

# ***The Jakarta Post* Coverage of Indonesian Presidential Candidates in 2019**

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**Abstract:** *This research analyzes 119 online news articles in The Jakarta Post from January to April 2019, leading to the 2019 national election, through content analysis, based on the issues tackled in the national debate organized by General Election Commission of Indonesia. Besides, this study adds a segment of categories encapsulating the issues exposed from the review of related studies. The inter-coder reliability test shows a very good rate (coders 1 and 3:  $k=0.83$ ; coders 1 and 2:  $k=0.84$ ; coders 2 and 3:  $k=0.94$ ). The study reveals that both candidates get the same opportunity to be framed objectively.*

**Keywords:** *content analysis, election campaign, news framing, online news*

**Abstrak:** *Penelitian ini menganalisis 119 artikel berita online di The Jakarta Post dari Januari hingga April 2019, terkait pemilu nasional 2019, menggunakan analisis isi berdasarkan pada isu-isu yang dibahas dalam debat nasional yang diselenggarakan oleh Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) Indonesia. Selain itu, penelitian ini menambahkan segmen kategori yang merangkum isu-isu yang diekspos dari tinjauan studi terkait. Uji reliabilitas antarpengkode mendapatkan nilai yang sangat baik (pengkode 1 dan 3:  $k = 0.83$ ; pengkode 1 dan 2:  $k = 0.84$ ; pengkode 2 dan 3:  $k = 0.94$ ). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua kandidat mendapatkan kesempatan yang sama untuk dibingkai secara objektif dalam pemberitaan.*

**Keywords:** *analisis isi, berita online, bingkai berita, kampanye pemilu*

The year 2019 was a critical and significant year for Indonesia's democracy. It involved political party positions and strategies for the upcoming elections (Aspinall, 2019). The election of the year differed from previous elections. Since the declaration of its democracy, Indonesians experienced the first national and local elections altogether in April 2019. Like any other national elections, discussions on the presidential candidates were the center of interest.

Captivatingly, the incumbent president Joko Widodo (Jokowi) was up for re-

election under Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P/The Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle). The authoritarian-populist former general, Prabowo Subianto, who was also Jokowi's competitor during the 2014 national elections, ran again during this fifth national election. Therefore, this presidential election looked like a rematch of the same two candidates having the same right to be a leader of Indonesia for the next five years.

During the 2019 presidential campaign in Indonesia, it has become customary for

the president and vice president candidates to engage in debate. There were five debates during this election and the General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum) of Indonesia had finalized the topics of the debate and date that have been discussed with the two campaign teams of candidates. The first debate on January 17, 2019, discussed law, human rights, corruption, and terrorism. The second debate discussed energy, food, infrastructure, natural resources, and environment held on February 17, 2019. Then, on March 17, 2019, the candidates debated issues on education, health, employment, social, and culture. The next debate on March 30, 2019, argued issues on ideology, government, security, and international relationships. The last, on April 13, 2019, the candidates debated issues on economy, social welfare, investment, and industry.

The media news coverage was no escape in the discussion of the 2019 Indonesian national elections and its democracy, particularly on issues of the presidential debate. Agenda setting and framing in media displayed a crucial aspect during the campaign period (Mun & Li, 2011, p. 44; Dekavalla, 2018, pp. 1603-1604; O'Malley, Brandenburg, Flynn, McMenamin, & Rafter, 2012, p. 6). How media, particularly newspapers, set their agenda and frame the presidential candidates influences the voting turnouts. Tresch (2012, p. 288) states that news coverage of newspapers plays an essential role in influencing voters through the content informing the candidates.

As one of the English news portals in Indonesia, *The Jakarta Post* offers quantitatively more political news, particularly presidential candidates during the debate periods. Only then offers printed broadsheets, *The Jakarta Post* ranked second among the most well-known newspapers in Indonesia (*The Jakarta Post*, 2014) and widely relying upon by the international community with a circulation of 50,000 (Press Reference, n.d.), started to produce its online edition free to access through *The Jakarta Post.com* (*The Jakarta Post*, 2011) since Indonesia had an internet penetration of 53.7 percent.

The news coverage of *The Jakarta Post* can lead to democratic erosion in Indonesia, particularly *The Jakarta Post.com*, where information becomes more accessible and crucial to Indonesian voters' choice and democracy. However, this online news portal can be biased if it favors one candidate by positively covering one candidate more than another.

