
Contestation of Meanings in Procedural Democracy: Inter-Media Framing of President Prabowo's Dialogue with Journalists

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Abstract

This study analyzes how Indonesian national media framed President Prabowo Subianto's dialogue with seven senior journalists held in Hambalang on April 6, 2025, a moment positioned as a symbol of political openness during the early phase of his presidency. Employing a qualitative approach and Robert Entman's framing analysis model, this research examines news coverage from six major media outlets — Kompas, Detik.com, IDN Times, Narasi, Liputan6, and TVOne — focusing on four framing dimensions: problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The findings reveal a notable consensus across media in defining the core problem as a deficit in direct and transparent presidential communication on strategic national issues, with causes attributed to one-way and intermediary-based communication practices. However, variations emerge in moral judgments and proposed solutions, reflecting each outlet's ideological orientation, editorial stance, and audience segmentation. While Kompas and Narasi adopt a more critical-constructive position emphasizing inclusivity and sustainability, IDN Times, Liputan6, and TVOne frame the dialogue more affirmatively as democratic progress, and Detik.com maintains a pragmatic and neutral tone. This study demonstrates that media framing of political dialogue is not neutral but constitutes a site of meaning contestation shaped by power relations. The findings contribute to political communication scholarship by highlighting how media simultaneously reproduce power narratives and perform a constrained watchdog role within Indonesia's procedural democracy.

Keywords: Media Framing, Political Communication, Presidential Communication, Indonesian Media, Robert Entman

INTRODUCTION

The media has an important role in shaping people's perceptions of certain issues, including the political sphere. Press freedom is an important indicator of public information transparency. Reporters Without Borders (2025) ranked Indonesia 127th out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index (Reporters Without Borders, 2025). Indonesia is one of the countries experiencing a decline in press freedom (Freedomhouse, 2024). Some of the main causes are high cases of violence against journalists, subtle censorship by the state, and concentration of media ownership affiliated with certain political forces (Tapsell, 2017; Wijayanto & Masduki, 2024).

RSF notes that under the outgoing Widodo administration, media oligarchies linked to political interests grew stronger, tightening control over critical outlets and prompting widespread self-censorship (Reporters Without Borders, 2025b). These factors set the stage for how leaders are portrayed: past framing research shows clear outlet differences. For example, a recent study of President Jokowi's contested diploma issue compared Tempo and Kompas coverage. It found Tempo's framing to be more procedural and neutral, whereas Kompas tended to be more emotional, highlighting demonstrators' feelings (Syarifuddin, 2025). The author attributes these differences to media ideology and orientation, economic interests and media ownership as well as editorial policy (Syarifuddin, 2025). In short, Indonesian framing studies point to owners' interests and editorial lines driving variation. However, none of these works examine a direct dialogue between president and press, a format without precedent in recent scholarship.

