

When Comedy Meets Politics: Symbolic Capital and The Electoral Phenomenon of Komeng in Indonesia's 2024 DPD Election

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Abstract: This study analyzes how Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng utilized symbolic capital to secure 5,399,699 votes, the highest nationally in Indonesia's 2024 Regional Representative Council (DPD) election from West Java. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach with a single instrumental case study grounded in Bourdieu's theory of capital, the research draws on official KPU documents, national media coverage (January–April 2024), social media data, and academic literature. The findings identify two primary symbolic capital dimensions: (1) popularity/fame accumulated over 35 years in the entertainment industry, and (2) a positively perceived charismatic image reinforced by an anti-expensive-politics narrative and absence of scandal. The study reveals that the DPD's non-partisan, personal-vote-based First-Past-The-Post system structurally advantages high-symbolic-capital candidates. Komeng's atypical zero-cost campaign centered on a viral ballot photograph and official name change amplified his symbolic capital into substantial electoral appeal. This research extends Bourdieusian theory by demonstrating how symbolic capital functions as a legitimacy heuristic in Global South democracies characterized by information asymmetry. The findings carry implications for understanding celebrity politics, institutional design of non-partisan representation, and the quality of electoral democracy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Bourdieusian Theory, DPD Election, Komeng Phenomenon, Symbolic Capital

A. Introduction

The phenomenon of celebrity involvement in the electoral political arena is by no means new in the development of global democracy, yet their presence in Indonesian political contestation in the post-1998 Reform era continues to show an increasingly significant upward trend. An open democratic system provides broad opportunities for every citizen, including public figures from the entertainment world, to engage and participate in the political process. In the 2024 General Election, at least 84 celebrities ran as candidates in the Legislative Election (Pileg), and 22 of them successfully won seats in the People's Representative Council (DPR) RI, an increase of eight seats compared to the 2019 Election results (Rahman, 2024). These data reflect a

shift in voter preferences while raising critical questions about the relationship between popularity, political capability, and the quality of representation in Indonesian democracy.

Amid the growing involvement of celebrities in the party-based legislative arena, the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI) presents a different and analytically more compelling institutional context for study. As a non-partisan institution whose members are elected purely through personal vote rather than party affiliation, DPD RI structurally privileges personal capital over party machinery as the primary determinant of electability (Andersson, 2015) — its specific electoral mechanics are elaborated in the Literature Review below. In such an electoral contestation environment, the symbolic capital inherent in public figures holds the potential to become a decisive competitive advantage.

In this context, the phenomenon of Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng emerged on the political stage in a manner unprecedented in Indonesian electoral history. In the 2024 Election, Komeng a comedian who has been active since the early 1990s, recorded 5,399,699 votes from the West Java electoral district (Antara News, 2024), making him the DPD candidate with the highest national vote tally. This result significantly surpassed DPD candidates from other provinces known as major vote reservoirs: Taj Yasin Maimoen from Central Java received 3,821,699 votes, while Ahmad Nawardi from East Java received 3,281,105 votes (Nashori, 2024; Priyasmoro, 2024). Komeng even outstripped his closest rival in West Java, Aanya Rina Casmayanti, by a margin of more than three million votes, a dominance rarely seen in the history of DPD RI elections.

Table 1 Comparison of the Highest Vote Totals Among DPD RI Candidates in the 2024 General Election (Three Largest Provinces)

Province	Candidate Name	Votes Obtained	Notes
West Java	Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng	5,399,699	Highest nationally
Central Java	Taj Yasin Maimoen	3,821,699	-
Central Java	Casytha Arriwi Kathmandu	3,567,338	-
East Java	Ahmad Nawardi	3,281,105	-
East Java	La Nyalla Mahmud Mattalitti	3,132,076	-

Source: (Antara News, 2024; Nashori, 2024; Priyasmoro, 2024)

Komeng's success possesses several distinctive features that make it academically significant. First, he ran as a candidate without a conventional campaign; there were no large billboards, banners, or paid advertisements on a significant scale. His campaign costs are reported to have amounted to only tens of millions of rupiah, far lower than the average candidate (Aditia, 2025). Second, the political communication

strategy he employed was anchored in the use of an iconic facial expression photograph on the ballot paper without any vision-mission text, which went viral on social media and triggered widespread public enthusiasm (Siswanto & Ahwan, 2024). Third, the primary modality he relied upon was not economic capital or structural party support, but rather the accumulated symbolic capital of reputation, positive image, and popularity built over more than three decades. Based on data from the Indonesian Survey Institute (2023), Komeng's popularity rate reached 85% among the people of West Java even before the official campaign period had begun (Aliah et al., 2018).

Academic studies on celebrities entering politics in Indonesia have thus far focused primarily on DPR RI contestation based on political parties, political communication strategies and personal branding, and the dimension of popularity as a standalone electoral factor. Research conducted by (Ambu & Ayu, 2024; Kosandi, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2024; Ulfa et al., 2024) generally emphasizes social capital, winning strategies, and visual communication, but has not yet systematically integrated all three within Bourdieu's theory of capital framework, particularly in the non-partisan DPD RI context. Moreover, no study has specifically examined the mechanism by which a celebrity's symbolic capital is converted to yield a seat in the DPD RI arena, which has different institutional characteristics from the DPR RI. To substantiate this gap more precisely, the following section maps the existing literature into three thematic clusters before situating this article's contribution within them.

Building on the gap identified above, prior research relevant to this study can be organized into three clusters based on their thematic focus, methods, and theoretical grounding. This clustering serves not only to map the existing scholarly landscape but also to demonstrate where this article's novelty and originality are positioned.

Cluster One: Capital. (Arzila et al., 2025; Kosandi, 2025; Pratiwi et al., 2024; Ulfa et al., 2024) argue that candidates' victories in legislative elections generally rest upon social capital, political capital, and economic capital. Studies on Komeng largely highlight his popularity as a national comedian but have not yet integrated this into Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic capital framework in a comprehensive manner. Research gap: no study has dissected the electability of a non-party celebrity through the lens of symbolic capital in the non-partisan, personal-vote-based DPD RI election. This research fills that gap by demonstrating that Komeng's victory is the result of symbolic capital conversion accumulated from image, legitimacy, and public recognition.

