

## Women's News Coverage in Local Mass Media: A Case of Regional Head Election 2018

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*Received:* 28 April 2021

*Revised:* 3 Maret 2022

*Published:* 30 April 2022

### **Abstract:**

The mass media can play a crucial role in election campaigns because it can influence people's points of view of a candidate, including how they responded to women candidates. This paper aims to analyze how the local media portrayed women candidates in the Local Executive Election (Pilkada) 2018 and the factors that drive it. Unlike most previous studies, which focused on women in legislative candidacy and analyzed the national mass media, this study focuses on women's candidacy in the local executive election by observing the local mass media. The author believes that the differences in the electoral system between the legislative election and the local executive one and the differences of the media scope will produce different findings. Using the explanatory sequential mixed method, the author combined the quantitative method followed up with the qualitative one to interpret this study's data. The author took a sample of 140 pieces of news from local mass media during March-23 June 2018, which was chosen by a non-probability sampling method with a quota technique. This study did not reveal any biased coverage toward women candidates due to four factors: the type of election that women participate in; the social-political capital of women candidates; the condition that women's active political participation is not a novelty; and the alignment of media to the more extensive political agenda. Therefore, it can be concluded that the neutrality of the media does not necessarily cause unbiased coverage, yet by the logic of the media, which makes the media are not passive conduits.

### **Keywords:**

Local Mass Media; Media Coverage; Political Campaign; Women's media coverage

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## Introduction

The role of mass media in a democratic country cannot be ignored. Today the media can be called the fifth pillar of democracy. The mass media can become an effective channel for political socialization in an electoral mechanism. The mass media can play a crucial role in election campaigns through the coverage of candidates, which can affect people's preferences regarding making political choices (Dalton, 2012). Goldenberg & Traugott (1987) concluded that the more often a candidate is covered by the mass media, the greater the chance she/he has been recognized by the public and even won the election. Thus, to benefit from the mass media role, a candidate must always be covered to convey his/her political messages to the public. The public can easily remember the candidate, including voting in the voting booth.

Apart from the frequency of media coverage, the tone of coverage is another critical factor in political marketing through the mass media. A positive and unbiased coverage can be an advantage for the candidate. On the other hand, any bias captured by the media can become a kickback for a candidate. Therefore, the balance and partisanship of the press are essential here. They can also explain the potential for women's electability in an electoral mechanism.

The women's portrayal by the media can influence people's responses to the women candidate (Phillips, 1998). If women are engraved differently from men in media coverage, this can hinder women's electability. Previous studies about mass media and legislative elections have shown that male candidates are more widely covered by the press (Kahn & Goldenberg, 1991). Not only in terms of reporting frequency but also by positive stories and tone of coverage (Bystrom, Robertson, & Banwart, 2001; Conroy, Oliver, Breckenridge-Jackson, & Heldman, 2015; Gidengil & Everitt, 2000; Heldman, Carroll, & Olson, 2000, 2005; Kahn, 1994; Uscinski & Goren, 2011). Consequently, social construction resulting from this biased mass media coverage is detrimental to women. As a result, women candidates may be considered less competent in political contestation than men (Conroy, 2017; Devitt, 2002; Dunaway, Lawrence, Rose, & Weber, 2013; Kahn, 1992, 1994). Therefore, the media must provide balanced coverage to every candidate without exception.

In Indonesia's case, as a form of anticipation from the general election commission (KPU) facing the 2018 simultaneous regional elections (Pilkada 2018), the KPU requires the media to provide fair and balanced news as regulated in Article 56 PKPU No. 4 of 2017. Although other studies concluded that there is no bias in media coverage against women (Hayes & Lawless, 2015, 2016; Smith, 1997), the KPU's action to regulate the balance of media coverage is essential to avoid gender bias in media coverage in Indonesia. The study that concludes that there is no bias against women was done by Hayes & Lawless to examine the media coverage and alignments to women candidates in the U.S. by-election

in 2010 and 2014. That study stated that in the U.S. polarized era and when women are no longer considered as the new actors in politics, the media tends to produce unbiased coverage. However, we cannot take the results for granted and believe that the political circumstance is now thoroughly gendered friendly (Sweinstani, 2018). Therefore, we must contextualize their findings to what truly happens in Indonesia. Moreover, when looking at a study about women candidates' coverage in Indonesia, gender bias is still often found in media coverage (Kusumawardani, 2017; Yuniati & Fardiah, 2017). This bias could happen due to the patriarchal value in some of Indonesia's societies.

