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## POLITICAL PREFERENCE OF MEDIA OWNER, POWER ABUSE, AND BIAS (CASE ON PRIVATE TELEVISIONS IN INDONESIA)

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### ABSTRACT:

Mass media behavior in Indonesia has changed since the 2014 presidential election. The media openly has shown partiality to one candidate and or became part of a support group. The media has been used as an arena to gain and support power, become a mouthpiece, and a propaganda tool for stakeholders. The political preferences of media owners are one of the causes. The 2014 presidential election as a starting point of change. Even in the 2019 presidential elections, the media was the same, especially on private televisions. This paper explored how the news was used as a battlefield in competing for public discourse to gain power during general elections and its impacts. The position of media owner who was also the leader of a political party was vulnerable to abuse of media power, which in turn had consequences for the media content (bias).

The forms of abuse of media power were the use of news as a tool to gain public legitimacy, to attack and defeat one another, and to build the image of media owners and groups. Because the news had been constructed for self and group interests, the next consequence that occurs was bias in content. Media content bias was related to the selection of facts into news, selection of sources, placement of news, and how to present a fact to become news to the public. The results of the study were obtained by document observation of private television news broadcast, Metro TV and TV One during the 2014 presidential election, and also interviewed the media actors.

### INTRODUCTION

The 2014 Indonesian presidential election became the starting point for changes in the behavior of the mass media, especially private television. For the first time in the post-democratic rising or reform era, television stations openly became a mouthpiece and propaganda tool for stakeholders like in the pre-reform era. Television vulgarly showed its opposition to one party or acted the opposite. In the 2014 presidential election, two private TV stations, namely Metro TV and TV One, showed their political position towards one of the candidates. Even after the election was over, the two media still positioned themselves as supporters of one of the contestants. Metro TV positioned as a supporter of the partner Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla (Jokowi-JK) while TV One supported Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Radjasa (Prabowo-Hatta). The form of support could be seen from the content of the news and the way the two

media presented the news. Jokowi-JK was supported by Nasdem, the political party that own Metro TV, Surya Paloh. Meanwhile, Prabowo-Hatta was supported by the Golkar Party whose general chairman was Abu Rizal Bakrie, owner of TV One.

In the pre-reform era, media affiliation to political parties or ruling parties, which then had an impact on the issue of neutrality, was not surprising because at that time the Indonesian press was controlled by the ruling party (government) to support and maintain power (Hill, 2011). Under the leadership of President Soeharto, the press was used to hegemony the community for legitimacy purposes (Romano, 2003). The press was strictly controlled by the information department to support and socialize government programs (Hill, 2011); (Surjomiharjo, 2002). The breidel threat (cut off the license) made the press choose the safe way instead of opposing the government. During the Soekarno government, the press was relied on as a means of gaining recognition from the international community regarding Indonesia's independence. Even so, the Soekarno government was noted to have participated in curbing press freedom by issuing an emergency military law. By that law, Soekarno suppressed the press that was considered contrary to his policy (Hill, 2011). However, in the post-reform era, amid freedom without the threat of breidelity, the press acted not freely by binding itself to certain parties, groups, or interests, as we would see on Metro TV and TV One.

This study explored how news was used as a battlefield in competing for public discourse. Interestingly, these efforts were not done by parties who were supposed to be directly involved in the election, such as the successful teams, but by the media. If referring to the applicable laws and regulations, the media must be free from all political interests to guarantee news products that are accurate, balanced, objective, and other ethical demands. The different political preferences of media owners in the 2014 presidential election caused the media to use their power and efforts for political interests, causing irregularities in the use of media power. The abuse of media power had consequences in the form of media content (bias).

This theme needs to be studied because power has a big role in shaking the independence of the media, in this case, private television. Power is essentially part of the goal of human life to get benefits from the results of the transaction process with other parties (Purwasito, 2011). Power is the ability to regulate or control (Suseno, 2002). Television is a media that uses the public sphere (broadcast spectrum) so it should be oriented in the public interest (Broadcasting Law No 32/2002, Chapter III article 1). Poor, television orientation has been different from putting aside the principle of impartiality, showing itself as a partisan media. Media independence is needed as a control of power related to the power of the media in disseminating information and influencing public opinion. That is why the media is also called a pillar of democracy (Gans, 2004; Shabbir et al., 2020). Without control, power will become tyrannical and the media can be one of the effective tools to create "truth" based on the regime's version by ignoring public rights (Kovack & Rosenstiel, 2001; Normalini et al., 2019; Shabbir et al., 2019).

