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**Between fear and power : Kompas, Indonesia's most influential daily newspaper, 1965-2010**

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*Part III*

**Kompas: The Minority  
with Power**

Chapter 7

## An Influential Minority

*“As President, I made Kompas one of my main references to oversee what is going on in society, to understand what the strategic issues of public concern are, to monitor the impact of our policies as well as many other aspects. Data and news have become an integral part of the information that we gather in order to decide the next strategy and steps to take, so that our policies can benefit the entire society.”*

*~President Joko Widodo, Kompas, June 28, 2015*

This chapter discusses the political influence of *Kompas* - that is, its power, as opposed to its fear that has been the keynote of the foregoing chapters. This power can be said to take two forms. The first and perhaps most obvious is the influence the newspaper has exercised, after 1998, on the electorate and its voting choices, both directly and via leaders and shapers of public opinion among *Kompas* readers. I have already discussed *Kompas*' position during the presidential election of 2014, which may have swayed voters to support Jokowi, and thereby played a role in his victory. A second and more unusual form of power exercised by *Kompas*, however, is that from time to time it appears to have exerted pressure directly on political decision-makers themselves.

In the previous chapters I highlighted the considerable caution that *Kompas* takes when reporting, particularly when their reports consider the interests of the elites. I argued that this caution is an inheritance of the New Order, when *Kompas* faced sanctions at several moments of its history. I showed how during the election campaigns, the newspaper aimed to maintain a balance in its reporting in an attempt to avoid alienating either Jokowi or Prabowo. In short, a recurring theme of this research so far has been a particular form of self-censorship that resulted from the perceived need of *Kompas* to maintain good relations with those in power.

In this chapter I want to refine that conclusion somewhat. I want to illustrate how sometimes, *Kompas* does talk 'truth to power', in the sense that the newspaper sometimes does express criticism of power holders. And when it does, *Kompas* is often quite influential, as politicians and policy makers are not only avid readers of *Kompas*, but also quite mindful of the opinions expressed in its pages. I will illustrate this in two particular cases, by discussing the way *Kompas* pushed Suharto to step down in 1998, and how the newspaper campaigned for upholding direct elections of Indonesian local heads at the city/regency level, as well as provincial level in 2014.

While I provide these examples to expound on the earlier conclusions that *Kompas* places great value on maintaining good relations with elites, the examples in this chapter also indicate that *Kompas* only expresses such criticisms in specific circumstances. The two cases to be analyzed were not controversial, in the sense that they did not pit large parts of the population against the other. Therefore, in articulating its position, *Kompas* was in touch with the general mood and desires of Indonesian society at large, and thus avoided adopting a position that could be disliked by a sizable group of its readers. Furthermore, these issues involved presidents who were nearing the end of their term in power. I will take this observation up in the conclusion of this chapter, when I argue that sometimes, *Kompas* does indeed criticize power holders, but only when the risk of negative repercussions are minimal.

## 7.1 The Media of the Indonesian Elite

### Kompas: Profile of its Readers

What groups or sections of the Indonesian society are most susceptible to being influenced by *Kompas'* reporting? One of the ways to answer this question is by looking at the profile of its readers. Based on the data from the *Kompas'* research division released in 2014<sup>37</sup>, the newspaper had 507.000 circulations and is circulated in 33 provinces across the Indonesian archipelago. This makes the newspaper the most read newspaper, not only in Indonesia, but also in Asia (Lim, 2011). Therefore, it is safe to say that the paper is read by more than half a million readers. From this amount of readers, it can be seen that in terms of education, *Kompas'* readers make up a highly educated part of Indonesian society, as can be seen in the following pie chart:

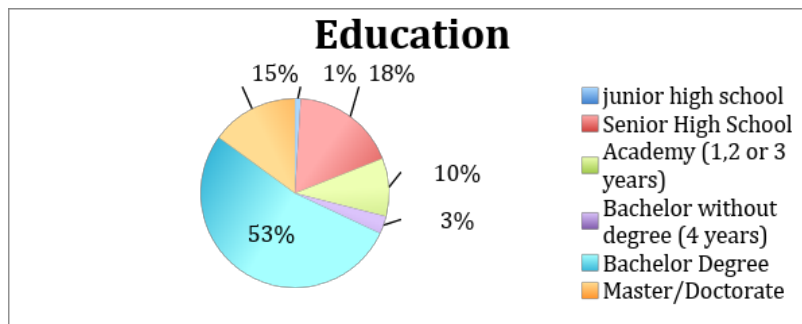


Figure 1: *Kompas* Readers in terms of Education (Kompas Media Kit, 2014)

<sup>37</sup> I tried to find other sources on *Kompas'* readership, as well as the profile of its readers; however, no other institution has this data. In Indonesia, figures of newspaper circulation are something of a secret as every media outlet wants to hide this data from the public. One of the reasons for this is because the amount of circulation determines the price of advertisement on its pages. However, it has been agreed by media scholars like Hill (1994) and Lim (2011) that *Kompas* is the largest newspaper in Indonesia, with a circulation reaching more than 500.000 copies per day. This figure, however, is believed to be declining recently. In this regards, *Kompas* has also been believed as the most influential newspaper in Indonesia (Anderson, 1994; Hill, 1994; Lim, 2011).

From figure 1, it can be seen that most *Kompas* readers are university graduates, making up more than half of its total readership (53%). The second biggest group of readers are those who have finished senior high school (18%). In third position are postgraduates, namely those who have obtained master or doctorate degrees (15%), and fourth are those who have finished academy degrees (10%). In Indonesia, this academy degree is taken after a person has finished senior high school and its length can be one, two or three years. In fifth rank are those who have the qualification of bachelor studies without a degree, which is a lighter version of a bachelor's and in Indonesia lasts for four years (3%). The smallest number of readers are those who only finished junior high school (1%). Therefore, if we define highly educated people as those who take additional studies after senior high school, then 81% of *Kompas* readers are highly educated. It is noteworthy that there are no readers who have only completed elementary school, or less than that.

In parallel with its educational level, *Kompas* readers are also those who occupy a high economic status in Indonesian society. This can be seen from the figure of *Kompas*' monthly expenditure as follows:

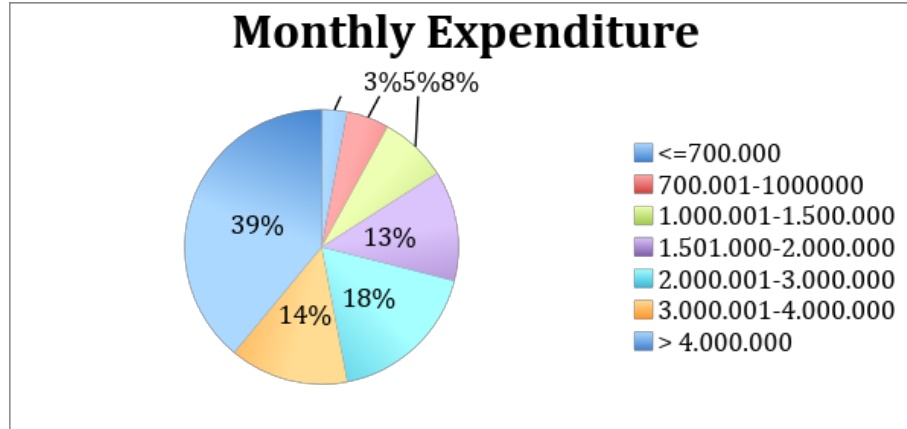


Figure 2: *Kompas*' Readers in Terms Expenditure (Kompas Media Kit, 2014)

From figure 2, it can be seen that most *Kompas* readers' expenditure is more than 4 million rupiahs per month (39%). This is more than 10 times higher than those living on the poverty line in Indonesia (which is 26.853 rupiahs a month), according to the Indonesian Statistic Bureau (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2014). The second biggest group of readers are those spending between 2 million to 3 million rupiahs a month (18%), followed by those who spend between 3 million to 4 million rupiahs a month (14%). In the fourth position are those who spend between 1.5 million to 2 million rupiahs a month (13%), and fifth are those who spend between 1 million to 1.5 million rupiahs a month (8%). In sixth rank are those who spend between 700,000 rupiahs to 1 million rupiahs a month (5%), and the smallest group of readers spend less or equal to 700, 000 rupiah a month (3%). This means that 97% of *Kompas* readers live significantly above the poverty line.

In summary, from the data above, it can be concluded that *Kompas* is the most widely read newspaper in Indonesia, and that its typical readers are highly educated and enjoy a good living standard. This also means that *Kompas* is mostly read by those who occupy a high social class. Related to this, the next section will demonstrate that *Kompas* is also the most read newspaper by the Indonesian power holders in the legislative and executive bodies.

