Out There: Citizens, audiences and the mediatization of the 2004 Indonesian election

Philip Kitley

University of Wollongong, pkitley@uow.edu.au

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/artspapers

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons, and the Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
13 Out there

Citizens, audiences and the mediatization of the 2004 Indonesian election

Philip Kitley

This chapter proposes a new way of understanding Indonesia's citizen-audiences in the context of post-Suharto regime transformation and a fully commercialized media sector which penetrates every aspect of urban social and cultural life. The audience has been crucial to our understanding of communicative processes even if the shaping of radio and television technologies by the challenge of overcoming space tended to place more emphasis on the projection of messages rather than their reception (Shannon and Weaver 1949). In academic research on audiences, however, we can observe a gradual shift away from audiences as (vulnerable) objects of communication processes to ideas of the audience as active, differentiated interpreters (McQuail 1997).

Following the effective establishment of the Indonesian Republic in 1949, broadcasting came under the influence of American theory and scholars, particularly Wilbur Schramm who played a major role in introducing "development communications" and an interest in media effects to Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) and later Televisi Republik Indonesia (TVRI) (Chu et al. 1991). The development communications paradigm and associated ideas of the efficient transfer of socially transformative information was supported in Indonesia by the United Nations and became the official dogma of the Department of Information which was responsible for the expansion of state-sponsored radio and television services. The impulse to control audiences was strengthened by the "couplage" in 1965 which led to centralized control of RRI and the newly established television service.

The launch of the Palapa satellite in 1976 was another illustration of state authorities' desire to control communications - this time primarily for military purposes, but also for cultural and educational purposes. Palapa and its effects were the focus of the largest and most systematic audience research project in Indonesian communications (Chu et al. 1991). The study of the impact of Palapa on isolated villagers was conceptualized as a longitudinal "experiment" designed to measure the impact of television in viewers' daily lives from 1976 to 1982. Reading the researchers' description of their research questions, it is clear that the experiment was based on the fundamental assumption that television did things to people, and researchers wanted to know how it affected consumption, agricultural practices, adoption of socially transformative practices such as family planning, national language learning and the like. One question inquired into viewers' "use" of television, but there were no questions which expressed interest in what meanings viewers read out of programming, what bored them or what they enjoyed.

American doctoral student Victor Caldarola broke with the information model of development communications and focused on reception of television among Muslim Banjarese in a book-length ethnographic study (Caldarola 1990). In the early 1990s, I studied audience relations by examining fan letters viewers had sent in to TVRI about the popular children's program Si Unyil (Kitley 1997). A long-running ethnographic study of the integration and effects of television on a village community in south central Bali, directed by English anthropologist Mark Hobart in collaboration with I Made Bandem of the College of Performing Arts in Denpasar, has produced a wealth of recordings of TVRI arts performances for critical analysis and a developing literature focused on the reception of television (Hobart 1998, 1999, 2000; Hughes-Freeland 1999 [1977]; see also Nilan 2000).

In summary, then, audience research in Indonesia is underdeveloped, and the key research in the field by Indonesian authors reflects quantitative, survey research methods and theories of "vulnerable" or passive audiences which have come under critical scrutiny as theories of encoding/decoding (Hall 1980) and the "active viewer" were developed in a number of landscaping studies (Morley 1988; Ang 1985; Fiske 1989; Liebes and Katz 1990; Jhally and Lewis 1992).

The social and political conditions which had understanding of audiences as targets in a message or text transmission model began to break down in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The new commercial broadcasters tested the waters and began to segment the market, constructing fictions of the audiences and the "segments" their programming and channels supposedly appealed to. The year 1996 was a watershed in the political life of the New Order when an increasingly assertive and competitive commercial television market and print media exposed the brutality of the New Order in crushing student dissent and the popularity of the opposition political party PDI. Since the late 1980s - and later for television (see Sen and Hill 2000) - "the media" has assumed an increasingly central position in the lives of particularly urban Indonesians (ISAI 1997; van Dijk 2001).

The dam burst in 1998 with the resignation of Suharto and the unexpected cancellation of print media licensing requirements and the issue of many new television licenses. Within a few years, five more TV channels were on air, hundreds of new radio stations had been established, and the flood of new magazine titles seemed unstoppable. This media frenzy precipitated two understandable but contrary reactions - enthusiasm from democratically minded citizens who revelled in the longed-for freedom to buy, establish and view whatever they chose, while more politically active
middle-class associations endorsed freedom of information as a strategy in moving Indonesia away from the oppression of the New Order regime. But the changes were also greeted with apprehension by groups which saw the expanded media sector as threatening core national, cultural and religious values. These opposed reactions have combined to produce a new kind of audience in Indonesia, which I call the mobilized audience. "Mobilized" acknowledges the interpretive connotations of the active audience and the various relations viewers form with mediated content, but goes further to name audience relations that involve deliberate practices of answering back or engagement with content to re-frame and re-set representations which misrepresent or misrecognize the activities and values of the social movement. The mobilized audience is intent on reforming and redistributing media power in a contest over meaning.

