

Framing Analysis of the Character of Governor and Deputy Governor Candidates in Local Newspapers during the 2018 Regional Election in West Nusa Tenggara

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the framing of the character of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in West Nusa Tenggara as presented by three local newspapers during the 2018 regional elections. Employing a qualitative content analysis method grounded in Entman's framing theory, the research investigates how local media outlets, Suara NTB, Lombok Post, and Radar Lombok, constructed narratives of political figures' character through four key elements: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. An analysis of 224 news articles reveals that each candidate pair was framed using different approaches: some were portrayed as experienced leaders, religious figures, intellectuals, populist candidates, successors to previous administrations, or even as champions of ethnic identity. These framings were significantly influenced by the social context and the strategic orientation of the media in building connections between the candidates and specific voter segments. This study affirms that the media do not merely function as conveyors of information but actively construct political realities through the selective creation and emphasis of character based narratives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Regional Head Elections represent a critical political moment within Indonesia's local democratic system, reflecting not only the dynamics of power but also playing a significant role in shaping public perceptions of leadership figures. In the context of West Nusa Tenggara Province, the 2018 Regional Head Elections emerged as a notable contest that garnered attention from the public, media, and academics alike. The election involved four pairs of gubernatorial candidates, each with distinct backgrounds, campaign strategies, and public images. Remarkably, a female candidate participated in the gubernatorial race for the first time in West Nusa Tenggara's political history. Mass media played a central role in framing the candidates' characters, thereby influencing political perceptions among the public.

Previous studies in political communication have demonstrated how media shapes candidate images through framing processes. Research on the framing of leadership candidates in the media reveals that the media do not merely function as transmitters of political information but also act as active agents in constructing a candidate's image and

political legitimacy. In the context of the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara Regional Head Election, Andriani et al. (2018) found that local newspapers frequently emphasized positive character frames for specific candidates, such as being religious, experienced, populist, and committed to maintaining ethnic harmony. These frames were strategically utilized in news reporting to enhance the political appeal of candidates.

In another study, Pyles (2021) explained that media tend to portray candidates based on elements of social identity, such as ethnicity, religion, and gender, which are tailored to specific contexts and voter segments. This approach creates symbolic narratives reinforcing a candidate's position in the electoral competition. Meanwhile, Anshori et al. (2022) highlighted how media framing is often influenced by political interests and the affiliations of media owners, resulting in candidate portrayals that are selectively constructed by the editorial stance.

Theoretically, Berinsky and Kinder (2006) assert that frames in political news possess significant power in shaping public perception of political figures, as the information presented by the media is selected, structured, and emphasized through particular perspectives. In other words, character framing is not neutral but a constructed representation embedded with values and interests.

These four studies collectively underscore the symbolic power of media in constructing leadership images. Nevertheless, there remains a scarcity of research that specifically and systematically analyzes how local newspapers construct each candidate's character. This article seeks to fill that gap by offering a novel contribution that maps the forms and patterns of character framing applied to the gubernatorial candidate pairs in the reporting of three local newspapers in West Nusa Tenggara, *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Radar Lombok*, during the 2018 Pilkada campaign period. This study focuses entirely on media content, aiming to uncover the character narratives constructed textually by these three local newspapers.

In addition, although numerous studies have examined framing in national political news coverage, research specifically analyzing how the character of regional head candidates is framed in local newspapers during regional head elections remains relatively limited. This is particularly evident in the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara election, which was marked by several significant developments: for the first time, a female candidate participated in the race for Governor, and one candidate pair ran as independents without party affiliation. Furthermore, the winning candidate for Governor did not belong to the ethnic majority group in West Nusa Tenggara Province. These dynamics present a critical research gap, especially considering the strategic role of local media in shaping public perceptions that are more proximate and contextually grounded concerning regional leadership figures. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) and Nelson and Kinder (1996) also emphasize that the media can direct public attention to specific aspects of a political figure, such as integrity, leadership ability, or populist appeal.

The scholarly novelty of this study lies in its focused analysis of how the character of the four pairs of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara election was framed by local newspapers, employing Entman's (1993) four framing elements: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Through this framework, the study not only maps the types of character traits framed by the media but also uncovers the narrative tendencies and value systems embedded in local political news coverage.

