

## How Smart Can We Go? The Quality of Campaign Information in the 2009 Presidential Election

*Kuskridho Ambardi\**

### **Abstract**

*Riset ini bertujuan untuk mengevaluasi informasi politik yang disajikan Harian Kompas dan Mingguan Tempo selama periode kampanye Pemilihan Presiden 2009. Sejauh mana informasi politik tersebut bisa membantu pemilih untuk membuat keputusan secara rasional? Temuan pokok penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa dari segi kuantitas, hanya sedikit berita kampanye yang memuat isu kebijakan yang ditawarkan para kandidat presiden. Dari jumlah yang sedikit ini, isu kebijakan yang disentuh oleh kandidat presiden pun rendah kualitasnya. Tidak ada proposal kebijakan yang didasarkan pada data memadai, yang ditopang dengan justifikasi yang meyakinkan, dan disertai cara pencapaian tujuan. Berita-berita tentang kampanye ini tidak cukup untuk membantu pemilih untuk memilih secara rasional. Namun rendahnya kualitas informasi politik itu lebih bersumber pada kandidat, bukan pada medianya.*

### **Keywords:**

*Informasi Kampanye; Pemilu Presiden; Peranan Media Massa; Strategi Kampanye; Perilaku Pemilih*

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\* *Kuskridho Ambardi* is Lecturer in the Department of Communication Science, The College of Social and Political Sciences, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He can be contacted through his email: ambardi5000@yahoo.com.

## **Introduction**

Politicians and mass media play a crucial role in structuring political competition, defining content of competition, and building types of linkages between parties or candidates and voters. By selling particular issues during campaigns, they galvanize social cleavages to be active politically. The campaign period of 2009 presidential election can give us an opportunity for seeing how the two actors exercise such a role.

On May 19 2009, Jusuf Kalla and Wiranto made a declaration in front of public to run as candidates for president and vice president. "We are a representation of Indonesia," went their claim. This claim had its weight since the incumbent Yudhoyono and his new running mate Boediono are both from Java. Jusuf Kalla is from Celebes (Sulawesi) and a Bugisnese, while Wiranto is from Java, a Javanese.

The ethnic and geographic divisions have long been a feature of Indonesian politics. Some politicians have often politicized Javanese versus non-Javanese or Java Island versus outer islands to get a political edge over the other. So it is not surprising when Kalla and Wiranto tried to make use of ethnic-based issues to outpace the incumbent in winning political supports.

One week later, on May 25 2009, Justice and Prosperous Party (PKS), via Zulkieflimansyah, voiced its concern publicly that a sizable cadres and sympathizers of PKS could possibly give their votes for Jusuf Kalla. The reason spelled out by Zulkieflimansyah was because Yudhoyono's wife, Kristiani, did not wear jilbab. Meanwhile, Mufida, the wife of Jusuf Kalla did.

Zulkielimansyah's statement had ignited a political ripple among PKS leaders for the fact that PKS itself previously signed a pact that it would endorse Yudhoyono. The ripple had turned into a tidal wave when the other candidates exploited the issue, attacking Yudhoyono for not representing the Indonesian Islamic community.

In the meantime, another pair of candidates Megawati of PDIP and Prabowo Subianto of Gerindra declared themselves as the defender of the interests of lower class and constantly attacked the incumbent, accusing the incumbent for betraying lower class and national interests. To make it convincing, when declaring themselves as another pair of candidates, they chose a dumping site for building their image. Just like ethnicity,

religious and class issues can be capitalized by the aspiring presidential candidates to win the heart of Indonesian voters.

Then the media comes to the mix. The work of modern democracy is inconceivable without the media. Due to its size, mass media informally perform an intermediary function that connects politicians, political parties, and the citizens.

Our research question then can be stated as follows: how do the media cover the campaigns made by the candidates? how much is it that the media focus on particular issues and overlook other issues? Do they focus more on religious and ethnic issues more than on policy issues? how deep do candidates explore policy issues?

### **Voting Behavior and Campaign Strategy**

Standard textbooks usually list three major theoretical models of voting behavior: sociological, psychological, and rational choice models (see, e.g., Niemi and Weisberg, 2001; Roth, 2008). Sociological model, introduced in 1950s by scholars from Columbia University, believes that sociological factors shape voters' behavior. Social and economic status, domicile, and religion are all believed to determine voters' choice of political party or candidate.

