

Mass Media and Governor Candidates

Challenges of Neutrality and Trend of Alignments

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Abstract: Mass media is one of the main pillars of democracy. This is because the mass media is one of the channels to obtain political information. Interestingly, the mass media are always actively involved in the reporting of candidates who compete in the election. Thus, the phenomenon that can occur is the unequal amount of news from each candidate in the mass media. At the time of the general election, mass media in North Sumatra province also wrote information about the governor candidate. This study describes the state of the news distribution in terms of quantity. This study has found that there are variations in the reporting of governor candidates in terms of numbers. In some cases there is a phenomenon where the mass media only focus on one candidate. Meanwhile, other candidates are rarely reported. But this study does not want to prove whether the mass media has sided with one of the candidates or not. This study concludes that the trend of partisanship has emerged from the news of candidates that can be seen from the quantity. In the case of elections in northern Sumatra, the mass media selects its own news without considering the issue of neutrality.

1 INTRODUCTION

A general election for Regional Head was held on June 27, 2018. This activity was conducted simultaneously in several regions in Indonesia, including the Province of North Sumatra. Other areas that also conducted an election were Provinces such as Riau Province, South Sumatra Province, Lampung Province, West Java Province, East Java Province and several other areas, including some areas in districts and cities located in Indonesia.

The mass media was involved in the election, especially in terms of delivering the news about the election. The coverage of the candidates was also the focus of the news, even before the candidates were fixed. After the official candidate was announced by the election organiser, the focus of the news was on the candidates. No newspaper ignored it.

As one of the pillars of democracy, mass media play an important role in the election. The mass media socialise election activities as well as the candidates. The problem is the election moment is an arena of political competition. Mass media inevitably have to be in the competition room. Any coverage of the candidate will affect public opinion. And public opinion has an effect on political choice. Thus, the

mass media is considered as a communication tool for the candidates. Furthermore, the mass media is identified as part of a certain candidate's political machine.

At the time of the general election, mass media in North Sumatra province also reported information about the governor candidate. The election of the North Sumatra Governor (Sumut) 2018 is followed by two pairs of candidates. Candidate number 1 was Djarot Saiful Hidayat-Sihar Sitorus (DJOSS) and candidate number 2 Edy Rahmayadi-Musa Rajekshah (ERAMAS). A small number of candidates and split voting conditions led to a very serious competition.

Is there a balance of news about the governor candidate in the mass media, especially the newspaper? Is there a difference in the amount of news (about candidates in the paper) to illustrate that the mass media has sided with the candidate? This study will answer these questions.

2 APPROACH AND METHOD

This study uses a political communication approach. The representative of mass media included in this study is the newspaper in North Sumatra.

Observations of news in local newspapers were conducted in April 2018. The method of analysis in data collection was quantitative and descriptive.

3 MASS MEDIA AND POLITICS

There are many studies related to mass media and political relations. One earlier study revealed that the less-known candidate is very little covered by the print media. According to Licher and Smith they even have a small chance of disseminating their opinions in the mass media (Kaid, 2015, p. 309).

Other studies have revealed the things that often become news during the election. Hess has explained that one of them is the theme of what happened during the campaign. It is also the strategy of the candidates and their experiences, including personal qualities, or leadership skills (Kaid, 2015, p. 309).

In the news, some candidates get fewer benefits than other candidates. Kahn and Kenney revealed that Republican candidates have received a favourable report compared to candidates from the Democratic Party. This case occurs in the United States. But the evidence of partisan bias is still not found. So the decision of reporters in choosing news about the campaign, will affect the advantages and disadvantages for candidates (Kaid, 2015, p. 308).

There is also a classic question that arises in America in terms of media and political relations. The question is whether news reflects a partisan or ideological bias? (Kaid, 2015, p. 307). This question is related to content evaluation and the quality of media coverage in elections.

Chandrappa, in his studies *The Influence of the Media in Politics - Campaigns and Elections*, concluded that "...the media has a very strong effect in politics, campaigns and elections by dictating what issues are relevant, what candidates will get the most coverage and what criteria they should use to evaluate candidates." (Chandrappa, 2014, p. 2312)

A more recent study (Moy, David, and Mark, 2016, p. 11), in the study *Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing*, explains that in the digital age, news readers have more choices. This means that fewer voters are affected by the print media in determining their political choices. They have direct access to the news they have chosen. Therefore, they are not dependent on one-way information.

4 THE NEW ERA OF MEDIA: THE END OF NEUTRALITY?

The election of Governor of North Sumatra 2018 followed by two pairs of candidates. Have the newspapers been identified as supporting particular candidates? In this study there was a gap in the amount of news content in each newspaper.

Quantitatively, Newspapers A and C mostly contained candidate number 1 (DJOSS) news. Newspaper B reported more on candidate number 2) (ERAMAS) (see Diagram 1). However, the news content does not always provide a positive image of the candidates to the voters. Therefore, basically, the quantity of news only describes how actively the mass media reports on the candidates in the news.

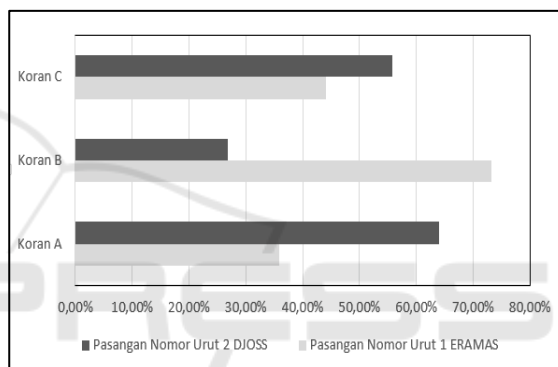


Figure 1: Quantity of News Candidates in the Newspaper (Source: results from data analysis).

Figure 1 illustrates that newspaper A reported more on candidate number 1, i.e. 64.4 percent. That means that newspaper A only reported on candidate number 2 approximately 35.95 percent of the time. Meanwhile, newspaper B reported more on candidate number 2, 73.17 percent of the time. This means that this newspaper only reported on candidate number 1 26.82 percent of the time. newspaper C reported on candidate number 2 55.81 percent of the time and candidate number 1 44.18 percent of the time. This means that there is an 11 percent number of news from candidate number 2 compared to candidate number 1.

Although the news in the mass media reported many activities of one candidate only, in fact, individuals at this time tend to be autonomous in choosing news, especially since access to news is so easy through the internet with mobile phones. Newspapers still provide news that reports the vision of the candidates' mission, but controls on the news

are in the hands of readers. This is consistent with the analysis by Patricia Moy.

Patricia Moy, in her study about mass media and democracy, explains that "...as news audiences migrate online, they exert increasingly greater control over the nature of the news they choose to receive. This newfound ability of individuals to select news, perhaps on the basis of their comfort with the issue or its frame..." (Moy, David, and Mark, 2016, p. 11). However, this condition does not automatically change the core issue. The challenge of mass media neutrality remains an important issue in elections and democracy.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In 2018, the election of the governor of North Sumatra was re-implemented. Candidates were elected by general election. One of the interesting things is the news about the candidates for governor in the newspaper. There are differences in the quantity of news on the candidates. The newspapers tend to report the activities of one candidate only. Is this evidence that the mass media has sided with one of the candidates? The answer, of course, still needs more research to prove it. This study only indicates that there is a trend of newspaper alignments with candidates, especially when viewed in terms of the quantity of news on the candidates. There seems to be a pattern that the newspapers tend to be positioned only effectively to be sources of news activities on certain candidates. Therefore, the issue of neutrality in newspapers becomes a challenge in elections and for democracy in Indonesia.

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