The research problem can thus be formulated as follows: How were the characters of the Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara election framed by local media during the campaign period? What patterns or differences in framing emerged between the various candidate pairs?

This article aims to analyze the character portrayals of Governor and Deputy Governor candidate pairs in local newspaper news coverage during the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara regional head election and identify the framing patterns and strategies used by the media to construct the public image of these candidates.

2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative content analysis method, applying framing theory to investigate how local newspapers framed the character of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates during the 2018 Regional Head Election in West Nusa Tenggara Province. This approach systematically examines how local media construct narratives, select specific elements and emphasize particular aspects within their political reporting. The study focuses on three major local newspapers, *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Radar Lombok*, which were selected due to their wide circulation in West Nusa Tenggara and their active engagement in covering social issues and political dynamics both before and during the election process.

The analysis includes news articles published between January and July 2018, covering key phases such as candidate registration, campaign activities, public debates, voting day, and post-election reporting. 224 articles were identified as relevant to framing candidate character and subjected to further in-depth analysis.

The analytical framework of this study is based on the framing model developed by Robert M. Entman (1993),

Table 1. Stages of Framing Analysis by Robert M. Entman (1993)

No	Framing Analysis Element	Explanation
1.	Problem Definition	How an issue or character is defined by the media
2.	Causal Interpretation	Who or what is considered responsible for the problem or for how the character is portrayed
3.	Moral Evaluation	How the media provide moral judgments about the situation or the character being reported
4.	Treatment Recommendation	Solutions or recommended actions suggested by the media in response to the issue or character portrayal

This model identifies how the media construct meaning and provides explicit and implicit evaluations of political figures (Entman, 1993; Iyengar, 1996; Kinder, 1998). In the context of the West Nusa Tenggara local election, these framing elements are applied to examine how local newspapers shape public opinion regarding the character of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates within society.

In the local newspaper coverage during the 2018 West Nusa Tenggara election campaign, candidates' character portrayals were framed using Entman's (1993) four-stage approach. Through problem definition, local newspapers framed various social and developmental challenges as central issues requiring visionary and solution-oriented leadership. Candidate character was subsequently shaped through causal interpretation, whereby individuals with experience, competence, or emotional closeness to the public were portrayed as those who understood the root of the problems and were deemed capable of addressing them. In the moral evaluation stage, candidates were depicted through specific value-laden attributes such as religious, just, decisive, or populist, reinforcing their moral legitimacy to lead the region. Media coverage went beyond personal profiles to include moral narratives that framed candidates as trustworthy and deserving public support. Finally, in the treatment recommendation stage, the solutions presented in the news were often associated with the candidate's character, typically through positively narrated programs or commitments—such as promises of continued development, improved welfare, or enhanced public services. Thus, the framing of candidates' character

in local media was not neutral; rather, it constituted a symbolic construction shaped by media narratives to influence public perceptions of a candidate's fitness to lead.

The textual analysis of news content was conducted using NVivo 14 software, facilitating consistent, theme-based coding. This tool also supported the mapping of framing elements and the identification of discursive patterns within the texts. Analytical validity was ensured through repeated readings and collaborative discussions among the research team to confirm that the categorized framing elements accurately reflected the intended meanings in the texts. Through this methodological approach, the study aims to describe the media representations of regional leadership candidates in West Nusa Tenggara and critically evaluate how local media contributed to constructing the socio-political reality during the 2018 regional election in West Nusa Tenggara Province.

3. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To understand how local media framed the character of regional leadership candidates in West Nusa Tenggara, a systematic analysis of newspaper coverage serves as a strategic approach to uncover the construction of candidate personas as presented to the public. This study focuses on the character portrayal of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in the news reporting of three major local newspapers in West Nusa Tenggara during the 2018 Regional Head Election. The following discussion presents the research findings based on Entman’s four framing elements to trace how candidates’ characters were constructed and positioned within the local media discourse throughout the campaign period.

3.1. Research Finding

The following are the character portrayals of the four Governor and Deputy Governor candidate pairs presented by the local newspapers *Suara NTB*, *Lombok Post*, and *Radar Lombok*.