The media news coverage is no escape in the discussion of the 2019 Indonesian national elections and its democracy. Pieces of literature show how agenda-setting (Mun & Li, 2011, p. 44) and framing (Dekavalla, 2018, pp. 1603-1604; O'Malley, et al., 2012, p. 6) in media display fundamental and essential elements during the period of the campaign, particularly the presidential campaign since this issue had been massively discussed among voters. Adams and Joslyn (in Lo, King, Chen, & Huang, 1996, p. 44) studied how most voters were highly dependent on media to inform political candidates and their policies.

Nevertheless, more recent studies underline how mass media are being used by the politicians to persuade the public to get voted from them in the election (Mun & Li, 2011, p. 37). News presentations in media, specifically in online portals, have studied to have huge effects on voter turnouts and vote preferences (Bachmann, Kaufhold, Lewis, & Gil de Zúñiga, 2010, p. 42). Lippmann (in Mun & Li, 2011, p. 32) states how media can shape “pictures in our heads”. In the digital era, information became more accessible and immediate to most voters. Ancu and Cozma’s research which was also supported by Stromer-Galley’s and Foot (in Fernandes, Giurcanu, Bowers, & Neely, 2010, p. 654) stated that the internet, for instance, has been the best tool to spread information, mobilize people and allow people to interact with each other to get entertainment. With media convergence, as stated by Chadwick and Schulz, the information in the digital era could easily be hyperlinked and spread across various media channels (Ohme, Vreese, & Albaek, 2017, pp. 3246-3247).

Mun and Li (2011, p. 37) revealed that media have the power to transmit object agenda’s salience. Moreover, their study highlighted how media news coverage during elections had a powerful effect on voter turnout in Malaysia’s 2008 election. Similarly, Research result of Banducci, et al. and Banducci and Semetko (in Johann, Königslöw, Kritzinger, & Thomas, 2017, p. 263) showed that greater news visibility changes the voting preferences about a particular party during an electoral

campaign. Meanwhile, Redlawsk (in Ohme, et al., 2017, p. 3244) said that voting decisions depended on the voters’ experiences when they voted at the previous election and the information from different sources of immediate and mediated communication.

Discussing the election in Indonesia, it cannot be separated from Indonesians’ voting behaviors. Michael Buehler (Strachan, 2014, p. 3) was doubtful that Indonesians prefer candidates based on public service, noting how Indonesians elect incumbents while in office and have been convicted of corruption. He also reiterated how Indonesians themselves have difficulty in defining what excellent public service is.

Asia Foundation (Anggriani, et al., 2014) reported that the candidate’s platform is a factor in determining Indonesian voting behaviors. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) conducted Indonesia Electoral Survey (2010) and revealed that 11 percent of electorate votes were based on a candidate’s platform. The same survey reports that 11 percent also vote a candidate based on his/her past performance. Thus, voters will vote for the candidates having the best track record, mainly when they serve society. Moreover, IFES Indonesia election survey report says 15 percent of voters regard the level of experience of the government.

Asia Foundation noted factors such as education, religion, and the candidate’s personality are essential for Indonesian’s choice of voting. A similar survey

revealed that religion becomes an essential consideration for the voters to vote for the candidates (38.6 percent) specifically for governor, district head, and mayor. On the other hand, IFES (2010) showed 41 percent of Indonesians base their voting preference on candidate personality. However, vote-buying is another factor and another issue in Indonesia's voting behaviors (Muhtadi, 2018). Though illegal, the Asia Foundation survey in 2013 said 11.8 percent of Indonesians do not mind voting the candidates involved in vote-buying (Anggriani, et al., 2014, p. 46).