Cluster Two: Winning Strategies. (Aliah et al., 2024; Ambu & Ayu, 2024) focus on the winning strategies of entertainment figures in the 2024 West Java DPD Election, highlighting the use of popularity, social media, a low-cost anti-politics image, and the symbolic uniqueness of the 'quirky' ballot photo. These studies predominate on aspects of campaign strategy and personal branding, yet fail to answer how Komeng's

social symbols and legitimacy were converted into electoral support within Bourdieu's symbolic capital framework, the gap this study addresses.

Cluster Three: Political Communication. (Dinda Rizka et al., 2024; Reskiwardina & Unde, 2024; Rizkia & Euis Komalawati, 2024; Siti et al., 2023) examine Komeng from the perspectives of visual communication, personal branding, multimodality, and netizen responses on social media platform X. All four stop at the level of popularity and media support expression, relying on secondary data without integrating Bourdieu's symbolic capital framework. This research fills that gap by integrating Bourdieu's symbolic capital framework.

Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Symbolic Capital

Symbolic capital is one of the central concepts in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, referring to any form of capital, whether economic, cultural, or social that receives recognition and legitimacy from other agents within a social arena (field). In *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991), Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as 'any capital perceived through categories of perception that are the product of the internalization of divisions or oppositions inscribed in the structure of the distribution of this type of capital. Symbolic capital can thus be understood as a force arising from the recognition and social acceptance that others grant to the advantages possessed by an individual.

"Symbolic capital is credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition."
- (Bourdieu, 1991), *Language and Symbolic Power*, p. 166)

Bourdieu (1986) in *The Forms of Capital* posits four interrelated forms of capital: economic capital (material and financial assets), cultural capital (education, knowledge, and competence), social capital (networks of relations and group membership), and symbolic capital, which acts as a 'meta-capital', the ability to convert and legitimize all other forms of capital. These four types of capital operate within a field (arena), a structured social space in which agents compete for positions and resources. Meanwhile, habitus as an internalized scheme of perception, appreciation, and action, mediates the relationship between the agent and that arena (Wacquant, Loic J. D. & Bourdieu, 1992).



Figure 1 Infographic of Bourdieu's Four Forms of Capital and Conversion Mechanisms in the Electoral Political Arena (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1991)

What distinguishes symbolic capital from other forms of capital is its reliance on misrecognition, the mechanism by which actual power relations are concealed by social recognition that is perceived as natural and taken for granted (Swartz L, 1997). A public figure regarded as 'worthy,' 'trustworthy,' or 'beloved by the people' is essentially deploying symbolic capital: the power of reputation and image that has received collective recognition. This mechanism enables celebrities like Komeng to enter the political arena without first needing to build a strong party base.

The conversion between forms of capital is a crucial aspect in understanding the phenomenon of celebrities entering politics. Thomson (2008) explains that the symbolic capital possessed by an actor in the cultural or entertainment arena does not automatically apply in the political arena; a process of translation and adaptation is required. However, when the level of recognition is already very high, as in the case of top-tier celebrities, this conversion process can proceed more efficiently compared to actors starting from scratch. This is precisely what distinguishes Komeng's trajectory from DPD candidates with backgrounds in bureaucracy or civil society activism.

Dimensions of Symbolic Capital in This Study

Popularity / Fame (Bourdieu, 1986b)

Popularity or fame is an important element in the formation of symbolic capital because it directly influences a candidate's visibility and appeal to the public. Bourdieu (1986) asserts that individuals with high symbolic capital, such as celebrity

status generally obtain widespread recognition that can be leveraged in a political context to influence public opinion and mobilize voter support.

In the contemporary political arena, popularity formed through the entertainment or cultural sphere can be converted into significant political capital. This cross-capital conversion process proceeds more efficiently when an actor's level of recognition is already very high, as observed in the case of top-tier celebrities entering politics (Thomson, 2008).

Positive Image and Charisma (Fukuyama, 2000)

Positive image and charisma are elements of symbolic capital that play a role in building trust and emotional closeness with voters. According to Fukuyama (2000), social capital is grounded in trust and moral reputation formed through shared norms and values. In the context of electoral politics, this trust is manifested through the candidate's positive image and personal charisma as the most readily felt form of symbolic capital by the public.

The charisma possessed by a public figure can reinforce political legitimacy by enhancing their credibility and influence among voters. An image formed and internalized over an extended period functions as a social identity attached to the individual, thereby eliciting an affective response from voters that fosters positive interaction (Siswanto & Ahwan, 2024). These two dimensions of symbolic capital, popularity and positive image are interrelated and mutually reinforcing in the arena of political competition.

Table 2 Dimensions of Symbolic Capital in This Study

Type of Capital	Theory / Source	Operational Definition	Indicators
Symbolic Capital	<i>Popularity / Fame</i> (Bourdieu, 1986)	The degree of public recognition and visibility of an actor that can be converted into political capital through the mechanism of collective recognition.	Level of public recognition - Media reach - Voter support
	<i>Positive Image & Charisma</i> (Fukuyama, 2000)	Moral reputation, public trust, and personal appeal that build candidate legitimacy through affective interaction with the community.	Clean reputation - Public trust - Personal appeal

Source: Author's analysis based on (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1991; Fukuyama, 2000)

Capital Utilization

Utilization derives from the root word 'utilize,' meaning use or benefit. In the context of electoral politics, the utilization of capital can be understood as the process or strategy of optimizing the capital possessed so that it becomes useful that is, deployed to attract voter support, garner votes, and ultimately win a seat through the election.

Capital Utilization in Elections

According to Reynolds et al. (2016), the electoral system functions as a mechanism that converts votes obtained in an election into legislative seats won by candidates and political parties. Accordingly, capital utilization in the electoral context can be understood as the process or strategy of optimizing one's available capital to attract voter support, secure votes, and ultimately win a seat through the election (Reynolds et al., 2016).

