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## **LOCAL ELECTION AND THE FUTURE OF INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY**

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### **Abstract**

*This writing is basically a critical reflection on local democracy phenomenon in Indonesia that has become the barometer for democracy in national level. By qualitative approach that implemented data collection technique in the form of interview, observation, and documentation, this writing telescoped democracy phenomenon in local level. Political party domination and centralization, identity contestation, money politic phenomenon, pragmatic voter emergence, senior politician domination along with regeneration crisis, and bias gender politics were the important findings in terms of the new issues in local election that were identified by writer. Finally, this writing concluded that local democracy direction in Indonesia had not included into democracy consolidation phase considering that many new problems had not showed any sign to stop. If that is the case, then Indonesian democracy face will remain under the fragility shadows. Therefore, it still needs to wait for the test period of Indonesian democracy power.*

### **Keywords**

Local election, Democracy, Political Party

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia has been entering the searching phase of ideal electoral political form. This is signed by the election mechanism changing from time to time. Since the reformation has rolled in 1998, there is almost always significant change within election mechanism in every five year election execution. The change of form and election mechanism have at least occurred in candidation technical aspect, campaign, and polling execution.

There were some interesting studies that related to local election of head government, although a part of them were focused on how local election was done. Mboi (2009:38-49) in her study was worried that local election of head government would give a big contribution to the substantive democracy. According to her, the recent local election of head government tended to be procedural democracy and finally would lead to the risk of tyranny of majority phenomenona. As for Pratikno (2009:70) in his study regarding political party in local election of head government concluded that political party centralization was a big problem in electoral politics. Sulistiyyanto and Erb (2009:28-31) stated that many studies were sceptical to the democratic consolidation in Indonesia; however, the transition toward it is on progress.

On the process, In local level, direct local election form has been a very interesting phenomenon to discuss. The shift from election using representative system in legislative into direct election in society level has had a great impact on political practice in local politics spaces. Local election has suddenly become hectic, as it occurs in legislative general election. People have privilege to determine the head of local government similar to as they choose in deciding the legislative representation. As the consequence, political hectic always occurs in every local election.

The latest decision regarding election in local level was the simultaneously local election implementation. This has been gradually taken place since 2015. The simultaneously local election implementation for most areas will be in 2017. It will be then implemented for all local government heads in 2024.

The basic question was then how would the local election implication and its entire dynamic have on local democracy strengthening aspect and finally on Indonesian democracy? The fact was that local government head election as a part of local election brought out some dynamics that even transformed into reverse flow for democracy affirmation. Local government head election was even colored with various negative practices from voter base that tended to be

pragmatic. While on political party level and the candidates themselves, the local government head position fight employed various modus (see for example Nugroho, 2016:154-166; Triantini, 2016: 249-263; Rohi, 2016:L363-382; Sumampouw, 2016: 321-340). Local democracy tended to show vague signs in the middle of the pragmatism strength of voters, political parties, and orientation on merely winning.

Of course, this writing is relatively different with some other studies that were already done as discussed above as the time framing was different. If those studies were mostly conducted on regulation No. 32/2004 of political regime, this writing even observed the recent political phenomenon that answered many questions of previous studies as the one by Mboi (2009) : Does the Local Election of Head Government contribute to the local democracy? Or is it still on procedural or already substantive? Or as Sulistiyanto and Erb (2009) guessed about the democratic transition and how fast the consolidation of Indonesian Democracy will occurred.

This paper would discuss the election new problems in local level in which its ultimate would be local government head election. As local democracy, many emerging problems, according to the author, were strongly believed to give great implication to the future of Indonesian democracy. This writing would like to predict Indonesian democracy direction by observing democracy in local level.

## **2. Democracy Transition Perspective**

Democracy transition is a condition in which there has been a shift from one democracy model to another. The author viewed that recently Indonesia is in democracy transition phase signed by the moving of New Order model democracy system to the new democracy model. Although remaining in democracy model, there has been however a fundamental shift in the way of its political life.

