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Reporting Politics: A Political Journalism Study from the Perspectives of Journalists in Malang Raya

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Abstract

Political journalism as a field of study under the banner of journalism study, needs to be explored deeper in the context of Indonesia. Indonesia is one of the biggest democratic countries in the world. The country has implemented the system of direct elections in every five years to elect regional leaders as well as president and vice president. This paper aims to shed light on the practice of political journalism in Malang Raya. Malang Raya is a region in East Java Province which is comprised of Kota Malang, Kabupaten Malang and Kota Batu. The writers conducted semi-structured interviews with 6 reporters. The findings of this research are: (i) journalist and contributors do not obtain a complete freedom in the process of gathering the news and writing the news; (ii) journalist and contributors have obeyed the Indonesian ethics of journalistic, and (iii) to some extent, there are some factors influencing political reporting, i.e.: the interests of media firms, local culture, and geographical locations. Furthermore, politics is an interesting and challenging issue to report. Journalists can face some challenges and problems in reporting politics, as it also happened to our informants. In general, media firms have capacity to interpret the politicians conduct, and influence voters behaviour. In return, politicians are also in need of media, in terms of disseminating their ideas and obtaining some information about the communities.

Keywords: *political journalism, journalists, Malang Raya, political reporting*

Abstrak

Jurnalisme politik sebagai salah satu bidang studi memang perlu ditelaah lebih dalam, terutama dalam konteks Indonesia. Secara empiris, Indonesia adalah salah satu negara demokrasi terbesar di dunia. Sekali dalam lima tahun, ada pemilihan yang akan diadakan. Rakyat berhak memilih wakilnya dan presiden-wakil presiden republik. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji praktik jurnalisme politik di Malang Raya. Malang Raya adalah wilayah yang terdiri dari Kota Malang, Kabupaten Malang dan Kota Batu – semuanya berada di Jawa Timur, Indonesia. Penulis memutuskan untuk



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melakukan wawancara semi terstruktur dengan 6 reporter. Kami menemukan beberapa poin tentang praktik jurnalisme politik, (i) jurnalis dan kontributor tidak mendapatkan kebebasan penuh dalam melaporkan dan menulis isu-isu politik, (ii) jurnalis dan kontributor menaati etika jurnalistik, dan (iii) kepentingan organisasi media, budaya dan lokasi geografis sampai batas tertentu mempengaruhi pelaporan politik. Dari hasil tersebut kami melihat bagaimana wartawan memiliki batasan dalam melakukan liputan isu politik. Pembatasan tersebut telah lama terjadi yakni sejak masa pra kemerdekaan hingga kini, Politik memang isu yang dinamis dan panas untuk diliput, tetapi menjadi ancaman bagi jurnalis. Media sendiri memiliki peran penting seperti menginformasikan kandidat dan gagasan. Media juga menafsirkan perilaku mereka yang sedang berkuasa serta mobilisasi para pemilih (voters) juga bisa dilakukan oleh media. politisi membutuhkan media untuk menyampaikan ide dan gagasan mereka. juga memantau apa yang sedang terjadi di sekitar mereka.. Aliansi Jurnalis Independen sebagai organisasi profesi juga turut menyoroti fenomena tersebut.

Kata kunci: jurnalisme politik, jurnalis, Malang Raya, peliputan politik

INTRODUCTION

Political journalism is one of the sub-field of journalism studies. The field of political journalism is relevant and essential to study in the Indonesian context, considering that Indonesia is one of the largest democratic countries in the world.

Political journalism has been an ongoing practice since the 18th century, starting in England. According to Cathcart, the history of the rule of political journalism begins with the presence of the weekly newspaper *Mercurius Aulicus*. On February 17, 1643, the newspaper (which, when its name is translated into English, becomes "Court Mercury ") wrote a story discussing what was called "political corruption" (Catchcart, 2022 (Morrison et al., 2022). *Mercurius Aulicus* offered a variety of content related to politics, such as analysis, opinion, or comments (Catchcart, 2022 Morrison et al., 2022).

As a sub-field of study, several scientists have studied political journalism. One of the most recent works in the form of a book published in this field is *The Routledge Companion to Political Journalism*, edited by James Morrison, Jen Birks, and Mike Berry (2022). This book invites readers to study various themes related to political journalism and contemporary phenomena, including the Covid-19 pandemic. This book contains six parts: (i) From 'truth' to 'post-truth' eras? The history of political journalism, (ii) Political journalism and media systems: Political economy and journalistic professionalism, (iii) Pluralism, partisanship and populism in political journalism, (iv) Public engagement in political journalism: Audience reception, interaction, and participation, (v) Political agenda-setting, media effects and voting behavior, and (vi) Political controversies: Single issue politics, grassroots advocacy

and campaigning in the news. The total number of chapters in the book is 40 chapters. With the diversity and complexity of the quality of the writings written by the authors in each chapter, this book is very worthy of being a reference for researchers of political communication and political journalism.

According to Esser & Strömbäck (2011), between the study of political communication and journalism studies, there lies the study of political news journalism. According to the two scientists (2011), the media have several important roles, such as providing information about candidates and their ideas to the public. Furthermore, the media can also interpret the behavior of candidates and their opponents, control those in power; and mobilize voters.

There are several studies related to political journalism and the role of journalists in covering political issues/themes. "Political journalism in South Africa as a developing democracy: understanding media freedom and responsibility" (Wasserman, 2010). it is explained that journalists, politicians, and intermediaries state that the media in South Africa is now more accessible than when it was still under the apartheid system. This freedom includes expressing political views (Wasserman, 2010). However, another viewpoint emerges in post-apartheid media freedom: journalists often say that press freedom is under the pressure of politicians. Journalists themselves do not see themselves as abetting the government. From a journalist's point of view, the ideal role seems to be one that is separated and balanced. One journalist saw it as a good sign when politicians from the ruling and opposition parties criticized them, as it proved that they were 'on the right track'.