Several previous studies in Indonesia concluded that although the frequency and scope of coverage were not gendered biased, the tone coverage, especially in the national media, was still not balanced and still biased. For example, in covering women politicians, especially candidates for legislative members, the media focuses more on women's appearances, not her programs and achievements (Kusumawardani, 2017). Furthermore, Yuniati & Fardiah (2017) explained that the media only emphasizes women politician news on three images: physical image, popularity image, and image of conflict. Likewise, with national media coverage for women candidates for the regional head, it is known that the media are still biased in their coverage due to the influence of the patriarchal ideology (Kurniasari, 2010).

Looking at some of the results of previous research both globally and in Indonesia, which mainly focused on women candidates in the national legislature covered by the national media, this study aims to see how local media portrayed women candidates for regional head and Vice regional heads in Pilkada 2018. Besides, this study also seeks to fill the academic gap regarding what factors drove these women candidates' media portrayal. The author believes that the differences in the electoral system between the legislative election and executive election would be one of the factors that influence women's portrayal in the mass media.

Apart from the above argument, the other novelty of this study is that this research is based on local media's nature, which is closer and easier to construct public awareness because the produced news can be adapted to local wisdom. In the context of good local governance, local media has become a strategic channel to accommodate grassroots aspirations for various decisions to be taken by the government. In other words, local media can be a key to the success of regional autonomy. Furthermore, it can become an effective channel for political education for local communities (Yusuf, 2011), including how to build public recognition about regional head candidates in their respective regions. By conducting studies on local media, it is hoped that the author can also make a difference in how the national media and local media treat women candidates.

In analyzing the driving factors of women's news coverage, apart from considering the incumbency status, this study also considers the Media Logic, a logic used by the

media that suggests that news values dominate in selecting and presenting political news (Altheide, 2004, 2016). Using this logic, the writer will examine how the media's political agenda can influence women's coverage. In contrast to the study conducted by Lühiste & Banducci (2016), which states that the media logic and the political party logic are the factors of women's news coverage, this study does not look at the logic of political parties. The women candidates here are the local executive candidates. Therefore, there is a bold difference between legislative candidacy and local executive candidacy. In the context of legislative candidacy, it is vital to highlight political parties' logic because parties can undoubtedly have the primary goal of winning elections through their representatives. Therefore, parties will put forward the candidates who are likely to win, and this will, in turn, shape which candidates are covered in the media. Meanwhile, in local executive candidacy, the candidate will not act as the political party's representative yet convince people by her/his vision, missions, and programs.

### Media Logic and Women's Political Image: A Conceptual Framework

This study used the explanatory sequential mixed method. Firstly, the author used the descriptive-quantitative method then followed up with the qualitative one to construct the whole interpretation of this study (Creswell, 2014). This study took a sample of coverage of 5 out of 7 women candidates, both regional head candidates and Vice regional head candidates in the four Provinces that held Pilkada in 2018. The four regions are East Java, Central Java, Lampung, and West Kalimantan. In these four regions, the author analyzed two candidates for Governor in East Java and West Kalimantan and three candidates for Vice governor candidates in East Java, Central Java and Lampung. The selection of the five women candidates was based on their political experience. Those five women are women with qualified political experience locally and nationally, such as being a Minister or Member of the National Legislative. Therefore, looking at those advanced backgrounds, this study examined whether those backgrounds will make the media free from bias or still probe women candidates as the secondary political actors.

