

## Political Hegemony and Neutrality of Local Media: A Theoretical Study of Post-2024 Election News Practices in West Sulawesi

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**Abstract:** This article examines the practice of local media reporting in West Sulawesi after the 2024 General Election through a theoretical approach based on critical discourse analysis. The main focus of this study is to examine the relationship between political interests and media neutrality, and how local media play a role in shaping political legitimacy through hegemonic narratives. Using the framework of Gramsci's hegemony theory, Herman & Chomsky's propaganda model, and agenda setting theory, this article reveals that local media tend to strengthen the dominance of political elites by highlighting narratives of victory and stability without including the voices of the opposition or civil society. The findings show that what appears to be neutral reporting is actually a form of symbolic hegemony that is decentralized and based on local economic-political relations. This article contributes to the development of hegemony theory in the context of local political communication in Indonesia, by offering a concept of how local media actively shape ideological consensus in a fragmented power landscape.

**Abstrak:** Artikel ini mengkaji praktik pemberitaan media lokal di Sulawesi Barat pasca Pemilu 2024 melalui pendekatan teoretis berbasis analisis wacana kritis. Fokus utama kajian ini adalah menelaah hubungan antara kepentingan politik dan netralitas media, serta bagaimana media lokal berperan dalam membentuk legitimasi politik melalui narasi hegemoni. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis wacana kritis untuk menelusuri konstruksi ideologis dalam teks berita dan relasi kekuasaan di baliknya. Dengan menggunakan kerangka teori hegemoni Gramsci, model propaganda Herman & Chomsky, serta teori agenda setting, hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa media lokal cenderung menguatkan dominasi elite politik dengan menonjolkan narasi kemenangan dan stabilitas tanpa menyertakan suara oposisi atau masyarakat sipil. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa apa yang tampak sebagai pemberitaan netral justru merupakan bentuk hegemoni simbolik yang bersifat terdesentralisasi dan berakar pada relasi ekonomi-politik lokal. Secara teoretis, penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian hegemoni dalam konteks komunikasi politik lokal Indonesia, sedangkan secara praktis memberikan pemahaman kritis bagi jurnalis dan pembuat kebijakan media tentang pentingnya menjaga independensi dan keberagaman perspektif dalam pemberitaan politik.

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media, Wacana kritis

## INTRODUCTION

Local media has a strategic role in encouraging the democratization process, especially through the delivery of accurate and balanced political information to the public (Yusuf, 2011). In Indonesia, local media often functions as a communication bridge between local governments and the community, as well as encouraging citizen involvement in the political policy-making process. In West Sulawesi Province, after the 2024 General Election, the existence of local media is expected to be able to strengthen political and social stability through objective and balanced reporting. However, dynamics in the field show a tendency towards bias in local media reporting after the election. Indications of bias can be seen from the dominance of narratives that tend to benefit the party that won the election and the lack of space for critical voices or opposition to the new government.

The results of monitoring the two largest online media in West Sulawesi, Radar Sulbar and Sulbar Express ([www.radarsulbar.com](http://www.radarsulbar.com) and <https://sulbarexpress.fajar.co.id/>) during the period March to May 2024 revealed that the majority of news about government policies had a positive nuance and rarely displayed critical views from the community or other parties. This condition raises critical questions regarding the extent to which local media can maintain their neutrality and independence in a local political landscape full of interests (Iskandar & Yusuf, 2024; Kadir et al., 2024).

Although there are many studies on the role of media in democracy, studies that specifically discuss political hegemony and neutrality of local media in Indonesia, especially in West Sulawesi, are still very limited. Generally, research focuses more on national or regional media, so they have not been able to provide a complete picture of the condition of local media in this region post-election. This gap suggests the urgency of developing a more in-depth theoretical study to understand the influence of political interests on local media reporting practices.

Based on this phenomenon, this study not only aims to analyze the relationship between political interests and local media neutrality, but also offers a new conceptual framework on how local media reporting practices in the post-election context act as a mechanism of symbolic hegemony that is local and adaptive. This contribution is expected to broaden theoretical understanding of how power works in the media landscape in Indonesia, especially outside the national center of power."

