

MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND DEMOCRACY PROCESSES IN INDONESIA

KEPEMILIKAN MEDIA DAN PROSES DEMOKRASI DI INDONESIA

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Abstract

This paper highlights the impact of media ownership on the democratic process in Indonesia. The research employs literature analysis and case studies to gather data from various relevant sources. The findings indicate that the concentration of media ownership significantly affects democracy in Indonesia, in the sense that it may lead to a proliferation of biased information and opinions, while simultaneously hampering the diversity of perspectives within society. However, these risks can be mitigated by sustaining press freedom, effective regulations, and strong public participation; Transparency, accountability, and robust media freedom are highly necessary to ensure a healthy diversity of media ownership and equitable information distribution in Indonesia. The article concludes that it is important to continuously monitor and study the relationship between media ownership and political influence within the context of democracy in Indonesia. Collaboration among the government, media, and civil society is key to maintaining a healthy balance between media freedom and the protection of a diverse and inclusive democratic process.

Keywords: Media Ownership, Political Influence, Independent Media, Democratic Process

Abstrak

Tulisan ini menyoroti dampak kepemilikan media terhadap proses demokrasi di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode analisis literatur dan studi kasus untuk mengumpulkan data dari berbagai sumber yang relevan. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa konsentrasi kepemilikan media memiliki dampak signifikan terhadap demokrasi di Indonesia, yang mana situasi tersebut dapat mendorong maraknya persebaran informasi dan opini yang bias, di samping menghambat keragaman perspektif di antara masyarakat. Namun, risiko-risiko tersebut dapat dimitigasi dengan mempertahankan kebebasan pers, regulasi yang efektif, dan partisipasi publik. Transparansi, akuntabilitas, dan kebebasan media yang kuat sangat diperlukan di Indonesia untuk memastikan adanya keragaman kepemilikan media yang sehat dan distribusi informasi yang merata. Artikel ini menyimpulkan bahwa penting untuk terus memantau dan mempelajari hubungan antara kepemilikan media dan pengaruh politik dalam konteks demokrasi di Indonesia. Kolaborasi antara pemerintah, media, dan masyarakat sipil menjadi kunci dalam menjaga keseimbangan yang sehat antara kebebasan media dan perlindungan terhadap proses demokratis yang beragam dan inklusif.

Kata Kunci: *Kepemilikan Media, Pengaruh Politik, Media Independen, Proses demokrasi*

Introduction

The media plays an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing democratic processes in a country. One aspect of concern in media studies and politics is media ownership, namely the concentration of ownership at the hands of a few conglomerates. This phenomenon can have a significant impact on pluralism, freedom of speech, and balanced representation in the political process (Curran, 2011; Milutinović, 2017; Neff & Benson, 2021; Riedl, 2019)

When media ownership is concentrated at the hands of a few owners who have specific political or economic interests, this may lead to biased news coverage and political narratives. Media dominated by specific groups or individuals can influence the dissemination of information, restrict access to alternative perspectives, and manipulate public opinion. (Neff & Benson, 2021) In the context of Indonesian democracy, concentrated media ownership can be a threat to democratic principles such as pluralism, transparency, accountability, and active public participation in political decision-making. As the saying goes: they who control the media control the masses.

The reform period brought significant changes to Indonesian media. It is now a tool for multiple oligarchs to obtain power in the public sphere, whereas in The New Order Era, it was under the singular control of the authoritarian government. Since the reform until now, Indonesian media tends to be partisan—especially visible during elections—because many media owners have vested interests in electoral politics (Subiakto, 2015). Media alignment began to show in 2004, when voters could directly elect the president and vice-president for the first time in Indonesia's history. At the time, mass media in Indonesia could already be categorized into partisan and nonpartisan media.

Sharper McChesney (2008) said: the richer the mass media corporations, the poorer the democracy. It is a relevant remark, because the problem in Indonesia is that almost all major media owners are affiliated with a particular

political bloc. Beyond mere connection to governmental or political figures, some media barons themselves are the chairman of a political party. Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the owner of MNC Group, is the chairman of Perindo Party. Surya Paloh, owner of Metro TV (Media Group), is the chairman of NasDem party. *Likewise*, TV One is owned by the family of Aburizal Bakrie—the chairman of Golkar Party between 2009 to 2014.