3.2. Suhaili and Amin

Based on local newspaper coverage in West Nusa Tenggara during the 2018 Governor and Deputy Governor election, several character traits were prominently highlighted in the portrayal of the candidate pair Suhaili and Amin. A total of 54 news articles were presented to the public, collectively encompassing a range of character attributes framed throughout the coverage.

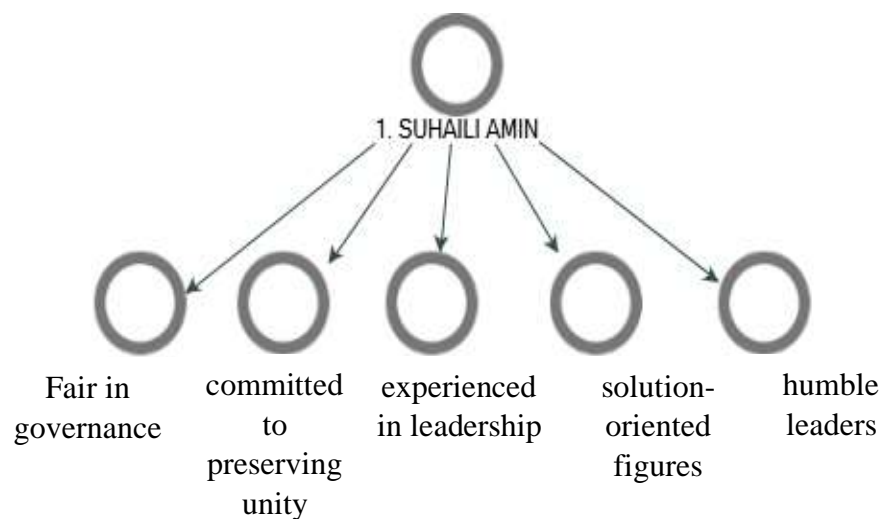


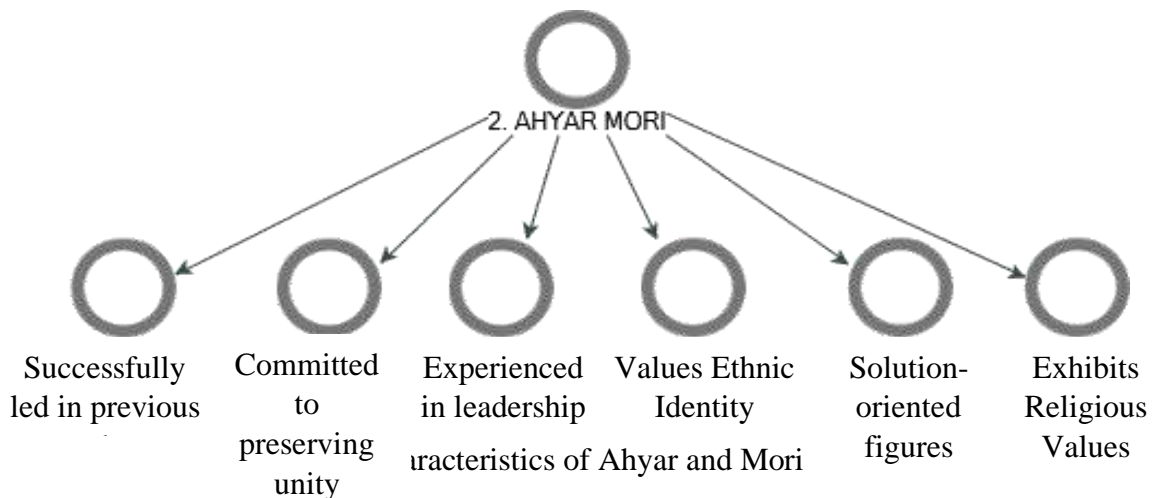
Figure 1. Characteristics of Suhaili and Amin

Based on Figure 1, Suhaili and Amin were framed as fair governance leaders, committed to maintaining unity within West Nusa Tenggara society, experienced in

leadership, capable of providing solutions and characterized by humility. Regarding fairness and leadership experience, various news reports consistently framed Suhaili as a victorious Regent of Central Lombok for two terms (2010–2015 and 2016–2021) and as the former Speaker of the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Parliament from 2004 to 2010. Similarly, Amin was portrayed as an experienced leader, having served as the Deputy Governor of West Nusa Tenggara (2013–2018) and as former Speaker of the the Sumbawa Regency from 1999 to 2009. Local newspapers used these credentials to construct their image as seasoned political figures. Furthermore, the media emphasized that, despite their extensive experience, both candidates remained humble and consistently advocated for unity, even in the face of provocation in political discourse—while positioning themselves as capable of offering concrete solutions to regional issues.

