

INDONESIAN POLITICAL PUNDITS IN THE EYES OF THE MEDIA

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Abstract

Political pundits are one of the elements present in political communication, especially in countries that adhere to a democratic system. This research seeks to answer two big questions, who are and what criteria can make individuals referred to as pundits by the media? So, what is the role of pundits so that the media must quote their statements and make them news sources? This qualitative research uses a case study scheme with an in-depth interview data collection process to answer the research questions. Five informants from different media became the research sources. From this research, it was found that pundits must have certain educational qualification standards. However, that standard alone is not enough as they must also have a close relationship with journalists in order to be interviewed as pundits. Another interesting finding is that the role of pundits in the media is similar to those who provide explanations of political situations. However, each media also has additional roles depending on the direction of each media. This is also discussed in this research.

Keywords: Political Pundit, Political Communication, Political Analyst, Political Commentator

INTRODUCTION

In every development of political issues, there are three main elements that impact each other, namely political organizations, media, and citizens (McNair 2018). Political organizations seek to convey political messages directly or mediated by the media. Meanwhile, the media as the fourth pillar of democracy records historical witnesses and reports them to the public. The media also plays a role in determining political attitudes. Furthermore, the media acts as a bridge that brings together the aspirations of the people and the responses of politicians. At the same time, the public receives exposure to political messages and utilizes them to make political decisions. These three elements are interrelated and have an impact on each other, which is even difficult to separate in a country that adheres to a democratic system.

In addition to these three elements, there is another element, namely political pundits. According to Williams (2020), a political pundit is an expert in the field of politics who meets certain educational standards and provides his comments on a political event to the media. Political pundits are placed alongside the media because they only exist when they appear in the media (Williams 2020; Alvin 2022c). The media's willingness to give political pundits space to speak indicates that they have news value and are respected.

For Williams (2020), there are three main functions of political pundits, namely providing background understanding, providing sound bites that can become news material, and providing views or attitudes from certain political events. The public is considered to need explanations or critiques from political pundits because they are considered competent figures (Bro 2012). Moreover, the development of current political communication practices makes all politicians show their best political impressions (Alvin 2019, 2023) both during offline communication and communication to the target public when mediated by social media (Alvin 2022d, 2022e).

Not all individuals can appear in the media and be labeled as political pundits. At least they must meet two main standards, namely meeting academic qualifications and having a charm that can amaze the public either by appearance and or words (Bengtsson 2015). Further, political pundits are also believed to have the power to influence public opinion. Their political positions become the reference and basis for decision-making by the public (Kofi Preko, Agbanu, and Feglo 2020; Alvin 2022a). In the context of political communication in Indonesia, there are several names that often appear in the media as news sources. Some of them are Gun Gun Heryanto, Rocky Gerung, Hendro Satrio, M Qodari, and others (RadarBangsa 2020).

When examined in depth, in the era of social media everyone can freely comment and give their political views (Palupi and Endahati 2019; Putri 2018; Winata and Alvin 2022), but not all of them can be categorized and deserve to be called political pundits. Apart from the names of political pundits that have often appeared in the media, an important question remains, namely how the media process chooses certain individuals deemed worthy of being a political pundit and how political pundits are used by the media in the field of political communication studies in Indonesia. These are also the main purpose of this research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Political Communication

Political communication is a communication process that has implications or consequences for political activity (Cangara 2016; Alvin 2022b, 2022c). Thus, the messages conveyed in this realm have political weight, and target members of the public who can exercise voting rights in the election.

The purpose of the application of political communication is the manufacture of consent (McNair 2018). Political actors when carrying out communication activities communication activities, make a selection of what information they will share with their audience.

The context of political communication described here is within the scope of a democratic state. Democracy focuses on the importance of the role of each individual. The prevailing political process The prevailing political process requires that individuals act collectively to determine who is entitled to lead them or occupy certain political positions.