#### **The Most Read Newspaper Among Indonesian Power Holders**

*Kompas* is also the most read newspaper by Indonesian power holders. In addition to the figures above, I conducted a small survey of 53 power holders, consisting of 38 people working as Indonesian parliamentary members<sup>38</sup> and 15

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<sup>38</sup> These 38 parliamentary members consisted of both the members of the house of representative (DPR) and the house of regional representative (DPD) who were chosen through a simple random sampling method. I visited the meeting room of the Indonesian parliamentary members as they were gathering, then I interviewed them during their break. In this regard, I surveyed only those who were willing to make time to answer my questions.



people working in the Indonesian executive body<sup>39</sup>. Most respondents read *Kompas* daily, as can be seen in table 1:

**Table 1**  
The Most Read Newspaper

<b>Name of Newspaper</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<i>Kompas</i>	68,6%
<i>Media Indonesia</i>	11,7%
<i>Republika</i>	7,8%
<i>Bisnis Indonesia</i>	3,9%
<i>Koran Tempo</i>	1,9%
<i>Jawa Pos</i>	1,9%
<i>Koran Sindo</i>	-
<i>Rakyat Merdeka</i>	-
<i>Others</i>	3,9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>39</sup> These 15 people were first of all, 2 (two) Special Staff members in the president's office, with the level equal to Ministers. The special staff functions as the daily 'whisperer' for the president, advising him closely. This team is like that of the west wing in the United States. They play a very important role in influencing the policy making processes of President Jokowi. Secondly, there were 5 (five) government officers in the Ministry of Economic Affairs, who hold positions as assistant deputy, or two levels under the Minister. With this role, they are in the strategic position to implement the policy of their ministry. Finally, there were 8 (eight) government officials from two institutions for elections in Indonesia, namely KPU (General Election Commission) and DKPP (The Election Organization Ethic Council). The first institution has the power to conduct general elections in Indonesia, while the second holds the power to supervise the work of the members of KPU at every level. There were 6 (six) KPU members who were surveyed and 2 (two) members from DKPP.

From table 1 above, it can be seen that *Kompas* is the first choice of most of the power holders, with nearly 70%. This number is dramatically higher than any other newspaper, including *Media Indonesia* which is second and was only chosen by 11.7% respondents. In third, fourth and fifth rank are *Republika* (7.8%), *Bisnis Indonesia* (3.9%), *Koran Tempo* (1.9%) and *Jawa Pos* (1.9%). It is interesting to note that in many interviews, respondents often immediately mentioned *Kompas* when asked about which newspapers they read. They often answered with this response before I, or my other surveyors, could provide them with the list of newspapers to choose from. This statistic also confirms my personal observation, where I often see editions of *Kompas* on display for perusal when entering an office of a legislative member or an executive officer.

The question then is: when did those power holders start reading *Kompas*? They were not asked for the exact year when they started to read it, but rather, were only asked to recall in which political regime they started reading *Kompas*. The results are as follows:

**Table 2**  
Period Starting Reading *Kompas*

Political Regimes	Number
Suharto	33
Habibie	1
Abdurrahman Wahid	-
Megawati Soekarnoputri	-
Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono	3
Joko Widodo	-

From table 2, it can be seen that most power holders have been reading *Kompas* since the time of President Suharto's regime, and are therefore not

new readers of the newspaper. Furthermore, the fact that Suharto's regime ended almost two decades ago reflects how *Kompas* has endured as their main source of information over a long period of time. The newspaper has informed and influenced Indonesian elites for decades.

From the findings of the survey, the following things can be surmised. First of all, *Kompas* is the most read and therefore the most influential newspaper for Indonesian power holders. Secondly, *Kompas* has held sway on current Indonesian power holders for decades, since the time when Indonesia was still in the authoritarian era under Suharto. In fact, as will be demonstrated in the following section, *Kompas* has had direct influence on presidents across different political regimes, from President Suharto during the authoritarian period to President Yudhoyono in the current Reformation era.

## 7.2 The Direct Influence of Kompas on Two Indonesian Presidents

### Pressurizing Suharto to Resign

As explained in chapter 2 on the history of *Kompas*, Sukarno's presidency ended when he passed his power to General Suharto on March 11, 1966, through a controversial letter: the "Letter of Instruction on 11<sup>th</sup> of March" (*Supersemar*). It is considered controversial because the original letter mysteriously disappeared and has never been found. As is clear from the course of history, however, this letter provided the basis of legitimation for Suharto to seize power. It suggested that Sukarno give Suharto full power to take control of national security, including that of domestic affairs. While Suharto claimed that this letter was aimed to establish security after the killing of military generals on the night of September 30, 1965, it was generally seen as a forced transfer of power.

However, despite the political controversy surrounding this letter, *Kompas* declared its support for General Suharto soon after he was granted power by the President to stabilize the situation in the country. This was done through an editorial entitled "*Salus Populi Suprema Lex*":

*Salus Populi Suprema Lex. The safety of the people is the highest law. Bung Karno as President has officially instructed the military commander Lieutenant General Suharto to act on his behalf to save the people, to prevent a revolution and to secure the safety of the president himself... As a consequence we have to obey whatever decisions are taken by him, and whoever disobeys him is against the legitimate holder of power, and therefore, against most of the Indonesian people. (Kompas, March 14, 1966)*

As shown in the editorial above, *Kompas* was among the first to give legitimacy and political support to Suharto, marking the first attempt of the newspaper to build a good relationship with him.

Nevertheless, as explained in chapter 2, having made a political investment through supporting Suharto did not mean that *Kompas* was free to write. The newspaper was compelled to establish and maintain a close relationship with the regime in various ways: first of all, by signing a contract that they would not cover certain issues deemed sensitive by the regime. This was done after *Kompas* was closed down by on January 21, 1978. In addition, it strove to only ever criticize the regime in an indirect way. One of these was by writing two editorials everyday: the first editorial was about domestic affairs and the second one about foreign affairs. The editorial on foreign affairs was the way in which *Kompas* criticized the government, for instance, by admonishing the practice of corruption in Indonesia by reporting on the practice of corruption elsewhere in other countries. *Kompas* also regularly provided a platform for the regime. In a personal interview with a *Kompas* journalist, I was told: "It was easy. In the time of Suharto, as long as we frequently provided a stage for the president by covering him on the front page of the newspaper, everything would be alright." (*Kompas* journalist, personal interview, March 17, 2014). Thus, it can be seen that *Kompas* played a symbolic role in establishing the basis of legitimacy for the new president.

Finally, the newspaper also regularly employed people who were close to power holders. When I was in the newsroom, two journalists told me that there was a minister's daughter who worked there, and that once this woman handed in her notice for family reasons, as she felt that being a journalist took up too much of her time and she was not able to fulfil her roles as wife and mother. Jakob Oetama personally asked her to stay, and as an incentive, she was transferred to the Sunday desk, which focused on the Sunday issue and therefore only required two days a week. According to these reporters, this was Jakob's strategy to retain the minister's daughter and keep her network close (Personal interviews with Wisudho, June 12, 2014 and Laluna, April 15, 2014).

As elaborated by Dhakidae (1991), besides creating *Kompas*, the Catholic movement also created the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which was to become Suharto's main think tank. CSIS has remained very close to *Kompas*, and there are several CSIS people who were also the founders of Bentara Foundation, the founding parent company of *Kompas*. Until now the good relationship between CSIS and *Kompas* has flourished. I illustrate this in chapter 4, in the incident involving Harry Tjan, who received special treatment by *Kompas* through his proximity to Jakob. When he complained about an article published by the newspaper, Jakob responded immediately; Tjan is one of the founders of CSIS. Therefore, having CSIS as Suharto's think tank is another strategy of *Kompas* to stay close to power.

However, despite all these strategies to ensure proximity to the power holders, once there were signs of the Suharto presidency breaking down, *Kompas* began to withdraw its support. An interview with Bambang Wisudo, a retired *Kompas* journalist who witnessed the fall of Suharto, show this:

*In that period, I was a journalist for the education desk. This gave me a chance to look closely at the dynamics of student activism in Jakarta. Prior to 1998, I wrote about the student protests against the president in Jakarta. However, none of the protesters were from Universitas*

*Indonesia (UI). Then I came to UI and I pinned the clipping of my article on their wall of magazines (majalah dinding). My intention was to kindle their desire to join the protest. As if I was saying: "hey, students from other universities have already staged protests. Why are you still silent?" In my view, it was very important that students from UI also joined the protest, so we could really break the regime down. (Wisudo, personal communication, June 12, 2014)*

It can be seen here that *Kompas* actively contributed to creating the conditions for the fall of Suharto.

The statement of Wisudo above was in line with Jimmmy Laluna, who explained as follows:

*We tried to trigger Suharto to make a statement that he would be willing to step down, and this happened on his journey from Cairo to Jakarta. We actually know that he did not intentionally say that he would step down. But we asked: "What if the people do not want you anymore?" He responded that if the people did not want him anymore, he would give up his power. This is different from him intentionally choosing to step down. So, we created a situation where he was obliged to consider stepping down. (Laluna, personal communication, April 15, 2014).*

By saying this, Laluna is referring to an article printed in *Kompas* dated May 14, 1998, entitled: *"If The People Don't Want Him Anymore: Suharto is Ready to Resign"*. In the article, *Kompas* wrote as follows:

*President Suharto said, if the people no longer want him to be president, he is ready to resign. He will not keep his chair with a gun. He will resign and dedicate himself to God, his family, children and grandchildren. However, the president highlighted that all this would have to be done in a constitutional way. "If there are people who want*

*to do it unconstitutionally, this would mean betraying Pancasila and the 1945 constitution”, said Suharto in a meeting with Indonesians living in Egypt.” (Kompas, May 14, 1998)*

By writing the lines above, *Kompas* was aware that Suharto actually did not intend to resign soon, but was rather referring to the possibility of losing power through a democratic election. However, by writing such an article, *Kompas* sought to imply to its readers that Suharto was ready to resign soon. They wanted to create the impression that Suharto was responding to the student protests pressurizing him to step down.