Through this study, the author hopes to enrich the discourse on the relationship between media and local politics in the realm of political communication studies and critical media studies. By highlighting the context of West Sulawesi, this article offers a new perspective on the issue of political hegemony and the challenges of local media neutrality, which can be a reference for similar studies in other regions.

The concept of hegemony introduced by Antonio Gramsci explains how power is not only enforced through physical domination, but through ideological consensus and control, especially through institutions such as the media in (Siswati, 2018). In the context of the media, hegemony means how the dominant class shapes public consciousness through the production and control of information. This theory was later developed in critical media studies by (Hall, 1980), which emphasized that the media is not a reflector of objective reality, but rather a site of discourse struggle that can strengthen the status quo of power in.

Claims of neutrality and objectivity in journalism are often myths, especially in situations where the media relies on advertising, capital owners, or has close ties to political elites according to Herman & Chomsky in (Triyono & Toni, 2020). Herman Chomsky's propaganda model shows that the media operates in a market and power system that filters its news through five main filters, including ownership, advertising, and official resources. In the local context, this becomes more complex because regional media are often owned or controlled by local political actors (As'ad, 2020).

Research on local media in Indonesia reveals a tendency towards closeness between media owners and regional political forces. Many local media are not completely independent, but rather become tools to build certain political images or interests (Bakri,

2016). In the book written by Aminah, *Kuasa negara pada ladang politik lokal* shows how local media are used to mobilize support before and after elections, and to create dominant narratives that benefit those in power (Aminah, 2014). Furthermore, the studies discussed in this study for the context of West Sulawesi are still very limited.

Post-election is a crucial period in which political forces try to establish legitimacy in the eyes of the public, and the media becomes an important tool in this process (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). The agenda setting theory put forward by McCombs in (Siswati, 2018) explains that the media does not tell the public what to think, but what to think about what in other words the mass media will highlight a content, issue or topic by presenting it continuously in order to attract public attention until finally the public accepts the issue and considers it something important so that public opinion is formed through agenda setting. In practice, local post-election media often frames the success of the winner dominantly, reducing the possibility of alternative voices such as the opposition or civil society movements. This creates a one-way political narrative that is susceptible to hegemonic bias.

This study uses a qualitative approach with the critical discourse analysis approach. This approach was chosen because the focus of the study is on a theoretical study of the relationship between political hegemony and local media neutrality, especially in the context of post-election reporting in West Sulawesi in 2024. Literature studies allow researchers to explore, interpret, and critique relevant literature to build a systematic analysis of local media-political discourse. The primary data were obtained from news articles published by Radar Sulbar and Sulbar Express between March and May 2024, supplemented by reputable journal articles and books. The reason for choosing this media is because these two media are the largest online media in West Sulawesi. The analysis was carried out qualitatively with a critical discourse analysis (AWK) approach referring to Norman Fairclough (Prayogi, 2023). This approach helps examine how power structures and ideologies work through media narratives. Thus, this study not only examines the content of the news, but also how the practice of reporting reproduces or challenges local political hegemony. In the study process, the theoretical frameworks of Gramsci (hegemony), Herman & Chomsky (propaganda model), and Stuart Hall (encoding/decoding) are used, which are combined with contemporary literature on local media in Indonesia and post-election studies in 2024.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Local Media Reporting in West Sulawesi After the 2024.**

Election Vote Counting March 10, 2024, “Provincial Level Vote Recapitulation Results Complete, Four Incumbents Pass to Senayan” – Radar Sulbar. This article officially reports from the West Sulawesi KPU that the 2024 election plenary meeting has been completed with the result that four incumbent members of the Indonesian House of Representatives and the West Sulawesi DPD have returned to “Senayan”. The news only conveys vote acquisition data without criticism or analysis, emphasizing the success of incumbent figures (for example Ratih Megasari Singkarru, Suhardi Duka) and supporting the legitimacy of the election contest. This kind of narrative strengthens the hegemony of mainstream politics because local media only broadcasts official results and the victory of the ruling party, without including a critical perspective on the process or policies after the inauguration.



