

Media Politics and Public Opinion Formation in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election: Implications for Voter Behavior

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of media politics in shaping public opinion and voter behavior during the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. In contemporary elections, media serves as a strategic arena where political actors construct narratives, influence public perceptions, and compete for voter attention. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach using a literature study method. Data were collected from scholarly articles, books, official reports, and credible online media published during the election period, then analyzed through content analysis. The findings reveal that media significantly influences issue salience through agenda-setting, making topics such as regional development, public services, and governance performance dominant in public discourse. Framing practices also shape how voters interpret candidates' competence, leadership, and credibility. Moreover, social media has become an essential platform for political communication by facilitating direct interaction between candidates and the public while simultaneously increasing information fragmentation and political polarization. The study further indicates that voter behavior is shaped by the interaction of media exposure, social environments, and individual interpretation. Although media does not directly determine voting decisions, it plays a crucial role in influencing cognitive evaluations and political preferences. Overall, the study concludes that media politics substantially contributes to public opinion formation and voter behavior in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election through complex interactions with social and psychological factors.

ASTRAK

Studi ini bertujuan menganalisis peran politik media dalam membentuk opini publik dan perilaku pemilih pada Pemilihan Gubernur Jawa Timur 2024. Dalam kontestasi politik kontemporer, media menjadi arena strategis bagi aktor politik untuk membangun narasi, memperoleh visibilitas, dan memengaruhi persepsi masyarakat. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan metode studi literatur. Data diperoleh dari artikel ilmiah, buku, laporan resmi, serta pemberitaan media yang relevan selama periode pemilihan,

kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis isi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa media berperan penting dalam proses agenda setting dengan menempatkan isu pembangunan, pelayanan publik, dan kinerja pemerintahan sebagai topik utama dalam diskursus publik. Selain itu, praktik framing memengaruhi cara masyarakat menafsirkan kompetensi, kepemimpinan, dan kredibilitas kandidat. Media sosial juga menjadi sarana komunikasi politik yang efektif karena memungkinkan interaksi langsung antara kandidat dan pemilih, meskipun turut mendorong fragmentasi informasi dan polarisasi politik. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perilaku pemilih dipengaruhi oleh interaksi antara paparan media, lingkungan sosial, dan interpretasi individu. Media tidak secara langsung menentukan pilihan politik, tetapi membentuk proses kognitif dan evaluatif yang memengaruhi preferensi pemilih. Dengan demikian, politik media memiliki kontribusi signifikan dalam pembentukan opini publik dan perilaku pemilih pada Pemilihan Gubernur Jawa Timur 2024.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election (Pilgub Jawa Timur 2024) was one of the most significant regional electoral contests in Indonesia, not only because of the province's large population but also due to its strategic role in shaping national political dynamics (Taqi et al., 2025). East Java is the second-most populous province in Indonesia and has long been recognized as a political battleground where various political parties, religious organizations, and social groups compete for influence. Consequently, electoral outcomes in East Java often attract national attention and are frequently viewed as indicators of broader political trends in the country (Karim, 2025).

The gubernatorial election featured three candidate pairs with distinct political backgrounds and support bases: Khofifah Indar Parawansa and Emil Elestianto Dardak, Tri Rismaharini and Zahrul Azhar Asumta (Gus Hans), and Luluk Nur Hamidah and Lukmanul Khakim (Asrori et al., 2025). The competition among these candidates generated extensive public discussion and media coverage throughout the campaign period. Beyond the candidates' policy proposals and political credentials, the election highlighted the increasing importance of media in shaping political narratives, influencing public perceptions, and mobilizing voter support (Khamdan & Fata, 2025).

In contemporary democratic societies, media has become an integral component of political processes. Political actors no longer depend solely on traditional campaign methods such as public rallies, party networks, and face-to-face interactions. Instead, they increasingly rely on mass media and digital platforms to communicate political messages, build public image, and engage with voters. The growing influence of media in electoral politics has transformed political competition into a contest not only for votes but also for visibility, attention, and public perception (Pawane, 2025).