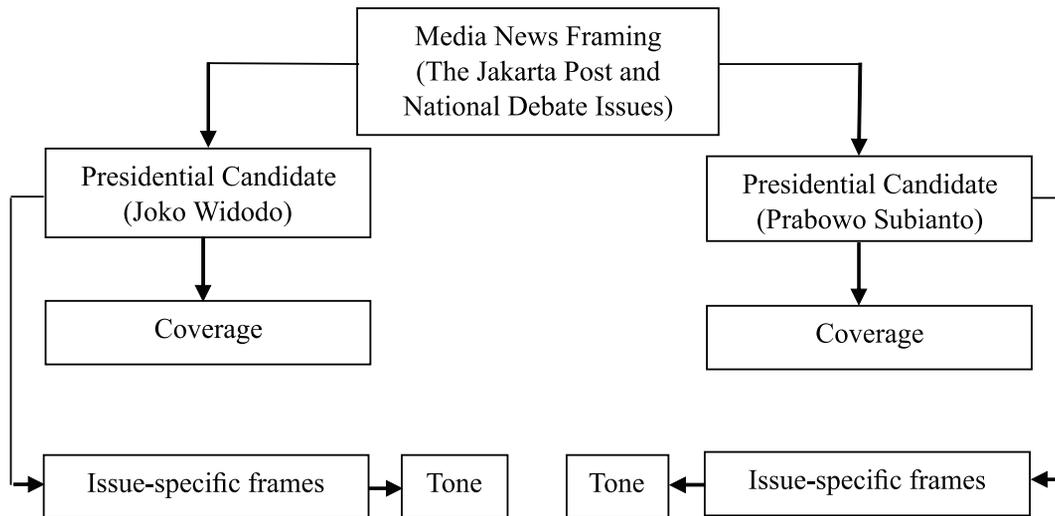
There have been reports that political candidates are creating their gimmicks to woo young voters in Indonesia (The Economist, 2018). According to Irawanto (2019, p. 2), millennials in Indonesia comprise 40 percent or about 80 million of the 196.5 million voters for the Indonesian 2019 national elections. Irawanto (2019, p. 2) highlights how the case of Jokowi and Prabowo as a rematch suggests loyal supporters for both candidates. However, Irawanto (2019, p. 1) adds, "The real impact of the millennials' votes remains uncertain because they are not homogenous."

Media can also influence the Indonesians' voting behaviors since news media can frame specific candidates and shape voters' preferences. Matthes (2009, p. 353) argues that media can encourage and influence the people with frames, by keeping producing many texts in a certain period by using the same keywords to highlight their messages through their news stories. In the future, those frames can be

spontaneously recalled when the same phenomenon occurs.

Vliegthart and van Zoonen (2011, p. 107) disagreed with the concept mentioning that framing becomes the product from separate processes in news media and their readers. The way how media produce frames cannot be separated from the relationship among media and political system (macro-level power), the power of market (meso-level), and the relationship of sources (micro-level). Hence, they argue that investigating frames should consider the sociological approach since producing and receiving the frames is influenced by individual differences and social and cultural backgrounds, structural divisions, and power collections.

This study investigates two sides of the framing, Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. It highlights the volume of the election coverage of *The Jakarta Post* on between the two candidates by identifying the percentage of the news coverage, which answers our research question. Moreover, the candidates' presence in an article allowed the study to identify the issues linked to Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. The issue-specific frames covered the topics of the national presidential debate and variables discussed from the review of related literature that determines voting turnouts in Indonesia, such as family, educational background, religion, race, and level of experience in politics. Then, the issues identify the tone of the framing, such as positive, neutral, or negative. Figure 1 shows the framework of the study.



**Figure 1 Research Framework**  
Source: Primary Data

## METHOD

The investigation of this study was performed using quantitative content analysis to gather more specific data. Therefore, the researchers get easier to collect, evaluate, and sum up data. Procedure of content analysis should be systematic since it analyzes the content of recorded information (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011, p. 156). Such quantitative instrumentation can assist researchers in obtaining greater precision. Moreover, content analysis is an established approach for such a study. It has been massively used to conduct research on printed texts and communication media (van Dijk, 2011, p. 18), since this approach will help to study and analyze communication phenomenon in order to measure variables, by considering systematic, objective, and quantitative manners (Fico, Lacy, & Riffe, 2008, p. 118). Therefore, the researchers utilized coding sheets with an organized code guide in collecting data needed to measure the variables.

The body of the study was obtained from *The Jakarta Post's* online news archive. The

analysis investigates explicitly the issues raised by the presidential candidates in the news reports on the days leading to the 2019 general election. The articles selected for analysis consisted of news contents in *The Jakarta Post* online news directly related to national issues from January 1 to April 13, 2019. This period was selected because it is the allocated campaigning period for the 2019 general election by the General Election Commission. Newspaper articles were accessed from *The Jakarta Post* online archives and were downloaded to be stored and printed. *The Jakarta Post* was chosen for analysis as the availability of online news archives allowed past news articles to be collected. Another reason was that *The Jakarta Post* uses the English language as its medium, which will allow the researchers to read and analyze its issues.

