

# Political Scandal and Public Figure: A Survey of the Effect of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama and Veronica Tan's Divorce Scandal on the Political Attitude of "Ahokers"

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## Abstract

*Indonesian society is familiar with the terms 'public figures' and 'celebrities', but the distinction is often not understood properly. The public's interest in content that focuses on entertainment, lifestyles, and gossip, as well as the presence of a media that facilitates such content, makes the process of 'celebrating' common. This process has resulted in the private space of public figures being transformed into objects of public consumption.*

*Scandals are often quite popularly discussed among the public, especially when their subject is a public figure. However, studies of how scandals affect the public and its political behaviour have not been widely documented. In 2018, Indonesian news media began widely covering the divorce of well-known politician Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (BTP/Ahok) from his ex-wife Veronica Tan, and this brought questions of extramarital affairs to the surface in the midst of a heated local election atmosphere. This situation was divisive, and received various public responses.*

*Previous studies have shown that scandals tend to negatively affect popular attitudes towards the politicians involved in them. In Indonesia, scandals have been common, widely recognised by the public, but their effects are never discussed in depth. Therefore, this study, which involved around 400 respondents, seeks to provide an overview of how the Indonesian public responds to politicians involved in scandals and how such scandals affect politicians' electability. The results of this study show that scandals do affect the public's political attitude, but not in the ways suggested by existing studies.*

**Keywords:** Scandal, Public Figure, Political attitude, Electability

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## Background

For the Indonesian people, there is significant intersection between public figures and celebrities. Indonesians understand celebrities as public figures, rather than recognise them as playing different roles. Consequently, the boundaries between celebrities and public are increasingly blurred, especially outside the entertainment industry. At the same time, celebrities possess a certain degree of popularity that makes them highly regarded by the public and grants them many privileges.

Boorstin defines a celebrity as 'a person who is known for his well-knownness' (1967, in Ahmad, 2020). The appearance of celebrities is made possible by the social structure, and it can therefore be understood that celebrities and the public are interdependent entities. Sternheimer, meanwhile, defines celebrities as individuals who are watched, cared for, and known by strangers; such a broad concept is more readily applied to everyday life (in Stever, 2018, p. 12).

Choi and Berger (2009) state that, in the 21st century, celebrities' influence has extended far beyond the entertainment sector. This better reflects the current condition, wherein celebrities are considered of equal influence to public figures. In this context, celebrities and public figures enjoy power relations with their audiences, defined as an asymmetric relationship in which social actors have the ability to influence the decisions of other social actors according to their wishes, interests, and values (Castells, 2009: p. 10). In current global society, individuals are no longer influenced merely by science or history, but also by celebrities (Choi & Berger, 2009, p. 13). The situation wherein celebrities act as influencers two-pronged:

aside from gathering followers, creating trends, and even leading opinions, there is an obligation to be responsible for the privileges of popularity.

On the global scale, celebrity culture in Indonesia itself is quite unique, due in part to the easy and instantaneous process of celebritisation. Every day, new faces are introduced to the public through entertainment programmes such as soap operas, talk shows, and infotainment. Celebrity status is achieved not only by those with talent and/or who have gone through rigorous auditions, but by anyone who goes through the process and ritual of media celebritisation (Driessen, 2013, p. 643).

The mass media still remains the largest force capable of bringing celebrities closer to the public. Infotainment programmes that cover celebrities and their behaviour are widely consumed in society, producing an infotainment industry rooted in the commodification of social activities and gossip (Pratiwi, 2014). This infotainment also functions as a means for creating discourse on the meaning of celebrity, providing a medium through which social agents can extend celebrities' power. This is in-line with Castells' argument that power is exercised through the discursive construction of meaning (2009, p. 10), which is—in this case—a task performed by the mass media.

Today, gossip has become a significant media commodity. For the public, gossip is tantamount to entertainment, and as such celebrities are often exposed to shameful and scandalous coverage in infotainment. Such scandals have extended to a certain class of politician, i.e., politicians who have been identified as public figures. Cashmore (2006, p. 210) writes that, as "readers

favored lifestyle stories, politics started to give way to lifestyle. [...] *USA Today* [for example, has begun] incorporating colorful graphics and relatively short (500-word) stories with lots of entertainment news and limited reporting on government or world politics."