The process of exercising voting rights is done without any coercion at all, but rather on the basis of consensus (McNair 2018; Robin, Alvin, and Hasugian 2022). In order to be elected by people who have the right to vote, political actors carry out political communication that focuses on image building efforts. This image often makes the public complacent.

Thus, there needs to be a comprehensive analysis of political image management and or political marketing campaign carried out by political actors. This scrutiny is usually carried out by political pundits who are given space to speak by the media.

Political Pundit

Political pundits are considered as a neutral 'voice of reason' (Shuman and Greenberg 2003) that is able to provide explanations or critical thinking on events and the political intrigues within them. Meanwhile, Williams argues that (2020) political pundits are likened to guardrails that keep democratic practices running in the right direction. Individuals called political pundits are considered to have significant power, because they are able to carry out agenda setting and framing.

Political pundits are often considered to have the ability to calculate the future based on current political events. However, many previous studies have stated that the percentage of accuracy of political pundits' predictions is the same as when tossing a coin (Metaxas and Leigh 2013; Gardner 2010; Tetlock 2005).

There are several types of political pundits. Based on Williams' study (2020), there are seven types. Meanwhile Bengtsson (2015) divides them into six types.

Table 1. The Seven Types of Political Pundits

No	Type	Characteristic
1	Academic Commentator	Tons of political research experience; Regular guest in a political talk show
2	Senior Journalist	Emerged as a columnist or political analyst
3	Group Commentator	Representation of an organization
4	Retired Politician	Make comparisons of past political events
5	Professional Polemicist	Pundits who are paid to discuss a particular political issue
6	Lived Experience Commentator	Individuals who experience certain socio-political events and are questioned on the basis of those experiences
7	Celebrity Commentator	Celebrities who give political opinions

Source: Williams (2020)

Table 2. The Six Types of Political Pundits

No	Type	Characteristic
1	Fill-in Argument	A fill-in who produces inexpensive news and stay in the game
2	Poster Boy Argument	A poster boy who brands a media to make the business survive

3	Insider Argument	Insiders who help voters understand the political game
4	Lover of Strategy Argument	Commentators who do not discuss political substance, but focus on spinning the issue
5	Cuckoo Bird Argument	Commentators who are likened to cuckoo birds are considered expropriating the real experts
6	Entertainer Argument	Commentators who are considered to provide entertainment for the public who watch or hear them

Source: Bengtsson (2015)

Despite the low percentage of accuracy in predicting the future, political pundits are still given a place by the media and are still heard by the public. Related to this, Gardner (2010) provides a logical explanation that humans have a tendency to avoid uncertainty in the future. Thus, listening to explanations and interpretations from pundits brings a little peace of mind.

At the same time, the existence of political pundits also received strong criticism from Nimmo and Combs (1992) that the presence of pundits caused democracy to shift towards punditocracy. Simply put, democracy requires active participation and critical logical thinking from the public. To be an active participant in a democratic climate, the public can follow the development of political news or participate in discussion forums. However, the existence of pundits makes participants passive. The public is considered a listener.

Looking at the development of literature in discussing the existence of political pundits, it is clear that there is a missing piece related to determining who is considered appropriate and worthy of being a political pundit. Therefore, this research question is how the media determine who becomes a political pundit.

METHOD

This research is categorized as qualitative research with a case study approach. The implementation of this case study research follows the procedures set out by Yin (2018). Yin (2018) explains case studies as empirical investigations that investigate unique phenomena in real life. This case study research also seeks to answer "how" and or "why" research questions on interesting phenomena. In connection with the phenomenon of the political pundits in Indonesia, the researcher decided that this research was included in the type of holistic single case study. Data collection from this case study research was obtained through in-depth interviews.

In-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from several media outlets. The media in question are national online news portals. The media chosen are not monotonous but come from different ownership backgrounds and affiliations. The media selected for the purposes of this research are summarized in the table below.