The research also emerges as an essential perspective that the media is a political player. The role of watchdog media is understood as opposition political parties involved in political battles. Some politicians believe that the media is influenced by their political motives, even though the political position of the media is different from the orientation of politicians (Wasserman, 2010). The relationship between freedom and responsibility is less specific. While journalists are often criticized for misusing the notion of 'freedom' for commercial gain without regard to quality, breadth, or depth of perspective, politicians are discredited for using the idea of 'responsibility' to exercise control over vigilant media.

Articles written by Fisher (2015) divide the concept of transparency into two, namely editorial transparency relating to journalists and editors who are open about decision-making and the production process. The second goes beyond openness about the editorial process to include disclosing the personal interests of reporters, preconceptions about the stories being written about their professional history, affiliations, and biases (Hayes, et al, 2007, h.271,

dalam Fisher, 2015). Through a phenomenological approach and conducting interviews with journalists who had been journalists and political media advisors, Fisher found that journalists who had previously worked as political media advisors perceived that the decision to disclose or to hide their political work and tendencies before returning to journalism is seen as a professional advantage.

However, others find disclosing their working history as a political media advisor inviting a perception of partisanship and thus risking their reputation upon returning to journalism. Despite these variations in individual experiences, the same general suspicion of bias applies, regardless of whether the reporter is partisan. To respond to these challenges, the interviewees adopted five main strategies related to their past work: 'upfront,' 'flying below the radar,' 'keeping it a secret,' 'selective disclosure,' and 'overcompensation.' Concerns about perceptions of partisanship and damage to reputation may result in journalists choosing to be 'upfront' about their interests and biases, while others prefer to 'keep it a secret' (Fisher, 2015).

In Brazil, Media and government relations returned to being a research topic by Antonio Hohlfeldt (2010). This research shows that since the re-democratization of Brazil in the 1970s, there has been an overlap between politics and communication. The re-democratization process has expanded the possibilities of such relationships, paving the way for a type of press that, although increasingly commercial, remains sensitive to issues relevant to citizens.

Research from 1984-2022 on leading newspapers in Brazil highlights that the level of citizen participation in the political process has increased substantially, even though this participation is not directly related to the activities of various political parties. The media is sensitive to such involvement by openly recording related thoughts and expressions. The ongoing re-democratization in Brazil is running parallel to the changes taking place in the national media. The process has, at times, been subject to confrontation and challenges resulting from personalization trends in new communication media and courts' decisions regarding freedom of expression and information.

Another challenge faced by Brazil is the conglomeration of newspapers and television media. Conversely, new technology paved the way for community radio stations that were relatively free from legislative control. These technologies change the level of civic participation in public debates. The government also has its media to produce its programs. Politicians are attracted to favorable coverage that positively impacts public support. They also seek information about what is happening around them through the media to make

decisions. At the same time, the government must report what they have done through the media. Matos (2008, dalam van Dalen, 2012) confirms that the media is central in mediating and promoting political debate.

Research by Arjen van Dalen (2012) is executed by conducting a content analysis of the news from Denmark, Germany, England, and Spain. The study shows that the news value of political power and conflict leads to a structural bias in government and parliamentary coverage. In certain countries like the UK, the government is more newsworthy than others. Journalists' conflict-seeking, i.e., undermines such a dominant position, and opposition members can express their criticism of more than half of the stories about the government. Meanwhile, in Spain, the chief part of the government is substantial, namely members of the Spanish cabinet. They are almost twice as visible as members of parliament. In contrast, only 17% of the voice of the opposition is news about the government as the leading actor.

The study also found that the dominance of the government in the news was influenced by structural biases attached to journalist routines in certain countries. Meanwhile, Germany does not follow the Danish consensus democracy pattern, namely the balance of executive and legislative powers. In Germany, the concept of relevance determines the attention given to each politician. Although the government's attention in reporting and the types of political conflicts covered are generally based on the political system, this study does not show that the nature of the political system determines the total amount of conflict coverage. However, this study finds out that the Danish consensus democracy has a level of conflict and contest framing no lower than Great Britain with its adversarial political system. Despite the nature of the Spanish political conflict, the level of conflict framing was significantly lower in Spanish news than in German information. This research also finds that opposition voices have relatively easy news access in countries with a pragmatic journalistic culture (Denmark, Germany, UK). Public debates will also be more open in a practical journalistic culture, whereby news provides an alternative perspective to government views, including opposing opinions from members of parliament and unofficial sources. Conflict may be a central element of politics in every parliamentary democracy, but coverage of the conflict is not an equal main element in all journalistic cultures.

Research related to political reporting by newspapers in a country was also researched in 2008 by Vanni Tjernstrom. Four Nordic newspapers have their characteristics in reporting on European politics, including *Politiken* (Denmark), Finland's *Hufvudstadsbladet*, Norway's *Aftenposten*, and Sweden's *Dagens Nyheter*. There are four categories of research. The first is *participation*, which in the original theory of Ferdinand Tonnies (1887, in (Tjernström,

2008), refers to intrinsic and instrumental motives for participating in a community, sharing subjective feelings of togetherness, and sharing evaluations of what behavior can be acceptable and unacceptable. They express a collective identity and shared sense of belonging *legitimacy* – does journalism provide legitimacy, recognition, or status for European cooperation? Identified by studying the extent to which Nordic newspapers prefer the European Union as a topic in their coverage. Included are EU issues, institutions, politicians, and civil servants.

The degree to which named observers and commentators have contributed to media publicity on a particular issue. Grundmann et al. (2000 in Tjernström, 2008) argue that the contribution of 'critical intellectuals' will cause the media to increase the credibility and legitimacy of the issues in question. Thus, media content can be seen as a social construct in which values are associated with events and actors present in the media. 'In providing status, the press embed social objects into various value networks' (Simonsen, 1999: 113, in (Tjernström, 2008).

Mondialization/universalism - The media can also report on the work of European institutions to more comprehensive international cooperation in areas of citizen interest in the European Union. *Identity* - (building diversity) deals with the variety in which people may be different but are related because they contribute to a common goal. The contribution of the Danish newspaper Politiken to European political journalism is impressive because it includes strong ideas of legitimacy and participation.