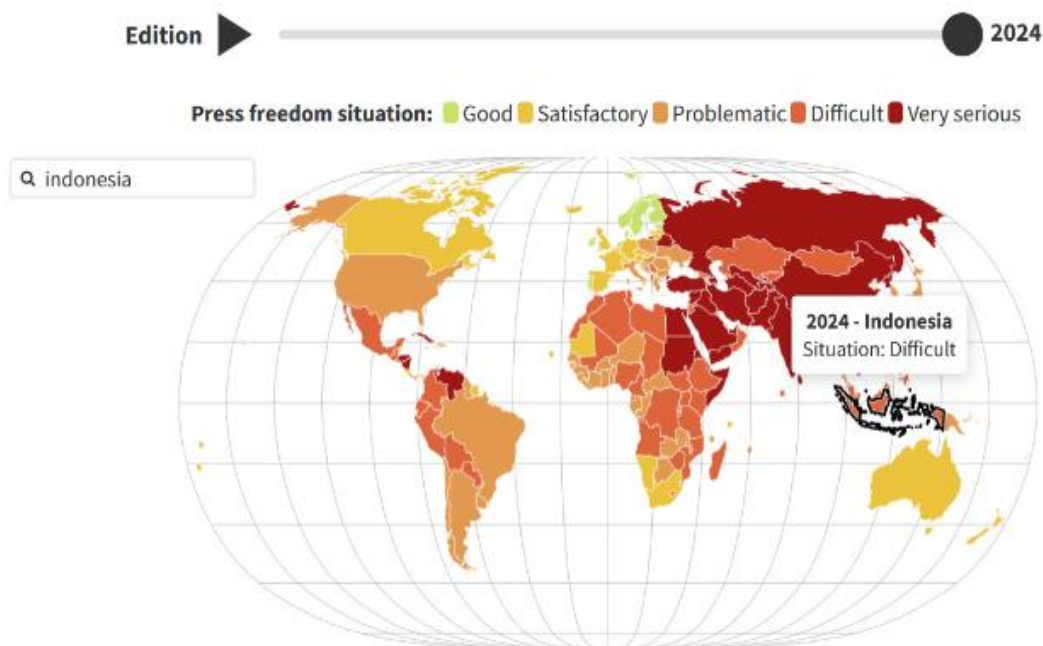


Figure 1. Situation of Pers Freedom in Indonesia
Image Source: World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders, 2024.

Despite this situation, the relationship between the government and the media has come under scrutiny. Since he was officially inaugurated on 20 October 2024, President Prabowo's policies and programs have received a lot of attention from the public, including diverse coverage by the media. As a response to the attention received, on April 6, 2025, President Prabowo invited senior journalists from 7 national media to have a dialogue together to discuss strategic issues at his residence, Hambalang, West Java. The journalists present were editors-in-chief from mainstream media such as Kompas, Detik, TvOne, SCTV-Indosiar, IDN Times, and an independent media, Narasi. The meeting was titled "President Answering" to mark 150 days of President Prabowo's leadership. Topics discussed included several sensitive issues, ranging from the TNI Law, Danantara, government communication patterns, to the government's attitude towards new trade tariff rules in the Donald Trump era (Ernes, 2025). This open discussion forum is President Prabowo's effort to provide information transparency with a new and open communication style (Detik, 2025).



Figure 2. Presiden Prabowo and 7 Journalists
Image Source: Detikcom Youtube Channel, 2025.

This dialog format is interesting because it provides an uncensored discussion forum without a prepared list of questions. Each media was allowed to ask directly about actual issues, ranging from the TNI Bill and demonstrations, the government's openness to criticism, to cases of terror against the media, such as those experienced by Tempo's editor (Daniswari Dini, 2025). Prabowo emphasized that freedom of speech and freedom of the press are principles guaranteed by the constitution.

This meeting received various responses from observers and the public. As reported by Tempo, the Indonesian Press Council appreciated the president's more open communication (Tempo, 2025). However, the meeting also received criticism from several observers and institutions, such as The Indonesian Institute (TII), which conveyed that the exclusivity of the dialogue only involved major media and did not provide enough space for alternative media or independent journalists (Tempo, 2025). The criticism highlighted the potential for favoritism and marginalization of minority voices or media that are often critical of the government. The discussion in the meeting, which was recorded for more than three hours, was then reported in various media, both those invited to the meeting and those who did not attend.

This event reflects an important dynamic in the relationship between power and media in the era of procedural democracy. In the context of political communication, the media not only acts as a conveyor of information, but also as an actor that frames social and political events in a certain way that can influence public perceptions of institutions, policies, and power elites (Entman, 2007). The effects of media framing and agenda-setting have been shown to influence how social issues are perceived and prioritized by the public (McCombs & Guo, 2014; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Therefore, it is important to pay close attention to how the media represent events that directly involve power, especially when there is accompanying praise and criticism.

In the context of political communication theory, framing is key to understanding the construction of reality in media coverage (Entman, 2007; Eriyanto, 2012). Through the framing process, the media does not simply report facts, but also selects, emphasizes, and gives meaning to certain aspects of events according to the editor's point of view, values, and interests (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Robert Entman's framing model underlines four main elements, namely problem definition, cause diagnosis, moral judgment, and solution suggestions, which are often used to unravel media bias or framing tendencies on social and political issues (Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2009).

A key gap is that prior studies analyzed media framing of presidential actions or conflicts, usually through press releases, speeches, or leaks – intermediary-based communication.

The Hambalang meeting represents a novel direct dialogue format: the President sat down with journalists without intermediary filtering. Officials themselves call this a new approach. For instance, Deputy Minister Angga Raka Prabowo described the April 2025 session as “*a new approach in Prabowo’s government communication strategy.*” (ANTARA News, 2025). No academic work to date systematically examines how media frame such direct engagements. It is important to critically analyze how switching from staged press conferences to open dialogues changes the framing contest. Specifically, ask how media meaning-making differs in this scenario, and what that reveals about power dynamics. Addressing this gap involves moving beyond mere description (e.g. what each outlet reported) to a critical analysis of the communication style itself.

