

An Analysis of the Framing of Social Issues in Local Newspapers during the 2018 Regional Elections in West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

Miftahul Arzak^{1,3}, Rani Ann Balaraman^{1*}, Normalini MD Kassim²

¹ School of Communication, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

² School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia

³ Department of Communication Science, Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: rani_balaraman@usm.my

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Abstract: *This study examines how local newspapers framed social issues during the 2018 Regional Head Election in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), Indonesia. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach based on Entman's (1993) framing model, the research investigates news coverage in three major local newspapers: Suara NTB, Lombok Post, and Radar Lombok. 117 news articles published between January and July 2018 were analyzed to identify how the media defined problems, diagnosed causes, made moral evaluations, and suggested remedies. The findings reveal that local media actively selected, highlighted, and structured narratives around various social issues such as infrastructure, poverty, and public health. The coverage was not neutral; it was strategically constructed to influence public perceptions regarding the candidates' capabilities and commitment to addressing these issues. Moreover, the newspapers explicitly linked these problems to the failures of previous governance, which was often characterized by widespread corruption. This study highlights the pivotal role of local newspapers as framing agents that actively construct socio-political realities through narratives shaped by specific ideological positions. Despite the growing dominance of digital media, local newspapers in NTB maintain their relevance and influence due to their perceived credibility and the depth of their analysis. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between media and local politics and its broader implications for the development of democracy in Indonesia.*

Keywords: Media framing, Local political communication, Social issue representation, 2018 NTB Regional Election, Qualitative content analysis, Corruption discourse

1. Introduction

Since the onset of the Reformation Era in 1998, Indonesia has experienced significant transformations in its political and media systems, including implementing direct regional elections. This transition has reinforced the role of the media, particularly local newspapers, as a primary medium for disseminating political information to local communities (Kadir et al., 2024). In this context, local newspapers function as news distributors and actively participate in framing social issues presented to their readership.

The involvement of local newspapers in political dynamics became increasingly evident during the 2018 Regional Head Elections in West Nusa Tenggara Province (NTB), where various

social issues became central to media coverage (Febryanti & Ahmad, 2023). This phenomenon suggests that the media's role extends beyond mere reporting; it also significantly shapes public perception through framing practices embedded in its news narratives (Febryanti & Ahmad, 2023; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Kinder, 1998).

This study examines how local newspapers framed social issues during the election process. Specifically, it analyses the framing of social problems in the coverage of three prominent local newspapers in NTB, *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Radar NTB*, throughout the gubernatorial election period from January to July 2018. Through this analysis, the study seeks to uncover the frames used to present social issues during the election period while contributing to a deeper understanding of the media's role within the broader context of local democratic processes in Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between media and politics in the context of elections, particularly in exploring how media framing emphasizes specific social issues while downplaying or omitting others (Iyengar, 2016).

In public governance, political leaders are expected to respond to emerging societal problems to prevent them from escalating. These social issues not only present significant challenges for governments but also attract public attention when evaluating the effectiveness of implemented policies (Palupi & Irawan, 2020). Moreover, social issues are often directly linked to the consequences of government policies that influence citizens' quality of life, playing a vital role in supporting economic growth and national development (Triamanda et al., 2022). As such, social issues presented in the media are frequently associated with infrastructure development, economic stability, public health, and government policies that potentially determine the welfare and future of a region's population.

Social issues are defined as news content that significantly impacts individual lives due to policy implementation. In this context, the media serves as the primary channel for disseminating such information to the public (Poti, 2019). The relationship between social issue reporting and political behavior varies across age groups. Young voters aged 17 to 39 utilize media as a political education tool to gather information about candidates' profiles, backgrounds, and surrounding social issues (Pardana, 2023). In contrast, older voters tend to rely on media as a credible and trustworthy information source based on their extensive experience with electoral processes and ability to compare candidates' capacities in addressing social challenges (Kuncoro et al., 2019). These dynamics highlight the strong interdependence between media and politics in modern democracies, particularly in informing public understanding of candidates, social issues, and the perceived competency of political figures.

The post-1998 political reform era in Indonesia marked a critical turning point in establishing a more democratic electoral system while opening up media freedom. In this new environment, local newspapers began to play a vital role in shaping public discourse, especially during regional election campaigns (Andriani et al., 2018; Nurhayati, 2021). Internationally, the contents of newspapers have also functioned as instruments of political education. For instance, newspapers strengthened group solidarity in shaping political preferences during the 2020 United States presidential election between Trump and Biden (Gaddini, 2023). Similarly, during the 2019 Romanian presidential election, the contents of newspapers emerged as the primary and most trusted information sources, especially in light of the growing mistrust

toward social media, which was often associated with disinformation and fake news (Gherghina & Marian, 2024).

Despite the rapid growth of digital media marked by its speed in disseminating information and its visually appealing presentation of candidates' visions, the contents of newspapers remain relevant, particularly in political communication and public education. The contents of Newspapers are characterized by academically valuable documentation supported by journalistic rigor involving data collection, ethical reporting, and strict editorial standards. Studies show that public trust in newspapers continues to surpass that of digital media, which is often open and lacks stringent content filtering (Firmansyah et al., 2022).

A similar phenomenon is observed in India, where digital media have transformed information consumption patterns, yet newspapers remain irreplaceable, particularly in rural areas. The contents of Local newspapers written in regional languages are more favored due to their cultural proximity and in-depth coverage of local issues (Mudgal & Rana, 2020). In Canada, the role of local newspapers contents in covering municipal elections has even increased alongside higher voter turnout. Local newspapers provide unique advantages by offering detailed insights into candidates and local dynamics that digital platforms have yet to replicate (Andrews & Pruyers, 2022).