The mobilized audience can be understood as a relation and a practice, one relation among many that makes up the complex and shifting character of audiencehood. Its forms have emerged from the specific political and media history of Indonesia and the belief that the media, its framing and representations matter, something which Indonesians share with many other societies where modern media saturate public communications (Gitlin 2002; Silverstone 1999). The mobilized audience is not confined to Indonesia, but it is likely to perform differently and for different reasons in other places. What is significant about the mobilized audience is that it is a way of performing audiencehood that is shared by a variety of different groups of citizens, the political public or civil society activists; conservative Islamists affronted by what they perceive as media excess; the man and woman on the street caught up in mass political activities such as electoral campaigns; and progressive Muslim teachers who look on the media as a mode of advancing society. The mobilized audience, that is to say, is not ideologically pre-determined as left or right: it is a range of relations and ways of behaving that are an outcome of what Gitlin describes as the torrent of mass-produced images and sounds in everyday life that is increasingly a "central element of our civilization" (Gitlin 2002: 118). The mobilized audience can be understood as a tactic of the (relatively) politically and commercially weak, a practice of behaving in a way that is primarily media-oriented, of playing and participating in the media game to complain, promote, critique or provoke media response about an issue or aspect of content that is central to the cultural politics of the affected group. It is a mode of tactically engaging with the cultural politics of representation by inserting the group's interests in the image flow (de Certeau 1984). It is a technology for answering back the media's tendency to subject audiences to its priorities, rhythms and frames.

The practices of the "active audience" are well known: viewers make sure they do not miss favorite shows by time-shifting and recording them for home viewing. They watch repeats and replay recorded episodes, sharing ideas about what the episodes mean to them. They send recordings to friends and share their pleasures. We incorporate images and sequences into our teaching and presentations. We talk about images we love or hate or are struck by. We track our favorite shows and stars through their resonances in magazines, chat shows and celebrity events. We display our interests by wearing our passions on T-shirts or dressing in the style made famous by the show/star/brand. We collect the spin-offs, listen to chat shows and sometimes "talkback." We immerse ourselves in the imaginary life of shows by textual poaching, conferencing and the websites that we create. But there are "as if" kinds of conversations because most of the time as audiences we cannot be heard and are not part of the production and circulation of mass media content flows. Because electronic media involve technologies, infrastructures, knowledge, protocols and capital that distance most viewers from directly answering back, audience behavior largely involves practices which map meaning away from the source of production and situate it in more or less private exchanges – with friends, colleagues, fan communities and a vague, virtually constructed "public" on the Web.

However, there are practices which do attempt a more direct engagement with the media as a site of the framing and representation of discourse. Gitlin's "jammers" answer back and deface/erase billboards, interrupt events at carefully chosen moments, demonstrate in the streets with an eye on maximum media exposure, hack into selected systems to wake them up or rip them off, and may even distribute their own videos to challenge and confront the value system and framing of social and political issues which they resist (Gitlin 2002: 153). There is an extensive literature on relations between social movements and the media which shows that social movements think carefully about their relations with mainstream media and the way their movement and its goals are represented (see Carroll and Ratner 1999, Jasper 1997).

By drawing attention to the mobilized (rather than the merely active) audience, we draw attention to practices which are consciously performed to re-set mass media representations of political and cultural discourses. This emphasis on the discursive activity involved directs attention to complex interactions between media producers and audiences. It foregrounds the discursive politics of recognition, of the way political and cultural actors see or want to see themselves, and moves away from a one-sided analysis of the relative "power" of the media and its effects on the audience.

The mobilized audience paradigm assumes that the mobilized audience is aware of and acknowledges media power and effects and responds in reflexive ways. It is a paradigm which draws together two traditions in media theory which have been held apart. We can say that the engagement of the audience is an effect of perceptions of the significance and signifying power of the media. The mobilized audience paradigm draws production and reception dynamics together, moving away from a dated and one-eyed focus on either an objectified, passive audience in thrall to the corrupting power of the media, or the semiotic power of the active audience, to an
understanding that audiences are relations formed around practices and content, and that the relations include all the familiar interpretive practices of the active audience and more besides—namely, activist practices which involve direct engagement with media production and circulation (Gillard 2002). In Indonesia in 2004, mobilized audiences performed across numerous sites. In this chapter, reference is limited to two empirical cases: the interaction between the election parades in the Jakarta streets and the media and, second, the work of non-government organizations collected together under the banner of "The Media Coalition" (Koalisi Media).