Regarding the characteristics of newspapers and journalists covering political issues, a study by Anu Kantola (2012) found that Finnish political journalists revealed that there were three periods of political journalism based on the theory of modernity, which were divided into three generations, namely the *solid modern*, the *liquefying modern*, and the *liquid modern*. These generations have different opinions regarding changes in the work ethic of journalists, including how they should present political news.

The *modern solid* generation considers it necessary to be close to news sources and has national responsibility. They see social relevance as the leading news criterion. Modern liquefying does not have a political alignment, and they tend not to influence work, even though the media has been business-oriented. Furthermore, the *contemporary liquid* opposes *modern solid* proximity and is considered too close to political sources.

Each of them also has a different point of view in writing about political issues. The modern liquid generation prefers to cover deep topics that later ages do not. They take a citizen's point of view and make it more relevant. They also have their agenda, apart from

institutional politics. The modern liquid generation is also at peace with citizen and audience orientation and opposes traditional political journalism. Modern liquefying argues that political journalism must be attractive. It does not just report what politicians say. Political journalism needs to be a storyteller more sensitive to the audience to evoke strong emotions.

A study entitled *Top Gear, top journalism: Three Lessons for political journalists from the World's most popular TV Show* (Harrington, 2010) mentions three lessons that can be taken from the Top Gear program to attract the attention of an audience that does not have much interest in the theme raised. What Top Gear has done can be a reference for political journalists. These three lessons include: making the audience feel connected by changing terms that ordinary people understand less to be easy to understand, being different by bringing up various types of opinions from multiple sources which have different views, and packing political issues into a form of popular entertainment genres.

At present, political information is not only distributed through television, newspapers, or art conventionally. Political information can be in the form of advertisements distributed through online media. This strategy influences one's social and political prediction. In a study entitled "*Political Advertising in Online Media and Peer Groups on the Decision of Choosing Young Voters in the 2019 Presidential Election*" by Dian Marhaeni Kudaningsih and Urip Mulyadi (2019), it is stated that political advertisements on online media can help to build public opinion. It also can influence the knowledge of the knowledge youth. News can also have an impact on one's social and political preferences. (Kurdaningsih & Mulyadi, 2019).

Political advertising on online media is not only in the form of written news. There are various ways to convey political information. A study conducted by Muzammil M. Hussain (2012) explains that online video sharing is the principal place to access and interact with news and political information (Madden, 2007 in Hussain, 2012). The public does not depend much on traditional news either. In America, only 35 percent of people read daily news (Patterson; 2007, dalam (Hussain, 2012). Society is not forced to rely solely on news media to learn about public life. The growth of activists in online communities is an essential source of change. Journalists are not again monopolized in terms of producing or mediating civic discussion. The ability of alternative online actors to co-produce and distribute content with journalists may have reduced the press' monopoly on mediating political information. This is especially important in the context of viral election videos as it increases the capacity of alternative actors (e.g., candidates, entertainers, and even citizens) to compete with the news media (Hussain, 2012).

A newer generation of citizens tends to emphasize individual voices as a primary preference for engaging in public life, making innovative use of social media technologies to do so (e.g., blogs, open source software, wikis, social networking services, podcasts, social bookmarking, digital petitions, and even activism campaigns (Levine, 2007: 94–95 dalam Hussain, 2012). The US Election also uses this trend by creating various websites for campaign mobilization. It has even been done since 2004 (Hussain, 2012). Blogosphere pemilu juga mencakup jurnalis. The election blogosphere also includes journalists. Many news organizations include blog journalism as an essential component of their online **repertoire** (Tuchman dan Ostertag, 2008 dalam (Hussain, 2012). Moreover, looking at the ecology of online media, civic and political information has expanded far beyond the domains traditionally seen as news. One example is the phenomenal growth of viral political information online. The most common format of dissemination of viral political information is via video, which reaches millions of views.

The research concluded that news video was the least popular video. The political entertainment information genre produced by elites and amateur citizens gains a large audience. Online gatekeeping mechanisms that distribute political content have expanded beyond journalists. This trend shows that the range of political information networks increasingly outnumbers journalists. In addition, professional journalists generally describe new genres of political information relevant to today's public. With the increasing number of civil society actors participating in the public sphere, diversifying political statements may be suitable for democratic life. However, the breakdown of barriers to generating and verifying general information by non-journalists can also pose problems.

The study entitled “*The Effect of Hoax on Social Media on Youth Social Political Preferences in Surabaya*” by Dinda Marta Almas Zakariyah (2020) explained that the power of the media could be misused by spreading hoaxes by anyone. Recently, people have thought that it is free to share information, even when the validity of information is not guaranteed. The examination conducted on Surabaya youth showed that the emergence of hoax influenced their perspective on the object reported.

Journalism is not only limited to information technology but also art media. David Low has carried out this practice through his caricatures. He was a 20th-century cartoonist from Britain. Through his jokes, David Low, who claims his work is 'art,' simultaneously emphasizes his identity as a journalist and the status of caricatures as journalism (Hampton, 2013).

While the research above discusses how political coverage is reported from the perspective of newspapers and journalists, as well as how political issues are packaged, the following study examines the practice of media use by politicians carried out by Canadian Prime Ministers as described in the research *Political Photography, Journalism, and Framing in the Digital Age: The Management of Visual Media by the Prime Minister of Canada*, a study by Alex Marland (2012) explains that photography has become image formation or image management of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. The communication becomes centralized because the government provides photos framed in such a way by the government. There were various responses provided by the research informants, such as making journalists dependent on information flow providers, which resulted in the results of the news being in line with what the Prime Minister's Office wanted. Journalists also cannot freely walk around the parliament building to take pictures. They do not want to be blacklisted by communications staff if they film around the parliament building. Photographers and videographers were replaced by photographs and footage shared by the prime minister's press office, which were distributed to newsrooms across Canada. The Prime Minister's Office itself considers that a photo release is synonymous with a press release

The studies above depict various phenomena of political journalism from multiple perspectives starting from journalists and the media used to communicate politics. to the politicians themselves. Therefore it is exciting to examine the phenomenon of political journalism from the perspective of political journalists, especially in Indonesia as a democratic country. In previous studies, democratization and re-democratization countries also have their dynamics in presenting their political issues through the media.