In conclusion, the contents of newspapers have a significant influence in shaping public political understanding. Their systematic, accountable, and contextually relevant framing of information makes print media a critical actor in shaping political preferences and fostering informed civic engagement.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method by applying the framing theory to investigate how local newspapers framed social issues during the 2018 Regional Head Election in the Province of West Nusa Tenggara (NTB), Indonesia. This approach systematically explores how local media construct narratives, select specific elements and emphasize certain social aspects in their political coverage. The study focuses on three major local newspapers, *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Radar Lombok*, which have significant regional reach and are known for actively reporting on social issues and political dynamics before and during the election period. The analysis includes articles published between January and July 2018, covering the stages of candidate registration, political campaigns, public debates, voting, and post-election reporting. From the data collected, 117 articles relevant to social issues were selected for further analysis.

The analytical framework of this study draws on the framing model developed by Robert M. Entman (1993), which comprises four key elements: (1) *Problem Definition*, how the media define a particular issue; (2) *Causal Interpretation*, who or what is considered responsible for the issue; (3) *Moral Evaluation*, how the media deliver moral judgment on the reported situation; and (4) *Treatment Recommendation*, what solutions or interventions are proposed to address the issue. This model is particularly effective for identifying how media construct meaning and convey both explicit and implicit evaluations of social problems (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1996; Kinder, 1998). Within the NTB regional election context, these framing elements are utilized to explore how local newspapers shaped public opinion regarding social issues and societal inequalities.

The news text analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 software, which enabled consistent, theme-based coding and the mapping of framing elements and discourse patterns emerging within the texts. Analytical validity was ensured through repeated readings and research team discussions to confirm that the identified framing elements accurately reflected the intended meanings of the texts. Through this approach, the study not only aims to describe media representations of social issues but also to evaluate the role of local newspapers in shaping the socio-political reality during the 2018 regional election in West Nusa Tenggara.

4. Conclusion

This study affirms that content analysis using a framing approach facilitates a deeper understanding of how social issues were constructed during the 2018 Regional Head Elections in West Nusa Tenggara (NTB) Province. Through a systematic examination of 117 news articles from three major local newspapers—Suara NTB, Lombok Post, and Radar Lombok—the findings reveal that the media actively engaged in selecting, emphasising, and constructing narratives concerning various social problems. These narratives were not presented neutrally but were strategically framed to highlight specific aspects.

By applying Entman's (1993) four dimensions of framing, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation, this study demonstrates that local newspapers function as conveyors of information and as agents constructing political and social realities from particular ideological standpoints. The media utilized problem definition to draw attention to the core societal issues; causal interpretation to direct accountability toward specific actors, including incumbent authorities and electoral candidates; moral evaluation to make normative judgments; and treatment recommendation to suggest solutions that implicitly favored specific candidates portrayed as politically capable alternatives.

The study found that social issues such as inadequate infrastructure, high poverty rates, and critical health challenges particularly malnutrition were focal points in local media coverage during the NTB 2018 elections. These issues were not framed as isolated sectoral problems but linked directly to the government's failure to deliver equitable public services. Local newspapers adopted frames that located the root causes of these problems in poor governance, often characterized by systemic corruption.

Corruption emerged as a central factor driving these persistent social challenges, including poverty, infrastructure deficiencies, and public health crises. According to Savedoff and Hussmann (2006), corruption compromises multiple sectors, economy, infrastructure, and healthcare. Economically, it hinders growth and exacerbates social inequality by diverting public funds from poverty alleviation programs to private interests. In infrastructure, corruption inflates project costs, compromises quality, and creates inefficiencies due to selecting unqualified contractors. In healthcare, corruption manifests in embezzlement, bribery, and the circulation of counterfeit medicines, significantly reducing access to basic services, particularly for vulnerable groups such as pregnant women and children (Savedoff & Hussmann, 2006).

Thus, corruption is not merely a legal violation but a structural root of systemic and enduring social crises. Combating corruption is, therefore, a strategic imperative, essential not only for governance reform but also for comprehensively improving societal welfare.

Within the framing of news discourse, local newspapers emphasized causal interpretation and moral evaluation to portray infrastructure underdevelopment, economic inequality, and public

health deficits as direct consequences of the corruption embedded in previous governments. As a result, corruption was framed as the fundamental obstacle to development and the source of widespread social issues, including worsening malnutrition across NTB.

Furthermore, local newspapers did not merely highlight these conditions as governmental failures. However, they actively shaped a public discourse advocating for new leadership characterized by integrity, anti-corruption credentials, and a strong public service orientation. The media promoted candidates with reputations for honesty, effective leadership, and reformist agendas as viable solutions to the ongoing social and political crises. This indicates that media operated as information providers and influential actors in constructing public opinion, favoring particular figures seen as capable agents of change (Iyengar, 1996; Kinder, 1998).

Overall, this study demonstrates that during the 2018 NTB local elections, the local media played a central role as framing agents, actively linking social realities to structural root causes, namely corruption in governance. Through systematic and evaluative reporting, the media helped steer public discourse toward the necessity of leadership change to solve the region's multifaceted social problems.

These findings confirm that local media possess significant power in shaping public agendas and interpretive frameworks regarding social issues in local politics. The frames employed by the media do not merely reflect reality but actively construct it based on specific perspectives and interests underlying news production. In this context, local newspapers serve not only as information providers but also as discursive actors that shape political narratives at the local level. Even in the digital age, local print media continue to exert influence due to their credibility, depth of reporting, and proximity to community concerns elements often underrepresented by national online platforms (Basalamah & Rizal, 2020; Vaccari et al., 2022).

Therefore, the central conclusion drawn from this framing content analysis is that local print media in NTB during 2018 played a strategic and active role in framing social issues to shape public perception.

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