The concept of media politics refers to the interaction between political actors and media institutions in the production, dissemination, and interpretation of political information (Baugut, 2022). Media serves as a bridge between political elites and citizens by providing information about candidates, policy issues, campaign activities, and electoral developments. However, media does more than simply transmit information. Through processes such as agenda-setting, framing, and priming, media organizations actively influence how political issues are understood and evaluated by the public. Consequently, media has the power to shape public opinion, define political priorities, and affect electoral behavior (Basu & Schürmann, 2025).

The increasing digitalization of communication has further strengthened the role of media in electoral politics. The widespread use of internet technologies and social media platforms has fundamentally altered the way political campaigns are conducted. Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X (formerly Twitter) have become important channels for political communication, allowing candidates to interact directly with voters without relying exclusively on traditional media outlets (Supriyanto, 2024). Through social media, political messages can be disseminated rapidly, reaching large audiences at relatively low cost. In addition, social media enables greater voter participation by facilitating discussions, content sharing, and political engagement (Budiana, 2022).

The emergence of social media has also created a new environment in which public opinion is formed (Rachimoellah, 2024). Unlike traditional media, where information flows primarily from journalists to audiences, social media allows users to become both consumers and producers of information (Mugil & Kenzie, 2025). Citizens can comment on political issues, share campaign content, and participate in online debates. This interactive nature of digital media has expanded opportunities for political engagement while simultaneously increasing the risks associated with misinformation, disinformation, political polarization, and the spread of unverified content (Sabrina et al., 2026). Therefore, understanding the influence of both traditional and digital media has become increasingly important in analyzing electoral processes in modern democracies.

During the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election, media coverage played a crucial role in presenting candidates to the public (Indriyanti et al., 2025). Television broadcasts, online news portals, newspapers, and social media platforms extensively reported campaign activities, political debates, policy proposals, and candidate performances. Political advertisements, campaign videos, interviews, and digital content were strategically utilized to strengthen candidates' visibility and improve their public image (Borchers, 2025). As voters were exposed to a continuous flow of political information through multiple media channels, their perceptions of candidates and political issues were likely influenced by the ways in which media organizations selected, framed, and emphasized certain topics (Febryanti & Adiwinata, 2026).

The relationship between media exposure and voter behavior has been widely discussed in political communication literature (Yadi et al., 2023). According to Agenda-Setting Theory, developed by McCombs (2011), media may not determine what people think, but it significantly influences what people think about. By prioritizing certain issues and events, media shapes the public agenda and directs attention toward specific political concerns. Similarly, Framing

Theory argues that the manner in which information is presented influences how audiences interpret political events and evaluate political actors (Zaklama, 2025). Through selective emphasis, language choices, and narrative construction, media can shape public understanding of candidates, policies, and election-related issues (Mukti, 2024).

In addition to agenda-setting and framing, the concept of mediatization of politics provides another useful framework for understanding contemporary electoral dynamics (Hm et al., 2026). Mediatization refers to the process through which political actors increasingly adapt their behavior, communication strategies, and campaign activities to the logic of media. Political success often depends on candidates' ability to attract media attention, generate favorable coverage, and maintain a positive public image (BouNassif, 2026). As a result, electoral campaigns have become highly dependent on media visibility and strategic communication management.

Despite the growing importance of media in Indonesian politics, research on the specific relationship between media politics, public opinion formation, and voter behavior in regional elections remains relatively limited (Asfar et al., 2025). Most existing studies focus on national elections, presidential campaigns, or general political communication trends. Consequently, there is a need for more empirical research examining how media influences political behavior at the regional level, particularly in provinces with complex political and social characteristics such as East Java.