3.2.1. Ahyar and Mori

Based on the coverage of local newspapers in West Nusa Tenggara during the 2018 Governor and Deputy Governor election, the three local newspapers emphasized several key character traits in their portrayal of the candidate pair Ahyar and Mori. A total of 89 news articles were published, collectively reflecting various character traits framed throughout the reporting.



Based on Figure 2, the character portrayal of Ahyar and Mori in local newspaper coverage during the gubernatorial election positioned them as successful leaders, unifiers within West Nusa Tenggara society, experienced in leadership, ethnically representative candidates, capable of offering solutions to public issues, and religious figures with recognized expertise in religious matters. Like Suhaili and Amin, Ahyar and Mori were framed as having a strong leadership track record, enabling them to offer credible solutions grounded in practical experience. Ahyar was frequently framed as the successful Mayor of Mataram during his two terms (2005–2010 and 2016–2021), credited with bringing prosperity to his constituents. Conversely, Mori was portrayed as the Deputy Speaker of the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Parliament (2019–2022), consistently voicing the people's aspirations.

Distinct from the other candidates, Ahyar and Mori were also framed as ethnic representatives of West Nusa Tenggara's majority groups. Ahyar hails from the Sasak ethnic group, the largest in Lombok and West Nusa Tenggara Province, while Mori is from the Mbojo ethnic group, which forms the majority in Sumbawa. This ethnic representation was highlighted by local newspapers, which often framed the pair as champions of ethnic pride. Furthermore, given

that the majority of West Nusa Tenggara's population is Muslim, Ahyar was regularly portrayed with his religious title *Tuan Guru Haji (TGH)* and recognized with religious honors from the Mbojo community. Despite facing provocative and politically charged coverage during the campaign, Ahyar and Mori were consistently depicted as figures committed to maintaining unity among the people.

3.2.2. Zul and Rohmi

Based on local newspaper coverage in West Nusa Tenggara during the 2018 Governor and Deputy Governor election, several specific character traits were prominently highlighted in the portrayal of the candidate pair Zul and Rohmi. 39 news articles were published featuring various character traits framed by the media, including the following.

