?

If these indicators occur, we can conclude that new communication technology cannot be used as a pillar of democracy. New communication technology allows the public to participate in the democratic process. It means that the new communication technology becomes an extension of democracy. Technically, new communication technologies like Twitter can spread messages and are instruments of democracy. Twitter creates opportunities or possibilities for conversations to be networked without social, physical, spatial, and temporal restrictions and barriers (Boyd, D., Golder, S. & Lotan, 2010). However, those in power can use their authority to control communication technologies.

Ideally, a hashtag is used to talk about something specific, according to the hashtag itself, instead of as a channel for political deliberation. In practice, hashtags do not indicate what Twitter users are talking about. Twitter users use hashtags and compete to turn them into trending topics. The powerful use their political capacity and authority to control the usage of new communication technology. The powerful can use their apparatuses (regulation, police) to control and use surveillance mechanisms against public communication via new communication technology. Moreover, those in power can deploy buzzers to orchestrate opinion on social media platforms as if it is the real public opinion. It can be identified by message inauthenticity. For example, Twitter users write the same sentences. To make it seem as if it is a genuine or natural message, they replace the word(s) with synonyms or write sentences with different writing styles. Manufacturing opinion is conducted by persuading Twitter users by giveaway if they respond to messages by mentioning, retweeting, or replying.

Conclusion

Democracy stands as both a governing system and a cherished set of values, embodying principles such as equality, freedom, and civic participation. Beyond mere governance, it represents a commitment to fundamental human rights and the collective voice of a populace. Central to the vitality of democracy is the role of media, encompassing a spectrum of communication technologies that serve as conduits for information exchange and public discourse. In this capacity, media acts as a facilitator, enabling transparency, fostering accountability, and

empowering citizens with knowledge vital for informed decision-making.

Acknowledging the dynamic nature of media is crucial. These platforms are in a perpetual state of evolution, adapting to technological advancements, societal shifts, and cultural dynamics. Whether it's the rise of social media, the proliferation of digital news outlets, or the advent of interactive multimedia, the landscape of media continues to evolve, reshaping the ways in which information is disseminated and consumed. Rather than confining media to the label of "mass communication technologies," it's imperative to recognize their broader function as mediators of societal values. They are not mere conduits of information but influential agents that shape public opinion, drive social narratives, and disseminate democratic ideals. Through news reporting, opinion pieces, documentaries, and even entertainment, media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping societal norms, fostering critical thinking, and promoting civic engagement.

However, amidst the technological advancements and the ever-expanding media landscape, it's paramount not to lose sight of the essence of democracy: its reliance on active participation and civic agency. At the heart of democratic governance are individuals—citizens, activists, journalists, and policymakers—who embody and advocate for democratic values. These agents drive societal change, challenge power structures, and uphold the principles of accountability and transparency that underpin democratic societies. In essence, while media technology serves as a vital tool in the democratic process, it's the agency of individuals that breathes life into democratic values. By fostering a symbiotic relationship between media platforms and active citizenry, societies can cultivate robust democracies where the exchange of ideas flourishes, diversity of voices is celebrated, and the collective pursuit of justice and equality remains steadfast.

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