The study by Hanish (2015) is basically interesting to see how he discussed about the distribution of power in local and national relation context. National government, according to him as long as this time tends to be super power and the granting authority to the local region is one of the solutions to solve the potential conflict. Transition here is read in redistribution of power and authority context. While, the more relevant study was described by Yeduum (2015) quoting from Freedom House Organization data suggested that the politics and Indonesian

government had not been stable from year to year. This indicates that the progress of Indonesian Democracy is relatively unlinier with its politics and democracy instability.

Collier in Hiariej (2004:5) stated that democracy transition tended to see the authoritarian regime falling down and political transition process following it as a concern of few people in the power center. The groups outside of it were neglected. Meanwhile, O'Donnell in Hiariej (2004:6) emphasized that democracy transition was more often occurred because of the failure to throw out the older regime political culture that opposed with democracy principles. The problem was, according to O'Donnell, on new democracy institutional development focus that didn't often automatically create more democratic situation.

In the context of Indonesian democracy transition, it looks interesting to see that democracy transition tends to encourage democratization emergence in certain boundaries. Half-hearted decentralization that doesn't touch all political life aspects in Indonesia showed that there has been some big issue regarding democracy transition. As mentioned by O'Donell above, it is interesting to see how Indonesia has experienced failure in building democracy legitimization through institutional expansion that has been considered as democratic. Instead of all new institutions make this nation more democratic, inefficiency has even occurred as a result of several new institutions overlapping. The beginning of democracy transition, according to Mundayat et.al (2005:92), also showed the tendency for civil society organizations to be fragmented and less organized.

According to Mar'iyah (2013: 14-15), Indonesian democracy transition itself was at least argued by two major groups, they were between the optimistic and pessimistic one. Optimistic group presumed that the new expected democracy must depart from the regenerated constitution. They were optimistic that through constitutional ways, the ideal democracy basis could be built on. Meanwhile, pessimistic group viewed that street democracy was more important, in which it operated through demonstration pressures. In turn, both groups were alternately elected as a part of democracy transition strategy.

Santoso (2004:63) emphasized that democracy and democratization were not merely about political issue; however, they were also concerned about cultural issue. According to him, political and cultural dimensions must be put forward. Santosa stated that democracy was understood as collective behavior referral institutionalization; therefore, democracy was an ideal construct in which its spelling out must occurred in institutional level that required contextuality.

### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1 From General Election to Local Election**

##### **3.1.1 Representative Politics**

In a very long time, Indonesian democracy was the representative one. New order, for 32 years under Soeharto government, perpetuated representative politics along with centralistic government regime. Representative politics in the style of Indonesia was the one placing representation through political party and regional representative. Government centralization helped shape political system tended to be centralized and signed by the strengthening of party management role in national level.

In electoral politics context, this centralize color was explicitly implemented. Local government head election was performed by legislative institution. It was the legislative decision as political party representation that played an important role in government, including local government head determination. The community role was only at general election held once in five years, when voting for political party and its representatives. As such, the election during political representation was a political party election, but not a seriously people representation election. It was the political party that was chosen in voting booths. Based on the winning votes obtained by political party, then it determined the representatives who would be delegated in legislative chair. Political party domination therefore would be very strong, since the voters would not get the names.

On local government head election, uniformity was more often occurred. People's representatives who became community delegation through their political party carried out closed local government head election. People almost did not have access in decision making since local government head determination was performed closely within legislative internal. People's aspiration might only be distributed through political party as the people's representatives themselves were not close to the people they represented. This was known as buying a cat in the sack; people did not know who their representatives were, and they could not directly influence people's representative decision in determining local head government.

Therefore, political electoral during pure representation politics season was signed by local government head recruitment that was closely carried out. People's representatives were elected through political party election, while local government head election was closely determined by

people's representatives. The similar thing also occurred in national level, namely people's representatives election in national legislative was conducted through political party election. President was also elected not through direct election by people, instead through election in national legislative level.

