

Examining the Role of Local Media in Political Communication during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections: A Case Study in Bima City

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Abstrak: *This study investigates the role of local media in shaping political communication during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City, with a particular focus on the accessibility of information influencing the electability of candidate pairs. The research highlights key challenges faced by local media, such as political bias undermining the objectivity of reporting and the shifting support of political parties affecting public perceptions. The study aims to examine how local media disseminate political information, its influence on public participation, and the adaptation of local media to the digital era, particularly through the utilization of social media platforms by political figures. Findings reveal that local media play a pivotal role in fostering political education and encouraging public engagement. Despite this, concerns regarding journalistic independence and neutrality persist. While local media effectively communicate candidate profiles and policy proposals, biases in reporting can distort public perceptions and hinder democratic quality. Furthermore, the use of diverse news formats, including interviews and opinion pieces, enhances public comprehension of political dynamics. This research concludes that local media hold substantial potential as intermediaries between political leaders and the electorate. However, advancing professionalism and adherence to journalistic standards of balance and impartiality remains imperative to fostering a more transparent and accountable democratic process.*

Keywords: *examination, local media, political communication, simultaneous regional elections.*

Abstrak: *Studi ini menyelidiki peran media lokal dalam membentuk komunikasi politik selama Pilkada Serentak 2024 di Kota Bima, dengan fokus khusus pada aksesibilitas informasi yang mempengaruhi elektabilitas pasangan kandidat. Penelitian ini menyoroti tantangan utama yang dihadapi oleh media lokal, seperti bias politik yang merusak objektivitas pelaporan dan pergeseran dukungan partai politik yang memengaruhi persepsi publik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana media lokal menyebarkan informasi politik, pengaruhnya terhadap partisipasi publik, dan adaptasi media lokal terhadap era digital, khususnya melalui pemanfaatan platform media sosial oleh tokoh politik. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa media lokal memainkan peran penting dalam mendorong pendidikan politik dan mendorong keterlibatan publik. Meskipun demikian, kekhawatiran mengenai independensi dan netralitas jurnalistik tetap ada. Sementara media lokal secara efektif mengomunikasikan profil kandidat dan proposal kebijakan, bias dalam pelaporan dapat mendistorsi persepsi publik dan menghambat kualitas demokrasi. Selain itu, penggunaan beragam format berita, termasuk wawancara dan opini, meningkatkan pemahaman publik tentang dinamika politik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa media lokal memiliki potensi besar sebagai perantara antara pemimpin politik dan pemilih. Namun, memajukan profesionalisme dan kepatuhan terhadap standar keseimbangan dan ketidakberpihakan jurnalistik tetap penting untuk mendorong proses demokrasi yang lebih transparan dan akuntabel.*

Kata kunci: *ujian, media lokal, komunikasi politik, pilkada serentak.*

1. Introduction

The role of local media in political communication in Indonesia is fraught with challenges, particularly in terms of professionalism and independence (Muhtadi, 2019); (Sabarudin, 2024). As intermediaries between political leaders and the public, local media bear a critical responsibility for ensuring transparency and fairness in political news coverage, especially during electoral periods (Bungin, Syarif, Teguh, & Rossafine, 2019). However, existing studies highlight the significant dependency of many local media outlets on local power structures, which hampers their ability to function effectively as watchdogs of power (Suryasuciramdhan, Ramadhan, & Deden, 2024); (Amisan, Pioh, & Pangemanan, 2024). For instance, research on local print media across regions such as Lampung, West Java, West Kalimantan, and West Nusa Tenggara reveals an alarming lack of balanced reporting on critical political issues, including corruption and public service delivery (Fathurrijal, Ishanan, Yusron, & Suhadah, 2024). Instead, media coverage often exhibits bias, particularly when addressing issues linked to the interests of local elites, thereby undermining their roles as impartial informers and watchdogs (Tasrif Tasrif, 2023).