This fact, however, was not mentioned by Suharto and he clarified this statement through his minister, which became the headline the next day, in an article entitled: *“President Declared that He Never Said ‘Ready to Resign’.”* *Kompas* wrote as follows:

*President Suharto clarified that he never said that he was ready to resign. What he said, however, was that he was fine if the people no longer trusted him to be in power....therefore he will not maintain the mandate of the people with gun. This statement was made by the Information Minister (menteri penerangan,) Alwi Dahlan in his house in Jakarta. (Kompas, May 16, 1998)*

This revision, however, did not erase the initial impression given to the readers as a result of the previous article.

The attempt of the newspaper to push the president to step down was made again through another headline, entitled: *“Welcome to the New Government, 11 Ministers Resigned from Office”*. Luhulima explained that when the article was written, there was a rumor that the president would step down very soon, possibly on May 21, 1998. However, in order not to trail behind other news outlets, *Kompas* wrote a piece welcoming the new government in order to give the impression to its readers that they were in full possession of the facts and

already knew the president would resign. In the case that Suharto did not step down, the newspaper anticipated covering itself by claiming that they had been referring to the 11 ministers who had resigned from office. Luhulima explained further: "This means that there would be new ministers appointed, and since a lot of new ministers would come, we could say that it's like having a new government." (Luhulima, 2001: xii)

On the same day, *Kompas* also wrote other articles to pressurize the president to resign by giving space to Suharto's political rivals. In an article entitled: "*Megawati Supported the Students*", the paper wrote:

*The chairman of the struggling Indonesian Democratic Party (PDIP), Megawati Soekarnoputri, was consistent in his support of the ongoing student protests. This is because reformation, the eradication of corruption and pressure on Suharto to step down are all also the goals of PDIP." (Kompas, May 21, 1998).*

On the very same day, on page 10 of the daily, an article entitled "*Artists Support Pak Harto to Step Down*" was published. In line with this, an article on page 12 entitled: "*The Foreign Minister of the United States Suggested Suharto to Resign*" was published. All these articles helped apply subtle pressure for the resignation of Suharto.

Suharto stepped down from power on May 21, 1998, passing the presidency onto Habibie. *Kompas* immediately threw their support behind Habibie, as shown by this article, entitled: "*BJ Habibie Wants the People to Support Him*":

*In his first speech in the Merdeka Palace, President BJ Habibie hopes for the full support of the Indonesian people in his new position as the third president of Indonesia. "I am hoping for support from all of the people so that we can get out of this political crisis, which might destroy the entire nation." Habibie became President of the*





In summary, this section has demonstrated that *Kompas* managed to build a close relationship with President Suharto and, in doing so, the newspaper was well positioned to influence him to step down from power. However, this attempt to persuade him to step down from power was made indirectly and politely, a strategy that will be elaborated on further in this chapter. But before that, in the section that follows, I will provide another example of how *Kompas* exerted influence on power holders, in this case on President Yudhoyono in the Reformation era.

### **Convincing Yudhoyono to Annul the Law on Local Elections**

After the fall of Suharto in 1998, Indonesian politics was transformed from an authoritarian into a democratic political system. A series of amendments to the 1945 constitution was conducted to provide the basis for this process. One of its initial consequences was the implementation of democratic processes at every level of government, where citizens would vote directly for their president, governor, city mayor and city regent. While the direct presidential election had already been regulated in article 22 E of the 1945 constitution, the election of local leaders came to be regulated in law number 32/2004. Thus, while the direct presidential election was conducted for the first time in July 2004, the election of local heads was held for the first time in June 2005. However, this was short-lived, as parliament went on to change this system of local election by passing Law number 22/2014, which eliminated the direct election of governors, city mayors and regents by the people, and instead, they would be appointed by local elected legislatures.

This change in democratic process was initiated in 2012, when the Home Minister, Gamawan Fauzi, suggested that only city mayors or regents would continue to be directly elected by the people, while governors should be elected by Provincial Parliamentary members (DPRD) instead (*Kompas*, June 7, 2012; *Tempo.co*, September 11, 2014). Governors, he argued, were a representation of the central government and should act as coordinators of cities or regencies in the region. This notion then became one of the main

points in the bill for local elections proposed by the government to be discussed in Parliament (DPR). One of the main reasons for this suggestion was to avoid the practice of vote buying during direct elections. Fauzi argued that the practice of direct local election by the people had generated the massive practice of vote buying during the governor election, and consequently, the cost of the local election was extremely high for every candidate. This, in turn, made the successful candidate susceptible to practices of corruption after being elected, in order to retrieve the money spent. He believed this high-cost politics could be prevented if governors were elected by the local legislative members instead, and it would be easier to monitor the behavior of tens of parliamentary members than millions of voters in a direct election (*Kompas*, July 21, 2012).

This idea from the Home Minister appeared three times in *Kompas'* coverage in 2012. The three articles were as follows:

**Table 3**  
*Kompas'* Coverage on the Local Election Bill in 2012

<b>Num (1)</b>	<b>Date (2)</b>	<b>Page (3)</b>	<b>Headline Title (4)</b>	<b>Type (5)</b>	<b>Tone (6)</b>
1	7 June	4	<i>Pilkada</i> : Government Proposed Governors Should be Elected by Local Legislatures (DPRD)	SN	Neutral
2	21 July	4	Vulnerable for Political Cartel, Governor Election by Local Legislatures Close the Chance for Individual Candidates	SN	Unfavorable
3	18 Sept	2	Ignoring Participation, the Elimination of Direct Election Doesn't Effectively Erase Vote Buying	SN	Unfavorable

SN = straight news article

From the table above, it can be seen that the issue of the Bill of Local Elections appeared in *Kompas* for the first time on June 7, 2012, with a neutral tone. This means that the newspaper did not adopt a position of either supporting or opposing the idea, and it was formulated as follows:

*The government has proposed that governors should be elected by local legislatures... This idea was raised by the Home Minister, Gamawan Fauzi, as he was reading the government's note on the Bill of Local Election (RUU Pilkada) in front of Commission II of DPR and DPD in Jakarta... The chairman of Commission II, Agun Gunanjar, said 9 factions in DPR will respond to the government's bill on 13 June 2012." (Kompas, June 7, 2012)*

In this article, *Kompas* simply wrote that the idea was raised by the Home Minister and reported on the schedule as to when the legislative members would respond.

However, this first neutral article was then followed by two unfavorable articles, which opposed the bill for local elections. On July 21, 2012 for instance, *Kompas* wrote that the indirect election would give a chance for the political cartel to flourish. Furthermore, it would also limit the chance for individual candidates to run for election. In an article entitled "*Vulnerable for Political Cartel, Governor Election by Local Legislatures Close the Chance for Individual Candidates*", *Kompas* wrote:

*The bill for local elections proposed by the government would create the chance for political cartels to evolve and thrive. With the requirement that political parties must have some seats to be able to propose a candidate, it would also limit the number of political parties joining the competition. Besides this, it would restrict chances for individual candidates. Political parties would rule National Parliament*

*(DPR), Provincial Legislatures (DPRD Provinsi) and City/Regency Legislatures (DPRD Kabupaten/Kota). This was said by a member of the Election Supervisory Board, Endang Wihdatiningtyas, on Friday in Jakarta" (Kompas, July 21, 2012)*

From the quotation above, it can be seen that the tone of the coverage opposes the idea of indirect elections, and *Kompas* quoted a source who argues about the dangers of returning to indirect elections..

In line with this position, the last article published by the newspaper covering the bill was also against the idea of indirect elections by DPRD. In the article dated September 18, 2012, entitled "*Ignoring Participation, the Elimination of Direct Election Doesn't Effectively Erase Vote Buying*", *Kompas* covered the opinion of various political actors who opposed the idea. Firstly, it quoted pro-democracy activist, Ahmad Fauzi Ray Rangkuti, who said that those who oppose direct elections ignore the importance of political participation. Secondly, it also quoted the statement of national legislative member, Nurul Arifin, who believed that indirect elections would not be able to erase the practice of vote buying. Lastly, *Kompas* also cited another legislator, Arif Wibowo, who argued that vote buying could be prevented without necessarily changing the system of the election.

Therefore, in 2012 *Kompas* covered the issue by adopting an overall oppositional tone. This tone is continuously seen in their coverage of the issue throughout 2013. In this year, there were 15 (fifteen) articles written by the newspaper, as illustrated in the following table:

**Table 4**  
*Kompas'* Coverage on Local Election Bill in 2013

<b>Num (1)</b>	<b>Date (2)</b>	<b>Page (3)</b>	<b>Title (4)</b>	<b>Type (5)</b>	<b>Tone (6)</b>
1	15/2	5	The Representative System Was Under Question, Government Proposed Gubernatorial Election by DPRD	SN	U
2	16/2	6	The Wave of Democracy in Reverse	E	U
3	19/2	15	Direct Election versus DPRD's Election	O	U
4	8/3	6	Bill on Election and Progressive Solution	O	U
5	22/3	5	Bill on Election: Government Change the Proposal on Election Mechanism	SN	N
6	25/3	6	Electing the Governor	O	U
7	15/4	6	Questioning the Local Election Mechanism	O	U
8	24/6	6	Local Head Must Be Elected	O	U
9	6/7	6	The Charm of Direct Election	O	U
10	9/7	5	Deadlock on the Discussion on the Bill of Local Election, Lobby Would be Conducted	SN	N
11	18/7	4	Bill on Local Election, Election of City Mayor and Regent Still Being Discussed	SN	N
12	30/7	4	Governor Would be Elected by The People, Regent by DPRD	SN	N
13	28/9	4	Bill on Local Election: Government and Parliament Still Disagree	SN	N
14	12/10	2	Direct Local Election Brings More Damage	SN	F
15	11/2	4	Bill on Local Election: Debate on the Election Mechanism	SN	N

SN = straight news article

E = editorial

O = opinion column

Column 6 of the table portrays the tone of each article, where it can be seen that out of a total of 15 articles, there were 8 unfavorable (U) ones (53,33%), indicating that more than half of the coverage was against the idea of direct elections by DPRD. Meanwhile, there were 5 articles (33,33%) which were neutral in tone, neither supporting nor opposing the idea of indirect elections. Lastly, there were only 2 articles (13,33%), which supported the bill. Therefore, the overall message of *Kompas* in 2013 was one that opposed the bill for local elections.

