

Media Representation of ‘Dark Indonesia’ 2025: A Comparative Framing Analysis of Reuters and The Jakarta Post

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Abstract

This study examines how Reuters and The Jakarta Post framed the 2025 Indonesian student protests widely known as “Dark Indonesia.” The research applies a qualitative descriptive approach using comparative framing analysis to investigate how both media institutions constructed sociopolitical meaning through news discourse. The analysis integrates Goffman’s concept of frame analysis, Entman’s four framing elements, and Semetko and Valkenburg’s generic framing categories. Data were collected from two news articles published during the peak of the protests in February 2025. The findings show that Reuters employed an event oriented and institutionally neutral framing by emphasizing conflict, policy reaction, and governmental response. The Jakarta Post, meanwhile, framed the protests as a civic and democratic movement by foregrounding morality, public accountability, and national identity. Reuters relied heavily on factual chronology and balanced reporting, while The Jakarta Post used emotionally expressive language and human-interest narratives to position students as legitimate democratic actors. The comparative analysis demonstrates that institutional orientation significantly shapes the representation of political activism. International media tend to prioritize neutrality and global readability, whereas domestic media integrate cultural and ideological dimensions into their reporting. This study contributes to comparative media studies by highlighting how media framing practices construct different interpretations of the same political event within Southeast Asian contexts.

Keywords: Media framing, Reuters, The Jakarta Post, Indonesian student protests, comparative analysis.

INTRODUCTION

Mass media occupy a central position in shaping public understanding of political and social realities. News institutions do not merely transmit information but actively construct meaning through selection, emphasis, lexical choice, and narrative organization. In contemporary media studies, this process is widely understood through the concept of framing, which refers to how media organize events into interpretive structures that guide audience perception (Goffman, 1974). Through framing, media institutions determine what aspects of an event become visible, what voices are prioritized, and what interpretations are legitimized within public discourse. Consequently, the representation of protests and political activism in the media has substantial implications for democratic participation, public opinion, and state legitimacy.

Indonesia presents an important context for examining media framing of sociopolitical activism due to its long history of student movements. Student activism has consistently functioned as a catalyst for political transformation, most notably during the 1998 Reformasi movement that led to the collapse of Suharto’s New Order regime. Since then, university students have remained prominent actors in criticizing corruption, defending democratic values, and demanding accountability from political elites (Setiawan, 2021). In early 2025, Indonesia experienced another wave of student protests triggered by controversial governmental policies, budget cuts, concerns regarding democratic regression, and increasing dissatisfaction toward political institutions. These demonstrations rapidly spread across Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, Makassar, and several other major cities.

The protests later became publicly recognized through the term “Dark Indonesia,” a phrase symbolizing public anxiety regarding the future of democracy, economic stability, and social justice in Indonesia. The movement gained significant media attention because it combined traditional street demonstrations with digital mobilization across social media platforms. Students used slogans such as “Save Our Democracy” and “Dark Indonesia is Real” to articulate fears surrounding authoritarian tendencies, economic inequality, and the perceived failure of government responsiveness. The demonstrations quickly transformed into a national discourse involving not only political actors but also journalists, academics, artists, and broader civil society.

The extensive coverage of these protests by domestic and international media provides an opportunity to examine how different journalistic institutions construct political meaning. Reuters and The Jakarta Post were selected because both occupy influential positions within English language journalism while representing different institutional orientations. Reuters functions as a global news agency recognized for its commitment to neutrality, factual reporting, and international readability. Its audience consists primarily of international readers, investors, policymakers, and global media networks. In contrast, The Jakarta Post is Indonesia’s leading English language newspaper with strong connections to domestic sociopolitical discourse. Although it also addresses international audiences, the newspaper remains culturally and politically rooted in Indonesian democratic concerns.

