

# **Effect of Partisanship on Hostile Media Effect in Indonesia Case Study: The Jakarta Elections**

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## *Abstract*

Convergence era has increased the amount of media channel and media content, that provide the audience to choose media based on their prior belief and avoid media that against them. This phenomenon was called hostile media effect. The tendency for individuals with a strong preexisting attitude on an issue to perceive media coverage as biased against their side and in favour of their antagonist's point of view. In Indonesia since the presidential election in 2014 that present only two candidates, Prabowo Subianto and Joko Widodo have changed political landscape into two sides. In Jakarta election the rivalry continued for Ahok's supporters was mainly Jokowi's supporters before, and Anies's was Prabowo's. Unfortunately, after Jakarta election, this polarization has become stronger, not only by political preference but also ethnicity, religion, race and inter-group relations. The polarization between the two camps was so prominent that it obscured other groups. Using opposite term like pluralism vs sectarian, rational vs racism, "short-tempered people" (kaum sumbu pendek) vs "robe-wearing thugs" (preman berjubah). The research found respondents identified as a partisan group that against Ahok, tended to perceived the article about the conflict between two group as biased against them. They believed news and media coverage from metrotvnews.com was unfair and take sides to against them. We concluded that hostile media effect has occurred in Moslem partisan, Whom perceived the same news as a bias against them..

**Keywords: bias; hostile media; intergroup conflict; partisan.**

## **Introduction**

In Indonesia electoral system with one man, one vote start at 2004, while previously both parliament and president was chosen by the council. This electoral process arises an uncertainty. To reduce this uncertainty or anxiety people gaining information about political party and candidates as a process before they making a decision (West & Turner, 2008)

Indonesian people still use mainstream media as main preference while collect information. Edelman Trust Barometer research shows that level of trust in media for Indonesia at 68% which is higher than other country (Edelman, 2016). Previously, the trend of information seeking was limited by the information that provided by mainstream media such as television, radio, and newspaper. Nowadays, after internet and convergence era has come, online media and social media becomes more popular for information reference. The difference with mainstream media which have an organized production process, online media and social media have user generated content that allows anyone to produce information (Nugroho, 2012).

Since begin in 2004, the General Election for both the President and the Regional Head has changed the map of the political landscape in Indonesia. Since 2009 loyalty of voters tends to go down (Republika, 2009). One of the cause is considered to young voters. In addition, about 30% of the average young voters still does not have a fixed political preferences, or often called swing voters, so the choice can still change (Okezone, 2016).

Young voters' access to the digital world also makes the distribution of information to attract young voters was booming in online media and social media. Unfortunately, the issues that

often arise in this election are issues related to ethnicity, religion, race, and inter-group relations. The issue of Religion itself becomes an issue that quite often appears in various elections. One of them was the issue of a blasphemy that resulted in two huge demonstrations on November 4th and November 2nd, 2016.

The vast amount of information provided by mass media, online media, and social media causes 'information tsunami'. With access to technology getting easier and cheaper, and faster for everyone. In effect, emerge a certain group of partisans that support one candidate and reject any information related to the other candidate. This is then called Hostile Media Effect. "People's tendency to perceive neutral news coverage as one-sided and unfair in favour of their opposing side" (Lin, Haridakis, & Hanson, 2016). A condition in which individuals who have become supporters of a group with bias assume that the news/information conveyed was supporting their opponent, even though the news/information is neutral.

In the context of elections, news related to candidates from certain camps is sometimes considered to be a part of a political agenda made by the candidate's opponent. It was supported by the condition of mass media ownership in Indonesia which has also been biased to show partiality to certain parties as happened in the 2009 Presidential Election (Viva, 2009) and the 2014 election (Heychael & Dhona, 2014). People then look for alternatives by searching for information in online media and social media. The advantages of the emergence of a lot of information are the ability of the user to select certain information according to their preferences.

