

Media Construction of Electoral Fraud in the 2024 Indonesian General Election

PRAYUDI*

MUHAMMAD EDY SUSILO

NINIK PROBOSARI

Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study examines how the media portrays electoral fraud during the 2024 Indonesian General Elections, particularly emphasizing the coverage provided by *Tempo* News magazine. This study examines how cultural, political, and economic issues influence news narratives, revealing the media's ability to set the agenda and shape public discussions. Through its analysis, this study shows that *Tempo* news coverage mainly focuses on the disclosure of the involvement of the President, his brother-in-law, and the first lady in designating the President's son as a vice-presidential candidate and the disclosure of the state agencies' support for the campaign of the President's son as vice presidential candidate. It also finds that *Tempo* News magazine has established itself as a news media magazine that consistently delivers news objectively and fairly, free from any influence or bias from political, economic, or power-related interests. This research contributes to the scholarly discussion on the impact of media on democratic processes, emphasizing the significance of ethical and accountable journalism in fostering openness and well-informed decision-making. The results provide practical suggestions for improving the quality and impartiality of news coverage, highlighting the importance of precise and fair reporting in promoting democratic principles and institutions.

Keywords: *Media construction, electoral fraud, textual analysis, Indonesian general elections, tempo news magazine.*

INTRODUCTION

Studies on media coverage of elections in new democracies have been of academic concern. Media scholars have devoted their attention to countries such as Malaysia, Russia, the United States of America, and Nigeria, each looking at the relations between media and general elections dynamically. Studies by Nor, Firdaus, and Kaur (2020) with Nwamara and Etumnu (2022) in Nigeria emphasize mass media's agenda-setting in shaping public opinion on the General Election. The exciting finding in Malaysia reveals the fact that the online discussion surrounding 1MDB progressed from intense posts debating responsibility and criticizing the Barisan Nasional government to endorsing the opposition Pakatan Harapan coalition, especially leading up to the 14th Malaysian General Elections in 2018 (Nor et al., 2020). Furthermore, the data revealed a disparity between the concerns the media prioritized and those the population viewed as necessary.

A different study examined how local newspapers focused on voter fraud in each of the 50 states during the 2008 and 2012 U.S. elections. The findings show that the states that passed restrictive voting laws before the 2012 elections had the most significant local coverage of voters during the 2012 elections (Fogarty et al., 2022). Another study examines the networked issue agendas of Vladimir Putin and Alexey Navalny in Russian mainstream

*Corresponding author: prayudi@upnyk.ac.id

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media and on the Internet, using the theoretical framework of issue ownership theory (Kazun & Semykina, 2020). Overall, research on the media portrayal of elections in emerging democracies, encompassing nations such as Malaysia, Russia, the United States of America, and Nigeria, provides an essential understanding of the interactive connection between media and national elections. All these studies provide influences on the complex nature of media influence in changing public opinion and election processes. Little study, however, has been given on how the media construct news concerning election fraud.

This study examines how the news media portray the electoral fraud in the 2024 Indonesian election as a case study. Electoral fraud presents a substantial risk to the integrity and legitimacy of democratic processes. As Long et al. (2021) note, the portrayal of electoral fraud in the Indonesian news media derives from an intricate building process that integrates cultural, political, economic, and industrial variables. By examining how electoral fraud is portrayed in Indonesian news media, scholars may assess the potential impact on public perceptions of election fairness and the efficacy of democratic governance (Ong, 2019).

This presidential and vice-presidential election marked a crucial milestone in Indonesian politics, indicating a change in leadership after President Joko Widodo's term. President Widodo cannot run for re-election in 2024 owing to constitutional term restrictions. Jokowi's desire, however, to remain in power has harmed democracy and pushed the republic to the brink of a crisis (Widadio, 2024). After his attempt to prolong his presidential term was thwarted by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P), he pursued an alternative strategy to remain in office by endorsing his eldest son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka, as a vice-presidential candidate to partner with Prabowo Subianto (Transparency International Indonesia, 2024). Other allegations included changing the age limit rules for presidential and vice presidential candidates, involving his brother-in-law in the Constitutional Court, using the state budget for social assistance, and ordering regional officials to win his son. The provisional vote counted in favour of his son, making the 2024 General Election the worst in Indonesia's history since the reformation era (Kaisepo, 2024; Widadio, 2024).

Assessing the literature on news media and elections, the authors observe that studies on how the media portrayed the issue of elections have been lacking. For instance, Nwamara and Etumnu (2022) examined how the media, through their agenda-setting function, can salvage the issue of electoral fraud in Nigeria. There have been some studies on general elections in Indonesia. Ruhdiara, Junaidi and Fatimah (2022) with Silalahi and Tampubolon (2021) examined the history of general elections in Indonesia, examining the election through popular sovereignty. Meanwhile, other studies examined general social media and elections (Karlina, Utami, & Wahyuti, 2019; Maharani & Nurafifah, 2020). However, these studies differ from the 2024 general election due to the recent general election, which has many fraud allegations involving the incumbent president, and the fact that some mainstream media institution owners have political connections with some political parties related to the government.