Political representation that played during New Order era was a pure political representation signed by the minimum public access to political decision making. The people's representation and their leader were elected through process that was truly simple, but elitists in nature. This was the one that actually became the fundamental criticism from scientists and democracy activists because finally the political process was not seriously constructed in accordance with people's aspiration. The process was truly cheap; however, its substance was so expensive for the qualified democracy.

### **3.1.2 Direct Local Election**

The fundamentally change of electoral politics in Indonesia occurred when New Order regime changed through reform process in 1998 (see Suwarso 2013:37). Suharto, who had administered for 32 years, collapsed through civil society movement. Centralization and authoritarianism were two basic accusations from pro-democracy group. Suharto was considered as killing his political opponents through the series of freedom restriction, including in political world. As the major reform agenda, then political system change was also occurred fundamentally.

Soon after Suharto's collapse, political form changing was fundamentally performed (see Prihatmoko, 2005:6-7). Constitution amendment adjusted with Indonesian modernization needs, until it came to local government authority changing into decentralistic. Political party was given a freedom to grow and develop, including the growing number possibility of political party. Local governments were given authority to manage their own administration.

Electorally, the changing occurred was people's representation election system using by party by name (compare to Diamond [2003:11]). Candidates' name list were written in such a way and opened to public. In addition to people's representation election directly in all level, people were also authorized to directly determine local head government as well as head of state. As the consequence, direct democracy was ensued. During socialization and campaign period, every voter was given opportunity to recognize, consider, and determine their representative directly.

Nevertheless, direct election basically had some problems. The election would be more expensive as every candidate needed time and energy to convince public. Technically, the election would be more complicated as well since it needed props to ensure the democracy rights of all voters to be channeled. Not with standing, the debates regarding direct vote accessibility of the desirable people resulted in every people having the similar dignity and pride. In the middle of many debates regarding the weakness and strength of direct democracy, Indonesia has at least decided to keep continuing democracy process based on direct election. This direct democracy choice will certainly have certain risks that will implicate on democracy progress in this big nation and multi-ethnic.

### **3.2 The New Problem of Local Election**

The real local election in Indonesia is the local government head election. It is local in nature since it takes place with candidate and atmosphere in local level. Although it is tied by candidate recruitment through political party; however, the election level really represents local interest. Direct local government head election is like local democracy party. The issues played by some candidates are certainly very close to people's daily life. This election reflects the democracy in local level.

Nonetheless, the local election can not be separated from various issues, either from the side of political party institutions, the issues played, to its practical campaign. It hasn't been fully operated in accordance to expectation, namely the more strengthening democracy quality along with the more people's autonomy enhancement in determining their vote directly. Local democracy that has been imagined to be qualified practical democracy reflection in local level remained facing reality that election is still colored by unhealthy practice for democracy.

#### **3.2.1 Political party domination and centralization**

Although in the side of authority, the government had been decentralistic; however, in the side of political party, centralization remained to be tradition. It seemed that decentralization did become the government's rationale choice, while political party even got drawned into administration domination practice in national level. The main characteristic of this political party centralization was its super power in decision making in central level. Management in the locality was not more as the hand extension from the central board, thus all decision making required consultation and major consideration in central level.

This political party domination and centralization at least took place in decision making to determine political party management in regency/municipality and province level. It also occurred as the determination of who the candidate would be supported by political party. As the consequence, the candidate determination along with its coalitions was greatly determined by lobby and transaction from the central board. The local officials who had different opinion with those in central board must be ready to receive consequence to be dismissed from the management or expelled from the political party membership if they were brave enough to have different opinion with the decision in central level.

Political party domination in this central level resulting in political practice developing in local level was not as interesting as the reform terminology in government level and other civil society movements. So far this political party had the greatest authority in determining the government direction (see also Suwarso, 2013:43). Finally, party constituent in local level much encounter central choices in which they were based on lobby and transaction by disregarding the proposal from political party official in local level. Moreover, local head government candidacy did not have to be a pure candidate of a party and as a result the candidate supported was often non-cadre and not in accordance with the people's desire in the territory. This study reaffirmed Praktino's studies (2009) that the fundamental problem of Local Election was about the domination and centralization of political parties.