The sampling method utilized in this study is probability sampling to ensure the equal probability of each article to be selected for analysis to ensure a high level of representativeness. The two significant

advantages that are offered by probability sampling: (1) it is more representative of the population than other types of samples and (2) allows for estimation of the accuracy or representativeness of the sample. Hence, this study could avoid personal bias in the sample selection.

Drawing from the dates mentioned before, there are altogether 2,163 articles from the online news archive of Jakarta Post as there are 21 articles per issue. The researchers used systematic random sampling with a random start as the type of sampling design. Given the massive number of articles available and numerous issues appearing in each article, systematic random sampling was chosen. Additionally, this sampling type is preferred in mass media research as it saves time, resources, and effort, as compared to simple random sampling (Wilmer & Dominick, 2006, p. 97).

The researchers constructed two composite weeks for each month (January-April) in the sample. From the sampling design, this study considered all the articles of *The Jakarta Post* that were drawn from two Mondays of January 2019, February 2019, and March 2019, two Tuesdays (drawn from the available Tuesdays of January 2019, February 2019, and March 2019), and so on, until all weekdays will be included, except Sundays however, since *The Jakarta Post* does not publish articles on their site during this day.

There were altogether 1,008 online news articles published on the days mentioned. The analysis of the sample for this study includes the media highlighted

issues mentioned by the presidential candidates. Therefore, the researchers used the names of the two Indonesian presidential candidates and the dates on the constructed weeks as the keywords (i.e., Joko Widodo Prabowo Subianto January 17, 2019). All articles mentioning the names of the two presidential candidates were downloaded as the samples of this study. However, stories that were repeated and commentary or opinions were deleted. The sample of 1,008 articles consisted of 119 articles mentioning the two presidential candidates.

It should be noted that the general election campaigns for the president and parliament members took place at the same time. However, this study only focused on the presidential election's coverage. Therefore, all news stories involving members of parliament and campaigns were excluded, unless a member of parliament made direct mention or campaigned for any of the presidential candidates.

The researchers analyzed the story in each article using the coding sheets and the coding guide. The researchers coded (a) all stories mentioning the two presidential candidates and (b) all stories about the following categories drawing from the presidential debates.

At first, debate I consisted of (a) law including law enforcement (individuals and agencies are responsible for enforcing laws and maintaining public order and public safety) and fairness for all people (individuals breaking the law would be punished and those obeying the law would not be punished), (b) human rights including

the protection of human rights (protecting the rights and freedoms of individuals and societies), (c) corruption relating to eradicating corruption (strategies for eliminating corruption, and (d) terrorism relating to delivering comprehensive counter-terrorism strategies.

Debate II consisted of (a) energy is about a steady supply for economic growth, (b) food includes low and stable food price, (c) infrastructure includes building structures and facilities, (d) natural resources include increasing production and consumption, and (e) the environment is about the protection of the environment.

Debate III consisted of (a) education relating to improving the education system that emphasized job creators rather than job seekers, (b) health relating to increasing the number of regional referral hospital and stocking enough medicine, (c) employment relating to putting in place mechanisms to help small business and bringing down employment rates, and (d) social and culture relating to implementing national planning to help small business and bringing down unemployment rates.

Debate IV consisted of (a) ideology relating to strengthening Pancasila as an ideology of Indonesia and unity in diversity, (b) governance/democracy relating to the rule of law or free and fair elections or restoration of term limits, (c) security relating to creating peace and strengthening the army and the maintenance of law and order for all citizens, and (d) the international relationship relating to building and maintaining good neighborliness and a

good relationship with other nations of the international community.

Debate V consisted of (a) economy relating to stabilizing and developing financial services, industrialization, science and innovation, tourism, agriculture, mining, oil, gas, and sustainability, (b) social welfare relating to improving the livelihood of civil servants through better remuneration and housing, (c) investment relating to promoting economic investment and investment policy to attract the investors, and (d) industry relating to supporting industries for economic growth.