A key issue confronting local media is the low level of professionalism in news management and production processes (Fauziah, Bimantara, Bahrenina, & Pertiwi, 2023). Many outlets operate under the constraints of inadequately skilled human resources, while journalists frequently face insufficient remuneration. Such conditions often compel media professionals to form alliances with local governments or political elites, further eroding the credibility of local journalism (Mahmudah, 2022). This dynamic weakens the local media's function as a cornerstone of democracy (Susilo Adi Purwantoro, Riyadi Syahardani, Erwin Hermawan, Aang Kuvaeni, & Indarti, 2021). In some cases, the establishment of local media serves as an extension of political agendas, with political elites actively involved in editorial decision-making processes. As a result, these media platforms frequently operate as instruments for advancing elite interests rather than acting as independent entities advocating for public concerns (Augesthine, Trisiana, Sayyidina, & Quljannah, 2022).

In the context of political communication, the relevance of local media has intensified in the digital era (Wahyuningroem, 2021). Politicians at both national and local levels increasingly

leverage social media to directly engage with the public and garner support during election campaigns (Ibrahim & Samsiah, 2022). Platforms such as Twitter, for instance, facilitate image-building efforts and the optimization of political communication strategies (Haq & Rafni, 2024). However, findings from a study in Malang, East Java, indicate that increased social media activity does not necessarily translate into electoral success for candidates (Pratama, Hadi, & Umami, 2024). This suggests that while social media serves as a potent communication tool, the effectiveness of political campaigns also hinges on complementary strategies, including the strategic use of traditional and local mass media to advance agenda-setting objectives (Nadia, 2023).

As intermediaries between public and political interests, local media bear the responsibility of ensuring balanced political information dissemination (Maharani & Mandira, 2024). Fairness in reporting, which encompasses principles such as neutrality and equitable representation of opposing views, serves as a critical measure of media professionalism (Novadilla, Said, & Miranda, 2019); (Kwon, Shao, & Nah, 2021). When local media fulfill this role effectively, they function not only as conduits of information between politicians and the public but also as guardians of democratic integrity (Pancane & Sukareni, 2024). Under ideal circumstances, local media can act as watchdogs by exposing abuses of power and equipping the public with the information needed to make informed political decisions. However, realizing this potential necessitates a concerted effort to improve professionalism, both in internal organizational management and in the quality of content delivered to the public (Khairul Annisa & Yusuf Afandi, 2023).

The 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections (*Pilkada Serentak*) in Bima City offer a compelling case study for understanding the dynamics of local media in political communication. These elections illuminate the role of local media as a bridge between regional head candidates and the electorate (T Tasrif & Haeril, 2024); (Hidayatullah, 2024). A primary challenge in this context lies in the media's ability to convey objective and unbiased political messages while simultaneously navigating their economic dependencies (Sahputra, Muda, Hidayat, & Waridah, 2020). In Bima City, as in other regions of Indonesia, the 2024 *Pilkada* features several candidate pairs competing for regional leadership. Amidst complex political strategies, coalition-

building, and the dissemination of campaign messages, local media emerge as key platforms for this electoral contest (Septiani, 2019). They play an instrumental role in disseminating information to both the public and political elites, while also shaping the public perception of candidates (Diazaki & Mubarak, 2024).

In the realm of *Pilkada* political communication, accessibility to media is a critical factor influencing the electability of candidates (Gilardi, Gessler, Kubli, & Müller, 2022). Candidates who effectively utilize local media are often better positioned to connect with voters. However, this dynamic presents challenges, as local media in Bima City are frequently accused of partiality toward specific candidates or political factions. The involvement of some local media as political agents for local elites raises serious concerns regarding their independence and objectivity. For the public, this lack of impartiality undermines access to reliable and balanced political information, which is crucial for making informed electoral decisions. When local media prioritize political or economic interests over their educational and informational roles, they fail to meet their fundamental obligation to provide accurate and objective content, thereby diminishing their contribution to the democratic process.