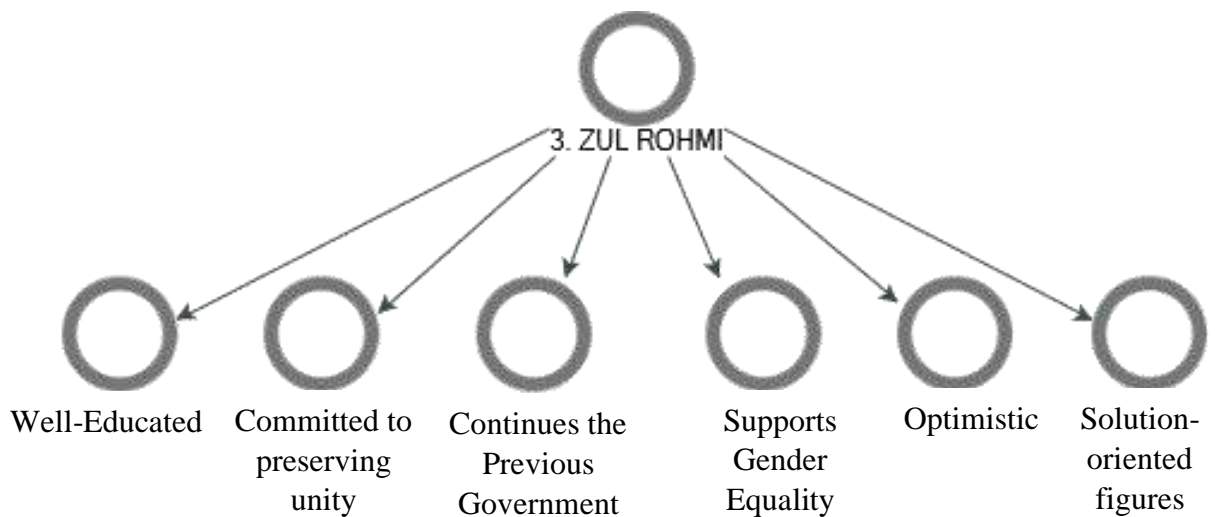


Figure 3. Characteristics of Zul and Rohmi

Based on Figure 3, the character framing of Zul and Rohmi in local newspapers during the 2018 gubernatorial election positioned them as candidates with strong academic backgrounds and as advocates for educational development in West Nusa Tenggara. Zul was consistently portrayed as a Ph.D. graduate from an overseas institution and former Rector of Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa (2013–2015). Rohmi was depicted as a doctoral graduate in education and former Rector of Universitas Hamzanwadi (2012–2018). Their academic credentials were highlighted as a foundation for their vision to improve the region's education quality.

Although they did not serve in the previous administration, the media frequently emphasized their close affiliation with the former Governor of West Nusa Tenggara (2013–2018), Muhammad Zainul Majdi (popularly known as Tuan Guru Bajang or TGB). Zul was described as a trusted colleague of TGB, while Rohmi is his biological sister. This association was strategically framed in the press to suggest that Zul and Rohmi were the only candidate pair endorsed and supported by the former governor, which positioned them as the legitimate successors capable of continuing the previous administration's policies.

Like Suhaili–Amin and Ahyar–Mori, Zul and Rohmi were also portrayed as solution-oriented leaders. However, their strength was framed as stemming from academic and analytical capabilities rather than direct government experience. As a result, some news reports questioned their administrative

competence, occasionally framing them as lacking in executive experience. Nonetheless, they were consistently portrayed as optimistic, resilient, and committed to unity, even in provocation and political attacks.

Furthermore, they were the only candidate pair associated with gender equality, with Rohmi being the sole female candidate in the race. Media reports often emphasized her candidacy's symbolic and strategic value in promoting women's representation in politics. Their approach to shared leadership was frequently noted during campaign activities: Rohmi would represent the campaign in women-dominated forums. At the same time, Zul typically appeared before male-majority or broader public audiences. This cooperative dynamic reinforced their image as inclusive and progressive leaders.

3.2.3. Ali and Sakti

As independent candidates for Governor and Deputy Governor of West Nusa Tenggara, running without the support of any political party, Ali and Sakti were also subject to framing by local newspapers. The three newspapers emphasized several distinct character traits throughout the campaign period, resulting in 42 news articles published between January and July 2018 during the regional election in West Nusa Tenggara Province.

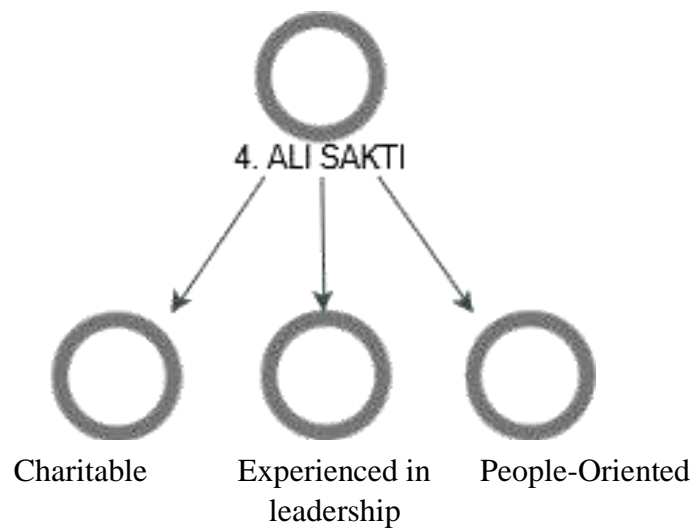


Figure 4. Characteristics of Ali and Sakti

Based on Figure 4, the character portrayal of Ali and Sakti in local newspaper coverage during the election period was the least prominent compared to other Governor and Deputy Governor candidates. However, the media still framed several distinct character traits. One prominent narrative depicted them as generous figures, frequently donating to the community an image reinforced by the fact that both were reported as the wealthiest candidates, according to the State Officials' Wealth Report. In addition, they were framed as having leadership experience, similar to the portrayals of Suhaili–Amin and Ahyar–Mori.