According to Freedom House (2022) research, Indonesia is still classified as a "partly free" country regarding Internet freedom. The score given by Freedom House is 49/100 ([Indonesia: Freedom on the Net 2022 Country Report | Freedom House](#)). Freedom House uses three indicators to assess Internet freedom: *obstacles to access*, *limits on content*, and *violations of user rights*. According to *The Jakarta Post* (2022), *Freedom House* is a UN-funded think tank. A survey conducted by Freedom House was later released with a report entitled *Freedom on the Net 2022: Countering an Authoritarian Overhaul of the Internet*, carried out from June 2021-May 2022. (*The Jakarta Post*, 2022) [Indonesian Internet 'partly free': Global report - Society - The Jakarta Post](#)).

Research conducted by Tapsell (2012) states that press freedom in Indonesia is still limited. Tapsell examines the practice of self-censorship among Indonesian journalists. As a

data source, Tapsell conducted interviews with 100 journalists as respondents. The journalists are based in Jakarta and Surabaya. According to Tapsell, those who encouraged the practice of self-censorship in Indonesia after the fall of the New Order were the owners of media companies. This differs from the method during the New Order era, where self-censorship was carried out due to fear of potential repression from the Soeharto regime. According to Tapsell, media owners limit the professional activities of journalists.

In a thesis written by Apsari (2021) entitled "History of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (Descriptive Study of the Struggle of the Alliance of Independent Journalists in Fighting for the Tri Panji Since 1994-2019)", as a professional journalist organization, the Indonesia Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI Indonesia, or interchangeably written as "AJI") criticizes some Indonesian media firms which often utilizing the media to carry out political campaigns as a result of media conglomeration. Ignatius Haryanto, Director of *LSPP* in the 2010 AJI Accountability Report, said that what is dangerous about this conglomeration is when it enters the editorial area. The issue was also written in a book published by *AJI Indonesia* together with the TIFA Foundation entitled "Wajah Retak Media." *AJI Indonesia* stated attitude towards the cases of media abuse. In addition, *AJI Indonesia* also plays an active role in advocating the misappropriation of public frequencies by some conglomerates. *AJI Indonesia* invites journalists not to hesitate to take a position as public spies in dealing with journalism abuse.

This research examines how journalists and contributors in the Malang Raya area carry out their duties regarding coverage of political issues. Malang Raya is a term to refer to the size of Malang City, Malang Regency, and Batu City. In recent years, the political dynamics in Malang Raya have not been stagnant. It has been influenced by the issue of corruption among its public officials. The alleged corruption cases include the point about Mochammad Anton (former mayor of the City of Malang), the likely corruption case of 41 members of the Malang House of Representatives, and the suspected gratification of the former Mayor of Batu, Eddy Rumpoko. Former Mayor of Malang Mochammad Anton (known as "Abah Anton") was sentenced to two-year prison and a Rp. 200 million fine, a subsidiary of four months in prison. He was found guilty since he was related to allegations of bribery in discussing the revised local government budget for 2015 fiscal year (Liputan6.com, 2018 [Wali Kota Nonaktif Malang Divonis 2 Tahun Penjara - News Liputan6.com](#)). As one of the effects of the corruption case that ensnared Abah Anton and members of the Malang House of Representatives, the elections with the agenda of electing the Mayor of Malang in 2018 were referred to by Ludigdo (2019) as "corruption-flavored

elections". It was because the two pairs of candidates were related to corruption cases in the election. The two pairs of candidates are Ya'qud Ananda Gudban-Ahmad Wanedi and Mochammad Anton-Syamsul Mahmud. From the direct election process, the candidate Sutiaji-Sofyan Edy Jarwoko won the battle by getting 165,194 votes (Kompas.com, 2018 Kalahkan 2 Pesaingnya yang Ditahan KPK, Sutiaji Jadi Wali Kota Malang Terpilih (kompas.com)).

Explanations regarding the alleged corruption cases that ensnared public officials and people's representatives in the Malang Raya area indicate that the political climate in Malang Raya is dynamic. Journalists face various political realities as the authoritative party in conveying information to the public. One is when the region's politicians are caught up in law violations. Therefore, researchers carried out a study in which we conducted some interview sessions with 6 people, with one informant working as a journalist and five working as contributors/correspondents to media organizations.

METHOD

The paradigm of this research is the constructivist paradigm. Researchers try to understand and describe the social reality in the specified context. The social reality in this study refers to the practice of political journalism, how journalists whose work locations are in Malang Raya, and how they carried out their daily journalistic work. This investigation was conducted by applying data collection techniques through semi-structured interviews. This data collection technique was chosen because researchers could obtain journalists' statements about their experiences covering and writing on political issues in Malang Raya. Interviews were conducted in the City of Malang. The following are the criteria for selecting informants:

- a. The informant has worked as a regular journalist or contributor/correspondent in national or local media for at least one year;
- b. The informant has covered and written news related to political issues;
- c. Informants know the political situation of Malang Raya. Malang Raya is an area consisting of Malang City, Malang Regency, Batu City; And
- d. Informants are willing to provide data about their work experience related to political issues.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face in December 2022. Researchers had the opportunity to interview six people: five contributors/correspondents and one permanent journalist. The name and affiliation of the media organization will be written under a pseudonym in the form of a specific code of letters and numbers to ensure the confidentiality of the informants' identities. The identities of informants are kept confidential since they disclose some sensitive information to the researchers during the interview sessions.

Below is the table containing the information on our informants:

Table 1 Informants Information Table

A A work in Media 1, covering Malang Raya, Lumajang, and Pasuruan regions. Before joining Media 1, A began his career in 2015 in one of the online media companies. He then continued his career in a print media company. Their journey in covering political news began in 2015, and he started his first political coverage by covering the 2015 Mayor of Batu election. He was also a part of his team reporting the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election. In the journey of political coverage, A was not placed on the desk of politics, but he is pretty intense in learning about politics. This is influenced by the media where he works, owned by a person involved in national politics.

