

# Indonesian Democracy, between two Political Systems

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This study aims to examine the existing democratic culture in Indonesia that is in the form of traditional values and institutions. The difference is in terms of the level of each culture. The study was conducted by comparing the democratic values in Minangkabau and Javanese culture. It is obvious that Indonesian culture comes from three elements of values: traditional, Islamic and western. Through observation and political science and political anthropology approaches, it is found that Indonesian democracy is a local level political system, namely a political system that lies between the local political system and the national political system. The combination of democracy types originated from local culture on the one hand; while the other originated from outside, which has resulted in confusion that is manifested in contests and political competition.

**Key words:** *Democracy, Local-Level Political Systems, Divergences, Traditional-Islamic-Western Values.*

## Introduction

Direct election of the head of a region creates new excitement in the history of Indonesian democracy. The community feels fully involved in the process of selecting their leaders without the need to delegate authority to their representatives in parliament. It feels like they chose the "neighbouring" community to know the prospective leaders; their family, childhood, track records and so on. Although the new procedures in democracy do not reduce the essence of the enthusiasm of direct participation in their implementation, there are lots of things that impair the essence of democracy, which include the emergence of dynastic politics, use of identity politics including issues of ethnicity, religion, race (SARA), money politics, mass mobilisation to influence the ongoing process. The changes to the 1945

Constitution and implementation of regional autonomy policies have led to the establishment of a Regional Representative Council (DPD) as a legislative institution besides the DPR, (Harsya Bachtiar, 1976). The senators from the community elements are chosen by the local community to represent their regions in the DPD. The election process is almost the same as a local election except that candidates are not selected through political parties but compete as individual candidates. Indirectly, the nomination system and mechanism provide greater opportunities for the traditional elites and head of regions than ordinary people. As a result, the Special Region of Yogyakarta is represented by the wife of Sultan HB X; Gorontalo Province is represented by the wife of Sultan Baabulah, who is now the wife of the former Governor; the Province of South Kalimantan "chooses" businessmen / business leaders and politicians as their regional representatives in the DPD. These facts have led to questions as to whether the electoral process is elitist or democratic.

In addition to using theory in political science, the question will also be addressed by using political anthropological approaches (McGlynn & Tuden, 2000: 42-44; Suparlan, 1989: 3-4) by observing Minangkabau and Javanese culture. (Bogdan, 1975: 80-91; Marshal & Rossman, 1989: 47-48).

Minangkabau and Java are the two ethnic groups in Indonesia that have been generally known as having conceptually-theoretical differences that can be grouped into ethnic dichotomies. Stereotypically, the Minang people are considered to adhere to a horizontal (egalitarian), democratic, and fraternalist way of life. The Javanese, on the other hand, are stereotyped as adopting hierarchical, feudalistic, and paternalistic ways of life and thinking.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Democracy, a political system***

There are at least two different opinions regarding democracy and its realisation in Indonesia. First, in the indigenous culture of Indonesian society, democracy is not something strange because it refers to the tradition of consensus that has existed in the cultures of ethnic groups in Indonesia in the form of nagari density, village consultation meetings, subak deliberations, and also in the existence of pepe democracy practices or the conveyance of opinions (protests) carried out by the community to the authorities through silent action. Second, democracy does not exist in the indigenous culture of Indonesian society. This can be found within the strong culture of feudalism and primordialism (Siti Zuhro, 2009: 2-3). Accordingly, political scientists agree that the origin of democracy as a political system began in approximately the 6th century BC, when the Greeks who formed the state questioned "how the political system should be organised in order to meet the interests and welfare of the people." Since then, democracy has become known and developed from time to time (Rais 1986: vii). In its development, the term democracy has received additional

words in order to emphasise the differences between one form of democracy and another. These include Constitutional Democracy, Parliamentary Democracy, Guided Democracy, Pancasila Democracy, People's Democracy, National Democracy and so on (Budiardjo, 2008).