Some research related to the 2014 presidential election in Indonesia, indeed, has been conducted such as by Ayub Dwi Anggoro (2014), Vicky Kurniawan and Hendra Naldi (2019), Aisyah (2014), Akram (2015), but they highlighted more about media impartiality and differences in news angle and not alluding to the abuse of media power and bias. Even the latest research about Metro TV

and TV One news in 2019 presidential election still did not highlight about those theme but described violations of news from aspects of the broadcasting law. Some of those previous studies show the novelty of this research (Ichlas, 2020; Munir et al., 2019).

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Media normative theory***

Media normative theory guides what the media should do. This theory is a behavioral guide for the media concerning their power in spreading messages and the impact they can have on society. How the media should behave has been regulated in certain terms which are known as journalistic principles. In Indonesia, the basic principles of journalism can be seen in the Press Law No. 40 of 1999, the Journalistic Code of Ethics, the Broadcasting Law No. 32 of 2002, and the Broadcasting Code of Conduct and Broadcast Program Standards (P3SPS). Journalistic principles emphasize how the media should behave, regarding the obligation to be independent, to produce accurate, balanced news, and not with bad intentions.

### ***Media and Influencing Factors***

The content of mass media, including television, is strongly influenced by various internal and external pressures (Mcquail, 2011). The influence from within the media organization is the interference of parties: (1) Management, (2) Media professionals (human resources), (3) Technical/technology support. Meanwhile, external factors that influence media content are economic and socio-political pressures. Economic pressure consists of: (1) Competitors, (2) News/information agencies, (3) Advertisers/sponsors, (4) Owners, (5) labor organization. Meanwhile, socio-political pressure includes (1) Political / legal control, (2) Pressure groups, (3) Other social institutions. Besides, several other forces also influence, namely the supply of events, information, culture, channel distribution, audience, interests, needs. Through those factors, we can see the kind of influence that affected the news broadcast by Metro TV and TV One during the 2014 presidential election. From the factors above, we can get an idea of why there is bias in mass media reporting and why the mass media uses its power for certain things.

### ***Agenda for Media Setting and Public Opinion***

Mass media including television can be used as a tool to shape and influence public opinion. The media has its agenda to be presented to the public by highlighting certain issues. To stand out, issues must be packaged and framed attractively to encourage the formation of public opinion (Tamburaka, 2012; M Shariff et al., 2020; Muhammad et al., 2019). The theory of agenda-setting media shows that the reality that circulates in society is the result of media construction, one of which is through the news. The media make efforts to control the reality that occurs in society. The media constructs as well as directs how we should think and even act. In the context of the 2014 presidential election, we could see that the media especially Metro TV and TV One, had an important role in making discourse distributed in society through the construction of political news.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The main data in this paper is the news document and also interview results. The document data was news recordings of Metro TV and TV One during the 2014 Presidential Election (June-22 July 2014), on prime time programs, namely "Metro Hari Ini" (Metro Today) and "Apa Kabar Petang" (Evening News). The research data was managed in a descriptive qualitative manner with

an inductive analysis of the filling system technique. This technique is used to explore the existence of abuse of media power for personal and group interests and the bias that results from this problem. The filling system is a step the researcher takes after data collection. Observation data were analyzed by making certain categories. After that, the data is interpreted by combining certain concepts or theories (Kriyantono, 2010; Noorollahi et al., 2019; Noreen et al., 2019). The data was also complemented by interviews to strengthen the research results. In analyzing the bias of media content, the categorization of Brent H. Baker (1995) was used. Baker categorized the bias into six forms, namely bias by omission, bias by selection of sources, bias by story selection, bias by placement, bias by labeling, and bias by spin. The level of analysis is construction on political news.