At last, other variables determining voting turnouts consisted of (a) family relating to family structure and the background of the members of the family such as their career and businesses if there are any, (b) education relating to the degree, level of education, and institutions where the candidate took the degree, including awards and school performance, (c) religion relating to belief, faith, and practices of such to a higher being, (d) race/ethnicity relating to the nationality or ancestry of the candidate, and (e) level of experience in politics relating to the years and the previous positions held by the candidate.

Although it should be noted that the participants during the debate III were only the vice-presidential candidates, the researchers still included the issues because these were critical issues that were needed to be addressed.

Pre-testing categories of issues were conducted to measure the inter-coder reliability rate. It is to ensure that the

categories of issues stated in the coding instructions were mutually exclusive, exhaustive, and reliable. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p. 172), the recommended subsample of the data is between 10 percent and 25 percent, and this will be re-analyzed by independent coders to calculate an overall inter-coder reliability coefficient rate.

The researchers downloaded samples from the Jakarta Globe to be utilized in the pre-testing. Using Cohen's Kappa, with the help of SPSS, the researchers calculated their inter-coder reliability. During their first attempt to code, they were not able to comply with the reliability passing rate wherein coders 1 and 3, and coders 1 and 2 got a fair rate ( $k=0.37$ ;  $k=0.36$ ), while coders 2 and 3 got a reasonable rate ( $k=0.62$ ). On their second attempt, however, they were able to pass the inter-coder reliability test and get an outstanding rate (coders 1 and 3:  $k=0.83$ ; coders 1 and 2:  $k=0.84$ ; coders 2 and 3:  $k=0.94$ ).

Using a quantitative design for this study, the researchers used data collection methods and techniques geared towards content analysis, which is more concerned with measurement and quantification. Moreover, the researchers utilized the SPSS software in analyzing the data for this study.

## FINDINGS

This study investigates the news coverage in *The Jakarta Post* from January to April 2019, leading to the 2019 Indonesian national election. Specifically, it focused on reporting political news on the two presidential candidates and how they appear in this online news portal in terms of national issue frames.

### **The Volume of News Coverage by *The Jakarta Post* for Each Presidential Candidate**

The findings reveal that most news articles exposed Joko Widodo (79.8 percent), while a significant majority of news covered Prabowo Subianto (64.7 percent). Moreover, McNemar's test of related samples shows that there is a significant difference in the news coverage of Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto,  $p = 0.000$ .

### **The Issues Linked to Each Presidential Candidate**

The top five issues most covered by *The Jakarta Post* on Joko Widodo were about governance (17.6 percent), experience in politics (16.8 percent), human rights (13.4 percent), security (10.9 percent), and law (10.1 percent). Meanwhile, the top five issues most covered by *The Jakarta Post* on Prabowo Subianto were about governance (34.5 percent), level of experience in politics (10.1 percent), human rights (10.1 percent), ideology (7.6 percent), and security (7.6 percent).

**Table 1 Volume of News Coverage (N=119)**

Candidates	Frequency	Percentage
Joko Widodo	95	79.8
Prabowo Subianto	77	64.7

Notes: Multiple Response

McNemar's Test:  $p < .01$

Source: Primary Data

**Table 2 Issues Covered by *The Jakarta Post* (N=119)**

Issues	Joko Widodo		Prabowo Subianto	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Governance/democracy	21	17.6	41	34.5
Level of experience in politics	20	16.8	12	10.1
Human rights	16	13.4	12	10.1
Security	13	10.9	9	7.6
Law	12	10.1	9	7.6
Infrastructure	10	8.4	3	2.5
Economy	10	8.4	6	5.0
Social and culture	7	5.9	4	3.4
Education	6	5.0	4	3.4
Corruption	5	4.2	3	2.5
Ideology	5	4.2	9	7.6
Religion	5	4.2	6	5.0
Food	4	3.4	2	1.7
Employment	4	3.4	7	5.9
Terrorism	3	2.5	0	0
Environment	3	2.5	2	1.7
International relationship	3	2.5	2	1.7
Family	3	2.5	1	0.8
Energy	2	1.7	1	0.8
Natural resources	2	1.7	1	0.8
Health	2	1.7	0	0
Welfare	2	1.7	3	2.5
Investment	2	1.7	1	0.8
Race	2	1.7	2	1.7
Industry	1	0.8	2	1.7
Educational background	0	0	0	0