Departing from this reality, this study aims to analyze how the media present at the joint meeting with President Prabowo framed the event of the joint dialogue as a form of media response. This is important to illustrate whether there really is an element of media bias in engaging in the meeting. Using a qualitative approach and the framing analysis method of Robert Entman's model (2007), this study parses four framing structures in the reporting of six media: Kompas, Detik, TvOne, SCTV-Indosiar through Liputan6, IDN Times, and Narasi. This study contributes theoretically in enriching the understanding of the reproduction of power narratives by the media in the era of procedural democracy, and practically as material for critical reflection for the press community, academics, and media policy makers. In a broader context, this study shows that media framing of symbols of political openness is not a neutral act, but a form of meaning contestation that reflects power relations in the digital public sphere.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to understand the meaning, context, and framing constructions that appear in the news media. This approach was chosen because it is suitable for researching complex social phenomena, where news texts are considered as multi-dimensional cultural and political products (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Qualitative research allows researchers to include interpretive dimensions and richness of context, which cannot be revealed through quantitative methods alone (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Framing analysis is conducted using a qualitative content analysis approach, where news texts are treated as narrative data that needs to be interpreted in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

This study focuses on six outlets (Kompas, Detik, IDN Times, Narasi, Liputan6, TVOne) because they correspond to the media groups that President Prabowo personally invited to Hambalang (ANTARA News, 2025). Antara News confirms that Prabowo met with seven journalists – one each from Detik, TVOne, IDN Times, Narasi, Kompas, SCTV-Indosiar, and TVRI – in a specially arranged dialogue (ANTARA News, 2025). This study excluded the state-linked SCTV-Indosiar and TVRI and instead included Liputan6 as part of MNC Group for broader comparison. In effect, our sample covers all major private outlets given direct access. This criterion is crucial: these six were the only media granted on-the-record access, so their coverage reflects a privileged perspective. At the same time, they span different ownerships: Liputan6 (MNC) and TVOne (Media Group) are owned by politically active conglomerates, whereas Kompas (Kompas Gramedia) and Narasi have no formal party affiliation. Sampling these outlets lets us compare frames across that spectrum of media interests, which is central to our critical analysis.

Data was collected documentarily through each media's official news website. Articles were converted into text for analysis. Additional data in the form of official releases from the Press Council, LBH Pers, and The Indonesian Institute (TII) were used as triangulation to strengthen the validity of the interpretation (Patton, 1999)

Entman's model is a clear analytical tool for examining media coverage. With Entman's framework, researchers can break down the news text into components as described in the following table.

Table 1. Robert Entman's Framing Analysis Components

Components of Framing Analysis	Interpretation
Define Problems	Determining what the main issue is and why it is important
Diagnose Causes	Identifying what or who is considered the cause of the problem
Make Moral Judgments	Provide an ethical evaluation or assessment of the parties or situation in the issue
Suggest Solutions	Offer solutions or recommendations for action on the problem

Source: Entman, 1993.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study analyzed six news articles from national media that attended the meeting with President Prabowo on 6 April 2025 in Hambalang, namely Kompas, Detik.com, IDN Times, Narasi, Liputan6/SCTV-Indosiar, and TVOne. The news analyzed is the news about the meeting published on April 7, 2025. The following list of news is outlined in the table below.

Table 2. News Mapping

Media	Date	Author	Title and Link
Kompas	7/4/2025	Erwina Rachmi Puspapertiwi, Ahmad Naufal Dzulfaroh	Isi Pertemuan Prabowo Bersama 6 Pemred Media di Hambalang https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2025/04/07/121500265/isi-pertemuan-prabowo-bersama-6-pemred-media-di-hambalang?page=all
DetikNews	7/4/2025	Yogi Ernes	Momen 4 Jam Prabowo Diwawancari 7 Jurnalis Senior, Bahas UU TNI-IHSG https://news.detik.com/berita/d-7857772/momen-4-jam-prabowo-diawancari-7-jurnalis-senior-bahas-uu-tni-ihsg
IDN Times	7/4/2025	Evan Yulian Philaret	Prabowo Diwawancarai 7 Jurnalis Senior, Ini Topik - Topik Yang Dibahas https://www.idntimes.com/news/indonesia/prabowo-ditanya-jurnalis-csc-02-9v364-kkbj4k
Narasi	7/4/2025	Tim Narasi	Presiden Prabowo Menjawab https://www.narasi.tv/video/narasi/presiden-prabowo-menjawab
Liputan6	7/4/2025	Delvira Hutabarat	Momen Prabowo Diwawancarai 7 Jurnalis Senior, Bebas Tanya Apa pun https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/5987070/momen-prabowo-diawancarai-7-jurnalis-senior-bebas-tanya-apa-pun
TVOne	7/4/2025	Achyar, Editor: Aqmarul Akhyar	Presiden Prabowo Gelar Dialog dengan 7 Jurnalis Nasional https://www.tvonenews.com/berita/nasional/319162-presiden-prabowo-gelar-dialog-dengan-7-jurnalis-nasional