To fill this gap, this paper seeks to investigate how electoral fraud is portrayed in the news media. As a case, this study focused on *Tempo* News Magazine's coverage of the Indonesian presidential and vice-presidential elections. *Tempo* has emerged as a prominent and influential news magazine in Indonesia, known for its libertarian approach and critical reporting style. Despite being banned by the New Order dictatorship in 1994 for four years, *Tempo* regained its status as the foremost news magazine upon its reestablishment in 1998 (Tempo, n.d.).

There are five sections in this study. Following the introduction, the authors will discuss media and general election and cultural studies of the text as part of the literature review. The third section outlines the methodologies employed in this paper to acquire and examine the findings given and examined in the same section. Section four discussed the result of the textual analysis of the main articles on electoral fraud in *Tempo* News magazine. The last section of this article, the conclusion, presents a concise overview of the research outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media, General Election, and Democracy

The influence of the media on public opinion and political conduct during general elections is an ongoing topic of research and conversation. Following Fogarty et al. (2022) and Müller's (2020) argument that the media has a crucial role in reporting on general elections as a means of establishing and maintaining democracy, studies are looking at news media as an essential intermediary agent between the government and the people, distributing important information that empowers voters to make educated decisions. The media plays a pivotal role in ensuring that political actors are held responsible and fostering transparency in the election process through investigative journalism and unbiased reporting (Amadu, Mumuni, & Chentiba, 2022).

In addition, the media functions as a platform for political discourse, allowing for the expression of diverse perspectives and opinions, thereby fostering an informed and engaged electorate. The media offers coverage of general elections and significantly influences the tangible political process. The influence of media on general elections and democracy has been a topic of significant attention in academic and public domains. Numerous studies have investigated the impact of media coverage on voter attitudes, political engagement, and the overall health of democracy (Müller, 2020; Nwamara & Etumnu, 2022). Research has also demonstrated how news media represents social actors, including the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, during general elections (Sholihah, Hidayah & Degaf, 2020).

Cultural Studies of Text

This study is theoretically based on an approach highlighting the importance of comprehending media text in connection with media institutions and the environmental setting. A cultural approach offers diverse analytical instruments for understanding text and its contextual backdrop. The cultural approach, also known as Cultural Studies (Potter, Stinger & Wetherell, 2023; Stokes, 2021), aims to analyse how media texts are created by considering the interaction of different influences within media organizations and external factors like political economy. Cultural Studies emphasizes the significant role of meanings, signs, ideas, and language in shaping the human environment (Kellner, 2020). The studies do not focus on media ownership but on how the media are situated in relation to the powerful elites in society. Therefore, the content is influenced by the interaction among news organizations, their sources, and other social institutions rather than just ownership or journalistic practices and rituals (Firmstone, 2024).

Kim, Toh, and Baik (2022) with Stevens (2022) state that it is essential to acknowledge that media should be comprehended within their institutional, economic, political, social, cultural, and historical context. Within this framework, an endeavour to understand the reasons behind the media's portrayal of an event in a specific manner can be elucidated by considering factors such as government manipulation of the press, market rivalry, ideological

sway, the necessity to generate revenue, influence from interest groups, media practices, the professional background of media personnel, historical circumstances, and various other influential elements. Thus, how media institutions produce their media texts results from complicated processes involving multiple factors.

Text and Context

The text is intricately linked to social practice, institutional processes, and political and economic action. A text is a meaningful unit that can be interpreted and understood, and it may exist in several forms (Matin, 2023), such as in writing, speech, drawing, music, or any other form of symbol (Spivey, 2023). The essence lies in these symbols being systematically arranged and having well-defined combinations of symbols. Textual content provided by media sources will remain within the appropriate context. This means that various aspects, such as the socio-political situation, will influence the process of message reconstruction. According to Cervetti and Wright (2020), the text is always socially constructed to have a specific meaning and achieve certain goals.

One may acquire knowledge about the significance of texts and situations via several methods, such as studying the development of different writings. By grasping this comprehension, the notion of 'context' may be seen as placing significant emphasis on public behaviour. Context encompasses the idea that meanings in news stories are constructed by many behaviours often associated with creating meaning, such as speaking, writing, audiovisual media, and interpreting texts. The concept of interacting with the text is present. Context encompasses the external factors that influence the use of language, such as the individuals involved in the communication, the specific circumstances in which the text is created, and the intended purpose of the text (Altarriba & Basnight-Brown, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This paper examines how electoral fraud in the 2024 Indonesian general election was portrayed in the *Tempo* news media. This paper further examines the engagement of news texts within the socio-political contexts.

