

Indonesian Press Freedom during the New Order Period (1966-1998)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of press freedom in Indonesia during the New Order period (1966–1998) and identifies factors influencing its fluctuations. Using historical methods with a qualitative approach, this research draws on press statistics and literature studies. The New Order government initially established control through mass purges of communist-affiliated press and a strict licensing system. In the early 1970s, the press enjoyed relative openness in criticizing policies, but this ended after the 1974 Malari Incident, which led to twelve media closures. The regime subsequently reinforced control through a corporatist approach and “telephone culture,” which institutionalized self-censorship. The 1980s marked the press’s shift from a tool of struggle to a commercial enterprise, characterized by media conglomerates and Suharto’s family involvement. In the 1990s, press courage reemerged with coverage of the 1991 Santa Cruz Tragedy, while the 1994 banning of Tempo, Editor, and Detik triggered widespread resistance and the birth of the Alliance of Independent Journalists, enabling the press to freely criticize the government by the regime’s end.

Keywords: Authoritarianism; Freedom of Press; New Order; Press Resistance; State Control.

INTRODUCTION

The press holds a strategic role in democratic political systems as the fourth pillar of power, functioning to control government conduct and voice public aspirations (McQuail, 2010). However, press-state relations are often antagonistic, particularly under authoritarian regimes, where the state employs legal instruments and coercive power to limit press freedom while the

press strives to maintain its critical independence (Downing, 1996). Indonesia during the New Order period (1966–1998) exemplifies how authoritarian regimes manage and control information flow.

Under Suharto's leadership, the press occupied a paradoxical position: constitutionally guaranteed freedom under the 1945 Constitution, yet practically bound by a repressive licensing system (*Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers*) and subject to extrajudicial repression (Sen & Hill, 2007). Throughout its 32-year rule, the New Order recorded multiple episodes of press repression: mass purges after the 1965 coup, suppression following the 1974 Malari Incident, student press closures in 1978, and the banning of Sinar Harapan (1986) and Prioritas (1987). The peak occurred on June 21, 1994, when Tempo, Editor, and Detik were simultaneously banned for reporting sensitive issues, including cabinet conflicts and the Suharto family's business interests (Efendi, 2020). Conversely, the period also witnessed significant press industry transformation, commercialization, media conglomerate emergence, and increasing press courage in covering events like the 1991 Santa Cruz Massacre, demonstrating new spaces for press agency amidst state pressure (Sen & Hill, 2007).

These dynamics reveal that state-press interaction was not static but resulted from a complex interplay between state political interests, market logic, and civil society pressure. While several scholars have studied this period, critical research gaps remain. First, Yuzril Fadhil Muhammad et al. (2026) examined media transformation from ideological tools to commercial commodities but offered limited in-depth analysis of the print press. Second, Erman Anom (2026) focused on post-1998 media as an arena for power competition, treating the New Order only as background. Third, Muhammad Muslimin et al. (2025) explored press freedom transition but lacked depth on the early and middle New Order periods. Fourth, Justito Adiprasetio (2025) provided strong case analysis of the 1994 Tempo banning but offered no comprehensive picture across the regime. Fifth, Yohanes Widodo et al. (2024) analyzed institutional control instruments but neglected press agency and external market or civil society pressures. Thus, existing research tends to focus on specific periods or cases, views the press as a passive object of state power, and lacks systematic periodization of press freedom characteristics.

This research addresses these gaps through three contributions: (1) A periodic analysis of press freedom divided into six phases (1966–1970, 1970–1974, 1975–1979, 1980–1990, 1991–1997, 1997–1998); (2) Identification of factors influencing press freedom changes in each phase, and; (3) Emphasis on press agency in responding to and adapting to state pressure. Accordingly, this study aims to: (1) Describe and periodically analyze press freedom development during the New Order (1966–1998), and; (2) Identify the factors that influenced its dynamics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a tripartite theoretical framework combining Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory, media authoritarianism theory, and the concept of resistance in media studies to capture the complex dynamics of press freedom during the New Order period. Antonio Gramsci's (1992) concept of hegemony provides a foundation for understanding how the New Order regime created ideological dominance through media control. Gramsci argued that hegemony operates not only through physical repression but also through consensus formation via civic institutions such as media, education, and religion. In the New Order context, the "Pancasila press" doctrine represented the state's effort to establish ideological hegemony by legitimizing

Pancasila as the sole official ideology while marginalizing alternative discourses (Hamson, 2022). The mass media, including the press, served as a crucial instrument in this process, functioning to shape public opinion and internalize state values. However, Gramsci also emphasized that hegemony is never total; there is always space for counter-hegemonic practices, evident in the press's persistent efforts to voice criticism within strict boundaries (Sen & Hill, 2007).