Among the variants of democracy, there are largely two schools of thoughts namely, constitutional democracy and democracy which is essentially based on communism (generally by adding the word "people" behind it). The two major groups of democracy are both from Europe. In political science, both the originators and developers in the beginning of the creation of democracy were European people whose cultures were almost similar. Only after World War II was the pattern of constitutional democracy applied by new countries in Asia, then Africa, while some chose democracy that was more inclined to communism. That choice of democracy seems to be based more on the joint consensus of government administrators, rather than consideration of the elements of history and culture of the people. Meanwhile, anthropology does not specifically examine democracy. In anthropology, democracy is more about general principles that create order in society. An order is carried out by many people without the presence of the state unlike the one explained in political science. A good example of this was in Greece. Likewise, social order and social exchange mechanisms and leadership were found in the smallest Pacific island region (Malinowski, 2002). Therefore, if Greece is recognised as the origin of democracy that has been used and developed in most countries of the world, the popularity of ancient Greek culture that incorporates competitive values in the public space such as sports, games, drama shows, including choosing leaders, could also be due to this. Victory and defeat in general elections is very much determined by the support of weapons possessed by the candidates (Graeber, 2004).

Democracy is difficult to define, especially if it is only described in formal terms, such as the existence of people's representative institutions, party systems and electoral institutions, and voting rights for every citizen (Rais 1986: xvi). Therefore, it is more appropriate to use the criteria or standards of democracy rather than making definitions to better understand their nature (see Rais 1986: xvii-xxii and in Budiardjo. 1982. 181 182):

- 1) Participation in decision making: people's participation in the decision-making process is carried out through elected representatives through general elections. However, the reality often shows that in the end, the people's representatives no longer voice the interests they represent, but form a separate group alienated from the people.
- 2) Equality of law: the equality of law cannot often be applied properly in society because of position and power that each member of the society has not obtained from the existing and applied law.

- 3) Fair income distribution: basically, the concept of equality in democracy is not a holistic concept. The equality does not apply, as it is emphasised only in one aspect of life. Political and legal equality are incomplete without being accompanied by equality in economy. Democracy will only be meaningful if there is a fair distribution of income in a country. The striking economic disparity between the rich and the poor indicates that democracy has not gone well.
- 4) A guarantee of freedom regarding certain matters: other democratic criteria are freedom of expression, press freedom, freedom of association and religious freedom. In this case, social participation, social control and social responsibility can only work well if these freedoms exist in a society

Democracy is defined as a political system in which political power is in the hands of many people, characterised by competition and participation (Krouse, 1982). Similar to a package, different types of democracy may have the same packaging, but the contents, which include understanding, application and acceptance can vary. One of the underlying factors is the culture behind the recipient of the democracy. In addition to being used as a guideline to behave in accordance with the environment, culture is human knowledge that contains devices and models of knowledge which are used selectively by its supporters to interpret and understand the environment that they face (Suparlan. 1988: 2). Meanwhile, a political system is a result of the models of knowledge possessed by humans in order to regulate interactions among them. The political system itself comprises the values and rules according to the supporting culture. Almond (1978) asserts that the concepts of systems, structures, and functions are part of the same process. These concepts are very important to understand how politics is both being influenced and influences the environment comprising nature and humans (Almond, 1978: 22-23).

Accordingly, every culture is unique. The culture of a society will produce a political system that is in accordance with the environment, mindset, beliefs, and customs of the people supporting the culture. In relation to this, understanding, application and acceptance of democracy cannot be separated from the political system of a society. In ancient times, people lived in their tribes, and these tribes were their own nations, which could be called the old nation. Each of these nations had its own territory of residence, culture and identity (Bakhtiar. 1976: 7). Each nation also had created various political systems (local political systems) to regulate interactions between members of their community. Later, these different old nations became united through the Youth Oath in 1928, and were politically united in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia through the 1945 Constitution.

The formation of a new nation (the national political system) also marks the enactment of a new political system. In the national political system, elements of local culture and elements of culture are combined. It is said that culture is not inherited genetically, but, obtained

through a learning process by imitating knowledge consciously or unconsciously. Models of foreign knowledge are accepted and adapted as the new nation's own culture and this also happens in other aspects of life. Talking about the political system, some questions arise; which political system is meant (Swartz, 1969: 1), to differentiate between the definition of local politics and the local-level political system.