This article utilized Baxter's (2020) textual analysis to answer those questions. The emphasis of the textual analysis is mainly on the study of meaning in the context of discourse. The authors organized three steps of textual analysis. First, the data-gathering method started by identifying the *Tempo* magazine edition covering the alleged fraud and then choosing the leading news articles. It is crucial to precisely identify the specific issues of *Tempo* magazine that discuss the alleged electoral fraud, as this ensures that the analysis is grounded in relevant and current materials, directly addressing the primary topic of inquiry. Furthermore, it is essential to choose the prominent news stories from these editions in order to concentrate the analysis on the most influential and thorough data, therefore establishing a solid basis for examining the significance and discussion around the purported election fraud.

Secondly, after determining the pertinent items, the leading news articles were numbered according to edition and then subjected to text selection and reduction. The selected text of each news item was assumed to represent the central issue of the article. Through methodical organization of the data, the analysis is able to concentrate on the most relevant excerpts that are believed to reflect the main topic of each article. This approach establishes a clear and succinct framework for comprehending the language and meanings expressed within the context of the alleged electoral fraud.

Thirdly, the authors then analysed the selected texts. The text analysis was done by determining what the text is about, its purpose, the news sources, and how the media constructed the news. Further, the findings were examined within the context of the press's 'fourth estate' position, influenced by cultural, political, and organizational issues. Thus, the analysis primarily focused on extracting more robust evidence from the entire text of the news stories, but only a portion of it was shown.

The selection of *Tempo* News magazine was based on some arguments. First, *Tempo* has been an independent and influential weekly news magazine with professional journalistic standards since its reintroduction on September 29, 1998. With more than two decades of track record, *Tempo* consistently emerges as a frontrunner in its industry. *Tempo*'s hallmark will always be its commitment to actuality, thoroughness, and accuracy in reporting. *Tempo* News magazine implemented an editorial policy that prohibited any external involvement. The magazine is known for its critical and libertarian reporting. *Tempo*'s format as a magazine allows it to utilize an in-depth reporting style. The *Tempo* editorial board recognized that the magazine was not as timely as the daily news research publication, so they addressed this issue by incorporating more in-depth reporting (Tempo, n.d.).

Table 1: *Tempo* News reporting electoral fraud

Headlines	Editions
Jokowi Involvement in the 2024 General Election	June 4, 2023
How Anwar Usman Manages Constitutional Court Decisions	October 22, 2023
Drama of Anwar Usman's Dismissal from the Chair of the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court	November 12, 2023
How Iriana Jokowi Raised Support for Prabowo-Gibran	November 19, 2023
Is it true that the police are gathering support for Prabowo-Gibran	December 3, 2023
Why we wrote PSI and the 1998 Activist Defection against Reform	December 31, 2023
Jokowi's manoeuvre won Prabowo-Gibran in one round	January 14, 2024
Jokowi's Social Assistance Ahead of the Election. What for?	January 21, 2024
How Pratikno became Jokowi's political operator	January 28, 2024
How State Institutions Collect Votes for Prabowo-Gibran	February 11, 2024

The study's choice of ten news items was based on the requirement to encompass a wide range of media coverage on electoral fraud at different phases of the 2024 Indonesian General Elections. The research sought to illuminate the evolving discourse surrounding electoral integrity by picking news editions that encompassed the time leading up to, during, and following the election. Furthermore, by examining various news articles, the research can identify patterns, trends, and possible biases in *Tempo* News Magazine's reporting. This will enable a more comprehensive evaluation of media methods and their impact on public opinion and democratic procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General elections have always been a subject of substantial news value for news media organizations. In Indonesia, this issue increases with the allegation that the incumbent President had attempted to manipulate his power to win the election for presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This scenario has garnered the eye of numerous political analysts and media outlets, raising concerns about ethics and potential conflicts of interest if the President's son assumes such a high political position (Aziz, 2024; Kaisepo, 2024). The public

is keen to comprehend the genuine intentions behind this action and its potential ramifications in the forthcoming elections.

Furthermore, the possible consequences of this revelation on the public's view of the current President and his government are substantial. The electoral process must prioritize transparency and honesty since any sense of nepotism or unfair advantage can erode public trust in the democratic system. The role of media in appropriately reporting and assessing such disclosures is vital and should not be underestimated. News media must strive to present the facts unbiasedly, allowing citizens to form their opinions based on accurate information (Geçer & FadiLlah, 2020). Thus, examining how news media organizations portray the subject of election fraud is intriguing.

Tempo is renowned for its comprehensive approach to reporting. For example, during the 2024 general election in Indonesia, *Tempo's* news magazine published almost ten special editions focusing on the matter. Meanwhile, some journalists collected and analysed data and news to provide the public with robust, current, and trustworthy information. In its profile, *Tempo* states its characteristic of journalism,

Our journalism adheres to the idea of impartiality, avoiding any favouritism towards certain groups. We believe that virtue and non-virtue are not exclusive to any one party. We believe the press's primary responsibility is not to propagate bias but to eradicate it. Its purpose is not to foster animosity but to facilitate mutual understanding.

