

Legislative Humane Activities During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia: Genuine Concern or Political Imaging?

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The legislative activities of every country, as representative institutions, have different ways of or actions in handling Covid-19. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the activities performed to deal with Covid-19 by the legislative bodies in many regions in Indonesia. The method of the study is an analysis of parliamentary activities from various provinces in Indonesia. We collect data from social media and online media reports concerning some legislatures. This study found that the humane activities conducted by legislators in the form of social assistance are aimed to show a genuine concern for the community and to escalate legislators' positive image amid the society. The conclusion of this study is the humane activities performed by the legislators contain two meanings that are mutually beneficial for both the society and legislators. Society needs solutions and assistance, especially during this pandemic, while the legislators need a good political image as a future benefit. This study implies that the parliamentary institutions in Indonesia immediately draft bills (RUU) and also regional regulations (PERDA) regarding the handling of Covid-19 and crises in Indonesia.

Key words: *Legislative, Humane Activities, Constituents, Covid-19, Pandemic, Indonesia.*

Introduction

Legislative activities during the pandemic often draw the public's attention. The emergence of several memes on social media means that the public has started to satirise and question legislative activities during this pandemic. This triggers the emergence of criticism of the legitimacy of various groups of people in Indonesia. Legislative institutions are political structures which job is to represent and express the interests of people and their opinions. As one of the crucial institutions for democracy in Indonesia, its role is certainly very much needed by the community. Democracy is a governmental system in which all citizens have the same right to make decisions as a consequence of surrender to this country (Hidayat 2019). This is in line with Sumodiningrat and Agustian (2008: 44), who assert that democracy implies the application of human dignity and values. For that reason, democratic principles serve as a benchmark for their success. The issue of democracy must always be upheld and is very crucial to the handling of Covid-19 (www.politic.lippi.id). The synergy between the government and the community becomes an important collaboration in dealing with the spread of the coronavirus which has been encountered in almost all regions in Indonesia.

The government has tried to handle halting the coronavirus chain and make policies in response to it. Multiple government policies regarding Covid-19 reap the pros and cons of this from society. Government regulation offers both positive and negative impacts that will not be separate from social and economic aspects. The decline of economic growth is the instance of the first negative impact that was immediately felt due to the coronavirus outbreak (Yunus and Rezki 2020). One of the effects of a pandemic is a crisis of public trust in the government. In many other countries, public trust in government is low. This is absolutely a new attack on the legislative body. The legislature has obligations to draft bills and supervise the working performance of the executive body. This allegedly has an impact on the policies related to Covid-19 anticipation. The support of the majority of parliament members for the executive has made it remain in power. This situation opens opportunities for the public to question the performance of the people's representatives in handling Covid-19 and to demand the participation of their representatives in parliament in responding to government policies (Nurhalimah 2020).

Some study on the legislature in Canada has found that citizens are the ones who have suffered the most in response to the role of parliament as a site of representation. Parliamentary oversight of legislative functions is better than those being presented in public. Parliament must complete their tasks and functions. Therefore, the legislature must also immediately deal with Covid-19 (Rayment and VandenBeukel 2020). Research from Canada even states that the legislature is a complex institution that serves many purposes. In the handling of Covid-19, legislators must be able to adjust to new digital working patterns. The

complexity of legislative obligations (issuing law, conducting supervision, and being the people's representative) leads legislators to become accustomed to working virtually (Malloy 2020). To pass judgment from the functions and duties of parliament, parliaments in Indonesia adhere to a democratic system that has complex roles to assist the community in dealing with Covid-19. This is because every parliament has constituency areas that support them to become legislative candidates. Indonesia as a developing country possesses policies imposed by the government that offer a significant impact on socio-economic welfare. However, it is not evenly distributed over all the regions.

Therefore, the implementation of large-scale social distancing policy has an impact on various companies that make employee layoffs. Some companies are bankrupt and some middle-class businesses are or have been forced to stop selling. The next policy regards civil emergency with the *#menolakdarurat* hashtag, has a homecoming ban, the release of prisoners, and the deferment of instalments. Regulations are defined as social practices and are not single and isolated events. Therefore, regulations are produced by the government and are formulated based on all the events that occur amid society. The phenomena are arising in the practice of social life, and are not stand-alone, isolated or extraneous to the community (Miftah Thoha 2012).

One of the Indonesian foremost presenters, Najwa Shihab, invited several parliaments through her Instagram account to discuss their concerns in dealing with Covid-19. The public considered that there was no significant action taken by the people's representatives related to the handling of Covid-19. Therefore, this study was conducted to evaluate how the legislative institutions in Indonesia, consisting of the House of Representatives and the Regional House of Representatives levels 1 and 2, carry out their activities as people's representatives to fulfill their duties and functions, and how they can help the government in handling Covid-19. That becomes the reference for how this study is conducted: to give significant solutions that can help the people in coping with Covid-19 and beyond, post-pandemic. This study has implications for several government sectors, for instance, those related to the socio-economic community that is affected by Covid-19.

