

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

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, the trend of celebrities becoming politicians is growing along with changes in political and social dynamics. This phenomenon is caused by changes in the election system, which emphasizes figure marketing and the pragmatism of political parties in gaining voters' votes. Political parties consider celebrities who are already famous as valuable assets to increase electability and vote acquisition in elections, so parties tend to partner with

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celebrities as legislative candidates base that allows them to attract votes without having to (Darmawan, 2015). Celebrities can conduct complicated campaigns like ordinary politicians. use their popularity as an effective In addition, the shift in Indonesia's increasingly open and political tool because they are known dynamic political culture also affects celebrity involvement to the general public and have a fan in politics.

Developing democracy allows people from various backgrounds, including celebrities, to exercise their right to vote and choose freely. Celebrities have a special advantage in gaining political support because of their ability to communicate with the public. The fact that celebrities become politicians also shows how the logic of the entertainment industry and mass media increasingly influences Indonesian politics. Celebrities and their transformation from entertainment stars to political figures are heavily influenced by the media. To ensure that celebrities remain relevant and trusted by the public in terms of politics, this process requires careful impression control (Wulandari & Nugroho, 2022). In Indonesian politics, the background of ability vs. popularity in placing artists in the Indonesian House of Representatives is often debated, especially related to the fact that many artists are elected as members of the legislature. In the 2024–2029 Indonesian House of Representatives period, 23–25 artists succeeded in becoming members of the DPR from various political parties and electoral districts, showing that popularity is the key to obtaining legislative seats (AntaraNews, 2024). Overall, the shift in the political system, and the social and cultural dynamics that allow celebrities from the entertainment industry to participate in politics are factors that shape the background of Indonesian celebrities becoming politicians. Celebrities use their popularity in political contests, however, their success as politicians depends heavily on their ability to adapt, learn, and carry out legislative functions professionally.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the phenomenon of celebrity appointments to legislative commissions in the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI). Focusing on Ahmad Dhani as a representative case, the study analyzes the tension between electoral popularity and legislative capability. Data is drawn from secondary sources, including news media, parliamentary records, and existing scholarly work. To provide broader context, the study includes a comparative analysis with legislative recruitment practices in the United States, particularly regarding celebrity candidates. The analysis is framed through the concepts of descriptive and substantive representation, with attention to the implications of weak political party recruitment and the need for a meritocratic framework in candidate selection (Yin, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Problem in Parliament

The phenomenon of celebrities entering politics, especially as members of the People's Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI), has become increasingly prominent in recent periods. In the 2024–2029 period, 24 celebrities were officially inaugurated as members of the DPR from a total of 580 seats, a significant increase compared to the previous period which only recorded 14 people (Sunaryo, 2024). They come from various political parties and electoral districts, with a fairly large number of votes. For example, Rano Karno won 149,397 votes, Ahmad Dhani 134,227 votes, and Tommy Kurniawan 100,656 votes (Hendrik, 2024). This data shows that popularity in the entertainment world has become an effective political capital in winning electoral contests. Political parties strategically utilize the appeal of celebrities as a powerful "vote machine". The popularity that has been formed in the public space is considered capable of replacing conventional campaign work which generally requires a lot of time and resources. However, this celebrity politicization strategy presents a fundamental problem: how to ensure that popularity-based electability is also balanced with capability in carrying out representation, legislation and oversight functions.

Some celebrities who have successfully entered parliament do bring social capital in the form of big names and extensive relations with the media, but are not necessarily equipped with adequate understanding of the legislative process, the dynamics of public policy, and complex governance. In fact, the quality of DPR members greatly determines the quality of democracy and the resulting legal products. This imbalance between popularity and capability has the potential to hinder the performance of the legislative institution as a whole. One of them is Ahmad Dhani, a musician who was elected as a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives for the 2024–2029 period 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). However, this electoral success does not necessarily guarantee eligibility in carrying out institutional tasks. At the meeting of Commission X of the DPR with the All-Indonesian Football Association (PSSI) on March 5, 2025, Dhani made a controversial statement that was considered sexist and insulting to cultural identity. He proposed the naturalization of foreign players by marrying widowers over 40 years old to Indonesian women, and distorting the surname "Pono" to "Porno" in referring to the musician from East Nusa Tenggara, Rayen Pono (Dian, 2025).

This statement drew criticism from various parties, including the National Commission on Violence Against Women and the APIK Legal Aid Institute, which considered it a form of harassment against women and an insult to cultural values (Rizki, 2025). In response to public

reports, the DPR's Council of Ethics (MKD) stated that Ahmad Dhani had violated the code of ethics for council members. He was given a sanction in the form of a verbal warning and was required to apologize directly to the reporter within seven days. Dhani himself stated that his statement was a "slip of the tongue" and was unintentional. However, this defense was unable to quell public criticism regarding the inappropriateness of his attitude as a people's representative (Ade, 2025). In an increasingly visual and personalistic democratic system, substance is often replaced by impressions. Therefore, it is important for celebrities who choose the political path not to stop at being elected, but to continue to develop capabilities, understand the ethics of representation, and carry out legislative duties with consistent integrity.