First Past the Post

Indonesia's electoral system draws a fundamental distinction between the mechanisms for electing DPR RI and DPD RI members. DPR RI employs an open proportional system, where parliamentary seats are distributed proportionally based on party vote shares while simultaneously allowing voters to directly choose individual candidates (Denk, T., & Anckar, 2015). This system produces fairer representation, though it still tends to favor larger parties. DPD RI, on the other hand, uses the First Past the Post (FPTP) system, a variant of the majoritarian/plurality electoral system in which the four candidates with the highest vote totals in each province are directly elected, without regard to vote proportions or party affiliation (Andersson, 2015).

FPTP's chief advantage is its simplicity: voters can easily understand who wins and why (Kelly, 2008). However, the system carries significant structural weaknesses: proportional representation for independent or resource-limited candidates is minimal, while candidates with substantial social and financial capital gain a systemic advantage. The fundamental difference between these two systems has direct implications for the character of representation produced. Open proportional tends to reflect the diversity of voter preferences, whereas FPTP opens space for the dominance of figures with accumulated symbolic and material resources, as manifested in the phenomenon of Komeng's election in the 2024 DPD election.

The institutional asymmetry illustrates how the electoral system itself functions as a "field" in Bourdieusian terms, one whose rules determine which forms of capital are most readily convertible into electoral seats. This article is structured as follows: following the introduction, the second section describes the qualitative research method based on secondary data; the third section presents the results and discussion,

encompassing Komeng's symbolic capital profile, his strategy for utilizing it in the campaign, and a structural analysis of the DPD RI arena; and the fourth section concludes the article with key findings, theoretical and practical contributions, and an agenda for future research.

This study makes two explicit contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the application and development of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of capital, particularly the concept of symbolic capital, in the context of contemporary Indonesian electoral politics, extending the framework to a non-partisan, personal-vote-based institutional setting that has not been systematically examined in prior Bourdieusian scholarship on Indonesian elections. Practically, the findings are relevant for understanding the dynamics of DPD RI elections, informing the institutional design of regional representation, and illuminating the way Indonesian voters build trust and legitimacy toward non-partisan candidates.

The selection of West Java as the electoral district further enriches this study with cultural depth, given Komeng's geographical, cultural, and social closeness to the region, particularly through his role as Chairman of the Indonesian Comedy Artists Association (PASKI) West Java for the 2016–2021 period and his humanitarian activities with the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) in Bogor Regency (Siswanto & Ahwan, 2024; Yusuf, 2025).

In line with the significance outlined above. This study offers novelty on three fronts: (1) its analytical focus on how symbolic capital is utilized, converted, and operationalized by a non-party celebrity; (2) the non-partisan institutional context of DPD RI, which differs from the majority of previous studies. Using Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, this research does not merely explain what symbolic capital Komeng possessed, but how that capital was converted into political legitimacy and the highest vote total in Indonesia in the 2024 DPD RI election. It is on this basis of significance and novelty that the central research question of this study is formulated.

Based on the theoretical significance, practical relevance, and novelty outlined above, this article addresses the following central research question: how did Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng utilize symbolic capital in securing a seat in the 2024 General Election for the Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia? To answer this question, the study pursues three specific objectives: first, to identify and describe the dimensions of symbolic capital possessed by Komeng; second, to analyze the strategy of utilizing symbolic capital in the 2024 DPD RI campaign and electoral contestation; and third, to discuss the implications of the findings for the study of Indonesian electoral politics, particularly in understanding the phenomenon of celebrities entering the non-partisan legislative arena.

B. Methods

This study is situated within an interpretive qualitative paradigm grounded in social constructivism, consistent with Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, in which knowledge of the social world is obtained through the interpretation of objective relations and agents' subjective dispositions (Siswanto & Ahwan, 2024; Wacquant, Loic J. D. & Bourdieu, 1992). The strategy employed is a single instrumental case study (Yin, 2018), with Komeng as the case that most extremely and documentedly represents the conversion of celebrity symbolic capital into the DPD arena, while also serving as a statistically analytical outlier that is highly informative within a personal-vote-based electoral system.

This study relies entirely on secondary data drawn from four complementary sources: official KPU documents, national media coverage from January to April 2024, Komeng's social media data (Instagram, YouTube, TikTok) as indicators of digital symbolic capital, and academic literature indexed in SINTA/Scopus as well as research institute reports. Document review followed a structured extraction protocol adapted from Bowen (2009), in which each document was systematically examined across five analytical categories: (1) indicators of symbolic capital accumulation; (2) evidence of capital conversion; (3) electoral arena characteristics; (4) campaign activities and expenditures; and (5) disconfirming evidence that challenged the symbolic capital thesis (Bowen, 2009).

Media content analysis (Neuendorf, 2017) was applied to national media items published between 1 January and 30 April 2024, encompassing three dimensions operationalized from Bourdieu's (1986) capital typology: symbolic capital indicators, capital conversion signals, and arena characteristics. All data were analyzed using a four-stage analytical procedure adapted from Swartz (1997) and Wacquant (2014): (1) field mapping, (2) capital inventory, (3) conversion tracing, and (4) structural interpretation. Analytical procedures were conducted manually, without reliance on qualitative data analysis software. Because this study employs a single researcher, three measures were adopted to enhance the credibility and dependability of the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and the maintenance of an audit trail through a dated research journal, substituting for inter-coder reliability checks that would be standard in multi-researcher designs.

C. Results and Discussion

Results

Komeng's Symbolic Capital Profile

The phenomenon of Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng's election in the 2024 DPD RI General Election cannot be adequately understood without first mapping the

accumulation of symbolic capital he built over more than three decades in the entertainment world. Within Pierre Bourdieu's framework (1986, 1991), symbolic capital refers to the accumulated recognition, reputation, authority, and social legitimacy collectively acknowledged by a group or society; this capital is relational, and its value depends on the arena in which it is deployed.

