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

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Propositions

1. Many studies have argued that under authoritarian political regime, media tend to have limited freedom in their coverage.
2. On the other hand, media enjoy a high degree of freedom of coverage under democratic political regime.
3. However, what happens to the media after the regime has changed from authoritarian into democratic system is still poorly understood.
4. The case of *Kompas*, the biggest and oldest daily newspaper in Indonesia, shows that change of a political regime from authoritarian to democracy is not necessarily followed by changes in the way the news media writes.
5. Past experience of banning under authoritarian regime has made *Kompas* daily newspaper lived in fear and filled with cautiousness in its coverage.
6. This fearfulness on the part of *Kompas* has been exacerbated by the experience of having been attacked by Islamic fundamentalists for its coverage on the Islamic issue, which the attackers suspect is colored by its Catholic-minority roots.
7. The success of *Kompas* in transforming itself to an economically giant media group has not embolden its news coverage, but on the contrary has reinforced its caution by raising the economic stakes attached to its survival.
8. Together, the abovementioned experiences and threats have given rise to a habit of self-censorship among *Kompas*' journalists and editors.
9. This habit of self-censorship has been developed with reference to *rasa* (literally: 'feeling'), an element of Javanese culture explicitly promoted among *Kompas* staff by Jakob Oetama, chief editor of the daily for four decades, who is himself Javanese.
10. *Rasa*-based self-censorship leads journalists to write in a polite, indirect and cautious style so as to avoid 'hurting the feelings' of influential people, be they powerful political and business actors, or potentially hostile groups among Indonesia's Muslim majority population.
11. Although after democratization the state could no longer ban newspapers, at *Kompas* self-censorship persisted due to the entrenched culture of *rasa* among the staff, as well as the ongoing threat from Islamic fundamentalism and the concern not to jeopardize the economic interests of the *Kompas* business group and its employees.
12. While current scholarship on the Indonesian media tends to be divided between cultural and 'political economy' interpretations of journalistic behavior, this study shows that both factors are intertwined and cannot be separated from each other.
13. Writing a dissertation is like joining a marathon race: one must learn to keep on going while at the same time saving enough energy to reach the finish line.