



# Democracy-Based Mass Media System: An Analysis of Its Functions, Roles, and Accountability in Indonesia

Ario Bimo Pangestu<sup>1</sup>, Yuli Andriani<sup>1</sup>, Armadila<sup>1</sup>, Roza Adriani<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>STAI YDI Lubuk Sikaping, Sumatra Barat, Indonesia

✉ [ariobimopangestu999@gmail.com](mailto:ariobimopangestu999@gmail.com) \*

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## Abstract

This article examines how a democracy-based mass media system operates in Indonesia by examining its functions, roles, and accountability in public life. This research is motivated by the need to understand the quality of Indonesian democracy, which is heavily influenced by the media's role as a transmitter of information, a check on power, and a space for public participation. Using a qualitative approach based on literature, this article examines various regulations, communication theories, and previous research findings to describe the actual state of media in post-reform Indonesia. The study's findings indicate that press freedom has opened up space for the development of information pluralism, but challenges such as ownership concentration, political bias, and weak media accountability still hinder the media's ideal function as a pillar of democracy. This study emphasizes that increasing media literacy, strengthening journalistic codes of ethics, and transparency of ownership are key steps to improving the quality of Indonesian democracy through a healthy media system.

## INTRODUCTION

The mass media system in a democratic country is more than just a collection of journalists or TV stations; it is a vital pillar maintaining the quality of national life. The media serves as a public window: conveying the information citizens need to make informed decisions, while also providing a space for exchanging opinions and monitoring the actions of those in power.

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In other words, a healthy media helps build a more critical and empowered citizenry. In Indonesia, this role faces both pressure and opportunity. Pressure stems from political and economic conditions that sometimes impact media independence, for example when media ownership is concentrated in the hands of certain groups or when political pressure makes journalists hesitant to report the facts (Nurdin & Putri, 2024).

On the other hand, technological developments, particularly social media and digital platforms, offer significant opportunities: information can spread rapidly, more voices can be heard, and digital literacy initiatives can grow to strengthen social control. However, the rapid flow of information also triggers new problems such as hoaxes and polarization, making the media's role as a balancing force increasingly crucial (Nurdin & Putri, 2024). Practically, the media has three main, interrelated tasks.

First, providing accurate and easily accessible information to the public is fundamental to a healthy democracy. Second, acting as a watchdog, exposing abuse of power and corrupt practices, without this role, public control over officials will be weakened. Third, opening up space for participation: providing a platform for public voices, especially those often marginalized, to make public policy more inclusive and responsive. These three tasks demand editorial professionalism, journalistic ethics, and the courage to report the truth (Raifangga et al., 2019). For the media to truly fulfill these functions, the aspect of accountability cannot be ignored.

Accountability here includes transparency of ownership, adherence to a code of ethics, correction mechanisms and the right of reply, and oversight by non-governmental institutions such as the Press Council and civil society organizations. Without accountability, press freedom is easily abused, for example, by being turned into propaganda for business or political interests. Therefore, freedom must be accompanied by clear responsibilities to ensure that the public interest remains a priority (Raifangga et al., 2019). Strengthening a democracy-based mass media system in Indonesia requires simultaneous efforts to strengthen the professional capacity of journalists, promote regulations that protect plurality and independence, and increase media literacy among the public. Only with a combination of policies, a healthy journalistic culture, and a critical public can the media truly function as a pillar that strengthens democracy.

## METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method. (*library research*) This method was chosen because the focus of the research is to analyze

concepts, theories, regulations, and previous research results regarding the mass media system in the context of Indonesian democracy. This approach allows researchers to describe phenomena comprehensively, in-depth, and critically based on relevant scientific sources (Darmalaksana, 2020). The data in this study comes from: Communication and media theory books, national and international scientific journals, laws related to the press and media, reports from press institutions such as the Press Council and scientific articles and research publications related to democracy and the media. All sources were selected based on relevance, credibility, and currency.

Data validity was maintained by using credible literature sources, source triangulation, and cross-reference confirmation (Darmalaksana, 2020). Researchers compared various theories and findings to ensure objectivity and accuracy of interpretation. Data collection was conducted by searching literature through libraries, academic repositories, and trusted online journals, summarizing key points from theories, regulations, and research findings, and grouping data based on themes: media functions, media roles, and accountability in democracy (Darmalaksana, 2020). Data analysis for this article was carried out through steps such as data reduction, data classification, and content analysis. (*content analysis*) and drawing conclusions

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Democracy-Based Mass Media System in Indonesia**

A media system that supports democracy is not simply about freedom of speech or a multitude of information channels. It is a set of rules, practices, and media culture that allows information to flow freely, citizens to have fair access to information, and the voices of the public, including those of the weak or minorities, to be heard. In a democratic context, the media ideally serves as a vehicle for fostering openness, government accountability, and meaningful public participation (Solihat, 2016). Since the post-reform era of 1998, media conditions in Indonesia have changed significantly. The state officially abandoned the previously widespread practices of censorship and strict restrictions, and the state has provided much greater space for press freedom through regulations and institutions that support independent journalistic practices (Putra, 2019).

