



The Situation of Declining Indonesian Democracy in 2021

By

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Introduction

Indonesian democracy is likely going to decline in 2021. After reviewing three reports from Democracy Index 2020 by The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Indonesian Democracy Index in 2019 by Indonesian Central Agency on Statistic and Democracy Report 2021 by V-Dem Institute, it seems that three reports have shown significant decrease, not only on civil liberties and political culture but also pluralism and the functioning of government. The two reports underscored civil liberties, as the central point of declining democracy. The former report puts Indonesia in 64th out of 167 countries, while the latter, which pays more weight on the freedom of speech, scores 64,29 points in 2019, which dropped 1,88 points than in 2018 with 66,17 points.¹ Lastly, V-Dem Institute puts Indonesia in 73rd out of 179 countries in terms of liberal democracy index.² In sum, these three reports have hinted at a decline in the level of Indonesian democracy, from “electoral democracy” becoming “flawed democracy”. This simply means, the elections that we have done not relate to what extent can elected leaders fulfill promises to their voters. The promises itself specifically refer to how leaders are able to increase public living standards.³

Given that the covid-19 pandemic is giving us the extraordinary impacts on social and economic life, it also contributes to the unpredictable political situation in Indonesian democracy currently. To be more precise, the inconsistent functioning of the government due to elite manners will likely bring Indonesia into a declining democracy situation. I would like to narrow it down into three main causes like the increasing role of the military in civilian matters, ideologies division, and lastly dynasticism.



Analysis

The first thing to note why declining democracy will likely be ongoing is the expanding role of the military in civilian roles. Compared to his predecessor President SBY, President Jokowi heavily relies on the military to intervene in daily social life.⁴ Starting from agriculture, natural disaster mitigation, public transport security, to the part of the covid-19 task force, we can see servicemen are everywhere. Our servicemen and servicewomen have contributed greatly in order to fight against pandemic covid-19, including repatriation, providing some public health assistances, and social aid redistribution.⁵ Regardless of having such positive helps, at some degree, they establish law and order as President Jokowi wishes to rehabilitate the economy very swiftly. However, this policy seems to contradict the principle that the military should be neutral and more focused on defence instead. Moreover, intelligence is generally assumed to play a role in watching some government dissidents. From hijacking their social media accounts to sending out the threats using unknown numbers, the critics are silent on how the government carries out policies. Although the expanding role of security agencies is also meant to help out the police's duties, the current situation shows how the government excessively monitors citizens through their social media. And it also means the military can discipline citizens more effectively than the police. The stronger grips of the military overtake civilian roles potentially causes no debates in democracy. Since the military only subjects and carries out duties without any complaints, this probably affects democracy quality ahead.

The second thing is the growing strained relationship between nationalist and some Islamic hard-liners. The Jokowi-led government, which is dominated by nationalist coalitions, has not been accommodating the conservatives into his government. This results in the resentment and anger from the conservatives to Jokowi administration. The emergence of Habib Rizieq Shihab and his followers is widely acknowledged as the main opposition force of Jokowi. He effectively gained popularity by sounding Islam should be the main priority as the main umbrella of all Jokowi dissident. This ideally can maintain the checks and balances in our democracy because Jokowi's strategy to embrace his opponents leaves no main contenders. However, the way Jokowi handles his political opponents seem to reflect his Javanese style which suggests there is no other sun in power. This means Jokowi would embrace or even eliminate his challengers. This practice is surely against democracy that requires oppositions to maintain check and balances procedures.

Thanks to the ongoing covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, the government can easily sweep critics through health protocol rulers.⁶ This specifically refers to Habib Rizieq Shihab and his followers and





student activists who strongly disagree with several bills. This could create double standard practice because the government loyalists will likely to get pardons than those government critics. Surely, this can stimulate a more serious problem ahead because it is likely that the government critics will be more consolidated. As a result, future crackdowns will take place around Indonesia in 2021. On behalf of government discrimination, hardliners and possibly students can join forces to challenge the government. This ongoing strained contestation is not only going to disrupt governmental processes but also break down pluralism values.⁷

Political favouritism and dynasticism is the last factor to contribute to Indonesian democracy setback in 2021. The latter factor will get stronger in 2021 onward because the parties are dull when it comes to nominating candidates. As the personalisation of politics matters in Indonesia, the incumbent has stronger political bargaining to nominate their family members to be his / her successors.⁸ According to the latest report from the General Elections Commission, 16 candidate couples connected to national elites in simultaneous local elections took place on 9 December 2020. This includes the son and son-in-law of Joko Widodo's family who won the mayoral election in Solo and Medan.⁹ Although dynasticism does not lead directly to political favouritism, it is clear that Indonesian democracy will still be costly and closed or candidates without strong wealth and family ties. This hereditary style certainly harms the functioning of government because public services are likely going to be unfair.

The ongoing covid-19 pandemic seems to be a blessing in disguise to nurture hereditary power within the democracy. They have unlimited access to state resources to be deployed as pork-barrel politics. Many incumbents nominate their family members to be designated successors. This subsequently shows the coat-tailed effect matters in Indonesian politics. In the end, the weak functioning of government comes to appear because no one can access the state policymaking.

Conclusion

In sum, these three factors above will likely contribute to the declining democracy in 2021. Obviously, we can look at how the government is inconsistent to handle coronavirus and it is followed by greedy elites and public denial of complying with health protocol because of relaxed control. Overall, this makes up the reason for the decrease of Indonesian democracy in 2021.





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