B B is an editor who works in the media 2. B started his career as a journalist in 2010 in one of the print media firms in Surabaya. B then continued his work in a local media firm in Malang, starting in 2011. In 2016, B was appointed to be an editor in Media 2. In the context of political coverage, B began the range in 2009 when he reported about the election of the Denpasar governor. As an editor of the Malang Raya region, momentum has no full authority on political news. The Surabaya regional coordinator dominates the head of the news or coverage agenda. However, B still has jurisdiction over the placement of political reporting, especially in Malang Raya as a coverage area. During political coverage, B succeeded in covering various political events, especially the Denpasar Regional Election 2009. He also managed to cover the election of the mayor of Malang in 2014, as well as other political issues.

C C is a contributor to the media 3. He joined press three in 2012. C began his political coverage in 2009, in which he reported on the presidential election—then, it continued with the range of the mayor of Malang election in 2012. In Media 3, especially before the election period, C was assigned to write political news, such as the figure of a

candidate and organizer. As a contributor, he does not write much about elections or general political issues.

D Currently, D is a correspondent who works in the media 4. Before joining Media 4 in 2019, D joined as a print media firm correspondent whose central office is in Jakarta. His career in the print media in Jakarta began in 2013 and stopped in 2020. He was assigned to produce 1-2 political coverage daily when on the political agenda. In media 4, D covered political issues in 2019, namely the coverage around the momentum of the presidential election.

E E is a contributor to media 5. He began his journalist career in 2008 in print media based in Surabaya. After six years of pursuing a print media career, E joined the press 5. As a contributor, E has covered various issues, including political ones. In political reporting he began political reporting in 2009. Then, in Media 5, E started his political coverage in 2014, coinciding with the 2014 presidential election momentum.

F F is a contributor to Malang Raya region in the media 6. F began political coverage in 2004, reporting on the presidential and legislative elections. Then, after joining the media 6, he started to preach politics in 2009, namely coverage around the presidential and legislative elections. F has covered almost all political-related issues related to 2019, including political issues in Malang, Batu, and Malang Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

From the data obtained through interviews and processed using interactive data analysis techniques, researchers compile data categorization, including:

1. Journalists and contributors get unclean freedom in covering and writing about political issues.

From the interviews conducted with six informants, they all recognize that in carrying out their journalistic work, the organization where they work gives freedom. Interestingly, the space provided is not absolute. Journalists and contributors, in some momentum, need to "negotiate" with rules or requests from their offices. Informant A said that he had received a request from the head office to write a news report with positive construction on a politician who also owns a group of media companies. Informant A also said that:

"We only carry out instructions. If anyone asks to write it, we will write it."

Even so, informant A said he also sets a boundary for himself. He is selective in choosing which issues to write about. In addition, he also received an assignment from the coordinator of the coverage (*coordinator liputan/korlip*). If there is a sensitive issue, informant A will interview other informants to obtain different viewpoints. It is about the creativity of informant A since the media firm he works for does not ask him to do so. In politics, the news about a political figure, for example, X figure, can be "used" by figure Y (political opponent of formation X). Thus, he always wants his news to be balanced. Informant A will always coordinate with the coverage coordinator to decide which public figures to cover.

Like the news media that provide issues to be covered, informants C also obtains "big themes" when it is close to the general election period. In the media firm where informant C works, editors can determine what issues will be covered. Informant C said his media organization gives him "freedom within a boundary." To illustrate, he said that if he wants to write X party, there must be equal information about Y or Z parties. However, informant C has never been assigned to describe a particular politician or political party with specific frames.

Informant F shares similar experiences with other contributors or correspondents in this study. He did not specifically write about political issues because he was a regional correspondent, along with informant E, who was on the general desk. Informant E will get a writing guide, but no specific guidelines for political issues exist. Determination of the theme of the coverage was carried out with an editorial meeting and given freedom, but there was an emphasis related to what topics were covered. Whereas informant E covered political issues if there were moments like elections. Informant E can write political themes freely from the media where he works, even though they must still pay attention to sensitive issues.

Regarding intervention or "direction" from internal media, informants do not obtain it except informant A. However, the potential for intervention remains present from the external media. The most frequent or commonly accepted form of intervention is an offer of a certain amount. It came from a specific political party. The political party asked A not to cover specific issues or to cover them but with a particular frame. The informants of this study entirely reject the provision of money (or, in the Indonesian context, it is commonly called the "envelope"/*amplop*).

The phenomena outlined above confirm the investigation of Tapsell (2012) surveyed 100 journalists who worked for some national media firms whose offices are in Surabaya and Jakarta. He found out that many journalists practiced self-censorship. Indonesian journalists who became his informants confirmed that they were afraid of their job security, especially when writing some people or issues. They should understand the needs of their media owners regarding specific people or topics to be covered. For instance, some media owners in Indonesia are also a politician. Politicians have some interests that the journalistic works of their journalists should back up. Therefore, being cautious of the claims of the media owners cause some journalists to self-censor themselves.

2. Journalists and contributors try to obey journalistic ethics.

In connection with journalistic ethics, all informants try to follow the Indonesian journalistic code of ethics, even though some media (media 1) have political interests. The informants in this study said that the way they obey Journalistic Ethics are such as: (i) verifying the information they obtain from news sources, (ii) trying to write news from all involving points of view (i.e., covering all sides), (iii) responsible to the resource persons, (iv) electing a credible person to be the informant, (v) giving the right to respond or correction rights towards the news source, (vi) not swallowing on gossips or rumors circulating on social media, and (vii) trying to be independent and ignore the potential intervention.

Informant A argued that in covering political issues, he received a request from his office not following the Journalistic Code of Ethics. However, when he felt free regarding “not receiving any request,” he tried to obey the code and maintain neutrality. As a journalist, he also does not want to mistreat his news sources, for instance, by asking for money or spreading false information for his interest.

