

Dynamics of The Journey of Democracy in Indonesia

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Abstract

At Indonesia is basically a democratic country whose government system led by, of, and for the people. The purpose of this article is to discuss the path of democracy in Indonesia, with a focus on the objectives of analyzing the development of democracy in Indonesia to create political and social stability. The method used in this article is by using the bibliographic method. That is, collecting various readings from various existing sources and analyzing and linking them to the issues discussed. problems discussed. The findings show that Indonesian democracy experienced different challenges at different times, including at different times, including corruption, political inequality and social conflict, and social conflict. The study also produced several results, including increased political participation and protection of individual rights. In summary, although many challenges remain to overcome, Indonesia's democracy has brought some positive improvements to politics and society.

Keywords

Ideas; Democracy; State

Introduction

Democracy is a system of government that emphasizes people's participation in political decision-making (Ubaedillah, 2016). This concept does not only reflect the electoral system alone, but also includes the values of freedom, equality, and justice in the life of the nation and state. Since Indonesia's independence in 1945, the journey of democracy in the country has gone through various phases full of dynamics, both in terms of the government system and the implementation of democratic values in political practice. Indonesia is one of the countries in the Southeast Asian region that has had a fairly complex and interesting democratic transition experience to study further.

In the early days of independence, Indonesia implemented a parliamentary democracy system that provided large space for political parties and parliament. However, this system did not last long because it was considered ineffective in uniting the vision of the nation and government. The transition to the Guided Democracy system under President Soekarno changed the direction of democracy to be more authoritarian, with a concentration of power in the head of state. This situation continued during the New Order under President Soeharto with

the Pancasila Democracy system, which although claiming to be democratic, in practice was very centralistic and repressive towards the opposition.

The 1998 reform era was an important milestone in the history of Indonesian democracy. The reform movement, triggered by the economic crisis and the pressure of civil society, succeeded in overthrowing the New Order regime and paving the way for a more open and participatory democratic system. Since then, Indonesia has experienced significant democratic transformation, including more transparent general elections, decentralization of power to the regions, and greater press freedom. However, the post-reform democratic journey has not been free from various challenges, such as political corruption, weak rule of law, and increasing identity politics (Sibuea, 2018).

In the global context, Indonesian democracy is often considered a "success story" among developing countries that have successfully made the transition from authoritarianism to democracy (Choiruzzad, 2016). However, the quality of Indonesian democracy continues to be questioned. Procedural democracy has indeed been running relatively well, but substantial democracy still faces complex obstacles. Economic inequality, money politics, and low political literacy among the public are real challenges in strengthening a just and inclusive democracy.

This paper is here to examine the dynamics of the democratic journey in Indonesia as a whole, from the time of independence to the reform era. This study uses a historical and analytical approach to trace how changes in the system of government and political culture have shaped the direction of Indonesian democracy today. By understanding the various phases of development, it is hoped that we can assess the position of Indonesian democracy within the framework of sustainable political development that is responsive to the aspirations of the people (Putra et al., 2020).

Finally, this article aims to provide an academic contribution to the discourse on Indonesian democracy through critical and reflective analysis. This study is also expected to provide strategic recommendations for policy makers, academics, and civil society in encouraging a more mature and quality democracy. Democracy is not a static system, but rather dynamic and demands the active participation of all elements of the nation to continue to oversee it towards the ideals of social justice and civilized humanity (Masrur, 2018).

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative-descriptive approach with a historical and normative framework to analyze the dynamics of democracy in Indonesia. The method is based on library research that involves the collection and review of primary legal documents, constitutional provisions, and legislative regulations related to Indonesia's political system across different historical periods. The study also uses secondary sources, such as scholarly articles, historical records, political analyses, and expert commentary that offer critical perspectives on the development of Indonesian democracy. The research adopts a conceptual approach to understand the evolving definitions and applications of democracy within the Indonesian context, as well as a comparative approach to position Indonesia's democratic development relative to other transitional democracies. Analytical tools used include content analysis and thematic synthesis, which allow for the identification of patterns, shifts, and contradictions in democratic practices over time. This method enables the researcher to explore both the formal-legal structures of democracy and the socio-political realities that shape its implementation. The scope of analysis spans from the early post-independence era, through the guided democracy and New Order periods, up to the post-1998 reform era, providing a broad

chronological lens through which the dynamics of democratic change in Indonesia can be assessed.

Discussion

Indonesia's democratic trajectory illustrates a complex interplay between institutional reform, historical legacy, and sociopolitical challenges (Prayuda, Purba, et al., 2024). The transition from authoritarian rule to democracy in 1998 was a critical turning point that brought about significant institutional changes. These included constitutional amendments, the establishment of new political bodies such as the Constitutional Court and the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), and the introduction of direct elections for both legislative and executive branches. These reforms provided the legal and procedural framework for a more participatory political system. However, democracy in Indonesia is not merely a matter of institutional transformation; it also involves deeply rooted political cultures, public attitudes, and the behavior of political elites. As such, although the post-Reformasi era marked a period of democratic opening, it also revealed structural deficiencies in Indonesia's political system, especially with regard to the quality of representation, the effectiveness of checks and balances, and the actual empowerment of civil society.