Tempo's cultural values include trustworthiness, independence, and professionalism. Trustworthiness is characterized by adhering to veracity, rectitude, and steadfastness. Freedom entails creating an environment that allows unrestricted exercise, including the freedom to think and express oneself.

(*Tempo*, n.d.)

This study has managed to identify ten editions that intensively reported the issue of electoral fraud. *Tempo* examined the subject from both cultural and political standpoints. Given these viewpoints, it focused specifically on the following matters: (i) disclosure of the involvement of the President, his brother-in-law, and the first lady in designating the President's son as a vice-presidential candidate, and (ii) disclosure of the state agencies' support for the campaign of the President's son as a vice-presidential candidate. Why did *Tempo* focus on these two issues?

Tempo seeks to highlight any conflicts of interest and exertion of undue influence that might compromise the integrity of the electoral process. Further, the revelation of state agencies' endorsement of the president's son as a vice-presidential candidate is crucial for preserving the autonomy and impartiality of government institutions. This investigative journalism not only reveals possible instances of misuse of authority but also highlights the significance of maintaining the division between political and administrative roles in a democratic society.

The Disclosure of the Involvement of the President, His Brother-In-Law, and the First Lady in Designing the President's Son as a Vice-Presidential Candidate

The portrayal of electoral fraud has attracted *Tempo* News magazine since President Jokowi stated that he would interfere in the General Election. *Tempo* emphasized the revelation of

familial participation in nominating the president's son as a candidate for vice president in the 2024 Indonesian General Election, which has ignited extensive deliberation and contention throughout the country. The extraordinary action has sparked worries regarding nepotism and its potential ramifications on the democratic process in Indonesia. The nomination of the president's son has revealed the intricate convergence of familial connections, political authority, and the trajectory of Indonesian democracy.

To show the electoral fraud in the presidential and vice-presidential general elections, *Tempo* highlights chronologically the steps Anwar Usman took to influence judges at the Constitutional Court to support the decision to allow President Jokowi's son to run for vice president in the 2024 elections. *Tempo* attempted to show that the involvement of Anwar Usman in the process of issuing the decision was not right due to a conflict of interest. The news media also paid attention to the First Lady's involvement in gaining support, which led to Jokowi's interference in the General Election and her brother's participation in the Constitutional Court decision.

This representation is evident in news items entitled *Jokowi Involvement in the 2024 General Election* (04/06/2023), *How Anwar Usman Manages Constitutional Court Decisions* (22/10/2023), *Drama of Anwar Usman's Dismissal from the Chair of the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court* (12/11/2023), and *How Iriana Jokowi Raised Support for Prabowo-Gibran* (12/11/2023). These news items effectively depict the complicated interaction between political power dynamics and legal institutions, which reveals the intricacies of Indonesia's democratic terrain. They enhance the comprehension of the complex socio-political influences that shape modern governance and the media's impact on moulding public discussions. The following excerpt from news items details the involvement of the President, his brother-in-law, and the first lady in designating the President's son as a vice-presidential candidate:

Table 2: *Tempo* News Items reporting the involvement of the President, his brother-in-law, and the first lady in designing the President's son as a vice-presidential candidate

Main articles
Jokowi Involvement in the 2024 General Election <i>We examine the activities of President Joko Widodo, who is actively engaging in political manoeuvring as his term in office draws to a close. Jokowi strongly desires to have the authority to determine his successor. It appears that Jokowi is the sole President who openly wishes to participate in selecting the future President. Jokowi, whose investors remain undisclosed by poll institutions, has a high confidence level in garnering popular support, as indicated by an 82 percent satisfaction rating. He utilized this backing to "exhort" presidential contenders to adhere to his devised script.</i> <i>The issue at hand is why Jokowi is preoccupied with determining the identity of his successor. His subordinates, who are part of the state apparatus responsible for ensuring fair and honest elections, may perceive his candidates as being influenced by practical political objectives when they favour one of the candidates.</i> <i>The lack of neutrality in the governmental apparatus is a significant drawback in a democratic system. Elections fail to represent the perspectives of a substantial portion of the population due to their susceptibility to manipulation by powerful entities. This is equivalent to practicing authoritarianism while feigning democracy (Tempo, Haryanto, 04/06/2023).</i>
How Anwar Usman Manages Constitutional Court Decisions <i>During the commencement of the meeting, Judge Arief Hidayat raised inquiries regarding the involvement of Anwar, the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court. The lawsuits under discussion, numbered 90 and 91, pertain to Gibran. Almas requested that regional leaders under 40 consider running for President and vice president positions.</i>

From July to August, Anwar Usman's strategic actions involved completing the petition amendment, after which the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court actively persuaded other judges to approve the complaint promptly. Nevertheless, a judge expressed a different opinion and requested the Court to convene a comprehensive conference to receive statements from additional parties, including the People's Representative Council. The judge's deliberation meeting resumed on October 12, three days after it had begun. The conference, which commenced at 11.00 WIB and continued for three hours, was in a state of active and energetic discussion when addressing Almas' case. Three judges affirmed their acceptance, two accepted with varying reasoning (concurring views), and four refused (dissenting opinions). Finally, the Constitutional Court has ruled that anyone under 40 with regional leadership positions can run for President and vice president (Tempo News Magazine, Rosana, 22/10/2023).