Table 3. Media List for Research Purpose

No	Media	Affiliation	Hierarchy Level	Status
1	Antara	Government	Senior Journalist	I1
2	Medcom	NasDem	Managing Editor	I2
3	Tirto	None	Senior Journalist	I3
4	JawaPos	None	Senior Journalist	I4
5	CNN Indonesia	None	Editor	I5

Antara officially became a National News Agency directly under the President of the Republic of Indonesia. This media is already 85 years old. Through Government Regulation No. 40 of 2007, Antara officially turned into a state-owned enterprise or Perum Lembaga Kantor Berita Nasional ANTARA (Antaraneews 2014).

Medcom.id was established in 2017, designed as a megaportal for all digital portals owned by Media Group News. Media Group News consists of MetroTV, Metrotvnews.com, Media Indonesia, Lampung Post, and others. This media is affiliated with the NasDem party (Adam and Andreas 2018). The founder of Media Group News and Chairman of the NasDem Party is Surya Paloh.

Tirto.id (2023) first went online in 2016. The choice of the name Tirto is an expression of respect for Tirto Adhi Soerjo, who is known as the Father of the Indonesian Press. On its official website, Tirto writes that it is not affiliated with any political interests.

JawaPos.com (2023) is part of the Jawa Pos Group, one of the largest media networks in Indonesia. Jawa Pos's online site arrived in Indonesia in 2014. This media has no relationship with any political party.

CNN Indonesia is one of the media under the Trans Group umbrella and was established in 2014. Referring to the Reuters Institute Report (Steele 2021), CNN Indonesia is the media with the highest level of trust in Indonesia.

Yin (2018) explains that the biodata of informants can be kept confidential if the informants requested and/or felt that disclosing their biodata could have a negative impact on them. In this context, informants requested that their biodata not be disclosed in this research.

Interviews with key informants were conducted online using Zoom because it is more flexible in terms of time and space. Interviews were conducted with a duration of one hour for each informant. Each interview was recorded through the Zoom feature. In addition, data collection was also carried out through observation of physical artifacts, in the form of published news articles. Yin (2018) explains that physical artifacts can be a supporting component to provide data and develop perspectives for researchers. After the data is obtained, it will then be processed for analysis. The researcher will also reduce the data, then classify it into relevant themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to answer two main questions: how the process of determining political pundits who appear in the media and how the utilization of political pundits by the media in Indonesia. The researcher will start from explaining the process of selecting individuals who deserve to be called political pundits by the media. After that, the researcher will discuss the purpose of each media that gives a stage to political pundits.

Relationship Closeness Factor

Each media has one thing in common in the process of determining individuals or groups that can be used as news sources, it is to fulfill the element of news value. The definition of news value is a concept to determine information or events that are considered worthy and can be converted into news (Pompper and Hoffman 2020). The foundation of the concept of news value was first proposed by Galtung and Ruge (1965) at an international academic conference in Oslo. They concluded that there are 12 factors of news value. If an information or event has fulfilled one of them, then it deserves to be news.

According to Galtung and Ruge (1965), what considered as news value are frequency, how often an event occurs; threshold, news-worthy events/information that have a big impact on the public; unambiguity, clear events/information that is newsworthy; meaningfulness, events/information that have proximity both in distance and culture; consonance, events/information that contains predictions; unexpectedness, unique events/information; continuity, continuous events/information; composition, events/information to provide balance in a media report; reference to elite nations; reference to elite people; reference to persons or events/information that occur in society; and reference to negativity.

Almost six decades on, the concept of news value has evolved academically. Starting from 12 factors, news value has now been condensed into seven factors of news value (Pompper and Hoffman 2020), namely audience or events/information that involve a large number of audiences, impact or events/information that can have a major impact on society, proximity or events/information that is physically or non-physically close, timeliness or events/information that is timeless, prominence or events/information sourced from famous and popular figures, unusualness or events/information that is outside the normal limits, conflict or events/information that contains conflict.