One of the persistent issues facing Indonesia's democracy is the oligarchic nature of its political economy. Despite formal democratic mechanisms being in place, power is often concentrated among a small elite who dominate political parties, control access to candidacies, and shape public discourse through their influence in media and capital. This phenomenon has undermined the substance of democracy, turning elections into high-cost contests driven more by patronage and money politics than by genuine ideological or policy debates. As a result, public trust in democratic institutions often suffers, particularly when elected leaders fail to deliver meaningful reforms or appear beholden to private interests. Moreover, vote-buying practices and transactional politics have normalized a cynical view of democracy among voters, weakening democratic accountability and encouraging apathy or disengagement.

Another challenge relates to the growing role of identity politics, particularly in the form of religious and ethnic polarization. In recent years, several regional and national elections have seen the instrumentalization of sectarian rhetoric, often at the expense of social cohesion and democratic tolerance. The politicization of identity undermines pluralism, one of Indonesia's foundational democratic values, and threatens to marginalize minority groups. This trend poses risks not only to democratic integrity but also to national unity, especially if left unchecked by political and civil society actors. The state's inconsistent responses to these issues—ranging from overregulation to selective enforcement—have further complicated efforts to build an inclusive democratic culture that respects both diversity and the rule of law. Despite these setbacks, it is important to recognize the resilience of Indonesia's democratic institutions and the active role of civil society in defending democratic norms. The rise of independent watchdog organizations, investigative journalism, and civic engagement platforms has contributed to greater transparency and public oversight.

Additionally, the judiciary, while facing its own challenges, has occasionally acted as a bulwark against executive overreach. Youth activism and digital movements, particularly during politically charged moments such as the 2019 elections or controversial legislative changes, demonstrate a vibrant democratic spirit among segments of the population. These developments suggest that democracy in Indonesia is not static; rather, it is constantly negotiated and contested through public discourse and civic action.

In essence, Indonesia's democracy is undergoing a process of gradual consolidation that is neither linear nor without contradiction. It is shaped by a unique combination of historical legacies, institutional designs, and contemporary sociopolitical pressures (Prayuda, Gultom, et al., 2024). The democratization process has made significant strides in creating formal mechanisms for representation and accountability, yet it still struggles to ensure equal participation, reduce elite domination, and foster democratic values at the grassroots level. Addressing these challenges requires a long-term commitment to political education, institutional integrity, and inclusive governance. Importantly, it also demands vigilance from both the state and civil society to resist democratic backsliding and to continuously strengthen democratic norms and practices.

Conclusion

Democracy can be said to be a legacy from ancient Greek civilization and has inspired many countries to organize their lives. Until now, democracy is considered the best model, including for Indonesia. If we look at history, it shows that democracy in Indonesia does not always go as expected. Democracy, as an idea obtained from a colonial country, struggles with the realities of life and various ideas that seem unique in Indonesia. Democratic countries experience ups and downs and sometimes reach a critical point. Political elites and democrats in a country often succeed in building a good concept of democracy. Unfortunately, there are two fundamental weaknesses that are often experienced by this country. First, the concept of democracy built by the elite often falls into a single forced interpretation. The two concepts that are developed are often not accompanied by a full will to implement them. As a result, the concept remains a concept and democracy in the country floats without clear boundaries. If we learn to organize national life from this reality and look to a better future, it would be good if we return to Pancasila democracy. Basically, Pancasila democracy must be built through continuous discussion, without forcing the collective will. We must also learn how to engage with the concepts we develop. Only in this way can meaningful concepts emerge and achieve their perfection in order to build a better democratic life. The development of the concept of democracy cannot be separated from the American Declaration of Independence in 1776 and French history in 1789. In developing the concept of democracy, democracy cannot be separated from the existence of equal rights, equal justice, and equal protection of human rights. So it can be said that there has been a development, namely the separation of powers between the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions. This is certainly closely related to the emergence of the concept of a state of law. Countries that adopt a civil law system use the term rule of law, while Anglo-Saxon countries use the term rule of law. democracy in indonesia It can be said that Indonesian democracy developed along with the political changes after the independence of the Indonesian nation itself. The concept of democracy has actually changed, starting with executive democracy, then becoming parliamentary democracy to presidential democracy. However, fundamentally, the role of the government in organizing democracy is still very dominant, because the 1945 Constitution and its amendments still emphasize that the government's power is greater than other powers.

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