An example of such an unfavorable article was entitled “*The Wave of Democracy in Reverse*”. This article, which takes the form of an editorial, strongly opposed the idea of election by DPRD in the gubernatorial elections, stating:

*The concerns over the expensive cost of democracy need not be addressed by taking away the rights of the people to vote. What needs to be found is a way to reduce costs. The idea to conduct a series of local elections in many regions at the same time would be one such method. In the end, it would also minimize the tendency of corruption by the elected officer. Taking back the rights of the people would be a reverse of the wave of our democracy. (Kompas, February 16, 2013)*

The article above scrutinized the government’s argument, which claimed that local elections created high cost politics. The editor argues that there is another way to reduce the cost of local elections, such as holding multiple elections. The article further argues that changing the election mechanism would threaten the ongoing democratization process.

As can be seen in table 4, this article was followed by two more articles which adopt a similar tone. The first article is dated February 19, only three days later, and is entitled “*Direct Election versus DPRD’s Election*”. This article is an opinion column written by a political analyst from the Center for Strategic and

International Studies (CSIS), J. Kristiadi. In this column, Kristiadi criticized the idea of gubernatorial election by DPRD as follows:

*This would potentially bring political instability as the City Mayor or Regent would have more power and legitimacy than the Governor. Some of these Mayors or Regents might feel that they have more support from the people and would disobey the Governor. Problems would worsen when political parties suffer a crisis of trust from the people, like what is occurring nowadays.” (Kompas, February 19, 2013)*

Therefore, we can see the escalation of Kompas’ coverage on the issue, and the consistently negative tone.

*Kompas* did not stop there. One month later, there was another opinion column that forcefully scrutinized the proposal. The column was written by Laode Ida, a member of Regional Representative Council (DPD), who opposed the bill, claiming that distinguishing the mechanism for election of the regional head at the provincial level from those at the city or regency level would be a practice of discrimination. Therefore, he suggested that both have to be elected in the same way. Secondly, he argued that democracy meant that the individual right to participate in politics, and therefore the most democratic mechanism for electing regional heads, would be direct election by the people. Thirdly, he stressed that if the government really minded the high costs of elections, the elimination of direct elections should be directed towards the city mayor or regent elections (*Kompas*, March 8, 2013).

These three articles above, to varying degrees, reflected *Kompas*’ position on the proposal. It is clear that the first article reflected *Kompas*’ position as it took the form of an editorial, which are written by a member of the editorial board, and quite often by the Chief Editor himself. Meanwhile, the opinion column also reflected the newspaper’s position, as opinion columns were tightly edited by a team of special editors, usually the senior ones, and are considered to be



one of the most popular sections of the newspaper. Every day, hundreds of articles written by many experts come to the desk of editors at “Opini”. The editors have full power to decide which article should appear in the column, and one of their main considerations is whether the article supports *Kompas*’ ideology. This is why quite often, *Kompas* invites certain experts whom they know support their position to write on a specific issue. Thus, it is clear that *Kompas* strongly opposed the proposal to eliminate direct gubernatorial elections.

As if in response to these articles described above, the government changed the proposal. This is illustrated in a news article dated March 22, entitled; “*Bill on Election: Government Change the Proposal on Election Mechanism*”. This article wrote:

*The government changed the proposal on the mechanism for regional heads in the bill of elections for local heads. The governor is going to be elected by the people, while city mayor/regents would be elected by DPRD. This idea was raised and agreed on in a closed meeting between the government and commission II of the DPRD.” (Kompas, March 22, 2013)*

From the article above, a parallel can be observed between the article of Laode in *Kompas*, on March 8, and the subsequent change in policy taken by the government. Did *Kompas*’ articles, then, influence this change in government policy? As will be illustrated later in the chapter, the articles of *Kompas* did indeed influence the government policy from having indirect gubernatorial elections into indirect regent/mayor elections. However, prior to this, in the next section, *Kompas*’ coverage of the issue in 2014 will be examined, as the resulting change in policy to have city mayors and regents elected indirectly did not meet the expectations of *Kompas*’ editorial board. What *Kompas* had advocated was that there be no elimination of direct elections at any level,

both at city or regency levels, as well as at the provincial level. Therefore, *Kompas* remained doggedly focused on this issue in 2014.

2014 was a crucial moment in Indonesian politics. In this year, the 2014 general election would be held to elect new legislative members at every level to serve in office until 2019, so it was the last year in office for the current serving legislative members. Therefore, the discussion for the bill within the parliament was very much intensified, and was also manifest in *Kompas'* coverage that year. While there were only three articles on the issue which appeared in 2012 and 15 articles in 2013, there were 80 articles that appeared from January until October 2, 2014.<sup>40</sup> The details of the coverage is as follows<sup>41</sup>:

**Table 5**  
*Kompas'* Coverage on Local Election Bill  
1 January – 2 October 2014

Page		Type			Tone		
Head Line	Non HL	Straight News	Editorial	Opinion	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable
30	50	59	5	16	78	2	-

From the table above, it can be seen that from January until 2 October 2014, there were 30 articles (37.5%) which appeared as front page headline news, indicating that *Kompas* considered this issue to be very important. Secondly, most of the tone of the coverage was unfavorable towards the prospect of eliminating direct elections (78 articles), and therefore 97.5% of articles were framed to support direct elections. It can also be seen that most of the articles

<sup>40</sup> It is important to note here, that this research limits its investigation on *Kompas'* coverage until October 2, which was the time when President SBY officially annulled the law on Indirect Local Elections, passed by the parliament by issuing regulations in lieu of law (Perppu) about Direct Election for Regional Head.

<sup>41</sup> For the title of every article, please see appendix.

appeared in the form of straight news (59 articles, or 73.75%), showing how the newspaper tightly monitored the progress of the issue. Sixteen of the articles (20%) appeared in the form of opinion columns, where *Kompas* used the view of the experts to support their position for refusing the elimination of indirect elections. Finally, *Kompas* expressed its concern on the proposal by writing five editorials, both to emphasize the importance of the issue and also to explicitly express the position of the newspaper.

The next important feature to note is that the most intensive part of *Kompas*' coverage on the bill occurred after 4 September 2014. As can be seen in the appendix, from January until 4 September 2014 (8 months), there were only 12 articles discussing the bill on *Pilkada* (Indonesian name for local elections). However, from 5 September until 2 October 2014, in the space of less than a month, there were 68 articles covering this issue. This reflects the political context surrounding the discussion in the parliament, where the notion for the elimination of direct elections proposed by the government was initially rejected. In 2012, as mentioned earlier, this rejection of the DPR was represented in *Kompas*' coverage through citing the response of two legislators: Nurul Arifin as well as Ari Wibowo (*Kompas*, September 18, 2012). In 2013, the parliament still disagreed with the government, and a rejection of the proposal can be seen in an article dated September 28, 2013, entitled: "*Bill on Local Election: Government and Parliament Still Disagree*". In this article, it was reported as follows:

*The discussion of the bill for the election of regional heads which started in 2012, is still far from finished. The government and the parliament still have differing opinions, especially in terms of the mechanism for electing regent and city mayors. The government proposed that elections for regent and city mayors be conducted by local legislators (DPRD). It was supported by the Faction of the Unity of Development Party, the Faction of Democratic Party and Regional Representative Council (DPD), but seven other factions*

*in the parliament rejected the proposal and want to maintain the ongoing direct election system.” (Kompas, September 28, 2013)*

Thus, at this stage, in September 2013, most members of the Indonesian parliament disagreed with the government’s proposal, and refused changing the system to allow elections by DPRD.

This refusal of most of the political parties in the parliament was maintained until May 2014. However, a very crucial event occurred in Indonesian politics in the middle of 2014 that instantly changed the political constellation in the parliament and their position towards the government’s proposal. It was the direct presidential election, held on July 9, 2014. There were two candidates running for president, supported by various political parties. The first candidate, Prabowo, who paired with Hatta Rajasa as his vice presidential candidate, was supported by five political parties: Gerindra, PAN, Golkar, PPP and PKS. The second candidate, Joko Widodo, who paired with Jusuf Kalla as his vice president, was supported by three political parties in the parliament: PDIP, Nasdem and PKB. As explained earlier in chapter 6, the political rivalry was so sharp that it divided the Indonesian parliament, and arguably, has polarized Indonesian society until today.

The political rivalry in the presidential election translated into shifting attitudes towards the bill in parliament, as the parties who supported Prabowo were now in favor of the bill, while those who supported Jokowi refused the bill. In an article dated September 4, 2014, entitled “5 Factions in DPR Changed Their Position, Political Constellation Impacts the Bill on Local Elections”, Kompas wrote:

*Five out of six factions in the People Representative Council (DPR) were united in the Red-White Coalition, and suddenly changed their position towards the mechanism of the election of local heads. If previously they were in favor of direct election for governors, regents and city mayors, now they propose an election by local legislative council (DPRD). Those five factions are: Democratic Party, Golkar*

*Party, National Mandate Party, Unity of Development Party and Great Indonesia Movement. One of the members of the Red-White Coalition, however, the Prosperity and Justice Party, still seeks to maintain direct elections.” (Kompas, September 4, 2014).*

Thus, there was now increasing support for the bill.