A critical issue in understanding the role of local media during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City is the phenomenon of fluctuating political party support for candidate pairs. This dynamic is evident in numerous regions, including Bima City, where shifts in political party allegiance often occur due to candidates' electability or behind-the-scenes political negotiations. Local media in Bima City play a pivotal role in conveying these developments to the public, yet the question of independence remains central. Many candidate pairs leverage local media as campaign tools, employing diverse political communication strategies that span traditional news outlets to social media platforms. The way media present such information, whether balanced or biased, profoundly impacts public perception of the candidates (Aminah, Apriani, Pranasari, Indarti, & Herlina, 2020).

Social media, in particular, has emerged as a significant arena for political communication. Politicians in Bima City increasingly utilize platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to engage directly with voters. With Indonesia's growing number of internet users, these platforms provide an efficient means to disseminate political messages widely and rapidly.

Social media enables politicians to not only communicate their agendas but also interact with the public in real-time. However, these advantages are accompanied by challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation and the manipulation of opinions through bot accounts. In this context, local media in Bima City have a critical role in filtering accurate and accountable information, ensuring that voters are equipped to make informed, fact-based decisions. While social media offers numerous benefits, such as enhanced personal branding for politicians, irresponsible usage risks undermining the democratic process (Asdhie Kodiyat & Hakim Siagian, 2020).

The examination of local media's role in political communication during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City reveals substantial potential for these media to act as effective intermediaries between political leaders and the public. However, challenges such as a lack of independence, political bias, and economic pressures frequently undermine this potential. It is imperative for local media in Bima City to uphold professionalism by adhering to principles of balanced and objective journalism. In doing so, they can make meaningful contributions to the democratic process, empowering the public to make better-informed political decisions. Additionally, politicians and political parties must exercise responsibility in their use of social media, ensuring the dissemination of accurate messages that do not exacerbate societal polarization. The synergy of well-managed local media and responsible social media use can create a robust framework for healthy political communication in this digital age.

This research aims to explore the role of local media in political communication during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City, with a focus on how local media present political information to the public and its influence on candidate electability. It also examines challenges such as neutrality, political interests, and economic pressures on media independence. The novelty of this research lies in its in-depth analysis of the local media's function as a bridge between political actors and the public, particularly within the context of shifting party coalitions and fluctuating candidate support. Furthermore, the study investigates the integration of social media in political communication, a topic that has received limited attention in prior studies of political communication in Indonesia. The findings of this research

are expected to offer fresh insights into local-level political communication strategies and provide recommendations for enhancing the professionalism and independence of local media.

2. Result

This study identifies three primary indicators that underscore the dynamics and contributions of local media in the realm of political communication during the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City. The first indicator is the role of local media in political education. This aspect highlights how media serve as a platform for educating the public about the political process, including the policies, visions, and track records of the candidates. By offering informative and accessible content, local media can empower voters to make informed decisions. In the context of Bima City, where voter education is integral to the democratic process, the capacity of local media to provide comprehensive and impartial information is particularly significant.

The second indicator focuses on the bias inherent in local media. The influence of media bias on public opinion and political choices cannot be understated. This study critically examines how partiality in reporting can shape public perception of candidates, potentially swaying electoral outcomes. The issue of independence is at the core of this discussion, as local media in Bima City face economic and political pressures that may compromise their neutrality. Recognizing these challenges, the study aims to provide insights into the extent and implications of media bias within the local political landscape.

The third indicator explores the variety of news formats employed by local media. The diversity of media channels, including print newspapers, online platforms, and radio broadcasts, reflects the multifaceted approach to disseminating political information. Each format offers unique advantages, from the immediacy of online content to the accessibility of radio broadcasts in areas with limited internet connectivity. By analyzing these different formats, the study assesses how effectively local media reach and engage with diverse audiences in Bima City. Through these three indicators, political education, media bias, and diverse news formats, this research seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of local media in shaping political communication. The findings are expected to offer valuable insights into the strengths and limitations of local

media in facilitating a democratic electoral process, particularly in the context of the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City.