Then interview was used to dig about the abuse of media power and its impacts. The 2014 presidential election data was chosen because of the starting point for a change in media behavior. It gives an overview of the pattern of mass media coverage that the media will always be used as a tool of interest as long as the media owner involves in the political party. So it can be an input to stakeholders to form the rules that can prevent or decrease the media offense to the public.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS**

### ***Abuse of media power***

One of the impacts of the involvement of media owners in politics can be seen from how the content is presented. Media is no longer merely a means of conveying information but is also used for personal and or group interests. The power of the media has been misused not for the common good as stated in the law to neglect the rights of the public, including the inadequate social control function that the media should carry. That is what is called abuse of media power. Because media was used as a tool to achieve personal and or group interests, media content then became biased (deviating) from what it should be (content bias). The forms of abuse of media power are based on an observation of Metro TV and TV One news during the 2014 presidential election, namely the use of the media as a means of attacking and bringing down one another; tools for creating and gaining legitimacy, and for building the image of media owners and groups.

#### 1). Tools to attack and bring each other down

The media was used as a means of attacking and bringing each other out seen from the way the two media present news to the public. The news Metro TV and TV One used to contain something contrary. One broadcast was responded to by another program that had contrasting meanings. Almost all the news broadcast contained something bad about the opposing party and displayed a positive/superior side about the supported figure. The public is treated to a comparison as an effort to influence their decisions in choosing a potential leader. For example, Prabowo on the frame of Metro TV was a criminal for humanity. He was the figure who was responsible for the many activists who disappeared in the May 1998 case. Because of that case, Prabowo was fired from military institutions. It was also emphasized on Metro TV's news that the people did not want a leader who had a black background. Prabowo had also been linked to the terror case against Wiranto (former the commander of military institution). Wiranto was also the chairman of the Hanura Party. Hanura was one of the supported party of Jokowi-JK. Metro TV even used words such as "sin" and "tragedy" in its reporting of events related to the demands for reform (4, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17, 19, 20, 24, 25 June). But on the

frame of TV One, Prabowo was a victim because the person who should be responsible for the reform riot was Wiranto. After all, at that time he was the top leader in Kopassus (the military organization in which Prabowo served). Prabowo previously even received a defense from the Chairperson of the PDIP Party (bearer of an opposing candidate), Megawati Soekarnoputri, when he took a coalition in the 2009 presidential election with her. , 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 June, 04 July). That was one of the bases on TV One's news that the 1998 case was deliberately used to overthrow Prabowo because it was against the ideology of the opposing party (7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24 June, 04 July).

The way the two media presented the news to the public as in the example above showed a change in the function of media which should be used as a means of conveying information, a source of education, social control, and social cohesion, shifting to become a tool of group interest. The media was used as a tool to bring down opponents to win public sympathy. That was in line with the statements of some informants (reporters) in the media mentioned above. To win a candidate supported by the party that owns the media, the portion of the coverage became unbalanced by containing more candidates/support groups. News about the opposition was minimized by airing it at the broadcast time that was not seen by many viewers.

*"Often and a lot of the news that we make related to political opponents is not broadcast. Especially if what we make is positive, it will drop or delete from the list, "(informant No. 2,5,8).*

*"Not only news but several programs also dropped, replaced by regular news programs and political talk shows,"(informant 6).*

The Broadcasting Law, Broadcasting Code of Conduct, and Broadcast Program Standards (P3SPS) even though it strictly regulates the prohibition on the above. Media must be used for the common good. The first principle of journalism is in the public interest. Independence and neutrality must be maintained by every media actor (Kovack & Rosenstiel, 2001). By acting independently and neutrally, the accuracy and balance of broadcast content are expected to be maintained. Thus the public interest can be maintained as mandated by law. Apart from the issue of accuracy and balance, the media also may not be used for purposes that can incite, mislead, confuse facts and personal opinions, and have bad faith. Broadcasting institutions are required to maintain independence in the production process of journalistic broadcast programs without being influenced by external or internal parties, including investors or broadcasting institution owners. However, in the coverage of Metro TV - TV One, the news was no longer value-free. The news became a tool of interest concerning the existence of external influences in the form of political parties that collaborate with internal influences, namely owners of capital who entered the world of politics. What the two media showed contradicts the mandate of the law because the weaknesses or shortcomings of the opponents were used as a means to bring down one another.