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025.

Presentation of Framing Analysis Results

To answer the problem formulation of how the media framed the results of President Prabowo Subianto's dialogue with journalists that took place on April 6, 2025, at Hambalang, the researcher used Robert Entman's framing analysis approach. This model was chosen because it can identify in detail how the media constructs social reality through four main tools: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993).

The results of the analysis were then put into a table to map the differences and similarities in framing between the media. The following are the results of the framing analysis of the six media.

Table 3. News Framing Analysis Results

Media	Defining the Problems	Diagnosing Causes	Making Moral Judgement	Suggesting Solutions
Kompas	Limited direct government communication on strategic issues.	No open forum that allows direct clarification.	Positive step, but should be more inclusive.	Need to involve more media in similar forums.
Detik	The President's lack of initial response to public issues such as the TNI law.	The President's lack of active involvement in previous public discourse.	The President's open efforts should be appreciated even though they are still limited.	Build a sustainable public communication system.
IDN Times	There is no regular space for journalist to confirm strategic issues.	There is no regular forum that openly involves the media.	This dialog shows the government's transparency intentions.	Make this dialog a routine government mechanism.
Narasi	Lack of direct communication between the President and the public.	The government relies too much on statements through spokespersons.	This forum reflects the President's willingness to answer criticism.	Implement the direct communication pattern as a permanent policy.
Liputan6	Lack of clarity on the President's stance on important issues.	The President is perceived as not being directly present in responding to issues.	This meeting is a step forward in democracy.	Increase the frequency of the President's dialog with the media.
TVOne	The need for direct communication patterns from the President to the media.	The President has tended to convey information indirectly.	A progressive initiative even though it is only in its early stages.	Maintain the open forum consistently and periodically.

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025.

All media analyzed in this study agree that there is a void in the government's public communication, especially in responding to strategic issues such as the polemics over the TNI Bill, demonstrations, and national economic developments. Kompas media emphasized that the President's direct communication has been limited and not inclusive, so that the public does not get enough information about crucial policies. Detik.com underlines the President's lack of quick response to issues that develop in the community,

especially those that cause public speculation. Meanwhile, IDN Times and Narasi highlighted the absence of dialogue between the President and the media prior to this meeting. Both media emphasized the importance of direct clarification so that information received by the public is not mediated unilaterally.

Liputan6 and TVOne also expressed similar criticisms. Liputan6 emphasized that so far the public has difficulty understanding the President's stance on important issues because information is one-way. TVOne said that the President's previous communication patterns did not provide space for the media to access strategic information directly and openly.

In identifying causes, all media point to the government's non-transparent and non-open communication institutions and practices. Kompas cites the absence of open communication forums as a major factor. Detik considers that the President has not actively engaged in direct public discourse. IDN Times and Narasi both blame the absence of regular communication spaces as the main obstacle. Liputan6 mentioned that the President's lack of direct involvement increases the communication distance, and TVOne stated that the President's communication style, which tends to rely on information intermediaries, causes public misinterpretation.

In general, all media view this dialog as a positive initiative and should be appreciated. However, the degree of appreciation differs. Kompas and Detik are moderate: appreciating the President's move, but emphasizing that this forum is not yet inclusive. IDN Times and Narasi were more expressive in welcoming this forum as a manifestation of transparency, even calling it a form of political courage. Liputan6 sees this meeting as a step forward in democracy, while TVOne calls this forum a progressive initiative that can strengthen the strategic relationship between the government and the media.