Different from the sociological model, psychological model sees that sociological factors can only remotely drive the behavior of individual voters. This model concurs that voters' identification with a political party is the most important factor in voting decision. And this identification is shaped through then process of socialization in a family. It is very likely that if a parent develops his emotional bound with a party (and a candidate) the children will likely to adopt that choice. The Michigan scientists who developed this model strongly believe that this is the immediate factor that determines voters' political choice.

The third model, the rational choice model, comes with a very different idea. First, this model assumes that voters are rational. They define voter rationality in terms of material interest. As long as a party or a candidate can connect their programs with the material interest of voter, the party or candidate can win voter's political support. The party's or candidate's program becomes the key of winning elections. In the process of signaling game, a voter can retrospectively assess the party and the

candidate of his or her choice by looking at then party or candidate past track record. It can also be that a voter vote prospectively by looking at the policy proposal offered by a party or a candidate.

The three models provide different implications as to formulating a campaign strategy – thus the type of information that can be reported by the media. A party or a candidate may delineate a campaign strategy that exploits ethnic, religious, and regional identities for winning political support. It can also happen that a party or candidate may be more convinced that party identity is the crucial factor that determines voters' choice so he or she may put emphasis on his or her party identity in their campaigns. Alternatively, for rational voters, a policy issue is seen as more important. With a belief that most voters are rational, a party or a candidate may present programmatic appeals to voters during campaign.

In this situation, there are two possibilities for the media to play their role in an election process. First, the media can simply and passively become a mirror through which the political information is captured and delivered to their audience. Second, within their ethical confines, the media may actively engage in the political process and defend for public interests.

**Deliberative aspect.** This research goes further by exploring and examining the quality of information delivered through the media. It does not stop at identifying message's attributes externally attached to it. But it is carried out by dissecting the content of information to explore its depth. This way, we will be able to see whether campaign messages – as reported by journalists – are deep enough so that it can enlighten voters in making a well-informed voting decision and a well-informed political judgment (Fishkin, 1991; Page, 1996).

The deliberative theory of decision making can provide us an analytical Framework that meets our need. The crux of the theory rests on the assumption that a good argument is the most important element in the process of decision making. A rational voter is most likely to choose a better argument over a lame one; a strong argument over a weak one. What is a stronger argument, eventually?

The quality of argument can be classified into four categories: argument with no justification, with inferior justification, qualified justification, and with sophisticated justification. The criteria for each

category are defined as follow (quoted directly from Steiner et.al., 2004: 57, added with additional adaptation):

- No Justification: "A speaker only says X should or should not be done, but no reason is given." This can be applied to a policy proposal stated by a candidate, and no more. The candidate does not provide any reason why the proposal is offered and why it should be prioritized. Or it also applies when the proposal is merely a problem statement.
- Inferior Justification: "Here a reason Y is given why X should or should not be done, but no linkages is made between X and Y – the inference is incomplete. This [...] also applies if a conclusion is merely supported with illustration." In our case, the reason that supposedly buttresses the policy proposal fail to do so; the connection between the two is simply absent or unclear.
- Qualified Justification: "A linkage is made why one should expect that the X contributes to or detracts from Y." The connection between X and Y is clear and logical – and for our case – this connection between the proposal and the reason is supposed to be presented with data.
- Sophisticated Justification: "Here at least two complete justifications are given, either for the same demands or for two different demands." To apply this criterion, two complete justifications can mean two different options or policy proposals from which one is shown as superior to the other with a complete reason and data to buttress the claim. This is where a candidate compare his policy choice to be offered to voters and show that his or hers is superior to the other candidates proposals.

It must be noted here that this four categories of argument will be used for analyzing the content of the campaign information qualitatively. So, it may enable us to assess the quality of the information.

**Media and Public Interest.** The connection between mass media and public interest is usually captured by two major model of mass media: the market model and the public interest model (Croteau and Hoynes, 2001: 13-24).

The market model sees the media in the first place as a business affair. Profit is the main motive that drives the media professional in deciding what kind of news and angle should be printed or aired. A high quality of journalistic product is possible but it would be seconded by the profit motive.