The article was accompanied by a diagram as follows:

**Diagram 1**  
Changes of Parties Political Position  
on the Regional Head Elections



Source: Kompas, September 4, 2014

Diagram 1 illustrates the sharp contrast in the position of the political parties before and after the presidential election on July 9. The underlying reason behind this political change was that those who supported Prabowo wanted to secure their choice of regional heads among their own coalition. They believed that if the power to choose regional heads was in the hands of the local legislators, they could secure the position of governor, city mayor and regent among their own coalition. With the fact that those six parties were united in the Red-White Coalition and therefore dominated most of the seats at most

regional levels, they would easily gain victory in most of the regions. Thus, they were determined to pass the bill on having elections by DPRD.

As the political constellation had dramatically changed and the discussion on the bill was coming to an end, the meetings in the parliament were intensified, with the Red-White Coalition determined to pass the bill. At the same time, a wave of protest came from outside the parliament, with *Kompas* newspaper playing two roles. Firstly, it played the role of political actor by pressuring the parliament as well as the government to annul the law, and secondly, it provided a platform for those who insisted on maintaining direct elections. These vital roles were played out through its coverage on the bill, which sharply increased to unprecedented levels. In total, 68 articles appeared in the paper opposing the proposal.

A day after the change of the political constellation in the parliament, *Kompas* covered the protests from various civil society activists. In an article dated September 5, 2014, entitled: “*Bill on Election of Local Head: Refuse the Election by DPRD*”, the newspaper reports as follows:

*The refusal of local head elections by DPRD is widespread and persistent. The change in the election mechanism is seen as a setback for the democratization process at the local level, and has betrayed the message of our reformasi as it eradicates civil rights to participate in the government.... Deputy director for the Union for Election and Democracy, Veru Junaedi, believes that the reason proposed by the government, namely the high costs of elections, does not make any sense. The high cost of elections could be minimized by limiting the campaigning budget of every candidate... Director Executive of the Center for Political Studies, at the Faculty of Social and Political Science at Indonesian University, Sri Budi Eka Wardani, has argued that election by DPRD will not prevent high cost politics. It will only move the practice of vote buying from the people into the council....*

*Executive Director of Local Autonomy Monitoring Committee, Endi Jaweng, believes that if local heads are elected by DPRD, they will accommodate the political interest of the council over the people in their every policy.” (Kompas, September 5, 2014)*

The article above was headline news, appearing on page 1 of the paper, and shows how the media prioritized the protests and became a medium for the people to articulate their discontent.

The next day, *Kompas* went further to emphasize the protests by writing an editorial that clearly stated the position of the media. The editorial had a bold, provocative title: “*Hijacking Democracy*”, and said:

*As the representation of the people, DPR should listen to the people whose rights are being taken. Polling conducted by our research division shows that 87.6% of the people still want to stay with direct elections. We hope that our legislators do not hijack our democracy by taking away the rights to vote from the people. Please refer to our constitution!” (Kompas, September 6, 2014)*

By writing this editorial, *Kompas* acted as a political actor and put pressure on the government. As I will explain later, this pressure articulated through its editorial was also accompanied by an offline lobby.

But before going there, I will examine how *Kompas* functioned itself as the medium for the intellectual elite to articulate their protest. This function was done by providing these intellectual elites with a space to write in *Kompas*’ opinion columns. One of them is an expert on the constitution from Andalas University, Sladi Isra, who wrote an article entitled “*Robbing People Sovereignty*”. In this article, he argued:

*If we carefully read article number 56 law number 32/2004, it uses the phrase “to be elected in a democratic way.” The most concrete*

*manifestation of the word “democratic” is direct vote by the people. Election by the council would mean people lose their sovereignty. Based on previous experiences, it is clear that the representative system often violates the people’s mandate. This is exactly the reason why we amended the 1945 constitution. Therefore, eliminating the people’s right to vote would be a serious violation of the constitution itself.” (Kompas, September 9, 2014)*

In the article above, *Kompas* used the authoritative power of an expert to pile on more pressure on the legislators in the parliament. However, it seems that the council did not seem to take *Kompas*’ position very seriously. The legislators who were united in the Red-White Coalition were determined to pass the law that served their interest the most.

Realizing that their voice was being ignored, *Kompas* changed tactics and started targeting the president himself to achieve the goal of blocking the changes to the electoral system. This is because they knew that even though the parliament passes the law, the president has the power to annul them. In addition, the paper realized that President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY) was very sensitive towards the media and paid great attention to any media coverage of himself. The Vice Chief Editor of the political desk of *Kompas* illustrates this:

*SBY is very sensitive to the media. He really cares about how people see him. He does not want to look bad. Based on years of experience serving as a journalist for the president palace, I have an interesting example that reflects this. Before a press conference, SBY took great care over his appearance and attire. He asked me about his peci (a type of hat for Indonesian people)... He said: “How is my peci Wisnu? Does it look good?” And I answered: “Yes, it looks good pak.” You know, he really cares about these details.... That is why, I believe, he is also the father of the media (Bapak Media). Because he is the first*



*president to ever use the right to answer (hak jawab) to show his protest to our coverage. He wants to be seen as a president that was friendly towards the media. (Anton Wisnu Nugroho, personal communication, June 14, 2016).*

For these reasons, *Kompas* started to direct its criticism at the president in their coverage.

Such critical articles can be seen in this following table:

**Table 6**  
*Kompas' Coverage Directed at President SBY*

Num	Date	Page	Title
1.	8/9	1	<b>SBY</b> is Asked to Protect Democracy, KPK: Pilkada by DPRD Could Allow Corruption to Flourish
2.	10/9	1	6 Factions Opposed the Voice of the People, The Public Hope, <b>President SBY</b> Doesn't Take Away Their Political Rights
3.	12/9	1	Local Head Reminds <b>SBY</b> , KPU: Election by the People is the Strength of Indonesian Democracy in the World
4.	15/9	6	Waiting for <b>SBY's</b> Legacy
5.	17/9	2	Open Letter to <b>SBY</b> , President's Advisory Council Support Direct Election
6.	18/9	1	Bill on Election: <b>President</b> Could Refuse the Ratification ( <i>pengesahan</i> ) of the Bill in the Collective Meeting
7.	22/9	6	<b>Yudhoyono's</b> Political Step
8.	24/9	6	Waiting for Special Present from <b>SBY</b>
9.	27/9	2	Law on Local Election: All Fingers Are Pointed to <b>the Chairman of Democratic Party</b>
10.	27/9	1	Bad Legacy of <b>SBY's Regime</b> : Bill on Election is Parliament's Product that Ignores the People
11.	28/9	1	Law: <b>SBY</b> Promises to Struggle to Change the Law on Local Election
12.	29/9	1	<b>SBY's</b> Promise Is Being Asked, Citizens Collect Identity Cards to Protest Law on Local Election
13.	1/10	1	President <b>SBY</b> Prepared for <i>Perppu</i> , Experts, Public and PDIP Party

			Gives Compliment
14.	2/10	6	Option for <i>Perppu</i> was Taken by <b>SBY</b>

From the table 6, it can be seen that there are 14 articles which explicitly mention the name of the president, therefore directly putting pressure him. These articles were dated between 8 September and 2 October 2014, and all appeared after the changes to the position of the parties in the parliament towards the bill on September 4. Eight of them (57,14%) were front-page headlines, reflecting the degree of importance of the issue, four of them are on page 6, meaning that either they are opinion columns or editorials. The opinion columns show how *Kompas* tried to harness the authority of experts to put pressure on the president, whilst the editorials clearly express *Kompas*' position to the president.

If we take a closer examination of one headline, for instance this article entitled, "6 Factions Opposed the Voice of the People, The Public Hope **President SBY** Doesn't Take Away Their Political Rights", which was dated on September 10, it informed the readers that group inside parliament that supported election by DPRD had increased, now consisting of 6 factions. This was because the Prosperity and Justice Party had now joined the coalition. However, the article suggested that President SBY could still save democracy:

*A recent survey conducted by Indonesia's Round Survey (LSI) suggested that 81.25% of the public wanted to stay with the direct election system...therefore, in making this happen it would reflect how President SBY is a real statesman. People hope that, at the end of his presidency, President SBY did not support the parliament to eliminate their rights. If the President fails to do so, it will be a black mark on his leadership." (Kompas, September 10, 2014)*

Here, it can be seen that *Kompas* used the result of the polls to support their claim that they really represented the voice of the people. This claim was based on academic research, which was important for SBY. *Kompas* editors knew that

SBY was greatly interested in science and academia, even holding a doctorate degree, and he was happy to be viewed as a scientist. The statement above was a warning to the president that if he did not follow the people's voice, as reflected by the survey, it would be a blemish on his record of leadership.

Besides giving a warning to the president, sometimes *Kompas* attempted to persuade SBY with friendlier words. This can be seen from an article dated September 24, entitled; "*Waiting for Special Present from SBY*". This article, which was an opinion column written by Saldi Isra, an academic professor in the Andalas University, states:

*If the legislative process in the parliament was ended by voting and then the option for direct election was lost, SBY would be remembered as the president who left a coffin carrying the death of the people's sovereignty. However, if the president was successful in controlling his party members in the parliament and won the vote, he would leave a special gift at the end of his work. Pak SBY, people are waiting for your special present!" (Kompas, September 24, 2014)*

From the quote above it can be seen that, again, *Kompas* used the authority of experts, in this case social scientists, to put pressure on SBY, by publishing an opinion column from an expert that seemed to be friendly and gentle in its title, but in fact was no less pressuring in its content.