All media suggested that similar forums be made a regular mechanism and expanded in scope. Kompas suggested the involvement of alternative media, Detik emphasized the importance of building a sustainable public communication system, and IDN Times encouraged this forum to become a permanent governance mechanism. Narasi advocates the adoption of direct communication as a fixed pattern, while Liputan6 encourages increasing the frequency of such meetings. TVOne suggested that open forums be conducted consistently and regularly throughout the government's term.

The findings above show a framing consensus among the media regarding the need for a more open and two-way public communication pattern between the President and the public through the media. This pattern shows a shared awareness among journalists of the importance of direct access to information to strengthen public participation in democracy. The analysis also shows that there are no media that position the President negatively, but rather normatively encourage the improvement of the quality of government communication in the future.

Interpretation of Inter-Media Framing Comparison

After analyzing each news article based on Robert Entman's framing model, the next step is to identify different or similar framing patterns between media. This comparison aims to understand how the construction of social reality is formed through each media's editorial approach in conveying the results of President Prabowo Subianto's dialog with journalists. Differences in the way media define problems, interpret causes, provide moral judgments, and recommend solutions show that framing is not neutral, but rather influenced by ideological preferences, communication styles, and the media's position towards power (Entman, 1993; Matthes, 2009). Therefore, by comparing the six media involved, it can be identified how each media forms a public narrative that is aligned or opposed to Prabowo's leadership and the social issues discussed in the dialogue.

The following table is a systematic description of the framing comparison of the six media.

Table 4. Inter-Media Framing Comparison

Media	Dominant Tone	Attitude Towards the Government	Ideological Tendency
Kompas	Moderate Critical	Appreciative but independent	Independent and professional journalism
Detik.com	Neutral Supportive	Supportive of first steps	Pragmatic and institutional
IDN Times	Progressive	Enthusiastic and open	Digital-native and pro-transparency
Narasi	Critical-Constructive	Emphasizes consistency	Public advocacy and democracy
Liputan6	Lightweight-Confirmed	Appreciative of symbolism	Cooperative and pro-government
TVOne	Supportive Strategic	Encourages direct communication	Stability and targeted political communication

Source: Processed by Researchers, 2025.

Kompas displays framing in a moderate critical style, reflecting an appreciative attitude while maintaining a distance from the government. This tone shows a commitment to the principles of professional and independent journalism. Kompas underlines the need for inclusivity in political communication forums, while highlighting the limitations of the dialog initiated by the President. This attitude shows that the mainstream media still plays a control function over power, albeit in a diplomatic atmosphere. Meanwhile, Detik.com framed the meeting in a descriptive and supportive manner, emphasizing that this meeting was a positive first step in establishing direct communication between the President and the public. There was not much explicit criticism, and the articulation emphasized factual information rather than critical analysis.

IDN Times uses progressive and participatory framing, emphasizing the importance of digital media and youth representation in the policy dialogue space. It encourages transparency and collaboration between the government and the digital community, and affirms that this dialog gives hope for a new, more open pattern of political communication. As an independent media, Narasi delivers a critical yet constructive narrative, emphasizing the urgency of sustainability and consistency in government communication patterns. It subtly challenges the potential for political symbolism and encourages the government not to turn this dialogue into an image.

The coverage used an affirmative and light-hearted style, highlighting the symbolic success of the meeting without offering deep criticism. This approach tends to support the stability of the government's image, especially by emphasizing the relaxed atmosphere of the dialogue and the President's personal openness. Similarly, TVOne framed the dialogue as a strategic step by the President in rebuilding relations with the media and the public. The tone was very supportive, emphasizing the importance of direct communication and the President's active involvement in the public information sphere.

This comparison revealed that all media recognized the importance of the dialogue as a positive step, but the level of criticism and independence varied. Kompas and Narasi show the most independent and critical stance. IDN Times emphasizes public participation and digital representation. Meanwhile, Liputan6 and TVOne are more supportive and tend to

strengthen the government's image, and Detik is in the middle, with a neutral and informative tone. Thus, the framing between media reflects the ideological position and editorial characteristics of each media, whether as independent journalists, progressive digital media, or strategic communication partners of the government.

