

Capability vs Popularity: A Case Study of Placing Celebrities as Capability vs Popularity: A Case Study of Placing Celebrities as Commission Members in The DPR RI

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ABSTRACT

Background. There is a growing trend in Indonesian politics where celebrities are elected to the House of Representatives (DPR RI) due to their popularity rather than political or legislative competence. This reflects a shift in electoral dynamics, where public recognition is prioritized over qualifications, raising concerns about the effectiveness of legislative performance.

Purpose. The study aims to analyze the gap between popularity and capability among celebrity legislators in Indonesia, with a focus on their placement in parliamentary commissions. It seeks to explore how descriptive representation (based on identity or appearance) may conflict with substantive representation (based on actual performance and advocacy).

Method. This research uses a qualitative case study method, focusing on Ahmad Dhani as a key example. It also applies comparative analysis by referencing best practices from the United States, and evaluates political party recruitment strategies through academic and media sources.

Results. The findings indicate that celebrity status does not ensure legislative competence. The study concludes that political recruitment must be reformed toward a merit-based system, and recommends legislative and ethical training for elected representatives to enhance the quality of democracy and governance in Indonesia.

Conclusion. Celebrity status alone does not guarantee legislative competence. To strengthen representative democracy in Indonesia, political recruitment must prioritize merit over popularity and include proper legislative and ethical training for elected officials.

KEYWORDS

Celebrity politics, House of Representatives, Capability, Popularity, Meritocracy, Political Representation

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INTRODUCTION

There has been an increasing tendency in Indonesia of celebrities becoming politicians, which coincides with changes in the political and social dynamics of the country. As a result of modifications to the electoral system, which places an emphasis on figure marketing and the pragmatic approach used by political parties in order to win the votes of voters, this phenomena has arisen. It is common practice for political parties to collaborate with celebrities in order to run legislative candidates (Darmawan, 2015). This is because political parties view celebrities who are already



well-known as valuable assets that can serve to boost electability and vote acquisition during elections. Because they are well-known to the general public and have a fan following, celebrities are able to use their popularity as a successful political instrument. This is because they are able to garner votes without having to engage in difficult campaigns like regular politicians do. In addition, the change in Indonesia's political culture, which is becoming more open and dynamic, has an impact on the participation of celebrities in political processes..

The growth of democracy makes it possible for people from a wide range of backgrounds, including celebrities, to freely exercise their right to vote and make their own decisions. As a result of their capacity to engage with the general public, celebrities have a distinct advantage when it comes to winning support for political causes. This demonstrates how the logic of the entertainment industry and the mass media is progressively influencing Indonesian politics. The fact that celebrities are becoming politicians is another example of this. The media exerts a significant amount of influence over celebrities, particularly in terms of their transition from being entertainment stars to political figures. This procedure calls for careful control of impressions in order to guarantee that public figures continue to be trusted by the general public and that they continue to be relevant in the realm of politics (Wulandari & Nugroho, 2022). The background of skill vs popularity in placing artists in the Indonesian House of Representatives is a topic that is frequently contested in Indonesian politics. This phenomenon is particularly relevant in relation to the fact that a large number of artists are elected to serve as members of the legislature. According to AntaraNews (2024), during the period during which the Indonesian House of Representatives was in session from 2024 to 2029, between 23 and 25 musicians were successful in becoming members of the DPR from a variety of political parties and electoral districts. This demonstrates that popularity is the most important factor in winning legislative seats. There are a number of variables that contribute to the backdrop of Indonesian celebrities becoming politicians. These include the transition in the political system, as well as the social and cultural dynamics that make it possible for celebrities from the entertainment sector to join in politics. Celebrities exploit their popularity to their advantage in political elections; nonetheless, their success as politicians is greatly dependent on their capacity to learn, adapt, and carry out legislative tasks in a professional manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate the phenomena of celebrity appointments to legislative commissions in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI), this research makes use of a qualitative case study methodology. The paper examines the conflict that exists between electoral popularity and legislative competency, with a particular emphasis on Ahmad Dhani as a representative case. Various secondary sources, such as the news media, parliamentary documents, and previously published scholarly work, are utilized to collect the data. The study offers a comparison analysis with legislative recruitment procedures in the United States, particularly with regard to celebrity candidates, in order to provide a more comprehensive background. Regarding the implications of weak political party recruiting and the requirement for a meritocratic framework in candidate selection, the study is framed through the ideas of descriptive and substantive representation (Yin, 2018). Paying attention to these implications is also taken into consideration.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Problem in Parliament