Pawai as mobilized audience

Grossberg has argued that "we need ... not a theory of audiences, but a theory of the organization and possibilities of agency at specific sites in every day life" (Grossberg 1997: 341). Here Grossberg uses a spatial metaphor in talking about audiences and their agency. In what follows I explore the dispersal of the performance of audiencehood across specific spaces in Jakarta and the projection and representation of that performance in the media. I suggest that one is inherent in the other; that the compatriot or the performance of the audience for the media derives from and is directed to its representation on the media. "Being with the media," as Gittins (2002) writes, is something that has grown over time in Indonesia and other places. It operates at a pre-verbal level like many social practices, and it is not "scripted" so much as recalled from past traditions of parading, renewed and adapted from audience experiences and visual practices that audiences see played out every day across a wide variety of settings (such as sport, politics and national events) at home and internationally. The media circulating a vocabulary of gestures and modes of comportment in public which can be taken up and adapted as required. For instance, the huge street marches in Taipei in September 2006 took the Roman emperors' "thumbs down" as their visual signifier as men and women and children of all ages paraded in the streets, gesturing that Chen Shui-Bian "should go." Even at night, aware that it would be better television if the thumbs down could still be seen, the marchers used small torches and swift, downward gestures to show they were not letting up. The visibility of performance is embodied, often creative and draws in viewers of all ages. Young children riding with their parents on bikes and trucks do not remember the election of five years ago. They have learned or imitated the party victory signs at the pre-verbal stage, just as they learn the gestures of prayer. RCTI's evening program Sepatu Indonesia on 16 March 2004 showed a father cradling a sleeping child in his arms, waking him and prompting him to wave at the camera when the lens swung in their direction. Children learn from and imitate their parade group, but they also learn from watching themselves and others performing on television and on the streets. It is a recursive, mutually reinforcing set of competencies.

In the Indonesian national election campaign which ran from 11 March to 1 April 2004, political parties were scheduled time and space for public meetings and drive-by publicity where their colors, symbols, logos and, most importantly, their supporters displayed themselves in cities and towns across the archipelago. In Jakarta the parties were allocated parade time on the so-called "jalan protokol," the main arteries of the city. Protokol, an Indonesian word with Dutch roots, is a signifier closely linked to officially approved modes of comportment and urban segregation. The jalan protokol impose and map a grid of power across urban space, channeling the powerful and favored few across the city to centers of influence—banks, five-star hotels, embassies, government departments, national monuments and selected signs of modernity. Turning the streets over to political parties even for the month-long "carnival of democracy" destabilized the protocols of power relations. The twenty-four parties and frequent parades called into question and fragmented the very notion that there was a unitary or agreed protocol, and heralded a political society where the forms of participation are not necessarily consistent with narrowly rationalist forms and principles of association in civic society (Chatterjee 1997: 32).

The street parades or pawai that I observed in 2004 were wonderfully colorful, very noisy and frequently playful. The parades have probably grown out of the long, ramai (crowded, exciting) foot marches to election venues in 1955 that Feith (1957: 22) describes, and the much more static mass rallies that were part of the first election in the New Order period on 3 July 1971. Ward's (1974) description of the election campaign which began on 27 April 1971 in East Java gives us an impression of mass meetings and set pieces managed by party officials. Golkar introduced something new with its "Safari"—teams of twenty or more popular singers and dancers from Jakarta who traveled to almost every province to entertain electors. In Surabaya, the Safari trucked supporters through the city before performing in the Gelora stadium (Ward 1974: 86). Less well resourced parties convened mass meetings which were lively affairs, but there is no indication that the crowds contributed to the event in any other way than just by being there. The spontaneity of mass gatherings of groups, often of unknown affiliations, drawn together under the banner of only newly organized political parties was much harder to achieve in 1971, so soon after the terror of 1965-6.

Descriptions of 1977 election parades are limited, but black-and-white news photographs from Jakarta show that the parades were much more pedestrian, in multiple senses of that term, than 2004, reflecting a time when Japanese motorbikes were rare rather than swarming, the pressure of population in Jakarta was not as great, and the possibility of spontaneous participation in street politics was scary rather than fun (Nas and Pratowo 2003). Just as Feith noted for the 1955 ballot day, when voters turned out in "good clothes," in 1977 participants wore their own street clothes and paraded on foot, carrying oversized puppet-like figures (onel onel) and danced with
hobby horses (kuda kepang) (Feith 1957). The spatial impact of the parades was understandably limited to the Monas area, reflecting the history of that area as a revolutionary space and the limited transport of ordinary folk in the 1970s (Kompas, 31 March 1977: 4). Walking the Jakarta streets is a hot and tiring process.

Significantly, the media were part of these earliest parades in the sense that media personalities such as H. Oma Irmana, Harry Roessli, Bemyamin, Isak, Kris Biantoro and Ateng were recruited to liven things up (Kompas, 7 April 1977: 1). The 1955 Safari tradition, it seems, had taken root. However, the parade stood little chance of seeing itself reflected back through the media – even if someone owned a television set, and very few did. The sole television channel TVRI limited its coverage to three fifteen-minute scripted addresses by party leaders during the campaign. Visual confirmation or mirroring of popular participation was limited to black-and-white photographs in newspapers, which were relatively expensive and read and seen by only a minority. The print and electronic media might have "covered" the parades, but could not – for a range of technical, economic and policy reasons – provide a means or site for any kind of interactive, reflexive witness or construction of the public's political identity. That was to come later.