Although the public figure concept has been widely studied in various fields, it actually originates from the legal sciences. Many sources refer to the concept offered by Gertz, who defines public figures as those who have assumed a particularly prominent role in society. "Some occupy positions of such persuasive power and influence that they are deemed public figures for all purposes. More commonly, those classed as public figures have thrust themselves to the forefront of particular public controversies in order to influence the resolution of the issues involved. In either event, they invite attention and comment" (1974, p. 345).

Gertz' thorough definition indicates that public figures share a key element: they are individuals who stand out among the community. This has implications for the comments and attention they receive. Schauer, in his article "Public Figure" (1984, p. 917), agrees that those classified as public figures are individuals with a certain effect on public inquiries, public policy, organisations, and social issues.

One thing that must be understood regarding the celebrity and public figure concepts is that, although these terms may seem similar, there are slight differences, particularly in terms of context. Turner (in Stever, 2018) reveals that the public often bears witness to the moments when public figures are transformed, or transform themselves, into celebrities. This may occur, for instance, when media coverage of their activities shifts from topics of public

interest to those regarding their personal lives. Such expression actually proves, and at the same time helps us understand, that there is indeed a gap between identity as a public figure and as a celebrity.

The fact that the media has become the main driver of lifestyle coverage has had significant impact on politicians both within and without Indonesia, driving a "celebritisation" of such public figures. One example, which will be the focus of this research, is the divorce of Basuki Tjahaja Purnama (henceforth BTP/Ahok) and Veronica Tan, which was transformed from a personal problem into one that drew the attention of the Indonesian people. This case began on 5 January 2018, when BTP (then in prison, after due to another case) filed a divorce suit against his wife Veronica Tan at the North Jakarta District Court (Liputan6.com, 2018). To date, the exact cause of their divorce is not known, but at the time the speculation was rampant. As this case occurred at a time when Indonesian political discourse was already oriented towards the ongoing regional elections, the public's attention was divided.

Fong and Wyer (2012) understand scandals as events, often related to the private lives of public figures or celebrities, that should not have occurred or been exposed. Such events are often manifested in behaviour that deviates from social norms and values, such as drug consumption, violence, deviant sexual behaviour, and so forth. According to Ekstrom and Johansson (2008, p. 72), scandals are not merely revealed, but shown, reported, staged, and kept alive day after day. In other words, scandals may be deemed newsworthy for a period of several days.

Allern and Pollack (2012, p. 14), discussing the scandal concept in greater

detail, identify one particular class of scandal: the political scandal, defined as a scandal that involves political institutions, processes, or decisions, or that involves active politicians in their political capacity. Political scandals can be measured using the indicators provided by Ruderman & Nevitte (2015) and Maier (2010). The first dimension is related to the characteristics of the scandal itself: (1) awareness, (2) political interests, (3) political knowledge, and (4) news media exposure. The second dimension, meanwhile, is related to how politicians are seen as individuals, or their personal characteristics, including (1) candidate evaluation and (2) integrity of politicians.

The problems surrounding public figures often arise in specific situations. A common one is when public figures who are considered 'role models' by the public behave in a manner deemed inappropriate. When such a public figure is involved in a scandal, the 'role model' status itself enters an automatic state of dysfunction. Various data and research have shown that scandals can negatively affect the public's attitudes towards the politicians involved (Carlson, Ganiel, & Hyde, 2000; von Sikorski & Knoll, 2018, in Alern, & von Sikorski, 2018, p. 3017).

The above situation can thus be taken as illustrating the beginning of a complex series of actions and reactions involving celebrities, public figures, and the Indonesian people (as audiences). The multitude of celebrities and public figures, which increases every day, has resulted in the rise of alternative news sources and decreased sensitivity amongst the Indonesian people. On infotainment programmes, such scandalous topics as infidelity, drug consumption, sexual

harassment, and prostitution are commonly exposed.