Armed with the knowledge of obedience to journalistic ethics, informant B said that a journalist must be able to distinguish the writing intended as advertising (i.e., advertorial) or products fabricated from a journalistic process. The media has its own rules to distinguish advertorial writing from news writing. Furthermore, following the journalistic code of ethics makes journalists feel "secure" because they have carried out their duties well. They do not feel worried about the potential for protests or lawsuits from parties related to the news they write.

The efforts to comply with journalistic ethics were also shown by informant C who said that a journalist could not swallow information from any source. This is because most politicians need the media to influence the public, especially about their image. Informant C gave an example: if a political actor describes himself as a “good figure,” then journalists must look for facts to test the statement.

Politicians also have the potential to approach journalists with a specific purpose. Informant C described that politicians tend to be “pretentious and close to journalists,” especially regarding the momentum of political contestation. They will make specific events to welcome reporters. Journalists were treated well at the event and asked to eat the food served immediately. Some politicians also offer some money, both inside and outside the context of the event they were creating. Informant C said he avoided and kept his distance from politicians and such events. He also applied the principle of covering all sides in writing about political issues. Although informant C has a personal political preference, that preference does not affect his work as a journalist.

Informant D also said he was responsible for obeying the journalistic code of ethics. His workplace always asks for data validity and completeness. In choosing a resource person for political issues, informant D chose credible sources such as political parties, legislative candidates, or regional leaders and visited some offices by asking for data. Experience and knowledge of political themes and local issues are considered in choosing sources. According to him, journalism acts as a bridge and not an answer. He meant that journalistic work must be able to bridge the community with social realities or issues.

Informant E also held the principle of journalistic ethics to avoid bias. Moreover, the media always warns us to be careful with sensitive political issues. According to E, journalistic ethics plays a “savior role.” To avoid bias from political figures, E applied his strategies. One of his strategies is: he already has an idea of an issue, and thus he does not depend on others’ opinions or even the request of the news sources. The strategy can also minimize the potential intervention from various parties he meets.

Meanwhile, informant F has its strategy for dealing with the possibility of bias in the coverage of political issues. Before covering a problem, he would read various regulations, the mechanism for implementing elections, and other relevant sources of information. During his working experiences, informant F never met difficulties because the media he works for also provided training on election coverage. Like informant C, he has a choice and does not affect his work. There was a situation when a politician asked informant E to write about him in a specific way. He only promised him (i.e., the

politician), but he did not write it. Informant E also rejected some facilities provided by the news source. For instance, somebody offered him to stay at a hotel while on duty to cover events related to a politician. He rejected that offer to obey the journalistic code of ethics because his workplace provided him with accommodation facilities. Informant E stated that he tried hard to refuse the offered facilities from news sources unless the facilities had to be accepted due to some condition. For example, when a journalist must cover a submarine owned by the Indonesian Navy, certain facilities would be received in the diving period using the sub.

3. Political issues and reporting are affected by several factors.

From this research, we observe that political issues and their reporting, especially in the context of Malang Raya, are affected by three factors. The media organizations' interests, a region's culture, and geographical locations are those three factors. Informant A said national issues are easier to cover because the resource people answered normatively. As for local issues, A said that it depends on the topic, whether the problem is beneficial or not for the speakers. In relation to the interests of media organizations such as about advertising, informant A said there was an impact when the media he works for already had an agreement with one of the political figures.

The potential adverse effect of political advertising is that the opposing sides of the figure who advertised would not be covered or written. Political interests in the media organizations in which informant A works are apparent. He said that because of the political interests of the media owner (i.e., the boss of informant A), then the results of the national election would impact the organizational financial policies. To illustrate, if the political party owned by the media owner could not reach the targeted votes, then the employee's salary could be paid late.

Informant B claimed that his news drafts were examined using journalistic rules. He also did not get any interventions from his media because his media refers to the laws that apply nationally. The political polarization, especially in the 2019 Presidential Election, did not necessarily make the media B act differently. According to informant B, political polarization in areas outside of Jakarta is not intense, and thus the media can "act normally."

Besides, informants C and D are also entirely free. About advertising, informant C who works in the Malang Raya area, has never been involved in advertising issues

because his central office in Jakarta directly manages it. Informant C claimed that his media supported the coverage of the community. The media also gives the same portion to everyone involved in political contestation. Regarding the attitude of politicians towards journalists, for C, in recent days, politicians are pretty mature because they already understand journalistic work procedures.

Informant E is on duty at the general desk, and thus he does not frequently cover politics. He was only asked to be careful about sensitive issues. The media where he works prefers to avoid vulgar and sensitive matters to protect their business interests. Even so, if informant E wrote a news article that criticizes a political party but was written from an interesting angle, the media would still publish his article. His media firm prohibits their journalists from being involved in sensitive issues played by some social media accounts. This is because the editorial board of this media is based in Jakarta and quite understands the national political situation.

Informant F did not experience any form of intervention. The media firm where he works does not have a political affiliation, so he can work freely. He claimed that neutrality was challenging to achieve. Informant F chooses to stand with the facts and interests of the public. Independence must be maintained far from intervention, including interventions from the owner or advertisers. Uniquely, one of the media founders where F works supports a particular politician. However, the founder did not intervene in anything related to the editorial decisions.

The political situation in the 2019 presidential election was full of political polarization. The tension rose as many people chose to be either on the side of Joko Widodo or Prabowo Subianto as the presidential candidate. According to informant F, the condition will likely happen again as Indonesians face the 2024 Presidential Election. The media where F works still holds the principle of independence in the editorial room. He argues that autonomy is essential to freedom on the election issue. In addition, according to him, it is crucial to have no riots caused by different political viewpoints and money politics.

Concerning culture, according to our informants, many Malang Raya residents support a particular political party. This makes journalists can or have the potential to obtain certain risks when writing about any themes regarding that political party negatively. The chances are potential to emerge, even though the writings are produced from a quality journalistic process. Informant A, for instance, once received a reprimand sometime after the news he wrote was considered to offend specific political figures and

his supporters. Informant A had carried out the standard journalistic procedures, but because the statement of exact political statistics can be called sensitive, he received many responses. The first response was a question from a representative of that most popular political party. The question was, "Was it true that the figure (i.e., honored figure in that party) stated such a statement?" This question was doubting the quality of journalistic procedures carried out by informant A. Furthermore, colleagues of informant A had received many questions about whether they could meet A. Informant A even received a written warning from the political party, which stated their objections towards the news reported by informant A. related to these political figures.