Differences between global and local media institutions often produce contrasting representations of the same event. Previous studies reveal that international media generally emphasize objectivity, stability, and geopolitical implications, whereas domestic media tend to incorporate emotional, cultural, and ideological dimensions into news narratives (Harlow et al., 2020). Cottle (2011) explains that protest coverage in global journalism frequently focuses on conflict and disruption, while local media may frame protests as moral or democratic struggles connected to national identity. Similar patterns have been observed in studies regarding the Arab Spring, Hong Kong protests, Black Lives Matter, and anti-government movements in Southeast Asia.

Within Indonesian media scholarship, however, comparative framing studies between international and domestic English language outlets remain relatively limited. Existing research predominantly focuses on local political communication, social media activism, or domestic newspaper representation without examining how Indonesian political events are simultaneously interpreted through global journalistic frameworks (Antara, I. P. J., & Irawanto, 2024). This limitation creates a research gap concerning how Indonesia’s democratic image is negotiated within international media discourse. Therefore, examining Reuters and The Jakarta Post comparatively is important for understanding how institutional orientation influences the framing of Indonesian political activism.

This research employs framing and representation theories as its analytical foundation. Goffman’s (1974) frame analysis provides the conceptual basis for understanding how media organize social reality into recognizable interpretive structures. According to Goffman, frames function as “schemata of interpretation” that help audiences identify and understand events within broader social contexts. Building upon Goffman’s theoretical perspective, Entman (1993) operationalizes framing into four analytical dimensions consisting of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. These dimensions allow researchers to identify how media define issues, assign responsibility, construct moral judgments, and suggest solutions.

In addition, this study applies Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) typology of generic frames consisting of conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality, and economic consequences. These categories are useful for identifying recurring narrative tendencies in political reporting. The study also adopts Stuart Hall's (1997) theory of representation as a supporting perspective. Hall argues that media representation is not a neutral reflection of reality but a productive process in which meaning is constructed through language, discourse, and ideology. Through this perspective, media narratives become sites where political identity, democratic values, and civic legitimacy are continuously negotiated.

Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative descriptive design with comparative textual analysis, an approach commonly used in media framing studies to examine meaning construction and narrative patterns within news discourse (Creswell, 2014). The study analyzes two news articles published during the peak period of the protests in February 2025. One article was taken from Reuters and another from The Jakarta Post. Both articles were selected purposively because they discussed the same political event while representing different institutional orientations. The analysis focuses on framing strategies, lexical choices, narrative organization, quoted sources, and discourse patterns to reveal how each media outlet constructed meaning.

The research seeks to answer two primary questions. First, how did Reuters and The Jakarta Post frame the 2025 Indonesian student protests? Second, what similarities and differences emerged from their framing strategies? Through these questions, the study aims to contribute to comparative media studies by examining how global and domestic journalism construct competing representations of political activism. The distinctive position of this research lies in its focus on English language media representation of Indonesian protests within a comparative framework integrating framing analysis and discourse analysis. Ultimately, the study demonstrates that media framing reflects broader ideological, cultural, and institutional dynamics shaping contemporary democratic discourse.

METHOD

Research Design

This study applied a qualitative descriptive method to analyze how Reuters and The Jakarta Post framed the 2025 Indonesian student protests. Qualitative descriptive research was considered appropriate because the study focused on interpreting meanings, narrative structures, and framing strategies embedded in media texts. The research employed comparative textual analysis to identify similarities and differences in how two media institutions represented the same political event. Comparative textual analysis is widely applied in framing studies because it enables researchers to examine ideological tendencies, lexical choices, and narrative structures across media institutions (Vliegenthart & Van Zoonen, 2011).

Data Source

The data consisted of two news articles discussing the 2025 Indonesian student protests. The first article was published by Reuters on February 21, 2025, while the second article was published by The Jakarta Post on February 18, 2025. Both articles were selected purposively based on relevance, publication period, and thematic similarity. The articles represented comparable coverage of the same sociopolitical event from different institutional perspectives.

Technique of Collecting Data

The researcher used documentation techniques to collect the data. The news articles were retrieved directly from the official websites of Reuters and The Jakarta Post. After downloading the articles, the researcher organized the texts according to publication date, source, and thematic relevance. Repeated reading was conducted to identify framing indicators, narrative structures, and discourse patterns.