Table 1. List of Women Candidates who became research subjects

No	Name	Running for
1	Khofifah Indar Parawansa	Governor of East Java
2	dr. Karolin Margret Natasa	Governor of West Kalimantan
3	Dra. Ida Fauziyah	Vice Governor of Central Java

No	Name	Running for
4	Hj. Chusnunia, M.Si., M.KN., Ph.D	Vice Governor of Lampung
5	Puti Guntur Soekarno	Vice Governor of East Java

The quantitative method was done by conducting a content analysis on local media. First, the author took a sample of the news in well-known local newspapers where women candidates run in each region. The local mass media observed are Suara Merdeka for Central Java, Jawa Post for East Java, Kalimantan Post for West Kalimantan, and Tribun Lampung for Lampung. Then, the author used a non-probability sampling method with a quota technique. In this quota technique, the author determines the number of editions to be observed. The author determined ten editions of local newspapers in each newspaper each month from March-23 June 2018. Of the ten editions, the author picked three editions at the beginning of the month, four editions at the middle of the month, and three editions at the end of the month. However, specifically for June, the author only took five samples of editions and limited it to the 23 June 2018 edition as the Pilkada was held on 27 June 2018. Thus, the author observed 35 editions of each newspaper for four months or the equivalent of 140 editions of the newspaper for four months of observation.

Of those samples, the author figured out two aspects: how the difference between men and women candidates' new frequencies is and the tone of the women's coverage. For the second aspect, the writer will look at whether the media only focuses on the appearance, personal life, or the programs and achievements of women candidates.

The author focused on the Special Pilkada Columns at each newspaper in the content analysis. Then, the author made some codes for the news frequency and the media portrayal of women observed. After giving exact codes to all the news observed, the author distributed the frequency of each coding in Ms. Excel. Finally, the author interviewed the journalist expert and conducted a documentary study to answer how the media portrayed women and the factors that drove it.

Table 2. Codes used in the content analysis

Codes	Frequency
1	Become Highlight with Picture
2	Mentioned in an article
3	Not Covered

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Women's Portrayal</b>
1	Physical Appearance
2	Personal Life; About Family or other activities outside the election
3	Political professionalism; Track Record, Vision, Missions, Programs, Political Standpoint
4	Men candidates news
5	Other News of Pilkada: Voting Behaviour, Participation, EMBs, etc

To synthesize this study, the author used the framework of media logic to sharpen the analysis. A media logic (Altheide, 2004, 2016) suggests that news values dominate in selecting and presenting political news. Therefore, rather than focusing on how media portray women, examining the logic behind the coverage, one would focus on how news values and journalistic practices might lead to gendered coverage. This logic recognizes that the news media (and journalists) are not passive conduits of political information, but those editorial decisions are based on journalists' values. These values include a commitment to informing voters and maintaining audience shares (Zaller, 1999). In maintaining audience interest, news media might focus on political leaders or those deemed more likely to win or those engaged to the superpower one in politics. Therefore, journalists' and editors' values may play a role in any gender bias in coverage (Lühiste & Banducci, 2016).