Over time news photographs reveal an increasingly visual, performative and internationally mediated style to the election parades that now seem dated, but were no doubt exciting and emotionally powerful for participants at the time. In 2004, politics and the media were mapped over each other, exemplified best perhaps by PAN leader Amien Rais taking the stage with rock group Fia, borrowing a guitar and pretending he was a rock star to the delight of the Yogyakarta crowd (Suara Pembaruan, 15 March 2004). A cartoon in Kompas played on the risky meshing of politics and rock, showing a candidate left alone with no one to talk to once the rock group had moved on to provide entertainment for another party (Kompas, 29 March 2004). In the 1987 parade, young men shaved their heads to display party logos (Kompas, 5 April 1987: 2). In 2004, however, the body painting and hair color of young campaigners was far more playful and inventive. Some young men turned their torsos into roving billboards, displaying messages such as "An informal vote is just" (Golput Adil). For some, body art went beyond a display of party logos and messages to a performative and visual style that was abstract and highly creative, while others drew on international tropes such as punk and Spiderman ( Tempo, 11 April 2004: 30).

In 2004, the parades had assumed an intensely visual and performative style. Urban spaces had been transformed for the campaign. Jakarta had shed its skin and shone with a bewildering variety of posters, slogans, cartoons, billboards and flags that brightened bus shelters and kampung walls. Verbal slogans played almost no part in the pawai look and practices. Far more important, as we might expect in the days of eleven color TV channels, were the atribut – the colors and logos of the twenty-four parties in contention.

Everyone had become a jockey, resplendent in their party's colors, all racing up and down Jakarta and other cities' streets in a political carnival. Participants rode a wild variety of vehicles, most numerously motorbikes with streaming flags and open mufflers. Others crowded into trucks sometimes got up as party symbols such as the buffalo of the PDIP, or the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle, whose staring eyes and long horns added sculptural flair to the passing parade. Red- and black-painted trucks parading as buffalos were accompanied by a herd of smaller horned riders, noisily keeping up or speeding past the master symbol of the day's parade. Oversize photographs of party leaders such as Megawati (PDIP), Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono (known as SBY; PD) and Amien Rais (PAN) were camera-friendly and extended the parties' advertising reach beyond the ten thirty-second spots per day the Election Commission specified.3 Riders on bikes and in trucks looked for the video camera along every stretch of the journey, breaking into smiles, flashing their party's number code with upraised fingers, pointing to their T-shirt logos and portraits, calling out to their imagined audiences, and swooning just to get on screen as they drove past the TV crews (TV 2004).

The Peace and Welfare Party chose to differentiate itself from the over-the-top display of their rivals, and mounted parades of colorful but sedate party supporters who made a great show of being courteous to other drivers, not breaking the road rules or messing up the streets by throwing water bottles, flags or other paraphernalia around. Their visual style participated in the whole phenomenon, and only made sense as a representative tactic in the semiotic excess of the pawai by being visually and semantically different.

At the end of each party's campaign time, the pawai ended up in mass gatherings in open spaces such as the Senayan stadium. The PDIP show that I saw turned the arena into a sea of red, across which huge banniers hung down, turning slowly in the heat and water sprays which drenched people on the track but did nothing for those sweltering in the stands. A dangdut4 stage was set up and the bands played to an enthusiastic crowd dancing down in front, begging the hose chief to douse them again so they could keep on dancing. After a while the only space seats in the stadium near the VIP box, were taken over by Megawati, who smiled and waved, said things that no one could hear, and departed with cheering ringing in her ears. Once again, speeches were out of the question; it was just a matter of being there, of the leader taking place in the huge sprawl of the party presence. She and her retinue were the signature authenticating the PDIP canvas that covered the stadium track and seating, the surrounding spaces where many parades cooled down under shady trees and the long line of riders still making their way along Jalan Sudirman before they turned into the Gelora Bung Karno, where her father had spoken many times.

The visual impact and the performative style of the campaign over time and space depended, then, on visual awareness, memory and its production
almost day by day as organizers, paraders and the media looped themselves together, especially on television whose news bulletins re-presented, commented on and boosted the parades for participants and the general audience to watch – over and over again. Interviews recorded for television brought the experience of being on camera right into the audience’s space. Recording in the open jostle of the parades and meetings meant that interviewees were surrounded by microphones and cameras. When the interviews were broadcast later, many of the lenses appeared to focus directly on the audience, creating a sense for the audience of being continuously on show (RCTI, Saptar Indoneisa, 16 March 2004).