In addition, the Malang Raya area is also the basis of one of Indonesia's most prominent Islamic organizations. Thus, if a figure from the organization decides to be involved in practical politics, many residents from Malang Raya will support the constitution.

Regarding the geographical location, the position of Malang Raya, which is located quite far from DKI Jakarta, makes the political situation in Malang Raya tends to be stable, or what is referred to in Javanese language terms as "*adem ayem*." The term was conveyed by informants D, and F. Informant F defined the term as:

"Actually (the situation) is not very interesting. Too stagnant. The role of check and balance of several groups does not work. There are almost no political groups that conduct the check-and-balance part. In Malang, it is *adem ayem*."

Of the three categories, it can be observed that journalists are mainly free to carry out political issues. This research shows that a media firm clearly asks its reporters to write about a political actor who owns the media firm. Besides, informants who work for media organizations that a political actor does not own still are not accessible in covering political themes. Some claimed to get an "envelope" to write down news articles as the givers requested. Politicians in Malang Raya tend to be friendly towards journalists because they need positive publications to maintain or raise their political image. Politicians are generally interested in beneficial coverage which can encourage the public to support them (van Dalen, 2012).

In the past, intervention in media work was apparent even before Indonesia's independence, and the press had received intervention from external parties. Take the example of the *Bataviase Nouvelles* newspaper published on August 7, 1744. The newspaper

was banned because the news of trading activities could reveal secret information to trade competitors (Manan & Bambani, 2014) & (Wanhar, 2014). Entering the Old Order era, Edward C Smith (in Wiratraman, 2011, p. 105) explained that the government required journalists to sign the 'loyalty document' containing 19 articles. There were only two options for journalists. The emergency law resulted in many disadvantages for political reasons. There are violations to press freedom, such as the punishment for news media which was considered to support regional aspirations rather than the central government or considered to insult the president, military, and politicians (Hill, 2011, p. 27).

During the New Order era, in 1974, for example, the government revoked the Publication License (*Surat Izin Terbit/SIT*) of 12 media firms (Hill, 2011). Then in 1994, three media organizations, namely *Tempo* magazine, *Detik*, and *Editor* tabloids, were banned because the news articles were considered a critique of the government's policy. (Dhyatmika, 2019) dan (Manan, & Bambani, 2014, p. 19). On May 21, 1998, Soeharto stepped down from the presidency and marked the start of the Reformation era. The Press Law Number 40 of 1999 was successfully approved, and the Indonesian press can run their business more freely.

The mass media is often referred to as a pillar of democracy (Adam, in Laksono, 2020), which then can realize the full potential in a country that is democratic and upholds human rights. The media is responsible for championing the community's interests, with some supporting factors such as freedom of publication, diversity of ownership, and diversity of content (Laksono, 2020).

Politics is indeed a dynamic and hot issue to be covered. The Alliance of Independent Journalists (AJI Indonesia, interchangeably called "AJI") also highlighted the phenomenon. According to Abdul Manan (AJI Chairperson in 2017-2021), three aspects threaten the freedom of the press in Indonesia: law, politics, and economy (dalam Apsari, 2021). It has been a long time since the media functioned as a means of publication of national aspirations or becoming a place of political agitation (Hill, 2011, p. 20). During 1950-1959, newspapers in Indonesia mostly voiced political parties or organizations (Hill, 2011, p. 27) & (Wiratraman, 2011, p. 104).

The media has several essential roles, such as informing about candidates and their ideas, interpreting the behavior of those in power, and mobilizing voters. In addition to public image, politicians need the media to convey their thoughts and obtain public support. The phenomenon is illustrated by the situation of the press and politics in Brazil: politicians are looking for information about what is happening around them through the media to make

decisions. At the same time, the government must report what they have conducted through the press (van Dalen, 2012).

Press freedom is also inseparable from the debate. Furthermore, journalists cannot be separated from the supervision of the media manager or owners, and political affiliation can influence the work of the media, like informant A who obtained a request to write about a political figure who owns his media company. He chose to write as he asked rather than get a company warning letter. However, it does not mean that he does not obey journalistic ethics. In covering issues other than politics, he does comply with journalistic ethics.

In the study by Herman Wasserman (2010), although journalists, politicians, and intermediaries stated that the media in South Africa was more accessible than when it was still under the Apartheid system, it was found that media freedom was under the pressure of politicians. The relationship between freedom and responsibility is less specific. At the same time, journalists are often criticized for abusing the idea of 'freedom' for commercial profits without regard to quality and depth of perspective. Ultimately, journalism responsible for commercialization is journalism which has value as a commodity. Journalism that has value as an item is called credible journalism (Wasserman, 2010).

Indonesia experienced a similar situation in the New Order era. At that time, President Soeharto popularized responsible press discourse. The press was a driving force for national development and a guard of *Pancasila* as a national ideology. At that time, President Soeharto even issued many policies that curbed the press, such as the Press Issuance Business License (*Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers/SIUPP*) (Manan, & Bambani, 2014, p. 35) & (Susilastuti, 2000). In its implementation, the license should be related to trade, civil, tax, and labor law; thus, it became ambiguous. The cancellation of the media license was addressed to the media, which was considered critical to the government. *Sinar Harapan* was banned in 1986, marking the license cancellation case of the era. (Arinanto, 1991, p. 41) & (Manan, & Bambani, 2014).