Fred Siebert et al.'s (1956) theory of media authoritarianism, later expanded by Denis McQuail (2010) and John D. H. Downing (1996), provides a framework for analyzing the state's concrete instruments of media control. In authoritarian systems, media functions as a state instrument to maintain power and suppress opposition through censorship, licensing, and threats of violence. In the Indonesian context, the Press Publishing Business License (*Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers*), the practice of banning, and the phenomenon of "telephone culture" exemplify authoritarian control mechanisms. However, this theory also recognizes that media in authoritarian systems are not entirely passive; they can exploit loopholes to convey criticism, particularly during elite divisions or when economic pressures push toward liberalization (McQuail, 2010). The press's shift toward commercialization in the 1980s, for instance, created tensions with state control, reflecting this theoretical insight.

James C. Scott's (1985) and John Fiske's (1989) concepts of resistance enrich this framework by highlighting press agencies' and civil society's active roles. Scott argues that subordinate groups are never completely passive; they create "arts of resistance" through hidden tactics such as satire, rumors, and critical reading of dominant discourse. In the New Order press context, these resistance forms manifested through figurative language, satirical writing, and strategic exploitation of regulatory loopholes to voice public aspirations (Sen & Hill, 2007). Fiske adds that resistance can also emerge through critical media consumption, where readers actively interpret and reject dominant messages. This perspective is vital as it positions the press and public not as passive objects of state power but as active agents responding to and negotiating meaning (Tapsell, 2017).

METHOD

This study employs historical methods with a qualitative approach to analyze press freedom dynamics during the New Order period (1966–1998). The historical method was selected for its capacity to systematically reconstruct and interpret past events based on available historical sources (Gottschalk, 1969; Yuwono et al., 2025), while the qualitative approach enables deep understanding of meanings, interpretations, and socio-political contexts behind press-related events (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Denzin, 2009). This research follows the four canonical stages of historical method: heuristic (source collection), source criticism (verification), interpretation (analysis and synthesis), and historiography (history writing) (Kuntowijoyo, 2018).

Data sources consist of primary and secondary materials. Primary sources include Basic Press Law No. 11 of 1966, press statistical data from Daniel Dhakidae (1991) and David T. Hill (2006), and memoirs of prominent press figures such as Mochtar Lubis, Yakob Utama, and Surya Paloh. Secondary sources encompass books, journal articles, dissertations, and previous research on New Order press freedom, including *The Press in New Order Indonesia* (2006), *Media, Culture, and Politics in Indonesia* (2007), and *Media Power in Indonesia: Oligarchs, Citizens and Digital Revolution* (Tapsell, 2017). Data analysis uses content analysis to identify main themes, patterns of state press control, and forms of press resistance (Krippendorff, 2004). To ensure validity and reliability, this study employs source triangulation

by comparing multiple data sources and different viewpoints (Given, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

CONSTRUCTION OF PRESS CONTROL SYSTEM AT BEGINNING OF NEW ORDER (1966-1970)

The year 1965 marked one of the darkest periods in Indonesian press history. The September 30 Movement not only triggered regime change but also devastated the press landscape. Within a short period, 46 of 163 newspapers were banned for alleged affiliation with the Indonesian Communist Party (*Partai Komunis Indonesia*) and its left-wing organizations (Haryanto, 1996). This figure represented the culmination of closures beginning in 1965, when 29 newspapers from the Sukarnoism Support Agency (*Badan Pendukung Sukarnoisme*) were also shut down for being considered anti-communist and anti-Sukarno (Sebastian et al., 2025; Sen & Hill, 2007).

The purge extended beyond publications to press workers. Hundreds of journalists were arrested, dismissed, or subjected to violence during the 1966 mass killings for alleged Communist Party membership. The national news agency Antara lost approximately 30 percent of its editorial staff due to internal cleansing under Jakarta regional military command supervision (Sen & Hill, 2007; Tapsell, 2017). Key positions were systematically filled by individuals loyal to the new regime (Daniel, 1991; Heryanto, 1990).