In recent times, there has been a growing trend of celebrities entering politics, particularly as members of the People's Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI). This phenomena has gotten increasingly prevalent. Twenty-four celebrities were officially inaugurated as members of the DPR during the term of 2024–2029, from a total of 580 seats. This is a huge increase in comparison to the preceding time, which only recorded fourteen people (Sunaryo, 2024). They are

drawn from a wide range of political parties and election areas, and they collectively have a significant number of votes. As an illustration, Rano Karno received 149,397 votes, Ahmad Dhani received 134,227 votes, and Tommy Kurniawan received 100,656 votes (Hendrik, 2024). According to the findings of this study, popularity in the entertainment industry has evolved into a powerful political capital that may be used to advance in electoral battles. In order to effectively "vote machine" their candidates, political parties make strategic use of the popularity of celebrities. It is believed that the popularity that has been established in the public sphere is capable of functioning as a substitute for traditional campaign activity, which often demands a significant amount of time and resources. This method of celebrity politics, on the other hand, poses a basic challenge: how to ensure that electability based on popularity is also balanced with the capabilities of carrying out functions related to representation, legislation, and oversight?

Some celebrities who have been successful in entering parliament do offer social capital in the form of large names and extensive links with the media; nevertheless, they may not necessarily be equipped with an appropriate understanding of the legislative process, the dynamics of public policy, and the complexity of government. In point of fact, the quality of the members of the DPR has a significant impact on the quality of democracy and the legal documents that are produced as a result. It is possible that the performance of the legislative institution as a whole will be hindered as a result of this imbalance between popularity and competency. Ahmad Dhani, a musician, is one of them. He was elected as a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives for the period 2024–2029 from the Electoral District of East Java I. Dhani even managed to win the highest number of votes in his electoral district, surpassing veteran political figures such as Puti Guntur Soekarno (Fitria, 2024). Dhani was elected from the East Java I electoral district. However, this electoral triumph does not necessarily imply that the individual would be eligible to carry out the responsibilities of the institution. On March 5, 2025, during the meeting between Commission X of the DPR and the All-Indonesian Football Association (PSSI), Dhani made a contentious statement that was regarded as being both sexist and demeaning to the cultural identity of the Indonesian people. His proposal was to naturalize international players by marrying widowers who were over 40 years old to Indonesian women. Additionally, he recommended changing the surname "Pono" to "Porno" in reference to the musician Rayen Pono, who was from East Nusa Tenggara (Dian, 2025).

The National Commission on Violence Against Women and the APIK Legal Aid Institute found this comment to be a kind of harassment against women and an insult to cultural norms (Rizki, 2025). These two organizations were among the many organizations who voiced their disapproval of this statement to the APIK Legal Aid Institute. Upon receiving reports from the general public, the Council of Ethics (MKD) of the DPR stated that Ahmad Dhani had committed a violation of the code of ethics that governs council members. A discipline was handed down to him in the form of a verbal warning, and he was forced to apologize to the reporter in person within a period of seven days. It was Dhani who admitted that his statement was a "slip of the tongue" and that it was not intended to be taken in that manner. On the other hand, this defense was not successful in avoiding the public criticism that was directed toward the inappropriateness of his behavior as a spokesman of the people (Ade, 2025). When it comes to a democratic system that is becoming more visual and individualistic, impressions frequently take the place of substance. Therefore, it is essential for celebrities who choose to pursue a career in politics to not stop at the point of getting elected; rather, they should persist in developing their capacities, gaining an understanding of the ethics of representation, and carrying out their legislative responsibilities with constant integrity.

Design Solutions Offered

There has been a lot of discussion among political analysts about the phenomena of celebrities joining the legislative branch and becoming legislators. It is for this reason that problems occur when the capabilities of these celebrities are called into question due to the fact that their origins are based on art and entertainment. Social capital (internal) and marketing models (political parties) are at least

two of the reasons why this phenomenon frequently occurs, particularly in the post-reformation age. Both of these variables are responsible for the occurrence. It is simpler for celebrities to win elections than it is for political party cadres, as stated by Resty Nabilah (2022). This is due to the fact that artists possess what is known as social capital, which includes financial strength and popularity. As a result, celebrities have the prerequisites to be accepted by voters in a short amount of time. For the purposes of academic writing, the term "celebrity politics" refers to the phenomenon in which celebrities who enter the arena of politics use their popularity and financial resources to influence the acquisition of votes. Worse, the tendency for celebrities to enter the political scene gives rise to a narrative that they are simply following pace because they observe their colleagues who have entered practical politics and have succeeded in assuming prominent positions (Fikri, 2012). This narrative is harmful because it gives rise to the concept that celebrities are simply following suit. What is actually urgent is the general election system that prioritizes social capital in comparison to the vision and mission of candidate candidates, which has resulted in a political party marketing model that is oriented toward figures rather than party ideology. This is in addition to the extremely low level of public participation and the lack of information regarding candidate candidates who have experience working in the field of community development.