Looking at these news value factors, political pundits can be considered to fulfill the elements of news value, especially in the threshold, composition, and reference to elite people.

Based on the process of collecting data from informants, the media has three general categories for labeling someone who can be called a political pundit, which are coming from academia, non-governmental organization (NGO), or part of a political consulting agency. Below are some of the names of political pundits according to three categories.

Table 3. List of Political Pundits in Different Categories

No	Academia	NGO	Political Consultant
1	Ujang Komaruddin, Universitas Al Azhar Indonesia	Lucius Karus, Forum Masyarakat Peduli Parlemen Indonesia (Formappi)	Hendro Satrio, Lembaga Survei Kelompok Diskusi dan Kajian Opini Publik Indonesia (Kedai Kopi)
2	Gun Gun Heryanto, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah	Haris Azhar, Lokataru	Djayadi Hanan, Lembaga Survei Indonesia (LSI)
3	Emrus Sihombing, Universitas Pelita Harapan	Adnan Topan Husodo, Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW)	Saidiman Ahmad, Lembaga Saiful Mujani & Research Consulting (SMRC)
4	Adi Prayitno, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah	Fatia Maulidiyanti, Komisi untuk Orang Hilang dan Korban Tindak Kekerasan (KontraS)	Yunarto Wijaya, Lembaga Survei Charta Politik
5	Ahmad Khoirul Umam, Universitas Paramadina	Hendardi, Setara Institute	Hanta Yuda, Lembaga Survei Poltracking Indonesia

Political pundits who come from academic circles are generally considered to have met the educational qualifications, so that they are able to provide in-depth analysis of a political event. The number of lecturers in Indonesia reached until the end of 2021 there were around 265.5 thousand lecturers. Of this number, around 82.6 thousand lecturers are on state campuses and 182.8 thousand lecturers on private campuses.

Of the many academics, not all of them get the chance to be interviewed by the media. Thus, there are other factors that determine who will become a news source in the media. Data from informants concluded that the main determining factor was the close relationship with journalists. This view can be seen from two sides. On the one hand, journalists can be more proactive in building relationships with academic pundits. On the other hand, pundits implement proactive information subsidy (Park, Bier, and Palenchar 2016; Gandy 1982) to help journalists meet news production targets by distributing press releases. The more often these individuals are interviewed as pundits, the more popular they become among other media outlets. Ultimately, this can have implications for determining who the media will interview when they need the views of political observers.

Paulussen (2012) has highlighted the potential for overexertion felt by online media journalists as they are chased daily by deadlines and news production targets. As a result, to meet these expectations, the news-making process is generally done as effectively as possible. One of the practical and effective approach journalists usually take is choosing news sources that they know are easy to contact and already have a good relationship with.

The tendency of our journalists in the field is that if we need fast news, we look for pundits who are easy to contact. We need something fast, just look for who wants to talk to the media (I2, in the interview, 2023).

The closeness factor is very important, if I need news, just call, interview the pundit, and it becomes news (I4, in the interview, 2023).

We see now that the pundit who appear in the media... are 4L (lo lagi-lo lagi, same person) people. Yes, because they are more willing and easier to contact (I3, in the interview, 2023).

Political pundits who come from NGOs are usually perceived as more independent. In the context of Indonesian politics, the government currently has the support of almost all political parties in Parliament (Basyari 2022). There are only those who act as opposition parties, Partai Demokrat and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS). Therefore, the media often interview pundits from the NGO category because they are considered more reliable to explain the political situation.

Meanwhile, pundit from political consultant agency get a stage in the media because there is generally an existing partnership. For example, political consultants can be covered by the media. In return, they will supply quick count results exclusively in the media. Data obtained from in-depth interviews with Medcom's Managing Editor revealed that there are pundits who are recommended by Media Group which affiliated with political party, NasDem.