Instrument of the Research

The primary instrument of the research was the researcher himself. The researcher was responsible for identifying framing elements, interpreting textual meaning, and analyzing discourse patterns within the articles. Supporting instruments included note taking sheets and coding tables used to classify framing categories, lexical choices, and quoted statements.

Procedure of Collecting Data

The data collection procedure involved several stages. First, the researcher identified the research topic and determined the object of analysis. Second, relevant news articles discussing the “Dark Indonesia” protests were selected purposively. Third, the articles were downloaded and documented systematically. Fourth, the researcher conducted intensive reading to identify framing elements and narrative tendencies. Finally, textual evidence was classified according to theoretical frameworks.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed through a framing analysis supported by discourse analysis. The framing analysis used Entman’s (1993) four framing elements, which include problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. In addition, the study applied Semetko and Valkenburg’s (2000) five generic frames consisting of conflict, human interest, responsibility, morality, and economic consequence. The analysis focused on identifying how each article defined the issue, assigned responsibility, and constructed moral and emotional perspectives. Discourse analysis complemented this process by examining the choice of words, sentence structure, and tone used by the journalists. Through this combined analysis, the study aimed to uncover how Reuters and The Jakarta Post framed the 2025 Indonesian student protests differently, based on their institutional orientation and ideological stance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

1. Framing in Reuters Article

The *Reuters* article frames the 2025 student protests primarily as an organized reaction to government policy rather than as a broader political struggle. The report begins with an objective tone, emphasizing factual chronology:

“Thousands of students gathered in Jakarta and other major cities on Friday, chanting slogans and holding banners calling for transparency and economic justice”
(Reuters, February 21, 2025:1)

This sentence sets a neutral frame by foregrounding the size and organization of the protests without moral commentary. According to Entman’s framing model, the problem definition focuses

on civil unrest as a consequence of discontent with policy reforms. The causal interpretation attributes the protests to “public frustration over new regulations seen as benefiting the political elite,” positioning the issue within an economic and governance context rather than an ideological confrontation.

The causal interpretation in Reuters remains institutionally balanced. The article acknowledges public dissatisfaction while simultaneously presenting official governmental responses. One government spokesperson is quoted as saying:

“The administration respects the right to protest as long as it remains peaceful”
(Reuters, 2025, p. 2),

The inclusion of this statement demonstrates Reuters’ effort to preserve journalistic neutrality by balancing perspectives between authorities and protesters. The article avoids directly endorsing student claims or morally condemning government actions.

Moral evaluation within the Reuters article is subtle and restrained. Lexical choices such as “peaceful demonstration,” “student gathering,” “public dissatisfaction,” and “official response” indicate an objective reporting style. The article refrains from emotionally expressive language and instead emphasizes procedural reporting. This aligns with Reuters’ institutional identity as a global news agency prioritizing factual reliability and international readability.

From Semetko and Valkenburg’s framework, Reuters primarily applies conflict and responsibility frames. The conflict frame appears through descriptions of tensions between protesters and authorities. The responsibility frame emerges through references to governmental policies as triggers for public dissatisfaction. However, the article avoids moral dramatization or personalization. Human interest narratives are minimal, indicating Reuters’ preference for institutional rather than emotional representation.

Discourse analysis further reveals how Reuters constructs neutrality through syntax and narrative organization. Sentences are concise, factual, and chronologically structured. Quoted sources include both government officials and student representatives, reinforcing balanced representation. The article positions readers as observers rather than emotional participants in the protests.

The Reuters article therefore reflects what Hall (1997) describes as a representational strategy shaped by institutional ideology. Although appearing neutral, the article still constructs meaning by privileging factual objectivity over moral engagement. Through this framing, the protests become globally readable political events rather than emotionally charged democratic struggles.