Source: Primary Data

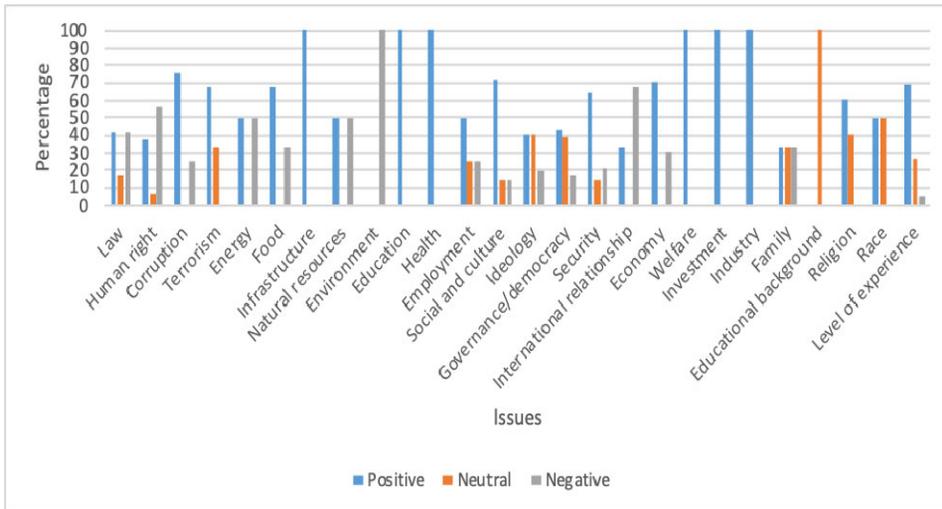
Regarding the coverage of issues between the two presidential candidates, the issue of governance and democracy was discussed more on Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. However, the issues were more distributed in the coverage of *The Jakarta Post* for Joko Widodo. On the other hand, there was a substantial discussion on the issue of governance and democracy on Prabowo than the other issues.

The issue of educational background was not covered for both presidential candidates. Also, terrorism and health issues were not covered for Prabowo Subianto.

These issues were also not substantial for Joko Widodo.

#### **The Tone of the Issues Framed for Each Presidential Candidate**

*The Jakarta Post* framed Joko Widodo (22 out of 26 issues) positively. Industry, investment, welfare, health, education, and infrastructure issues were all positively framed. Joko Widodo had four issues neutrally framed by *The Jakarta Post*. They are ideology, family, educational background, and race or ethnicity. However, in human rights, environment, and international issues, he was negatively framed.



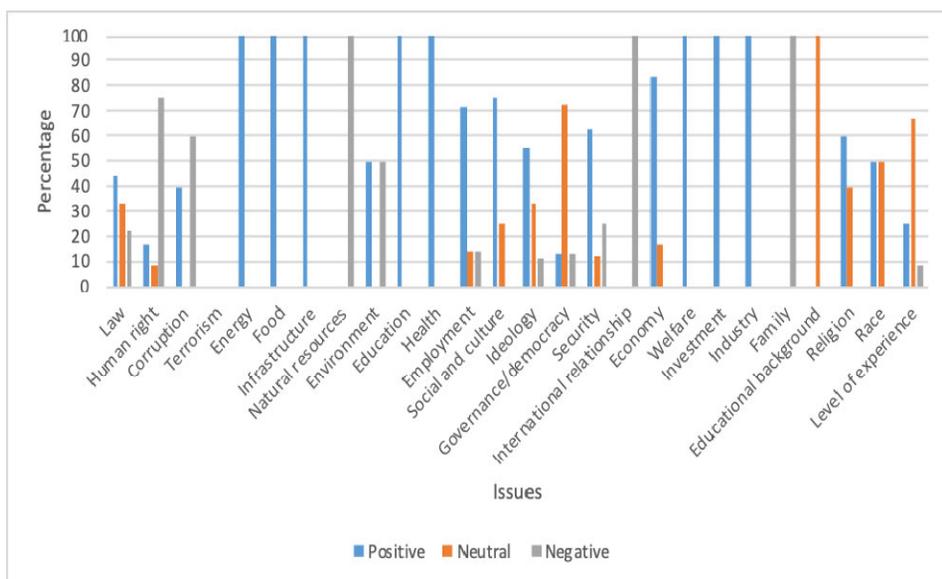
**Chart 1 The Tone of the Issues Framed for Joko Widodo**

Source: Primary Data

*The Jakarta Post* framed Prabowo Subianto (17 out of 26 issues) positively. Like Jokowi, industry, investment, welfare, health, education, infrastructure issues were all positively framed, adding food and energy on the list. Prabowo was neutrally framed by *The Jakarta Post* in the issues of governance or democracy, educational background, race or ethnicity, and level of experiences in politics. However, similar again with Jokowi, he was negatively

framed in human rights, environment, and international issues.