Some previous studies may provide insights regarding the importance of media ownership. As Milutinovic points out, in Serbia, the transformation of media ownership was crucial in the democratization process during the post-socialist period. His study showed that the transposition and harmonization of European media policy standards into Serbian media law between 2000 to 2016 was successful albeit with an important flaw: the development of a market-driven model of the media system in Serbia did not guarantee favorable conditions for democratic public debate (Milutinović, 2017) Therefore, it is important to conduct in-depth research on the relationship between media ownership and democratic processes in order to understand their impact on healthy and functioning democracies (Livingstone & Lunt, 1994).

Within that context, this study will focus on Joko Widodo's administration, from 2014 to 2023; partly in response to the assumptions that Indonesia's democracy index has declined in this period.

Media Ownership in Indonesia

It is commonly believed that the media is an important actor in political struggles. First of all, its existence in democratic countries—both as a private entity and an element in democratic politics—is usually protected by law. In addition, the media can play a variety of political roles, including supporting the process of democratic transition and being a channel for critical voices As Cook points out, this has become an important concern in Western societies, where journalists have been fairly successful in preventing the people from seeing

them as political actors, helped by political pundits who have also failed to recognize the media as a political institution (Cook, 1998).

Ben Bagdikian, an American former journalist and author, highlighted the problem of concentration of media ownership in his famous book: "The Media Monopoly." He highlighted issues such as advertising costs and the relegated importance of public issues. It details a trend where increasingly fewer companies own the majority of newspapers, television stations, book publishers and film companies (Bagdikian, 2004). As market influences may affect the media, he also raised critical questions about whether market-driven media business models could threaten the integrity of journalism and diversity of information. Baker, on the other hand, explained how commercial pressures can encourage media to present more popular content while ignoring deeper, more complex issues. Danah Boyd is a researcher and social media expert who studies the relationship between social media and political dynamics in the digital age (Bagdikian, 2004; Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

This line of skepticism was also reinforced in Barsamian & Chomsky (2001); as well as Chomsky & Arcal (2002). In their propaganda model, the media perform in accordance to serve the interests of the elite. However, the model offered a rather conspiratorial view regarding the media, where its dynamics are construed as deterministic, functional, and simple. In addition, it downplays the agency of journalists; whether regarding their individual capacity to work independently, or their collective potential to foster systemic change. by Robert W. McChesney, an American communications professor and media expert who studies the impact of concentrated media ownership on democracy and free speech (McChesney, 2008).

In Indonesia, the increasingly centralized media ownership into the hands of a small group of people seems to have become commonplace. According to a study conducted by Innovation Policy and Governance (CIPG) and Hivos titled "Mapping the Landscape of the Media Industry in Contemporary Indonesia", Indonesia's media industry has been dominated by just 12 major

groups. They are: Global Media Communication and Media Nusantara Citra (MNC Group), owned by Hary Tanoesoedibjo; Jawa Pos Group, owned by Dahlan Iskan; Kompas Gramedia, owned by Jacob Oetama; Mahaka Media, owned by Erick Thohir; Elang Mahkota Teknologi, owned by the Sariaatmadja family; CT Group, owned by Chairul Tanjung; Visi Media Asia owned by the Bakrie group; Media Group, owned by Surya Paloh; MRA Media, owned by the Soetowo family; Femina Group, owned by Pia Alisjahbana; Tempo Inti Media, which belongs to the Tempo Foundation; and BeritaSatu Media Holding, which belongs to Lippo Group. Most of these groups operate on multiple fronts through their subsidiaries, whose activities range from printing, broadcasting, to online news portals.