The public interest model gives a different view. It is public interest motive that drives the journalistic work. The concern is how to engage public in a public life through journalistic products. In political realm, the journalists would likely to supply the public with high quality of information so that the public can make an enlightened judgment and a well-informed decision.

At this point we see a parallel among the three theoretical Frameworks. First, the voting behavior models can give us with an idea of how to classify the campaign material into several meaningful categories. The candidates and the media may give emphasis more on rational issues by offering a policy proposal; or otherwise, they stress on non-programmatic issues. The second theoretical Framework, the deliberative model, gives us a tool for dissecting the content of the campaigns and looking at the quality of argument that goes with their policy proposals. And lastly, the public interest model, gives as a basis for evaluating the journalistic performance of the media: either they could ignore or defend for public interest.

## **Methodology**

This research combines the quantitative and qualitative methodology for assessing the journalistic information as conveyed by printed media. The quantitative method is used for identifying the attributes of the journalistic information; and for this, this research has developed a coding scheme. The qualitative method is also used for dissecting the content of the journalistic information.

Procedurally, the research begins with applying a process of media selection. It chooses *Kompas* and *Tempo* – two printed media that are known for their excellent journalistic practices. It is followed by selecting the edition of both media. Since it focuses on the information related to the presidential election, this research limits the editions that were published

during the campaign period only. All news and op-ed published in this period were then all coded and classified into relevant categories.<sup>1</sup>

The subsequent step is to assess policy-based campaign only. For this purpose, the research utilizes the conceptual tools developed by Steiner et al when assessing the depth of an argument. The candidates' policy proposals are then dissected and examined by looking at the depth of the argument: whether a policy proposal is deep enough so that we can find a justification for the proposal.

### The Quantitative Data

It firstly aims to provide a bigger picture about the trends of journalistic reporting on presidential campaigns. Secondly, it provides a basis for qualitative analysis that is carried out in the next section. Six descriptive-frequency tables are presented: three of them are tables that describe the journalistic aspects of the election-related information while the other three are more substantive. For the last three tables, the content of the information are coded to substantive categories such as whether an item displays candidates' campaign or not, on which candidates a news or an op-ed focuses, and whether or not it presents a policy proposal of the candidates.

**Journalistic Aspects.** The number of cases of news and op-ed altogether is 411. It contributes to only 11 percent of all types of news and topics, editorial, and opinionated columns combined.<sup>2</sup> *Kompas*, because it's a daily newspaper, predictably has more items than *Tempo*. It is these entire items that were coded. Among these items, as seen in Table 2, only 3 percent of them are opinion of editor (op-ed). The rest of 97 percent of information comes in form of news.

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1 A standard journalistic coding such as the categories of type, placement, object, and substance of information are all included in the coding scheme.

2 On average, in each edition of *Kompas*, there are 95 items of information (news and opinion) while *Tempo* comprises 97 items per edition. During the campaign period, there were 35 editions of *Kompas* and 5 editions of *Tempo*. Hence, the sum of all news and editorials is:  $(95 \times 35) + (35 \times 5) = 3715$ . Thus, the proportion of news and editorials that are related to the presidential election is around  $411/3715$ , which is around 11 percent of the total.

**Table 1: Number of Information Coded**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Kompas</b>	354	86
<b>Tempo</b>	57	14
Total	411	100

**Table 2: Distribution of Campaign-based News and Op-Ed**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Op-Ed</b>	13	3
<b>News</b>	398	97
Total	411	100

These pieces of information were all coded. How often did the two printed media place the national events such as the presidential election in their front page? The choice of editor to put a news item in the front page signifies that the item is a top priority in the view of the editor. Table 3 shows that 15 percent of them are placed in the front page. This means that at least there was one news item found in the front page – on average.

**Table 3: The Placement of News**

	Frequency	Percent
Front Page	62	15
Non-Front Page	336	82
Not Relevant	13	3
Total	411	100

**Substantive Aspects.** Presidential election offered journalists many aspects of the election to be covered. This research, however, focuses on election campaign, so we need to classify all information into two major categories: campaign and non-campaign. What this research means by campaign is any efforts made by the candidates to win electoral supports from voters. This is a coordinated activity with a single goal of winning the election. Thus, it includes campaign teams that helped the candidates



promote their causes, engender voters' sentiment to like or dislike a particular candidate, and sell a policy proposal. With this definition, we include all campaign issues that the candidates and their campaign teams raised during the campaign period regardless of whether the campaign does not offer any policy proposal. Let's see the following table:

**Table 4: Distribution of Campaign and Non-campaign Items**

	Frequency	Percent
Campaign	202	49
Non-Campaign	209	51
Total	411	100

It is very possible for journalists to fall into bias. A direct way to be bias is to give a candidate an opportunity to have more space or airtime in the media. But there is more. The choice of angle can also reflect a bias. For a particular candidate, the media use a favorable angle; but for another candidate, it gives an unfavorable one.