Dimensions of Political Competition

Legislative life is closely related to competition and power struggles (Barber and Schmidt 2019). The life of parliament during this pandemic forces the legislators to be flexible with the current situation, specifically in the context of the completion of obligations, which have all been switched to virtual modes. Parliamentary life will always intersect with various relations, including relations with constituents, executives, political parties, business people and also fellow legislators. Indonesia, as a democratic country with a tagline of 'for the

people and by the people’, provides space for each legislative body to be able to do more for the people (Thuỳ and Pham 2019). This pandemic period seems to be a moment that should not be taken for granted by the legislature as a time to fight over political power for political benefit in the upcoming period. The pandemic condition can be a starting point for holding healthy and transparent political competition that is highly needed for the legislators in carrying out their duties and functions. Almost all online media reports post every kind of issue. In political competition (Anon 2002), all individual movements must consider their meaning and purpose, considering that people always have negative stereotypes towards parliament. According to Scammell (2015), modern democratic politics is a battle of competing images.

Method of the Study

This study illustrates to what extent parliaments and their concerns impact on the community in dealing with Covid-19. The study employs observation, interviews and other references, such as social media. Indonesia, which consists of 32 provinces, places legislative tasks into three structures of the political system, namely the House of Representatives (DPR), the Provincial Representative Council (DPR Provinsi) and the Regional Legislative Councils (DPRD). Each has separate duties and functions, different local pearls of wisdom, and all three are under the auspices of the same political party.

Result and Discussion

I summarise the results of this study in Table 1, which illustrates the humane activities of the legislators during this pandemic in helping the community. The manifestation of legislative activities is various, although several regions in Indonesia have similarities. However, even though the condition of each region concerning the number of Covid-19 patients is different, the policy imposed by the government applies to all regions in Indonesia. Therefore, based on the existing legislative system in Indonesia, members of Legislative Level II (Regional Legislative Councils) in the regencies/cities within a certain province interact more frequently with and more closely to the lives of constituents. Thus, the manifestations of legislative concerns are depicted as follows:

Table 1: Legislative activities conducted for the community

	Activity Legislature	Forms of Social Assistance	Purpose
1	Jakarta Capital City Legislative Council, West Java Legislative Council, Wajo South Sumatra Legislative Council, Kaiman West Papua Legislative Council, Asahan North Sumatra Legislative Council, Lampung Sumatra Legislative Council, Sragen Central Java Legislative Council, Gianyar Bali Legislative Council, Surabaya East Java Legislative Council, Gorontalo Legislative Council, West Kalimantan Legislative Council, Boalemo Gorontalo Legislative Council	Distribution of vitamins, distribution of health protocols (masks and hand sanitisers), distribution of basic needs (rice basic food), spraying disinfectants	concern for the community and health workers
2	Part of the house representative (DPR) and House of Representatives and Regional Legislative Council (DPRD)	Deductions from individual salaries	concern for the the people affected by Covid-19
3	Mataram West Nusa Tenggara Legislative Council, Klungkung Bali Legislative Council	Budget allocation	help to overcome the spread of Covid-19
4	Boalemo Gorontalo Legislative Council, Sukabumi Legislative Council	Socialisation and education for each constituent	help to overcome the spread of Covid-19
5	Kudus Central Java Legislative Council, East Java Legislative Council, Jepara Central Java Legislative Council	Supervise the community (forming task force handling team for Covid-19)	help to overcome the spread of Covid-19

Based on Table 1, it can be seen that the legislative body carries out activities related to the impact of policies imposed by the government in dealing with Covid-19, namely providing social assistance in various forms. In almost all provinces, legal institutions in Indonesia provide social assistance in the form of distribution of vitamins, health protocol tools for the community (masks, hand sanitisers and disinfectants). Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) are also distributed to health workers. The distribution of basic needs is also given to people affected by Covid-19, such as rice and other basic food. The policy handling Covid-19 is impacting more on social and economic aspects (Department of Economic & Social Affairs, 2020). Many people are laid off and cannot apply for jobs because they are prohibited from leaving the house. Many Micro Small Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) do not run their

business activities. Almost all municipal legislative bodies in all provinces in Indonesia provide direct social assistance for the communities, both for people affected by Covid-19 and health workers.