The 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election provides an important case study for exploring these issues. The election occurred within a highly digitalized media environment where traditional and new media operated simultaneously in shaping political discourse. Examining how media contributed to the formation of public opinion and influenced voter decision-making can provide valuable insights into the functioning of local democracy and political communication in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the role of media politics in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election by focusing on the processes of public opinion formation and voter behavior. Specifically, the research seeks to examine how media coverage, political communication strategies, and digital campaign activities influenced public perceptions of candidates and affected electoral choices. By investigating these dynamics, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between media and democracy, while offering insights into the evolving nature of political communication in contemporary Indonesian elections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Politics and Electoral Competition

Media politics refers to the role of media in shaping political communication, political competition, and public perception in electoral processes (Daud, 2021). In contemporary democratic systems, media functions not only as a channel for delivering information but also as a strategic arena where political actors construct narratives, compete for attention, and attempt to influence voter preferences (Vargas-Merino et al., 2025). Through news coverage, political advertising, and digital content, candidates seek to build favorable images and strengthen their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

In electoral contexts, media exposure plays a crucial role in determining how candidates are perceived. The visibility of candidates in media platforms often affects their popularity and public trust. As political communication becomes increasingly mediated, the ability to manage media representation and maintain consistent messaging has become an essential component of electoral success, particularly in regional elections where voters rely heavily on media to access political information (Coşgun, 2026)

Agenda-Setting Function of Media

The Agenda Setting Theory developed by McCombs, (2011) explains that media influences public perception by determining which issues receive attention. While media does not directly dictate what people should think, it significantly shapes what people consider important. Through selective reporting and repeated coverage, media directs public attention toward specific political issues. During election campaigns, media often highlights issues such as economic development, infrastructure, public services, education, and governance performance. These issues then become part of the public agenda and influence how voters evaluate political candidates. As a result, candidates are frequently assessed based on the issues most emphasized by media rather than all available political information. This process demonstrates how media plays a central role in shaping political priorities in electoral contexts (Khan & Khanum, 2026).

Media Framing in Political Communication

Framing Theory explains how media constructs meaning by selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more prominent in communication (Araba, 2023). According to Entman (1993), framing involves defining problems, identifying causes, making moral judgments, and suggesting solutions. Through this process, media does not only report events but also interprets them. In political communication, framing influences how voters perceive candidates and political events. A candidate can be framed positively as an experienced leader, a capable administrator, or a reform-oriented figure, or negatively depending on how media narratives are constructed. Different media outlets may present the same political event in different ways, leading to variations in public interpretation (Selvanathan & Lickel, 2021). Therefore, framing plays an important role in shaping political image and voter evaluation during elections.

Public Opinion Formation

Public opinion refers to the collective attitudes, beliefs, and evaluations held by citizens regarding political issues and leaders. According to Arnold-forster & Arnold-forster (2023), individuals often depend on media representations to understand political reality because direct access to political events is limited. Media therefore acts as a primary source of political knowledge for the public. The formation of public opinion is influenced by several factors, including media exposure, interpersonal communication, social environment, cultural background, and individual experiences. In the digital era, social media has become increasingly influential because it allows rapid dissemination of information and encourages public interaction. Political discussions on social media often shape how individuals interpret political events and form opinions about candidates during elections (Sinaga et al., 2024).

Social Media and Political Campaigning

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed political communication. Social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and X have become essential tools in political campaigns (Fátima & Camilo, 2026). These platforms allow candidates to communicate directly with voters, bypass traditional media gatekeepers, and distribute political messages in real time. Social media also enables interactive communication, where voters can respond, share, and engage with political content (Hermawan, 2025). This creates a more dynamic political environment compared to traditional media. However, the use of social media also presents challenges, including the spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and political polarization. Despite these challenges, social media remains a powerful instrument in shaping political awareness and influencing voter behavior in modern elections.

