



## Indonesian Politicians From One Stage to Another

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**Abstract:** After the Reform Era's birth in 1998, following the New Order regime's downfall that had controlled Indonesian politics for 32 years, two shows dominate the Indonesian political stage: freedom and violence. Politicians manage their roles on the front-stage, middle-stage, and backstage with the different political communication styles from those in the New Order era. Today, political communications in the Parliament tend to be more fluid as well as interactional, circular, convergent, and even transactional instead of linear, where political communicators, politicians, activists, professionals, and people deliver their aspirations to the political stage and political journalists in more open political message exchanges. All politicians should be wise in presenting their roles in the political stage shows, and social media that functions as the middle stage for political shows, which they should manage well to align political shows with political stages.

**Keywords:** Politician, Political Communicator, Political Stage

### INTRODUCTION

Based on the results of the Legislative Elections (Pileg) 2019, the Indonesian Parliament consists of 575 members of the House of Representatives. In the election, the Indonesia Democratic Party Struggle (PDIP) won the highest popular votes of 19.33 percent and 128 chairs; Golongan Karya Party (Golkar) won the second spot with 12.31 percent of votes and 85 chairs; Indonesia Raya Movement Party (Gerindra) on the third spot with 12.57% of votes and 78 chairs. On the fourth spot is the National Democratic Party (Nasdem), with 9.06 percent of votes and 59 chairs. On the fifth spot is the National Awakening Party (PKB) with 9.69 percent of votes and 58 chairs, followed by the Democratic Party on the sixth spot with 7.77 percent of votes and 54 seats, Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) on the 7th spot with 8.21 percent of votes and 50 chairs, National Mandate Party (PAN) on the eighth spot with 6.84 percent of votes and 44 chairs, and, lastly, United Development Party (PPP) on the ninth spot with 4.52 percent of votes and 19 chairs.

Some other parties that joined the legislative election but did not grab a seat in the Parliament include Work Party (Berkarya) 2.09 percent, Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI) 1.85 percent, People's Conscience Party (Hanura) 1.4 percent, Moon and Star Party (PBB) 0.79

percent, Indonesian Unity Party (Perindo) 2.07 percent, dan Indonesian Justice and Unity Party (PKPI) 0.22 percent, and Garuda Party 0.5 percent. Six out of the nine parties won seats in the Parliament, namely PDIP, Golkar, Gerindra, PKB, Nasdem, and PPP, form a coalition that supports the ruling government. PKS and PAN chose to be outside the government and PD that declares to form a coalition with the people. The vast support of political parties to the ruling government comes with consequences. Politicians in the Indonesian House of Representatives whose political parties join the coalition supporting the government should be wise in playing their political roles, especially when they are on the front stage, such as during the commission session, plenary session, and hearing session (RDP) with their working partners. The front stage in the political show is the stage that people notice so that they should not behave inappropriately.

In reality, some politicians from the parties who join the government coalition have enough guts to have different opinions from those of the government. Fadli Zon of Gerindra Party, for example, often expresses a view that is different from and tend to contradict the government's policies and decision, inside the Parliament or outside it such in the mainstream media, social media or an off-air program where he speaks. Ribka Tjptaning of PDIP also sometimes shows the behavior and an opinion that is perceived to be against the government's, such as on the government's COVID-19 vaccination program. Ironically, both Gerindra and PDIP did not sanction the politicians. Fadli Zon, along with Fahri Hamzah, another government critic, received the Bintang Mahaputra award from the government, provided by President Jokowi himself. The political stance and behavior of Fahri Hamzah—who is no longer a member of Parliament after the legislative election 2019—or Fadli Zon and Ribka Tjptaning do not represent those of the 575 members of Parliament. Analyzing politicians' stance and behavior from various factions of the parliaments is not easy since many are often absent when the Parliament makes critical decisions.

Their absence in the hearing and commission sessions or their indecisiveness when they are present in sessions, which can be seen from empty chairs and shallow arguments during the Parliament sessions that discuss the interests of the people they represent, makes people lost their trust in their representatives in the Parliament. No wonder that people often reject the Parliament and government's joint decisions on various bills. Corruption Eradication Commission and Job Creation Laws are two examples. The two laws have sparked prolonged demonstrations staged by different elements of the people who disagreed. Therefore, observing how politicians behave on different political stages, either on the parliamentary stage or media (mainstream and social media) stage, is essential to provide the public with clear pictures of the what, who and how of political messages communications and people's representation in the Parliament. People can see politicians' works and how they represent the stage they manage from their mainstream and social media activities.