Ali previously served as the Regent of East Lombok for two terms (2003–2008 and 2013–2018), while Sakti briefly held office as a member of speaker the West Nusa Tenggara Provincial Parliament from 2014 to 2015. The pair

were also portrayed as close to the people, frequently engaging directly with local communities and as benevolent leaders due to their charitable actions. Despite their independent status and limited institutional support, local newspapers constructed an image of Ali and Sakti as grassroots-oriented candidates who maintained a tangible presence among the people.

3.3. Discussion

Overall, the framing of social issues and the character of local leadership candidates demonstrates a closely intertwined relationship. Social issues emerged as central themes in the campaigns of the Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in West Nusa Tenggara. Some candidates framed themselves through proposed solutions to these issues, while others designed specific programs they pledged to implement if given the mandate to lead. These capacities were often linked to the candidates' leadership backgrounds and deep understanding of the local community's needs.

From the perspective of political character framing, the media strategically emphasized or downplayed certain individual traits, particularly within the political context (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Kinder, 1998). This phenomenon was evident in how local newspapers reported on the character of West Nusa Tenggara's gubernatorial candidates during the election period from January to July 2018. Certain character traits were deliberately highlighted, while others were overlooked or marginalized in the coverage.

For instance, the framing of leadership candidates' character reveals several similarities across pairs, particularly in how leadership experience was emphasized only for Suhaili–Amin, Ahyar–Mori, and Ali–Sakti, all of whom had previously held executive positions at the regency or municipal level. In contrast, Zul and Rohmi were not framed as having prior government leadership experience. However, they were portrayed as former university rectors in West Nusa Tenggara and thus framed as optimistic candidates who, despite their limited experience in local governance, presented policy platforms offering solutions to public concerns.

In framing political figures, media narratives often construct binary character distinctions (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006). For example, Suhaili–Amin, Ahyar–Mori, and Zul–Rohmi were consistently framed as candidates who promoted unity and conflict resolution through various policy programs. In contrast, Ali and Sakti were framed more as missionary style leaders, engaging directly with the public, demonstrating empathy, and participating personally in grassroots problem-solving. Meanwhile, the other candidates more frequently embodied a development-oriented leadership model, emphasizing physical infrastructure and welfare improvement through strategic regional planning (Mayasiana & Sasti, 2020; Nursholikah, 2016).

Despite the presence of overlapping character traits among candidates, the media also emphasized the unique attributes of each individual, aligned with specific strategic interests. This emphasis aimed to attract readers' attention to certain candidates' advantages or distinctiveness (Febryanti & Ahmad, 2023) and to shape public perception (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Iyengar, 1996; Kinder, 1998; Nelson & Kinder, 1996).

For example, Suhaili and Amin were framed as fair and humble leaders. Their campaign highlighted the issue of developmental disparities between Lombok and Sumbawa islands, stressing the importance of equitable development, including the proposal to establish a provincial representative office in Sumbawa. Political fairness refers to a balanced distribution of social, economic, and infrastructural development aimed at public welfare (Panggabean & Harahap, 2024). Beyond their extensive

political experience, Suhaili and Amin were also depicted as leaders willing to accept any electoral outcome, which is important for inclusive and community-accepted leadership (Alisa et al., 2023).

Candidate pair number two, Ahyar and Mori, were framed as figures who championed ethnic identity and religious values. Given West Nusa Tenggara's demographic composition, dominated by the Sasak (74%) and Mbojo (16.5%) ethnic groups (Pemerintah Provinsi NTB & Olat Maras Institute, 2021) Ahyar, of Sasak descent, and Mori, of Mbojo origin, were perceived as symbolizing their respective ethnic communities. This reflects the concepts of "cultural politics" and "identity politics," in which candidates employ ethnic and cultural identity to build emotional resonance with voters (Herdiansah & Al-Banjari, 2023). Their religious orientation further enhanced their appeal among the predominantly traditional Muslim population of West Nusa Tenggara Province (Sumitro & Kurniawansyah, 2020).

