

# Media power in Indonesia oligarch citizens and the digital revolutions

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## Media power **in** Indonesia; oligarch, citizens and the digital revolutions

by Ross Tapsell, Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 208 pp., \$120 (paperback), ISBN: 9781786600363

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## BOOK REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to review the book written by Ross Tapsell, about media oligarchy phenomenon in Indonesia. The review technique is implemented based on each chapter, which consists of five. The first two chapters discuss mass media development in Indonesia and the dynamics between the regions and Jakarta-based. Furthermore, the third to fifth chapters talk about politicians' relationship with media ownership, which reinforces oligarchy practice. The conclusion in this book review shows this practice has taken over, in addition to media owners having a strong relationship with politicians as stated in this book. Therefore, to provide more detailed information, it is necessary to clearly explain the beneficiaries of the practice.

## 1. Discussion

The crucial role of the media in disseminating information in order to boost the electability of candidates cannot be overemphasized. Through the media, political aspirants are able to build opinions, share information, and provide new electoral perspectives. This book on the role and impact of the media on Indonesian politics is organized into five chapters. The first chapter provides an insight on the various interesting facts of each mass media in Indonesia. For instance, in the early days of independence, the radio was used as a propaganda tool against anti-colonialism, with the distribution of newspapers and the inception of the internet in the late 1990s. This chapter provides an overview of the New Order era which impacted tremendously on the growth of the mass media and the beginning of media conglomerate in Indonesia.

The second chapter discusses the inability of the local mass media to compete with Jakarta-centric, and the religious-based with the non-religious. In summary, no Indonesian mass media has succeeded in carrying out the religious broadcasting model, except through commercialization and commodification. Chapter three analyzes the techniques used by the politicians and top public figures to generate publicity during elections. The fourth chapter describes how the media oligarchs try to pursue positions in the state cabinet. It also discusses the emergence of anti-oligarchic media movements. Lastly, in chapter five the difficulty associated with censored counter-oligarchic mass media contents is discussed.

In this book, Ross Tapsell, a Professor of political science in the Pacific region, argues that the rapid development of the media after the end of the New Order is expected to strengthen the pillars of democracy in Indonesia, instead of becoming a tool for the interests of certain groups of people in political parties. Currently, the mainstream media have become more partisan due to a stronger concentration of ownership in the political sphere with a very strong influence in the editorial chambers. This article, was therefore, written to steer reporting toward the interests of the oligarchy which controls every information published by the

media, to ensure that public opinions are formed in accordance with the objectives of political figures. At the end, the relationship between the media owner and politicians, becomes associated with economy and politics issues.

Tapsell also stated that the decline in public confidence, especially among young people, toward the conglomeration of mainstream media has encouraged the inception of alternative platforms such as Kompasiana, Liputan 6, and Indonesiana. However, these alternative channels directly support public debate, and air hoax news. However, these channels are highly patronized by the public because it is usually followed by the mainstream news.

When more platforms or public media spaces are opened, it is likely to trigger communities opinion war. Indeed, media conglomeration owned by oligarchic actors in government and at the editorial desk still find it difficult to defeat the public with their weapons. The speed at which information is disseminated using the hashtag algorithm system on social media, enables people to express themselves freely. Eventually, the use of alternative media has become more polarized due to public opinion.

The alternative and mainstream media have become more powerful in influencing the other pillars leading to press freedom. Therefore, cases related to the press and violations of the ITE Law have become more noticed since the emergence of President Joko Widodo. Law practitioners argue that the president's power tends to pay more attention to the media after the New Order era. The Joko Widodo's government is more difficult to criticize due to the fear of being imprisoned for not being careful in sharing and writing information using smartphones.


As stated by Tapsell in chapter one, after the Reformation, the political landscape and patterns of information flow changed fundamentally. The New Order left a bad memory because the freedom and right to obtain information was restricted. During that time, the politics played by the government was monarchical with focus on propaganda and total control of the flow of news, thereby, limiting the spread of knowledge. Today's condition is different, as ordinary people are able to share and obtain political information from alternative media houses and the internet. Tapsell also stated that the biggest concern in the era of post-truth-politics today is associated with the untruth information provided by the elites of political parties and mass media, which are consumed and debated by the citizens. Unfortunately the virtual space that is often a 'game' arena has no time and place restrictions. In other words, the cyber space records and stores all circulated information as digital artefacts, even though the electoral interests are complete. One is left to ponder the phrase by James G March that 'information is not innocent.'

This is one of the few books that discusses mass media oligarchy in Indonesia. However, it would have been more compelling had the author presented more data on the political parties that benefited from the current phenomenon of political oligarchy.

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