

The Role of Local Journalists in Covering Black Campaign News during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a democratic country that upholds public participation in elections. During the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election, Black Campaigns targeting candidate pairs emerged and posed a threat to the quality of democracy. Digital media played a significant role in the dissemination of political issues, while local journalists were required to maintain professionalism and objectivity. This study aims to explore the roles, challenges, and strategies of local journalists in covering Black Campaign issues. Using Kurt Lewin's Gatekeeping Theory, the research was conducted through a descriptive qualitative approach with a post-positivist paradigm. The findings indicate that local journalists play a crucial role in maintaining the quality of factual and balanced information despite facing political pressure, social norms, and the dynamics of digital media. The challenges encountered are both technical and social, including public pressure, media algorithm influence, and strong local cultural values. These pressures do not directly alter news content but influence its presentation style to remain ethical and acceptable to the public. To maintain neutrality, journalists apply strict editorial strategies, data verification, and maintain professional distance from sources. Despite external influences from institutions such as the Press Council, the General Elections Commission (KPU), and the Election Supervisory Board (Bawaslu), journalists adhere to journalistic codes of ethics and existing official regulations.

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1. Introduction

Indonesia is a democratic country that routinely holds general elections (Pemilu) as a manifestation of popular sovereignty, as mandated by Article 1, paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution (Purnawati & Fajar, 2020). In addition to national elections, Indonesian citizens also participate in local elections (Pilkada), including gubernatorial elections (Pilgub), which will be held simultaneously on November 27, 2024 (KPU, 2025). Banten Province, as one of the regions with a large number of voters, has drawn considerable attention in the implementation of the 2024 Pilgub.

The development of digital technology has transformed the landscape of political communication in Indonesia. Social media platforms, digital campaigns, and online news portals now play a key role in shaping public opinion (Wandini, 2024). However, this advancement also brings new challenges, such as the widespread dissemination of false information and black campaigns, which can undermine the integrity of the democratic process (Susanto & Iqbal, 2019).

The phenomenon of black campaigns in the 2024 Banten Pilgub has been identified through various online media reports highlighting the spread of hoax videos, allegations of vote-buying, and violations of civil servant neutrality (Hidayah, 2023). Such practices not only harm certain candidates but also have the potential to divide society and disrupt social stability. Therefore, the role of local journalists becomes crucial as the front line in delivering accurate and responsible information.

Previous research, such as that conducted by Nirma (2020), indicates that journalists play a strategic role in countering hoaxes through the application of principles of accuracy, objectivity, and accountability. However, to date, there is still a lack of studies specifically examining how local journalists cover black campaigns in the context of the 2024 Banten Pilgub, which is rife with political pressure and ethical challenges in the digital media era.

Based on this background, this study offers a scientific novelty by focusing on the role of local journalists in Banten Province in addressing the phenomenon of black campaigns during the 2024 Pilgub campaign period. Using the gatekeeping theory perspective (Lewin, 1947; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009), this research explores how journalists filter information, maintain the integrity of news coverage, and anticipate political influences that may manipulate public opinion.

The research questions addressed in this study are: (1) What is the role of local journalists in covering black campaign news in the 2024 Banten Pilgub?; (2) What challenges do local journalists face in the news coverage process?; and (3) What strategies do local journalists use to maintain the integrity of news coverage amidst political pressures and the dynamics of digital media?

The objective of this study is to analyze the role of local journalists in reporting on black campaigns in the 2024 Banten Pilgub, to identify the challenges they face, and to explore the strategies used by local journalists to uphold professionalism and the integrity of news coverage.

2. Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach within a post-positivist paradigm. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of local journalists in covering *black campaign* news during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election, by highlighting their experiences, perspectives, and journalistic practices within a dynamic social and political context. The post-positivist paradigm is used to explore the meanings behind the *black campaign* phenomenon while maintaining rigor in data collection and analysis.

The types of data used in this study include both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct observation and in-depth interviews with key informants, namely local journalists in Banten Province who were directly involved in covering the campaigns of gubernatorial candidates for the 2024 election, as well as data triangulation with informants from the Banten Provincial Election Supervisory Board (BAWASLU) and campaign teams of each candidate. Secondary data were obtained through document studies, including media coverage archives, campaign regulations, and other supporting documents.