Local level political systems exist in communities' living units, relationships existing between actors and local political groups arise and apply not only to the area concerned. Meanwhile, the local political system also occurs in the context of complex relationships, but the reference range of actors and valid political groups is limited to the region concerned.

Based on the formulation above, the local political system is defined as the overall values and rules that come from the culture of the local community (ethnic culture). Political actions and public policies are regulated and implemented by citizens of the local community, while the national political system is the overall values and rules that come from Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, when political actions and public policies were regulated and implemented by Indonesian citizens. In the Republic of Indonesia today, most local political systems from various regions have mingled with the national political system, except in areas that are still alienated from other larger living entities. Then, the distinction between the local political system and the national political system, among other things, will lead to what is called by Swartz (1969, 1) a more complex local level political system.

## **Discussion and Analysis**

### ***Democracy, Value, Order, in Ethnic Culture***

#### ***Minangkabau culture***

The Minang people call their homeland the Minangkabau Nature. The use of the word "nature" has a very deep and broad meaning. For the Minang people, nature is not only a place of birth and death, life and development, but it also has philosophical meanings as outlined in this proverb: "satitiak is made lauik, why is it made into a mountain, the nature of takambang is made teacher." The teachings and views of their lives quoted in the proverb, *petitih*, *pituah*, and *mamangan*, take expressions of form, nature, and natural life (Navis, 1984: 59). They observe the natural law that the big ones maintain the small and respect the great fellow. Local culture culminates in ethics in social relations. It is manifested in a way that governs their lives: "the *ketek* is loved, and the same is how it is resisted by *baito*, which is respected." They see other people as being respected, as needing to be invited to consult and being protected. Respect for fellow (rights) as part of the value of the "Minangkabau model democracy" is also reflected in the expressions of protection, which are respected, and which are protected (the smaller are protected, the greater are respected, the same are respected).

Even though there are also other ethnic groups, Minangkabau people tend to consider deliberation as their typical ethnic democracy. Consultation carried out by leaders is not based on a majority, so that the 'voting' system is unknown. Deliberation to reach consensus is based on the principle of "Saiyo-sakato" (all-person) and agreement (consensus). This is reflected in the 'bullies are classically classified, picak is often aired' (if the round is allowed to be classified and if it's flat it should be filed). In other words, an agreement has obtained mutual agreement and can be implemented. To reach an agreement, deliberation must adhere to the principle of the plot and obey (the principle of rationality) which is adjusted to the conditions, situation, time and place. In other words, it does not apply in the same way at all times and circumstances (Zuhro, 2009).

This view of life is strengthened by the presence of Islam in Indonesia. Islam teaches that everyone is a brother who must be loved as much as one loves himself. Islam also teaches that there is no excess of people than others caused by wealth, strength, and other individual advantages. The glory of a person is determined by his taqwa to God alone. There are many similarities between views on life views by the Minangkabau people and the values in the teachings of Islam (Syara '). As such, any damage on the adat will also bring damage to some important elements in the Islam in Minangkabau. This is expressed in the proverb: "adat basandi syara ', syara' basandi Kitabullah, syara mengato adat mamakai" (Hakim, Idrus Dt Rajo Penghulu. 1978: 99-100).

### ***Javanese culture***

For the Javanese people, the universe is something big and intact with all the elements that support it. There are two types of universe: the big universe (macrosmos) and the little universe (mikrosmos). The Javanese believe that humans, homes, villages, communities, and kingdoms are small universes (little universe, microcosm). This is because the characteristics that exist in the universe (the universe, the macrocosm) are also present in these elements. Two elements, namely human and kingdom, are also considered as replicas of the universe or the great universe (Latief. 1988: 31). The small universe which is a part or an element of the universe, must continue to maintain its relationship to be harmonious with other elements of the universe (large universe). Regularity and schism are not considered to be in an equal position, but are always in a hierarchical relationship. In the kinship system, for example, the use of language types, terms or terms in social ethics, is clearly illustrated.