In inter-group conflict, members of each group are referred to as partisans. This term refers to internalization in a person to belong to a particular group. Membership of the group will then affect all forms of attitude and behavior (Korte, 2007). Later evidence was found that public behavior filtered media entities and media content based on their previous ideology has increased (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). This condition emerge the selective exposure, which then causes the hostile media effect. Hostile media effect is not in the realm of media effects, but rather takes place through an internal mechanism that leads to certain behaviors (Hansen & Kim, 2011).

Some study found that membership of the recipient group could trigger a hostile media effect. The perception of bias come from internal recipients is a major factor that can cause media bias, compared to other factors. The higher the identification of a partisan against a particular group, the higher the hostile media effect will appear. In addition there is a second factor that will cause the hostile media effect, that is partisan media. News about group conflicts displayed by opposing group media (outgroup) can lead to hostile media effect to the reader, even if the news is presented in a neutral way. One of the factors that can trigger the occurrence of hostile media effect is because of the prior belief, the previous belief in partisan mind that the media will display biased news.

In the case of Jakarta elections, the groups involved in the conflict were the Pro Ahok group vs. the Islamic Defense Action. Where the two groups have mutual views related to cases of blasphemy that occurred. Islamic Defense Action group is set to be the subject of research. While partisan media that will be the subject of this research is Metro TV which is the opposite of Islamic Defense Action group.

Based on the above exposure then formulated the hypothesis in this study

H1: Partisan Islamic Defense Action (Aksi Bela Islam) will perceive a neutral news presented by Metro TV Group as a bias news against them.

The research that related to the hostile media effect in Indonesia has only been studied in psychology science field by Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois (2007) on Ambon conflict phenomenon in *Republika* and *Suara Pembaruan* newspaper. The study was conducted in inter-religious conflict situations. While this research tries to see the potential phenomenon of hostile media effect that may occur in election conditions that can also trigger conflict between groups. In addition, research related to this phenomenon in Indonesia has not been

studied in the era of convergence. The era in which the number of media and access to media is greater, so the possibility of someone to choose the media based on its preference is also greater. This research will try to see in the context of Indonesia, how the young voters who joined in one of the groups that are counter to Ahok in perceiving the news displayed in the media during the Jakarta Election 2017, especially for issues related to religion and blasphemy that involved one candidate.

### **Literature Review**

Hostile media effect is defined as a process performed by an individual who perceives a neutral message as if it were biased against its view. Usually, the next process that happens is the individual tends to diminish his belief if the facts conveyed felt counter to what he believed, and vice versa. This research begins with experiments conducted by Vallone, Ross, and Lepper (1985) which shows how the news about the Beirut case in 1982 against the Pro-Arab and Pro-Israel. Both groups allege that the news is biased and more supportive of his opponents, assuming the character in it also defends his opponent, and the news is considered to be produced by people who have opinions to support his opponent (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985)

According to Vallone et.al there are two processes that occur on partisan. First, partisans evaluate truths based on facts and arguments samples differently. In a different view, they objectively judge the good and bad cases in comparison with their own correspondence as to how it should be told. Second, partisans made their own perceptions and then reorder all the information they get based on the content. Each partisan group usually reports a more negative reference first which then directs hate to the media coverage (hostile). Nevertheless, both groups have a more biased tendency to perceive the media if the information reported is related to a crisis (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

After proving bias tendency in responding to the news, the researchers also tried to find out what factors might cause the hostile media effect. There are three assumptions that were expressed to know the factors that affect acceptance on partisan circles, which usually perceive the contents of the report differently. As the theory of selective categorization explains, viewers with different attitudes usually perform identical part such as pictures, facts, or arguments, but still, assume that the fact is hateful to their side. While social judgment theory argues that there is a possibility of a neutral stimulus falling to the wide latitude rejected by the partisan's ego itself. Consequently, the valence that does not clearly support the partisan position will be considered to hate their strongholds rather than being neutral. In contrast to the predictions proposed by the concept of selective recall, rather than categorizing neutral matter as hateful, partisans may only remember the worse part of the material better, resulting in more or less similar behavioural effects in perceived bias. The above three explanations actually culminate in a similar assumption that the hatred toward the media arises as a result of the effect of processing media content. However, trust or information that comes first and was believed to encourage individuals to assume a specific content as biased (Giner-Sorolla & Chaiken, 1994).