TABLE 1. The Impact of the Press Cleansing After the September 30 Movement in Indonesia

Indicator	1964 (Before the September 30, 1965 Movement)	1966 (Before the September 30, 1965 Movement)	Decline
Number of Magazine Publications	163	117	28.2%
Number of Newspaper Publications	609	406	33.8%

Source: Angela Romano (2013); Daniel Dhakidae (1991); Ignatius Haryanto (1996).

This purge was not merely temporary political cleansing but the foundation for a press control system lasting 32 years under New Order rule. By systematically eliminating “subversive” press, the regime created a public space free from ideological criticism contrary to state interests (Heryanto, 1990). Surviving press demonstrated loyalty to the new regime and willingness to adapt to political demands. This purge aimed to establish ideological hegemony that would characterize press management throughout the New Order era. The state, through military and bureaucratic instruments, ensured the press functioned solely as a tool of power legitimization, not as a forum for social control as in democratic systems (McQuail, 2010).

In December 1966, the government passed Basic Press Law No. 11 of 1966, officially replacing previous regulations. This law contained fundamental contradictions that would define state-press relations for three decades. On one hand, it provided liberal freedom

guarantees. Article 4 stated “There shall be no censorship or blockade of the National Press,” while Article 5 guaranteed “Press freedom is guaranteed in accordance with the basic rights of citizens” (Hamson, 2022). However, Article 20 paragraph 1(a) required press publishers to hold two permits: Published Permits (*Surat Izin Terbit*) issued by the Ministry of Information and Printed Permits (*Surat Izin Cetak*) issued by the Security and Order Restoration Operations Command (*Komando Operasi Pemulihan Keamanan dan Ketertiban*) (D. T. Hill, 2006; Sumiati, 2020). This dual licensing system granted the state full power to revoke permits without court proceedings, making freedom guarantees illusory (Sen & Hill, 2007). This became known as the “iron ring” binding the press (Jackson & Pye, 1978).

The impact was visible in statistical data. In 1964, there were 609 press publications with a total circulation of 5,561,000 copies (Daniel, 1991; D. T. Hill, 2006). By 1969, publications decreased to 259 with a circulation of 2,528,050 copies (Wanandi, 2012), a decline of more than 57 percent in publications and 54 percent in circulation. This reflected the effectiveness of state purge and repression policies. Media considered disloyal were systematically removed, while surviving media demonstrated conformity to rulers’ political interests (Sen & Hill, 2007). The state successfully created a homogeneous, compliant press landscape where only regime-supporting voices survived (Heryanto, 1990).

TABLE 2. The Press That Survived at the Beginning of the New Order

Newspaper Name	Year Established	Early Affiliation	Survival Strategy
Kompas	1965	Catholic Religious Organizations	Caution against the New Order Regime
Sinar Harapan	1961	Protestant Religious Organization	Avoiding Confrontation with the Military
Merdeka	1945	Nationalist Organizations	Supporting the New Order Regime Policy

Source: Daniel Dhakidae (1991), David T. Hill (2007), Krishna Sen & David T. Hill (2007).

Surviving newspapers: Kompas (Catholic), Sinar Harapan (Protestant), and Merdeka (Nationalist), adopted cautious news strategies, avoided direct government confrontation, and gradually adapted to the increasingly authoritarian regime’s demands (Heryanto, 1990; Sen & Hill, 2007). This surviving press became the forerunner of press conglomerates dominating the Indonesian press industry in subsequent decades, though at the cost of losing the independence and critical courage characterizing the past struggle press (Heryanto & Adi, 2001).

TEMPORARY PRESS FREEDOM AND PRESS RESTRICTIONS DUE TO MALARI INCIDENT (1970-1974)

In the early 1970s, the Indonesian press experienced what contemporaries termed a “golden age” of press freedom under the New Order regime. After undergoing repressive purges and consolidation in the mid-1960s, the press began enjoying relatively wider movement space. Newspapers such as Indonesia Raya under Mochtar Lubis’s leadership dared to criticize government policies and corrupt practices among high-ranking officials. Most notable was

criticism against General Ibnu Sutowo, Pertamina's head, accused of massive mismanagement and corruption in the state oil company (Sen & Hill, 2007). This criticism was supported by other major newspapers, Kompas and Sinar Harapan, demonstrating press solidarity in voicing public concern against power abuse (Daniel, 1991; Sen & Hill, 2007).