Usually in political years, Media Group usually has four or five political observers who are selected to talk about current issues (I2, in the interview, 2023).

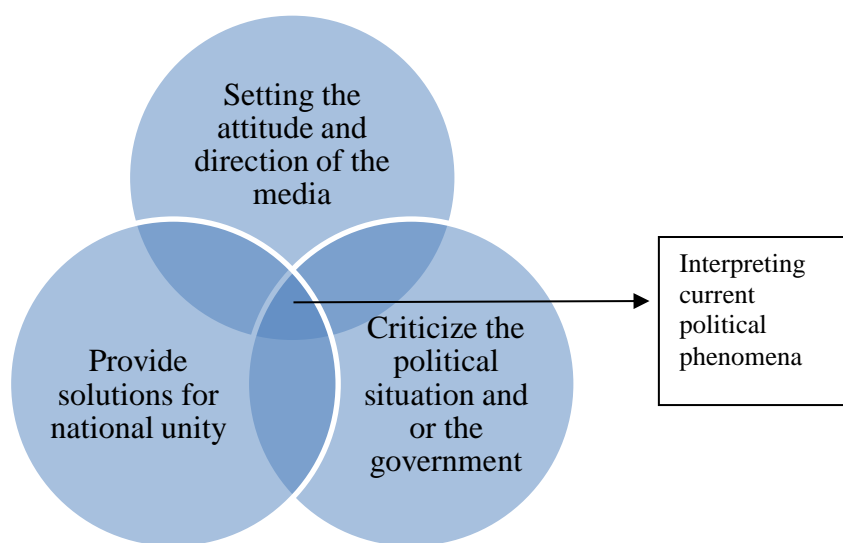
The ease of contact is very noticeable because there is already a partnership. Usually, pundits from political consultants will be interviewed by Medcom journalists after being a guest on one of MetroTV's programs. Another practice is that pundit statements on MetroTV can be instantly reproduced as online news and published in Medcom.

It can be concluded that political pundits in Indonesia are divided into three categories, namely the academic category, the NGO category, and the political consultant category. The role of the pundit will be elaborated in the following sub-chapters.

Role of the Political Pundit

Each media has its own editorial policy. This includes determining the role of political pundits. The role of political pundits has similarities and differences in the media. The commonality of the media, regardless of affiliation, places political pundits as those who explain and predict the political situation. Below is a figure containing the classification of pundit roles in each media.

Figure 1. Diagram of the Role of Political Pundits



For LKBN Antara, political pundits play an important role in balancing information for the public. Often information in politics is secret and closed to the public, and enigmatic. Political pundits, armed with their academic knowledge and experience, are believed able to predict political situations that may occur in the future, reflecting on academic theory books and history that may repeat itself.

Political observers can shed light on various political events that occur. Furthermore, politics is the art of managing possibilities, so calculations in politics should be able to be done by political observers. That is the role of political observers in my view (I1, in the interview, 2023).

In addition to providing an explanation of the political situation, LKBN Antara as a media affiliated with the government uses statements from political pundits with the vision of strengthening national unity. Politics will be futile if it leads to disunity and destruction. Moreover, the spirit of politics is to achieve a better life together.

The vision for national unity is translated in the efforts of LKBN Antara journalists to seek solutions from pundits who are considered experts in politics. Pundits who only criticize without solutions will not be given a chance as a news source at Antara.

The doctrine at LKBN Antara is actually more about the unity of the Republic of Indonesia. We were never specifically asked to interview pro or anti-government pundits. The important thing is to enlighten and solution. For example, when there was disunity during 2019 general elections, the issue raised is how to unite the public. Antara will ask political pundit what the solution is for the unity. Regarding government policies, Antara also criticizes, so it is allowed to interview observers who criticize as long as the criticism is constructive with a solution (I1, in the interview, 2023).