2.1 The Role of Local Media in Political Education

Local media play an essential role in fostering political education during regional head elections (Pilkada). As the most accessible source of information for the public, local media significantly contribute to disseminating relevant, impartial, and accurate political content (Maier & Nai, 2020). The primary objective of political education through local media is not only to raise public awareness regarding voting rights and the significance of political participation but also to enable citizens to comprehend the Pilkada process comprehensively. This includes an understanding of electoral mechanisms, candidate profiles, and proposed policy (Chen, 2021); (Issn, 2019).

The role of local media in political education during the Pilkada encompasses several critical aspects. Firstly, as a primary information provider, local media deliver comprehensive coverage of the Pilkada stages, including candidate registration, campaigning, voting processes, and result tabulation. This continuous coverage ensures that the public is informed of election developments and can access reliable information to make more informed political decisions (Nai, 2021).

Secondly, local media act as intermediaries between candidates and voters, facilitating the dissemination of candidate profiles, track records, and policy agendas. Through interviews, political debates, and special features, local media provide the public with deeper insights into the candidates and their proposed programs. Additionally, local media contribute to fostering political ethics by educating the public on the importance of integrity in elections, free from corruption, and on voters' rights and responsibilities. These efforts encourage public engagement in political processes at both local and national levels, not merely as voters but also as critical observers of the electoral process.

Empirical studies reveal that in the context of the 2024 Simultaneous Pilkada, local media have played a pivotal role in enhancing public awareness about the significance of political participation, particularly in Bima City. The political education provided by local media has

equipped citizens with a better understanding of election mechanisms, their political rights, and the broader implications of political decisions on everyday life. Moreover, with the rapid expansion of social media, the function of local media has evolved to encompass both traditional platforms, such as newspapers and brochures, and dynamic digital channels. This study aims to investigate the role of local media, both print and digital, in disseminating political information and its impact on community participation in the 2024 Simultaneous Pilkada in Bima City.

The findings indicate that local media in Bima City, such as brochures and other print formats, have positively contributed to enhancing public understanding of the Pilkada process. The effectiveness of these media lies in their engaging designs and use of accessible language, which facilitate the dissemination of relevant political information. Additionally, local media often prioritize local issues that receive limited attention from national outlets, fostering a stronger connection between the public and the information being presented. However, the impact of print media on increasing political participation remains relatively limited; previous research highlights that print media influence political participation by only 12%. This underscores the need for stronger collaboration between local media and local government to maximize the efficacy of political campaigns through these platforms.

The integration of social media has become a critical component of political communication in the digital era. The study reveals that social media offers broader access to political processes, particularly for younger demographics, allowing for more active engagement. Through social media, citizens can access information directly, interact with candidates for regional leadership, and contribute to a more inclusive public discourse. Nevertheless, social media also poses challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation and the potential for political polarization. To address these issues, local media must filter and verify information, ensuring the dissemination of accurate, high-quality content. In this capacity, local media in Bima City play an essential role in maintaining the integrity of political communication during the Pilkada by acting as a mediator between political candidates and the public. Beyond information dissemination, local media also function as instruments of social control. During the Pilkada, they can serve as watchdogs to ensure that electoral processes are conducted with transparency and fairness.

Local media in Bima City, through real-time coverage and investigative reporting, can uncover irregularities in the electoral process. This aligns with the media's broader role as a 'watchdog' dedicated to upholding accountability and transparency in governance. For example, investigative reporting by local media in other regions has exposed issues such as human rights violations in the extractive industry, demonstrating their ability to influence public opinion and mobilize political support through balanced and critical reporting. The role of local media in political communication in Bima City underscores the importance of collaboration among local governments, electoral agencies, and the media. Dissemination of information through a variety of media channels, both print and digital, has proven effective in increasing public political participation. However, a significant challenge moving forward is how local media can continue to innovate in presenting political information that is engaging and comprehensible to diverse segments of society. Through robust collaboration among these stakeholders, local media can further contribute to strengthening local democracy and fostering more inclusive political participation in the 2024 Simultaneous Pilkada.