These two possibilities can be captured by developing two different types of categories. The first type should focus on the subject of news and opinion of editor (editorial); and the second type on the angle and the editorializing tendency that is usually placed at the end of a news item. Let us see the following table:

**Table 5: Which Candidate to Be Covered?**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>JK-Win</b>	58	14
<b>SBY-Boed</b>	62	15
<b>Mega-Pro</b>	63	15
<b>JK-Win and SBY-Boed</b>	7	2
<b>JK-Win and Mega-Pro</b>	2	0
<b>JK-Win and SBY-Boed and Mega-Pro</b>	39	9
<b>None of the Above</b>	180	44
Total	411	100

Intended or not, *Kompas*' and *Tempo*'s coverage on the three pairs of candidates show a balanced coverage in terms of frequency. Each of them was presented equally around 14-15% of the total coverage. This means that both *Kompas* and *Tempo* did justice for the three pairs of candidates.

**Table 6: Policy and Non-policy Campaigns**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Policy</b>	130	32
<b>Non-Policy</b>	281	68
Total	411	100

**Table 7: Cross-tabulation Between Campaign/Non-campaign and Policy/Non-policy**

	Policy	Non-Policy	Total
<b>Campaign</b>	19 (77)*	30 (125)	49 (202)
<b>Non-Campaign</b>	13 (53)	38 (156)	51 (209)
Total	32 (130)	68 (281)	100 (411)

\*) In the parenthesis are the absolute number of information (news and op-ed)

The four cells described above are the results of cross-tabulating two units of analysis: campaign/non-campaign news and policy/non-policy news. The first cell, campaign and policy, represents the type of news and editorial that cover issues raised by the candidates and a policy proposal that comes with it. So this is campaign efforts made by the candidate to connect the candidate with aspiring voters. Typically, the connection between the two is built through policy or program. The second cell represents the number of journalistic information that covers efforts by the candidate to connect with voters through means or issues other than policy or program. It can be religious, ethnicity, candidate personality, personal history, or quality of leadership issue.

As for the third cell, non-campaign crosses with policy, it includes journalistic reports that deal with collective problems begging a policy solution or presenting a solution but are articulated by the media, not the candidates. These journalistic works may demonstrate a function carried out by the mass media as a public interest defender. They can come in

the form of investigative reports, special reports, or features. The fourth cell contain journalistic information that neither representing collective interests nor campaigning by the candidates. Out of these four cells, we should focus and the first and the third cells. These are the type of information that could help voters find relevant information for making a good political decision.

Table 7 above provides a quantitative data on all four types of information coded. Policy-based information contributes only 32 percent to the total presidential election-related information during the campaign period. It is relatively small percentage that only three out of ten news items or editorial that deal with policy issue or proposal. Smaller is the percentage or number of the candidate campaign that offers policy proposal: 77 items or 19 percent only. The rest, 13 percent of policy-based information, was not proposed by the candidates but by the journalists or the media.

In short, the candidate tried to reach voters more with exploiting emotional appeals than with using programmatic appeals. The question is of course: how is the quality of policy-based campaign?

### **Qualitative Analysis: How Deep Can We Go?**

This section limits its focus on the depth of the information needed for making a rational decision by voters. An assumption is made that it is necessary for a voter to have a good deal of information about candidates and their policies before he or she makes a political choice. The quality of information is then the key.

All candidates touched many policy issues during the campaign. So, it is understandable when we think about the plurality of interests of the society, the candidates try to connect themselves with those all social groups. Thus, there is a very wide range of issues: human rights, character and nation building, national defense, education, governance, corruption, forestry, various economic policy, transportation and infrastructure, conflict and peace, and regional interests and many others.