Compared to other countries, Indonesian society is anomalous. Generally, celebrities and public figures experience de-celebrification after a scandal, which is described by Mortensen and Kristensen as "a grave loss of public image, status, and positive media visibility" (2020, p. 91) that emerges from the scandal's negative impact on the public's perceptions of celebrities and public figures. However, the Indonesian public seems to have become immune to coverage of public scandals. Even when such scandals are widely reported and highlighted by the media, cases eventually disappear like dust in the wind. When political figures are or have been involved in scandals, their electability does not appear to be affected. The simple explanation to such occurrence are explained by Littlejohn & Foss (2009, p. 57), who stated that individuals' responses are shaped by the events that occur in their environment. Responses may also occur where individuals are stimulated by an event, then receive a new stimulus. McQuail (2010, p. 555) similarly argues that individuals are only affected by the media if first exposed to its messages.

Ultimately, It turns out that not all scandals that befall public figures become career-destroying factors. There is an interesting dynamic, wherein scandals may sometimes serve to revitalise the waning popularity of a public figure who has been forgotten by the public. Reactions to scandals may fall into four categories: condemnation, indifference, resentment, and approval (Cashmore, 2006, p. 155). Of these, only approval indicates support for the public figures involved. Such approval is often unlikely, especially given that scandals are associated with negative acts

and deeds. In this study, the four responses mentioned above will be main considerations when determining the situation in Indonesia.

This article reports the results of research into audiences' response to scandals regarding public figures in Indonesia, where scandals have become commonplace and widely recognised, but rarely discussed in depth. This research focuses on BTP/Ahok as a public figure, rather than as a celebrity figure. Being the former Governor of DKI Jakarta, he is a politician, and thus meets the criteria suggested by Schauer (1984, p. 917). He has been perceived as having a certain effect on public questions, policies, organisations, and social issues, and also has his own audience group. This article also examines the role of Indonesian society, particularly those who identify themselves as "Ahokers", i.e., supporters of BTP, and thus as watchmen in a society surrounded by media products. This research is expected to provide a step towards further investigation of political scandals in Indonesia.

This article is expected to bridge the gap between theoretical reality and empirical reality in the study of public figures in an Indonesian socio-cultural background. It does so within the specific context of political figures, scandals, and audience responses.

## Research Method

In this study, an explanatory survey approach was used to produce broad knowledge using regular methods and procedures, as well as to objectively look at the correlational relationships between variables.

This study will combine the indicators from previous studies by Ruderman and Nevitte (2015) and Maier (2010), who identify two categories of indicators relevant to this study. The first category is related to the characteristics of the scandal itself: (1) awareness, (2) political interests, (3) political knowledge, and (4) news media exposure. The second dimension, meanwhile, is related to how politicians are seen as individuals, or their personal characteristics, including (1) candidate evaluation and (2) integrity of politicians.

At the same time, this study's concept of response is taken from Cashmore (2006). It involves four main categories, which can be used to measure audiences' attitudes in response to scandals related to public figures: (1) condemnation, (2) indifference, (3) resentment, and (4) approval. Public behaviour, as a manifestation of the influence of the scandal itself, will be seen from whether or not audiences were still willing to elect BTP/Ahok if he campaigned for a legislative seat.

Based on the above theories and concepts, the following table explains the variables and concepts operationalised in this research:

**Table 1. Research Variables**

No.	Variable	Dimension	Indicator
1.	Political scandal (X)	Characteristics of scandal	a. Scandal Awareness b. Political Interest



		c. Political Knowledge
		d. News Media Exposure
	Characteristics of politician	a. Candidate Evaluation
		b. Integrity of Politician
	Political attitude	a. Condemnation
		b. Indifference
		c. Resentment
		d. Approval
2. Supporters' attitude and behaviour	Feedback	a. Would Vote
		b. Would Not Vote

Source: Author

The working hypotheses applied in this research are:

H0: The divorce scandal of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan does not have a significant influence on Ahokers' political attitude towards BTP/Ahok.

H1: The divorce scandal of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan has a significant influence on Ahokers' political attitude towards BTP/Ahok.