## 2). Legitimacy tool

The abuse of media power as a tool to create and gain legitimacy can be seen in the table. From the same issue, each media had a different point of view regarding the facts presented to the public. The mass media was no longer neutral but take sides. See the figure of table bellow:

No	TV One	Metro TV
1	Electability of President Candidates- Vice: Prabowo Defeats Jokowi in the latest survey: Prabowo excels in the majority of provinces ( <a href="#">Kabar Petang, 20/6/14</a> )	The President of Our Choice: Jokowi-JK electability increases: Results of Presidential Candidate survey (8 July 2014)
2	Quick count: People's Choice President: Prabowo Declares His Victory (Live, June 9, 2014)	Jokowi-JK Wins Quick Count: Jokowi-JK Wins According to Several Credible Survey Agencies: (Live June 9, 2014).

**Figure** : Screenshot of tabel example about media partiality in news

**Source:** Research data

Not only showing the problem of media partiality, but the table above was also able to show the work of the media. The media had carried out such constructs to influence public perceptions regarding the candidate being supported. The news above explained if media content had been used as a tool to legitimize each candidate. News 1 in the table above, for example, showed if Metro TV and TV One did the same thing. Each claimed that their candidate won the vote. News is indeed a report about facts or events. However, what is shown on the screen by the media according to Mursito (2012:1) is not about the event itself but the facts that have been represented. Reading or seeing news in the media means reading events that have been constructed. We do not perceive facts but perceive news about an event. We read facts that have been selected and formatted according to the perspective of the media. From that narration, we can see if the facts or events that are displayed on the screen are facts that have been constructed in such a way for a specific purpose. News is a message. The message is communication. Communication according to Miller is purposeful and not without purpose. This is explained by the condition in which the source when transmitting messages with the awareness of the intention to influence people's behavior (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011). On Metro TV and TV One news, what was broadcast as part of an effort to instill perceptions at the public level about something that was expected to have an impact in the form of support or legitimacy referring to the choice of facts presented.

### 3). Tool for building the image of media owners and groups

Another form of abuse of the media power was that news was used as a tool to build the image of the owner and the group. Media normative theory shows how the media should behave. Media must be free from all kinds of intervention, including investors or media owners. The media must be used for the larger interest of the public, not for personal or group interests. However, what was shown by Metro TV and TV One showed the opposite. We could see how Metro TV had been used as a medium to portray Surya Paloh and his party, Nasdem. Metro TV provided a special room for Surya Paloh and matters related to the Nasdem Party. Many of the activities carried out by Surya Paloh had no news value but got a special portion in reporting. Some were even shown live or as headlines. For example, the news entitled "Inauguration of the Surya Al Athaya Mosque (19/09). The broadcast contained Surya Paloh's activities when he inaugurated a mosque in Bandung. The question is, what aspects make that activity newsworthy? In reporting a fact to the public through news, the media has a guide called news value. News must have value so that it is appropriate to be presented to the public. The news value is what then

determines the feasibility of a fact to be appointed as news (newsworthiness). There are many criteria to make a fact valuable. Some of them are about extraordinary, novelty, having an impact or containing important, useful, elements of closeness, information, conflict, closeness, human interest, something surprising, and/or sexual things (Brooks, Brian S; Kennedy, George; Moen, Daryl R; Ranly, 2010). Referring to those criteria, what was the basic fact about the inauguration of a mosque worthy of being appointed as news? The answer was there is no value except because Surya Paloh is the owner of the media.

What Metro TV had done was the same as TV One when it reported Prabowo. TV One interviewed Prabowo as chairman of the Gerindra party live from Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. TV One asked Prabowo's opinion regarding inflation in Indonesia. Similar to Metro TV, TV One utilized news as a tool to build character or image about Prabowo as a smart figure, with a vision as a leader. We could see that from TV One's choice in choosing Prabowo as an interviewee. It was the right for each media to choose who was the source in the news. But in the above problems, what capabilities did Prabowo have that he was asked for his comments specifically, even live from abroad, regarding the economic condition of this country. On the template, Prabowo was written as the General Chair of the Gerindra Party. In this matter, it was not in his capacity to comment on inflation, unless he was asked in his capacity as an economist or a business actor affected by inflation.