TABLE 3. Indonesian Press Circulation in 1970

Newspaper Name	Circulation (1970)	Features
Merdeka	82.000	Critical of Economic Policy
Kompas	75.000	Moderate and Analytical
Sinar Harapan	65.000	Critical but Cautious
Berita Yudha	75.000	Pro-Government and the Armed Forces
Indonesia Raya	40.000	Very Critical and Vocal Against Corruption

Source: Daniel Dhakidae (1991), David T. Hill (2007).

Increased circulation during this period reflected positive public response to press courage in expressing criticism. However, this openness proved temporary and conditional. The government only tolerated criticism as long as it did not touch the ruling elite's vital interests or threaten political stability. When criticism targeted key figures around President Suharto or threatened economic interests of conglomerates close to the palace, the state did not hesitate to use violence (Heryanto, 1990). This so-called government "tolerance" was actually a tactic to create an illusion of democracy while full control remained in state hands (Downing, 1996; McQuail, 2010).



The car that caught fire in Jakarta on January 15, 1974 during the Malari incident
Source: 30 Tahun Indonesia Merdeka (1977)

Media-government tensions peaked in January 1974, known as the Malari Incident (*Malapetaka Lima Belas Januari* or Catastrophe of the Fifteen January). The large demonstration in Jakarta on January 15, 1974 was triggered by several factors: (1) Japanese

Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka's visit, arousing anti-Japanese sentiment; (2) Public dissatisfaction with economic policies considered unfavorable to ordinary people, and; (3) Widespread suspicion of conglomerates close to the palace enjoying government-granted facilities and business monopolies (Schwarz, 1993; Sen & Hill, 2007). Demonstrations quickly transformed into riots, and the government responded decisively, arresting approximately 470 people, including editors-in-chief of newspapers deemed to have incited or supported demonstrators (Sen & Hill, 2007).

TABLE 4. List of Publications Banned Due to the Malari Incident (1974)

Publication Name	Type	Features
Indonesia Raya	Daily	Independent
Harian KAMI (Kesatuan Aksi Mahasiswa Indonesia)	Daily	Student Press
Nusantara	Daily	Nationalist
Abadi	Daily	Islamic
Pedoman	Daily	Socialism
Ekspres	Weekly	General News Magazine
The Jakarta Times	Daily	International
Mahasiswa Indonesia	Daily	Student Press
Pemuda Indonesia	Daily	Student Press
Mingguan Wenang	Weekly	Critical General Magazine
Suluh	Daily	Regional News
Indonesia Pos	Daily	Regional News

Source: David T. Hill (2007), F. Gani (2018), Ririn Radiawati Kusuma (2018).

Of the twelve banned publications, only two were allowed to be republished with different names and editorial staff: *Pelita* (replacing *Abadi*) and *The Indonesian Times* (replacing *The Jakarta Times*). Journalists from banned publications were blacklisted and required permits from the Directorate General of Press and Graphic Development before working elsewhere (D. T. Hill, 2006; Sen & Hill, 2007). This policy effectively created a culture of fear among journalists and ensured no similar criticism would arise in the future. The Malari incident was a highly significant “turning point” in state-press relations. This mass banning eliminated the most vocal and critical press, marking the end of the “struggle press” era that dared to voice criticism of power (Heryanto & Adi, 2001). This event served as a bitter lesson for the next generation of journalists, criticism of rulers would be fatal, and the only survival strategy was cautious reporting and avoidance of direct confrontation (Sen & Hill, 2007).

REPRESSION, NORMALIZATION, AND STRENGTHENING OF INDONESIAN PRESS CONTROL (1975-1979)

After the press restrictions triggered by the 1974 Malari Incident, the New Order government further strengthened media control through a corporatist approach. This strategy aimed to “control from within” by transforming professional organizations into state extensions (Heryanto, 1990). During 1975–1977, the Indonesian Journalists Association (*Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia*) was designated as the sole government-recognized journalist organization, while the Newspaper Publishers Union (*Serikat Penerbit Surat Kabar*) became the only legitimate publishing organization (Sen & Hill, 2007). The Press Council, as the highest institution, was dominated by government and military elements, functioning more as a control tool than a press freedom protector (Sen & Hill, 2007).