The population in this study is geographically demarcated and limited by age group. The research targeted active internet users, between 19 and 34 years of age, who are also active voters in Indonesia. A sample of 400 respondents was taken using nonprobability sampling. Questionnaires were distributed online, through the researchers' own networks, until the predetermined quota was reached.

### Results and Discussion

Based on collected data, respondents were predominantly women (n = 232), and

most were between the ages of 19 and 23 (n = 193). Respondents were predominantly students and private sector employees (n = 152 for each). Based on their level of education, the majority of respondents had completed an undergraduate degree (n = 238). Most lived in the Java–Madura region.

Although the political world seems to be dominated by men, and is sometimes identified with masculinity, the majority of respondents in this study were women. This may be the result of the research subject, which deals with a scandal related to divorce. Such an issue tends to be closer to women, who are more likely to be exposed to coverage of such incidents in their everyday lives.

Audiences who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok were categorised as millennials and Generation Z. Most were between the ages of 19 and 23; at that age, respondents are dynamic individuals, and tend to be open to diverse sources of information. In addition, the spirit of critical thinking within this cohort

encourages members to obtain as much information as possible about a particular issue.

In the mean analysis of Variable X1, almost all responses returned a value of more than 3; only one in returned a value less than 2. The highest mean value was associated with the statement "I think that the political situation in Indonesia is important to know", with a mean value of 3.94. These high mean values show that respondents tended to approve of the statements in Variable X1, and thus understood the political scandal being discussed (i.e., the divorce of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan).

Scandals are characterised by four indicators: (1) scandal awareness, (2) political interest, (3) political knowledge, and (4) news media exposure. Of the four indicators, scandal awareness was highest, with an average score of 3.94. This shows that respondents agreed that it was important to remain aware of the political situation in Indonesia and accessing information from various media sources. Respondents also expressed knowledge regarding the development of the divorce scandal.

The next mean analysis investigated the characteristics of politicians, which this study uses to describe how audiences see politicians (in this case, BTP/Ahok) as individuals. This dimension involves two main indicators: (1) candidate evaluation and (2) integrity of politicians. These two indicators were translated into five statements, almost all of which received an average score of higher than four; this indicated that BTP/Ahok is perceived as having a high level of integrity. Furthermore, the mean value of responses to the statement "I liked the performance of BTP/Ahok when he served as a politician in

Indonesia" (mean = 4.40) were the highest of all statements, indicating that the audiences perceived BTP/Ahok's political performance positively. Among the dependent variables, the highest mean value was achieved by the statement "I would vote for BTP/Ahok if he ran for legislature" (mean = 4.31), which indicates that respondents who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok would still support him in the future.

Next is the analysis of the mean for the dependent variables, which is used to assess the political attitudes and feedback. Responses were defined as involving the tangible aspects of understanding, judgment, influence, or rejection.

The political attitudes dimension was used to determine how audiences responded to the news about the divorce of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan. The highest average score (4.10) was returned for the statement "I will respect whatever choice BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan make in their divorce case". This indicates that approval was the most prominent. On the other hand, respondents tended to disagree with the statement "I felt angry and hopeless when I saw/heard about the divorce of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan" (mean = 1.95). It may be concluded that audiences viewed the divorce scandal as something that deserved to be accepted, rather than criticised.

The feedback dimension describes audiences' behavioural responses, and is measured using two indicators: willingness to support and/or vote for BTP/Ahok if he were to run for legislature. Respondents generally agreed with the statements "I would support BTP/Ahok if he returned to politics" and "I would vote for BTP/Ahok if he ran for legislature" (mean = 4.26 and 4.31, respectively). This illustrates that the

majority of respondents who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok did not immediately retract their support due to the scandal over his divorce, and instead expressed support for his continued political career.

To ascertain whether a linear relationship exists between variables in this study, a Pearson correlation test was conducted. Variables are deemed correlated if the dependent variable changes when the independent variable changes. Such changes may be positive or negative; positive change occurs when variables change in the same direction, while negative change occurs when variables change in the opposite direction. Testing was conducted using independent and dependent variables, with the former

being defined as the characteristics of the scandal and the characteristics of politicians, and the latter being defined as respondents' attitudes and supporting behaviour (measured using the political attitudes and feedback dimensions).