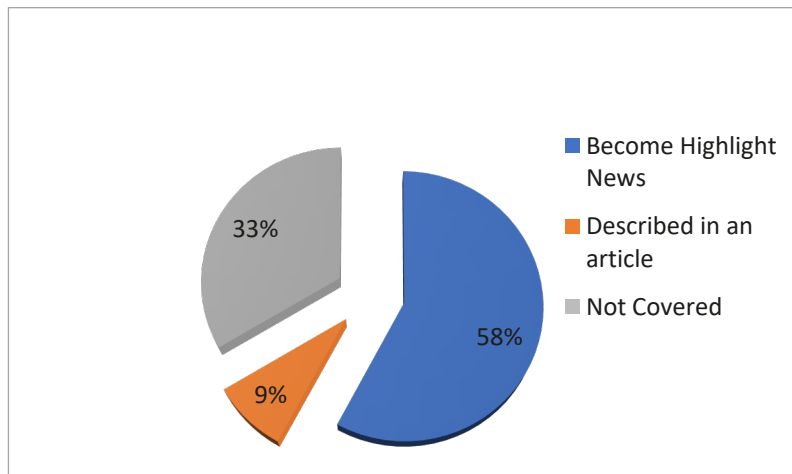
With the intention of such media logic, borrowing critical media theory in the study of communication science, it is said that the mass media can construct a political agenda according to the ideology of who controls the media. What is constructed by the press through the images and opinions can benefit or harm specific political interests because the media have significant power to produce and reproduce political images (Arifin, 2011: 161-162; Haryanto, 2018: 219). Such assumptions on the media are relevant to Tuchman's opinion, which states that all media content as reality has been constructed, including how they construct the imagination of women candidates.

### **Women Candidates Portrayal in Local Mass Media**

Previous studies on the mass media's portrayal of women candidates show that they still portray women candidates in biased coverage. It can be seen from the media coverage that it has not highlighted the programs and achievements of women politicians (Yuniati & Fardiah, 2017). However, this study managed to show different results. Based on observations on 140 news in four local mass media in four regions, 67% of local media had portrayed women regional head candidates in the particular Pilkada column in each media. Moreover, they portrayed women candidates both in headline news and in the

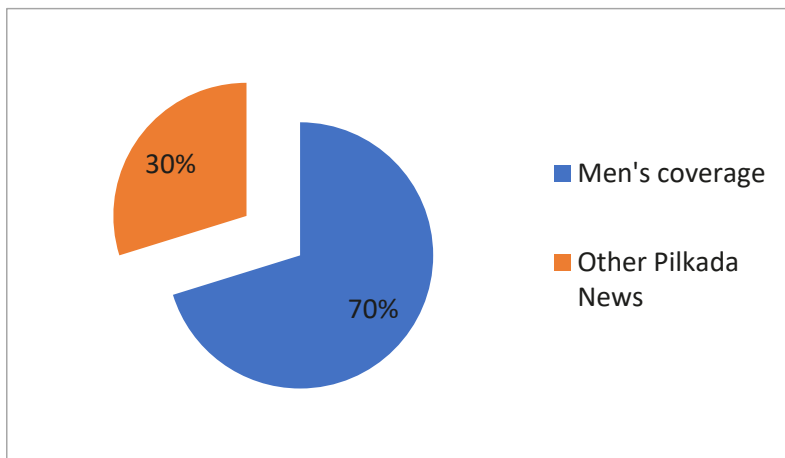
body of an article about Pilkada (see figure 1). In contrast, the rest captured the male candidates and the other news related to Pilkada (see figure 2).

Figure 1. Frequency of Coverage of Candidate Women for Regional Heads in All Local Media Observed



Source: Processed by the author based on observations from March-23 June 2018

Figure 2. Frequency of Other News that Did not portray women candidates



Source: Processed by the author based on observations from March-23 June 2018

One of the factors that cause local mass media to cover women candidates in a high enough frequency is the candidate’s advanced political background. For example, two of the five research subjects were candidates for the governor with significant social-political capital. One of them is a former minister. The other is the elected Regent of Landak Regency, West Kalimantan, in 2017-2022, who is also the daughter of the Governor of West



Kalimantan for the 2008-2018 period. Due to this background, the media made these two women the spotlight of their respective Pilkada columns with a reasonably high frequency.

Moreover, in regions with two women running for the regional head, such as in East Java, the frequency of women candidates' coverage is even higher (see figure 4). The media juxtaposed the two women in the same news column even in the same news (see Figure 3, the left picture). The purpose of juxtaposing the two women is to provide differences in women's programs and leadership styles. In addition, there was also news that set side by side the woman and the man candidate in the same news column, such as in Suara Merdeka March 28, 2018, even though those two candidates did not run for the same level of candidacy. The man candidate ran for the governor and the woman for the vice governor (see Figure 3, the right picture). However, it seems like no hesitation by the media to compare them as both of them have similarly advanced political capital. Therefore, we can infer that social-political capital owned by women candidates can be a factor that drives the media to cover them in a high frequency.