The author is of the opinion that this issue has the potential to ultimately have an effect on the legislative aptitude and competence that is lacking. In reference to Pitkin's (1967) political representation theory, which differentiates between descriptive representation (who sits in parliament) and substantive representation (what is being fought for), it is possible that celebrities may be strong descriptively but weak substantively. Therefore, the role of political parties is extremely important in the recruitment process in order to produce quality political cadres (Norris, 1997). There are a number of conceptual solutions that can be proposed, and it is anticipated that these ideas will be implemented in a practical setting. Changing the paradigm of the recruitment mechanism used by political parties, which not only promotes electability but also needs to favor meritocracy, is the first step. It is necessary for political parties to have the ability to incorporate candidate competency indicators such as prior experience in the organization, knowledge of public policy, and ethical standards. Additionally, it is supported by an evaluation that is based on legislative competency criteria and is conducted through internal competency and propriety examinations. In the second place, the function of celebrities who were initially involved in electoral politics should be shifted to that of political educators, such as issue ambassadors or campaign winning teams. In essence, political parties continue to play the primary role and bear the primary responsibility in resolving this issue by consistently demonstrating capacity, honesty, and commitment to representative tasks.

Best Practice Parliaments in Other Countries

A long-standing phenomenon in the United States is the participation of famous people in political campaigns. Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger are two well-known people that are considered to be influential in this way. Both of them were able to successfully leverage their fame to establish themselves in key political positions; but, they had a difficult time demonstrating their ability to lead. In the years leading up to his entry into politics, Ronald Reagan began his career in Hollywood as an amateur actor. During his time as President of the Screen Actors Guild, he developed talents in both leadership and negotiation. Following his victory in the general election for governor of California in 1966, Ronald Reagan was elected as the forty-first President of the United States in 1981. Ronald Reagan's journey into politics was aided by a variety of different circumstances. While he was engaged in political activities before to running for office, he first became aware of concerns that were affecting the public. In order to assist him in formulating policies, Ronald Reagan established a capable advisory council. Throughout his career, Ronald Reagan was noted for his ability to communicate effectively, which aided him in persuading the people to support his objectives and policies. Arnold Schwarzenegger, more commonly known for his role as an action movie hero,

entered politics in 2003 when he stood for re-election as the governor of California. Subsequent to his election, he served till the year 2011. It was necessary for Schwarzenegger to demonstrate that he was a capable leader. In order to solve this issue, he took action by establishing a knowledgeable advisory council, focusing on significant issues like as budget reform and renewable energy, and striving to create collaboration across different political parties.

There is a certain dynamic that emerges as a result of the participation of celebrities in political endeavors. On the one hand, their popularity may increase the number of people who vote and raise awareness of the issues that are at hand. With that being said, there are concerns over their level of expertise and their comprehension of the complexities of government. The United States of America has taken a number of actions to acknowledge this. In the United States, examples of best practices include training and orientation. In order to acquire knowledge about the ethics of government and the legislative process, new legislators, especially those who come from backgrounds that are not political, participate in orientation programs. In the second place, public leaders are assisted by experienced staff members who aid in administration and policy analysis. This facilitates the process of ensuring that decisions are made on the basis of facts and thorough deliberation. In the third place, there is the issue of accountability and transparency. In order to guarantee that public officials, particularly celebrities, fulfill their responsibilities, it is essential for the media and civil society to monitor their performance.

CONCLUSION

Celebrities entering Indonesian politics, notably the House of Representatives, reflects a shift in political culture toward figures and public impressions. Celebrities can boost political participation and electoral capital, but they also conflict with descriptive and substantive representation. Popularity does not guarantee legislative competence, as political reality shows. Controversial examples like Ahmad Dhani highlight the need to align competencies and respectful representation.

International practices like the US show that celebrity success in politics is supported by legislative training, competent staff, and strong public control, not just popularity. This emphasizes the need for political reform in Indonesia, particularly party recruiting. Figure-based politics must be replaced with meritocracy that values integrity, competence, and representative dedication.

The challenge is to make electoral democracy a venue for meaningful political representation, not just celebrities. Political parties, the foundation of democracy, must screen and train legislative cadres, including celebrities, to perform constitutional tasks ethically and professionally. Thus, the Indonesian parliament can become popular and able to meet public needs.

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