Through Pearson Correlation testing, strong correlation was found between the independent and dependent variables, returning a figure of 0.515. This shows that the independent variables influence changes in audiences' attitudes, as seen in the responses of "Ahokers". In the next few paragraphs, the results of Pearson correlation analysis will be discussed to ascertain which independent and dependent variables influence each other most.

**Table 2. Results of Pearson Correlation Test**

		Correlations				Would	Not
		Condemnation	Indifference	Resentment	Approval	Vote	Vote
<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	Scandal Awareness	.186**	0.077	.262**	.310**	.288**	0.058
	Political Interest	0.027	.170**	.112*	.405**	.418**	0.061
	Political Knowledge	0.049	.216**	.160**	.470**	.461**	0.085
	News Media Exposure	0.033	.207**	.152**	.424**	.468**	0.066
	Candidate Evaluation	0.040	.356**	.170**	.604**	.825**	-0.044
	Integrity of Politician	0.084	.381**	.205**	.615**	.788**	0.036

Source: Questionnaire

From the above table, it may be seen that not all independent variables have a

correlational relationship with dependent variables. From the table above, it may be



seen that correlation tends to vary. Variables' correlation ranges from negative to very strong. A very strong correlational relationship ( $n = 0.825$ ) is evident between candidates' attributes and voter attitude, which shows that audiences tend to agree that BTP/Ahok has a positive character.

To ascertain the values in question, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. Regression analysis is used to estimate the average and value of dependent variables based on the value of independent variables, thereby testing the hypothesis and predicting the average value of the independent variable (based on the values obtained).

Regression testing conducted using the independent variable "Political Scandal" and the dependent variable "Attitudes and Supporting Behaviours" returned an unstandardised coefficient value of 1.893. The regression coefficient value obtained is 0.366, which means that for every additional 1% increase in the scandal's

influence, attitudes and supporting behaviour increase by 0.366. Because the value obtained is positive, the scandal can be said to have had a positive effect on supporters' attitudes and behaviour. Regression testing returned a significance of .000; as such, H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected. This indicates that the public figure's political scandal did influence the political attitudes and behaviour of audiences. Regression testing returned a percentage of 26.5%, showing the extent to which political scandals have influenced the attitudes and behaviours of BTP/Ahok supporters; the other 73.5% of supporting attitudes and behaviours are formed by other factors.

In addition to conducting various analytical tests of respondents' answers, crosstab analysis was conducted in order to see the relationships and tendencies between questions. The results can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3. Results of Crosstabulation Test**

No.	Statement	Chi-square Table	Chi-square Statistic	Result
1	I liked the performance of BTP/Ahok when he served as a politician in Indonesia * Have you ever written (opinion) related to Indonesian political issues on social media?	12.592	15.049	Correlated
2	I feel that BTP/Ahok succeeded in carrying out his work during his tenure as a politician * Have you ever written (opinion) related to Indonesian political issues on social media?	12.592	15.049	Correlated
3	I would support BTP/Ahok if he returned to politics * Have you ever written (opinion) related to Indonesian political issues on social media?	5.991	7.606	Correlated

4	I would vote for BTP/Ahok if he ran for legislature * Have you ever written (opinion) related to Indonesian political issues on social media?	5.991	7.606	Correlated
5	The negative news coverage of BTP/Ahok made me reluctant to re-elect him if he ran for legislature * Which factor is the most important consideration for a candidate of leader?	5.991	6.496	Correlated
6	I would rather entrust a representative position to a politician other than BTP/Ahok * Which factor is the most important consideration for a candidate of leader?	5.991	6.496	Correlated
7	The negative news coverage of BTP/Ahok made me reluctant to re-elect him if he ran for legislature * Are you participating in one of Ahok fanbase?	5.991	8.044	Correlated