## RESEARCH

The research was conducted using the qualitative method with an interpretative approach and constructivist research paradigm. The researcher looked for how politicians interpret their roles on various political stages themselves, not based on the researcher's subjectivity. Research informants were decided based on the first snowball, i.e., the first politicians that the researcher saw playing their roles in the mainstream media or their capacities as spokespeople in various activities organized by the media. In those activities, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews so that the informants were not aware that they were the subjects of research. The data were also collected by observing participants when politicians were during their activities, including through an overhearing technique. From the first snowball, the researcher found other informants. The data was analyzed using the interactive model pioneered by Milles and Huberman, which comprises data reduction, data verification, and conclusion.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the in-depth interviews, participants' observations, overhearing, and interactive model analysis, the researcher succeeded to find various phenomena on the political stages, especially seen from the Dramaturgic Erving Goffman theory about the frontstage and backstage, combined with Lely Arrianie(2006) 's finding of the middle-stage that modifies Goffman theory. Erving Goffman boldly says that the frontstage is the stage area where inappropriate behaviors should not appear since it is sterile of spectators, while the backstage is the stage area where the front stage show scenario is prepared. According to Lely Arrianie (2006), the middle-stage is the stage area that functions as the meeting or compromise point between the frontstage and backstage, where political communicators present themselves in their capacity as politicians but not on an official political stage.

According to the theory, there are different categories of stages where politicians manage their political roles, including their political stances and behaviors. Political from various political parties have different views on interpreting political stage terminology. Interestingly, politicians from the same political party have different views on interpreting a political stage. On the contrary, politicians from the different political parties have the same view on interpreting the political stage. A small group of politicians from the same party and factions has the same view or politicians from different parties with different views on a political stage. The researcher found that the different views on interpreting a political stage make politicians from a particular party and faction or politicians from various parties and factions screw up the interpretation of stages in political stages.

A politician's front stage can the middle or backstage of another politician from the same party or another politician from a different party. The differences in the ways politicians interpret political stages and Indonesia's political stages and communications almost do not have a model. But we can say that the model is 'no model at all." Since there is no political communications model that politicians can use to manage their roles in the political stages, they do not have a reference on how to deliver political messages or conduct political message exchanges. Therefore, each political tends to use a communications style that originates in their old habits and stances when running political communications. In short, there is no frame of reference that politicians can use as a political party communications model.

The researcher found in many participant observations that when politicians engaged in political communications, they tended to use their own communications styles. Politicians who came from religious, nationalistic, and traditional based parties may have similar political communications styles. In contrast, politicians who originated in the same parties may deliver their political communications differently. Politicians' appearances in the media directly or indirectly described that each politician does not have a political communications model that their party can use as a reference. Differences and errors in interpreting political stages make politicians position themselves and their symbols and Parliament membership wrongly. They also incorrectly interpret when and where the symbols and emblems to put on when they are in different areas of political stages.

In her participant observations, the researcher also found several politicians put on their Parliament membership pins at wedding parties or during holidays. Probably, they simply forgot to remove the pins from their shirts. Whatever the reason, they had used the symbol that identifies their parliament memberships inappropriately. Some politicians put on the pins at media events, but some others never used their membership pins. Observations also found that some politicians looked dandy with shave faces. They wore coats with foreign branded ties and shoes. Some others only wore short-sleeved batik shirts without membership pins and sandals. They argued that those they wore at the Parliament building and speaking on television would not show what they wore waist down.

Researcher's observation of famous politicians' Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and vlog accounts found that their political communications were almost the same, especially in the way they chose narratives and dictions when they made comments about the government that they either supported or did not supported. In other words, there was no difference in political communications narratives between politicians who supported the government and those who did not support it. The researcher's findings confirmed that politicians were inherently difficult to distinguish different political stages conceived by Erving Goffman in their political presentations. It was hard for the people to determine which politicians fight for their interests, the politicians' own groups' interest, or their own interests. Some members of Parliament's own findings showed that the Parliament members' interests were what they mostly fought for.

Brian Mc Near (2003) interprets political communications as the tool that purely talks about the allocations of public resources that have some value, either power or economic value, by officials in the legislative or executive branch of the government who have authorities to give power or make the decision on laws or regulations and set sanctions. It provides a clear description that politicians are the main actors in political communications. Politicians have three powerful rights: the right to draft laws, the right to oversee, and the right to set the government's budget. Unfortunately, politicians' involvement in setting the government's budget brings them to the political corruption trap. Since politicians must approve all government's budgets in the Parliament, government and politicians often work based on a 'symbiosis mutualism' principle. The result was that out of the 1000 corruption cases handled by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), 255 cases involved members of the House of Representatives (DPR) and Regional House of Representatives (DPRD); 100 cases involved regional heads (governors, mayors or regents), 27 cases involved ministers or former ministers and 208 cases involved high-rank officials of government's agencies or ministries. Recent Speakers of the House Representatives and Regional Representatives (DPD) were also caught in corruption.

Those who were alleged of corruption faced not only corruption charges but also money laundering. And again, there was no difference between politicians who came from religious, nationalistic, restorative, and traditional parties in their corruptive behaviors. The research findings also showed that politicians' confusion in interpreting political stages makes the stances and behaviors of politicians do not match with the roles that they should play on the political stages. However, the frontstage, according to Erving Goffman (1959), is theoretically the one where inappropriate behavior should not appear, and it should be sterile of spectators. However, some politicians who often appear in the mass media do not seem to care if their stance and behavior on a particular stage are inappropriate in the public's eyes. They often demonstrate contemptuous narratives and dictions or verbally attack their counterparts in the media forum with psychologically violent words.