How Iriana Jokowi Raised Support for Prabowo-Gibran

Iriana played a role in formulating the strategy to propose Gibran as Prabowo's running mate. According to a relative of Joko Widodo, Iriana has been making consistent attempts to support her eldest child's candidacy for deputy president, which have intensified since the start of this year. Iriana has been present for a considerable period and has nurtured a sense of dissatisfaction towards the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. Iriana frequently told her inner circle that the bull party behaved inappropriately towards Jokowi. The outrage reached its highest point when Jokowi participated in the inauguration of the PDIP National Working Meeting at JIExpo Kemayoran, Central Jakarta, on January 10 last year. Megawati Soekarnoputri, the General Chair of the PDIP, stated that the President has the position of a party officer. Before Anwar Usman announced the Constitutional Court's judgment on Monday, October 16, Iriana met with his family. During the meeting, an informed insider revealed that Iriana explicitly stated that the Constitutional Court's ruling would allow Gibran to be selected as Prabowo Subianto's running mate in the upcoming election. Nevertheless, Iriana also voiced apprehension about her family, particularly Gibran, being inundated with public criticism (Tempo News Magazine, Rosana, 19/11/2023b).

In three of the four main articles in Table 2 above, *Tempo* notes that the President's unwillingness to stay neutral in the 2024 general elections may lead to an unfair democratic process. *Tempo* highlighted that Jokowi unequivocally declared his intention not to maintain a neutral stance in the forthcoming presidential election. He contended that his intervention was undertaken in the nation's interest and the promotion of sustainable development. Jokowi seems to be disregarding the democratic tenet of popular sovereignty. President Joko Widodo's political manoeuvring as his term ended has led to his desire to determine his successor. His actions raise concerns about the lack of neutrality in the governmental apparatus, which could lead to elections failing to represent the perspectives of a significant portion of the population, akin to practicing authoritarianism while feigning democracy. He fails to acknowledge that the public determines the quality of a subsequent president through fair and responsible elections rather than by the current president in power. This finding is quite similar to the research by Fortin-Rittberger, Harfst and Dingler (2017), who suggest that the connection between electoral fraud and contentment with democracy might be affected by election results since winning an election may outweigh worries about the fairness and competitiveness of the voting process.

Thus, since mid-2023, eight months before the general election, *Tempo* had warned the public of potential violation of democracy. The news magazine explicitly portrayed this issue through the above news item. At the same time, this can be seen in how *Tempo* has performed its role as the fourth estate by criticizing the President's involvement in the 2024 general election. Political analysts later said that due to the President's reluctance to stay neutral in the General Election, the President claimed it was permissible for a president to side with specific presidential and vice-presidential candidates (Ramadhan & Ihsanuddin, 2024).

Furthermore, as indicated in the second news item in Table 2 above, *Tempo* also focused on the actions of the Head of the Constitutional Court, who is the President's brother-in-law, to advance the ruling concerning the age limit, which is a crucial part of the legal framework allowing the President's son to run for vice president. This clandestine manipulation is a subtle illustration of the intertwining of governmental and judicial authorities, with the president, in his capacity as the leader of the executive branch, exerting influence on the judiciary through familial links. This confluence of familial relationships and political ambitions raises issues about the impartiality and independence of the Court but also highlights broader implications for the relationship between the separation of powers within the framework of democracy. To complete the discussion, *Tempo* also brings up the issue of how the First Lady strategically mobilized support for her son to secure his candidacy for vice president.

Thus, these four news items described the beginning of the election fraud carried out by the President, which started with President Jokowi's desire to continue his power, followed by efforts to legalize his son, who was not yet old enough to become Prabowo Subianto's vice-presidential candidate. While at the same time, the President's wife worked to raise support for her child. According to *Tempo*'s investigation, apart from an attempt to perpetuate power, this also represents an attempt to loathe the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle, which considers Jokowi an official of the party.