Voter Behavior in Electoral Politics

Voter behavior refers to the decision-making process through which individuals choose whether and for whom to vote (Alwi & Ram, 2024). Political science literature explains voter behavior through three main approaches: sociological, psychological, and rational choice approaches. The sociological approach emphasizes the influence of social factors such as religion, ethnicity, education, and community affiliation on voting behavior. The psychological approach focuses on political attitudes, emotional attachment, and candidate perception (Brader & Marcus, 2013). Meanwhile, the rational choice approach assumes that voters make decisions based on logical evaluation of candidate performance, policy programs, and expected benefits. Media plays an important role in all these approaches by providing information that shapes perceptions and evaluations (Liao, 2023). Continuous exposure to political messages through media can influence how voters interpret candidates' credibility, competence, and trustworthiness during the electoral process.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the role of media politics in shaping public opinion and voter behavior in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. A qualitative approach is selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of political communication processes, media narratives, and audience interpretations within the electoral context (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Rather than testing hypotheses statistically, the study seeks to describe and interpret how media politics contributes to the formation of public opinion and influences voter behavior throughout the electoral process.

Data were collected through library research using various secondary sources. The sources consisted of online news articles from nationally recognized and credible news portals, official reports and publications issued by the General Election Commission (KPU), Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and other government institutions, peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books discussing media politics, political communication, agenda-setting, framing, and voter behavior, as well as publicly accessible digital content from official social media accounts of candidates

and political parties involved in the election. The sources were selected based on four criteria: (1) direct relevance to the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election, (2) publication within the election period from January to December 2024, (3) credibility and authority of the publishing institution or media organization, and (4) the availability of sufficient information regarding media narratives, campaign communication, and public responses. A total of 45 documents were analyzed, comprising 25 online news articles, 8 official reports, 7 scholarly publications, and 5 official social media content archives.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis followed four stages. First, all selected documents were compiled, categorized, and organized according to source type and publication date. Second, the documents were coded to identify themes related to media framing, agenda-setting, political messaging, public opinion formation, and voter behavior. Third, thematic interpretation was conducted by comparing patterns across different sources to understand how media narratives represented political actors and electoral issues. Finally, the findings were synthesized to explain the relationship between media politics, public opinion, and voter behavior during the election. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from news media, official government documents, academic literature, and social media content. The research focuses on three main aspects: (1) the role of the media in constructing political narratives during the election, (2) the influence of media exposure on public opinion formation, and (3) the relationship between media communication and voter behavior. By concentrating on these dimensions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how media politics operates in the context of the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election.

This study is limited to the analysis of secondary data and does not involve primary data collection through surveys, interviews, or direct observation. Consequently, the findings reflect patterns identified from existing media content and scholarly literature rather than firsthand accounts from voters, candidates, or election stakeholders. Furthermore, because the analysis is limited to the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election, the findings may not be fully generalizable to other regional elections or broader electoral contexts in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Media Coverage and Candidate Visibility

The analysis shows that media coverage played a fundamental role in constructing candidate visibility throughout the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. In modern electoral politics, visibility is not merely about recognition, but about the frequency, framing, and

consistency of how candidates appear across media ecosystems (Taras & Davis, 2022). Candidates who are repeatedly featured in news reports, political discussions, and digital content tend to occupy a stronger position in public awareness.

During the campaign period, the incumbent pair benefited from relatively high and sustained exposure across multiple media channels (Riau et al., 2026). Their activities as public officials created continuous news value, allowing media outlets to report on governmental programs, policy implementation, and development achievements. This form of “institutional visibility” strengthened their presence in the public sphere even outside formal campaign events. Meanwhile, challenger candidates relied more heavily on episodic visibility generated through campaign rallies, televised debates, and social media circulation. Although digital platforms enabled rapid dissemination of content, the consistency of exposure remained uneven compared to incumbent coverage. This condition illustrates how media structures can unintentionally create visibility gaps between candidates (Asfar et al., 2025).

In addition, algorithmic logic on digital platforms further influenced visibility distribution. Content that generated higher engagement such as emotionally appealing videos, controversial statements, or visually attractive campaign materials tended to be amplified by platform algorithms (Milli et al., 2025). As a result, political visibility was increasingly shaped not only by journalistic selection but also by audience interaction patterns and platform mechanics. This situation reflects a broader transformation in media politics, where visibility is co-produced by journalists, political actors, and algorithmic systems.