Along with the development, freedom of the press is not only related to the government but also the existence of media conglomerates. In Indonesia, some media owners are also politicians. Abdul Manan (in Apsari, 2021, p. 185). Centering ownership is a problem because media owners generally have slices for business owners of other fields of materials to become administrators in political parties (Manan, A, 2010, p. 18). Ignatius Haryanto, Director of LSPP in the 2010 AJI accountability report, said that this conglomeration's danger was when it entered the editorial area. The development of this media conglomeration leads to a new threat to democracy. If only a few media companies

remain, dominance can not be avoided. The remaining company dominates the media industry, creates a media oligopoly, and will contribute to political views (Lim, 2012, p. 4).

What is feared has happened and was written in a book published by AJI Indonesia with the TIFA Foundation entitled "Wajah Retak Media: Kumpulan Laporan Penelusuran." Which contains the topic, among others, the relationship between media and capital owners, the interests of journalists as individuals, such as the dualism of the goods And political affiliates, journalists' advance as candidates for legislative members, and media production that are overwhelming with the interests of attracting advertising, to classical issues about the practice of envelopes (Patria, 2009, pp. 5–6). In 2009, based on research from the Institute of Information Flow Studies (*Institut Studi Arus Informasi/ISAI*), it was clear that ANTV and TVOne news was seen as giving a portion of negative image-construction towards Jusuf Kalla-Wiranto more than the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Boediono as two pairs of a presidential candidate running for 2009 Presidential Election. Furthermore, there was *Jurnal Nasional*, a print media that constructed positive images of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono-Boediono. The newspaper was close to SBY (Manan, A, 2010, pp. 19–20).

Implementing direct elections, such as the DKI Regional Election, West Java, Central Java, and East Java in 2013, gave rise to new problems related to the ethics of journalists. The involvement of media owners in the political domain has been increasingly felt in the editorial division. AJI Indonesia, in May 2013, issued a statement related to the planned abuse of news media and public frequencies for political purposes (Kompas.com, 2013).

AJI Indonesia often criticized and issued statements that encouraged media firms in Indonesia not to be used as a tool for political interests. AJI Indonesia delivered the call during World Press Freedom Day and in cases related to the media owner's abuse of the editorial room (Apsari, 2021). AJI Indonesia observed that the broadcasting industry is indeed developing but annexed three interests at once, namely politics, markets, and the public, with the control of broadcasting stations that tend to be monopolistic and harm the public interest. AJI Indonesia is part of the Independent Coalition for Broadcasting Democratization (*Koalisi Independen untuk Demokratisasi Penyiaran/KIDP*). In 2014, KIDP focused on escorting the Broadcasting Bill and the Republic of Indonesia Television Radio Bill (RTRI). The KIDP Coalition has fought for democracy and diversity of television broadcasting content and filed a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court to issue more assertive rules related to cross-ownership articles in the Broadcasting Law. The case was filed at the end of 2011 (Haryanto, 2012).

AJI Indonesia also responded in other ways, such as by holding discussions. At the end of 2013, they discussed "Independence of Broadcasting Media in the Political Year." The debate— which resulted from cooperation with UNESCO and UNIC— aimed to democratize broadcast media in Indonesia. The discussion was attended by the Chairman of the KPI Commissioner, Dr. Judhaiksawan, S.H., M.H., Member of Commission 1 of the Indonesian Parliament Mahfudz Siddiq, Indonesian Private Television Association Shanti Ruwyastuti, Chairman of Press Council Bagir Manan, TV activist Budhi Hemanto Community, and Pr2Media Director and KIDP members, Amir Effendi Siregar. With moderator Igantius Haryanto (Bambani & Rahardjo, 2013) & (AJI, 2013).

In his press release entitled “Hentikan Praktik Jurnalisme Partisan,” Aji condemned the practical partisan journalism from the mass media, especially for those who use public resources in form of frequency. AJI recommended stopping broadcasting channels to the revocation of the broadcast frequency permit with the approval of the KPI and the Press Council for TV stations violating broadcasting rules (P3SPS) and Regulation No 32/2002. AJI Indonesia also reminded journalists on all media platforms to obey the principle of broadcasting neutrality and independence so that it can produce quality news. Journalistic Basic Training and Code of Ethics to Owners, Media Managers, to the Media Management for Free (AJI, 2014) & (Manan, 2015, pp. 37–38), in addition to KIDP, AJI Indonesia joined the National Coalition of Broadcasting Reform (Komisi Nasional Reformasi Penyiaran/KNRP). The members of KNRP were around 160 academics and practitioners, and 20 civil society organizations that paid attention to democratic broadcasting in favor of the public interest (Manan & Aswiara, 2017).

At the local level, AJI also carried out a specialization on the issue of local elections and democracy. As a fellow AJI member, informant F said that AJI would train journalists to cover elections. AJI also has a code of conduct for its members. Therefore, journalists who became a member of AJI must also comply with the code of conduct set by AJI. According to informant F, AJI also forbade its members from becoming political party administrators. However, AJI allows its members to be a political party cadre.

Nationally, AJI Indonesia conducts strict monitoring and campaigns that the media must be independent. However, AJI still respects the decision of some media firms to support one of the election contestants as long as the balance in reporting and producing news remains. The statement was made by Revolusi Riza Zulverdi, as Secretary General of AJI 2017-2021 (dalam Apsari, 2021).

Journalists who became informants in this study always tried to comply with journalistic ethics when covering political issues. When covering elections— both local and national— our informants prioritized the General Elections Committee (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/KPU), since they are the committee authorized to manage all the stages of holding elections. To report on the cases of election violation, they present the data and perspectives of the Elections Supervisory Agency (*Badan Pengawas Pemilu/Bawaslu*). The informants covered at least two sides of an event or an issue to avoid bias. In doing their work, they thought they were responsible to the community.

CONCLUSION

Political journalism is a dynamic practice and has the potential to be connected to a variety of interests. This study has shown the course of political journalism as experienced or implemented by journalists and contributors in Malang Raya. This study found that journalists and contributors faced dynamic situations and challenges which demanded their ability to maintain professionalism as a journalist. This is also supported by the fact that journalists obtain partial freedom in carrying out their duties. Potential intervention came from internal and external parties of the media organizations where they work at. Politics is a battlefield of many interests, demanding journalists be careful and obey various rules, including journalistic ethics in Indonesia.

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