Based on the above description, how did *Tempo* construct the news? By employing comprehensive and investigative news-gathering methods, *Tempo* provided detailed information about the involvement of the President, the first lady, and the President's brother-in-law before the decision of the Constitutional Court and saw this as a threat to democracy. Exhaustive research is one of the primary ways that news is constructed. To cross-verify material, *Tempo* journalists, as Brock (2024) states, need to sift through various sources, such as traditional media, social media, reports from the government, and academic publications. Additionally, conducting interviews with relevant stakeholders and eyewitnesses can provide invaluable firsthand insights that add depth and authenticity to the news story. As an additional point of interest, investigative journalists frequently rely on specialized methods such as data analysis and demands for freedom of information to unearth concealed truths and bring to light illicit activities (Müller & Wiik, 2023). *Tempo* implemented news feature writing to enhance their coverage. The inclusion of perspectives from all parties involved in the topic demonstrates *Tempo*'s effort to incorporate their ideas into the reporting. *Tempo* always confirms news sources relevant to the issue, although, for sensitive issues, it is found that sources from the government refuse to respond.

Tempo's editorial approach remained unchanged regarding press freedom during the 'reform' era, resembling the restrictive dictatorship of the New Order era. This is because it has embraced a liberal approach to reporting founded on the ideas of justice, accountability, independence, and precision since it was founded. These principles were further adapted to align with the nation's current social and political circumstances. This was also found in the study by Prayudi and Hendariningrum (2017).

Harrison and Pukallus (2023) coined "civic journalism" to refer to the concept that media is responsible for public life beyond simply reporting the news or presenting a large amount of factual information. According to Luce, Jackson, and Thorsen (2020), journalism has the potential to either empower or turn off a community. *Tempo* has effectively showcased a proficient execution of journalism, surpassing mere publishing status.

The Disclosure of the State Agencies’ Support for the Campaign of the President’s Son as Vice-Presidential Candidate

Concerns have been raised over the possibility of conflicts of interest and abuse of power as a result of the disclosure that state agencies have provided support for the campaign of the president’s son against the vice-presidential candidate in the general election that took place in Indonesia in 2024. The participation of state agencies in a political campaign can undermine the fact that all candidates are competing on an equal playing field and diminish public trust in the elected government. Following the portrayal of the disclosure of the involvement of the President, his brother-in-law, and the first lady in designing the President’s son as a vice-presidential candidate, *Tempo* critically reported state agencies’ support to win the President’s son’s vice-presidential candidacy and how the President himself orchestrated this. It is of the utmost importance to investigate the ramifications of such support with regard to the values of democracy and good governance, as well as the fairness and integrity of the electoral process. There is clear evidence of this depiction in the news items entitled *Is it true that the police are gathering support for Prabowo-Gibran?* (03/12/2023), *Jokowi’s manoeuvre won Prabowo-Gibran in one round* (14/01/2024), *Jokowi’s Social Assistance Ahead of the Election. What for?* (21/01/2024), *How Pratikno became Jokowi’s political operator* (28/01/2024), *How State Institutions Collect Votes for Prabowo-Gibran* (11/02/2024). Part of the text of news items representing this issue read as follows:

Table 3: <i>Tempo</i> News reporting state agencies’ support for the President’s son as vice-presidential candidate
Main Articles
Is it true that the police are gathering support for Prabowo-Gibran? <i>Following the interrogation of some village chiefs by the police, two administrators from the association of village government officials throughout Indonesia mentioned to Tempo that many of their fellow employees were experiencing fear. They are hesitant about getting active in political activities once more. Because the individuals who are most frequently questioned by the authorities are supporters of the two other couples. On the other hand, village leaders extended invitations to their fellow workers to convert their support to Prabowo-Gibran candidates. A few of them were at the event held in Jakarta by the All Indonesian Village Government Association. The East Java Regional Police reportedly assisted in providing financial support to village leaders in the province so they could travel to Gelora Bung Karno, according to some people that Tempo questioned (Tempo News magazine, Adyatama, 03/12/2023).</i>
Jokowi’s manoeuvre won Prabowo-Gibran in one round (14/01/2024) <i>President Joko Widodo sought to consolidate the primary power of Prabowo-Gibran Rakabuming Raka by desiring just a single round of the presidential election. Over three consecutive days, Jokowi engaged in dining sessions with the general head of the political party that supported the pair. There are suspicions that President Jokowi is engaging in strategic actions to assist Prabowo-Gibran in ensuring that the presidential election may be resolved in a single round. An official at the palace said that Jokowi was following the presidential candidate supported by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle. Jokowi denied that his activity agenda followed Ganjar’s agenda. The social assistance scheme is believed to exclude the involvement of Minister of Social Affairs Tri Rismaharini, who is primarily responsible for delivering social aid. According to two sources, including a high-ranking official from the Ministry of Social Affairs, it has been reported that Risma was not included in many meetings on social assistance since she hails from the PDI Perjuangan party (Tempo News Magazine, Rikang, 14/01/2024).</i>
Jokowi’s Social Assistance Ahead of the Election. What for? <i>Joko Widodo, the President of Indonesia, continues to provide the general population with social aid before the February 14, 2024, voting day. During the campaign, some ministers, who are also the general chairmen of the political party supporting Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka, referred to Jokowi’s social aid as his property. There have been instances in which incumbents have used social assistance to boost the number of people who vote for them.</i>