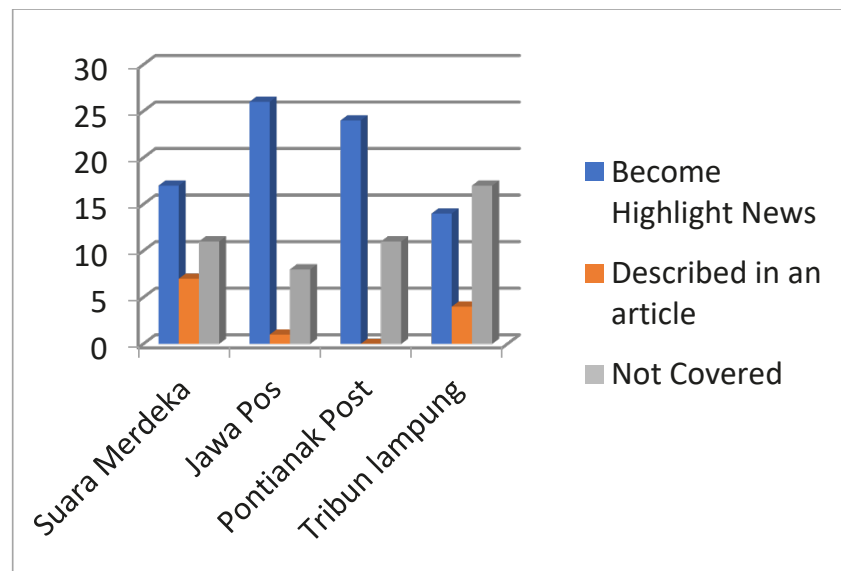
Figure 3. The examples of news that placed women's coverage as the highlight.



Sources: Jawa Pos April 17, 2018 (left) and Suara Merdeka March 28, 2018



Figure 4. Frequency of Coverage of Candidate Women for Regional Heads in Each Local Media Observed

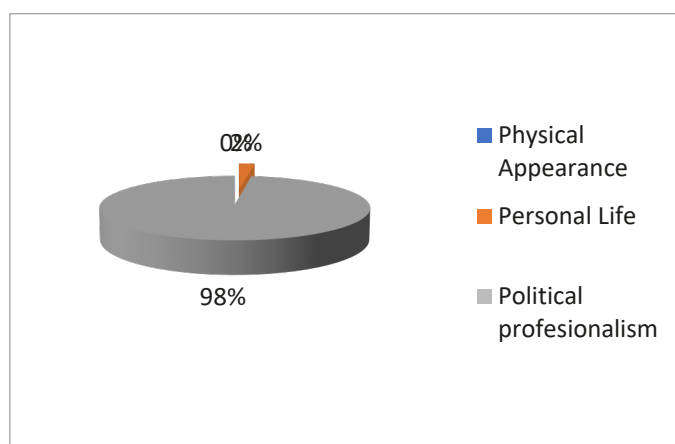


Source: Processed by the author based on observations from March-23 June 2018

After knowing how the women's coverage frequencies are, the second thing I found in this study was the tone of local media coverage on women. The image constructed by the media on women candidates is an important thing that can influence public perceptions of them. This study found that the local media no longer only captures the women's physical appearance and private life. Instead, the four local media being observed emphasized the efforts to build the political professionalism image of women candidates by reporting on the programs they carry on, the vision and mission, campaign activities and public debates, and the track records of each women candidate. Even for the case where a woman candidate is running for the Vice Governor candidate, the local mass media still portrayed their political professionalism by capturing their programs or campaign according to their portion as Vice governor.