To anticipate the results of the analysis: in general, the news that describes the candidates' policy proposals – if not all – shows a low quality of argument. They are poor in quality in the sense that many of them are simply a wish-list. The candidates proposed a policy proposal

but without much elaboration. In other words, a policy proposal usually comes with no justification. At best, some of them provide a qualified justification but none of them present a sophisticated justification. Let us take a look at three examples below:

**“SBY: The government has protected the Indonesian migrant workers”**

The presidential candidate Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono believes, the government under his leadership has swiftly taken necessary steps for protecting the Indonesian workers working in foreign countries.

He also expressed his optimism that the Indonesian workers in foreign countries will be able to improve their skills so that they can get a better salary. [...]

Furthermore, he stated that it is mandatory for a president to protect and defend his citizens. That is why, when an Indonesian foreign worker is facing a work-related trouble, the government steps in and handles it swiftly. [...] (*Kompas*, June 29 2009).

It has been known that Indonesian migrant workers have faced various problems due to their status as foreigners. The problems range from their legal status that make them legally vulnerable and prone from abuses, being weak when negotiating with their placement agencies, experiencing a variety of abuses from their employers, to becoming an object of corruption carried out by the personnel of Indonesian embassies that should have protected their interests. The importance of the issue has only gained prominence because finding jobs in foreign countries has helped Indonesia reduce the rate of unemployment.

Thus, it is only logical that the candidates brought up the issue in their campaign. It was a policy-like statement however, as shown in the citation above, Yudhoyono made a claim that the government has protected the Indonesian migrant workers. It also means that what he was offering is a policy continuation – a policy he deemed beneficial for the workers. However, it stopped short in specifying the policy and in addressing the current workers’ problems. Instead, Yudhoyono relied on a normative justification for his claim by saying that it is compulsory for the government to protect its citizens. He also failed to identify the

problems and to connect it with his policy proposal – let alone to supply it with relevant data and possible policy options.

The three paragraph cited above is definitely a truncated citation. The rest of the report, however, gives no more details of the issue. It basically contains journalistic technical information that deals with the traveling schedule of Yudhoyono, the number of people attended the campaign gathering, and where the next campaign stop was.

This type of campaign was a regular type of campaign. It does not exclusively belong to Yudhoyono but also belongs to the other candidates as well. Let us see another example – a campaign performed by Jusuf Kalla on June 28, 2009:

### **Jusuf Kalla Will Protect Communal Rights**

The Baduy community attended an interactive campaign held by Jusuf Kalla in Pasir Ona Stadium, Rangkasbitung, Lebak Regency, Banten on Saturday morning.

In that occasion the Baduy members expressed their demand that elected president to protect their communal rights by delineating a law on communal rights. “We ask the president to initiate a law on communal rights,” said Jaro Daniah, a representative of Baduy Community.

Other promises: improving people’s welfare if elected, raises the benefits for local state apparatuses, national self-reliance, revitalizing the agricultural sector by guaranteeing lower prices for fertilizers and seeds, and protecting the price of paddy. Also in the promise was a credit for up-starters. [...] (*Kompas*, June 29 2009).

Kalla held an interactive campaign during his campaign visit in a remote area of Banten where a traditional community namely Baduy has lived in that area barely touch with modernity. It is a choice made by the community to detach itself from ordinary, modern life and to keep its tradition intact.

The nature of the campaign was supposed to give a room for developing a policy proposal. It did provide the members of the community to express their concerns before Jusuf Kalla. One of them demanded that the government (with an assumption that Kalla would win the presidential election) makes a law that would give the community

formally an exclusive right for maintaining their tradition. Kalla responded with a specific promise and other promises.

A promise is a promise but it is not a well-prepared policy proposal that would become the basis for a law-making. What was the anatomy of the problem and its magnitude? Do other traditional communities have a similar problem? What is the core issue that should be tackled in the first place? Kalla did not address these questions in a specific way. Instead, he would rather raise other issues such as the promise of the benefits for local government apparatuses if elected, the important of self-reliance, the revitalization of agricultural sector. Nowhere do we see how Kalla made an effort of finding any common denominator across traditional communities that could become the basis of formulating their rights. We even do not see any logical connection between the political demands leveled by the Baduy with all Kalla's promises of bringing about prosperity for the Baduy.