Komeng began his career in 1989 with the comedy group Diamor, appearing in programs such as Kompor Diamor, Akal-Akalan, and Putri Duyung, before working as a radio broadcaster at Radio SK Jakarta (1993–1996) and Bens Radio (1996). His peak popularity was achieved through Spontan on SCTV (1996–2003), one of the longest-running sitcoms in Indonesian television history, produced by Starvision Plus for 12 years with the catchphrase 'Spontan... Uhuy!' that transformed into a cross-generational popular cultural marker (Beritasatu.com, 2025).

Over three decades of his career, Komeng participated in approximately 75 television programs, 13 television series, and two feature films, while also serving as a Yamaha brand ambassador and as a Volunteer Worker for the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) in Bogor Regency, responding to the 2018 Sunda Strait Tsunami and the 2022 Cianjur Earthquake (Telisik.id, 2024). This three-decade accumulation of symbolic capital constitutes the empirical foundation examined in this study, recorded against an electoral outcome of 5,399,699 votes, the highest national tally among DPD RI candidates in 2024 (Kumparan, 2024). Table 3 summarizes seven dimensions through which this accumulated symbolic capital manifested, from recognition and fame to converted social and civic capital:

Table 3 Dimensions of Komeng's Symbolic Capital and Their Manifestations

Dimension of Symbolic Capital	Concrete Manifestations	Source / Basis
Recognition & Fame	The name 'Komeng' known across generations; catchphrase 'Uhuy!' a national pop-culture icon; ±75 TV programs, 13 TV series, 2 feature films (1989–2024)	35+ years entertainment career
Reputation & Credibility	Chairman of PASKI West Java, two terms (2013–2021); Panasonic Gobel Awards nominee (2015); clean track record	PASKI; Gobel Awards (2015)
Symbolic Legitimacy	Accepted as authentic, non-elitist figure; Spontan aired 12 years; national Yamaha advertising star	Spontan (SCTV, 1996–2003)
Converted Social Capital	PASKI West Java network as mobilization infrastructure; PASKI Subang meeting as candidacy origin	PASKI Subang meeting

Digital Presence	Organic trending topic on X on election day; ballot photo viral at zero cost; legal name change (Aug. 2023)	Viral ballot photo
Civic Social Capital	PMI Bogor volunteer; assisted 2018 tsunami & 2022 earthquake victims; HMI member (1990)	PMI Bogor; 2018 & 2022 disasters
Electoral Capital	5,399,699 votes – highest nationally among 54 senate candidates	KPU RI, 2024 Recapitulation

Source: Compiled from (Ambisius Wiki, 2026; CNN Indonesia, 2024; Inforedaksi, 2022; Kaltimtoday.co, 2024; Komisi Pemilihan Umum Provinsi Jawa Barat, 2024; Kumparan, 2024; Medianekita, 2022; Suara.com, 2020; Tabloid Bintang, 2015; Telisik.id, 2024; Yanuar, 2025; Zon, 2013)

One of the most powerful manifestations of this symbolic capital in the digital era appears in Komeng's social-media footprint. On election day, 14 February 2024, the name 'Komeng' became an organic trending topic on X (Twitter), a phenomenon difficult to attain through conventional campaign spending alone, and evidence that his symbolic capital had evolved into digital capital, a dimension introduced into the Bourdieusian framework by (Loader et al., 2014).

Komeng also built institutional legitimacy through his position as Chairman of PASKI (Indonesian Comedy Artists Association) West Java for the 2016–2021 period; this position reflects social capital successfully converted into symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986a). Notably, the idea of Komeng's candidacy originated at a PASKI West Java meeting in Subang, indicating that the organization functioned as an initial mobilization infrastructure.

Strategic Utilization of Symbolic Capital

Overview: From Symbolic Capital to Electoral Capital

The most prominent finding in Komeng's case is the high effectiveness of symbolic-capital conversion into electoral capital. While other DPD candidates in West Java generally allocated around Rp80–100 billion for campaign costs, Komeng openly stated that his campaign expenditure did not even approach hundreds of millions of rupiah.

"If I spent tens, it didn't even reach hundreds of millions, just tens of millions. No need to put up big billboards, people already know what my face looks like."
- Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng, HAS Creative Podcast (Gofar Hilman), April 2025

Komeng's campaign strategy can be classified as minimum-cost, maximum-exposure: minimizing conventional campaign expenditure as much as possible while optimizing media exposure anchored in the symbolic capital accumulated over 35 years. The

following model summarizes the conversion process of that symbolic capital into substantial electoral support.

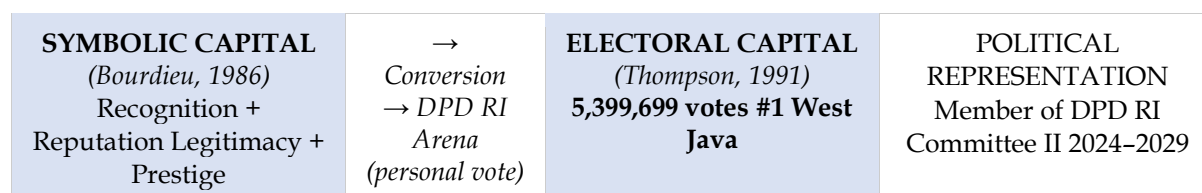


Figure 2 Model of Symbolic Capital Conversion → Electoral Capital (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1991; Thompson, 1991; Thomson, 2008)

The diagram above shows how Komeng’s symbolic capital, developed over 35 years, encompassing recognition, reputation, legitimacy, and prestige was converted through the personal-vote DPD RI arena into 5,399,699 votes of electoral capital, ultimately bringing him political representation as a Member of DPD RI Committee II for the 2024–2029 period. This finding affirms that strongly accumulated symbolic capital can replace the function of economic capital in certain political contestations.