Design Solutions Offered

The phenomenon of the rise of celebrities who become legislators has been widely debated by political experts. The reason is, problems arise when the capabilities of these celebrities are questioned because their backgrounds are based on art and entertainment. There are at least two factors why this phenomenon often occurs, especially in the post-reformation era, namely social capital (internal) and marketing models (political parties). According to Resty Nabilah (2022), celebrities find it easier to win elections than political party cadres because artists have what is called social capital which includes financial strength and popularity, so celebrities have the requirements to be accepted quickly by voters. Celebrity Politics in academic literature or what is commonly referred to as celebrities who enter the political realm use popularity and finances to influence vote acquisition. Worse, the tendency for celebrities to enter the political stage gives rise to a narrative that they are just following suit because they see their colleagues who have entered practical politics and have succeeded in occupying important positions (Fikri, 2012). Apart from the minimal public participation and lack of information regarding candidate candidates who have experience in the field of community development, what is actually urgent is the general election system that prioritizes social capital compared to the vision and mission of candidate candidates, resulting in a political party marketing model that is oriented towards figures and not towards party ideology.

In the author's opinion, this problem can ultimately have an impact on low legislative capability and competence. Referring to Pitkin's (1967) political representation theory which distinguishes between descriptive representation (who sits in parliament) and substantive representation (what is being fought for) celebrities may be strong descriptively but weak substantively, so the role of political parties is very vital in the recruitment process to produce quality political cadres (Norris, 1997). There are several conceptual solutions that can be offered and are expected to be applied in a practical scope. First, changing the paradigm of the recruitment

system from political parties which not only prioritizes electability but must prioritize meritocracy. Political parties must be able to integrate candidate competency indicators such as organizational experience, policy understanding, and public ethics. Also supported by an assessment based on legislative competency standards through internal competency and propriety tests. Second, shifting the role of celebrities who initially participated in electoral politics to the role of political educators such as issue ambassadors or campaign winning teams. In essence, political parties still have the main role and responsibility in resolving this problem by always implementing capacity, integrity, and commitment to representative tasks.

Best Practice Parliaments in Other Countries

In the United States, the practice of celebrities entering politics is not new. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Ronald Reagan are two famous individuals in this regard. Both successfully used their fame to gain significant political positions, but they also struggled to demonstrate their leadership skills. Before entering politics, Ronald Reagan began his career as an actor in Hollywood. He gained leadership and negotiation skills while serving as President of the Screen Actors Guild. Reagan became the 40th President of the United States in 1981 after winning the 1966 California gubernatorial election. A number of factors helped Reagan transition into politics. He first became aware of public issues by engaging in political activities before running for office. Reagan formed a capable advisory group to help him formulate policies. Reagan was known for his ability to communicate clearly, which helped him convince the public of his goals and programs. Action movie star Arnold Schwarzenegger entered politics in 2003 when he ran for re-election for governor of California. He served until 2011 after being elected. Schwarzenegger had to show that he was a capable leader. He took action to address this by forming a knowledgeable advisory group, concentrating on important topics such as renewable energy and budget reform, and working to promote inter-party collaboration.

There is a unique dynamic that is created when celebrities enter the political arena. On the one hand, their popularity may raise awareness of issues and increase voter turnout. However, there are questions about their competence and understanding of the intricacies of government. The United States has taken several steps to embrace this. Best practices in the US include, training and orientation, to learn the ethics of government and the legislative process, new lawmakers including those from non-political backgrounds attend orientation programs. Second, professional staff to ensure that decisions are based on facts and careful consideration, public leaders are assisted by knowledgeable staff members who assist in administration and policy analysis. Third, Transparency and Accountability to ensure that public officials, especially celebrities, carry out their duties, the media and civil society are critical in monitoring their performance.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of celebrities entering Indonesian politics, especially as members of the Indonesian House of Representatives, is a reflection of the shift in political culture that is increasingly oriented towards figures and public impressions. Although celebrity involvement can increase political participation and bring popularity as electoral capital, it also raises a dilemma between descriptive and substantive representation. Political reality shows that electoral success based on popularity is not necessarily accompanied by adequate legislative capabilities. Controversial cases such as those involving Ahmad Dhani emphasize the urgency of aligning capabilities and dignified representation functions.

Learning from international practices such as in the United States, celebrity success in politics is not only due to popularity, but also supported by a support system such as legislative training, professional staff, and strong public control. This shows the importance of reform in the Indonesian political system, especially in political recruitment by parties. There needs to be a paradigm shift from figure-based politics to meritocracy that emphasizes integrity, competence, and representative commitment.

Therefore, the challenge ahead is to ensure that electoral democracy is not just a stage for celebrities, but a space for quality political representation. Political parties as the main pillars of democracy must take a strategic role in filtering and fostering legislative cadres, including celebrities, so that they are able to carry out constitutional duties professionally and ethically. In this way, the Indonesian parliament can transform into an institution that is not only popular in the eyes of the public, but also capable of answering the aspirations of the people.

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