This study emphasizes that local media are not merely providers of information but also act as catalysts for change in the political landscape. By delivering consistent, high-quality political education, local media in Bima City can promote a more politically informed, critical, and participatory society. The 2024 Simultaneous Pilkada represents a pivotal moment for local media to assert their significant role in political communication and to contribute to the development of a more robust and sustainable democratic future in Bima City.

2.2 Local Media Bias

Media bias in the context of regional elections, commonly referred to as Pilkada in Indonesia, denotes the preferential stance or partiality displayed by media outlets toward specific candidates or political groups vying for regional leadership positions (Marquart, Ohme, & Möller, 2020); (Jandevi, 2019). This bias often manifests in various forms, such as selective narrative framing, disproportionately positive coverage, or the omission of negative aspects involving favored candidates. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon, including economic dependencies, personal affiliations between media owners and candidates, or

political pressures. Such bias carries significant implications, as it may shape public perceptions and potentially influence electoral outcomes (Oluwatosin, Olusoji, Olusola, & Popoola, 2020).

The presence of media bias in regional elections poses challenges to democratic integrity. When media fail to maintain neutrality and exhibit favoritism, the public receives skewed or incomplete information, thereby hindering their ability to make informed, objective decisions (Pokhrel, 2024). Furthermore, biased reporting undermines the media's role as a critical watchdog in the political process, compromising both transparency and accountability. While media bias can occasionally serve as a vehicle for political mobilization, particularly in amplifying the visibility of underrepresented candidates, such practices must be reconciled with the ethical imperatives of journalism, which prioritize accuracy, impartiality, and fairness (Ali, Habes, & Qamar, 2020).

In the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Bima City, the bias exhibited by local media highlights a compelling case for examining political communication dynamics. Local media play a pivotal role in disseminating political information and shaping public perceptions of candidates. However, some outlets have demonstrated clear favoritism, either overtly or implicitly, by providing unbalanced coverage. This may include disproportionately positive portrayals of preferred candidates or the omission of unfavorable issues. The roots of such bias often lie in economic incentives, political alliances, or personal relationships that compromise journalistic neutrality. In Bima's political landscape, media bias not only influences local political dynamics but also underscores the broader role of media in shaping voter behavior and public opinion.

The Simultaneous Regional Elections 2024 in Bima City also indicate that local media, besides being a source of information, can be used as an effective campaign tool. Media bias is evident in the framing of political news. This framing refers to how media highlight certain aspects while ignoring others to shape public opinion. In this context, biased media often frame news to project a positive image of the candidates they support, while news about their competitors tends to be sidelined or presented negatively. For instance, some media may focus more on the flagship programs of certain candidates without providing space for other

candidates to showcase their strengths. This phenomenon creates an information imbalance that can influence the political choices of the public.

In addition to bias, local media also control the dissemination of issues relevant to the local community. In the 2024 regional elections, issues related to the economy, infrastructure, and religious identity emerged as significant factors highlighted in news coverage. Based on existing data, media supporting a particular candidate tend to emphasize achievements or programs related to these issues to garner sympathy from specific voter groups, particularly from the middle class and the religious majority. As observed in the 2019 presidential election, where voters with strong religious backgrounds tended to choose candidates that aligned with their religious identities, a similar phenomenon occurs in the Bima regional elections. Media bias in this context leverages social and religious identities to shape political support, a strategy that has proven effective but poses the potential for increasing political polarization within society.