2. Framing in The Jakarta Post Article

Unlike Reuters, The Jakarta Post frames the 2025 student protests as a moral and democratic movement rooted in civic responsibility and public concern regarding Indonesia’s political future. The article opens with emotionally expressive imagery:

“Carrying placards reading ‘Save Our Democracy’ and ‘Dark Indonesia is Real,’ thousands of young Indonesians marched through the streets demanding government accountability.” (The Jakarta Post, February 18, 2025:1)

This introduction immediately constructs the protests as symbolic acts of democratic resistance rather than merely public demonstrations. Lexical choices such as “Save Our Democracy” and

“government accountability” position the protests within broader narratives of democratic crisis and national concern.

From Entman’s perspective, the article defines the central problem as democratic regression and governmental failure to respond to public aspirations. The article portrays students not simply as protesters but as representatives of civic morality and national conscience.

The causal interpretation identifies the government’s policies and political insensitivity as the primary triggers of unrest. One passage explains that the protests emerged due to “the government’s failure to listen to the people’s voice,” emphasizing political alienation and democratic dissatisfaction.

Moral evaluation is significantly more explicit compared to Reuters. The Jakarta Post clearly sympathizes with student concerns and frames protesters as legitimate democratic actors. One student leader state:

“We protest not to create chaos, but to remind the leaders that democracy belongs to the people” (The Jakarta Post, 2025:2).

This quotation reflects a moral frame portraying the students as defenders of democratic integrity. The article’s narrative encourages readers to empathize with protesters and perceive them as morally justified participants in civic life.

Within Semetko and Valkenburg’s framework, morality and human-interest frames dominate the article. Emotional expressions such as “hope,” “bravery,” “fear,” and “defending democracy” personalize the protests and create emotional engagement. Human interest framing is strengthened through descriptions of student emotions, symbolic banners, and collective solidarity.

Discourse analysis reveals that The Jakarta Post employs a more interpretive narrative structure compared to Reuters. The article uses evaluative vocabulary and rhetorical expressions that align readers emotionally with the protesters. Narrative sequencing emphasizes democratic ideals, public disappointment, and civic responsibility rather than institutional neutrality.

Hall’s (1997) representation theory becomes highly relevant in understanding this narrative orientation. Through language and symbolic representation, The Jakarta Post constructs the protests as part of Indonesia’s ongoing democratic journey. Rather than merely reporting events, the newspaper actively participates in shaping national discourse concerning citizenship, democracy, and accountability.

The article also demonstrates stronger domestication of political meaning. References to Indonesia’s democratic history, youth activism, and civic identity reinforce the newspaper’s role as a culturally embedded institution. Unlike Reuters’ detached perspective, The Jakarta Post functions as a moral participant in public discourse.

Discussion

The comparative analysis demonstrates that Reuters and The Jakarta Post employ significantly different framing strategies in representing the same political event. Although both articles discuss the 2025 student protests, their institutional orientation, audience expectations, and ideological positioning shape contrasting constructions of meaning. Comparative media scholars argue that institutional context strongly influences how political events are narrated and interpreted across different journalistic systems (Guo et al., 2012; Ndlela, 2017).

Reuters prioritizes factual clarity, chronology, and institutional neutrality. Its framing strategy reflects global journalistic standards emphasizing objectivity and balanced reporting. Through

concise narrative structure and restrained lexical choices, Reuters frames the protests as political events occurring within a democratic system rather than as moral struggles. The dominance of conflict and responsibility frames indicates a focus on governance, public order, and policy reaction. Previous studies on international journalism explain that global news agencies commonly emphasize stability, neutrality, and factual precision in order to maintain credibility across transnational audiences (Harlow et al., 2020)..

The Jakarta Post, however, adopts a more interpretive and emotionally engaged approach. The newspaper frames the protests as expressions of democratic concern and civic morality. Human interest and morality frames dominate the narrative, transforming student demonstrations into symbolic representations of national anxiety and democratic resistance. This finding is consistent with Hall's (1997) argument that media representation actively constructs ideological meaning through discourse and cultural positioning.