While entering the digital age many researchers are focusing on increasing the choice of media and information service providers that cause the hostile media effect to occur. Social media provides readers with multiple choices from a variety of sources, in a political context it adds social value to partisans. The presence of social media simultaneously improves partisan positions into certain media entities and filters content based on perceived perceptions and ideologies or eliminates consumption of news in order to avoid politics. Not only to form a specific fragment, it also limits the diversity of available information, and also establishes a certain polarization, increasing the ideological homogeneity between party members or partisan parts.

Selection of news content means selecting the source as well. In many previous studies, selective exposures saw that individuals do not face the challenges of information on a large

scale with regard to the social environment, habits, and advantages in information retrieval. Furthermore, many experimental data suggest supporting evidence of partisan selectivity while consuming news content on social media, although there are differences of opinion about the number of frequencies of selectivity on the internet, social media remains a platform that provides the opportunity to choose stories from various sources, whether people will choose to process news that actually comes from different camps (Messing & Westwood, 2012).

Selection of content and sources then give the partisans tendencies to select a news that is perceived as more in line with their political ideology. The great access provided by the internet makes everyone greater opportunities to discuss in accordance with the same interests, including political interests. This is also in line with increasing the sharing of opinions and information sesame friends in social media, which over time increases the information bias between them. Internet access also increases the selectivity between partisans (Lelkes, Sood, & Iyengar, 2015).

The diffusion of new media causes the transformation of information resources. With so many options available, the media also presents a large selection of content. Especially in the case of news, this leads to a selective selection process of political information. This case is happening because of process of selective selection of media. "People will avoid information that they expect to be congruent with their preexisting attitudes" (Mutz, 2006). The presence of media choices makes partisans have access to choose which news is perceived to be more in line with their political ideology. The great access provided by the internet gives everyone greater opportunities to discuss in accordance to their interests, including political interests.

Perceptions of news credibility are also important in a digital media environment in which viewers have more choices on which news to consume (Vraga & Tully, 2015). If based on the elements that determine the credibility of the media, then credibility of online media and social media itself is lower than conventional media. Conventional media undergo the verification process and check and recheck before reaching the public, but the internet site does not always perform these steps (Flanagin & Metzger, 2000). Unfortunately the notion that online media and social media have low credibility, actually sharpening the biased assumption against the media. Furthermore, many experimental data mention supporting evidence of selective partisan selectivity when consuming news content in social media (Messing & Westwood, 2012).

## **Research Method**

In this study, the two camps in conflict are divided into Ahok groups and Islamic Defense Action (Aksi Bela Islam) groups. An experiment was conducted on 40 people belonging to an Islamic-based organization, with a pretest to see that they were a support group of the Islamic Defenders and declaring that Ahok was guilty of defaming religion. They were divided into two groups, namely the control group and the experimental group. Both groups were given a stimulus in the form of news related to the action after Ahok's conviction that involved conflict between the two supporters. The control group is informed with a neutral visual, where the news is mentioned published by an online news portal. While the experimental group was given the same news but the visual form of the news was made in such a way as it came from metrotvnews.com (member of Media Group which considered an opponent of Muslim). They also rated the extent to which they believed that the newspaper is generally biased or fair in the reporting of news. The indicators taken from previous research on hostile media effect in Indonesia provide by (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007). Participants used 7-point scales to rate the extent to which their 'overall impression of the article' was that it was 'biased in favor of Muslim' or 'biased in favor of Ahok', the extent to which the article presented a 'stronger case against Muslims or Ahok', 'the extent to which they felt the editor's personal view of the article seemed 'anti-Muslim

or Ahok' and the extent to which they felt there was 'too much focus on Muslims or Ahok' bad behavior'. All the results then tested using independent t-test to see if there is any different between two groups.