The observation also confirmed that the front stage on the Parliament's hearing session with working partners from the government's element, a politician from the ruling party elements uttered swear words and asked a minister to call attending members of Parliament "Honorable MPs" or the hearing session would not start. Politicians seemed to want to show that legislative officials had a much bigger power and stronger bargaining position than executive officials. They had gone through a sort of a cultural shock as becoming politicians had changed them from nobodies into the Newly Rich (OKB) and the Newly Popular (OPB), with totally new speaking styles and new elite social circles, while their positions in specific commissions require them to master many new things that their education background did not allow them to understand easily. Unfortunately, they could not maximize their existence in the political system. Gurevitch and Blumler (1977) said that when political communications components—either seen from the institution, communications aspects, media, and its political aspect and public orientations on political communications that are relevant with today's

communications—begin to take shape and develop, the people will be enthusiastic about investigating the political behavior of their representatives in the Parliament.

Probably, since politicians are required to have the expertise and master various aspects of the economy, politics, culture, governments, foreign affairs, forestry, agriculture, health, education, and others, only a handful of politicians exist and popular among the people. Out of the 575 members, only some of them are willing to speak on the media to talk about their roles as people's representatives. Similarly, the media only invite a few Parliament members to hear their updates on what is being discussed or has been decided in the Parliament. Limited political communications capability or the lack of willingness to show expertise on their work in the Parliament's commissions make most politicians choose to hide behind the stage. Therefore, they do not seem to play a role in critical decision-making that affects many people's lives. People's political culture, which Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba (1980) call as Civic Culture, or people's stance and reaction to broad politics and government, will increasingly show participant political culture today when social media creates information overflow so that anytime there is a new Law or revision to existing laws, people will criticize and sue the politicians. However, politicians often have excuses, e.g., they were not there when decisions were made, while they were supposed to be active and present in all levels of sessions if they want to prove that as people's representatives, they were serious.

Seriousness is proof that they understand what is being discussed and know their roles. They should also understand political communications languages. Doris Greber (1981) says: political communications are not merely rhetoric but also include symbols, body language as well as political actions such as boycotts, protests, and demonstrations. Based on the researcher's observation, some factions boycotted the decision-making process in the plenary sessions. They walked out of the room in protest, showing that they disagreed with the Law that would pass. The researcher sees it as an inability to interpret the plenary stage so that even if they boycotted the session and walked out of the room before a decision was made, they had lost it since as the parties outside the government's coalition, their group are relatively much more minor. Therefore, they were supposed to deploy various political communications types in the commission sessions and conduct political lobbying through persuasive approaches. Otherwise, they could have used modified political communications models to achieve their communications objectives, and the people would not blame them since they had a fight to the max during the discussion processes.

The people also witnessed some politicians said in media interviews after the inauguration as members of Parliament that they would try to adapt to the Parliament's political stages and learn to understand the situation and condition in the first few months to first year their respective fields. Such a statement reveals that the politicians have wrongly interpreted their existence on the political stage. Once politicians win the election and enter the Parliament, they belong to honorable people who are not still 'learning' but ready to implement their political communications skills, which they show perfectly in their political shows in the Parliament. Moreover, Indonesian politicians in the Parliament get support from government-paid expert staff who provide them with necessary thoughts and analyses to help them play their political roles on the frontstage, middlestage, and backstage.

Fagen (1966) said: "Political communications are all form of communications activities that occur in a political system and between the system with its environment that comprises communications networks, either organization, groups, mass media and special channels, social-economic determination and communications styles that are available in the system." Fagen said it is a sufficient reference for politicians to manage their roles in various political stages, either the front-stage, middle-stage, and backstage. Otherwise, they can create their own stage area to interpret to prove their ability to manage their own political show stage. As Fagen said, they belong to a political system where they have a dominant bargaining position to create

a good communications network with the government and the people as their constituents. Besides, they can communicate their political roles with social-political organizations, interest groups, and even the media. They can do that if there is a will, and they understand their political objectives as politicians, not just power-hungry people. However, reality shows that people's disappointment and distrust of politicians are still high. One of people's disappointment is that politicians do not seem to understand their roles on the political stage and manage their roles intelligently. They also misinterpret political stages so that the frontstage of a politician can be the backstage of another politician or vice versa.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results, the researcher can be concluded that: Politicians have many stages where they show their political roles, i.e., the front-stage, middlestage and backstage. However, many politicians find it difficult to interpret the various stages so that they confuse the meaning and terminology of the stages. The front stage of a politician can be the middle-stage or backstage of another politician or vice versa. Unfortunately, the theoretical principle pioneered by Erving Goffman about stages in his Dramaturgy does not apply to the parliamentary political stages in Indonesia. It is suggested that the subsequent research will find an Indonesia-specific political communications model that is in-line with the Indonesian political stages

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