Figure 1. Local Media Reporting in West Sulawesi After the 2024 Election Vote Count

**March 21, 2024, “Recapitulation Complete, Prabowo-Gibran Win” – Sulbar Express.**

This coverage confirms the victory of the presidential candidate pair who won the highest number of votes nationally. Sulbar Express (part of the Fajar network) wrote that “Prabowo Subianto and Gibran Rakabuming Raka won the highest number of votes in the 2024 Presidential Election”.

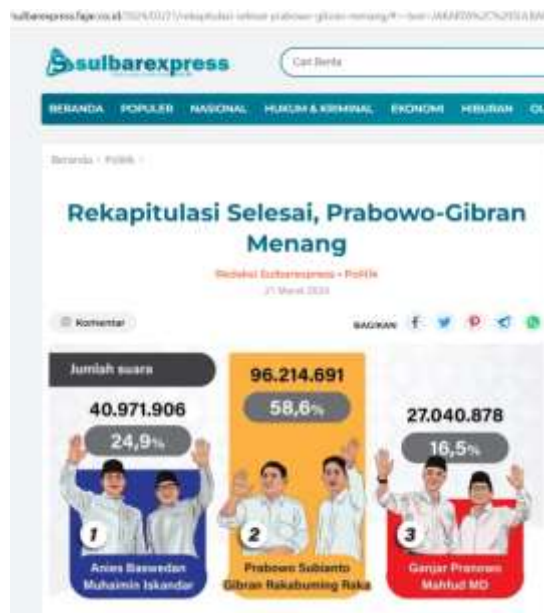


Figure 2. “Recapitulation Reporting Completed, Prabowo-Gibran Wins” – Sulbar Express.

Despite being a local media, this news coverage highlights the national results, giving the impression of the legitimacy of the election results and their victory without criticism. The mention of the winning figure without comparing any doubts or problems indicates confirmation of the winner's narrative. Thus, the news coverage emphasizes the legitimacy of the winning figure and tends to erase doubts, in line with the theory of hegemony where the media broadcasts the story of the victory of the ruling party as a "fact" accepted by the public.

**May 11, 2024, “Election Participation in West Sulawesi 82 Percent, Several Agencies Receive Awards” – Radar West Sulawesi.**

This Radar Sulbar news report features the official comments of the Acting Governor of Sulbar praising the success of the election. Acting Governor Zudan Arif Fakrulloh expressed relief that voter participation reached 82% and the election was “safe and peaceful, there were no prominent issues”. In addition, he trivialized the dispute over the results as something ordinary. The media reported this praise without questioning or criticizing the local government, and even quoted the Governor's order for officials to remain neutral in the upcoming Pilkada. This kind of reporting strengthens the legitimacy of the ruling regime by showing achievements and political stability. This gives the impression that the election contestation is truly under control and without serious conflict. The absence of opposing voices or critical evaluations in the article is an example of how local media implements “neutrality” which actually supports the status quo, according to the hegemonic paradigm.



**Figure 3. “Election Participation in West Sulawesi 82 Percent, Several Agencies Receive Awards” – Radar Sulbar.**

The findings above show the tendency of local media in Sulbar to highlight the success of the winning contestants and the official declaration (from the KPU or officials)

regarding the smooth running of the election. The news coverage focuses more on positive achievements (high participation, incumbents' victory) and the legitimacy of the organizers, while criticism of new policies or post-inauguration issues is ignored. This kind of coverage attitude supports the theory of political hegemony, where the media becomes a tool to spread the narrative of the ruler and reduce the visibility of critics, so that the image of the dominant regime is strengthened.

### **Hegemony and Post-Election Political Representation Practices**

In the framework of Gramscian theory, the media is one of the main institutions in the formation of hegemony, namely the domination of a particular class or group through the production of context in the ideological realm of Gramsci, 1971 in (Siswati, 2018). Post-election, the media plays a strategic role in constructing legitimacy for the parties that win the contest. In West Sulawesi, local media coverage after the election showed a strong tendency to frame the success of the winners as something neutral and natural.

Radar Sulbar dated March 10, 2024 carried the title "Results of the Provincial Level Vote Recapitulation Complete, Four Incumbents Pass to Senayan", with a narrative that emphasizes success without objective process, legitimacy, or criticism of power. The media does not display a diversity of voices, such as lawsuits from other candidates or the voices of civil society, but instead focuses on the victory of the old political elite. This shows that the media acts as a cultural mechanism that transmits the ideology of the ruling class to the public, eliminating alternative narratives.