Agenda-Setting and Issue Salience

The findings confirm that media played a significant agenda-setting role during the election period. Across traditional and digital platforms, certain political issues consistently received higher levels of attention compared to others (Araba, 2023). These issues included infrastructure development, economic growth, public service delivery, and regional welfare programs. The repeated coverage of these themes contributed to their dominance in public discourse. As a result, voters tended to evaluate candidates based on their perceived competence in addressing these highlighted issues. This demonstrates that media not only informs the public but also structures the boundaries of political discussion by emphasizing specific topics. Interestingly, some important but less “newsworthy” issues received minimal attention in mainstream coverage (Bryant, 2008). Topics such as long-term policy planning, bureaucratic reform, and governance system improvements were relatively underrepresented. This indicates that media prioritization tends to favor issues that are more immediate, visually appealing, or politically competitive.

At the second level of agenda-setting, media also influenced how issues were interpreted (Priscilla et al., 2025). For example, economic development was often presented in terms of visible achievements and infrastructure outputs, while governance performance was framed through efficiency and service delivery narratives. This dual-layered agenda-setting process shaped not only what voters considered important, but also how they evaluated those issues. Overall, agenda-setting in this election contributed to the simplification of complex policy debates into more digestible public narratives, which in turn influenced voter cognition and decision-making.

Media Framing and Political Meaning Construction

Media framing emerged as a crucial mechanism in shaping political meaning during the election (Riaz, 2025). The analysis shows that different media outlets constructed different interpretative frames for the same political actors and events. These frames influenced how voters understood candidate identities, campaign messages, and electoral dynamics. The incumbent candidates were predominantly framed within a narrative of continuity, stability, and development success. Media coverage often emphasized ongoing infrastructure projects, government programs, and administrative experience. This framing constructed an image of competence and policy consistency, reinforcing public perception of governance continuity (Priscilla et al., 2025).

In contrast, challenger candidates were frequently framed within narratives of change, critique, and alternative governance approaches. Their messages were often highlighted in relation to policy criticism, reform proposals, or calls for political renewal. While this framing increased their visibility, it also positioned them in a comparative role against the incumbent's established record. Importantly, framing was not uniform across media platforms (Anshori et al., 2022). Some outlets employed neutral reporting styles, while others used subtle evaluative language that influenced tone and interpretation. Digital media further intensified framing effects through selective video editing, headline construction, and short-form content dissemination that emphasized emotionally engaging moments rather than comprehensive policy discussion (Miguel et al., 2024). These framing variations contributed to fragmented audience interpretations. Depending on media consumption patterns, different voter groups could develop contrasting perceptions of the same candidate. This demonstrates that framing does not merely shape opinion, but also contributes to the diversification of political reality within society.

Social Media Ecosystem and Digital Political Communication

Social media played a dominant role in shaping political communication during the election (Hermawan, 2025). Platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X became primary arenas for campaign dissemination and political interaction. Unlike traditional media, social media enabled direct communication between candidates and voters without institutional gatekeeping (Ladopurap, 2025). Candidates used these platforms to share campaign activities, personal messages, policy explanations, and behind-the-scenes content. This contributed to a sense of personalization in political communication, where candidates appeared more accessible and relatable to voters. The study also found that content performance on social media was strongly influenced by engagement-driven algorithms. Short videos, emotionally charged messages, and visually engaging content tended to gain higher visibility and circulation. This created an attention-based political communication environment where message virality often outweighed policy depth (Geise et al., 2025).

However, the social media ecosystem also introduced significant challenges. The spread of misinformation, selective exposure to politically aligned content, and algorithmic filtering contributed to the formation of echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021). In such environments, users were more likely to encounter information that reinforced their existing political beliefs, reducing exposure to alternative viewpoints. Despite these limitations, social media

significantly enhanced political participation, especially among younger voters. It facilitated rapid information sharing, public commentary, and digital mobilization, making it a central component of modern electoral politics.