Local media bias does not always have negative implications; however, in some cases, it can pose challenges to the democratic process. When local media lean towards bias, voters may not receive balanced and objective information, which can ultimately undermine the quality of their political decisions. Elections, which should serve as a means for the public to evaluate and select the best leaders, can become propaganda arenas controlled by media power. Therefore, it is crucial for local media to maintain their independence and professionalism in reporting political issues. The use of more ethical and professional media can enhance the quality of democracy, enabling the public to make better decisions based on accurate and balanced information.

Ultimately, examining the role of local media in the Simultaneous Regional Elections 2024 in Bima City reveals the significant influence media have on local political processes. Although local media play a vital role in conveying political information to the public, the bias exhibited by some outlets indicates a more complex dynamic in the relationship between media, politics, and the public. Media bias can be leveraged by candidates to boost their popularity; however, it can also harm the quality of democracy if not balanced with good journalistic ethics. Thus, improving regulations, transparency, and accountability within local media is crucial for preserving the integrity of the electoral process in the future.

2.3 Variations in News Formats

Variations in news formats during regional elections refer to the diverse methods employed by media outlets to disseminate political information to the public (Skogerbø & Karlsen, 2020). Both local and national media adopt various reporting formats to engage audiences, effectively communicate political content, and shape public perceptions and electoral choices (Petrova, Sen, & Yildirim, 2021). Commonly utilized formats include news reports, interviews, opinion analyses, investigative journalism, and infographics, each contributing uniquely to the framing of political discourse and offering a range of perspectives to the electorate (Bappayo, Abubakar, & Yushau, 2021).

One widely used format is live news reporting, which provides real-time updates on campaign developments, candidates' policy platforms, and issues pertinent to voters (Malev, 2021); (Cagé, 2020). This format often emphasizes immediacy, presenting the electorate with up-to-date information on campaign activities and critical election-related events. Another prominent format is candidate and community leader interviews, which offer deeper insights into the visions and missions of regional head candidates. Opinion analyses, frequently featuring political experts or commentators, provide contextual evaluations of ongoing political dynamics. Meanwhile, investigative journalism delves into hidden aspects of the electoral process, such as potential campaign violations or political manipulation, offering the public a more nuanced understanding of the political landscape. These varied formats not only enrich the delivery of political information but also empower voters to make informed decisions during elections (Saleh, Rudianto, Anshori, & Adhani, 2021).

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Research underscores the importance of diverse reporting formats in shaping public perceptions during the Simultaneous Regional Elections 2024 in Bima City. Local media, while primarily serving as information providers, also play a strategic role in political communication by leveraging different formats to reach and influence audiences. In the case of Bima City, some local media outlets exhibit partisanship, favoring specific candidates through their coverage, while others strive for neutrality and balance. This dichotomy highlights the complex relationship between media practices and the electoral process at the local level, offering valuable insights into the dynamics of political communication during regional elections.

Among the various formats employed, live reporting stands out as a dominant method used by local media to cover the elections. This format focuses on delivering timely updates on campaign activities, including the presentation of candidates' visions, missions, and policy platforms. In addition to providing insights into the political agenda, live reporting often highlights infractions of campaign regulations, such as breaches of ethical standards or neglect of health protocols by candidates' teams. By offering a comprehensive view of campaign developments

and electoral activities, live reporting enables the public to gain a clearer understanding of the regional election process and the behavior of candidates on the ground.

Complementing live reporting, in-depth interviews represent another critical format used by local media during the 2024 regional elections. These interviews offer a platform for delving into candidates' visions, missions, and detailed work plans, providing the public with insights into their approaches to pressing local issues such as infrastructure, education, and economic development. Through this format, voters gain a nuanced perspective on how candidates intend to address specific challenges facing Bima City. In-depth interviews also serve as a valuable tool for scrutinizing candidates' problem-solving abilities and their responsiveness to community concerns, aspects that often go unexplored in broader campaign narratives.

