

## “Capturing The Watchdog”: How Regional Budget Weaken The Role of Local Media?

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**Abstract.** *The political economy perspective suggests that the organization and financing of mass media influence media content. This research examines how the regional revenue and expenditure budget (APBD) financing has affected (the quality of) content and public communication. The study was conducted in Yogyakarta and Bali. This study uses qualitative methods. Data is collected through in-depth interviews and observations of the news. In-depth interviews were conducted with journalists, academics, and media analysts in Yogyakarta and Bali. This research found that the APBD significantly contributes as the revenue source of local media, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some media outlets even exhibit high dependency on APBD, as indicated by the sum of APBD they received. This has weakened the role of local media as a watchdog for local government while also creating a crisis for local public communication. Public communication today is predominantly filled with news emphasizing publicity rather than critical and investigative coverage of local issues. As a result, efforts to create an informed society as a prerequisite for democracy would be difficult to realize. The community's involvement in local democracy is greatly defined by the quality of information they receive.*

**Keywords:** *Political economy, local media, watchdog, local democracy.*

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### INTRODUCTION

One of the most frequently mentioned roles of the press in mass communication textbooks is ‘the watchdog of the government’ or commonly translated as a means of social control (Curran, 1989, 2011; McNair, 2011; Willis, 2007). Due to this role and responsibility, the press enjoys privileges in the form of press freedom guarantees (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006), protecting them from censorship and suppression. The press cannot have its license revoked based on the content of its news broadcasts. Censorship and suppression are also prohibited as they would hinder the media from helping uncover the truth, including fulfilling its role as the ‘watchdog’ of power.

The idea of the media as a ‘watchdog’ originated from the French

Revolution. O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) suggest that workers often see themselves as a ‘political watchdog’ and are often referred to as ‘the fourth estate’ after the judiciary, parliament, and church. As the fourth estate, the mass media constitutes an institution that can provide commentary, criticism, and investigation through the freedom of speech towards the actions of other institutions or powers. Therefore, freedom of the press is crucial because guaranteeing freedom would allow the media to provide independent, unbiased coverage that consistently serves the public interest. This monitoring ensures that institutions of power exercise their power responsibly (Putra, 2004).

Initially, the idea of the mass media’s role as a watchdog was viewed skeptically. However, this role gradually

gained acceptance as necessary and appropriate for news published by mass media. In its most ambitious formulation, the media is expected to be an independent institution, a social institution, and the fourth pillar, responsible for ensuring that other institutions serve the public interest. Referring to Bill Moyers, Baran and Davis (2000) argue that a functioning media is needed to “hold leaders accountable and provide weapons to the powerless with the information they need to protect themselves from the tyranny of rulers, both political and commercial.” Although this traditional role is widely accepted, concerns have arisen that the ‘watchdog’ may be under the control of the government or even become its lapdog, as evidenced in studies employing the propaganda model (Ashraf et al., 2016; Pedro, 2011).

James Curran (1989) has outlined several possible issues when the idea of the ‘watchdog’ becomes a key term in a market-based liberalized democracy (free market of ideas). The first issue is when media conglomerates emerge, as economic interests tend to subordinate the interests of fulfilling the ‘watchdog’ role. The hyper-commercialization of media products also fosters the emergence of market-driven journalism (McManus, 1994), leading to the growth of larger media entities that become increasingly tied to the industry (Curran, 1989; R. McChesney, 2000; R. W. McChesney, 2001). Additionally, there is valid criticism concerning media owners whose media outlets have become large corporations with significant political power, compromising the proper functioning of the ‘watchdog’ role. From this perspective, the press should be more than capable of being a ‘watchdog’ for government power, but can it fulfill the same function for its owners? Nevertheless, public media also face challenges when playing the key

role of the ‘watchdog,’ particularly due to their vulnerability to manipulation by authorities for their political interests (Curran, 1989). Hence, business-oriented private and public media have weaknesses in fulfilling the ‘watchdog’ role. In this regard, Curran (1989) states, “State-linked watchdog can bark, while private watchdog sleeps. However, often, both can remain somnolent.”