Nonetheless, their interests may extend beyond the realm of business and into the political, reflecting the position of their respective owners. This may pose a problem, because ownership of the biggest conglomerates revolves around a handful of elites who are also the top brass of Indonesian political parties. Aburizal Bakrie, whose family owns Visi Media Asia (Viva Group), is the former General Chairman of the Golkar Party and current Chairman of Golkar's Board of Trustees. The owner of Media Group, Surya Paloh, is the founder and Chairman of the NasDem Party. Hary Tanoesoedibjo, the owner of MNC Group, is the founder of Perindo Party (Aulia, 2016).

Tabel of Media Ownership in Indonesia

Media	Owner	Political Affiliation	TV Station	Newspaper	Daring/Online
Visi Media Asia (Viva Group/ Bakrie & Brothers)	Aburizal Bakrie/ Anindya Bakrie	Partai Golkar	ANTV, TV Satu	-	VivaNews
Grup Media	Surya Paloh	Nasdem Party	Metro TV	Media Indonesia, Lampung Pos, Borneo News	Media Indonesia
Media Nusantara Citra (MNC) Group	Hary Tanu Soedibyo	Partai Perindo	RCTI, Global TV, MNCTV, INewsTV	Seputar Indonesia (Koran Sindo)	Okezone
Trans Corporation/CT Grup (Para Group)	Chairul Tanjung	Partai Demokrat	TransTV, Trans7	-	Detik online

Processed from various Sources

As suggested by the table, the phenomenon is especially apparent in the ownership of television stations. While Chairul Tanjung also has his own television network, the three previously mentioned figures and groups are different in how they try to gain control over news networks. TV One (Viva Group), Metro TV (Media Group), and iNews (MNC Group) are all dedicated news channels often treated as references for political issues.

Metro TV is the eldest of the three, founded in 2001 as the first 24-hours news channel in Indonesia. It was established by Surya Paloh, who also formed the National Democratic Party (NasDem) in 2011. From the beginning, Metro TV’s political orientation—especially in presidential elections—has been dependent on Paloh’s orientation (Tapsell, 2017). INews, on the other hand, was launched as the third 24-hour news channel by Harry Tanoesoedibjo, just a few months after he formed Perindo Party in February 2015. Before that, Tanoesoedibjo had briefly joined both NasDem and People’s Conscience Party (Partai Hanura).

Principles of Democracy and Media Independence

Democratic principles can be seen as a set of guidelines on how political power should be

exercised in a democracy. The penultimate aim of these principles is to ensure participation, freedom, equality, and accountability in democratic governance. Within the context of this study, one of the most relevant democratic goals or principles is the freedom of the press and media. Independent media is an important pillar in democracy, due its role in providing objective information, monitoring exercises of power, and facilitating public discussion.

The freedom of press is a part of the freedom of speech, itself part of fundamental human rights. However, nowadays the independence of mass media has begun to fade due to social, economic, and cultural frictions. Disturbance may come from political actors, state officials, informal networks, or the general public; taking shape in gratifications or offers for tempting positions. It is an issue that deserves the attention and firm actions from state institutions, which in this case are KPI (Indonesian Broadcasting Commission) and DPI (Indonesian Press Council). Being the institution that carries out supervisory functions as mandated by Law No. 32 of 2002 concerning broadcasting, KPI has the authority to accommodate public complaints and carry out monitoring (Khotimah, 2019).

Pertaining to the press, independence refers to the freedom to conduct journalistic work without external interference that may

violate the integrity and objectivity of reporting. This is a core principle in journalistic ethics that ensures that information is presented as clear and balanced as possible, as well as based on facts—rather than influenced by personal, political, or economic interests. Independence is an important foundation in maintaining public trust in the media as reliable sources of information.

In practice, media independence involves several aspects. First, it means keeping a safe distance from parties that may influence news contents (including governments, companies, or individuals with particular interests). This ensures that the media does not get bogged down in narratives or agendas that can obscure the truth or overshadow alternative views. Second, independence also implies transparency in newsmaking. Independent media should open greater access to news sources, encourage in-depth investigations, and provide a better understanding of the background to events. In this way, the media not only provides information, but also provides the necessary context for better understanding.