Generally, a kingdom always consists of a container or place, namely the kingdom itself, the contents of the kingdom which consists of humans, various animals and plants, and spirits that are not visible. Furthermore, the king is the centre of the kingdom that governs and controls the kingdom and its contents. The king as the centre of the kingdom is considered as

a replica of Sang Hyang Wenang which is the centre of the universe. The king is his representative or reincarnation in the kingdom. Thus, the absolute power of the king over all the contents of the kingdom can be justified (Suparlan. 1986: 5-6).

Meanwhile in the village, the village government is led by a head of village assisted by village officials consisting of a head of village representative or congkok, jurutulis (carik), treasurer or kamitua, religious officials (kaum or modin), messenger (kebayan), village police (jagabaya), and an administrator distributing water from the river to the fields called ulu-ulu. The position of the village in the royal environment is autonomous, except for villages which are located very close to the centre of the kingdom. As a result, the village government is different from the royal government because the power of the village head over the residents of his village can be said to be not absolute (Suparlan. 1986: 23-24). In carrying out their duties, a lurah has a greater role as a father. This role may be explained by the historical background of the establishment of villages in Java. The villages in Java are usually founded by a husband and wife. Thus, as a model, the control and regulation of villagers is based on a system of kinship. Being considered as the father of the village residents, usually, the person who becomes the village the head of village is someone who is old or who is an elder of his village. Therefore, the position of the head of village lasts for his lifetime.

According to Suparlan (1986), there is a difference between the position of a father in the family and the position of a lurah in the village. If a father makes a mistake, he cannot be sued by his children. However, if a mistake is made by a village head, he can be sued and removed from his position by the villagers. However, not all villagers have the right to sue the lurah. Only certain people, including core citizens or descendants of village founders, can do it. It is also not done openly, but through representatives. Usually it is carried by a respected elderly person. If the guilty head of village does not want to quit according to the wishes of his citizens, then the villagers would not obey all the orders and rules he made, would not respect him anymore, or would even damage his property. Rumours (gossip) are often used as a way to channel complaints from villagers in place of formal institutions that do not exist. The position of the villagers as children does not make it possible to control the village head who is a father. For this reason, the parents of the village founders, who would immediately intervene to advise the village head if it was felt that these rumours had become increasingly intense and widespread.

Furthermore, the role of parents is an expression of Javanese social structures that emphasise differences in age and generation. The implication, among others, emphasises the opinion that older people have greater knowledge than younger ones. Therefore adat and procedures to show respect towards the older people must be carried out by young people (Suparlan. 1986: 25-26). The Javanese kinship system is based on the principle of bilateral descent. The system of kinship terms refers to the class system according to the forces. All brothers and

sisters of father and mother, along with their wives and husbands are each classified into one with the terms siwa or uwa (Geertz, 1982).

This layered community structure is seen more clearly in the division in society (Geertz, 1983). The upper layer of nobility or *bendara* and *priyayi* consists of civil servants and educated people. Meanwhile, the lower layer is a layer of ordinary people or small people, for example farmers, artisans and other unskilled workers. Furthermore, in the village there is more self-coating. The highest layer is the *raw wong*, then successively below the coolies *gadok* (protect) and *joko* (*sinoman* or *bujangan*) (Kodiran 1980: 337 - 339).

Why are *joko* or unmarried people placed in the lowest layer? This is because in the Javanese culture, people who have not / are not married until a certain age are still considered as "children." Despite their capability to support themselves, they are still placed under the responsibility of their parents.

### ***Indonesian democracy between two cultures***

There are three cultural elements that influence democracy in the two cultures. Firstly, the elements of traditional culture inherited from the ancestors. Secondly, the element of Islamic culture (for most ethnic groups in Indonesia), and thirdly, the elements of modern culture that are obtained through contact with western nations and their culture. The differences in appreciation and composition of the three elements of culture determine the form among the sub-cultures. The three elements of culture can be described as follows (Latief, 1988: 35).