Nevertheless, despite *Kompas'* ruthless and persistent efforts to prevent the bill of direct elections, parliament decided to go ahead and pass it. On September 26, 226 of the parliamentary members voted for indirect election by DPRD. Another 135 legislators from PDIP, PKB and Hanura voted against the bill, whilst 124 legislative members from the Democratic Party, of which SBY was the general chairman, walked out of the meeting and abstained from voting. This act allowed those in favor of the bill to win by a majority, and the result of the victory was law number 22/2014 on the Mechanism of the Election for Governor, Major and Regent. In article 28 point 1 of the law, it says: "Votes

were taken, counted, and announced in an election which was held at a complete meeting attended by the Provincial Legislative Council, as well as Regent and City Legislative Councils". In addition to this article 28, in article 31 number 1 it was regulated as follows: "Every member of this council gave its vote only to 1 candidate of Governor, candidate of Regent and candidate of city Mayor." From these two articles, it was clear that the new law regulated the regional head to be elected by the local legislative council. This law was to come into effective (*mulai diundangkan*) starting from October 2, 2014.

In response to this latest political development, *Kompas* wrote a strongly critical piece that appeared on their front page, entitled: "**Bad Legacy of SBY's Regime: Bill on Election is Parliament's Product that Ignores the People**". It stated:

*The decision of the collective meeting (sidang paripurna) of DPR which has passed the election of local heads by DPRD has generated wide protest from the people. This enactment has also been seen as a bad legacy for Indonesian democracy at the twilight of SBY's regime. This decision could not be separated from the proposal by the government under Yudhoyono' Presidency as well as the Democratic Party's position in the parliament, which was also led by Yudhoyono as its General Chairman. The Democratic Party walked out from the meeting where the voting was taking place. "SBY isn't leaving a legacy which makes him deserving to be remembered as a defender of democracy. The election by DPRD is simply destroying democracy," said the Chairman of Committee for the Monitoring of the Local Autonomy's Implementation, Robert Andi Jaweng." (Kompas, September 27, 2014)*

This paragraph was the lead of the article on the front page, and is indeed very critical, claiming that the passing of the law has left a bad legacy for SBY. There was a rumor inside the newsroom that SBY, on reading this headline, was

terribly upset. In a daily meeting in the newsroom, one of the editors said that Daniel Sparingga, Special Staff of the President for Political Communication, was sent to *Kompas* to discuss this. The *Kompas* editor was informed by Daniel that SBY had been made very nervous on reading the headline: “SBY *mencret-mencret* (had diarrhea) on reading the article.” (*Kompas*’ Editorial Meeting, September 29, 2014) and, all day long, was distracted, going frequently to the restroom, trying to think of a solution.

On the very next day, the media reported that SBY planned to make a regulation in lieu of law (*peraturan pemerintah pengganti undang-undang*) in order to annul the law. This is covered in an article dated September 28, entitled: “*Pilkada Law: SBY Promises to Struggle for Changing the Law on Local Election.*” This headline about the president’s promise to change the law was seen as a good sign, and that the newspaper’s campaign was starting to get results. *Kompas* monitored the president closely, ensuring that he would fulfill the promise, as reflected in another article the next day, on September 29, entitled: “*SBY’s Promise Is Being Asked, Citizens Collecting Identity Cards to Protest Law on Local Election*”.

*Kompas*’ ruthless campaign finally brought results when on September 30, 2014, SBY issued a *Perppu* on the bill of the election of local heads. In *Perppu* number 1, 2014 about the Election of Governor, Regent and City Mayors, a key point was outlined by *Kompas* as follows: “The governor, regent and city mayor would be elected directly by the people...and to declare that Law number 22/2014 about the Election for Governor, Regent and City Mayor which regulates election for local heads by DPRD is annulled.” (*Kompas.com*, October 2, 2014). The president’s decision was then appreciated by *Kompas* in the writing of an editorial supporting the decision as follows:

*President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono finally took a decision to issue Perppu to secure direct elections of local heads with 10 improvements. This constitutional move of President Yudhoyono was taken also in*

*response to public anger towards those 124 democratic party members who walked out of the parliament during the vote. This decision was appreciated by PDIP party, who shares the same idea as the president. (Kompas, October 2, 2014)*

The enactment of the *Perppu*, which was praised by *Kompas* through the editorial above, marked the end of the years of drama on this issue.

As is clear, the persistent coverage of *Kompas* was responded to accordingly by the government, resulting in a change in policy. But the question then is: did the president really take such a decision and change the agenda because of *Kompas'* influence? Furthermore, given the fact that *Kompas* was not the only media who protested against the bill, to what extent was it *Kompas* that influenced the decision? To be more specific, did the assertion among *Kompas* journalists that SBY had paid attention to their coverage on the legislative process have any empirical grounds? This question can only be answered by the president himself, or by someone who know exactly the president's mind. The next part of this chapter will be dedicated to answering these questions.

### ***The President's Mind***

Edi Peni looked proud. He was sitting on the balcony of his house in Depok City. It was with great enthusiasm that he was telling me about his relationship with President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (SBY). The relationship had begun in 2002. Susilo was a Minister of the Politic and Security Coordinator in the cabinet of Megawati Soekarnoputri. He had established a think tank, namely Bogor's Brighton Institute, and asked Edi to join it. The main mission of the think tank was to produce a policy review for President Megawati. Indeed, the former military general was the right-hand man of the president. It was General SBY who provided a detailed policy brief for the cabinets. It was for this reason that he needed an academic like Edi, a professor in Sociology at a distinguished university in Indonesia, to support him with the research for the policies.

The rumor was that Megawati wanted to run for President in the upcoming 2004 presidential election, and that she wanted to have SBY as her vice president. However, something happened along the way that prevented this from happening. SBY's popularity was increasing significantly prior to the election. His eloquent speeches combined with his handsome looks made him a media darling. After three periods of being led by a civilian president, the country now missed having a military general in power. SBY seemed to be the answer. Aware of his popularity, he decided to run for president himself. For this purpose, Edi was again needed to support him with ideas for his campaign. Edi explained: "Everything was new back then. It was for the first time that a president was voted directly by the people. So our think tank prepared a "white book" elaborating his vision and mission as a presidential candidate."

As is clear from the course of history, SBY went on to win the election, with a senior politician from Golkar Party; Muhammad Jusuf Kalla, as his vice president. SBY himself was supported by the Democratic Party, which he himself found in 2001. SBY and Jusuf Kalla became the first President and Vice President ever directly elected by the people. This also marked the beginning of Edi being assistant to the former general. Whenever the elected president needed a certain policy review, he would ask for Edi's expertise. The climax of the relationship was in 2010, when Edi was officially appointed as Vice Chair of the President's Personal Secretary (Wasespri). SBY had just been elected as president for the second term from 2009-2014, and Edi stayed in this role until the very last days of SBY's presidency.

The President Personal Secretary is a member of the president's staff with the very special function to help with the daily presidential tasks. While in Indonesia, a president is already assisted by the State Secretary (Sekretaris Negara) and Cabinet Secretary (Sekretaris Kabinet), SBY wanted more. He appointed his own Personal Secretary as a trusted person who understands his vision. Edi explained this office as follow:

*In the old days, information was circulated from State Secretary or Cabinet Secretary to the President. Now all go to the Personal Secretary's office. This office will conduct final checks on all letters, papers, appointment to the President. So he ran the Presidential Office just like that of a Military Commander. This was exactly why the Chief Personal Secretary was always a Military General. I was the only civilian serving in this office. And my position was only the Vice Chief Personal Secretary to the President." (Edi Peni, personal communication, September 11, 2016)*

From the explanation above, it is clear that the president's personal secretary had a very close position to the president himself. They assisted him on a day-to-day to basis, so they knew exactly his daily activities. The personal secretary follows the president wherever he goes whilst performing his duties. They even accompanied the president over the weekends, when SBY spent time with his family in Puri Cikeas. It is for this reason that Edi could describe precisely and affirmatively the president's daily habits in engaging with the mass media.

Having served the president for years, Edi could confirm that SBY paid significant attention to the mass media. The 6<sup>th</sup> Indonesian president was a very active man, Edi said. SBY would sleep late every night and wake up very early. Before going to bed, SBY would watch news programs on TV. His favorite was news on foreign affairs, as he gave much attention to international issues. Reading newspapers was among the activities he did to start his day. From the newspapers, he focused mainly on home affairs, as he wished to monitor the current social and political issues as presented in the press. For this purpose, he subscribed to almost all national newspapers, with special attention to *Kompas* and *Jurnal Nasional* daily newspapers.

*Jurnal Nasional* was a daily newspaper founded and initiated by President SBY himself in June 2006. Many have observed how the newspaper was very supportive to every one of the president's policies and actions, and it was



commonly believed that the very reason to establish this newspaper had been to support the regime. Many doubted that the newspaper would survive after SBY was no longer in office, and this prediction was confirmed. *Jurnal Nasional* was closed down on November 1, 2014, around the same time as SBY's time in office was ending. Considering this background, it is unsurprising that SBY paid much attention to this daily newspaper. The reason to pay attention to *Kompas*, however, was much more complicated.