Opinion analysis is another widely used format that enhances the richness of media coverage. This format allows political experts and observers to share their insights on the electoral dynamics, including candidate strategies, voter behavior, and the potential implications of the election outcomes for the city's governance. These analyses often highlight deeper systemic issues, such as the persistence of clientelism or misuse of state resources by incumbents. Moreover, opinion pieces frequently explore the challenges faced by local media in maintaining neutrality, particularly when certain outlets exhibit overt partisanship. By providing expert commentary, opinion analysis fosters critical discourse and promotes greater public understanding of the political context.

In-depth investigative journalism further exemplifies the role of local media in fostering accountability and transparency. By uncovering concealed practices such as corruption, vote-buying, or the unethical allocation of public resources for campaign purposes, investigative reporting serves as a vital check on the electoral process. Media outlets employing this format function as watchdogs, shedding light on activities that could compromise the integrity of democracy in Bima City. Investigative journalism not only informs the public of irregularities but also pressures candidates and political actors to uphold ethical standards.

Infographics and data visualization offer yet another dimension to media coverage by presenting complex electoral information in an accessible format. From survey results and candidate profiles to quick count outcomes, infographics transform dense data into visually

engaging content. This format is particularly effective in capturing the attention of diverse audiences, including those less inclined to consume detailed reports. By simplifying intricate political information, infographics enable voters to grasp essential details quickly, enhancing their ability to make informed decisions.

Together, these diverse reporting formats underscore the strategic role of local media in shaping political communication during the Simultaneous Regional Elections 2024 in Bima City. Each format contributes uniquely to the dissemination of political information, providing the public with varied perspectives and insights. However, the effectiveness of these formats hinges on the ability of local media to maintain their independence and uphold journalistic ethics amidst political pressures. By ensuring objectivity and transparency, local media can serve as reliable conduits of information and guardians of democracy, helping to safeguard the electoral process against undue influence. The variation in news formats not only reflects the complexity of political dynamics in Bima City but also highlights the media's pivotal role in empowering voters and fostering democratic integrity.

3. Conclusion

Local media play a pivotal role in advancing political education, particularly through the dissemination of relevant and accurate information about electoral processes, candidate profiles, and proposed programs during regional elections (*Pilkada*). This function transcends mere information dissemination, embodying a significant educational role in fostering public awareness of voting rights, political ethics, and the importance of active electoral participation. By utilizing diverse platforms, including both print and digital media, local media effectively broaden their audience reach, leveraging the growing influence of social media in the digital age. This study underscores the indispensable role of local media in enhancing public political participation. Acting as intermediaries between candidates and voters, local media facilitate a deeper understanding of candidates' visions, missions, and track records through interviews, political debates, and specialized articles. Moreover, local media address regional issues often neglected by national outlets, thereby fostering a stronger connection between communities and the electoral process. Nevertheless, despite these contributions, the impact of local media on

political participation remains limited, with evidence suggesting that print media influence only 12% of public engagement. Consequently, stronger collaboration between local media and local governments is crucial to maximizing the effectiveness of political campaigns through media channels.

The research further identifies the phenomenon of media bias during regional elections in Bima City, where certain local outlets demonstrate favoritism toward specific candidates by disproportionately emphasizing positive attributes while omitting critical issues. Such biases have the potential to shape public perceptions and undermine democratic quality when ethical journalism standards are not upheld. Conversely, in certain contexts, media bias may serve as a mechanism for political mobilization, particularly for candidates seeking greater visibility and support.

Additionally, the diverse reporting formats employed by local media, such as live coverage, interviews, opinion pieces, investigative reporting, and infographics, play a strategic role in delivering political information. Each format offers unique perspectives, enhancing public comprehension of the electoral process and fostering more informed political opinions. In conclusion, the analysis of local media's role in the 2024 simultaneous regional elections in Bima City highlights the significant potential of local media in supporting a transparent, accountable, and participatory political process. However, the findings also underscore the need for ongoing innovation and adherence to principles of neutrality to optimize their contribution to democratic development.

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