TABLE 5. The Corporatist Structure of the New Order Press

Organization	Function	Control Instruments
Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia (Indonesian Journalists Association)	A Single Journalist Organization	Compulsory Membership
Serikat Penerbit Surat Kabar (Newspaper Publishers Union)	Sole Issuer Organization	Business Licensing and Supervision
Dewan Pers (Press Council)	Consultative Institutions	Content Oversight
Departemen Penerangan (Department of Information)	Primary Regulator	Press Publishing Business License (<i>Surat Izin Usaha Penerbitan Pers</i>)

Source: David T. Hill (2006), Dicky Kurniawan (2019), Krishna Sen & David T. Hill (2007).

This corporatist structure gave the state authority to determine who qualified as a journalist, how they performed their duties, and what content they could produce. Every journalist was required to be an Indonesian Journalists Association member, while every publisher had to join the Newspaper Publishers Union. This membership enabled the state to revoke credentials without court proceedings (Daniel, 1991). This represented a subtle but equally effective control form, creating self-censorship mechanisms automatically operating among journalists and media owners (Ariwianto, 2024).

In January 1978, student protests again shook Indonesian universities. Demonstrators demanded President Suharto’s resignation, criticized development policies unfavorable to the people, and highlighted corrupt practices among officials (Sen & Hill, 2007; Shiddiq, 2015). The government responded with harsh repression: seven newspapers in Jakarta were banned and seven student presses were closed (Smith, 1986). This violence was part of the Normalization of Campus Life (*Normalisasi Kehidupan Kampus*) policy aimed at eliminating students’ political role and restoring campus function solely as an educational institution (Sen & Hill, 2007).

TABLE 6. The Student Press That Was Banned in 1978

Student Press Name	Campus	Features
Airlangga	Universitas Airlangga	Highlighting Marginalized Communities
Almamater	Institut Pertanian Bogor	Critical of Food Policy
Derap Mahasiswa	Institut Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan Yogyakarta (now named: Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta)	Critical of Education Policy
Gelora Mahasiswa	Universitas Gadjah Mada	Critical of Socio-Political Policies
Kampus	Institut Teknologi Bandung	Critical of Military Policy
Media	Institut Teknologi Bandung	Critical of Education Policy
Salemba	Universitas Indonesia	Critical of Public Policy and Public Facilities

Source: Abdurrachman Surjomihardjo (1979), David T. Hill (2007), Soebagijo Ilham Notodidjojo (1979).

The campus life normalization policy not only dissolved student councils but also imposed strict control over student press. Every campus publication required permission from the rector and a recommendation from the Regional National Stability Coordinating Board (*Badan Koordinasi Stabilitas Nasional Daerah*) before publication (Hardita et al., 2023; Sophianti, 2025). The 1978 blockade ended students' role as an effective opposition political force, closing one of Indonesia's most effective criticism channels (Heryanto & Adi, 2001; Sen & Hill, 2007).

Beyond formal control instruments, the regime created a highly effective informal mechanism known as "telephone culture" (D. T. Hill, 2006). Government officials, generally from the Directorate General of Press and Graphic Development, only needed to call an editor-in-chief to convey an "appeal" to stop certain news reports considered sensitive (Sen & Hill, 2007). No appeal or defense mechanism existed, and non-compliance usually resulted in written warnings and ultimately license revocation (Harianto, 2022). The system operated without written records, making it nearly impossible to track or challenge.

"Telephone culture" was the New Order's most powerful media control tool. Unlike public bans attracting international attention, a single phone call could stop news without formal traces (D. T. Hill, 2006). Its long-term impact was deep "self-censorship" among journalists, who learned to be cautious of rulers and aggressive toward smaller communities (Sen & Hill, 2007). This culture of fear became characteristic of state-press relations throughout the New Order (Daniel, 1991). Senior journalists admitted fearing "telephone culture" more than censorship because the latter provided certainty, while the former created constant

uncertainty and psychological anxiety (Sen & Hill, 2007).