In an interview with Tempo, five politicians from parties that support the Prabowo-Gibran alliance said that the social assistance that the government distributed was intended to assist the two candidates in winning. Following the five, the regions that are the primary targets for the distribution of social aid are those in which Prabowo-Gibran's electability is still falling behind (Tempo New Magazine, Dongoran, 21/01/2024)

How State Institutions Collect Votes for Prabowo-Gibran

According to the same source, after Gibran was appointed Prabowo's running mate, the National Police implemented personnel transfers for officers in medium and high-ranking positions. The objective is to deploy officers who can contribute to the victory of Prabowo-Gibran. Individuals who are considered to endorse alternative candidates are promptly dismissed.

State institution's attempt to win Prabowo-Gibran also occurred at the Ministry of Religion. Starting in January 2024, religious counsellors in different areas have been assigned a new responsibility by the director of the spiritual affairs office, which is to assist in boosting the electoral support for the second-ranked candidate. During a meeting held at the religious affairs office in a sub-district of East Java in late January 2024, the institution's leadership assigned 20 state civil workers to assist in the victory of Prabowo-Gibran. In November 2023, President Joko Widodo allegedly requested Yaqut to increase the vote count for Prabowo-Gibran by a maximum of 9 percent. According to informed politicians, Yaqut only consented to a 4 percent agreement.

The scent of Prabowo-Gibran's triumph is not limited to the Ministry of Religion; it is also evident in the Ministry of Agriculture. The approach involves conducting a clandestine campaign during technical guidance events. According to two ministry officials, the Minister of Agriculture, Amran Sulaiman, instructed his staff to organize a technical guidance marathon (Tempo News Magazine, Adyatama, 11/02/2024).

The purpose of the preceding depiction was to provide Tempo's readers with a description of how Jokowi, as a president, has misused his power to win the general election for his son. It is signified by the involvement of state agencies and apparatus such as the Indonesian police, the minister of finance, the minister of religion, and the ministry of agriculture. The first news item, as shown in Table 3, represents *Tempo's* portrayal of the police's coercion of a village head about the allocation of village finances, owing to their lack of endorsement for President Jokowi's selected presidential and vice-presidential candidates, is a blatant misuse of authority and a serious infringement of democratic values. Firstly, these activities immediately weaken the self-governance and self-reliance of local administration since village chiefs are elected officials responsible for overseeing community matters in line with the desires and requirements of their voters. The police undermine the democratic process and hinder the free expression of political opinions within local communities by intimidating and coercing village leaders depending on their political connections. This is definitely against Act Number 7 of 2017 concerning Elections, especially Article 282, which prohibits village chiefs from engaging in acts that either aid or hurt any of the participants in the election throughout the campaign period (Farisa, 2023).

Further, the improper use of village funds as a means of political retaliation establishes a risky precedent for using public resources for party advantage. Village funds should be allocated transparently and fairly to promote community development and welfare (Indraswari, 2024). It should not be used to coerce loyalty to specific political objectives. When law enforcement authorities take action to penalize individuals who express opposing views inside local leadership structures, it not only undermines the public's confidence in government institutions but also maintains an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that suppresses democratic engagement and diversity of opinions. Ultimately, it signifies a perilous degradation of democratic principles and the supremacy of legal frameworks.

Meanwhile, as shown in Table 3, represented by news items 2 and 3, *Tempo's* portrayal of the indiscriminate and uncontrolled use of social assistance funds from the budget before the election provides substantial proof of President Jokowi's exploitation of every possible

method to ensure the success of his son's campaign. Initially, the unexpected and rapid increase in the distribution of social assistance funds, particularly during the pre-election period, prompted significant inquiries about the underlying intentions behind these expenditures (Sunj, 2024). Instead of being awarded based on actual need and meticulous planning, these funds seem to be used as political patronage to gain electoral support by distributing favours and resources. This strategic use of state resources will enhance his son's chances of winning the election. This unscrupulous use of public money not only distorts the democratic process but also undermines the concepts of justice, openness, and accountability in government.

At the same time, *Tempo's* coverage also sheds light on how President Jokowi's electoral strategy intertwines with efforts to diminish the voting base of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates from the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P). By strategically diverting social assistance funds and leveraging state resources to bolster his son's candidacy, Jokowi seeks to strengthen his family's political dynasty and undermine the electoral prospects of his political rivals within the PDI-P. Through targeted expenditures and selective distribution of resources, Jokowi aims to weaken the support base of competing candidates aligned with the PDI-P, thereby consolidating his power and influence within the political landscape. This calculated manoeuvring underscores the intricate interplay between electoral tactics and intra-party dynamics, revealing the lengths Jokowi is willing to go to secure victory for his son while undercutting the electoral prospects of his political adversaries within the ruling party. In addition to *Tempo's* critical journalism on the problem above, *Tempo's* reportage sheds light on the troubling participation of government entities, such as the Ministry of Religion, in actively fostering support for President Jokowi's son's candidacy.