Local democracy practices, according to me, were still hijacked by central interest. It means that when civil movement was successful in giving wider autonomy to people in territory to develop their capacity, political party was even failed to give positive stimulus for local democracy. The face of political party in Indonesia was at least still colored with centralization and local interest hijack in the name of stability and political party ideology purity. This condition was not healthy for local democracy since there had been quite a lot of records that appeared regarding official domination in this central level; for example, there was a qualified cadre proposed as local head government but then he/she was not accommodated (see, for example, Sahdan and Haboddin, 2009:73-76), or cadre dismissal since he/she didn't obey party's instruction in central level, or for example, some money transaction to get recommendation from the central board. It seemed that the centralistic practices led to party in local level that merely as the subordination from the party interest in central level.

### 3.2.2 Identity Contests

One of the interesting facts in local election contestation was identity instrumentation in every competition. During campaign, the issues having identity basis remained to be the interesting one to sell by the successful team and the candidate. The candidate would usually always make use of identity, for example, religion, ethnicity, and territory origin to develop similarity basis. The facts given in nature was sold and reproduced to persuade the voters in accordance with certain interest in specific region. The candidates and the successful team utilized various media to build similarity imagination and encourage efforts to refuse different identity candidate.

At the same time, identity was also used by successful team to negating different candidate. Hence, identity was built on two different directions, in one side, it was used to construct support; however, in the other side it was used to resist candidate (see Sulaiman, 2016; Damanik, 2016; Ibrahim, 2016; see also the urgent of identity issue on Zhaowen's Study, 2015 and Cetinkaya & Yetim's Study, 2015). Various organs that were not directly involved in electoral process often used identity to resist candidate, for example, through demonstration movements. Ahok rejection approaching 2017 Jakarta Governor Election, for example, was massively performed by religious organizations. In other regions, many successful teams distributed pamphlet or campaign attributes using identity element for contestation interests.

The identity utilization as the basis to build political support apparently signed that voters and candidates in some parts of region were still traditional. Santoso (2004:362) stated that primordialism efficiency expansion as the basis for state affair indicated its primitive democracy. The given by nature identity basically did not have positive correlation with candidate quality aspect. Within community that tends to be figure-oriented with less attention to quality, identity determination has remained a trend. This has bad impact in the effort to create local democracy that is really performance oriented.

Although, there has been some progress in thinking aspect of most voters, especially in suburb area; however the fact that candidates and the successful team still took advantage of identity in almost every contestation signing that there was unfinished democracy business in local level. The fact was that building similarity imagination was easier and cheaper and often became the primary consideration of election and identity utilization to polish the image.

### **3.2.3 Money politic phenomenon**

One of the greatest threats for direct local government head election in Indonesia would be the costly expenses for winning. These debates had actually been long enough to blow since it turned out that it's not easy to create direct democracy having affordable cost. From the implementation aspect, there had been technical problem in terms of the high cost, for example, ballot paper, election committee, supervision, and others. However, beyond those things, the most important one would be the increasing cost for candidate winning.

In the middle of election system using direct punching, candidates and their successful team used many ways to gain victory. Money politics had been unavoidable. Organizers and the set of rules had undergone some modernization to prevent money politics in every election. However, the candidates and their successful team always had the ways to deceive the rule (see Wahid, 2016; Rohman, 2016; Hamdi, 2016). If far before it money politics was not restricted in detail, then lately there has been some rule that prohibits money using to influence voters.

In the local level campaigns, the modus used by candidates was quite varied. If money politics was already defined in the regulation, then the money was replaced by other goods such as, rice, sarong, *jilbab*, *sajadah*, and other necessities. In a glance, those goods were not money politics; however, basically and substantively it was money politics. The sets of rules had been tried to restrain, as well as the intensity of supervision institution formed by government; however, successful teams would always have many ways to distribute the goods. Such goods by the successful teams and their candidate were called as 'contact tool', 'communication tool,' or 'thank-you note.'