In various provinces, the legislature makes budget cuts from several planned programs and allocates the rest of the budget to help Covid-19 patients. One form of budget allocation comes from recess funds (outside the trial period), which is usually done every three months. This activity is in the form of legislative visits to constituents aimed at gathering aspirations. During the pandemic, the recess is performed through social media and webinars. Thus, funds for recess is allocated for handling Covid-19 in the form of community assistance. The recess material is utilised to hold socialisation of health protocols for society. Each region has different regional conditions of Covid-19, for instance, cultural, geographic, demographic and psychographic matters. According to Iqbal et al. (2020), the most significant early Covid-19 spread occurs in countries with relatively cool temperatures.

Based on Table 1 above, the People's Representative Council, the Regional Legislative Councils level I and the Regional Legislative Councils level II simultaneously deduct the legislative base salary to be allocated to people affected by Covid-19, whereas several legislative bodies in several provinces have established a supervisory and task force on Covid-19. This is done to oversee government performance in tackling the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some provinces have not created a task force for Covid-19 to avoid overlapping tasks and functions of the legislative bodies (Khmelko and Wise 2019).

Based on the results of the study, in maintaining its integrity as a representative of the people and political party cadre, it has become a necessity for the legislature to get involved in the government in tackling Covid-19 and in campaigning about the danger of Covid-19 to the constituents. During this time, the duties and functions of legislative routines always reap criticism, especially when there is an opportunity for applying it. This certainly becomes a polemic for legislators. First, no matter what happens, legislative members must fulfill their duties and functions, every single day. Second, the legislative bodies must assist the government in handling Covid-19, such as by overseeing the budget legislation. However, the legislature must also help the government provide solutions regarding the handling of Covid-19 in Indonesia, for instance, drafting bills and stipulating regional regulations for the regional legislature. Third, government policies that are considered detrimental to society require legislative institutions to help people both morally and materially. Fourth, as a party cadre, the legislative bodies are also required to build a positive image of the party. During this period, the party as a representation of the people must be able to act critically towards policies that harm the public. Therefore, this pandemic is an opportunity for political parties to restore public confidence after the election in 2019. Fifth, the legislation has to be vigilant to government policies that may bring disadvantages to the legislature itself. Activities

undertaken by the legislature as described above indicate an expansion of the role that is legally performed in this pandemic period. The legislature carries out many kinds of dual activities because of additional obligations charged to the legislation during the pandemic (Lee 2020).

Genuine Concern or Political Imaging?

Legislative activity towards the impact of government policy in dealing with Covid-19 represents the Indonesian cultures, namely “gotong royong”, or helping one another (Bowen 1986) Mardiasmo and Barnes 2013). This is not only done by legislative institutions but also the society in general. We are working hand in hand and helping lower-class people affected by the pandemic. As shown in Table 1, the purpose of the activities performed by the legislators is a form of legislative concern for people who need assistance, in response to policies that are considered detrimental. This is also a way for the legislature to maintain its connection with constituents. The people who get help from the legislature consider that those actions are the manifestation of concern in response to detrimental government policies in dealing with Covid-19. Instead of campaign promises, constituents feel the concrete evidence from the people's representatives.

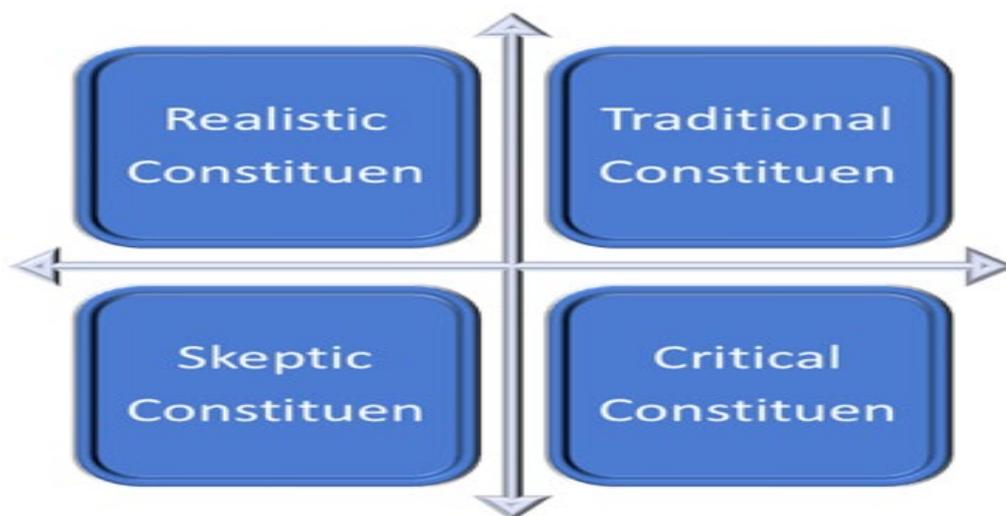
Political competition, which is often unavoidable, separates the legislature into two, namely the supporting and opposition groups. Political struggles are often carried out by politicians at which every moment can be brought onto the political stage and create a turning point of his or her political journey in the future. The Covid-19 Pandemic is a condition that cannot be separated from the involvement of legislative performance, which provides an opportunity for the members of the legislature to be able to show their identity and improve their image in the eyes of the public. Instead, it still draws criticism from and even invites many polemics in the community who constantly question the role and performance of the legislature.