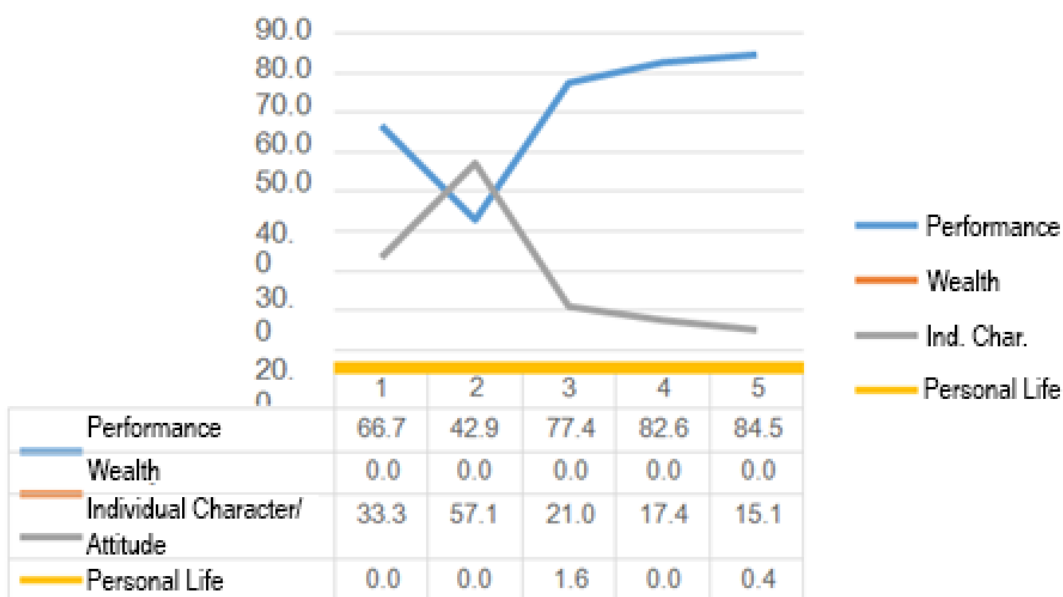
Source: Questionnaire

Based on Table 3, crosstabulation of the items "I liked the performance of BTP/Ahok when he served as a politician in Indonesia" and "I feel that BTP/Ahok succeeded in carrying out his work during his tenure as a politician" shows a correlation with politicians' integrity. Furthermore, examining respondents' opinions and social media posts, all items are found to be correlated. This can be seen from items 3, 4, 5, and 6. Finally, in item 7, cross-tabulation of the non-voting feedback dimensions and the item "The bad news about BTP/Ahok made me reluctant to re-elect him if he ran for legislature" indicates that these items are mutually correlated. Although the unselected feedback

response has the lowest mean value (= 1.56), the chi-square value is quite high compared to the previous cross tabulation tests that also took response or feedback items.

Based on the results of the cross tabulation, a graph of the distribution of answers is provided in Figure 1. Based on Figure 1, it can be noted that 77.4% of respondents agreed that performance is an important factor, something that is required of leaders. Wealth and personal life, conversely, are not perceived by respondents as important factors in choosing leaders.

**Figure 1. Candidate Evaluation and Important Factors in Choosing Political Leaders**



Source: Questionnaire

This study of a political scandal, as related to a public figure, has collected data from more than 400 respondents who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok. In this study, the researcher sought to identify how the scandal of BTP/Ahok and Veronica Tan's divorce influenced the political attitudes of audiences.

To explore this political scandal, the researchers used two dimensions: the scandal characteristics (scandal awareness, political interest, political knowledge, and news media exposure) as well as the characteristics of the involved politician (as measured by candidate evaluation and perceived integrity). Meanwhile, to measure audiences' attitudes and supporting behaviour as a form of response, the researchers used two dimensions: attitudes (categorised as condemnation, indifference, resentment, and approval) and feedback (decision to vote/not vote for the candidate). These attributes were processed to ascertain the

link between the political scandal of public figures and the attitudes of supporters.

In brief, although the political world seems to be dominated by men and is sometimes identified with masculinity, in this study respondents were predominantly women. This may be the result of the research subject, which deals with a scandal related to divorce. Such an issue tends to be closer to women, who are more likely to be exposed to coverage of such incidents in their everyday lives.