It is increasingly clear that Kalla (and Wiranto) had a tendency of appeasing the audience who attended his campaigns. When he met with substitute teachers with no regular salaries, he gave them his promise to make them regulars under the government payrolls accompanied with pensions. When he met with village heads he came with an offer that Kalla would award them with salaries under government payrolls too.

It was apparent all those promises were more like an ad-hoc strategy for winning electoral support. Whatever a social groups was met, he promised to give them more prosperity while it was not evident as to how to finance his promises. What were the consequences that follow his choice if he was elected? There was no discussion about it, and consequently there was not any justification for it. Let see another example from Prabowo – a vice presidential candidate with whom Megawati paired with:

### **Prabowo: Don't be misled by Political Slogans**

The vice presidential candidate Prabowo Subianto said that all government's policies are no more than political rhetoric or political tricks. They [Yudhoyono and Boediono] are simply sell slogans for luring voters for them so that they can extend their hold on government.

“All government programs such as free education, free healthcare, and cash transfer to poor people, are anything but true and well-designed policies for eradicating poverty. These programs are more political for buying votes than a set of defensible policies.” [...] The government practically has done nothing, said Prabowo. [...]

In one of his campaign stops, Prabowo reiterated his criticism to Yudhoyono-Boediono. His attack focused on Yudhoyono-cum-government programs for poor people that gave them assistance in getting cash transfer, free healthcare, and voucher on lower education. These programs, according to Prabowo, were not a well-designed policy. The programs deceived lower class people because they were meant to “buy” votes of lower class people than were meant to be a sustainable policy that could lift poor people out of poverty. With that criticism Prabowo simply tried to undermine Yudhoyono’s credibility by emphasizing that Yudhoyono was giving rhetoric only without delineating executable, superior policies.

This campaign attack was not accompanied with an alternative policy. So, it was more intended for pushing voters away from Yudhoyono but was not followed by an effort to lure them voting for Megawati Prabowo. In other campaigns, Prabowo launched attacks of epic proportion, criticizing the incumbent for mortgaging state treasures, selling the national interests to foreign countries or multinational corporations, and advancing neo-liberal agenda (see, among others, *Kompas* June 19, 2009: “Prabowo: Save National Assets”). But, again, all these criticism did come with an alternative policy proposal that squarely addressed the need of investment for Indonesia and a viable economic strategy to promote the idea economic self-reliance.

Most of policy-based campaigns carried out by the candidates were not deep enough so that voters would be able to make an informed judgment before casting their votes. At the poorest presentation of a campaign-based policy, the candidates simply made a wish list. But we would not find any systematic presentation as to exploring the economic or social problem, how to address the problems, and with what policy option. The candidates did present a logical connection between problem and policy option but did not sufficiently discuss the available policy options and explain he or she chose one option over the other and

equipped the option with solid data. The first type of the policy-based campaign constitutes argument with no justification and the second type constitutes an argument with complete justification. But these two types of policy-based campaigns would barely make critical voters and produce a well-informed decision on the side of voters.

What explains this finding? Was it because the candidates were more interested in exploiting non-programmatic issues than in luring voters with programmatic issues? Was it because the candidates did not develop a series of well-designed policy to be offered to the voters? Or, was it the journalists who performed poor professionalism in covering the candidates' campaigns?

If we take a look back to the quantitative data on this matter, we have evidence that shows a tendency of candidates to exploit the non-policy issues in their campaigns more than policy issues. As can be seen in Table 6, there was only 32% of the candidates' campaigns that dealt with policy issues. The rest of 68% were non-policy issues. Thus, it was on the part of the candidates that explains why their policy-based campaigns were poor in quality.

*Kompas* and *Tempo* actually noted the candidates' tendency. Both clearly mentioned in their op-ed during the first week of the campaign period that the candidates seemed to lack of programs to be offered to voters. The candidate possibly thought that religious, ethnic, and regional sentiments were more effective for persuading voters but they did not formulate a comprehensive strategy or a set of strategies for addressing nation's daunting problems. Pondering this situation, one op-ed of *Kompas* provides an assessment of the quality of candidates' programs as follows:

#### **Candidate Vision on Education**

Sad! It is hard to accept the fact that the campaign teams of the candidates present their political visions with too much simplification.

The formulation of their visions on national education – at least as presented in the media – merely touched technical issues such as nationally standardized test, elementary education, and budget for education. They mixed up vision, mission, strategy and its real implications and consequences. [...]