For the image of private life, local mass media also captured it as additional information to balance the formal information and the earthier one, yet only in a few frequencies. Only 2% of the coverage contained elements of personal images. The difference between the findings in this study and the previous study also indicates that at the local level, which tends to be closer to the community, the local media focuses more on the news consisting of the women candidates' programs that are considered directly can solve problems in the local level. It contrasts with the national media, which tends to create the image of women's physical appearance and their political kinship (Yuniati & Fardiah, 2017). Therefore, this study did not find a media bias against women in the local mass media when seen from the tone of coverage.

Figure 5. Image of Media Coverage of Women Candidates



Source: Processed by the author based on observations from March-23 June 2018

### The Unbiased Portrayal Factors

Based on the results of local media observations described in the previous section, the absence of bias of women local executive candidates' news coverage in local media can occur for several reasons. The first factor is the election in which women participate. Here, the context of women candidates is women who run for the local executive election. This result confirms the author's thesis statement that media logic plays a significant role in capturing women candidates in the local executive election. The bold differences between the electoral mechanism included the candidacy in the legislative and executive election, making the media see that the more valuable things to be raised as political news is the candidate itself; the programs, track record, and any other related to the candidates. In addition, in local executive candidacy, the candidate will not act as the political party's representative, yet convince people by her/his vision, missions, and programs. Candidates who win the election do not play a role as party representatives but will "work managerial" for their lead regions. The media prioritize a candidate's program as it is expected to solve any local problems. Therefore, the media is more interested in juxtaposing each candidate's program regardless of the gender status inherent in the candidate.

Of course, these situations can be different if women run for legislative elections. In legislative elections, women will not only fight with candidates from the outside political party, but they also have to fight with their male counterparts in the same party. Usually, when male and women candidates are in the same party, the political parties are more inclined to win over the male candidates. Consequently, the party may always highlight the male candidate. In this condition, the logic of political parties proposed by Lühiste & Banducci (2016) affects women's media coverage.

The second factor is the women's advanced social-political capital. The five research subjects here are women politicians with great experiences in politics. Khofifah Indar Parawangsa, who run for Governor of East Java, is a well-known women politician who previously served as the 27th Minister of Social Affairs, the fifth he fifth Minister for Female Empowerment, the chairwoman of the Family Planning Board in the National Unity Cabinet, and the former Deputy Speaker of the Indonesian House of Representatives. The other woman, Karolin Natasa, is currently serving as regent of Landak. Previously, she had served as a member of M.P.s. She is also the daughter of the former Governor of West Kalimantan. Her personal political experiences and familial ties with the male politician made her the center of attention in the West Kalimantan Local election. Ida Fauziah, who runs for Vice Governor of Central Java, is currently the Minister of Manpower. When she ran for the local election, she was a member of M.P.s and was seated for the chairperson of the VIII Commission in DPR RI in 2012-2014. She was also the founder and chairperson of the Women Parliament Caucus. The other candidate, Chusnunia Chalim, who ran for Vice Governor of Lampung, is also a famous Indonesian Woman Politician. She was the regent of East Lampung Regency and was previously elected as a member of M.P.s in 2009 and 2014.

Last but not least, Puti Guntur Soekarno, who ran for the Vice Governor of East Java, was the granddaughter of Mr Soekarno, the first president. Despite having close political kinship to the founding father, she also has advanced political experiences. She was the cadre of PDI Perjuangan and was elected as M.P.s in 2009 and 2014. Therefore, due to this background, the media made these women the spotlight of their Pilkada news and prompted local media to create the image of political professionalism through various campaign activities and programs promoted by women candidates.

The third factor of the unbiased portrayal is that today women are no longer considered a novelty in Indonesia's politics. Even though they do not fully have equal political access to men and the spirit of political affirmation for women is still echoed, women's presence in Indonesia's politics is no longer a new phenomenon. Especially when they have sufficient political experience, it becomes understandable why the media no longer raises biased issues such as mere physical appearance. It is in line with the findings of Hayes & Lawless (2016) in the legislative elections in America. When women are no longer considered as the newbie in politics, the mass media tends to be more balanced in covering women (Hayes & Lawless, 2016).