Public Opinion Formation and Cognitive Processing

Public opinion during the election was formed through a continuous interaction between media exposure, interpersonal communication, and cognitive interpretation (Khan & Khanum, 2026). Media served as the primary gateway through which voters accessed political information, particularly for those who did not participate directly in campaign events. Repeated exposure to specific narratives influenced how voters evaluated candidate credibility, leadership capability, and policy effectiveness. Over time, these evaluations became reinforced through consistent messaging across multiple media platforms (Defi, 2026).

Interpersonal communication also played a significant role in reinforcing or filtering media messages (Claes & Boomgaarden, 2006). Discussions within families, peer groups, and community networks acted as interpretive layers that shaped how media content was understood. In many cases, social trust influenced which information sources were considered credible. The integration of social media into daily communication further blurred the boundary between media consumption and interpersonal interaction. Political content was not only consumed but also shared, commented on, and reinterpreted within social networks (Rodriguez-saavedra, 2026). This created a dynamic environment in which public opinion was continuously constructed and reconstructed.

Voter Behavior and Decision Making Dynamics

Voter behavior in the election was shaped by a combination of rational, emotional, and sociological factors (Fadli & Sardini, 2026). Media exposure contributed to rational evaluation by providing information regarding candidate programs, performance records, and policy positions. However, emotional framing and narrative repetition also significantly influenced voter preferences.

Many voters did not rely solely on detailed policy comparisons but instead based their decisions on perceived leadership qualities, trustworthiness, and familiarity with candidates (Schwenk, 2024). Media framing of competence, integrity, and political image played a significant role in shaping these perceptions (Koivula et al., 2024). Sociological influences such as community affiliation, religious identity, and local political networks interacted with media exposure (Sazali & Azhar, 2026). In several cases, media narratives were interpreted through existing social identities, reinforcing pre-existing political preferences. The findings indicate that voter behavior is not determined by a single dominant factor. Instead, it results from a complex interaction between media influence, social context, psychological attachment, and rational evaluation. Media politics therefore operates as an indirect but powerful force in shaping electoral outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study strongly reinforce the relevance and explanatory power of both Agenda-Setting and Framing theories in understanding contemporary electoral communication

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dynamics (Ahmed, 2025). In the context of the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election, media functioned not merely as a passive channel for transmitting political messages, but as an active institutional actor that participates in constructing political reality (Asrori et al., 2025). This construction occurs through selective visibility, repeated emphasis on certain issues, and the continuous production of narratives that define how political events and actors are perceived by the public.

Agenda-setting processes were evident in the way media organizations consistently prioritized specific political issues during the campaign period (Shabana et al., 2024). Issues such as infrastructure development, public service delivery, economic performance, and governance effectiveness repeatedly appeared in news coverage and digital discourse, making them highly salient in the public agenda. As these issues received sustained attention, they gradually became the primary reference points for voters in evaluating candidates. In this sense, media did not determine electoral choices directly, but it significantly structured the boundaries of political attention by defining what was considered important, urgent, and worthy of public discussion (Taqi et al., 2025). In parallel, framing processes shaped how these prioritized issues and political actors were interpreted by the audience. Through framing, media outlets constructed particular narratives that influenced meaning-making. Political actors were presented through different interpretative lenses such as continuity versus change, competence versus criticism, or stability versus reform depending on how information was selected, emphasized, and presented (Nasywa, 2025). These frames played a crucial role in shaping not only voter awareness but also voter judgment, as individuals tend to evaluate political reality based on the interpretive structures provided by media narratives.

When combined, agenda-setting and framing operate as interconnected mechanisms that influence both cognitive and evaluative dimensions of voter behavior. The cognitive dimension refers to how voters acquire knowledge and awareness of political issues, while the evaluative dimension refers to how they assess and judge candidates based on that information (Lau et al., 2022). In this study, it is evident that media exposure influenced both levels simultaneously: voters became aware of certain issues because of agenda-setting effects, and they formed opinions about candidates through framing mechanisms embedded in media discourse.