Political interests often have to be negotiated. Many interests negatively affect the effectiveness of message delivery to the community regarding the purpose of the activities done by the legislature to help the government deal with the virus' outbreaks. Some people interpret this activity as an opportunity to gain people's support, or so-called political imaging. This image is illustrated by a legislative body aiming to gather public support and restore political images. This is certainly marked by the following matters: *first*, inviting various media to cover social assistance activities; *second*, the inclusion of political party logos and personal identities in every aid given to the people; *third*, the budget used to help the people is not originated from their personal expenses. According to Natal'ia (2017), image making is a two-sided process, one side is the behaviour of politicians and the second is the source of the media covering this behaviour. According to the results from Lalancette and Raynauld's (2019) article, the making of political images is very prominent in the

political context that is mediated today because "modern democratic politics is a battle [without stopping] from image competition" to attract attention (Scammell 2015). Usually, however, he has tried to redefine the image as a substantial concept: reputation based on track record and credibility of promises differ from the good looks of surface appearance. More broadly, the making of a political image is to produce, maintain, sharpen and reinforce favourable perceptions among community members to influence their personal political attitudes and, by extension, decision making is performed in a strategic manner. Image management is a core task of political marketing practice. Politicians usually build an image that reflects core political values because it embodies great American values - such as individualism, freedom, or equality - enhancing their status, legitimising their claims to exercise power and justifying their policy choices (Strachan and Kendall 2004).

Given the highly competitive political competition, the legislature has political interests for the future. Political competition is defined (as is customary) in terms of party competition: the size and number of parties taken as given, and the consequences for political behaviour investigated (Stigler 1972). Thus, the activities performed by the legislature have the imaging attribute. Based on these two meanings and the data from Table 1 regarding the legislature's social activities, constituents can be categorised into:

Table 2: Type of constituency



1. Realistic constituents

What has the legislature done? Assistance in any kind of form performed by the legislators, that the community receive. This type of constituent recognises that the legislature has contributed to the community. So, this type of constituency recognises that the legislature has done something for them. The most important thing is empirical evidence. When the community, for example, undergoes economic shortcomings, the legislature is there to help.

Constituents do not need promises from the legislature, but they need concrete evidence to give way out and become part of the constituents. For realistic constituents, social assistance activities are a manifestation of legislative efforts to help them.

2. Traditional constituents

This type of constituent will follow what is believed by the person closest to them. Whatever is said by “x”, I will follow. Traditional constituents easily put trust into any legislative activity. They are almost the same as realistic constituents, but they will believe in people who they are close to. They are usually passive legislative supporters who are only waiting for orders. This type of constituency has high loyalty and will believe in the social activities performed by the elite. This happens because the traditional constituents have repeatedly benefited from the existence of the legislature.

3. Skeptical constituents

This type of constituency does not believe in social legislative activities. Skeptical constituents are almost the same as critical constituents. The difference is that skeptical constituents usually tend to be pessimistic in assessing legislative performance and their activities, even though the legislators have proven the pledges. For skeptical constituents, social activities undertaken by the legislative as a manifestation of concern for the people are doubtful. They believe that it is only for political interests or imaging.

4. Critical constituents

Why are social activities done? This type of constituency will analyse the depth of actions taken by the legislators. What is the purpose behind it all? It is better to focus on the oversight function so that the government will truly work for the people. Critical voters see the legislative activities in a complex manner to empirically unveil an unseen thing, such as the intention and purpose of legislative’s social activities.

Conclusion

During the Covid-19 pandemic, political activity became a dual role that inevitably had to be handled by the legislature. The social activities undertaken by legislators in assisting the government and the community in coping with Covid-19 are interpreted as both attention and as part of political interests or political imaging. In this period, these two things become mutually related and provide benefits to one another. Even though it is in the form of imaging, those actions are very much needed by the people affected by Covid-19. Legislative care is the starting point for how the legislative bodies can establish relationships with constituents. Good relations with constituents become political investments in the future. In dealing with Covid-19, municipal legislative bodies in various regions in Indonesia should



become opinion leaders to educate the society and to campaign about the pandemic and how to overcome it. This is essential since the legislative members are community representatives and have a part of the community's voice.

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