### **Constructed Neutrality and the “Myth of Objectivity”**

Herman and Chomsky (1988) in the Propaganda Model (Shabira, 2021), emphasized that media operating in a capitalist system tend to filter information through five main filters, including ownership, advertising, and news sources. Local media in West Sulawesi, such as Radar West Sulawesi or West Sulawesi Express, in reporting on the 2024 Presidential and Legislative Elections more often quoted official officials, the KPU, or winning figures, and rarely featured critical voices. This is reflected in the news dated March 21, 2024 in the West Sulawesi Express: “Prabowo-Gibran Wins”, which only conveys the results of the vote count without any room for analysis or public reaction to the election results.

News reporting that only quotes sources from elite circles shows a form of “neutrality” that actually confirms the status quo. This neutrality is pseudo, because it implicitly conveys a hegemonic message that the system has worked well and victory is something natural. This reinforces the thesis that objectivity in the media is often a dominant representation of the perspective of power (Wahid, 2024).

### **Post-Election Legitimacy Consolidation and Reduction of Criticism**

In the post-election period, the public space should be an evaluative arena for the initial policies of the new regime. However, a report from Radar Sulbar on May 11, 2024 entitled "Election Participation in Sulbar 82 Percent, Several Agencies Receive Awards" actually shows that the dominant narrative is appreciation for the implementation of the election. The Acting Governor of Sulbar praised the success of voter participation without raising any issues regarding ASN partisanship, disputed results, or vote mobilization. The media only quoted official statements and disseminated them as a form of institutional "truth".

This phenomenon illustrates how the media play a role in determining which issues are considered important by the public, in line with (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Zaldy & Sumai, 2025) agenda-setting concept. When critical issues such as civil servant bias, potential

data manipulation, or doubts about election organizers are not highlighted, the media weaken their accountability function (Jacobs & Schillemans, 2016) and make it easier for the public to believe that no serious problems exist (Happer & Philo, 2013). In some cases, economic or political interests may influence media narratives, causing structural issues that are essential to local democracy to become obscured (Tomaz, 2024). In West Sulawesi, local and digital media play a significant role in shaping public opinion and political participation (Rasyid et al., 2024). This was evident when media framing ahead of the 2024 West Sulawesi gubernatorial election re-vote was dominated by narratives of electoral success and lacked critical perspectives on the organizers (Mento & Hadi, 2025). Although the information presented appeared factual, the way issues were framed still influenced citizens' perceptions of the quality of local democracy.

### **Discourse Imbalance and Local Media Ethics Crisis**

Local media that do not maintain a balance in post-election reporting are at risk of becoming public relations instruments of power. When opposition or civil society narratives are absent from the news, the media no longer plays a deliberative role, but instead becomes part of a hegemonic structure that perpetuates the dominance of political elites (Yang, 2013). This situation shows a crisis in local media ethics, especially in the context of media ownership by political actors or business affiliates who have an interest in the election results.

The conditions in West Sulawesi are in line with the findings (Yanuar Nugroho et al., 2012) regarding the low capacity of editorial independence in regions in Indonesia. Many regional media face not only economic pressures, but also political pressures, so that critical discourse tends to be suppressed.

### **CONCLUSION**

A theoretical review of local media reporting practices in West Sulawesi after the 2024 elections shows that the media are not completely neutral, but are involved in the production and reproduction of political hegemony. Through news frames that highlight the victory of political elites, the technical success of the election, and the absence of criticism or opposition voices, local media actually strengthen the legitimacy of the new rulers. This practice reflects what Gramsci calls ideological domination, where public consensus is formed not through coercion, but through the internalization of dominant narratives conveyed "neutrally" by the media. This tendency also shows how the concept of media neutrality is often constructed in a false manner. Instead of conveying various perspectives, local media actually emphasize symbolic partisanship through source selection, choice of diction, and the elimination of opposing voices. In this context, reporting not only conveys information, but also becomes a symbolic political instrument that strengthens the dominant order.

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