The Indonesian word *pawai* may be translated as “parade” but the traditional connotations of the word are lost in the English term, which signifies ostentatious display and military ceremonial. *Pawai* signifies linear organization, one thing following another, but a *pawai* is also a cultural practice associated with a joyful coming together, a desire to accompany, witness and join in an activity such as a ritual chant, wedding procession and the like. *Pawai* is inscribed, that is to say, with a sense of fun, of getting out and enjoying something that participants have in common. This sense of something publicly shared is the important subtext of the argument below, that in 2004 the election campaign opened up increased opportunities for citizens to display and witness their part in the expanding space of democratization. It is best understood not simply as an irrational, emotional excess but, acknowledging the multiple satisfactions of public participation, as a desire to welcome and share in emerging freedoms in ways that drew on and were inspired by long-established cultural practices (Jasper 1997: 84). It was not the first time that this had happened. In 1999, there was a tangible sense of sharing rather than rivalry in the *pawai* activities that crisscrossed Jakarta and other cities. Anyone who participated in the huge gathering of PCIP in front of the Hotel Indonesia in the last days of the campaign was aware of the space that the crowd made for itself, accommodating thousands of fellow citizens without stress or violence, and seemingly without pushing and shoving. In 2004, the atmosphere was similar, but more orchestrated for the media, which had learned from the excitement generated by public enthusiasm for the 1999 election, and scheduled an extensive range of news, comment and talk shows focused on the election. It is tempting, especially given the local press’s use of “*karnaval*” (*Media Indonesia, 11 March 2003; Koran Tempo, 11 March 2003*), to interpret the *pawai* as carnival, drawing on ideas of street parades as a “safety valve”, or Bakhthin’s (1968) analysis of the upside-down logic of street ritual. But the notion of the carnival has historical and cultural associations that are a long way away from Indonesian *pawai*. As well, the critical inverting play that is part of European carnival is missing from the Indonesian *pawai*. In my view, the playfulness and roundness are closer to indigenous celebratory practices of *pawai*, and have gained over time their sense of scale and visual style from their imbrications with the camera and television. The election parades are not liminal performances or rituals of rebellion (Turner 1969; Gluckman 1965), but are political rituals that are essentially consensual and closer to Durkheim’s “effervescence assembly” (Durkheim 1965).

From day one of the election campaign in 2004, one “live,” embodied performance and two more textual performances clashed in the streets, public and imaginary spaces of Jakarta. In the shifting power relations of post-*reformasi* (reform) Indonesia, there was clearly an anxiety about representations of the public in the streets. The political disparagement of the Indonesian masses as too erratic and ignorant to be involved in politics except briefly for the purposes of (highly manipulated) national electoral campaigns has a long history that goes back to elite ideas that the common people were unequipped and easily led. The mass was reconstituted in a persistent, reverberating discourse about the mindless superficiality of the public and the way the noisy and noisome parade of party supporters took over the streets, turning hot tracks of asphalt into ribbons of channelled fun, community and color.

Thus the parades were built around their dispersal across two spatial orders: urban space – the streets, stadiums, halls and sports fields drawn into the campaign – and the ramifying spaces of television, radio and the print media which flicked back and forth across the archipelago, both drawing together and dispersing the political public across the nation. Technologies of satellite news gathering and digital communication patched together parades in Medan and Palembang with parades in Bali and beyond, focusing on the color, the eddies and the noise of display politics. On 16 April, for example, TVRI’s Election Segment showed snatches of election parades and meetings of five different parties in Batam, Lampung, Ambon, Balikpapan, Jember and Kediri in East Jakarta. Later that evening, viewers were shown *pawai* in NTT, the province east of Bali, Golkar’s campaign in South Sumatra, party followers dancing at a PPP rally in Batam, a speech in an indoor venue in Jakarta and a meeting in Sleman, Yogyakarta.

The celebration and enthusiasm of the visual coverage was often underscored with commentary which deplored the unruliness of the parades, reading the participation as campaign mercenaries, in it for a few thousand rupiah and a T-shirt, undisciplined and reckless in the way they included their young children in the action on the streets, and insinuating in the way they enthusiastically boosted one party one day and another party the next (*Media Indonesia, 15 March 2004; Koran Tempo, 12 March 2004*). The commentary denigrated the media-consciousness of the crowds, and was irritated by and simultaneously aware of the media-savvy public’s obvious understanding of the image-value of their banners, face paint, masks, rau-cous exhausts and playful tossing around of bottles of drinking water. Alois Agus Nugroho from Atma Jaya Catholic University argued that the 2004 campaigns, despite being supposedly modern, were still “culturally primitive,” and that the masses were far more interested in the hurl-by
of the parades than studying the vision of electoral candidates (Koranas, 25 March 2004). PAN candidate Sjaifoch Tanjung discovered this truth the hard way when he asked a small crowd gathered in a sports hall in South Jakarta “Why are you here?” and got the answer “We don’t know!” (Jakarta Post, 16 March 2004). Communications scholar Eftendri Ghaizati was equally dispirited, saying that the effort parties went to in putting their flags and banners everywhere they could showed a very old-fashioned understanding of what it took to win an election (Koranas, 25 March 2004). But when the streets were relatively empty of supporters, onlookers or both, the media deployed the public’s “passivity” and lack of interest in democratic process (Media Indonesia, 12 March 2004; Republika, 27 March 2004).

For the whole month, media representations tracked back and forth between the perceived excess of the parades and claims about public apathy on those occasions when a crowd failed to turn up for a candidate’s speech, or turned out in smaller numbers than expected. At times commentators grudgingly admitted that the public’s lack of interest in so-called inside events was understandable, given the emptiness of politicians’ speeches and their poor communication skills. Thus we can understand the pawai and the media as co-dependents, each in a way the audience of and for the other, each using the other and each schooled by the other in their publicity and image-conscious practices. More significantly, the conflicted discourse registers the dismay and displacement of the elite and new protocols of representation which a far more inclusive public – men, women and children together – has taken hold of and used to reassert their presence, electoral power and pleasure in recognizing and displaying their identity as part of reformasi in a way that was hardly imaginable during the New Order when the streets were often “spaces of fear and discipline” (Abidin Kusno 2000).