Data collection techniques consisted of observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to gain an understanding of the field context and journalists' work processes in reporting on *black campaign* issues. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore journalists' experiences in facing reporting challenges, information filtering processes, and strategies for maintaining the integrity of their reporting. Documentation was used to complement and verify the collected data, particularly concerning media archives and relevant regulations.

The validity of the data in this study was ensured through source triangulation, by cross-checking data from various sources using the same techniques. Triangulation was conducted to ensure a high degree of validity and to reflect the actual conditions in the field.

Data analysis followed the stages proposed by Miles and Huberman, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was performed by selecting and simplifying the data collected in the field. Data display was presented in narrative text form to facilitate understanding. The researcher then conducted verification to ensure data accuracy and drew valid conclusions.

Informants in this study were selected using purposive sampling, considering that the informants possessed relevant experience and understanding of the issues under investigation. Thus, this study is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the role of local journalists in covering *black campaign* news during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election.

3. Results and Discussion

The research findings show that local journalists in Banten perceive their role in covering *black campaign* issues during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election as a form of moral and professional responsibility to the public. Journalists also act as information intermediaries who strive to maintain

objectivity and integrity, despite facing political pressure, social norms, and the dynamics of digital media. They consistently endeavor to uphold objectivity, integrity, and neutrality in their reporting, even when confronted with pressures from political actors, media owners, and sensitive social dynamics. Local journalists are also seen as important partners of the Bawaslu (Election Supervisory Board) in disseminating factual information without manipulating public opinion, through collective efforts such as journalist working groups and informal communication. Although a small portion of media outlets are indicated to be biased, in general, local journalists are considered to play a significant role in maintaining the quality of political information and supporting a healthy democracy in Banten Province.

Covering *black campaign* issues in the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election poses significant challenges for local journalists, who must face various obstacles such as limited data access, political pressure, the spread of hoaxes, and media interest interventions. Despite structural, social, and technical pressures, they adhere to the principles of verification and balance, consistently upholding journalistic ethics by relying on credible sources and direct confirmation to ensure news accuracy. Support from local media and references to official regulations help safeguard their integrity, although they have not yet fully overcome biases and the limited space for clarification. Amid these complex challenges, local journalists continue to strive to deliver fair and responsible information in the public interest.

In facing the challenges of covering *black campaign* news during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election, local journalists maintain reporting integrity by applying rigorous editorial processes, careful information verification, and strict adherence to journalistic codes of ethics. They maintain professional distance from sources, remain balanced toward all candidates, and actively coordinate with various stakeholders, including Bawaslu, which also recognizes the importance of local journalists being cautious in countering hoaxes and providing political education. Media collaboration with Bawaslu and other institutions strengthens efforts to maintain neutrality amid the intense flow of information and pressures from both the public and media owners. Despite frequent intimidation, journalists remain committed to ethical principles, demonstrating their dedication to maintaining information quality in support of a healthy democracy.

4. Conclusion

This study finds that local journalists in Banten Province play a strategic role in covering *black campaign* issues during the 2024 Banten Gubernatorial Election, as a manifestation of their moral and professional responsibility in maintaining the quality of political information. Despite facing various challenges, such as political pressure, media owner interests, the spread of hoaxes, and limited access to data, local journalists strive to uphold objectivity, integrity, and neutrality in their reporting. They rely on rigorous verification processes, credible sources of information, and a strong commitment to journalistic ethics. Their role extends beyond that of information conveyors, positioning them as key partners of Bawaslu in supporting a healthy democratic process through the delivery of factual and balanced information.

The collaboration established between local journalists, Bawaslu, and other stakeholders strengthens efforts to combat hoaxes and safeguard democratic quality amid the dynamics of digital media and political pressure. Although a small portion of the media remains susceptible to bias due to political-business interventions, in general, local journalists in Banten significantly contribute to creating a more informative public sphere and fostering a healthier democratic process. With a strong commitment to journalistic ethics and professionalism, local journalists continue to strive to deliver accurate and responsible information to the public.

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