Five Mechanisms of Operationalization

From Bourdieu’s (1986) perspective, popularity is one of the most tangible and most easily convertible forms of symbolic capital in a political arena grounded in personal vote. Based on data from the Indonesian Survey Institute (2024), cited in (Aliah et al., 2024), Komeng’s popularity rate reached 85% among the people of West Java even before the official campaign period had begun. At least five mechanisms operationalized this popularity into electoral support:

Table 4 Five Mechanisms for the Operationalization of Komeng’s Symbolic Capital

No.	Mechanism	Operational Description	Theoretical Basis
1.	Official Name Change via PN Cibirong	Conversion of the identity ‘Komeng’ into a legal name on the ballot paper (2023), maximizing name recognition as the most valuable symbolic asset.	Bourdieu (1986): social credit being cashed in
2.	‘Quirky’ Ballot Photo, Zero-Cost Innovation	A wide-eyed, startled expression functioning as a visual recognition heuristic; spread virally without advertising cost.	Lim (2017): algorithms accelerate symbolic capital
3.	‘Performing in Bandung’ Strategy, Covert Campaign	Entertainment activities as voter-contact medium without violating the formal definition of campaigning.	Thomson (2008): translation of capital across arenas
4.	Anti-Expensive-Politics Image	Campaign costs of tens of millions of rupiah (vs. Rp80–100 billion average) reinforced an authenticity narrative.	Thompson (1991): consent via emotional closeness

5.	Non-Ambition Motivation Narrative	Candidacy rooted in the failure to secure National Comedy Day, reinforcing an image of cultural advocacy over power-seeking.	Bourdieu (1991): habitus as internalized disposition
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Source: Author's analysis based on (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1991; Rizkia & Euis Komalawati, 2024; Thompson, 1991).

The ballot-photo mechanism deserves elaboration: the startled, wide-eyed expression functioned as an instant cognitive recognition trigger, what Rizkia & Komalawati (2024) term a 'visual recognition signal.' Table 5 maps how this image propagated across digital platforms between 14–18 February 2024, entirely without paid promotion:

Table 5 Map of the Virality of Komeng's Ballot Paper Photo on Digital Media (14–18 February 2024)

Platform	Form of Virality	Period	Electoral Impact
X (Twitter)	Organic national trending topic	14 Feb 2024 (Election Day)	Zero-cost; millions of spontaneous impressions
Instagram	Ballot photo in Stories & Feeds	14–15 Feb 2024	Positive reinforcement; humanizing moment
WhatsApp	Distribution in family & work groups	14–16 Feb 2024	Demographic reach for the 35+ age group
TikTok	Reaction videos & netizen comments	14–18 Feb 2024	Amplification to the Gen Z segment
Mass Media	Coverage in 100+ national & international articles	Feb–Mar 2024	Mainstream legitimacy; narrative of a phenomenon formed

Source: Compiled from (Dinda Rizka et al., 2024; Lim, 2017; Reskiwardina & Unde, 2024; Siti et al., 2023)

Positive Image and Charisma

If popularity represents the quantitative dimension of symbolic capital (how many people know someone), positive image and charisma reflect its qualitative dimension, how that individual is perceived and the emotional response elicited. Table 6 disaggregates this qualitative dimension into four sub-elements:

Table 6 Four Sub-Elements of Image and Charisma as Komeng's Symbolic Capital

Sub-Element of Image	Manifestation & Mechanism	Theoretical Basis
Anti-Expensive-Politics Image	Transparency of campaign costs differentiates Komeng from conventional candidates; budget limitation converted into an authenticity narrative.	Goffman (1959): impression management
Comedic Charisma as Affective Resonance	The catchphrase 'Spontan... Uhuy!' embedded in collective memory for 25+ years; charisma is embodied in gesture and expression.	Bourdieu (1991): embodied habitus
Absence of Scandal as Positive Negative Capital	30 years without moral, legal, or political scandal — a rare symbolic asset amid public distrust of politicians.	Fukuyama (2000): consistent moral reputation
Non-Ambition Motivation Narrative	Candidacy motivation rooted in the failure to secure National Comedy Day; frames Komeng as a cultural advocate, not a power-seeker.	Thompson (1991): consent via sincere narrative

Source: Author's analysis based on (Bourdieu, 1991; Fukuyama, 2000; Goffman, 2018; Thompson, 1991).

DPD Field as a Favorable Arena

An analysis of Komeng's victory cannot be separated from a structural understanding of the field (arena) in which the contestation took place, a competitive space with its own rules, hierarchies, and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986a). Structurally, the DPD RI 2024 political field constitutes an arena that benefits candidates with high symbolic capital.

DPD RI applies the First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) system based on personal vote: voters cast ballots for individuals, not parties; candidates need not affiliate with political parties; and only the four highest vote-getters in each province receive a seat (Reynolds et al., 2016). These rules shift the determining factor for victory from party strength to personal strength, within which symbolic capital becomes the most effective form of personal capital.

West Java as Komeng's electoral district adds a scale dimension: with a Permanent Voter List (DPT) of 35,714,901 voters and 140,457 polling stations, West Java is Indonesia's largest electoral district. Candidates without a high recognition rate are nearly impossible to reach widely on a limited budget, a constraint under which Komeng's accumulated symbolic capital functioned as a natural differentiator.

KPU data shows that Komeng obtained 22.75% of the total valid DPD votes in West Java, nearly three times the share of the second-elected candidate, Aanya Rina

Casmayanti (8.33%). Notably, Komeng's vote total in Bogor Regency alone (678,352 votes) exceeded the highest DPD vote total recorded in several other provinces, such as West Kalimantan and Bali.

Table 7 below illustrates the evolution of the KPU real count. Komeng maintained a clear lead from the earliest reporting stage, with the margin expanding steadily throughout the counting process until the final tally. Rather than reflecting a late-count surge, this trajectory indicates broad-based and geographically dispersed electoral support.

Table 7 Development of KPU Real Count & Komeng's Dominance from the Outset

Time	% Polling Stations Counted	Komeng's Votes	Closest Competitor
15 Feb 2024, 11:00 WIB	33.20%	193,189	Aanya: 87,289
22 Feb 2024, 17:01 WIB	60.77%	2,030,258	Aanya: 843,340
18 Mar 2024 (Final)	100%	5,399,699	Aanya: 1,976,561

Source: (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia (KPU RI), 2024; Priyasmoro, 2024)

Komeng's consistent lead from the point at which 33% of polling stations had reported is itself a descriptive finding: it indicates evenly distributed support not dependent on concentrated local mobilization, in contrast to the more fluctuating real-count patterns typically associated with clientelistic, locally concentrated campaign networks. For context, Table 1 (Introduction) already situates Komeng's 5,399,699 votes against the next-highest DPD vote-getters nationally.