Central to “telephone culture” was the unwritten MISS SARA acronym, identifying eight prohibited categories: Incite (*Menghasut*), Insinuation (*Insiniasi*), Sensation (*Sensasi*), Speculation (*Spekulasi*), Ethnicity (*Etnis*), Religion (*Agama*), Race (*Ras*), and Stream (*Aliran*) (D. T. Hill, 2006). The Monitor Magazine case exemplified how religious boundary violations could be fatal, a popularity poll ranking Prophet Muhammad 11th sparked Muslim outrage, leading to closure and editors’ imprisonment (Sen & Hill, 2007). MISS SARA limitations were mostly unwritten and never formally defined, but every journalist understood the consequences of violation (Daniel, 1991). Thus, “telephone culture” and MISS SARA worked synergistically to shape journalist behavior and ensure the press never exceeded regime-set limits (Zharfan, 2024).

BUSINESS AND COMMERCIALIZATION OF PRESS (1980-1990)

Entering the 1980s, the Indonesian press underwent a fundamental paradigm shift. After repeated repression in the 1970s, the press abandoned its identity as a “tool of struggle” and transformed into a business entity oriented toward profit and continuity (D. T. Hill, 2006). This “business press” emergence was characterized by market focus, large investments in printing technology and human resources, and the beginning of press conglomerate formation. Three main groups dominated: Kompas-Gramedia under Yakob Utama, Sinar Harapan (Sinar Kasih group), and Tempo-Grafiti supported by Eric Samola and Ciputra, which are summarized in the following table.

TABLE 7. Press Conglomeration of the Early 1980s

Groups	Parent Company	Main Characters	Major Publications
Kompas-Gramedia	PT Kompas Media Nusantara	Yakob Utama	Kompas Daily, Monitor Magazine, Intisari
Sinar Kasih	PT Media Interaksi Utama	Aristides Katoppo	Sinar Harapan Daily, Suara Pembaruan
Tempo-Grafiti	PT Grafiti Pers	Eric Samola & Ciputra	Tempo Magazine, Jawa Pos Daily

Source: Daniel Dhakidae (1991), David T. Hill (2006), Krishna Sen & David T. Hill (2007).

This shift was driven by two factors. First, political fatigue from repeated repression led media to prefer business focus over political risks (Anom et al., 2025). Second, economic growth in the 1980s created unprecedented advertising and investment opportunities (Sen & Hill, 2007). However, commercialization made media more vulnerable to government control. With large investments at stake, media owners became reluctant to take political risks that could lead to bankruptcy, a form of “self-regulation” more effective than direct threats (Heryanto & Adi, 2001; Rakhmadi, 2026).

Unlike the mass banning of 1974 and 1978, the 1980s saw “surgical” banning, one or

two publications at a time, to provide warnings without provoking widespread resistance (D. T. Hill, 2006). The first case occurred on October 9, 1986, when Sinar Harapan was banned. The government cited speculative economic news that could cause unrest, but observers argue the real reason was sharp criticism of Suharto's family business monopoly (Sen & Hill, 2007).

The second case occurred on June 29, 1987, when Prioritas was banned for allegedly violating Press Publishing Business License provisions (75% economic news, 25% general news allocation) (Sen & Hill, 2007). A more convincing reason was embarrassing reporting on New Order policy issues, considered too bold and threatening (Borsuk & Chng, 2016). Sinar Harapan was forced to rebrand as Suara Pembaruan with a "moderate" editor close to Golkar, while Prioritas disappeared and reemerged only later as Media Indonesia under Surya Paloh's restructuring (Sen & Hill, 2007). This ban caused publishers to prioritize business aspects over reporting government policies.

Entering the late 1980s, the press industry experienced an unprecedented wave of conglomerate expansion. Media Indonesia or Surya Persindo, led by Surya Paloh, expanded the national press network by acquiring regional publications (Sen & Hill, 2007). Jawa Pos, under Dahlan Iskan's leadership, grew from 7,200 copies in the early 1980s to 350,000 by 1990, one of Indonesia's largest newspapers (H. Hill, 2007). Overall, national press circulation increased from 5 million in 1978 to 11.7 million in 1990 (Daniel, 1991).

TABLE 8. Press Conglomeration of the Early 1980s

Groups	Key Figures	Major Publications	Expansion Strategy
Surya Persindo	Surya Paloh	Media Indonesia; Vista TV	Regional Press Acquisition
Jawa Pos	Dahlan Iskan	Jawa Pos	Expansion into Remote Areas
Bimantara Group	Bambang Trihatmojo	RCTI (Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia)	Entry into Electronic Media
Yayasan Tujuh Dua	Sudwikatmono	Bintang Indonesia	Entertainment Magazine
Cipta Lamtoro Gung Persada	Hardiyanti Rukmana	Wanita Indonesia, TPI (Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia)	Women's and Television Magazines

Source: David T. Hill (2006), Krishna Sen & David T. Hill (2007), Zainal Bakri (2015).