The injustice of alienating citizens from the public spaces of their cities and of designating the form of public participation by stereotypically describing the behavior of pawai and rallies as the mindless behavior of the unenlightened mass is an example of what Fraser calls cultural or symbolic injustice: “being routinely maligned and disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions” (Fraser 1995: 71). The public’s desire for due recognition and their portrayal as a range of parties is best understood as a sign of their interest in being recognized as integral to the whole democratic process rather than as indifference or lack of understanding of the politics of representation. The pawai is an activity of political society that depends on media processes, just as much as the powerful elites of civic society depend on press conferences, expert opinion and current affairs shows. As James Jasper puts it, “participating in important historical events, the kind that are reported on the evening news, is a … profound satisfaction” (Jasper 1997: 82). For Indonesians, this attitude about elections dates back to their first experience of elections, but its form has shifted over time. Feith records that in the first election of 1955, voters felt part of the symbolic construction of the nation and “a sense of participation in greatness” (Feith 1962: 431).

The street parades were involved in the polities of recognition in a way that exhibited the political significance of “the public” as much as the expanded array of political parties. In taking over the streets and using the presentation modes learned from watching sports crowds and globalized media events, political society re-set the parameters of recognition, resisting the elitist discourses of the civic society to exhibit the political significance of the population, the people, the public and their modern forms of political association such as parties (Chatterjee 1997).

**Media watch as a mobilized audience**

In 1999 four friends with different but well-developed media skills were determined to intervene in the first “free election” since the 1950s (Antlov and Codenroth 2004: 5). Their objective was modest enough; they simply wanted to remind citizens that the 1999 election presented an opportunity for self-reflection and autonomous decision-making about political representation. The result of their optimism and passion was the “working group” Vsi Anak Bangsa (VAB) (The Citizens’ Perspective) and a series of public service advertisements on television which captured the mood of the time perfectly. They were immediately popular and the source of tag phrases and regionally inflected ways of insisting that violence must stop and that “we are all entitled to our own political opinions.” Five years on, one of VAB’s punchlines “aku beda, boleh ‘kari’” (“I can have a different view, can’t I?”) still resonated in a large display advertisement on metropolitan buses. It showed a colored T-shirt amid a string of black-and-white T-shirts on a washing line and carried the caption: “Differences are normal” (Beda itu Biasa).

In 2004, VAB and the Institut Studi Arus Informasi (ISAI) (Institute for the Study of the Flow of Information) formed an umbrella organization, the Media Coalition (Koalisi Media), and divided their grant funds among the eleven other groups included in the coalition. All these groups distinguished themselves by intervening in some way in the mediatization of the 2004 election. Here, the focus is on the activities of ISAI as part of a mobilized audience. This analysis of ISAI’s activities in 2004 – and analysis of those activities in terms of a mobilized audience – contributes to theorization of democratization processes through an investigation of micro-level activities which, taken together, can be understood as scaffolding larger patterns of change.

As Ariel Heryanto has argued, “a democratic transition in post-colonies is effective when democratization-friendly consciousness, ideas, practices and institutions have already found fertile ground in various forms” (Heryanto 2003: 25). The activities of ISAI and related media-engaged
organizations are part of the fertile ground Heriyanto writes of. Taken together, the activities of civil society organizations such as ISAI, VAB, Internews, the Indonesian Media Law and Policy Centre (IMLPC), Alliansi Jurnalis Independen (AJI) (Alliance of Independent Journalists), and many more have signaled reformist principles and practices characteristic of a responsible and more socially responsive media sector in Indonesia. My concern here is to show how the concept of the mobilized audience may be productive in understanding the historical specificities and deeper cultural dynamics of Indonesians’ experience of living with the media.

In 2004, ISAI adopted a media monitor role focused on checking television stations’ compliance with the regulations agreed between the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) and TV stations in February 2004. In 2004, TV stations were restricted to screening one five-minute party political “monologue” for each party and ten thirty-second spot ads per day free of charge for each party throughout the campaign. Parties could book and pay for additional ads, but the high cost of political advertising on TV (since the Commission insisted that commercial rates must be charged) deterred all but the four financially strong parties from significant TV advertising campaigns (Prospektif, 22-28 March 2004: 10-29).

In crowded premises at 6SH Utan Kayu Street, ISAI established a monitoring program which involved visual coding of public service advertisements, party political spots, free-of-charge party political monologues, blocking time and sponsorship arrangements. The results of the monitoring were released fortuitously during the campaign in press conferences where data handouts were distributed. These press conferences were unexpectedly lively, given the rather dull material that was reported.