Based on Curran’s idea, it is possible to conclude that the media has fulfilled its role as a watchdog if it can provide critical coverage of power abuse, such as corruption. In other words, the media monitors the exercise of power (Putra, 2004). Typically, this is accomplished through investigative reporting (Carson & Farhall, 2018) yet exposing abuses of public trust had renewed focus in 2016. “Spotlight”—a Boston Globe investigation into Catholic Church sex abuse—inspired an Oscar-winning film. Two months later, 300 International Consortium for Investigative Journalism members broke the global story of tax evasion with the Panama Papers. These represent exemplar moments for watchdog journalism in a “post-truth” age characterized by fake news. They illustrate a shift in investigative reporting practice: from an “old model” of a highly competitive single newsroom environment—like the “Spotlight” team—to a “new model” of multiple newsrooms (and countries. One of the hallmarks of investigative reporting is that it exposes news that may have a different interpretation from government or corporate leaders that wish to conceal the truth (Gaines, 1998). The aim is to inform the public about potential abuses committed by those in positions of power. In this sense, as a watchdog, the media presents itself as part of a “checks and balances” mechanism in democracy (Putra, 2004).

Truth is never singular in journalism. Instead, there is another version of the

truth. As a result, journalism's role is to present diverse interpretations of the truth (Baggini, 2003). In other words, the media serve as a watchdog while offering themselves as the public realm (Carson & Farhall, 2018) yet exposing abuses of public trust had renewed focus in 2016. "Spotlight"—a Boston Globe investigation into Catholic Church sex abuse—inspired an Oscar-winning film. Two months later, 300 International Consortium for Investigative Journalism members broke the global story of tax evasion with the Panama Papers. These represent exemplar moments for watchdog journalism in a "post-truth" age characterized by fake news. They illustrate a shift in investigative reporting practice: from an "old model" of a highly competitive single newsroom environment—like the "Spotlight" team—to a "new model" of multiple newsrooms (and countries). The media's potential to promote itself as a civic forum is referred to in this concept (Putra, 2004). As a civic forum, the media facilitates citizen debate on public issues rationally (Coleman, 2013; Dahlgren, 2005).

The economic relationships determining media content and distribution have been a focal point for political economy scholars for several decades (Garnham, 2011; Golding & Murdock, 1992; Hardy, 2014; Mosco, 2009; Murdock & Golding, 1997). Nicholas Garnham (2000, 2011) argues that how media is organized and funded determines media content. Based on this argument, the following hypothesis is proposed: commercial press, driven by profit motives, will subordinate the need to serve as a public watchdog and prioritize organizational profits. With the same foundation, it can be argued that the role of local media as a 'watchdog' will be weakened by the forms of government funding provided to local media through the regional revenue and expenditure

budget (APBD).

This hypothesis is important because the government's public relations have long provided substantial funds for media publications. At the same time, how such an incentive affects the role of the press is rarely investigated. However, government advertising expenditures have been notably significant compared to commercial advertisements for several years. In the first quarter of 2022, Nielsen recorded that the government and political organization ad spending was up to 4.4 trillion (Julian, 2022), indicating the substantial size of government ad expenditures.

The increased government funding raises questions about the presses or media's independence, particularly as a watchdog over power. In Indonesia, conducting such a study would be highly intriguing. Additionally, as noted by Ignatius Haryanto (2003), many media outlets heavily rely on subscriptions from government offices for their livelihood, in addition to advertising revenue derived from the inauguration of officials and routine budgets allocated by local governments for communication, information, and propaganda purposes.

In the context of local media, the expected funding source for local media does not solely come from private companies but also public government institutions. As a result, the competition expected to create a free market of ideas can hardly occur, as journalism is no longer oriented towards public interests but profit-oriented.