Hence, *The Jakarta Post* framed both Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto positively. On the other hand, in framing specific issues, some differences can be seen. For instance, in framing corruption issues, *The Jakarta Post* tended to frame Jokowi Dodo positively, while Prabowo Subianto was negatively framed. It was also interesting to note that although both



**Chart 2 The Tone of the Issues Framed for Prabowo Subianto**

Source: Primary Data

candidates were negatively framed by *The Jakarta Post* in the issues of natural resources and environment, Prabowo Subianto was more negatively framed in the issue of natural resources. Meanwhile, Joko Widodo was more negatively framed in the issue of environment.

There was the same number of issues neutrally framed by *The Jakarta Post*. Joko Widodo had four issues neutrally framed by *The Jakarta Post*: ideology, family, educational background, and race, while Prabowo Subianto had four issues neutrally framed: governance, educational background, race, and level of experience in politics. However, in human rights, environment, and international issues, both candidates are negatively framed.

We further analyzed the data, wherein we can see the overall tone framing of *The Jakarta Post* between the two presidential candidates. Using McNemar’s two related samples test, findings showed that there was no significant difference in the positive

framing between Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto in terms ( $p = 0.052$ ). Likewise, there was no significant difference in the negative framing by *The Jakarta Post* between Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto ( $p = 0.210$ ). However, McNemar revealed a significant difference in the framing of *The Jakarta Post* between the two presidential candidates in terms of neutral framing ( $p=0.005$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

This study investigates the news coverage in *The Jakarta Post* from January to April 2019 prior to the national election, particularly on how this media frames its news reports on the two presidential candidates in terms of national issues. The results revealed that *The Jakarta Post* tends to cover Joko Widodo more than Prabowo Subianto. This media gave more opportunities for Joko Widodo to engage with the voters.

Covering more Joko Widodo then became agenda-setting and framing of *The Jakarta Post*. It can influence voter turnout

**Table 3 McNemar Result for Tone Framing between Two Candidates (N=119)**

Framing	Frequency	Percentage
Positive		
Joko Widodo	76	63.9
Prabowo Subianto	66	55.5
Notes:		
McNemar’s Test: $p=0.052$		
Negative	29	24.4
Prabowo Subianto	23	19.3
Notes:		
McNemar’s Test: $p=0.210$		
Neutral		
Joko Widodo	23	19.3
Prabowo Subianto	39	32.8
Notes:		
McNemar’s Test: $p=0.005$		

Source: Primary Data

through the contents that informed the candidate, and it also can shape the voters' preference, particularly when *The Jakarta Post* produced the online edition since the internet provides a great opportunity for traditional newspapers to migrate to online newspapers. This edition is free to be accessed and becomes an excellent tool to disseminate the information massively. The finding also emphasizes that *The Jakarta Post* takes the advantage of the strengths of this new medium to disseminate its news content about presidential issues during the debates to its readers.

There was a significant difference in the volume of news coverage between the two presidential candidates. Among the top five issues covered by *The Jakarta Post* on the two presidential candidates, governance and democracy, level of experience in politics, and security were similarly linked to both candidates. *The Jakarta Post* tend to cover Joko Widodo among all issues used as variables in this study except for the educational background. Meanwhile, Prabowo Subianto was heavily covered on governance and democracy, displaying a massive gap in all other issues. We found a large volume of Prabowo Subianto on governance (34.5 percent), but if we are going to see from the tone of the issue, it was neutrally framed.

The results of the data suggest that *The Jakarta Post* demonstrated equal valence framing on its coverage between the two presidential candidates last April 2019 elections, specifically that there was no significant difference in the positive

framing and negative framing between Joko Widodo and Prabowo Subianto. In the neutral framing, however, the results show a significant difference in the valence coverage of *The Jakarta Post*, wherein it covered more neutral framing of issues on Prabowo Subianto than Joko Widodo. This difference indicates a slight bias toward a specific candidate.