In other words, independence requires the media to avoid conflicts of interest that can interfere with the integrity of the news. This could mean avoiding a configuration of media ownership that is too concentrated on a small number of individuals or groups, especially ones that have strong political or economic affiliations. The media should also be careful about streams of revenue that can affect the content of the news. Thus, media independence should be upheld not only to reflect the ethical code of journalism, but also to serve the primary role of the press as a guardian of integrity, transparency, and trust in an increasingly complex and varied world of information (Khotimah, 2019).

Journalistic standards are ultimately tied to this independence, which contains principles of objectivity and neutrality. In addition, objectivity also acts as a marker for media professionalism. Professional media that possess a high level of independence will tend to display impartial media coverage. Conversely, media that is not independent will tend to make biased reports.

Several important indicators to gauge the independence of a media: presence or absence of opinions, elements of personalization, sensationalism, stereotypes, juxtaposition or linkage, and accuracy in reporting (McQuail & Windahl, 2015).

Slightly different from above, Baker (2001) prefers to emphasize the aspects of free speech and media ownership. He outlined the importance of the media in a democracy: as a critical information channel for citizens in acquiring knowledge on relevant political and social issues.

In the constructivist view, according to Bennet, media is not only passive channels or tools to relay messages, but also subjects who actively construct reality, views, biases and perceptions. The first consequence of this thought is that the media can no longer be imagined as an ideal space that is inherently egalitarian and unbiased. This, in turn, produced the second logical consequence: media products cannot be seen only as descriptions of objective reality—i.e., the news material—but also the construction of the media itself (T. Bennett, 2005; W. L. Bennett, 2012). There is no neutral media because a media will tend to side with the interests of its owner. As said by Rivers: the freedom of the press that prevails in the world is the freedom for media owners. “Media owners can still put news that is important to them—even if not very important to the public—on the first page or in prime time. Conversely, certain news stories may be withheld or canceled. This proves, the owner is still in power” (Rivers, 2003). In other words, journalists and their independence will be shackled by the interests of owners or financiers, where the news content is forced to align with the vision and policies of their workplace.

It is undeniable that in 2014 the majority of Indonesian media has lost its way. The legislative and presidential elections held that year were important moments in Indonesia’s democracy. Unfortunately, the position taken by the media tends to focus on accommodating interests, instead of providing educational information. During the presidential election campaign, for example, some media went as

far as manipulating the public by generating and presenting misinformation. It was an irony, because the media has a strategic position to move democracy within a country, whether forward or backward. (Slamet, 2017).

In another instance of the problem, Hary Tanoesodibjo—the owner of MNC Group and Chairman of the Perindo Party—notoriously used his media network to broadcast his party's political drama surrounding the 2019 presidential election. Combined with how MNC Group has also been used as a channel to showcase Tanoesudibjo's business, suspicions regarding its independence may be raised. As it bows down to the political tastes of the owner, the media itself was commodified, thus no longer a tool of the public. Through MNC Group's activity, the pillars of democracy symbolically collapsed (Hariyadi, 2018)

Political problems grow increasingly complex as media oligarchs who are also party leaders pick sides in presidential elections. When this occurs, the impact is twofold: first in how they lead their respective parties, then in how they affect the political expression of their respective media as reflected in the news during the election campaign. This is in line with the views of political economy, where the media is deemed to be inseparable from the interests of capitalists, state, or other groups. Since the media itself is a tool that can be utilized to control and dominate society, monopolies of media ownership could jeopardize consumer choice and press freedom.