Framing Patterns and Political-Economic Context

The findings reveal clear polarization along media-ownership lines. Outlets tied to government-aligned conglomerates (MNC's Liputan6 and Media Group's TVOne) displayed mostly affirmative frames: they reported Prabowo's arguments with little critical spin, stressed positive outcomes, and generally endorsed official solutions. In contrast, more independent outlets (Kompas, Narasi) emphasized problems and uncertainty. For example, Kompas stories questioned the effectiveness of proposed policies and highlighted constraints; Narasi often framed issues in terms of reform demands. These differences mirror Indonesia's media political economy. As noted above, Indonesia's largest media groups are owned by oligarchs who often have partisan agendas. For instance, MNC's owner Hary Tanoesoedibjo founded Perindo Party, and Media Group's Surya Paloh chairs NasDem. In contrast, Kompas Gramedia's owners have no party affiliation. Prior research suggests that such ownership shapes framing: media aligned with power tend to promulgate friendly narratives, while more independent outlets retain the role of critic. Indeed, one recent assessment concluded that Kompas has largely become a polite watchdog in Indonesia, consistent with our finding that it was comparatively critical. By contrast, (Syarif, 2025) and others observe that mainstream coverage in Indonesia is often pro-government under elite influence, which helps explain why Liputan6 and TVOne framed the dialogue affirmatively.

In Entman's terms, the moral judgments and solution recommendations were where these differences surfaced most. Government-aligned outlets tended to use positive moral language about the President and presented solutions uncritically. Independent outlets were more likely to attach cautionary or problem-focused moral notes and to discuss alternative solutions or public demands. These patterns are theoretically grounded: media political economy theory predicts that owners' interests influence editorial lines. In our data, this played out as clear framing contrasts that reflect broader power relations – an outcome not captured by a purely descriptive account of the data.

Finally, this study considers whether the Hambalang dialogue constitutes genuine transparency or managed symbolism. Officially, the event was billed as a way to deliver comprehensive and clear information directly to the public. However, in Indonesia's political context, such events often serve an image-management role. The evidence casts doubt on substantive openness. Notably, the journalists did not submit questions in advance; as Uni Lubis confirmed, "*the president did not know the questions,*" and they were posed freely on the spot. This suggests spontaneity, but it also indicates tight control over the forum. More importantly, independent observers have warned that Indonesia's press environment under Widodo became tightly circumscribed: dissenting voices were repressed, media freedoms were curtailed, and coverage was shaped to favor the government (Syarif, 2025). With Prabowo's record and alliances, RSF cautions that press freedom offers little reassurance under the new administration. In this light, the dialogue risked being a procedural gesture rather than substantive accountability. It provided a photo-op of accessibility within a heavily managed media system. The framing analysis supports this interpretation: while officials touted transparency, all outlets largely stayed within elite-sanctioned narratives (especially Liputan6/TVOne), and even the more critical coverage remained within bounds consistent with a controlled watchdog role.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how six national mainstream media outlets, invited to a meeting with President Prabowo, namely Kompas, Detik, IDN Times, Narasi, Liputan6, and TVOne, framed their reporting on President Prabowo Subianto's dialogue with seven senior journalists on April 6, 2025, in Hambalang, using Robert Entman's framing analysis model.

First, there was consistency in defining the problem and determining the causes, with all media outlets positioning the dialogue as a response to the President's lack of public communication on strategic issues such as the TNI Bill, demonstrations, and economic issues. The main causes identified were one-way communication practices and the absence of open and regular communication forums involving the media more broadly. Second, there were significant differences in moral assessments and recommended solutions. Media outlets such as Kompas and Narasi took a more critical stance, emphasizing the limited inclusivity of the media invited and calling for a more open and inclusive dialogue. Conversely, IDN Times, Liputan6, and TVOne tend to frame the dialogue positively and support the continuation of this forum as a form of transparency and democratic progress. Detik.com takes a more neutral and pragmatic position, focusing on presenting facts.

Third, the overall media framing shows the symbolic dominance of power, where dialogue is seen as a positive step by the government, even though the criticism that emerges is limited to formal and structural aspects without sharp criticism of the content of policies or mechanisms of power. This indicates that the media still maintains its control function, but within the limits of a functional relationship with power.

Fourth, the research results confirm that media framing is influenced by ideological orientation, business models, and audience segmentation, as the latest literature on political communication and digital media has found. Digital-native media such as IDN Times emphasize public participation and openness, while television and mainstream media tend to be more affirmative and cooperative.

Fifth, this research has important implications for the development of political communication and media democracy in Indonesia, namely the need to institutionalize regular and inclusive dialogue between the government and the media to address the public communication deficit, while strengthening the media's role as a critical yet constructive watchdog.

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