Metera (2013:145) in his study, for example, was very worried if there would be no changing form in local government head election, thus the leadership would be held by the capital owners from generation to generation. In the end, political contestation would be no different with economical contestation (see also the study by Limba and Bake, 2013; Samadhi and Warouw, 2009:55).

Within democracy strengthening context, money politics was destructive, since finally the election would rely on the greater financial support. Democracy moved stagnant when the candidate relied more on money to encourage his/her elected. This phenomenon apparently became a color that was still quite often found in the local government head elections. This note was important for local democracy quality strengthening aspect as it would implicate on the

resulted leadership quality. Political process based on the money lure would damage the joints of democracy and ineffective to recruit the leaders based on quality as well.

### **3.2.4 Pragmatic voters**

Basically there were two directions for money politics to develop in every contestation in local level. First, money politics developed because the candidates made money politics as tradition to win competition, thus people were used to various gifts. Second, money politics developed as negative tradition as the voters trully developed into pragmatic voters. Both of them became the explanatory alternated that supported why the voters tended to be pragmatic.

On one hand, there was a process to gain support by relying on money to influence voters by the candidates and their successful teams. On the other hand, the society culture that still put the gift as a present and hence it must be paid back by voting. These two created pragmatic society culture and the tendency to choose because of gift effect.

The facts happened a lot in the field showed that the voters in Indonesia tended to be pragmatic following money politics tendency line occurred. This pragmatism was more relevant in the context of voters that tended to receive the gift or to vote because of something given by the candidates. People's pragmatism could be seen from the voters' inconsistency in determining the candidate. In many places, the voters' base was still based on what they had got from the candidates or which candidate had given more lure goods.

Voter pragmatism was also colored by sudden appearance of brokers to offer their service as voter persuader. Voter broker groups were usually active to offer their service to candidates. They usually played in two or more candidates depending on who gave the better facility. Such groups were usually the rents' hunter and they would come approaching local government head election along with the link searcher by the candidates.

Voter mobilization and pragmatism group would be easy to move approaching the end of campaign to voting period. Although not all regions or voting areas could be managed using pragmatism logic; however, this condition would implicate on the local democracy quality achievement. Pragmatic voters would damage democracy since finally the main consideration in electing was not candidates' ability and track record, but their giving aspect. They would also evoke uncertainty because their tug support by basing on money consideration would make political calculation difficult to predict.

### **3.2.5 Bias gender politics**

Women's political participation in various levels was still considered as scarce. Female politician or female leader existence was still low, though there had been some political forms taken place, for example, 30% quota for women in every legislation candidation or within political party administration. Having operated for more or less 18 years for the reform in Indonesia, female politics has remained stagnant. It is signed by the minimum number of female legislator and leader elected from female group.

Generally, although Indonesia doesn't place female subordinatively within sociopolitics life; however, culturally, Indonesia has a long history related to how to view and place women. It is really not easy to change Indonesian culture in order not to be bias gender. The fact is that women involvement in electoral activities is still limited. Ratnawati (2004:147) stated that in Indonesian political history, women tended to be late in political world participation since the women's stigma who were often positioned them within domestic affairs (see also Mar'iyah, 2013:23). Dewi (2007:67) also concluded that since the reformation rolling, it took place some positive development in women's politics; however, patriarchal tendency hadn't too much shifted.

The fact showed that only more or less 17 percent of Indonesian women who have been successful to be legislator in the center for the period of 2014-2019. This number was decreased from 18 percent in the period of 2009-2014, while in the level of elected leader was also low. By the 30 percent quota affirmation enactment for women, it can be seen that there hasn't been any significant changing in women's political practice in Indonesia.

Then, why is women's politics important to see the democracy development in Indonesia? I guess this is related to the readiness to receive the fundamental change. In fact, women were positioned as follower, second class citizen, and primarily placed as unsuitable figure to enter political masculinity. State affairs should not be differentiated with gender aspect, but with leadership quality.