More than 63 years after the independence, we still have not had a philosophical basis for our education. We have not developed our educational system but school system only. (*Kompas*, op-ed, June 10, 2009)

The lack of vision and integrated solution marked the candidates' campaign. It is not limited to public campaign forums. In the forum of presidential debate the candidates did not engage in a lively debate by showing the superiority of his or her policy while exposing the opponents' weaknesses. Instead, they mostly shared a normative goal without revealing the policy option that one took and the reasons why that option must be taken. Thus the opportunity for public to see well-argued policy options simply slipped away. In its original words, *Kompas* describes the situation in its op-ed – an assessment of the presidential debate: “[...] how do we assess the debate? As the public had noticed, the “debate” was not really a debate. What was performed by each candidate actually was not a debate nor dialog, but a monolog. [...] (*Kompas*, June 22, 2009).<sup>3</sup>

*Tempo* also provides a similar assessment of the quality of the presidential campaigns and debates. Entering the third week of the campaign period, the quality of the campaigns did not show any progress. The candidates' campaigns were filled with music concerts than with programmatic exposures. The same thing happened to the debate where the candidates were not passionately involved in substantive discussions that enabled audience/voters to have critical information on candidates' policy options. This situation was captured by *Tempo* through its introduction for its special edition<sup>4</sup> of presidential election: “What is still interesting about the presidential election of 2009? Presidential and vice presidential debate showed no passion. The three candidates and

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3 In its July 1 2009 op-ed, *Kompas* made a summary for the candidates' vision on multiple issues, saying that they had nearly similar visions. As long as the visions deal with normative goals, it is understandable if the candidates shared them. However, the concern was not supposedly limited to formulating normative goals but it should deal with the policy option and the strategy for achieving the goals.

4 In this edition (June 29 – July 5, 2009) *Tempo* decided to focus on the history that shaped the life of the candidates. This decision was made after sorting out any possible angles that possibly would attract its reader. The policy issues were skipped because *Tempo* did not see that it would attract the readers due to the quality of the policy discourse offered by the candidates.

their three partners seemed to perform three monologs than a dialog – let alone an argumentative debate.” [...].

In summary, *Kompas* and *Tempo* see that there was nothing much to be discussed in regard to the candidates’ takes on many crucial issues. The candidates basically failed to convince the public and the media that they truly had the capability to formulate a policy option for all problems that the nation has grappled with. Thus, we should not expect that voters would have sufficient information that makes them able to critically make a well-reasoned political judgment before making their voting decision.

Does this mean that voters cannot rely on the information supplied by the media in making their critical judgments? What did *Kompas* and *Tempo* do when they found that the candidates merely made a wish list instead of a policy proposal with a sophisticated argument for tackling a pressing national problem? To answer these questions we need to explore the policy-related information that the media supplied with.

Technically, under our quantitative scheme, we may identify this type of information by crossing the categories of the type (campaign and non-campaign) and substance of information (policy and non-policy). The cell that contains journalistic information about policy but not a campaign is the cell represents the journalists’ work in dealing with critical issues that candidates should pay attention to. There is no journalistic information we found but they are limited to information specifically intended by *Kompas* and *Tempo* for the presidential election.

For this purpose, *Kompas* had created a specific section under the heading of “Mandat Rakyat” or People’s Mandate for which readers would know that the information was directly related to the presidential election. More specifically, *Kompas* made four series of investigative reports that enabled the candidates as well as the voters to make use of the information in making their political decision.<sup>5</sup> For the voters, the information could help them understand the nation’s problems and assess the candidates’ main concern and capability in addressing the problems. Let see the first investigative series.

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<sup>5</sup> *Kompas* had even made it clear that the investigative reports were for the election by giving the title of the series, for example, “Presidential Election and the Regional Problems.” (see, *Kompas* June 23 – June 26, 2009).

The first report dealt with educational problems facing Papua. The fact is that Papua is lacking of educational resources – especially teachers. The supply side has always been lower than the demand side. There are multiple causes from the geographical challenges such as difficult terrain and bad condition of roads to housing problem for teachers. Ironically, a huge amount of state funds are available for Papua to develop its educational programs.