Mcquail's theory, now widely accepted in the study of mass communication, explains how factors that initially affected the organizational aspect of a media may also significantly affect the end products of said media. Management, media professionals, and advocates of technical or technological progress are the three most influential groups in mass media companies. Three of these parties are in the middle of a battlefield where they must make decisions amid various obstacles, restrictions, and demands as well as various attempts to inject influence and power into media organizations (McQuail & Windahl, 2015)

News that will inevitably influence public opinions and decisions are shaped within this context of intertwining interests. As a consequence, news may suffer from bias because the press is reduced into a vehicle, a weapon, or an amplification device utilized by media oligarchs to support their preferred political candidates. In the 2014 presidential elections, there was an increasing connection between media figures, political parties and candidates. Media Group, for instance, became the largest media network behind the pair of candidates for the presidential office, Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla. It was made possible because the group belonged to Surya Paloh, who is also the chairman of NasDem—one of the parties behind the nomination of Joko Widodo along with PDIP, PKB, PKPI, and Hanura party. On the opposing side, Aburizal Bakrie—owner of Viva Group—provided the bulk of media support for Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Rajasa by utilizing Viva Group. The step was in line with the direction of the Golkar party that he also led, i.e., nominating the pair alongside Gerindra, PAN, PKS, PPP, and The Democratic Party (Dahlia & Permana, 2022).

In the 2019 election, media support for presidential and vice presidential candidates grew increasingly uneven. On 7 September 2018, Erick Thohir, owner of Mahaka Group, was appointed as the Chairman of Joko Widodo's National Campaign Team. This meant that the mass media's support base for the Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin victory was getting bigger, because they had already secured the support of Hary Tanoesodibjo (MNC Group) and Surya Paloh (Media Group) beforehand. Prabowo-Sandi's camp, on the other hand, received no direct support from any media conglomerates. Unsurprisingly, this skewed distribution of media backing was later reflected in news coverage of both candidates.(Dahlia & Permana, 2022).

It is worth noting that the three primary actors in media politics are politicians, journalists, and interest groups; each possessing a different set of goals. For politicians, the goal is to mobilize the public support necessary to win elections and promote programs once

elected. For journalists, the purpose is to create good media products that attract the attention of the masses. For the public, the purpose of media politics is to oversee politics and policies, while ensuring transparency and accountability of state officials. The relationship between the three actors can be strained, especially between politicians and journalists. The former may lament what they deemed to be “unbalanced” coverage while demanding complete “neutrality” in all journalistic products, but the latter may wish to retain their independence, including from such pressure (Aulia, 2016).

Political Polarization and Public Opinion

Sometimes the media is caught up in pre-existing political polarization. If a society is already deeply divided between different political views, the media may find it necessary to choose sides in order to maintain the loyalty of their audience.

This populist tendency can be seen in the 2014 presidential election, where some media outlets blatantly showed their support for a certain candidate. Even Metro TV and TV One—two of the largest new stations in Indonesia—were not immune to the pattern, thanks to the political configuration previously elaborated. Their thinly-veiled partiality towards either pair of candidates was noticeable in the making of news, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Their bias then became ingrained into people’s common sense at the time: supporters of Joko Widodo should watch Metro TV, while supporters of Prabowo should instead watch TV One.

Operations carried out by both media were certainly intended to shape political opinions of potential voters. The duration, frequency, and emotional content of the object of news can be utilized by candidates to gain support. According to Scheufele, media framing is inevitable and natural in the newsmaking process, especially when elections are in the equation. However, this deviates from the normative role of the media as an information medium that puts public interest above all else. This has greatly deviated

from its role as an information medium and as a social controller. Moreover, media framing risks intensifying public mistrust and cynicism, despite the media’s capability in unveiling new information and increasing public interest in political life (Aulia, 2016).

Kompas.com news portal also encountered similar difficulties to remain balanced, especially because some news pertaining to either pair may contain stereotypes that offend the other. It somehow retained its reputation as an independent media nonetheless, despite justifiable doubt in the matter (Khotimah, 2019). This shows how the media will always have a particular tendency in reporting any political figure. One media may provide greater space to one political candidate at the expense of another. Therefore, in ideal terms, it is much better if the mass media is transparent about its position and implements the principle of fairness as much as possible, without having to be subjected to bans or restrictions in the event of transgressions. In another case, Media Tempo Group in the 2014 election was perceived by the public as supporters of Joko Widodo and Jusuf Kalla, even though they did not openly endorse the pair. On the contrary, Tempo was perceived as against the pair of Prabowo Subianto and Hatta Rajasa. This is the result of Tempo’s editorial article in the July 9, 2014 edition, entitled “Choosing Leaders”. Within the op-ed, Tempo built a narrative that urged voters not to elect candidates with grim track records. Prabowo was in Tempo’s line of fire, since he was allegedly involved in cases of gross human rights violations, namely the kidnapping and disappearance of pro-democracy activists in 1998. Afterwards, the door to judge Tempo as a partial media was wide open, due their implied allegiance.