In the middle of low women's political participation and the identical politics as the men's spaces, local democracy remains keeping the big problems about gender equality and ultimately political equality. Healthy democracy is the one having basis on the rights and obligation similarity without differentiating gender aspect. In many part of Indonesian area, local democracy politics tends to be bias gender.

### **3.3 Local Democracy vs Indonesian Democracy**

#### **3.3.1 Predicting local democracy direction**

Then in the middle of the notes about local democracy in Indonesia, how will this local democracy direction move forward? Many developing notes within local democracy in Indonesia are basically principle. The things regarding the minimum political party decentralization, identity instrumentation, money politics, and pragmatics voter existence, to bias gender politics are basically political practices that still need to transform into substantive democracy.

Procedurally, Indonesian democracy does tend to positively developing into ideal democracy practice. The fact is that it's not easy to construct directly electoral politics practice for such a big nation with a lot of diversity. To date, Indonesia has been successful to practice local democracy politics based on special voting in every community member. It means that Indonesia still has the opportunity to shift democracy that initially centralistic and elitist into decentralistic and populist. The problem will be then how fast Indonesia will enter the substantial democracy.

Substantively, local democracy in Indonesia still learns many things, particularly in overcoming the problems of culture and people's habit as well as political elites. Indonesia still needs more time to come to the healthy local democracy. How long will it take? The answer will certainly depends on how fast every stakeholder in local level is able to transform. However, looking at the growing notes about the current local democracy, Indonesia apparently needs 3 to 4 elections to move forward into a healthy democracy. It will also depend much on how fast the adaptation toward the democracy defects can be managed.

#### **3.3.2 Indonesian Democracy Challenges**

There are at least two big democracy challenges in Indonesia, primarily when it comes to talk about local democracy. First, Indonesia needs electoral politics form changing in terms of its mechanism considering that the peculiarities taken place begins from the evoking regulation cracks. This, for example, can be seen on the taking advantage of money politics chance. The state should have more efficient and effective formula to oversee money politics utilization and consistently punish the actors and its receivers. The same thing, for example, also takes place for identity politics practice in which its basis is inequality and discrimination.

The changing challenge will presumably examine about how fast some problems arising from democracy can be overcome. Generally, the peculiarities occurred can be resolved by

regulation strengthening. Although it needs to be understood that within Indonesian democracy system, regulation makers remain the political figures who are more often to be peculiarity contributors. However, it warrants joint movement to encourage the more modern and solutive electoral politics form searching on the evoking problems.

The second challenge is, according to me, the political culture changing in local level. Albeit it is not easy to alter pragmatic culture, the lust for power, and bias gender issues; however, through various movements and socializations, the cultural changing of a healthy democracy politics can be created. I suggest the pro-democracy groups, such as university students, lecturers, non-government organizations, and media to actively encourage the cultural changing of politics in this country.

Presupposing that cultural changing rapidly occurs in politician body and their political parties may feel utopian. This cultural changing has precisely potential to be initiated and assisted by pro-democratic groups that were born outside of the electoral politics' core element. This awareness movement should be the joint challenge to create better democracy culture. Other civil society pressure and non-politics elements need to be increased through persuasive movements to public. This way can guarantee that Indonesian democracy will be getting better.

#### **4. Disclosure**

Local democracy in Indonesia tends to experience some changing to positive direction signed by the better public access in making decision regarding public affairs. The election using direct democracy form, either for legislative or government head has pushed the inception of the better local and national democracy. Even so, in the middle of the occurring changes, some basic problems still become dynamics in electoral politics. The things regarding political party domination until the bias gender local politics result in local democracy future in Indonesia that must face the fundamental challenge.

There is a need to make rule adjustment to overcome some peculiarities occurred; however, on the other hand there is cultural challenge that must be encouraged by several elements to be merely outside of practical politics player and general election as well as local election organizer. If these regulative and cultural challenges can be rapidly resolve, then Indonesian democracy will grow well toward the democracy that is not just a procedural. There

is a need from pro-democracy activists to encourage political form changing in local level in order that democracy will be getting more substantive as time goes by.

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