The study also highlights the increasing centrality of social media within the broader ecosystem of electoral communication. Digital platforms have fundamentally transformed political communication by introducing an environment that is highly interactive, fast-paced, and algorithm driven (Widodo & Kristiyono, 2025). Unlike traditional media systems, where editorial processes determine content visibility, social media platforms rely heavily on user engagement metrics such as likes, shares, comments, and watch time. This algorithmic logic intensifies competition among political messages, making visibility dependent not only on informational value but also on emotional appeal and virality potential (Patria, 2026).

Within this digital environment, political communication becomes more fragmented and decentralized (Ariel, 2025). Candidates, supporters, media organizations, and ordinary users simultaneously participate in producing and disseminating political content. As a result, political discourse is no longer controlled by a single dominant institution but is distributed across multiple actors with varying levels of influence. While this democratization of

communication expands opportunities for participation and engagement, it also introduces significant challenges.

One of the most prominent challenges is the decline in information quality. The rapid circulation of unverified content, simplified narratives, and emotionally charged messages often reduces the depth and accuracy of political understanding (Park et al., 2026). In addition, algorithmic personalization contributes to selective exposure, where users are more likely to encounter information that aligns with their existing beliefs. This condition fosters echo chambers and contributes to political polarization, as individuals become increasingly isolated within ideologically homogeneous information environments (Barbera, 2019). Despite these challenges, social media remains a dominant force in shaping political awareness and mobilizing voter engagement. Its ability to facilitate direct communication between candidates and voters enhances accessibility and political immediacy (Hidayanto et al., 2025). However, this immediacy often comes at the cost of reflection and critical evaluation, as political messages are consumed in rapid, continuous flows of information.

Overall, the findings confirm that media politics exerts a significant and multidimensional influence on public opinion formation and voter behavior in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. Nevertheless, this influence should not be understood as deterministic or one-directional. Voters are not passive recipients of media messages; instead, they actively interpret, evaluate, and filter information based on their social context, personal experiences, and psychological predispositions. Social networks, cultural affiliations, and individual cognitive frameworks all contribute to shaping how media content is understood and integrated into political decision-making. As a result, electoral behavior emerges from a complex interaction between media systems, social structures, and individual agency. Media provides the informational and interpretive resources, but voters ultimately construct meaning through a selective and contextualized process. This dynamic underscores the complexity of modern electoral politics, where public opinion is continuously formed and reformed through the interplay of mediated communication and social interpretation.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that media politics plays a significant role in shaping public opinion formation and voter behavior in the 2024 East Java Gubernatorial Election. Media functions not only as a channel of political information but also as an active actor that constructs political reality through agenda-setting and framing processes.

The agenda-setting function of media is evident in its ability to determine which political issues receive public attention. Issues such as development, public services, governance performance, and economic progress became dominant topics in public discourse due to their frequent coverage in both traditional and digital media. This indicates that media plays an important role in shaping issue salience during electoral competition. In addition, framing processes influence how political actors and issues are interpreted by the public. Different media narratives construct different images of candidates, such as continuity, change, competence, or criticism. These framing patterns contribute to variations in voter perceptions and evaluations of candidates during the election process.

The study also finds that social media has become a central component of contemporary electoral communication. Digital platforms enable direct interaction between candidates and voters, accelerate information dissemination, and increase political engagement. However, they also introduce challenges such as misinformation, polarization, and fragmented public discourse due to algorithm-driven content distribution.

Furthermore, voter behavior in the election is shaped by a combination of media exposure, social influence, and individual interpretation. Voters do not rely solely on media information, but also filter and interpret it through their social environment and personal experiences. This indicates that electoral decision-making is a complex and multidimensional process. Overall, media politics significantly influences both public opinion formation and voter behavior, but its impact is not absolute. Voters remain active agents who interpret and negotiate media messages in constructing their political choices.

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