Following the election of Jokowi-JK, Tempo published an illustration of Jokowi. Joko Widodo was pictured as himself, albeit his shadow was depicted as having a Pinocchio-esque elongated nose. This became a hot topic in public discussion, raising suspicions that Tempo was in opposition to the government. In this context, of course, it can be seen that Tempo is expected to continue to have independence in

reporting; in accordance with the real problems faced by this nation. Moreover, we all know that political news is often far from the aspect of neutrality because it is full of interests for power.

Tempo often refuses to advertise products or services considered not in line with public interest or results of their investigative reporting. Example of an advertisement that annulled their own reporting was regarding the Bandar Kemayoran City project in April 2006. Editors of Tempo officially apologized to readers for conceding an advertisement that denied its investigative coverage. Tempo's management was firm in their decision, believing that the steps taken will not affect their relationship with business partners whose advertisements are the company's main source of revenue. This proved that mass media editors can be considered capable of maintaining their independence and being responsible to the public for the news that they produced. Thus, the public perception that media editorials in the era of conglomerates and advancement in digital information technology are easily controlled by capital owners is not entirely true (Susanto, 2021).

The measure of media objectivity in reporting events cannot be judged from their angle, because choice of angle becomes part of how the media works (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2003). An important example is related to the loss of independence of the print and online press in Medan, North Sumatra due to digital disruption and the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to continue operations, local media cooperated with local governments, publishing news that was barely distinguishable from advertisements. As they publish paid news based on the interests of the contractor, they are no longer independent in carrying out their journalistic functions. Such practices are considered a form of interference with the newsroom and are not in accordance with the journalistic code of ethics. It was a picture of the alleged collapse of the independence of the print press and news portals through the adoption of news contract policies from paid news (Susanto, 2021)

Political Pressure, Media Interests and Ownership

The media can experience pressure from political parties, whether in the form of threat of lawsuits, or funding cuts. This kind of pressure can encourage the media to avoid reporting that can harm the political party in power, although it is often believed that the owners of the media have considerable power in political affairs. It cannot be denied that the power of media owners is sometimes held hostage by the reigning political power as in cases of legal threats. This often makes the media or media owners have no choice but to participate in the prevailing mode of newsmaking, in accordance with the wishes of the ruler. This can be seen across two periods of Joko Widodo's tenure. No national media dared to report facts that are unfavorable to the government, let alone openly criticize them. When Kompas reported on the debts of PT KCIC (the company contracted for a government-sponsored high-speed-rail megaproject) which had swelled by 8.5 trillion rupiahs, they were met with a lawsuit. Under the pretext of content appropriation, a KCIC-associated Youtube content creator took KompasTV and Kompas.com to court. Rosiana Silalahi, Editor-in-Chief of KompasTV, later revealed that the Youtuber demanded 1.3 billion rupiahs in reparation. (<https://www.cnnindonesia.com>)

Another example was the experiences of Surya Paloh's Media Group. He explained that the group faced several business issues and political threats since he led NasDem to become the main nominating party of 2024 presidential election candidate, Anies Baswedan. Although NasDem has always stated that it will support Jokowi's government until 2024, it is still perceived as a political opponent, because they did not back the administration's preferred successor to Jokowi. This was echoed by one of the party's leading figures, Effendy Choirie (liputan6.com); and also covered by Tempo.co who reported that Surya Paloh's business empire was affected following the declaration of Anies Baswedan as presidential candidate on October 3, 2022. This story was revealed in the May 14, 2023 issue of Tempo Magazine Report. (<https://nasional.tempco.co>)