In the Minang culture, the three cultural elements experience optional divergence (diffusion) and diffusion. Thus, these are reflected in the philosophy and outlook on life and patterns of individual behaviour and society. This is evidenced by the proverbs, an egalitarian and democratic system of government involving *ninik-mamak*, *alim-ulama*, *cerdik-clever*, *manti-ulubalang* is a picture of the prevalence of appreciation and accentuation of these three cultural elements; everything widens, seeps and it is inferred. The values of democracy appear to have been deliberately created to regulate the political and social needs of the people. The procurement of institutions is intended for the rules that have been determined to have stronger legal force. Everything from history, mythology, philosophy of life and value systems, social and community organisation systems is combined, until the kinship system are clearly illustrated.

In the Javanese culture, the three elements experience the opposite process. There is convergence (grouping) of each strict cultural element. As a result, each element prioritises the elitists whose existence must be taken into account. The concept of "hierarchicalism" emerges from the differences between elemental elites. The conception consists of their thinking, systems of life, and symbols. History, mythology, philosophy of life and value

systems, and kinship systems illustrate the concrete form of operationalisation of the concept. The traditional element ranks at the top. The effort to "diffuse" elements of religion (Islam) into it creates a form of "forced integration" (Latief, 1988: 36) or syncretism. Thus, the religious behaviour of Javanese people (especially *prijajis* and *abangan*), is religious behaviour in the position of traditional subordination, because both are seen as part of culture (Geertz, 1983).

Based on the above figure, it seems that democratic values in Javanese culture have small levels. Institutions were created in line with the concept of hierarchies which are always present in Javanese life, especially in the royal system. *Pepe* tradition, for example, is a form of communication that is recognised between the king and his people. The recognition of this institution is manifested in the form of planting two stems of banyan trees in each royal square, which is one of its functions as a place for people to do *pepe*. What needs to be questioned is how much influence it has on the decision making of the king.

Furthermore, in the village, these values can still be found, among others in the existence of a correction mechanism in the management of village governance through the dissemination of rumours that are felt to be very effective as they are repeated as intensely as possible (Suparlan, 1986. 26). As one of the elements of implemented democratic criteria (see Rais. 1986: xxv), the mechanism for the dissemination of hearsay is not able to reflect that, unless it is done in East Java, which has a culture which tends to be more open (Zuhro et al., 2009: 58-69). In the kingdom, another alternative is the way of violence in the form of a coup, for example. This could all be made possible in the concept of hierarchies and coatings in the structure of society.

If we talk about ethnic culture as an internal factor that influences the implementation of democracy in Indonesia, then, the western democratic ideology that was brought into Indonesia in the early 20th century by our students who study in western countries is an external factor that affected it. The meeting of democracy originating from local culture with western values is often confusing. Ideally, the combination of elements will complement and cover up the weaknesses that exist in the elements originating from one culture, or form new elements so as to create democracy with universal ideals or ideas without being separated from cultural sources of the community.

However, what followed was that democracy was accepted in two different capacities, namely as a political system in the framework of local and national understanding. As a result, ambiguity arises. On the one hand democracy is recognised and accepted as a national political system, with an understanding that is more laden with western values that are integrated with the political life of its people. On the other hand, in its implementation, democracy has become a political system with local values and rules or conversely it applies



western values in the context of a national political system that cannot escape from local values.

## **Conclusion**

Democracy as a result of human thought cannot be separated from the cultural values in which it grows. Although the state of the old nations is generally in the form of a kingdom, democratic values existed long before Greek-style democracy was discovered. Then, in the development of becoming a new (Indonesian) nation, these values continue to carry over. Before we make judgements about democracy, we should try to find out, study and understand what is really happening with democracy as the political system that we choose and agree on. By referring to the two great cultures, democracy in Indonesia is at a more complex level of local politics. When the local political system becomes a local level political system, then the mixing or disappearance of one element is certain, as for examples the Direct The Head of Region Elections and Regional Representative Council Elections.



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### **Short Biography**

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