Traditionally, political economy studies focus more on the power struggles among agents in policy formulation (Masduki, 2018; Rahayu, 2018; Wahyuni, 2006a, 2006b, 2016) this initiative is not protected by strong regulations. For instance, Indonesian PSB, which is represented by RRI (Radio of the Republic of Indonesia or the network of

interests between rulers and media owners (Sudibyo & Patria, 2013; Tapsell, 2019). Some studies have indeed examined the impact of ownership on broadcast content, such as the works of Rianto et al. (Heychael & Dhona, 2014; Rianto et al., 2014; Siregar et al., 2014; Souisa, 2020). However, the impact of local government financing on the role of local media as a 'watchdog' overpower and its implications for public communication have not been adequately investigated. Therefore, this study aims to fill the gap in previous research, considering that local media plays a crucial role in local-level democracy (Yusuf, 2011)

## **METHOD OF STUDY**

This research employed a qualitative approach and was conducted in Bali and Yogyakarta. The study took approximately four months, from October 2022 to January 2023. Data were collected through in-depth interviews. In Yogyakarta and Bali, in-depth interviews were held with journalists, academics, and media analysts. Discussions primarily involved the editor-in-chief and were supplemented with interviews with journalists to enhance the data from a journalist's perspective. The in-depth interviews aimed to investigate the sources of Regional Revenue and Expenditure Budget (Anggran Pendapatan dan Belanja Daerah) money for the media and the implications for reporting. Interviews were also performed to learn about editorial policies regarding marketing pressure. The data were further enriched through qualitative media analysis in both regions. Data analysis began as soon as the data were collected, placing data into relevant themes.

The analytical process followed the model proposed by M. B Miles et al. (2018), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, data

coding was performed, which involved data reduction. Data that were deemed less relevant in addressing the research questions were discarded. The remaining data were then grouped according to relevant themes and subthemes. In the second stage, data display was conducted to identify patterns of government funding (government advertisements) on the one hand and its impact on the watchdog role of the media over power on the other hand. In the third stage, conclusions were drawn. The analysis involved a dialogue between the research findings, theoretical concepts, and previous research results to understand better the impact of government financing in co-opting the role of the 'watchdog' in local media, particularly in Bali and Yogyakarta.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Condition of Local Media in Both Yogyakarta and Bali**

The existence of local media in the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) and Bali, like other media outlets in Indonesia and even worldwide, faces two simultaneous challenges. The first challenge arises from competition among themselves. Based on data from the DIY Regional Broadcasting Commission (KPID DIY), there are six local television stations and 37 private radio broadcasts in Yogyakarta. In terms of newspapers, there are five major newspapers, namely Kedaulatan Rakyat (one of the oldest local newspapers in Indonesia), Harian Jogja (a subsidiary of Bisnis Indonesia), Radar Jogja (part of the Jawa Pos group), Tribun Jogja (part of the Kompas Gramedia group), and Koran Merapi (part of the Kedaulatan Rakyat group). This does not include online news media in DIY, which is difficult to identify. However, it is worth noting that each newspaper also has its online platform. The abundance of the local press in DIY indicates high competition. However, according to data

from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in September 2022, Yogyakarta is the poorest province on the island of Java. The poverty rate in Yogyakarta reaches 11.49%, higher than the national poverty rate of around 9% (Setyono, 2023).

In Bali, the situation is not much different regarding media competition. According to Ketut Sujana, a journalist for a public broadcasting agency in Bali (interview, November 29, 2022), approximately 20-22 reporters often “hang out at the Public Relations office.” This indicates that there are quite several local and competitive media outlets in Bali. Specifically, there are Bali TV, Dewata TV (a Kompas TV network), and Net Bali for local television stations. There are also major local newspapers, like *Kedaulatan Rakyat* in Yogyakarta, namely Bali Pos. Additionally, there are Nusa Bali, Pos Bali, Denpost, Media Bali, *Tribun Bali* (part of the Kompas Gramedia group), and Bali Express (part of the Jawa Pos group). Besides television and print media, several online media outlets and radio stations exist.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, media outlets in both regions faced significant economic pressures. Like other businesses, the media industry in Yogyakarta and Bali also experienced contractions, primarily due to a decline in the advertising capacity of enterprises. Some media outlets, such as *Tribun Jogja*, pursued digital transformation to increase revenue in this sector, while others relied on income from local government budgets through various cooperation schemes. When the private sector suffered setbacks due to the pandemic, the government was seen as having the financial resources or funding to support the life of local media. Octo Lampito (interview, December 22, 2022) stated that during the Covid-19 pandemic, only the government had the money. In the case of *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, the revenue contribution from local

government spending even approached 60% of their total income.