These differences illustrate Entman's argument that framing involves selecting certain aspects of reality while excluding others (Entman, 1993). Reuters selects institutional response, chronology, and policy implications as central dimensions of the protests. The Jakarta Post instead selects emotional experience, democratic values, and moral legitimacy as the dominant narrative focus. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) similarly explain that framing devices influence audience interpretation by emphasizing particular dimensions of political events.

The contrast also reflects Goffman's concept of frames as organizational schemata (Goffman, 1974). Reuters organizes the protests within the frame of political reporting and international journalism. The Jakarta Post organizes the same event within a frame of democratic discourse and civic participation. Consequently, audiences encounter different interpretations despite consuming reports about the same protests. According to Lee and Chan (2020), media framing significantly shapes public understanding by guiding how audiences interpret political activism and protest legitimacy.

Hall's representation theory further explains how institutional context influences meaning production (Hall, 1997). Reuters constructs reality through a discourse of neutrality associated with international journalism. The Jakarta Post constructs reality through domesticated narratives connected to Indonesian democratic identity. Both articles therefore reveal that media representation is never entirely neutral because institutional ideology inevitably shapes narrative emphasis. This perspective aligns with Vliegenthart and Van Zoonen's (2011) argument that media frames are socially and culturally embedded forms of representation.

Another important distinction concerns the role of emotional discourse. Reuters minimizes emotional vocabulary and relies on procedural language such as "official response," "public dissatisfaction," and "policy criticism." The Jakarta Post employs emotionally charged expressions such as "Save Our Democracy," "bravery," and "national concern." These lexical differences significantly influence how readers emotionally engage with the protests. Research on protest coverage demonstrates that emotional framing often increases audience identification and sympathy toward social movements (Francis et al., 2020).

The comparative findings also reveal broader implications regarding global and local journalism. International media institutions often prioritize readability across diverse audiences and therefore avoid excessive ideological positioning. Domestic media institutions, however, are more likely to incorporate cultural memory, historical experience, and local democratic values into their reporting. Consequently, The Jakarta Post functions not only as a news provider but also as a participant in national democratic discourse. Comparative media research similarly notes that

local newspapers frequently integrate national identity and sociocultural perspectives into political reporting (Antara & Irawanto, 2024).

Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that framing practices influence perceptions of legitimacy. Reuters frames the protests as organized political reactions, whereas The Jakarta Post frames them as morally justified democratic movements. These distinctions shape audience understanding regarding the role of student activism within Indonesian society. Previous studies have shown that media framing affects public interpretation of protest movements, particularly regarding legitimacy, social order, and democratic participation (Cottle, 2011).

The study ultimately confirms that media framing is both a textual and ideological process. Through lexical choice, narrative organization, quoted sources, and symbolic emphasis, Reuters and The Jakarta Post produce different yet interconnected representations of Indonesia's 2025 student protests. Their reporting reflects broader institutional dynamics concerning journalism, democracy, and political communication within global and domestic contexts. This conclusion supports Entman's (1993) and Hall's (1997) view that framing and representation are central mechanisms through which media institutions shape political meaning and public consciousness.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Reuters and The Jakarta Post construct different representations of Indonesia's 2025 "Dark Indonesia" student protests due to their institutional orientation and journalistic priorities. Reuters adopts a factual and event centered framing emphasizing neutrality, chronology, and governmental response through conflict and responsibility frames. In contrast, The Jakarta Post frames the protests as a moral and democratic movement by foregrounding civic participation, public accountability, and national identity through morality and human interest frames. These differences demonstrate that media framing is influenced not only by textual structure but also by ideological, cultural, and institutional contexts. Reuters reflects the conventions of international journalism that prioritize objectivity and global readability, while The Jakarta Post reflects domestic engagement rooted in Indonesian democratic discourse. Overall, the findings confirm that media institutions actively construct political meaning through framing practices, shaping how audiences interpret activism, democracy, and social conflict within contemporary Indonesian society.

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