The most notable phenomenon was President Suharto's family involvement in the media industry. Bambang Trihatmojo founded RCTI (first private television), Sudwikatmono launched *Bintang Indonesia*, and Hardiyanti Rukmana published *Wanita Indonesia* and founded Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia (D. T. Hill, 2006; Sen & Hill, 2007). This created a fundamental contradiction. On one hand, the state had an interest in controlling the press for political stability. On the other, large investments demanded legal certainty and reduced state intervention (Daniel, 1991). This contradiction shaped 1990s press dynamics, where capital interests began colliding with regime political interests (Heryanto & Adi, 2001).

COURAGE OF THE PRESS AND RESISTANCE (1991-1997)

On November 12, 1991, the Santa Cruz cemetery massacre in Dili, East Timor (now Timor-Leste), marked a turning point in state-media relations. Although coverage was initially delayed pending official government statements, Indonesian media eventually reported the incident in depth and critically. Photographs, eyewitness reports, and criticism from the International Legal Aid Institute appeared widely (Sen & Hill, 2007). Most striking was the absence of repressive measures despite highly critical coverage of the government and military (D. T. Hill, 2006).

The Santa Cruz Tragedy became a “historic moment” because, for the first time since 1978, Indonesian media dared to cover sensitive events in depth without fatal consequences. Three factors supported this phenomenon. First, market competition drove media to provide the best coverage to increase circulation and advertising revenue. Second, international pressure closely monitored the event, and blocking would trigger global condemnation damaging Indonesia’s image. Third, elite divisions within the military and government created differences on how to handle the case, which media exploited for freer coverage. Coverage of Dili marked “the beginning of the struggle presses at the end of the New Order era,” where commercial interests began to overcome state control.

After the Santa Cruz Tragedy, Indonesian press coverage in covering sensitive issues increased. DeTIK emerged as a weekly tabloid highly critical of the government and military, while Tempo and Editor sharpened coverage of cabinet conflicts, particularly between B.J. Habibie (Minister of Research and Technology) and Mar’ie Muhammad (Minister of Finance) over used East German warship purchases and Reforestation Fund use, as well as Suharto family business, human rights violations, and power abuse (Sen & Hill, 2007). Surya Paloh, owner of Media Indonesia, even filed a judicial review with the Supreme Court challenging the Minister of Information’s authority to revoke Press Publishing Business Licenses, though it was rejected (D. T. Hill, 2006).

On June 21, 1994, the government banned three major media simultaneously: Tempo (circulation 187,000), DeTIK (215,000), and Editor (80,000). Official reasons cited news about cabinet conflicts, Suharto’s family business, and leadership succession issues disrupting national stability (D. T. Hill, 2006). However, what distinguished this event from previous bans was the unprecedented public response. The House of Representatives summoned Information Minister Harmoko, military Brigadier General Syarwan Hamid stated the bans were “undesirable and regrettable,” mass demonstrations occurred in various cities, and solidarity organizations such as Indonesian Solidarity for Press Freedom (*Solidaritas Indonesia untuk Pembebasan Pers*) emerged (Heryanto, 2006).

The resistance culminated in the formation of the Alliance of Independent Journalists (*Aliansi Jurnalis Independen*) on August 7, 1994, the first alternative journalist organization challenging the Indonesian Journalists Association’s dominance supporting the New Order (Sen & Hill, 2007). The 1994 bans proved to be a “boomerang” for the regime. Instead of intimidating the media, they triggered organized resistance and accelerated the collapse of New Order legitimacy (Heryanto & Adi, 2001). This dismantling can be considered an “anachronism”, actions no longer relevant and counterproductive amid demands for stronger openness (D. T. Hill, 2006). This event signaled that the era of absolute state media control was ending (Dhakidae, 2003).

THE PRESS AT THE END OF THE NEW ORDER (1997-1998)

In 1997, Indonesia experienced a monetary crisis that caused the rupiah's value to plummet, inflation to surge, and many large companies to go bankrupt. Amid this crisis, mass media became increasingly critical in reporting on government economic policies, Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism practices among the elite, and worsening social injustices (Pye et al., 2005; Sen & Hill, 2007). Leading newspapers such as Kompas, Republika, and others began openly criticizing the government, a move previously difficult due to repression threats.