From a democratic perspective, the abundance of local media is certainly advantageous because it provides the public with multiple alternatives based on pluralistic-liberal ideas (Lee, 2001), which can promote pluralism (Ciaglia, 2013) and diversity (Siregar, 2014). The number of media outlets in Yogyakarta and Bali indicates the presence of external pluralism, as people can choose the information sources they prefer and need, either from print media, electronic media, or online media. On the other hand, the abundance of media in Yogyakarta and Bali is expected to provide different perspectives. This is known as internal diversity (Ciaglia, 2013). It is assumed that media diversity would present diverse perspectives—the extent to which internal and external media diversity in Yogyakarta and Bali exist requires further investigation. However, describing the intense competition in the media industry in these two regions is important to provide context for the ‘dependency’ of media businesses on local government budgets, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic. The higher the level of competition, the greater the efforts that media outlets must undertake to obtain advertisements (Wahyu Darmawan, interview, August 2022). They need to be innovative in managing marketing. The argument put forward in this study is that while the Covid-19 pandemic has crippled the advertising capacity of industries amid intense media competition in Yogyakarta and Bali, the dependence on government funding has increased. As a result, the media’s role as the ‘watchdog’ of power will weaken.

### **Varieties of Local Government Budget Funding for Local Media**

Local media in Yogyakarta and Bali have a relative ‘dependency’ on the

regional revenue and expenditure budget (APBD) funding. Their dependence on APBD is highly determined by the characteristics of the media outlets and, of course, the extent to which these media outlets can lobby and market themselves to the local government. For example, according to Ribut Raharja (interview, November 30, 2022), *Tribun Jogja* only receives small advertisements from the government. In Ribut Raharja's view, this is due to their inability to lobby the local government effectively. However, lobbying is not the sole factor determining the APBD funding received by media outlets. Reputation, audience reach, and the relationships established between local media and the government play a significant role in determining the allocation of APBD funds. *Kedaulatan Rakyat*, for instance, due to its reputation as a newspaper serving the Yogyakarta community, has received significant funding from the APBD.

Several forms of financing for local media, both in the form of 'retail' funding, such as advertorials. The retail system determines the placement of advertisements on specific pages and their color. Advertisements are labeled as ADV (advertorial) or ORD (order). Some government agencies that frequently advertise in local media include the Cooperatives and Small-Medium Enterprises Agency, the Tourism Agency, and the Social Services Agency of the DIY Provincial Government. As for advertisements from the Yogyakarta City Government, they are coordinated through the public relations department of the local government.

In addition to the retail system, long-term cooperation through contractual agreements can be established, typically for at least one year. Such contracts are usually initiated for the 'financing' of the government's press releases. In such a contract, media

outlets that have established cooperation with the local government must use instead the press releases material provided by the government. Based on observations and in-depth interviews, the models of collaboration between local governments and local media in terms of content publication can include advertorial columns, columns for public service advertisements, full pages (1-2 pages) to convey information related to regional regulations (Perda); and (4) announcement columns. This does not include special programs in the form of benchmark studies. Every year, journalists are gathered to participate in benchmark studies organized by the local government's public relations department. For electronic media such as television, the cooperation between local media and the local government usually takes the form of program segments, including news, special reports, or public service advertisements (DL, interview, November 22, 2022).

Meanwhile, cooperation in advertising can also involve field journalists. The editorial department supports the business department in producing government advertisements through advertorials. Ribut Raharja, the Editor-in-Chief of *Tribun Jogja* (interview, November 30, 2022), mentioned that the business department or Account Executives need to send a letter to a specific editor to assist them in providing field support when there are advertisements from the local government to be written in the form of advertorials. The special editor's role is to request Tribune reporters to cover the story in the field. The business editor then curates the reporter's written report before publication. For example, when the DIY local government's Cooperatives and Small-Medium Enterprises Agency holds a seminar, the Account Executive writes a specific form submitted to the listening

officer editor, who connects the business and editorial departments. Afterward, a journalist is assigned to cover the event. The marketing editor specialist needs to be knowledgeable about the news coverage to identify potential advertisements that can be discussed. Clients from the local government also often send press releases that the editor will process. Based on interviews with media editors-in-chief in Yogyakarta and Bali, the contribution of APBD to local media can reach 20-60% of their total revenue.