Pressures from inside and outside media organizations affect the actual content of the media. In other words, media content is a combination of internal programs, administrative and editorial choices, as well as external influences that come from non-media actors—such as socially prominent people, government officials, advertising clients, and so on. There is no denying that the owner of a non-profit media outlet has considerable influence on media content, having the authority to direct journalists to publish or not to publish certain media products (McQuail & Windahl, 2015; Reese, 1991)

In this way, media products can be considered as an item to be traded on the market, and the amount of information spread depends on what the market will pay for it. As previously stated, according to the perspectives of political economy approach: the media cannot be separated from the interests of the owners of capital, the state, or other groups. In other words, the media serves as an instrument for hegemony. This process of hegemony indicates the existence and activity of mass communication, both of which are significantly influenced by the relevant political economic structure of society. The natural conclusion is that the reality that the media presents is skewed and prejudiced. The capitalist class, which wields economic power, currently controls media ownership in Indonesia. In this sense, the media is seen as a tool of domination that can be used by capital owners or other governmental groups to direct the flow of public information according to their interests in the commercial market system. With this pattern of understanding, the focus of the political economy approach is not only on the financial dimension but also on the interrelations between economic, technological, and cultural aspects of social reality.

In addition, when viewed structurally, the case of capital ownership in Indonesia shows how economic structure affects media content such as television. In Indonesia, capitalists—whether of local, regional, or global levels—determined how television media operates. The more industrial aspects of the sector are strictly regulated and governed by this capitalistic

system, consequently making media workers appear soulless. In the end, the capability of the capitalistic system overpowered the influence of individual agents within it. Agents have virtually no free will in their social actions, because all their actions are a reflection of the structure of global capitalism (Kurniasari & Aji, 2018; Novianti, 2013; Nurhajati & Wijayanto, 2019)

On one hand, there are strong indications that the government can easily control the mass media to serve political interests of the ruling powers. But on the other hand, the NasDem case also shows a space for building a self-balancing ecosystem of newsmaking, unlike the previous election in 2019. It is hoped that the media will really provide good and balanced political education for the public ahead of the election. Not only in terms of quantity (such as airtime of news pertaining to each camp) but also in terms of quality (depth, context, and substance), so that the public can make informed decisions instead of being misled by framing and propaganda. The media is also expected not only to work for the short-term benefit of elections. As a pillar of democracy, it should be important for them to think about the interests of the nation and state.

Media Ownership and Projected Support for the 2024 Election

If present candidate/party configuration does not change until the official registration in October-November 2023, then a map of media support or interest in the upcoming 2024 presidential election can be drawn. Currently there are 3 presidential candidates who are strongly projected to run as presidential candidates are Prabowo Subianto with the support of political parties (Gerinda, PKB, PAN, and Golkar, PBB), Ganjar Pranowo with party support (PDIP, PPP Perindo) and Anies Baswedan (Nasdem, PKS, Demokrat) with the tagline “coalition of change”

These axes are likely to also divide major media groups into 3 axes. We start with presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto. Golkar’s inclusion into his coalition implies the support of Viva Group, because Bakrie

Family is associated with Golkar. Meanwhile, Ganjar Pranowo will receive a massive boost from Perindo's inclusion into PDIP's coalition. MNC Group, under the control of Perindo's chairman, thus far has acted accordingly, as reflected by the increasing airtime of news about Ganjar's nomination in MNC's news channels. Finally, the challenger Anies Baswedan will be supported by Media Group, which belongs to Surya Paloh of NasDem party. This is especially interesting, not only because it marks a split between Jokowi's camp and Paloh's NasDem—the latter is the first and foremost nominator of Baswedan—but also because Media Group were known to be critical of Baswedan during his tenure as the Governor of DKI Jakarta between 2017-2022.

In a way, the configuration of political blocs is much more balanced compared to the 2019 presidential election. At the very least, it may provide various options and sources of information to the public. Nonetheless, media owners eventually will have to find balance between advancing their interests and the sustainability of their media. As media critics have pointed out, their survival is subject to the dynamics of political economy and democracy.