In addition to providing explanations for politics, CNN Indonesia also involves pundits in the process of determining editorial policies and attitudes towards certain political events. For example, in the issue of postponing the election, CNN Indonesia is not in a hurry to determine whether to agree or reject. They invited pundits from the academic category and discussed internally first.

On the issue of postponing the election, apart from editorial meetings, we had internal meetings for brainstorming. We invited two experts to give their views on the discourse that was becoming a polemic

in the public. We invited political experts and constitutional law experts, Feri Amsari and Uceng (Zainal Arifin Mochtar) from UGM (I5, in the interview, 2023).

Furthermore, JawaPos' senior journalist specifically revealed an interesting point that political pundits in Indonesia can be classified: some are pro-government and some are against the government. For JawaPos itself, political pundits who are often interviewed and reported on are those who dare to criticize the government. This is because the political map in Indonesia is more inclined towards the government.

Because maybe the ones who are somewhat independent now are the pundits. If for example we contact and ask for comments from political party politicians, they will definitely support the government because the majority now support the government. The DPR also supports the government. Meanwhile, those who criticize it may be too few. So we are looking for those who criticize, to make it a bit balanced (I4, in the interview, 2023).

In the statement above, it can be seen that JawaPos as one of the oldest media in Indonesia is still trying to carry out ideal journalism practices. The presence of the media in the realm of democratic politics aims to carry out the watchdog function (Harsono 2010). This practice becomes very important and relevant when the political majority is in favor of the government.

Tirto as a media with no affiliation to any party or institution sees little importance in the classification of pundits who are pro or contra the government. What is important is that the interview process needs to be done with a critical mindset, not just accepting whatever the pundit says. In another sense, it is also important to give space to new pundits, so that new faces and different views will emerge.

There must be a challenge in the interview. And the challenge is indeed used to understand how well the pundit understands the phenomenon. Especially if he uses strong arguments or uses political theory. When the interviewee understands our question, understands the context we want to take, and it turns out to be answered. Yes, why not use it? Essentially, Tirto does not want to justify people who are pro or against the government. But if I'm interviewing a pundit, I still won't put in comments that are considered unreasonable (I3, in the interview, 2023).

One of the interesting findings of this research is that the managing editor of Medcom admits that the media he works for has an affiliation with the NasDem party, but did not receive special instructions to interview pundits who are pro-NasDem. Medcom is claimed to still uphold media independence. Although there are pundits who are recommended to be news sources because they have collaborated.

CLOSING

Conclusion

The existence of political pundits in the scope of political communication is essential. This research was conducted to answer two major questions, how the process of selecting political pundits in the media and how the role of pundits in the media. Basically, media that are pressured by deadlines and targets that must be achieved inevitably have to find sources easily and quickly. As a result, this practice makes pundits who are easy to contact who get the spotlight in the media. besides being easily accessible, the main criteria for pundits are to meet the minimum educational qualifications of postgraduate. because they are considered to have a deeper theoretical and conceptual understanding so that they can provide sharp

analysis. Generally, such criteria only allow individuals who work as lecturers on campus to be called pundits. However, this research proves that pundits in Indonesia are divided into three categories: academics, NGOs, and political consultants.

There is a similarity in the role of each pundit in the media, apart from the editorial policy of each media. pundits are considered as figures who are able to provide explanations for political situations. In addition, there are additional roles that are customized by each media. LKBN Antara views pundits as parties who can provide alternative solutions to political chaos in order to strengthen national unity. CNN Indonesia utilizes pundits to determine the attitude and direction of the media on certain political issues. Tirto, Medcom, and JawaPos see the pundit as a figure who can be a voice of reason and criticize the government.

This research certainly has its limitations. Referring to the Hierarchy of Influences theory, the determination of pundits is only seen at the journalist level, not at a broader level such as the social system, social institution, or media organization. From this research, researcher hope to be a stepping stone for further research in the future. One suggestion for future research is to specifically examine the process of pundits marketing themselves to the media.

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