### Weak Role of the Watchdog

Studies on how much the media can fulfill its watchdog role in a democracy are often conducted using quantitative approaches (Kalogeropoulos et al., 2015; Okumura et al., 2021; Pinto, 2008). Research typically tracks reporting trends in critical issues, such as Okumura et al.'s study on how the media in Japan covered the vulnerability of nuclear energy during the 2011 earthquake. The study concluded that the Japanese media failed to fulfill its watchdog role due to its inability to expose nuclear energy when the earthquake struck Japan. According to Okumura et al., the Japanese media's failure to deliver the worst-case scenarios of atomic power plants in a major quake was driven by the potential conflicts it would create with the government, the energy industry, and other associated industries. As a result, they avoided critical coverage that aimed to uncover the worst-case scenarios of nuclear power plants in the event of a major earthquake, such as the one in 2011.

Okumura et al.'s research combined quantitative and qualitative methods through content analysis and in-depth interviews with media executives. However, other studies on the media's watchdog role tend to rely more on quantitative content analysis conducted over a specific period. While such studies

have the advantage of providing an overview of reporting trends, they often struggle to provide a broader contextual understanding.

This research relies on qualitative data to understand how local media in Yogyakarta and Bali fulfill their watchdog role. In-depth interviews were conducted and enriched with qualitative observations of media coverage, particularly in print media. The findings from the in-depth discussions among the informants can be categorized into two opposing groups. Media managers generally stated that despite their close relationships with the local government and receiving funding from the APBD through various mechanisms, objectivity is maintained in their news coverage. This is reflected, for example, in the following interview quotes.

*"If it is related to the public and the public needs to know, the media must continue to report. We adhere to the Press Law and the Journalistic Code of Ethics in journalistic work. We report from both sides."* (NF, November 22, 2022)

*"We do not deal with money in the editorial department. We do not think about money. We do support the business side. You cannot order the editorial department to serve your clients. We do not do that. Nevertheless, this issue has never been a problem so far."* (Ribut Raharja, interview, November 30, 2022)

Ribut Raharja also stated that Tribun Jogja gives freedom to its journalists to write. Even when faced with the threat of subscription termination due to coverage related to student fees, Tribun Jogja remains steadfast. Despite any boycott, the news is still published. The line between the editorial and marketing

departments is always maintained at Tribun Jogja.

DL (from a local Bali media) and OL from Kedaulatan Rakyat also expressed similar sentiments. They believe their media outlets maintain independence by creating balanced news or program content and adhering to broadcasting regulations and codes of ethics. They also emphasize that ethics are fundamental for journalists as they represent the highest values that should be upheld. Without ethics, there is no value in journalism. Octo Lampito added that criticism of the government should be based on cultural approaches. In other words, the objection should be conveyed subtly so as not to corner other parties. Therefore, efforts to remind the government are carried out through news coverage and activities outside journalistic practices.

In contrast to media workers, media analysts tend to be more critical in assessing the media's performance, particularly in fulfilling their watchdog role.

*"The regional revenue and expenditure budget (APBD) funding has significantly influenced the news coverage. For example, local media in Bali were not critical of the swab test policy at the end of 2020, the governor's birthday celebration, and allegations of bribery without strict health protocols. The local media did not provide balanced and comprehensive coverage of these events" (GS, interview, November 22, 2022).*

Furthermore, it was mentioned that the local government can frame and set the media agenda. Consequently, local media are more susceptible to being used as instruments of government propaganda.

I Nengah Muliarta (Chairman of AMSI Bali/Lecturer at Warmadewa

Denpasar) also noted that the media is often lacking and tends to position itself as a public relations instrument of the local government.