The relationship between the concentrated media ownership and democratic processes is complex and controversial. Some argue that the concentration of media ownership can harm the democratic process, while others argue that there is no direct link between the two. Correspondingly, some argue that the concentration of media ownership is not necessarily detrimental to the democratic process. Press freedom, effective regulation, and strong public participation can overcome the negative effects of concentrated media ownership. In addition, the emergence of digital platforms and social media has provided new space for public participation and more equitable distribution of information.

It is important to study media ownership and engage stakeholders—including governments, media, and civil society—in order to ensure there is a healthy diversity of media ownership and adequate regulation. Transparency, accountability, and strong media

freedom are important factors in maintaining a balance between quality media ownership and inclusive democratic processes.

With media ownership in mind, media in a democracy must offer avenues of information that enable public engagement. According to Habermas (1989), building avenues for “undistorted communication” is essential to enable participation in the public sphere. In this context, minority groups' participation is important, and giving them impartial channels will encourage them to participate much more actively. In other words, “undistorted communication” will allow minority groups to demand equal rights and claim equal positions.

The ideal public sphere, to return to Habermas's formulation, should not be institutionalized, should be accessible to everyone, and should have the ultimate authority even when squared against the state and the market. This is of utmost importance because the balance of power within the public sphere may tilt and push the interests of minority groups out of public discourse. Moreover, public space is not singular or monolithic; Instead, there are various public spaces (public spaces). The same public area should logically be able to accommodate the diversity of viewpoints in society because public spaces reflect the diversity of society.

McLuhan believes that advances in media technology have not only made the entire world locally accessible, but have also given rise to a new type of participation that allows anyone to take part in any global issue. Although McLuhan also cautioned that this phenomenon is potentially unresponsive to local issues, it does have the potential to increase people's social awareness as they begin to react to global issues and their implications for local issues. For democracy to spread to the farthest reaches of the world, the media must be able to create a new paradigm of participation (Castells, 2010; Mansell, 2004)

To extrapolate previous points: the concentration of media ownership can create an imbalance of power in conveying information and public opinion. If a small number of media

owners control the majority of the media, they can control the narrative, influence the news agenda, and limit the range of perspectives presented to the public. This can adversely affect freedom of expression, pluralism, and fair access to information, which are necessary for a healthy democratic process.

The concentration of media ownership can open up opportunities for manipulation of public opinion. If media owners have a particular political or business interest, they can use their media to influence people's perceptions and views on political or public issues. It can undermine the integrity of democratic processes by manipulating information, spreading propaganda, or restricting access to alternative perspectives.

The media can also threaten diversity and pluralism in society. When the same media owner controls multiple outlets, they may tend to follow their own interests or those of a particular group, which can reduce the diversity of opinions and viewpoints available to the public. A healthy democratic process requires discussion and exchange of diverse ideas.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the investigation of the relationship between media ownership and the democratic process in Indonesia is as follows: the concentration of media ownership has a significant impact on the democratic process in Indonesia. Media ownership concentrated in a few major owners can result in unequal influence on the delivery of information and the shaping of public opinion. It can harm pluralism and the diversity of opinion in society because the range of perspectives and viewpoints provided to the public is limited. The manipulation of public opinion is also a real threat to the democratic process, since media owners who have particular political or business interests can use their media to influence public perception, restrict access to diverse information, and influence political choices.

Press freedom, effective regulation, and strong public participation are essential in

maintaining a balance between media ownership and healthy democratic processes. There is a need for transparency, accountability, and strong media freedom in Indonesia to ensure non-monopolistic media ownership and fair distribution of information. Adequate regulations and transparent oversight mechanisms need to be put in place to prevent abuse of power and ensure freedom of speech, namely by emphasizing the efforts to continuously monitor and assess the relationship between media ownership and political influence. Finally, collaborative efforts between stakeholders (governments, media, and civil society) pertaining to the issue are key to maintaining a healthy balance between media freedom and the protection of diverse and inclusive democratic processes.

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