Discussion

The findings of this study generate three interrelated theoretical implications that extend Bourdieu's framework beyond its original European social-field context. These contributions advance the political sociology literature on capital, celebrity politics, and electoral competition in the Global South.

Symbolic Capital as a Legitimacy Heuristic under Information Asymmetry

(Bourdieu, 1986a, 1991) conceptualized symbolic capital as recognition-based legitimacy operating through misrecognition within structured social fields. This study extends that framework by showing that, under conditions of high information asymmetry, symbolic capital also functions as a legitimacy heuristic, enabling voters to simplify electoral decisions when programmatic information is limited or distrusted (Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Popkin, 1991). Komeng's 85% popularity rate

in West Java before the official campaign (Aliah et al., 2024), reinforced by his viral ballot photograph, generated an affectively charged cognitive shortcut that displaced deliberative candidate evaluation, consistent with Kahneman's (2011) System 1 thinking. This heuristic effect was further amplified by Indonesia's 2024 simultaneous elections, where low voter literacy, limited access to candidate information, and weak institutional trust, conditions common in many Global South democracies (Norris, 2011) allowed the symbolically pre-loaded name "Komeng" to dominate voter attention with minimal campaign investment, thereby illustrating a context-specific extension of Bourdieusian theory beyond its original European setting.

The DPD Arena as a Bourdieusian Field that Privileges Symbolic Capital

A second theoretical contribution is demonstrating that the DPD RI electoral system constitutes a Bourdieusian field, a structured arena whose immanent rules (First-Past-The-Post, non-partisan, personal vote) determine which forms of capital are most readily converted into electoral success (Bourdieu, 1993; Thomson, 2008). Unlike the DPR RI's open-proportional system, where party organizations, economic capital, and clientelistic networks remain central, the DPD structurally favors candidates with pre-existing symbolic capital acquired beyond politics. Consequently, Komeng's campaign expenditure of only tens of millions of rupiah, compared with competitors' Rp 80-100 billion, reflects a structural advantage rather than an anomaly: his 35-year celebrity brand represented accumulated symbolic capital that, under a non-partisan personal-vote FPTP system, could not be matched through economic investment alone. This finding extends Thomson's (2008) theory of cross-arena capital translation by identifying the institutional conditions that maximize its electoral efficiency.

Digital Capital as an Extension of Symbolic Capital in Electoral Arenas

A third theoretical contribution concerns the integration of digital capital into the Bourdieusian framework. (Loader et al., 2014) introduced the concept of the networked young citizen, arguing that social media platforms generate new forms of political capital through participatory visibility; this study extends that argument by demonstrating that pre-existing symbolic capital is the essential precondition for zero-cost virality. Komeng's ballot photograph went organically viral not merely because of platform affordances, but because decades of accumulated symbolic capital had already created positive affect toward the stimulus among millions of users (Lim, 2017); without that symbolic base, an identical quirky photograph by an unknown candidate would likely have attracted negligible organic engagement. These findings suggest that social media does not independently generate political visibility but primarily amplifies pre-existing symbolic capital, positioning symbolic capital, rather than economic capital for paid advertising as the principal driver of electoral visibility in high-penetration social media environments such as Indonesia, one of the countries with the highest social media usage rates in the world (Kemp, 2024).

Table 8 Theoretical Contributions: Original Bourdieu vs. Extensions of This Study

Bourdieu's Original Theory	Contributions of This Study	Implications for Democracy
Symbolic Capital • Operates in arenas with specific rules • Depends on misrecognition • Convertible to other capital forms • Developed in a Western European context	Bourdieuian Extensions • Symbolic capital as legitimacy heuristic in Global South • Effective under information asymmetry • FPTP as non-partisan Bourdieusian arena • Digital capital as extension of symbolic capital in social media era	Policy Implications • Risk of imbalance between popularity & competence • Legislative recruitment without substantive vision • Need for DPD RI institutional reform • Relevance of voter literacy programs

Source: Author's analysis based on (Bourdieu, 1986b, 1991; Loader et al., 2014; Lupia & McCubbins, 1998; Street, 2004a; Thomson, 2008).

Implications for Indonesian Democracy

Komeng's case does not merely illuminate an entertaining electoral footnote; it raises substantive questions about the architecture of Indonesian representative democracy at a juncture when the country is grappling with consolidating a post-Reform (post-1998) democratic system (M. Mietzner, 2021). Three implications merit sustained attention.

The Tension between Descriptive Representation and Substantive Representation

Komeng's election advances descriptive representation by placing a non elitist entertainment world figure in a chamber previously dominated by former bureaucrats, regional businesspeople, and established political figures. In Pitkin's (1967) canonical framework, descriptive representation, having someone "like you" in office, carries intrinsic democratic value by signaling institutional accessibility, and Komeng's victory demonstrates that Indonesia's DPD RI is, at least in principle, open to non traditional candidates without party affiliation, significant financial resources, or bureaucratic connections. At the same time, it raises important concerns about substantive representation, namely whether representatives advance the policy interests of their constituents (Mansbridge, 2022; Pitkin, 1967). The 5,399,699 voters who supported Komeng largely relied on affective recognition rather than programmatic evaluation because his ballot paper contained no vision mission statement and his campaign expenditure was minimal. Whether his legislative performance in DPD Committee II (2024-2029) ultimately transforms this popular support into substantive policy advocacy remains beyond the scope of this study and constitutes an important agenda for longitudinal research.