The New Order government could no longer effectively control information flow. Unlike previous crises, the government could no longer rely on "telephone culture" or censorship threats to silence the media. During this period, market forces encouraged media to cover sensitive issues because the public urgently needed information about the monetary crisis. Elite political divisions deepened, reducing the state's ability to act uniformly in suppressing media. International pressure increased as the economic crisis forced Indonesia to depend on International Monetary Fund (IMF) assistance requiring transparency and good governance (Kusumaningrum, 2019). Consequently, the media became one of the forces contributing to Suharto's downfall as president.

Coverage extended beyond rupiah exchange rate fluctuations and basic necessity price increases to include government economic policies considered unsuccessful in overcoming the crisis (Sen & Hill, 2007). Newspapers such as Kompas, Republika, and Media Indonesia regularly reported the crisis's impact on the real sector, mass layoffs, and rising poverty. More significantly, media began associating the economic crisis with Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism practices long entrenched among the ruling elite (Untarawati, 2024).

Media openly exposed Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism involving Suharto's family and palace-close conglomerates. Various cases of power abuse, business monopolies, and government fund allocation to presidential family projects were reported in (Sen & Hill, 2007). Coverage of Suharto family businesses, including companies managed by Bambang Trihatmojo, Hutomo Mandala Putra, and Siti Hardiyanti Rukmana, became widely accessible. This news directly reduced regime legitimacy by linking public suffering from the monetary crisis to Suharto family wealth (Heryanto, 2014).

The Indonesian press at the New Order's end functioned as the voice of people's aspirations and the growing protest movement. Student demonstrations demanding total reform and Suharto's resignation received widespread media attention and support (Sen & Hill, 2007). Unlike 1978 student demonstrations facing repressive responses and press closures, in 1998 media became partners of the student movement (Sophianti, 2025). Newspapers reported students' demands, authorities' violence against demonstrators, and casualties in the Trisakti and Semanggi tragedies in Jakarta. Media also played a crucial role in disseminating information about solidarity actions in various cities and reform forum establishment. Simultaneously, media openly reported political and military elite divisions, including previously taboo leadership succession discussions (Heryanto & Adi, 2001).

In May 1998, after three decades in power, President Suharto finally resigned. The Indonesian press played a crucial role in this event, serving as the voice of people's aspirations and regime criticism, disseminating information about large demonstrations across various cities, and exposing hidden corruption and power abuse cases (Sen & Hill, 2007). The state's ability to control the press had declined significantly, and the press could report almost any event without fear of reprisal. Suharto's fall on May 21, 1998 marked the end of the New

Order's 32-year press control system (D. T. Hill, 2006).

CONCLUSION

The dynamics of press freedom during the New Order (1966-1998) showed a volatile nature and were the result of a complex interaction between three main forces, namely: (1) Hegemonic and authoritarian efforts of the state through legal instruments, dual licensing, and telephone culture; (2) The logic of the market and commercialization that encourages the press to seek a wider space of movement, and; (3) The resistance and creativity of the press in conveying criticism in the midst of pressure, which is divided into six different phases ranging from the construction of the control system, temporary freedom, repression and normalization, commercialization, the courage of the press, to the end of the regime. In terms of theoretical implications, this study enriches Antonio Gramsci's framework of hegemony by showing that the ideological domination of the state is never perfect and there is always room for counter-hegemony, expands the theory of media authoritarianism by identifying non-formal control mechanisms such as telephone culture that are more effective than open repression, and reinforces the resistance concept of James C. Scott and John Fiske that the press and the public are not passive objects power, but rather an active agent in responding and negotiating meaning. In terms of practical implications, this study provides a historical understanding of the patterns of press control that can be valuable lessons for maintaining press independence in the contemporary era, especially in identifying new forms of control that are more subtle but as effective as economic pressures and patronage relationships. The limitation of this study lies in the limited scope of the print press so that it does not cover the dynamics of electronic media, as well as the dependence on secondary sources that may have certain interpretation biases. For further research, it is recommended that a study be conducted on the dynamics of press freedom in electronic media during the New Order period, as well as an in-depth study of the role of individual actors such as editors-in-chief and media owners in responding to state pressure during the New Order period.

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