This legal basis opened the door to the growth of print, electronic, and more recently digital media platforms, allowing information to spread more quickly and widely. This change provided an opportunity for the public to gain diverse perspectives and monitor public administration (Putra, 2019). Normatively, the model often considered appropriate for Indonesia is a combination of press freedom

and social responsibility: media are given the freedom to report and criticize, but are also expected to operate according to professional and ethical standards that safeguard the public interest. This means that freedom is not absolute and without limits; there is an obligation to verify facts, maintain balanced reporting, and avoid the dissemination of information that is detrimental to the public without a clear basis (Hidayat, 2025).

This principle places the press as a right accompanied by professional obligations to citizens. In practice, the implementation of these principles is not always smooth. There is a tendency for concentrated media ownership to dominate certain voices, and under such conditions, editorial independence can be undermined by the business or political interests of the owners (Hidayat, 2025). In the digital era, other challenges arise: the rapid flow of information facilitates the spread of fake news, polarizing narratives, and clickbait practices that prioritize traffic over quality.

Furthermore, political or economic pressures sometimes make journalists and editors hesitate to raise sensitive issues (Hidayat, 2025). All of this weakens the media's potential as a pillar of democracy if not anticipated. Therefore, strengthening a democracy-based media system requires a dual approach: on the one hand, strengthening the regulatory and oversight framework, for example, transparency of ownership, enforcement of codes of ethics, and public accountability mechanisms; and on the other, strengthening the media's internal capacity and the public's ability (Raifangga et al., 2019). Strengthening capacity means building journalistic professionalism that emphasizes verification and independence, expanding the plurality of healthy media owners to prevent information domination, and encouraging media literacy in the community so that citizens can distinguish between facts and hoaxes (Raifangga et al., 2019). The combination of clear policies, a strong journalistic culture, and a critical public is key to a media system that truly supports the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

### **The Function of Mass Media in a Democratic System**

In a democratic system, the mass media performs several fundamental, complementary functions. These functions are not only professional duties for journalists but also essential for a healthy political and social life. The following is a detailed explanation of each function and its practical implications (Hanifa et al., 2024):

#### **Public Information Channel**

The media serves as the primary source of information for the public. The information conveyed must be factual, relevant, and accessible to various groups of

citizens, from students to workers, from cities to villages. This function is crucial because sound political and social decisions depend on the availability of accurate and easily understood information. Practically, the media must present clear news, include context (why the issue is important), and identify credible sources. If information is inaccurate or unevenly distributed, the public becomes vulnerable to misconceptions and opinion manipulation (Hanifa et al., 2024).

### **Supervisory Power (*Watchdog*)**

One of the media's most strategic roles in a democracy is to monitor the actions of governments, public officials, and major institutions. Its watchdog function involves the media investigating and exposing corrupt practices, abuse of power, or policies that harm the public. This role maintains a balance of power; when officials are aware of oversight, they are more likely to be held accountable. To effectively carry out this function, the media requires editorial independence, investigative courage, and protection mechanisms for sources and journalists covering sensitive issues (Hanifa et al., 2024).

### **Public Space and Participation Facilitator**

The media provides an arena for public dialogue where citizens express their opinions, criticize policies, and advocate for collective interests. In practice, this function means opening opinion columns, discussion forums, reporting on marginalized voices, and facilitating informed debate. This can make the policy-making process more inclusive and responsive. If this public space is limited or dominated by certain groups, the quality of participation declines, and public decisions will be less representative of the interests of many parties (Hanifa et al., 2024).

### **Public Education and Enlightenment**

The media also plays a role in educating the public, not just by conveying news but also by explaining the context, processes, and consequences of policies or events. This educational function includes in-depth reporting, data analysis, explanations of technical terms, and programs that increase public understanding of complex issues. With proper media education, the public becomes more critical, able to evaluate information sources, and less easily provoked by misinformation (Hanifa et al., 2024).