*"[Independence] is highly influenced by editorial policies independence of the editorial team. However, in situations like the present, local media tend to play it safe. It is not uncommon for some local media to act as if they are the public relations of the local government. For example, in the case of the construction of the Bali Cultural Center, which involved land excavation in the surrounding Dawan subdistrict, not many local media outlets reported on it. The media tends to take a safe position because, on the other hand, they face limitations in terms of human resources."*

Furthermore, he stated that,

*"The funding from the local APBD has a significant impact, especially on local media. The local government's public relations office diligently sends press releases to the media. In contrast, media outlets with limited human resources rely on the available press release material without conducting further fact-checking. As a result, it is not uncommon for local media coverage to resemble public relations materials."*

The observations conducted on news coverage in several newspapers confirm the conclusions of the media analysts mentioned above. News articles in local newspapers in Yogyakarta and Bali tend to serve as government publications rather than present critical and investigative reports. This can be seen, for example,



in the following news headlines: “Ganjar Distributes Aid to 631 Tourism Villages” (KR, February 4, 2023), “DIY Continues to Improve as ATF Venue” (KR, January 11, 2023), “MSMEs Face Challenges in Partnership and Promotion: Kulon Progo Regency Government Accelerates Investment Efforts” (Tribun Jogja, January 11, 2023), “Yogyakarta City’s Waste Volume Decreases by 15 Tons: The City Government Continues to Promote the Zero Inorganic Waste Movement” (Tribun Jogja, January 11, 2023), and “Tourism Providers Need Improvement: DIY Hosts the ASEAN Tourism Forum (ATF) 2023” (December 30, 2022). Additionally, in the December 30, 2022, edition of *Tribun Jogja*, six news columns presented the achievements of the Gunung Kidul Regency. An article titled “Under the Leadership of Sunaryanta, Gunung Kidul Successfully Reduces Poverty Rates” was accompanied by an infographic highlighting the achievements of the Gunung Kidul Government. Unfortunately, this news article was not accompanied by an advertorial disclaimer, presenting the news as if it were a regular report.

News articles with publicity-style titles resembling public relations materials were found in most editions of local print media. Conversely, critical news articles are often directed to parties with limited power and resources. For instance, in the February 4 edition of *Tribun Jogja*, a report highlighted fraudulent practices by individuals involved in adulterating Bulog rice. Critical coverage concerning local governments is much harder than the publicity-oriented range.

In a study on the role of local media in Ambon, Lestahulu (2015) concluded that the social control function over public policies in Ambon has not been maximized. Lestahulu provided several examples, such as public criticism of the local government’s managing Regional

Owned Enterprises (BUMD) policy. The public criticized the appointment of politicians rather than professionals to work the BUMD. However, this criticism did not receive adequate coverage. Therefore, according to Lestahulu, in the context of the press in Ambon, the print media in Ambon plays a greater role in fulfilling the information function rather than the social control function. This study corroborates the findings of this research, as news articles concerning local governments generated from the collaboration between media outlets and local governments are predominantly focused on information functions due to their origin from press release material provided by the government. As a result, the control function is not well executed.

In the field of political economy, the influence of media organization and funding plays a crucial role in determining news output (Garnham, 2000, 2011). This becomes even more significant in crises caused by a pandemic, where the government becomes the only entity with the greatest economic resources. NF, a journalist from a local media outlet in Bali, stated, “Yes, it includes various forms, especially in the current situation where only the government has the money. Usually, it takes the form of collaborations within a year.” Hence, it is not surprising that the government has a greater capacity to control public communication, not vice versa. Consequently, these local media outlets may present news objectively but fall short in fulfilling their role as social watchdogs, as public communication is predominantly dominated by cooperative news and press releases rather than investigative reporting. In this regard, Curran (1989) argues that efforts to promote the watchdog role of the mass media require clear and practical measures that do not solely rely on one system, such as the free market. In this case, the liberal free market has proven

insufficient in encouraging local media to fulfill their role as watchdogs against power abuse. On the contrary, in a pandemic situation where businesses are difficult financially (Ispriadi et al., 2020) and the government possesses resources, the dependence of local media on the government increases. This directly weakens the function of media watchdogs, although economic resources are not the sole determining factor. Other factors related to public awareness, journalistic professionalism, media ideology, culture, and organizational routines may also have an effect (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). However, economic resources tend to suppress other factors when businesses are at risk.