Why does the media tend to be narcissistic when it comes to owners? Several informants who are media workers said that it was an unwritten rule regarding reportage. The editorial team usually takes a decision automatically by giving orders, especially to the reporter and cameramen to cover the activities of media owners even if they do not have sufficient news value to broadcast. Some were even broadcast live and also turned into headlines.

*"Sometimes we also play a role, setting up activities carried out by groups from parties that own the media to be feasible even though the original is not feasible in video visual and content,"*(informant 8).

From the above, we can see that the ability of the media to spread messages widely and quickly had been used as a tool to build a certain image about supported figures (groups). Through the image that was built, perceptions or impressions of the figure would be obtained. Self-image about someone or something can influence public decisions. Tubbs & Moss (Tubbs & Moss, 2011) stated that in political communication, image or impression is very important because it becomes the basis for making decisions. By utilizing the media, political elites not only reflect but also help create mass expectations and also myths so that they can be widely accepted (Nimmo, 2000). A good image of a candidate will have a big influence on people's decisions in the general election (Prasetyawan, 2012). Image is something that is very important and is even called a part of political power. The success or failure of political communication depends on the ability of the media to construct political power. The media has the power to influence the audience (Latif, Yudi; Ibrahim, 1996)

### **Bias**

Many of Metro TV and TV One's news reports were biased mainly because of the selection of facts and their construction into the news.

#### ***Bias by Story Selection***

A fact is assembled into the news in different ways so that it produces different impressions, meanings, and impacts. This bias can be seen from the way TV One constructs news with the theme of bad opponents' campaigns. For example is the alleged involvement of the Indonesian national army (TNI) in winning over one of the candidates. Although it did not mention Prabowo's support, Metro TV indirectly indicated that Prabowo was using his network in the military to assist him in winning the presidential election. That was done through the mobilization of Babinsa (village guidance officer) which led to reports of allegations of intimidation against residents. The TNI denied this allegation and confirmed its neutrality in the general election through a news broadcast on TV One but not on Metro TV. Metro TV strengthened this allegation by reporting on the confessions of some witnesses and the existence of 2 TNI members who were sanctioned for disciplinary actions. News about the existence of sanctions against members of the TNI who were said to have committed disciplinary actions was also not on TV One. That is where the practice of news construction or media setting agenda can be read clearly.

#### ***Bias by the selection of sources***

The coverage of the electability survey results of the candidates from the survey institute Pusat Data Bersatu (PDB), the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI), a Pollcomm, were biased due to the selection of sources. TV One deepened its news through direct interviews in the studio, but only sources from the PDB presented it while researchers from other survey institutions who produced data that Jokowi-JK was superior in the survey, not in the studio, because the only PDB was stated that Prabowo received higher support than his opponent. Metro TV was also biased by the selection of sources, as Prabowo insinuated through the news of TV One because it never broadcasted news about the survey results that said it was superior to Jokowi-JK even though it was carried out by a credible institution. All of them present selected sources that lead to news formation that did not benefit the opposing party.

#### ***Bias by the selection of story and bias by source selection***

The news about Prabowo's alleged involvement in the 1998 human rights case was also biased because of the selection of angles and sources. In the news, Metro TV never interviewed Prabowo but instead presented Wiranto's statement, who was formerly Prabowo's commander or superior. The selection of news excerpts which confirms that Prabowo acted on his initiative in connection with the disappearance of several activists, then the question of terror against Wiranto, who was allegedly related to his statements in the mass media regarding the 1998 case (19 June). Regarding the news about the 1998 case, TV One issued a rebuttal report using Prabowo's younger brother, Hashim, as a resource (June 9). It was emphasized that Prabowo had always been used as a scapegoat in case 98 and the attack using the 1998 case is referred to as a form of distrust of his opponent for his ability to compete with Prabowo (12,13 June). The coverage was biased due to the selection of sources. Bias because the selection of sources bring other consequences in the form of bias in other forms, namely bias of selection story. Due to the different selection of sources, the news generated by different facts, especially in the selection of sources, already contains certain content/interests. This bias by selection of sources then creates a bias by selection story or vice versa because the selection of sources determines the content and the selection of the content could also determine who will be the sources, depending on what content will be made. That is why the media are obliged to be independent to produce accurate, balanced, and objective news. Independent means reporting events or facts by the conscience without intervention from other parties, including