In contrast, candidate pair number three, Zul and Rohmi, were framed as highly educated figures, committed to policy continuity, and supportive of gender equality. The media consistently highlighted their academic titles, referring to them as "Doctor (PhD)" in almost every article, reinforcing their intellectual credibility. At the same time, Rohmi was portrayed as the successor to her brother, former Governor Tuan Guru Bajang (TGB), suggesting a political dynasty element (Sukri, 2020). While such dynastic links are often criticized, the support of influential public figures can significantly enhance a candidate's electability (Sinpeng et al., 2020). This dynamic was present in the electoral success of Dr. Zul and Dr. Rohmi, the only candidate pair publicly endorsed by TGB.

Rohmi was also framed as a strong advocate for gender equality. As the only female candidate, and the first woman to contest a gubernatorial election in West Nusa Tenggara, she faced significant challenges in a society still skeptical of female leadership (Masykuroh, 2020). Nonetheless, her candidacy was framed as a symbol of women's political representation, with specific programs targeting homemakers and working women. This strategy contributed to building a strong political brand identity among targeted voter groups (Wulandari et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, candidate pair four, Ali and Sakti, were framed as generous and people-oriented figures. In contemporary Indonesian politics, being "close to the people" is often measured by a candidate's physical presence in communities and involvement in social activities. However, the sincerity of such generosity is frequently questioned. Local newspapers supported this narrative by including testimonies from religious and political figures, reinforcing the perception that their charitable acts had been ongoing long before the campaign. Endorsements from respected religious leaders, such as *Tuan Guru Haji* or *ustadz*, were especially impactful, as they were perceived as moral authorities guiding voters' political decisions (Sunata, 2022).

Overall, local media played a significant role in framing the character of leadership candidates through various approaches tailored to local issues and demographic contexts. Some candidates were framed as leaders who emphasized justice in regional development, presenting concrete proposals to balance infrastructure between underdeveloped areas and the provincial capital. Others employed ethnic and religious identity as a form of cultural and political strategy to build emotional connections with voters, aligning with the region's predominantly Muslim population and its strong adherence to traditional values.

In addition, the media highlighted intellectual credentials and policy continuity as key strengths, particularly in framing candidates with academic backgrounds and prior affiliations with former administrations. The presence of a female candidate

advocating for gender equality and women's political representation was also framed positively, signaling a progressive shift in local political discourse. Meanwhile, another pair of candidates were portrayed as charitable and close to the people, with media narratives reinforced by testimonies from religious leaders to emphasize their sincerity and long-standing community engagement.

These varied framing strategies demonstrate how local media shape public perceptions of candidate credibility and character during regional elections.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analyzed, local media played a significant role in framing the character of Governor and Deputy Governor candidates in West Nusa Tenggara, primarily shaping public perception. Each candidate pair was framed with an emphasis on specific characteristics, depending on their background, personal strengths, and the sociocultural context of the local electorate. The media did not merely transmit information but actively constructed narratives reinforcing specific images such as experienced leadership, religious devotion, intellectual credibility, or grassroots engagement. These framing patterns reveal that the media employed strategic approaches tailored to voter segments, thereby influencing public perception in a targeted manner. This suggests that character framing is a key element in local political contests that shapes voter attitudes and preferences toward competing candidates.

This study was guided by the aim of uncovering the meanings embedded in the discursive construction of local newspaper coverage, as outlined in the Introduction. Following a systematic analysis process, the findings presented in the Results and Discussion chapter strongly align with the study's initial objectives. This confirms that the chosen approach effectively captured the social realities constructed through media language and narrative, offering in-depth and meaningful insights.

The consistency between the research objectives and the final findings affirms the relevance of discourse-based approaches as a methodological tool for understanding how media constructs meaning within specific social contexts. This study opens opportunities for further research, either by expanding the scope of the media objects under analysis or by integrating complementary methods to achieve more comprehensive results.

From an applied perspective, this study's findings may serve as a reference for various stakeholders seeking to understand the role of media in shaping public perception. Moreover, this research can offer a foundation for strengthening critical media literacy and can inform the development of more responsible and context-sensitive communication strategies in the future.

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