As previously mentioned, pro-public reporting exemplifies the function of watchdog media. The media portrays this function in two ways. Firstly, through critical coverage of those in power. Investigative reports are often used for this purpose. However, the media frequently refrains from investigative reporting due to financial constraints because it requires risk, bravery, a strong team, and financial support. Investigative reporting is generally regarded as being unprofitable. Additionally, sponsors may threaten investigative reporting if the institution generates significant media or advertising revenue. Therefore, according to proponents of political economics studies, the media's commercial interests interfere with their ability to serve the public interest (Carson & Farhall, 2018) yet exposing abuses of public trust had renewed focus in 2016. “Spotlight”—a Boston Globe investigation into Catholic Church sex abuse—inspired an Oscar-winning film. Two months later, 300 International Consortium for Investigative Journalism members broke the global story of tax evasion with the Panama Papers. These represent exemplar moments for watchdog journalism in

a “post-truth” age characterised by fake news. They illustrate a shift in investigative reporting practice: from an “old model” of a highly competitive single newsroom environment—like the “Spotlight” team—to a “new model” of multiple newsrooms (and countries). This diminishes the media's ability to carry out its watchdog role. This is why the local press in Bali and Yogyakarta are more prominent in their ‘publication’ role compared to their role as watchdogs for those in power.

The second aspect is the role of local media in the public sphere. The press cannot position itself as a public realm since, in this study, information transmission in local media is given more weight than watchdogs. The ‘space’ between the government and the marketplace is how Nicholas Garnham describes the public sphere (Dawes, 2014) from an ethos of public service and citizenship to a neoliberal faith in market logic and the sovereign consumer that undermines the public sphere. Much of this discussion is weakened, however, by a lack of engagement with citizenship and consumption, and the reduction to unitary oppositions of what are actually protean distinctions. This weakness in the literature is particularly problematic when it comes to analysing contemporary changes unreflexively as ‘neoliberal’, because neoliberalism cannot be reduced to the passing of power from the state to the market, or to a simple process of privatisation or individualisation. Rather, neoliberalism involves the changing governmental relation between state and market, and between citizens and consumers. Consequently, engagement with theoretical debates on citizenship, consumption and neoliberalism will be recommended to provide a more sophisticated reading of broadcasting and the public sphere. © The Author(s). When the firm (market) or politics (state) exert

pressure, the public sphere becomes more constrained. The public sphere frequently fails when political or commercial interests control the media.

This study focuses on Yogyakarta and Bali and relies solely on qualitative techniques. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other locations in Indonesia. It is strongly advised to conduct studies that integrate qualitative and quantitative research in various regions of Indonesia. These studies will provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of local media watchdogs in fostering a better democracy. On the other hand, citizen movements on the internet through digital activism and sousveillance practices can continue to be encouraged. In many cases, these movements have proven effective in correcting abuses of power (Lim, 2017; Saud & Margono, 2021; Suwana, 2020; Tapsell, 2015, 2019). Studies in this field can also be further elaborated, especially its contribution to oversight and promoting democratic accountability.

## CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the regional revenue and expenditure budget (APBD) is a source of local media funding. They exhibit a relative dependence on APBD funding, with various forms of collaboration between local media and the local government, including cooperation in reporting and coverage. Additionally, there are forms of advertorial advertising, press releases, and others.

Among local media, some have a high level of dependency, while others are less reliant. The extent of local media's dependence on APBD has implications for public communication. Media outlets with long-term collaborations tend to publish government press releases more frequently, particularly in news reporting. As a result, they may be less effective in fulfilling their role as 'watchdogs'

overseeing the government's actions. On the other hand, media outlets with less dependence and more diverse funding sources are better positioned to fulfill their role as 'watchdogs.'

This study suggests the importance of media diversifying their sources of income and not solely relying on advertisements from the local government. By doing so, their independence can be preserved. Additionally, the public must maintain a critical mindset, avoiding being easily manipulated by news from local government press releases. In doing so, local democracy can function more effectively, and the role of local media oversight can be upheld.

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