Audiences who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok were categorised as millennials and Generation Z. Most were between the ages of 19 and 23; at that age, respondents are dynamic individuals, and tend to be open to diverse sources of information. In addition, the spirit of critical thinking within this cohort encourages members to obtain as much information as possible about a particular issue.

Analysis indicated that the integrity of the politician, as represented by the statement "I liked the performance of BTP/Ahok when he served as a politician in Indonesia", achieved the highest mean score of all independent variables (4.40). This indicates that audience response to BTP/Ahok's performance during his tenure as a politician was positive. Meanwhile, of the dependent variables, the highest mean value (4.31) was returned for the statement "I would vote for BTP/Ahok if he returned to politics", which represents the feedback dimension. This relatively high figure illustrates that respondents who identified themselves as supporters of BTP/Ahok would still approve of a political career for him.

To measure the direction of the linear relationship between this study's variables, Pearson correlation testing was conducted. It was found that the independent and dependent variables in this study are 'strongly' correlated, with a value of 0.515. A very strong correlational relationship occurs between candidate evaluation attributes and voting attitudes, showing that audiences tend to agree with the positive characteristics and attitudes exhibited BTP/Ahok.

Based on these correlation value, a regression test was conducted to ascertain the influence of variables and test the hypotheses revealed in chapter one. Regression testing returned a significance of .000; as such, H1 is accepted and H0 is rejected. This indicates that the public figure's political scandal did influence the political attitudes and behaviour of audiences. Regression testing returned a percentage of 26.5%, showing the extent to which political scandals have influenced the attitudes and behaviours of BTP/Ahok supporters; the other 73.5% of supporting

attitudes and behaviours are formed by other factors.

In addition to conducting various analyses of the answers given by respondents, , crosstab analysis was conducted in order to see the relationships and tendencies between questions. During these various crosstabulation analysis, three combinations returned particularly interesting results: Political Characteristics and Important Factors for Consideration in Choosing Prospective Leaders, Feedback and Opinions on Social Media, and Non-Voting Feedback and Participation in Fanpage.

The most interesting result of crosstabulation is returned for the Characteristics of Politicians and Important Factors for Consideration in Choosing Prospective Leaders; of the five items tested, three were deemed uncorrelated. This shows that the factors of wealth and personal life are not considered important. In addition, the graph shows that 77.4% of voters agreed that performance is an important factor in leadership selection.

From these results, it may be concluded that political scandals can affect audience attitudes. This study applies four categories for understanding audiences' responses to scandals involving public figures: (1) condemnation, (2) indifference, (3) resentment, and (4) approval. Overall, however, it finds that coverage of the scandal did not have much of a negative influence on research participants' political attitudes.

## Conclusion

This study examined audience responses to political scandal involving the public figure BTP/Ahok. Interestingly, analysis of the data generated found that

the scandal showed a positive trend in the formation audience attitudes. In that sense, the presence of the scandal made audiences (who were already supporters) firmer in their support; this differs from previous studies, which found that scandals can detrimentally affect, and even end, the careers of public figures. This supports the assumption that Indonesian society's response to scandals is anomalous. The results indicated that the divorce scandal was not simply neutral, but beneficial to the public perception of BTP/Ahok and this public figure's political power. Audiences' responses are very much in line with Castells' argument about power and the public.

Studies related to scandals in Indonesia, and even internationally, remain scarce. As previously discussed, the role of public figures in Indonesia has been somewhat refracted due to the community's process of "celebrating". As such, it would be understandable if this article contained biased answers from

respondents. Moreover, the use of the internet for the survey may have skewed the demographic and geographic factors.

The explanatory survey method used in this study has not been able to achieve a deeper understanding of the ins and outs of Indonesian audiences' political attitudes and reasons for such. The method used in this research was only able to reveal information regarding scandals and their effects on the public. In order to achieve a deeper understanding, new theories about scandal and audience attitudes can incorporate ethnographic methods so that research results specifically regarding audiences' political attitudes can be obtained.

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