Institutional Design Implications for DPD RI

The finding that the FPTP personal vote system allows symbolic capital to substitute for economic capital and party networks raises important questions about the institutional design of DPD RI. Although its non partisan design was intended to promote independent regional advocacy (Sherlock, 2010), the Komeng phenomenon suggests that it instead favors extrapolitical visibility over policy competence. Comparative electoral reform literature (Norris, 2004; Reynolds et al., 2016) suggests:

1. Mandatory vision mission statement submission for ballot inclusion.
2. Structured provincial candidate debates.
3. Enhanced KPU voter information on candidates' regional policy positions.

These reforms would encourage celebrity candidates to translate popularity into policy credibility. Komeng's experience in DPD Committee II since 2024 further suggests that the institutional environment shapes how symbolic capital is ultimately deployed.

Celebrity Politics and Voter Literacy in the Digital Age

Perhaps the deepest democratic implication of the Komeng phenomenon lies in what it reveals about voter literacy in Indonesia's digital era. The organic virality of a ballot photograph lacking substantive policy content generated a national trending topic and contributed to more than five million votes. This outcome exposes a structural vulnerability in democratic choice-making, where symbolic capital functions as a legitimacy heuristic shaping electoral decisions (Popkin, 1991). Rather than reflecting voter failure, this pattern represents rational adaptive behavior under conditions of information overload and institutional distrust (Ferejohn & Kuklinski, 1990).

Indonesia's KPU has made significant progress in voter education. However, the continued dominance of popularity over programmatic evaluation in DPD elections indicates that voter education specifically addressing the DPD's non-partisan, issue-based mandate remains insufficient (Buehler, 2016). A democracy-strengthening agenda for Indonesia's DPD RI therefore requires simultaneous improvements in institutional design (supply side) and the voter information environment (demand side).

Table 9 Matrix of Institutional and Democratic Implications

Implication Dimension	Study Finding	Democratic Risk	Policy Recommendation
Descriptive Representation	Komeng opens DPD RI access to non-elitist candidates without party capital	Low – increases inclusivity	Maintain non-partisan DPD RI system
Substantive Representation	5.39 million votes without a policy platform; no vision-mission on ballot	High – possible popularity-over-substance trade-off	Mandate vision-mission statements on DPD ballot
Institutional Design	FPTP personal vote systematically privileges symbolic capital	Medium – advantages the already-famous over the most competent	Provincial public debates as DPD candidacy requirement
Voter Literacy	Viral ballot photo without programmatic content influenced millions of voters	Medium-high – under conditions of systemic information asymmetry	KPU voter literacy program specifically for DPD track record & platform

Source: Author's analysis based on (Buehler, 2016; Mansbridge, 2022; Norris, 2004; Pitkin, 1967; Sherlock, 2010).

Comparative Perspective

Celebrity politics is not unique to Indonesia. Entertainers, athletes, and cultural figures have won legislative and executive offices worldwide, including Joseph Estrada's presidential victory in the Philippines (1998), Imran Khan's rise to Pakistan's prime ministership (2018), and Arnold Schwarzenegger's tenure as California Governor (2003–2011). The Komeng phenomenon belongs to this comparative landscape while demonstrating the distinctive features and theoretical and practical significance of Indonesia's DPD elections.

Common Patterns in Celebrity Electoral Success

Across diverse national contexts, the literature on celebrity politics (Street, 2004b; Van Zoonen, 2005; Wheeler, 2013) identifies several common structural preconditions for celebrity electoral success: (a) high pre-existing name recognition built outside the political arena; (b) a trustworthiness narrative that contrasts with a distrusted political establishment; (c) an electoral system or context that allows personal appeal to substitute for party machinery; and (d) a media environment that amplifies the candidate's visibility relative to competitors. Komeng's case exhibits all four conditions.

What Makes the Komeng Case Distinctive

Despite these common patterns, the Komeng case differs from most comparative studies of celebrity politics in three theoretically important respects. First, his electoral success was driven by near-zero-cost virality based on pre-existing symbolic capital. Unlike Estrada, Schwarzenegger, or Khan, who relied on substantial campaign infrastructures, Komeng converted symbolic capital accumulated over decades into electoral support with minimal campaign expenditure, making symbolic capital itself function as campaign infrastructure. Second, the DPD RI's non-partisan, personal-vote institutional design is structurally distinctive. Whereas Schwarzenegger (Republican), Estrada (LAMP-PMP), and Khan (PTI) competed through party organizations, Komeng ran as an independent in an institution specifically designed for independent representation, allowing celebrity capital to translate directly into electoral success without an intermediate organizational structure. Third, the Komeng phenomenon demonstrates the social media amplification of embodied symbolic capital. The viral trigger was not campaign content but the official KPU ballot photograph, whose facial expression reflected three decades of Komeng's embodied comedic identity. Millions of Indonesians immediately recognized the Komeng persona, an embodied habitus in Bourdieu's terms, and shared the image as a cultural experience rather than a political act, transforming symbolic recognition into electoral mobilization.

Table 10 Comparative Analysis: Komeng vs. Celebrity Politicians in Other Countries

Dimension	Komeng (Indonesia, 2024)	Joseph Estrada (Philippines)	Cynthia Villar (Philippines)	Imran Khan (Pakistan)	Arnold S. (USA, 2003)
Arena / System	DPD RI (FPTP personal vote, non-partisan)	Presidential (direct election)	Senator (party-list)	Prime Minister (Westminster)	Governor California (recall election)
Symbolic Capital Base	35-year national entertainment popularity	Cross-generational action film star	Political dynasty + celebrity family	Cricket superstar + nationalism	Hollywood icon + bodybuilding
Capital Conversion	Symbolic → Electoral (without party)	Symbolic + Economic → Electoral	Symbolic + Social + Party → Electoral	Symbolic + New party (PTI)	Symbolic + Economic → Gubernatorial
Campaign Cost	Very low (tens of millions IDR)	High (major party)	Medium-high	Medium (new party)	High (CA gubernatorial)
Electoral Outcome	1st rank national DPD RI (5.39 million votes)	Elected President 1998	Elected Senator	Elected PM 2018	Elected Governor 2003

Source: Author's analysis based on (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia (KPU RI), 2024; Sherlock, 2010; Street, 2004a; Thomson, 2008; Van Zoonen, 2005; Wheeler, 2013).