owners of press companies (Broadcasting Ethical Code, 2012). Accurate means is believed to be true according to the objective circumstances when the event occurred. Balanced means that all parties have an equal opportunity in reporting (Ethical Code of Press, 2006).

From the reporting model of the two media above, we can understand why media independence is placed at the earliest point, namely in article 1 of the journalistic code of ethics, because it can become a firewall, a protector of the media in producing responsible information, protecting public rights, and also protect the media itself to its credibility in the society. It is also from this independence that all media coverage is free from something called bad faith. Bad faith as described in the journalistic code of ethics is the intention of intentionally harming other parties. We also can see that the reasons for the reporting of the two media did not fulfill the basic principles of journalism due to the intervention of press company owners and other parties through company owners. In the context of the 2014 presidential election, this was due to the involvement of press company owners in political organizations (parties) in which the party where the media company owner is the party that carries one of the candidates. Accurate, balanced, objective reporting becomes difficult to materialize because it contains content for the benefit of (winning) candidates through the news construction process, by favoring the supported and belittling the opposing party. This is where the intention is solely to harm other parties as contained in the journalistic code of ethics (article 1) and also the first part of P3SPS regarding journalistic principles (article 22).

### ***Bias by Placement***

Bias by placement is about a story being placed. Is it placed as something that is considered important or not, as headlines, headlines, or as regular news? (Baker, 1995). It can be said that almost all of the reports of the two media mentioned above were biased because the placement of news in a program was unfair and not following the feasibility of a news item (news value, newsworthiness). All news related to the activities of the candidates being supported was always placed in the headlines and gets a bigger portion than news about the opposition.

Metro TV and TV One were both biased by placement because of the unfair and unbalanced news placement. Metro TV coverage was dominated by Jokowi-JK and related groups. In addition to percentages, placement bias was also related to the position of news broadcast which was always on the headlines and news content. Today's Metro Program on June 4, for example, of the 14 news broadcasts, eight of them contained Jokowi-JK activities while the other six contained opposing parties but all had negative nuances. Prabowo was never placed at the beginning either as headlines or headlines. Meanwhile, on TV One, on June 4, for example, there were 19 news stories. Of those, there were six stories about Prabowo, while Jokowi only had 2. News placement was also the same as Metro TV, where the opponent's figure was placed not in the first place, but at the end.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

This study is a form of criticism of journalistic work as well as input for media people to hold to the basic principles of journalism in terms of the media's ability to influence people's thoughts and behavior. This study is also a reminder for the public to become smart media connoisseurs as well as a form of implementation of the broadcasting law regarding public participation in supervising and controlling media content. The results show that the

involvement of media owners in politics does not only have consequences on media content but also impacts the audience concerning content produced and disseminated to society.

The public's right to obtain complete and accurate information is not fulfilled because the political preferences of media owners make newsrooms not independent so that the information produced is not objective, unbalanced. The message has been packaged in such a way for certain interests, one of which is to achieve power. This situation can contribute to divisions at the community level due to misinformation or disinformation. It takes awareness and goodwill from media managers regarding their social responsibility to society so that press management is not only oriented to business or profit. The press must be monitored because of its ability to create and control opinion and public behavior. The press can be used to create certain truths based on the regime in power, and destroy democracy. I agree with Tony Harcup (2007) that ethical journalism is good journalism. Without ethics and grip, the press will run wild to the new form of the invader to the public. If the press is no longer respects the existing ethics, it is not impossible if the press will not respect the truth anymore. Even though the key to news is fact, truth, and honesty.

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