### Research Novelty

The research that related to the hostile media effect in Indonesia has only been studied in psychology science field by Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois (2007) on Ambon conflict phenomenon in *Republika* and *Suara Pembaruan* newspaper. The study was conducted in inter-religious conflict situations. While this research tries to see the potential phenomenon of hostile media effect that may occur in election conditions that can also trigger conflict between groups. In addition, research related to this phenomenon in Indonesia has not been studied in the era of convergence. The era in which the number of media and access to media is greater, so the possibility of someone to choose the media based on its preference is also greater.

### Discussion

The study respondents consisted of 14 men and 26 women, ranging from 19-23 years old. All respondents currently studying undergraduate degree. Respondent divided into two groups, control and experiment. Each group consisted of 20 students.

Table: 1.  
Experiment vs Control Group Results

Group	Mean	Df	t	t table	Sig	Sig table	Results
Experiment	31,70	38	-5.813	2.024	0,00	0,05	significant
Control	24,80						

*Source: obtained from primary data*

Analyzes on ratings of perceived bias revealed a significant result, with  $t -5.813 > 2.024$  t table at (0.05, df 38). Experiment group participants tended to rate the article as biased ( $M = 31.7$ ,  $SD = 3.94$ ) and the control group was lower with ( $M = 24.8$ ,  $SD = 3.55$ ) Result also show mean difference point at -6.900. Which prove our hypothesis that Islamic Defense Action (Aksi Bela Islam) partisan perceived neutral news displayed on Metro TV as biased against their position.

From the results, there are differences in perceptions related to media alignments to an issue. The experimental group assumes that the news they read tends to attack their group and do better when defending the opposing group. The experimental group assumes that *metrotvnews.com* is unfairly reporting and taking sides with their opponents. The experimental group also assumed that the news tended to attack them and against them, whereas the news is perceived to be neutral by the control group. Though the news presented is the same news with different visual treatment. This phenomenon is known as hostile media effect. Hostile media effect is defined as a process performed by an individual who perceives a neutral message as if it were biased against its view (Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985).

### Discussion

This research captured the hostile media effect in the case of Jakarta Election 2017. Starting on October 7, 2016, in the middle of Jakarta Election, Ahok was reported to the authority on charges of blasphemy. Ahok's speech as a Governor of DKI Jakarta was considered offensive when he bring up Koran verse, Al-Maidah:51. This case urged FPI (Islamic Protector Front) masses rally in front of Police Bareskrim building and Jakarta City Hall. They will escort Ahok's case and want Ahok to be immediately put into trial. Then on November 4, 2016, massive rally called "Aksi 411" was conducted around Monas, Central Jakarta. On November 16, 2016, Ahok was officially suspected for his blasphemy allegation. Ahok immediately prohibited to go abroad, but not arrested. At December 2, 2016, The 212 demonstration was held. This action is bigger than the previous action, 411. The 411 and 212

demonstrations become the biggest demonstration in Indonesia until today. And finally at May 9, 201. The judges set a 2-year prison sentence, higher than the prosecutor's charges. The judge ordered Ahok to be arrested immediately. Ahok appealed the verdict. He was immediately taken to Rutan Cipinang.

The case of the 2017 Jakarta Election was not only related to political issues but also to religious and racial issues. Since this case opened, the inter-group debate has taken place. Those who support Ahok mention that the case of blasphemy is nothing more than a political game in an attempt to obstruct Ahok to win again in the election. While those who counter and consider Ahok to have humiliated the religion of Islam began to build arguments. Issues then roll not only limited to the problems of al-Quran and Islam. Race-related issues related to Ahok's Chinese heritage also appear. Inter-group hatred occurred, both groups now even have a nickname for his opponent. The nickname of the flat earth (kaum bumi datar), the short axis (kaum sumbu pendek), the camel (bani onta) were given to the group of the Islamic Defense Action alumni. While Ahok's supporters are called by the tribe of the tablecloth (kaum bani taplak), the friend of blasphemers (teman penista) (Lim, 2017).