These four functions are interconnected without accurate information: the media's oversight capacity is weakened without a broad public space, oversight struggles to drive change, and without education, citizens are less able to evaluate

information and participate effectively. Therefore, efforts to improve the media system must address all functions: improving the quality of journalism, protecting press freedom, expanding access to information, and fostering media literacy in the community.

### **The Role of Mass Media in Indonesian Democracy**

The mass media in Indonesia plays a crucial role in democracy, not only conveying information but also shaping political, social, economic, and public advocacy processes. In the political realm, the media functions to frame issues, highlight political actors, and influence public understanding to make citizens' choices more rational. Editorial freedom and transparency of ownership are key to preventing news from turning into propaganda. Socio-culturally, the media contributes to shaping national identity and strengthening cohesion through the representation of national values, tolerance, and diversity, with the caveat that content must be sensitive and inclusive to avoid triggering prejudice or polarization (Santosa, 2017).

In the economic sphere, media operates as an industry that generates revenue and absorbs labor, but an overly commercial orientation can shift editorial priorities from in-depth reporting to sensational news. Therefore, funding diversification and sustainable business models are important to maintain journalistic quality. In addition, the media plays a role as a public advocate, highlighting under-recognized issues such as the rights of marginalized groups, the environment, and social injustice, by separating facts, opinions, and advocacy to remain professional and trustworthy (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019).

These four roles are interconnected: political performance requires economic support, socio-cultural quality depends on good editorials, and effective public advocacy is supported by investigative reporting. Challenges in Indonesia include ownership concentration, political pressure, and the flow of disinformation, necessitating strategic measures such as transparency of media ownership, protection of editorial freedom, support for sustainable business models, increased public media literacy, and strengthening codes of ethics and correction mechanisms to ensure the media is able to carry out its role as a pillar of democracy (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019).

Furthermore, the development of digital technology has significantly changed the media landscape, presenting both opportunities and risks. Online platforms allow information to spread rapidly, providing space for more voices, and making it easier for the public to access diverse perspectives (Santosa, 2017). However, the speed and

volume of information also pose new challenges, such as the spread of hoaxes, misleading news, and the polarization of public opinion. In this context, the role of the mass media as a filter of information is vital. The media needs to develop fast and accurate verification mechanisms, provide educational content, and facilitate constructive dialogue to prevent the public from easily falling prey to misinformation.

Digital literacy is an integral part of the media's function, as a critical public is the foundation of a healthy democracy (Santosa, 2017). Furthermore, the sustainability of the media's role in democracy also depends on journalistic culture and public participation. The media must encourage professional, transparent, and accountable editorial practices, and commit to strict ethical standards (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019). On the other hand, the public needs to play an active role as a watchdog, through the right of reply, public criticism, and involvement in discussion forums.

The synergy between responsible media and a critical public will strengthen democracy, ensuring that the media serve not only as conveyors of information but also as checks on power, facilitators of participation, and agents of social change. With this joint effort, the Indonesian mass media can become a pillar that strengthens accountability, plurality, and the quality of democratic life in a sustainable manner.

### **Accountability of Mass Media in a Democratic System**

The mass media in Indonesia plays a strategic role in building and strengthening democracy, not only as a conveyor of information but also as a watchdog of power, a facilitator of public participation, and an agent of social change. Healthy media serves as a public window, providing access to accurate and reliable information, enabling the public to make rational and critical decisions. Furthermore, the media provides a space for citizens to voice their opinions, convey their aspirations, and highlight often-marginalized issues, enabling democracy to operate in an inclusive and participatory manner (Nurdin & Putri, 2024).

Since the post-reform era in 1998, media in Indonesia has undergone significant changes. Press freedom is guaranteed through Law No. 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, which abolished the censorship system and provided space for journalists to work independently. This legal basis allows print, electronic, and digital media to develop, provide a plurality of information, and shape public opinion (Putra, 2019). However, this freedom must still be accompanied by social responsibility, including



professional standards, fact-checking, and the principle of balance, so that the media is not used for certain political or business interests. In terms of function, mass media has a dual, complementary role.

The first function is as a public information channel, which delivers factual, relevant, and easily accessible news to all levels of society (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019). The second function is as a watchdog, highlighting corrupt practices, abuse of authority, and policies that are detrimental to the public (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019). The third function is as a public space, providing a forum for dialogue, debate, and citizen participation in various social and political issues (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019). The fourth function is public education, where the media presents contextual, in-depth, and analytical information so that the public is able to critically understand complex issues (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019).