Edi believed that *Kompas* held a special position for SBY, and he viewed the newspaper with great respect. SBY realized that *Kompas* was one of the most influential newspapers in Indonesia, with arguably the biggest network, not only inside Indonesia, but also at the international levels. A lot of international news media rely on *Kompas* when they wanted to know about Indonesian affairs. This had grabbed the interest of the President, who according to Edi, always paid great attention to global issues. In fact, many believed that SBY would play an active role in the international arena after resigning from office. Furthermore, *Kompas'* large network in Indonesia led SBY to believe that *Kompas* reflected the aspirations of the Indonesian public. He knew that *Kompas* was the biggest national newspaper with the highest circulation. As a president who was also a scholar, he was well aware of the power of the media<sup>42</sup>. Last but not less importantly, *Kompas* functioned as a site for the political elite to communicate with each other.

It is for these reasons, Edi explained, that President SBY appointed Afdel Lingua as his Special Staff for political communication. Daniel was not only a prominent intellectual elite in Indonesia, but he was also a Catholic. According to Edi, this factor could help endear SBY to *Kompas*. SBY believed that the fact that Jakob Oetama, the owner, founder as well as General Director of *Kompas*,

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<sup>42</sup> In fact, SBY himself also wrote three opinion columns in *Kompas*, after he resigned from office. These articles were entitled: "Indonesia 2045" (*Kompas*, 28 June 2016), "Strategic Environment and 2017" (*Kompas*, 2 January 2017), and "Answering the Challenges of 2017" (*Kompas*, 9 January 2017).

was also a Catholic himself, would help smooth communication between the newspaper and the president. As I have elaborated more deeply in chapter 3 in the section *People and Values of Kompas*, many *Kompas* journalists were Catholics and the editorial board of the newspaper was also dominated by them. Therefore, very often SBY personally invited Jakob Oetama to meet with him, using Daniel as the messenger. This happened, according to Daddi, when the president felt the need to clarify any issues circulating in the media related to his policies. These frequent meetings between Jakob Oetama and SBY left a lasting impression on the founder of *Kompas*, who wrote in one of his articles:

*On various occasions of meeting, as well as seeing himself as the first person responsible for 200 million people in Indonesia, SBY has declared himself a true scientist. The deepest calling of a scientist is to explain, and to suggest creative solutions to problems... SBY is very clear and detailed when considering every decision, along with examining the background and scope of the problem, as well as the rationale. This is in line with how the media works, which also focuses on the solving of collective problems. " (Jakob, 2014:12-27)*

In this piece which was intended to be a testimony for President SBY, Jakob not only confirmed that he had met with the president regularly, but also expressed his positive impression of him. According to Edi, not many media people are invited to a personal meeting with the president, which shows that SBY treated *Kompas* differently from other newspapers. The president wanted to build a good relationship with the newspaper in order to help disseminate his policy.

Therefore, it was understandable that the smile on Edi's face slipped when he was asked to describe the relationship between the president and *Kompas* at the end of his presidency. He said:

*This is how Pak SBY treated Kompas. So when Kompas criticized us too much, usually he sent Pak Daniel. Pak Daniel was a special staff on*

*political communication, right? And Pak Daniel was Catholic, right? So we can say that Pak Daniel could communicate well with Pak Jakob and with Kompas. So when, for him, Kompas was much too critical, Pak SBY invited Pak Jakob for a dialog. He tried his best to explain to Pak Jakob what was actually going on. However...very often Kompas still attacked him. But then the fact was revealed that...many editors at Kompas were in favor of PDIP party. The media darling now turns out to be Jokowi. Right? ... But yes, Pak SBY quite often invited Pak Jakob, who mostly came together with senior editors. The meetings were not held in the State Palace (Istana Negara) but in the State House (Wisma Negara). Because it was more personal.” (Edi Peni, personal communication, September 11, 2016)*

The interview above clearly describes the relationship between President SBY and *Kompas*. As a person who was the personal assistance of SBY for more than a decade, he could explain in great detail the relationship between the two. Edi believes that the relationship was good at the beginning; however, it slowly worsened, especially in the last period of SBY's presidency. However, apart from the declining relationship, one thing is clear: that the president considered *Kompas* not only as a messenger to the people, but also as a political actor who could grant support to different politicians, which in this case was the upcoming President Jokowi.

Considering this, in relation to the polemics on the election bill, it is unsurprising that SBY's policy fell into line with *Kompas'* coverage. As clearly elaborated in the previous part, *Kompas'* position on the legislative process was very often followed by a change in the decision of the president. This is believed by *Kompas* editors to be proof of *Kompas'* influence on the palace. This is especially evident from the story about Afdel Lingua, in the article entitled: “*Bad Legacy of SBY's Regime*”. When confronted with this fact, Edi agreed by saying:

*I can say for sure that Pak SBY pays a great attention to Kompas. Of course, it is not only Kompas that he reads, right? But Kompas is one of the most important..... Mr. Afdel was right when saying that the President was very upset. However, I guess he doesn't have the authority to say that Pak SBY mencret-mencret (diarrhea). He was not the one in charge to be around the President, right? I was more close to the President. Very often Mr. Afdel asked me whether Pak SBY was around, when he wanted to meet him." (Edi Peni, personal communication, September 11, 2016)*

From the part of the interview above, it is clear that *Kompas* played one of the most important roles in influencing SBY's decision to annul the law on *Pilkada*.

I argue that the reasons as to why the newspaper had such influence are threefold: first of all, the media had the authority to claim that they spoke on behalf of the public, and furthermore, they articulated the voices of the people in their coverage. As seen in the earlier part of this thesis, *Kompas* gave a platform for the protest from civil society activists, academics, as well as from experts towards the proposal to eliminate direct elections. On the other hand, *Kompas* also had the power to claim to reflect public aspiration by conducting their own survey which demonstrated that most of the public wanted to stay in the direct election.

The second reason for the newspaper's influence in this case was that *Kompas* was also the site where political elites communicated with each other. By reading *Kompas*, SBY could see the position of other political elites. As clearly covered in the newspaper, *Kompas* conveyed a message that the next power holders, Jokowi and PIDP Party, wanted to stay with direct elections. As a politician, he could calculate the danger his party would be in if he turned his back on the people, while other parties would gain benefits by standing with the people. It is important to note that starting from October, the new legislators would start working in office, and the new president, Joko Widodo,

would also hold office. There were rumors that if SBY's regime stubbornly went forward with the new law, President Jokowi would just annul it anyway. Therefore, as a smart politician who was well-known for his expertise in the strategies to win wars, SBY preferred to take the opportunity to annul the law himself, thus securing his own political advantage.

Finally, as reflected by years of connection with *Kompas*, SBY saw the newspaper as a political actor in itself. As a political actor, the paper could either play a role as his ally, or stand on the side of the coalition, with his competitors. During those days, he understood that the paper's position towards the bill was in support of the upcoming regimes. Based on his experience, he believed that *Kompas* could play a significant role in making or breaking a politician's career. In the long term, the coalition between the new regimes and *Kompas* could bring an alliance that would be able to bring the law on direct election back in. Therefore, he understood that not only would he gain less benefit by opposing the paper, but more importantly, he would not be able to stop them. This explained why in one of his last meetings with Jokowi, SBY was believed to say this: "Mas Jokowi, you don't need to worry. You are powerful. Because *Kompas* is supporting you." (Edi Peni, personal communication, September 11, 2016)

From the words of the president above, it is clear that SBY saw *Kompas* as a political actor with considerable clout, and whose support would be very important for any power holder. Furthermore, it can also be implied from the frequent meetings between SBY and Jakob, that they had established a close relationship. This close relationship was built, perhaps, over the decade of SBY's presidency, and therefore, when the dispute over the bill occurred, SBY listened to *Kompas* more than to any other media. Knowing this, *Kompas* journalists used it as a strategy to exert influence. In words that reflect the opinion of many of its journalists:

*We want to be a friend of the power holders. We rarely attack them. We always try to be kind to our friends, so we can earn their trust. Therefore, in a critical situation, when we attack them, they listen to us more. They will think: "Hey, this is my friend. Unlike other media who always attack me, they are always kind to me. But why are they now critical of me? Perhaps I have gone too far, indeed." (Asep, Editor of political desk, personal interview, February 7, 2014)*

Asep was not the only one who believed this. It is common belief among *Kompas* journalists, and I often heard similar views expressed in the newsroom. The course of history had taught *Kompas* journalists that applying this tactic was successful influencing power holders, both in the Reformation era under Yudhoyono, as well as in earlier authoritarian era under Suharto.

### **7.3 Explaining the Critical Stance of Kompas**

The two case above clearly demonstrate that *Kompas* can take a critical stance on power holders, and take action to support democracy. In this regard, a question can be raised about the identity of the newspaper: so what is *Kompas* then? Is *Kompas* a fearful and cautious newspaper as demonstrated in the earlier chapters? Or is *Kompas* a bold, brave newspaper as demonstrated in the case of Suharto's resignation and the annulment of the law on indirect local election? Which one is *Kompas*?