The big demonstrations that took place on 4 November and 2 December left many things. Both demonstrations also hinted at hatred not just between groups. It is also between the community and the media. One of the accused is Media Group network which has Metro TV, metrotvnews.com and Media Indonesia. The expulsion of Metro TV reporters during the coverage of the two large demonstrations was strong evidence that the media was seen as opposed to the demonstration group.

The discourse of the group led by Surya Paloh in delivering the news has actually happened long enough. In the political sphere, it is no secret that during the presidential election of 2014, the news coverage of this media is more profitable to Joko Widodo (Heychael & Dhona, 2014). The allegations that Metro TV and its network are Muslim haters are also quite common. However, in the case of Jakarta elections, the discourse is getting bigger, especially after Metro TV is considered to deceive the public related to the number of demonstration participants 212. Metro TV is accused of mentioning that the number of periods is only 50,000 while the group demonstrators claim that the number of participants reached 2.3 million. Islamist groups allege that Metro TV often corners Muslims through its message. Even on the facebook group "Alumni 212" it has become commonplace to call Metro Tivu (Metro fraudsters). Hashtags #BoikotMetroTV also appeared after the demonstration.

Biased hatred and assumptions towards a media are what increasingly strengthen the occurrence of hostile media effect. Certain media are considered partisan and will preach biased about their group. So even if the news is neutral, the audience will still perceive in their own way according to their group's view and belief. In conflict-related research between groups of members, each group is referred to as partisan. Later evidence was found that increased public behaviour filtered media entities and media content based on their previous ideology (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). The presence of social media simultaneously improves partisan positions into certain media entities and filters content based on perceived perceptions and ideologies. Not only forming a particular fragment, it also limits the diversity of available information, and also forms a certain polarization, increasing the ideological homogeneity. In other words, one will avoid information that they feel will contradict and seek more information that is expected to be line with their attitude

Interestingly, the media are now more likely to widen the polarization between groups. Various media content now provides content that is tailored for certain camps, media create more content to meet the demand of their audience for the sake of keeping the consumers (Agirdas, 2015). The choice of media is now increasingly showing partisan preference, as people will tend to choose information that is consistent with their preferences. As happened in the case of Islamic advocacy groups and Metro TV, they will tend to choose other media that are perceived in accordance with their preferences and beliefs, and avoid Metro TV.

If this phenomenon continued, there are several implications to the democratic process. First, when people see news coverage as biased against them, they will continue perceived others opinions as biased. Moreover, this condition can lead individual to perceived public opinion also bias against them (Feldman, 2014). Second, the hostile media effect can threaten news organizations and journalism. When people perceived balanced coverage as biased, then whatever journalist try to inform will meaningless. This become the signal of death of trust in journalism. Third, hostile media perceptions trigger polarizing discourse. This situation was dangerous for democratic process, especially during election phase.

The research result and discussion section contains results of the research findings and their ensuing discussions. The findings acquired from the results of the conducted research should be written with the supplementary support of adequate data. The research results and findings should be able to resolve or provide explanations to the question or hypothesis stated in the introduction.

### **Conclusion**

The result of research indicating the Hostile Media Effect has occurred in the inter-group conflict in Indonesia in the context of Jakarta's Election. This research supports previous research that Hostile Media Effect has been occurred in Indonesia (Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2007). This research also says that Hostile Media Effect can occur not only in religion conflict settings but also in political conflict. However, this study has limitations because this study only tested to one group that involved in the conflict and .the political context that builds in this study also mixed with religion and inter-group conflict which have been proven previously in Indonesia. Thus, in the future, this research should be developed in a pure political setting, that do not involved inter-religious conflict. However with the evidence of potential Hostile Media Effect in Indonesia, the government needs to be wary of it in order to keep the democratic process in Indonesia. Given the Hostile Media, Effect can threaten the process of forming public opinion, political participation, and perception about media credibility.

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