By using the government's administrative apparatus to further his son's political ambitions, Jokowi blurs the distinction between the state and the political party and weakens the impartiality and honesty of crucial government institutions. Some political analysts see this as an irony and the decline of democracy (Ramadhan & Ihsanuddin, 2024; Widadio, 2024). The disclosure of state agencies actively participating in partisan activities raises significant concerns about the neutrality and autonomy of the civil service, as well as the possible misuse of public resources for political purposes. Further, this highlights the more extensive decline of democratic standards and values since the exploitation of government agencies to get electoral advantages reinforces the consolidation of power among the governing class and weakens the impartiality and openness of the election process.

Tempo's reporting in this setting plays a crucial role as a vigilant observer, revealing the obscure connections between political favouritism and the control of institutions. These disclosures emphasize the immediate need for strong measures to prevent political favouritism based on family connections and the excessive power of government agencies in electoral politics. To enhance its democratic institutions and maintain the rule of law, as Grzywacz (2020) stated, Indonesia must ensure that any instances of power abuse are brought to light and dealt with. This is crucial to protect the integrity of the election process and sustain the fundamental principles of democracy.

Amidst a climate characterized by increased division and party vitriol, *Tempo's* steadfast dedication to unbiased journalism is a strong defence against misinformation and manipulation. *Tempo* has equipped voters with essential information and facilitated their active engagement in the political process via rigorous fact-checking and comprehensive analysis. Its coverage of election fraud and anomalies has played a crucial role in promoting

accountability and transparency in Indonesia's political institutions, hence strengthening the core values of democratic government.

Tempo's journalism procedures go beyond just exposing election fraud; they include a comprehensive and professional commitment to unearthing the complexities of political manoeuvring and their impact on democracy. *Tempo* maintains a high level of professionalism by avoiding sensationalism and provocative language. Instead, it presents information straightforwardly and impartially, relying on facts and data. *Tempo* has consistently maintained a democratic climate through its reporting, including during previous governments. This is due to the fact that it steadfastly upholds the principle of independence and deliberately distances itself from any socio-political groups. This ensures that its journalism is unbiased and impartial, placing the public interest ahead of partisan agendas.

Tempo offers its readers a thorough comprehension of the intricate network of political influence and power dynamics involved in the period leading up to the general election, achieved via careful inquiry and detailed analysis. This news magazine maintains high media professionalism and is a reliable source of information for its readers by adhering to the ideals of neutrality, accuracy, and ethical journalism. This ensures that the public stays well-informed and actively participates in the democratic process.

Thus, *Tempo's* portrayal of these issues highlights what Jha and Kodila-Tedika (2020) state in their research: the importance of media in informing democracy and promoting political knowledge and trust. Additionally, *Tempo's* portrayal in this study signifies one of the most critical roles that the news media plays in giving citizens information that is both reliable and pertinent (Mont'Alverne et al., 2023), which enables them to make judgments that are informed during general elections.

CONCLUSION

The study examines how the media, *Tempo* News magazine, constructs the concept of electoral fraud in the 2024 Indonesian General Elections. It offers valuable insights into the media's influence on public perceptions and its impact on democratic processes. The research used textual analysis to shed light on the intricacies of media portrayal and its influence on public discussions over the integrity of elections.

This paper supports Nwamara and Etumnu's (2022) argument regarding how the media use their agenda-setting role in addressing election fraud. The way *Tempo* portrays the issue in the news makes it different from other news publications and gives new insight into how the news media institution should construct the news.

Amidst the politically volatile environment before Indonesia's 2024 general election, *Tempo* has emerged as a prominent source of unbiased media dedicated to revealing the truth and exposing electoral misconduct. *Tempo's* meticulous investigative reporting has been crucial in ensuring accountability and preserving the integrity of the electoral system as the country deals with the intricacies of democratic government and election procedures. *Tempo* has effectively upheld the ideals of impartiality and openness, serving as a crucial forum for opposing voices and underprivileged populations. This has resulted in the amplification of their concerns and the exposure of instances of election misconduct.

BIODATA

Prayudi is an associate professor at the Department of Communication Science, Universitas Pembangunan Nasional Veteran Yogyakarta (UPN Veteran Yogyakarta), Indonesia. Email: prayudi@upnyk.ac.id

Muhammad Edy Susilo is a senior lecturer at the Department of Communication Science, UPN Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: edysusilomuh@gmail.com

Ninik Probosari is an associate professor at the Department of Management, UPN Veteran Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Email: ninik.probosari@upnyk.ac.id

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