The infringements that ISAI documented became the focus of television news items, talk show comment, newspaper reports and payback press conferences where the television channels sought to rebut the charges that they had infringed regulations concerning advertising. The charges about media infringements fed into a disciplinary discourse of campaign misdemeanors that was a feature of the campaign from its outset. Suara Pembaruan’s headline “The First Day of the Campaign Colored by Violations” was typical (11 March 2004). Koran Tempo went further and outlined the 286 violations that police registered on day one of the campaign (13 March 2004). The detailed reporting of violations across the nation was maintained in all major dailies right up to the end of the campaign. Actual violations were underscored with articles about what was lacking in the campaign, absence operating discursively as powerfully as actual infringements in signifying problems with the campaign process. Newspaper headlines such as “Campaign Dialogue Quiet” (Kampanye Sepi Dialog, Koran Tempo, 25 March 2004) and “Campaign Dialogue So Far Uneducational” (Kampanye Diologis Belum Mendidik, Suara Pembaruan, 18 March 2004) lamented unsuccessful debates and meetings between candidates and the public; the empty meeting halls implicitly reminding us of the crowded, lively parades, reinforcing and circulating a view that the public was either not ready or incapable of rational debate, and was most comfortable with the mindless carnival of the parades (Media Indonesia, 11 March; Koran Tempo, 11 March; Kompas, 25 March).

ISAI’s claims about media organizations’ violations may be read as an intervention into this discourse of democratic immaturity. ISAI’s audience activity destabilized the power relations inscribed in the discourse and charged elite institutions with the same irresponsible behavior that the public was accused of daily. ISAI’s professional mode in press conferences, where it displayed TV stations’ minor infringements in complicated-looking tables, talked about their methodology and cheekily announced the results of its analysis of the “Ten best news reports about the election” for the fortnight, re-framed the discourse of the public’s unreadiness for democratic processes and branded elite institutions with the same faults. Television channels were drawn on to the same ground in defending themselves: in denying their infringements of the rules, they committed themselves to the regulatory environment and responsible management of their programming which was ISAI’s larger agenda.

I have argued above that specific historical and political circumstances shaped the public’s performance of claiming the streets in the election parades. This is equally true of ISAI and its activities, even though a different social dynamic was at work in the politics of ISAI’s mobilized audience activities. ISAI was founded in 1994 by a group of well-known media figures as a protest against the summary banning in June 1994 of the respected but critical weekly Tempo and Editor, as well as the tabloid Detik (Heriyanto 1996). ISAI’s monitoring activities and their citations of the ten best news stories can be understood as one of the “novel ventures” which Heriyanto considers marked middle-class activism following the media bans in 1994 (Heriyanto 2003: 43). Certainly the founders of ISAI were middle-class, public intellectuals, and the personnel who managed the day-to-day activities of ISAI were also middle-class, though less well known than the founders. Most ISAI managers were tertiary educated, and many had had experience as journalists. Heriyanto argues that the media industry networks that organizations such as ISAI could draw on contributed fundamentally to the persistence, high public profile and effectiveness of a range of causes pursued by intellectuals after 1994 (Heriyanto 2003: 41). “Novel ventures” such as litigation against state authorities, the establishment of an independent professional journalists’ association (AJI), the creation of Indonesia’s first independent election monitoring body and a general emphasis by civil society organizations on public education about democratic processes and principles of good governance all benefited greatly from media literacies and a clear understanding of the role of the media.

An industrialized media sector reflects and fits into an increasingly globalized circulation of information and media properties. It is also subject to a broader scrutiny and is drawn into transnational regulatory regimes
that serve the interests of multinational media corporations, but can also serve the interests of groups working for greater accountability in media activities. The monitoring activities of ISA and similar groups in Indonesia are part of a global concern with media practices and draw on best practice and norms of professionalism that are articulated widely in democratic countries and aspiring democracies across the world. What this suggests is that audience research which examines the activities of mobilized audiences in specific circumstances can reveal local events and practices to be as reflection of wider cultural, economic and political processes.

ISA’s mobilized audience role is consistent, then, with its origins in the media. Just as tactics in challenging mainstream media using well-established, almost routine practices of monitoring and press conferences can be understood as the reflexive behavior of media organizations which see their role as contributing to the maintenance of a media environment characterized by principles of freedom of information, respect for public accountability and high standards of journalistic practice. ISA’s mobilized audience activities are closer to conventional audience practices than the parades which can be understood as an exhibitionist mode of comportment derived from and shaped by living with the media. ISA’s audience practice is more textual, an outcome of close reading with a specific audience function or role in mind. It is a process of surveillance, where citizens perform the disciplining function which, following Foucault, we usually link to centers of power (Foucault 1977). In its mobilized audience role, ISA appropriated the social shaping effects of the media and the disciplinary discourse of campaign violations. It turned the technologies of surveillance back on to the media, adopting the iconic forms and tactics of confrontation which have often been the focus of ideological critique. ISA uses these public processes and critique quite consciously to disconcert mainstream media channels, publicize their own monitoring practices as a technology of truth, and re-assert the citizen function rather than the commercial function of the media.