The Fourth factor is related to the hidden agenda, which influences the logic of the media to produce and reproduce women candidates' portrayal. The political agenda led by the mass media is very much influenced by who controls the media. Bugin (2008: 102-106) explains that the political agenda constructed by the mass media is also heavily influenced by modern capitalists' interests towards the ruling government regime. In other words,

the media's alignments towards specific political interests also greatly determine how they capture any political issue, including women's candidacy.

Concerned with this factor, the author's finding shows that local mass media's political alignments to the political parties that carry women candidates and the national political agenda benefit women candidates. As is well known, the implementation of the 2018 Pilkada is very closely related to the implementation of the 2019 Simultaneous Election. Therefore, the 2018 Pilkada can be called the pre-event of the 2019 Simultaneous Election. The timing of the 2018 Pilkada is very close to the registration period for the 2019 Simultaneous Election. The registration period for legislative candidates is less than two weeks after the 2018 Pilkada voting day.

Meanwhile, the registration period for presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the 2019-2024 period was carried out less than two months afterwards. It can even be said that the Pilkada 2018 were not just about choosing governors and mayors/regents. The 2018 Pilkada could be considered as a qualifying round for the determination of presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the 2019-2024 period (Kompas, 2018).

Related to the women regional head candidates, there was a tendency for the media to support the certain president and vice president's candidate to provide massive coverage of the regional head candidate pairs affiliated with the presidential candidate in question. This tendency was confirmed by Widyawati, a journalistic expert who said, "the mass media would prefer to cover the candidates who are aligned to the presidential candidate whom they support" (interviewed with Dr. Widyawati, Jakarta, August 2018).

Therefore, Simultaneous elections with the presidential election as the center of attention can be a great opportunity, not only for the legislative candidates (Amalia, Budiatri, Sweinstani, M. K., Kusumaningtyas, & Ekawati, 2021; Sweinstani, 2019) but also for the women regional head candidates and the mass media to associate themselves with certain presidential candidates. Women candidates get a coat-tail effect from the alignments of this media. The mass media must construct an image of the candidates' political professionalism representing the press's political alignments.

The four driven factors above show that the media will logically produce the most valuable news. This logic recognizes that the news media (and journalists) are not passive conduits of political information but rather that editorial decisions are based on journalists' values. Therefore, it can be concluded that several factors, both from women candidates and external factors, are considered the media logic that suggests or influences the media to portray women candidates in an unbiased manner. The factors from the candidates are the social-political capital and their political participation status, which is no longer

considered as a novelty. Meanwhile, the external factors are the type of election and media political alignments to the more extensive political agenda.

## Conclusion

The unbiased coverage towards women regional head candidates positively impacts women regional head candidates through the news's balance. There is no bias against women candidates both in the new frequency and the tone of coverage. Even though, in general, politics is still a challenging domain for women and often alienates women in this field, several factors encourage the local mass media not to be biased in presenting news about women. Four factors influence the alignment of local mass media towards women; the type of election that women participate in, the social-political capital of women candidates who are considered attractive to be appointed as news, the condition that women participated in politics is not a novelty, and alignment of media to the more extensive political agenda. Those factors then transform into the media logic, suggesting that news values dominate in selecting and presenting political news. Therefore, it can be concluded that the neutrality of the media does not necessarily cause this unbiased nature. However, the logic of the media pushes the media not to be a passive object.

## Acknowledgment

The author would like to thank all of the colleagues in the Research Center of Politics, BRIN who gave inputs for this project. The author also would like to thank all the librarians in Indonesia National Library who helped the author find the back edition of some newspaper.

## Funding

The author did not receive any funding for this research, authorship, and publication from any party.

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## Interview

Dyah Widyawati, A Journalist Expert, Jakarta, August 2018

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