In addition to these functions, the media plays a strategic role in the political, socio-cultural, economic, and public advocacy sectors. Politically, the media frames issues and highlights political actors, influencing public opinion and choices, and simultaneously serving as an arena for public scrutiny of power. From a socio-cultural perspective, the media shapes national identity, strengthens social cohesion, and showcases diversity in an inclusive manner (Cahyani et al., 2025). Economically, the media serves as an industry that generates revenue and creates jobs, but an excessive commercial orientation can shift the focus from in-depth journalism to sensational news (Ahda et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the media serves as a public advocate, highlighting issues of marginalized groups' rights, the environment, and social injustice. This can trigger policy change if conducted professionally and ethically (Kusumaningsih, 2024). The development of digital technology adds a new dimension to mass media. Online platforms allow information to spread more quickly and provide space for more public voices, but also present challenges in the form of hoaxes, opinion polarization, and misleading content (Pangaribuan & Irwansyah, 2019). Therefore, the media needs to establish rapid verification mechanisms, provide educational content, and facilitate constructive dialogue so that the public is not easily trapped by misinformation. Media literacy is key to enabling citizens to assess the quality of news and use information critically.

Accountability is a crucial factor in preventing press freedom from being abused. In Indonesia, media accountability is governed by regulations and self-regulatory mechanisms within the Press Council, where the press is free but still obligated to respect religious norms, morals, journalistic codes of ethics, and



democratic principles (Hanifa et al., 2024). The Journalistic Code of Ethics emphasizes the principles of truth, verification, balance, and the prohibition of slander or the dissemination of misleading information (Armadila, 2023). Furthermore, the public has the right to submit criticism, complaints, and the right of reply, while transparency of media ownership is necessary to ensure the public is aware of potential conflicts of interest. Antitrust oversight is crucial to maintain the diversity of information and prevent the dominance of a single interest (Hanifa et al., 2024).

With a combination of freedom, responsibility, and accountability, Indonesian mass media can optimally fulfill its role (Armadila, 2025). Editorial professionalism, ownership transparency, public literacy, and a strengthened code of ethics are prerequisites for the media to be able to carry out its informative, educational, oversight, and advocacy functions (Hidayat, 2025). The synergy between responsible media and a critical public will strengthen democracy, ensuring that the media is not only a conveyor of information, but also a pillar that maintains accountability, plurality, and the quality of democratic life in Indonesia on a sustainable basis.

## CONCLUSION

Healthy media requires a rapid verification system, educational content, and a space for constructive dialogue to prevent the public from falling prey to hoaxes. The key is media literacy, the ability of citizens to critically and responsibly assess information. Press freedom must go hand in hand with accountability. In Indonesia, this is safeguarded through regulations and the Press Council's self-regulatory mechanisms, which emphasize that freedom remains bound by norms, morals, and the Journalistic Code of Ethics. The principles of truth, verification, and balance are foundational, while the public is given the right to criticize, complain, and respond. Ownership transparency and antitrust oversight are also crucial to prevent conflicts of interest and maintain information diversity.

Since the 1998 reforms and the enactment of Press Law No. 40 of 1999, the media has grown rapidly and become more independent, opening up space for pluralistic opinions. However, this freedom demands a high level of responsibility to ensure that the media are not swayed by political or business interests. Functionally, the media serves as a conveyor of information, a check on power, a space for public dialogue, and a means of education. Strategically, the media influences politics, shapes culture, drives the economy, and advocates for public issues, including the interests of marginalized groups. However, an excessive commercial orientation risks shifting the quality of journalism toward sensationalism.

In the digital era, the flow of information is increasingly rapid and inclusive, but also prone to hoaxes and polarization. Therefore, the media must adapt by strengthening verification, public education, and the quality of discourse. Digital literacy is a key bulwark for maintaining critical public engagement in a complex information ecosystem. Ultimately, the synergy between professional media and a critical public is the foundation of a strong democracy. With maintained ethics, upheld transparency, and expanded literacy, the media becomes not only a conveyor of information, but also a guardian of accountability, a guardian of plurality, and a driver of sustainable social change. Moving forward, strengthening the media ecosystem must be carried out in an integrated manner through collaboration between the state, the press industry, and civil society.

Adaptive regulations, improved journalist competence, and technology-based innovation need to be directed toward maintaining information quality amidst digital disruption. At the same time, public participation in media oversight must continue to be encouraged to strike a balance between freedom and responsibility. This way, the media will not only survive amidst change but also be able to lead the way for a healthier, more inclusive, and more integrated democracy.

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