The mobilized audience practices described are not limited to concerns over electoral matters. In April 2004, the Aceh News Watch sector of ISA convened a public seminar and press conference with the title “The forgotten war in Aceh.” Speakers discussed difficulties of covering the war and subjected newspaper and television organizations to close scrutiny, arguing that they had taken the easy way out in giving most attention to the election and needed to review their tendency to simplify and sensationalize the war. Close reading and public critique of media was performed by other groups with a similar interest in a socially conscious media environment. The Indonesian Survey Organization (Lembaga Survei Indonesia or LSI) convened an interactive dialogue with Radio Delta on 26 March 2004, at which it invited Radio Delta’s audience to phone in their concerns with media coverage during the election. Despite technical problems associated with broadcasting from a noisy meeting room in the Sari Pan Pacific Hotel, LSI’s approach organized audience relations around the dominant media discourse and media bias, and re-framed analysis of voter behavior by presenting its careful analysis against the often glib and uninformed assumptions of television talk shows.

The varied audience relations briefly outlined here, situated along a continuum of more or less direct engagement with media texts and production practices, can be understood as part of the “novel ventures” challenging authoritarianism that Heryanto (2003) has described. The ventures are a product of a more competitive and varied market for information, the collapse of corporatist restrictions on journalism practices, lower overheads and the greater flexibility of digital cameras. All these have facilitated the entry of organizations with limited capital, have mobilized audience practices and have challenged mainstream media organizations’ capacity to imagine and position their audiences as passive, compliant viewers. Audience research focused on the mobile engagement of audiences with media processes may contribute significantly to understanding the dynamics of social activism and changing forms of cultural critique which often involve and are dependent on recursive or reflexive involvement with the media industry.

Future directions for audience research

My discussion of the concept of the mobilized audience in Indonesia in 2004 is an argument that research should not focus so much on specific moments of audience relations with particular texts, but register and investigate the cultural significance of the shift from a time when television was most Indonesian a communal, once-a-week event to a time when television sets are “everywhere,” in villages and urban households, in restaurants, workplaces, inter-city buses and inter-island ferries. While not discounting text and site specific (at home viewing) audience research (McCarthy 2001: 117), working with an amplified sense of audiencehood and looking for and acknowledging a range of audience practices that derive from and are informed by living with the media will be productive of a culturally and politically informed understanding of the effects and cultural significance of the media in contemporary Indonesians’ lives. As the national television system breaks up into a system of local and regional networks, this approach will enrich our understanding of audiences and audience practices as Indonesians across the nation are increasingly implicated in a reality where the media acts as an important cultural frame and as a site and means for realizing their aspirations.

In the post-Suharto period, there is clearly much more scope for audiences to interact with media producers. The media is a greatly expanded sector at all levels, the highly controlling Department of Information is no more (although a new department, the Ministry of Communication and Information, has been established with more limited powers), there is a progressive Press Act, and interactivity between producers and their audiences is greater than it ever was. Much of the interactivity, however, is still on
the terms of the media industry. The dial-in quiz shows, phone-in polling and so on, wrap audiences into the genres, rhythms and commercial agendas of media producers. While we can see the panwai as a mobilized audience activity that is more independent of the media, in the end panwai is performance and display largely structured by media processes. There is, however, some symbiosis here: both are co-dependent and need each other in the construction of the media event. The activities of ISAi and like-minded groups are more interventionist and more constitutive in re-shaping media and cultural relations. Their activities are shaped, however, in reaction to the initiatives of the media sector and depend on inserting themselves into the flow which is managed by the industry. Civil society groups such as ISAi have been very successful in this form of intervention, as has been shown. They are about what they do and have the media skills and contacts to make their interventions work effectively. But their opportunities for more extended, less reactive contributions to public debate are constrained by the commercial imperatives of the media industry, a strong commercial television producers' lobby and a newly established regulatory authority, the Indonesian Broadcasting Commission (IMLPC 2003a). A further dragging by the authorities is that the media sector and media-society relations in Indonesia are not yet entirely "post-Suharto" despite the many changes that have occurred. This investigation of the mobilized audience, understood as relations of interactivity that go beyond a limited understanding of reception, reveals practices of accommodation, intervention and resistance still marked and shaped by official and private sector impatience with public processes of debate and participation in political and cultural life that have the fingerprints of the New Order all over them.

Notes

1. Research for this chapter was supported by Australian Research Council Discovery Grant DP0343059.
2. I observed street parades in Jakarta, Palembang and Medan. The visual style and patterns of behaviour were generally consistent, reinforcing my argument that the panwai has shifted from a traditional cultural practice to a pattern of participation that reflects a cultural and political heritage and contemporary, global, modes of media performance and representation.
3. Partai Demokrasi Indonesia Perjuangan (PDI-P) is the Indonesian Democratic Party for Struggle; PD is the Democratic Party; and PAN is the National Mandate Party.
4. A popular music genre.
5. Apart from items in news bulletins, election programs included: TVRI's Gembira Pancit (Election Glance), Kampanyee Dialogues (Campaign Discussion) and Debat Parpol (Political Party Debate); TransTV's Kilas Pancit (Election Brief); MetroTV's Pontas Kandidat (Candidates on Show); and, SCTV's Liputan Pancit Terkini (The Latest Election Report).

Bibliography