I argue that *Kompas* is both. *Kompas* is fearful in the issues related to Islam and cautious towards corruption; however, the daily can be firm on other issues which relate more to the policy of certain power holders, though it never seeks to attack the power holders as individual suspects in cases of corruption. I have demonstrated clearly the fear towards Islamic groups which muzzles the newspaper somewhat in chapter 2 (especially in the example of the *Monitor Weekly* case), and in chapter 4 on *rasa* (especially in the case of FPI's attack). In both cases, *Kompas* decided to admit that it was in the wrong and to apologize, even though the paper believed that it had been journalistically correct. It also

agreed to stop covering the issues being protested against by the Islamic groups, and based on my observations, the newspaper also advised its journalists to be more cautious in the future reporting of such issues. In addition, I have shown *Kompas'* cautiousness on the issue of corruption in chapter 4, when *Kompas* stopped covering Boediono in the case of Century Bank after complaints from the Vice President. I also have demonstrated the newspaper's cautiousness in chapter 5, in which my content analysis of 50 years of the newspaper's coverage has shown that the news sources in corruption stories are mostly official sources, and the articles are framed in a mostly legal and official context, rather than that of a whistleblower or investigative one. This suggests that the newspaper is not committed to the notion of watchdog journalism, which strives to expose the misconduct of power holders.

On the other hand, this chapter has demonstrated that the newspaper can take a critical stance towards certain policies of the government. However, it is usually conducted in certain conditions: when journalists are certain that the risk of adopting such a critical stance are close to minimal, and when the paper can resort to claiming that it is reflecting the aspirations of the wider public and, more specifically, its loyal readers. Therefore, in this way, the paper employs the general mood of the public and thus avoids adopting a position that could isolate a sizable group of its readers. In the case of Suharto, *Kompas'* position went in accordance with the widespread aspiration of the Indonesian public demanding him to resign from power. In fact, Suharto was indeed impeached by people power, which for some observers, is considered a political revolution. Meanwhile, in the case of Yudhoyono, maintaining the direct election of the local head was the main demand of the Indonesian public. To stay in the direct election system was seen as being faithful to the democratization process Indonesia had committed itself to following. Furthermore, any risks are considered minimal when the person being criticized is losing power, or even no longer in power. The newspaper's critical stance towards Suharto as well as to Yudhoyono were adopted when both were already nearing the end of their

presidency. The only difference was that while Suharto was forced to resign through people power, Yudhyono was already at the end of the second period of his presidency.

Similarly, *Kompas* was very critical of Sukarno when Suharto was rising to power, despite –as explained in chapter 2– its initial support of Sukarno when the first Indonesian president came to power. Indeed, the name of the newspaper, *Kompas*, was the idea of Sukarno himself, and in its editorial dated June 28, 1965, on the first day of its publication, *Kompas* wrote as follows:

*Our Kompas is Pancasila, Manipol and God's blessing. We are the messenger of the people's conscience, as Manipol teach us that revolution also means the conscience of the human beings...This is where the struggle is. Kompas gives its hands to all progressive and revolutionary power without assumption and phobia. (Kompas Editorial, June 28, 1965)*

However, after Suharto was made president and Sukarno was longer in power, the paper took a very critical stance towards Sukarno, as follows:

*Gestapu/PKI was the result of the implementation of Pantjasila within a wrong political policy, which is the policy of nasakom (an acronym which stands from Nasionalisme/nationalism, Agama/religion, and Komunisme/communism). This is because with the strategy of Nasakom, PKI got legitimate permission from the power holders to prepare the battle for power through G 30 S (30 September movement). The basis of the strategy of Nasakom was Manipol (acronym which stands from Manifesto Politik/ Political Manifesto) for which provided the guidance for the state. So, if this is correct that Nasakom has stimulated the G 30 S, this would also be true that the foundation of the PKI was the political turmoil of G 30 S." (Kompas, September 28, 1966)*



From the editorial above, we can see that *Kompas* blamed Sukarno for giving the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) the opportunity to grow in Indonesia. This occurred under the guise of the political thinking of the president, who believed that nationalism, communism, and religion (*Nasakom*) could be reconciled to live in harmony in Indonesia. Furthermore, this political idea of Sukarno was declared in a political speech in August 17, 1959, which then became famous as the political manifesto of the president (*Manifesto Politik/Manipol*). In a nutshell, unlike their first editorial which declared that: “Our *Kompas* is Manipol”, therefore aligning the newspaper with the goals and vision of the president, *Kompas* here states that *Manipol* was wrong because it allowed the PKI to attempt a coup d’état, which it strongly opposed.

In addition, when being critical, the paper ensures that the criticism did not focus on the activities of the power holder themselves, such as exposing practices of corruption. Both in the cases of Suharto and Yudhoyono, none of the criticism addressed the corrupt practices of these two presidents. Moreover, in both cases, *Kompas* did not attempt any investigative reporting to expose the misconduct of these two presidents, despite both having been rumored to be deeply involved in the practice of corruption: Suharto was alleged to practice widespread corruption (McLeod, 2000), whilst Yudhoyono was rumored to be responsible in the case of the scandal of Century Bank (Andres, 2016). Yet none of those cases were thoroughly investigated by *Kompas*.

Finally, but not less importantly, when taking a critical stance, the daily always strives to convey its message in a polite and indirect way, so as not to anger or cause offence to those in power. Thus, the critical stance will not create a personal conflict with the elites. In the case of Suharto, the illustration above clearly demonstrates that *Kompas* did not explicitly demand him to resign, rather, it only politely wrote as follows: “*If the people don’t want him anymore, Suharto is ready to resign*” (*Kompas*, May 14, 1998). Here, the paper never stated that it wanted him to resign, but rather this message was conveyed

implicitly. This is because the sentence could also mean that Suharto would resign if he lost in the democratic elections. This politeness was further reinforced by the coverage in the following two days, suggesting that the president had clarified the statement: on May 16, 1998, the daily wrote: *“President Declared that He Never Said Ready to Resign.”* This shows the willingness of the newspaper to represent the president’s view, and maintain cordial relations with the power holder.

The same act of indirectness as well as politeness was taken when criticizing Yudhyono on the bill on local elections, which would enforce indirect elections of the local heads. This politeness, or at least indirectness, can be seen from the fact that out of a total of 80 articles reporting on the issue (see table 3), only five of them appeared as editorials. This meant that most of *Kompas’* position was conveyed through citing experts who opposed the bill. Furthermore, as also explained above, *Kompas* “hid” its critical position behind the results of the poll, showing that most Indonesians demanded the election of the local head to remain through direct elections. It took the daily more than two years of advocating on this issue, from June 7, 2012 to October 2, 2014, before it finally wrote an article with the bold headline: *“Bad Legacy of Yudhyono’s Regime: Bill on Election is Parliament’s Product that Ignores the People”*. However, despite the headline of the article, the content of the coverage actually cited another source, Robert Endi Jaweng to voice its stance:

*SBY does not leave a legacy that makes him worth remembering as a defender of democracy. Pilkada by DPRD is the same as suppressing democracy”, said the Chairman of the Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Regional Autonomy, Robert Endi Jaweng, on Friday (26/9).” (Kompas, September 27, 2014).*

In the article above, *Kompas* “borrows the mouth” of Robert Endi Jaweng, the Chairman of the Committee on Monitoring the Implementation of Regional Autonomy, to convey its position. In fact, in its own editorial, the daily wrote a

more polite article entitled: “*Political Steps of Yudhoyono*” (22 September 22, 2014). In this editorial, the paper even positively expressed its optimism that the president would support the annulment of the bill: “The public is still waiting for the realization of the political steps of the Democrat Party Chairman in the House of Representatives”. Therefore, it is clear that despite its critical stance, the daily is consistent in its indirectness and politeness in conveying its message, so as not to offend Yudhoyono.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter aims to investigate the influences of *Kompas* newspaper on Indonesian politics. It began with a survey of *Kompas* readers, which to some extent, reflects the influence of the paper. It was found that in terms of readership, *Kompas* is the largest newspaper in Indonesia, and whose readers are highly educated and economically well established. Furthermore, *Kompas* is the most read newspaper by Indonesian power holders, many of whom have been reading the paper since the New Order period. Therefore, it can be said that *Kompas* has been the newspaper of the Indonesian elites and is the most influential newspaper on the power holders. This has been described in the first part of the chapter.

In the second part, I demonstrate two cases in which *Kompas* demonstrably did have direct influence on issues of great importance occurring at crucial historical junctures, and in particular influenced two Indonesian president: President Suharto during the New Order period and Yudhoyono during the Reformation era. In the first case, *Kompas* helped convince president Suharto to step down from his presidency, which was a hugely important political event in Indonesia’s political history, marking the beginning of the new democratic era. Meanwhile, in the Yudhoyono’s period, the newspaper played a central role in convincing the president, at the end of his period of tenure, to annul the law passed by the parliament about the election of regional heads by local legislative councils.

In this regard, it is clear that despite its cautiousness, the newspaper can take a critical stance on certain policies of the government. However, the two examples above are unique and highly unusual, and therefore, it does not necessarily mean that the daily has functioned fully as an effective force in supporting democracy. This is because the critical stance was only taken under specific conditions: firstly, when journalists could claim that the criticism of the policy was based on the aspirations of the wider public and its readers, and secondly, when the newspaper was sure that the risks of taking such a position were minimal. Usually, this was when the power holder under scrutiny was losing power, as both Suharto as well as Yudhoyono were. In order to minimize the risks, the paper ensured that any criticism was never focused on the power holder as a person, such as exposing his practice of corruption. Furthermore, the paper always couched its message in polite and indirect language.

In addition, this chapter has shown that none of the critical stances were directed towards Islamic issues which, as explained in chapter 4, are the most sensitive issues for the daily. The fear the newspaper feels in covering such topics is because when it has done so, it has often been targeted by Islamic hardliners, who invoke the paper's Catholic roots to undermine it. Therefore, this chapter concludes that *Kompas* has not fully functioned as an effective force in supporting democracy. This last point will be elaborated further in the next and final chapter of my research.