The report was deep enough that it gives us an understanding on the anatomy of problem, its magnitude, data on the financial resources that can be used for solving the problems, and an argument for why this problem should be addressed. The report implies that a comprehensive educational policy for Papua is badly needed for the fact that the financial side for the policy does not really pose any problem.

With this report readers would likely have a complete picture of the regional problems and what kind of policy needed to solve the educational problems in that area (no teachers, no student discipline, and no housing facility for teachers).<sup>6</sup> Within the context of the presidential election, voters then can use the information as a base for assessing the vision and priority of the competing candidates in dealing with such kind of problem. We therefore can expect that the voters can make a well-informed political decision.

In the last series, *Kompas*, again,

### **The Declining Sources of Rice**

Some twenty years ago, the young Asep Rukiyat (now, 52) could be proud of being a son of one of the richest farmers in East Rancaekek, Rancaekek County, Bandung Regency, West Java. His late father, Rokhaendi, was the owner of paddy field as wide as 8 acres.

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<sup>6</sup> In the second series *Kompas* described a different set of problems that Kalimantan is facing (see, *Kompas*, June 24 2009). A similar quality of report would make well-informed readers – a process needed to create critical voters. Different from Papua, Kalimantan is facing double trouble for the fact that environmental degradation has come to a seriously critical point. This series report indirectly gives a contrast between the harsh reality that the workers have to deal with and the normative response made by Yudhoyono in his campaign as previously discussed.

But Rukiyat can no longer be proud it. His land, inherited from his father, has drastically decreased due to the expansion of the *property* business, industrial development, and toll roads. (*Kompas*, June 25, 2009)

This news-lead straightforwardly poses a perennial problem of land usage in Indonesia, particularly in the rice-producing provinces such as West Java. The economic development process has converted large chunks of the agricultural areas into industrial complexes and road infrastructure. Worse is the growth of population that accompanies the process also demands for land conversion. The rate of land conversion is alarmingly high with a few predictable effects.

For buttressing its claim, *Kompas* had supplied the report with solid data quoted from the Ministry Office of Environment on the rate of land conversion. There was as much as 384, 544 agricultural land loss within the time span of two years, from 2005 to 2007.

The effects of land conversion are also specified by the report. The declining income of farmers is reported. More importantly, the land conversion has caused a sharp decline of rice production in Java. Data on the decrease of rice production at the local and provincial level are presented.

Looking at the report, we can conclude that it presented a policy proposal with a sophisticated argument. It starts with mapping the problem, shows the magnitude of the problem, supplies it with solid data, and shows the connection of the causes and the effects. At the end, it explicitly asks the candidates to handle the problem properly.

## **Conclusions**

This research aims to assess the quantity and the quality of journalistic information as presented in *Kompas* and *Tempo* in connection with voters' need of information for making a well-informed voting decision. It is expected that both the candidates and the media would present such kind of quality information for the voters. Both have a similar reason that at the heart of democratic practices voters would likely to be rational when it comes to making voting decision. And the quality information comes into being when the candidates offer policy-based campaigns and the media squarely cover the campaign by emphasizing the candidates' policy programs.

Our research on the media content show mixed findings. Our first finding tells us that the candidates and the media were occupied with issues other than policy issues. Out of 411 news and op-ed that dealt with presidential election, there is only 13 percent that discuss policy issues. The rest can be anything about the election but not touches then policy issues.

This quantitative finding gives a pessimistic view in the sense that voters barely can find information that enabled them to vote rationally. A qualitative finding confirms the quantitative one.

When dissecting the policy-based campaign/information, this research finds that the small number of policy-based issue covered by the media is qualitative poor. The qualitative analysis shows that most of the policy-based information – if not all – does not ever have a sophisticated justification. They are generally a wish list of the candidates equipped with sporadic normative justification but with no arguments and data that can buttress their wishes. At best, intermittently the policy-based campaigns give a complete argument without accompanying it with a clear policy option.

What is encouraging is that *Kompas* and *Tempo* intentionally made a variety of journalistic efforts to provide a series of investigative reports that could be used by voters in making a better political judgment and a better voting decision. In short, it is the candidates who failed the voters, not the media – at least as represented by *Kompas* and *Tempo*. \*\*\*\*\*

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*Kuskridho Ambardi, How Smart Can We Go? The Quality of Campaign Information in the 2009 ...*

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