The Global South Dimension

The comparative literature on celebrity politics has largely focused on established Western democracies. This study contributes to the growing scholarship on Global South democracies, where celebrity politics is shaped by lower voter literacy, higher institutional distrust, weaker programmatic party competition, and rapid social media expansion (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Indonesia combines these conditions with one of the world's highest social media usage rates, creating a "perfect amplification environment" for symbolic capital conversion. The findings suggest that the mechanisms identified in Western democracies operate in an accelerated form through institutional distrust, information asymmetry, and digital platform penetration. Komeng's achievement of 5.39 million votes with near-zero campaign expenditure represents one of the strongest documented examples of this accelerated dynamic in the comparative literature.

Limitations and Future Research

Scholarly transparency requires acknowledging the limitations of this study's design while framing them as opportunities for future research. This study identifies five limitations, each accompanied by a specific methodological recommendation.

Secondary Data and the Unverified Voter Motivation Problem

This study relies on secondary data from official KPU documents, national media, social media indicators, and academic literature. Although appropriate for an instrumental case study (Yin, 2018) and supported by source triangulation, this design cannot directly verify the motivations of Komeng's 5,399,699 voters. Voter behavior is inferred from aggregate patterns and Bourdieusian theory, including symbolic capital as a legitimacy heuristic, affective resonance, and zero-cost viral recognition. Future research should employ post-election surveys or exit polls among West Java voters, combined with structural equation modeling, to measure the relative influence of name recognition, positive image, comedic charisma, and the anti-politics narrative on voting decisions.

Single Case and the Limits of Generalizability

The single instrumental case study design is theoretically justified by Komeng's status as an extreme outlier in the 2024 DPD RI election but limits the generalizability of the findings. The study cannot determine whether the observed mechanism reflects Komeng's unique symbolic capital, the 2024 DPD electoral context, or a broader pattern of symbolic capital conversion in Indonesian electoral politics. Future research should apply a Most Similar System Design (MSSD) (Przeworski & Teune, 1970) by comparing Komeng with DPD RI 2024 candidates who possessed high symbolic capital but were unsuccessful, enabling identification of the conditions under which

symbolic capital conversion succeeds or fails and strengthening the generalizability of the proposed Bourdieusian mechanism.

The Unexamined Post-Election Quality of Representation

The study focuses on Komeng's electoral victory and cannot assess whether his accumulated symbolic capital translates into effective legislative representation in DPD RI Committee II (infrastructure, regional autonomy, and spatial planning), which remains the study's most important substantive question. Future research should conduct a longitudinal analysis of Komeng's legislative performance during 2024–2029 using a modified Legislative Effectiveness Score framework (Volden & Wiseman, 2014) to evaluate whether symbolic capital can be converted into sustained legislative impact within the DPD RI.

Digital Capital Without Quantitative Measurement

This study extends Bourdieusian symbolic capital by introducing digital capital through social media virality indicators but does not measure this dimension quantitatively. Although the viral KPU ballot photograph is identified as the key mechanism and supported by qualitative media triangulation, the study does not estimate engagement rates, organic reach, sentiment scores, or the conversion of social media engagement into votes. Future research should apply computational political science methods by integrating platform API data with polling-station electoral results to quantify the relationship between digital capital exposure and vote shares at the kecamatan (sub-district) level.

Absence of Geographic and Demographic Decomposition

This study treats West Java as a homogeneous electoral district and interprets Komeng's evenly distributed support as evidence of symbolic capital outweighing local networks. However, it does not account for demographic variation across West Java's 27 kabupaten/kota, including urban–rural differences, generational cohorts, ethnic and religious composition, and industrial versus agricultural economic profiles. Future research should combine GIS-based spatial analysis of KPU data at the kecamatan level with BPS demographic data to identify the geographic and demographic sources of Komeng's support, testing whether symbolic capital operates uniformly or is conditioned by demographic factors while informing KPU voter education strategies.

Table 11 Matrix of Limitations, Future Research Recommendations & Methodological References

Limitation	Future Research Recommendation	Method & Key Reference
Secondary data only; actual voter perceptions unverified	Post-election voter survey to measure weight of symbolic capital in voting decisions	Exit poll methodology; structural equation modeling
Single case study; limited generalizability	Multi-case comparative study: elected vs. non-elected celebrities in DPD RI 2024	Most Similar System Design (Przeworski & Teune, 1970)
Post-election quality of representation not analyzed	Longitudinal analysis of Komeng's legislative performance in DPD Committee II (2024–2029)	Legislative effectiveness scores (Volden & Wiseman, 2014)
Digital capital dimension not quantitatively measured	Social media analytics to empirically measure digital capital's conversion to electoral support	Computational political science; Barberá et al. (2019)
No in-depth geographic/demographic analysis	Spatial GIS analysis of Komeng's vote distribution across West Java's 27 kabupaten/kota	Spatial analysis & electoral geography (Johnston & Pattie, 2006)

D. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Alfiansyah Bustami Komeng converted symbolic capital accumulated over 35 years in Indonesia's entertainment industry into 5,399,699 votes, the highest national vote total in the 2024 DPD election. The findings identify two primary mechanisms of this conversion: (1) strategic operationalization of popularity through institutional tactics, including a legal name change and a viral ballot photo, reinforced by narratives of anti-expensive politics and non-ambition motivation; (2) the structural advantages of the DPD's First-Past-The-Post (FPTP), non-partisan system, which privileges personal recognition over party affiliation. The study makes three contributions. It extends Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital to celebrity electoral politics in Global South democracies, demonstrating how symbolic capital functions as a legitimacy heuristic under conditions of voter information asymmetry. It provides the first systematic analysis of Komeng's unprecedented electoral performance. It identifies institutional implications, suggesting that the DPD's FPTP system may systematically favor candidates with pre-existing public recognition over those with substantive policy expertise, raising questions about the quality of representation in non-partisan electoral systems. The Komeng phenomenon reflects broader tensions in Indonesian democracy: representational quality versus populist appeal, professional expertise versus public recognition, institutional design versus democratic outcomes.

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