News coverage, particularly online, where information can become more accessible, is crucial to Indonesian voters' choice and democracy. According to Kenney and Simpson, political bias happens when news media favors one candidate or political party (Lo, et al., 1996, p. 44). *The Jakarta Post*, being an English online newspaper, extends its reach of readership globally, and therefore giving more coverage about Joko Widodo would entail more information about him not only to Indonesians but also global readers. This is critical, however, to Indonesian voters who prefer to read *The Jakarta Post* that they would get more information about Joko Widodo than Prabowo Subianto and affect their voting preferences. Therefore, this result highlights a study of Simarmata (2017, p. 153), stating that the media tends to give more attention to specific political candidates or parties. The media has been involved in the election by choosing which candidates or parties to cover and how much they are covered.

The greater news visibility changes the voting preferences about a particular party during an electoral campaign (Johann, et al., 2017, p. 263). Significantly, *The Jakarta*

*Post* tends to be balanced in framing both candidates. This shows that *The Jakarta Post* does not support one of the candidates. Both candidates get the same opportunity to be framed objectively. Thus, it suggests balanced framing for both candidates and tells us that responsible news delivery exists in fast globally reached readership like *The Jakarta Post*. Indeed, responsibility and value for democracy, contribute to creating an efficient citizen and society.

The findings of this study also offered some new insights towards a better understanding of the framing theory. For instance, it is interesting to note that online newspapers, such as *The Jakarta Post* strongly focused on the debate issues in which these issues are heavily discussed among the Indonesian people. For this study alone, it appears that *The Jakarta Post* wanted to bring the debate issues into a higher level of public awareness by focusing on the issue of governance/democracy. This makes a great sense since this issue has strong relationship to the leadership (Woods, 2004, p. 22).

It is also critical to note that whenever *The Jakarta Post* used a framing strategy in portraying the debate issues, it is always about the credibility of leadership of the presidential candidates. However, issues relating to background of the family, education levels, race/ethnicity, and level of experiences in politics are not heavily covered. This demonstrates that *The Jakarta Post* only prioritized the debate issues although these issues are also important in the context of Indonesia. As the

former president of Indonesia, Megawati Soekarno Putri explained that knowing the background of presidential candidates is crucial since it can help the voters to vote their candidates (Tempo.co, 2004). A researcher of Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), Almas Sjafrina (in Suparman, 2019) added that in the election, the voters need more reviews regarding the background of the political candidates and to recognize track records of the candidates will prevent the potential for wrong choice.

Nevertheless, *The Jakarta Post* did a good job of covering the debate issues of the two presidential candidates during the 2019 presidential campaign. The reports projected that the presidential candidates have their strengths and weakness to be an Indonesian president. Moreover, it is worth noting that the quality of the news coverage toward debate issues of the two presidential candidates, not only the quantity, is also crucial to the presidential candidates. The readers of *The Jakarta Post* then may rely on its contents helping them to make their electoral decisions.

It is also worth mentioning that studies on media and politics, particularly during elections, suggest that media, for instance *The Jakarta Post*, play an essential role during the campaign when voters are highly dependent on media to get informed about political candidates. This research contributes to this body of knowledge by investigating an emerging channel, online media. Although traditional media are still being consumed, Indonesia is moving towards digital media. As of 2019, Indonesia

has an internet penetration of 68% (Statista, 2020). However, now, broadcast, including digital media, is still being regulated by the Indonesian government, including licensing.

## CONCLUSION

Mass media, including the Indonesian online news portal such as *The Jakarta Post*, functioned as gatekeepers of the fourth pillars of democracy, have balance framing for both candidates. It highlights that responsible news delivery in fast globally reached readership such as *The Jakarta Post*. Responsibility, as well as value for democracy, contribute to creating an efficient citizen and society. This study brought a new understanding of the reliability of online news portals.

It is clear to note that media coverage of presidential candidates is important since it communicates their positions to their readers. *The Jakarta Post* covered substantive issues to both candidates. The study revealed a significant difference in the volume of news coverage between the two presidential candidates in terms of neutral framing.

Finally, the results of the research presented in this article suggest that media should be able to fulfil its role in effectively informing citizens about the candidates without bias. Media bias can lead to electoral behaviour since the media, for instance *The Jakarta Post* has a great potential for influencing their readers. However, the media has played its role to improve citizens' understanding of presidential candidates.

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