

Democratic Transition in Local Indonesia: An Overview of Ten Years Democracy

Cornelis Lay

Universitas Gadjah Mada, Jl. Sosio Yustisia Yogyakarta
e-mail: conny@ugm.ac.id

Abstract

This article attempts to map out the current situation of democracy in Indonesia, especially at local levels. This map is based on a simple question: the extent to which 10 years of the democratization process in Indonesia has led the country closer towards effective democratic governance. It concludes that an effective democratic government is far from being realized. Moreover, this article shows a paradox in the development of local politics in Indonesia, on the one hand there has been political liberalization which is assumed as a prerequisite for the realization of democratic governance, but on the other hand, the development of local democracy in Indonesia seemed to stop at its infancy stage. The reasons behind this failure are vary, but in principle related to the symptoms that some scientists called as a "broken linkage" a syndrome in which the forces of modern intermediary fails to perform its functions in linking *demos* with public affairs.

Key Words:

democracy; democratic governance; local politics; Indonesia.

Abstraksi

Artikel ini berusaha memetakan situasi terkini perkembangan demokrasi, terutama di tingkat lokal Indonesia. Peta ini disusun berdasarkan pertanyaan sederhana sejauhmanakah perjalanan lebih dari 10 tahun proses demokratisasi di Indonesia telah mengantarkan negeri ini semakin mendekat ke arah pemerintahan demokratis yang efektif. Artikel ini berkesimpulan bahwa pemerintahan demokratis yang efektif masih jauh dari terwujud di tingkat lokal. Lebih lagi, artikel ini menunjukkan adanya paradoks dalam perkembangan politik lokal Indonesia yakni di satu sisi telah terjadi liberalisasi politik yang diasumsikan sebagai prasyarat bagi terwujudnya tata kelola pemerintahan demokratis, tapi di sisi lain, perkembangan demokrasi lokal Indonesia seakan berhenti pada fase infantnya. Alasan-alasan di balik kegagalan ini bervariasi, akan tetapi secara prinsipil terkait dengan gejala yang oleh sejumlah ilmuwan sebagai "broken linkage", sindrom dimana kekuatan-kekuatan intermediary modern gagal menjalankan fungsinya dalam menghubungkan *demos* dengan *pubik affairs*.

Kata Kunci:

demokrasi; *democratic governance*; politik lokal; Indonesia.

Prolog: The Optimism

The fall Soeharto in 1998 has paved the way for Indonesia to re-entering an era of what might be called re-democratization.¹ This optimistic view has its solid ground. Political development of the country during the last decade has strongly suggested that the prerequisite for democratic governance to take place has been fulfilled by Indonesia. First is the massive installation of modern democratic institutions into Indonesian political system. Re-designing of political institutions both at the national and local level throughout constitutional change and the introduction of new regulations has changed dramatically the very nature of political institutions of the country. The presumably Schumpeterian (Schumpeter, 1972; Dahl, 1971, 1989, 1998) type of modern democratic institutions such as party, parliament, and election for instances, are not only boosting but also enjoying a very strong constitutional status following the constitutional change.

Four times constitutional amendments taking place between 1999 and 2002 brings Indonesia into a phase of party-based political system. This change has paved the way for the establishment of hundreds of new political parties, spreading out to the whole areas of the nation, and the creation of new representative bodies, including almost one hundred thousands of new representative bodies at the village level. All of these bring about high level of political competitiveness among parties, high level of density of intermediary power, as well as deeper penetration and wider spread of intermediary power

(party and parliament) ever experience by people of Indonesia.

Second is the massive dispersion of power. Locus of power is dramatically multiply. Political power has migrated in massive scale from old political agencies and locus into new agencies and locus. Migration of power has two folds. *First* is migration of power exclusively within the various levels of state structures; it is an intra-bureaucratic type of transfer of power. This was facilitated through decentralization policy starting in the very early stage of *reformasi*.

Following the implementation of the politics of decentralization, locus of power is no longer mono in character as Jakarta as its Centrum, but disperse to local areas. More than 500 districts and cities, and 33 provinces in the country now enjoy a substantial amount of power to run their local affairs, something that the country had been suffering for more than 30 years. While Jakarta as the center, retains only strategic power related to defense, foreign policy, fiscal and monetary, religious, and law affairs. This has shied a new light in the debate of local politics in Indonesia, either in position as agency, locus, or in its symbolic manner.

Power is also shifted horizontally within the centers of local power. Power migrates from old center of politics — province, district, and city — to the previously remote political areas of the local periphery as expressed and facilitated through the massive creation of new local government entity, known as *pemekaran wilayah* (or re-districting in American terms) during the last ten years (Surya, 2006; Suaib, 2006; Djohan, 2006; Ratnawati and Jaweng, 2005; Ratnawati, 2007; Hanif and Catur, 2007; Santoso and Lay, 2006, Santoso and Mas'udi, 2008, Pratikno, et.al., 2008). Still in the state arena, power moves away from bureaucracy to new actors. The very long concentration and centralization of power in the hands of state bureaucracy, including military is now

¹ This concept has been widely used to describe the massive political changes of major Latin American countries during eighties. Re-democratization is used in this article since contemporary political development in Indonesian shown (a) the post Soeharto period is marked by the re-installation in a massive scale modern democratic institutions of the fifties, and (b) most of the political parties of today Indonesia are very much the revival of parties of the past, including their ideologies, pattern of organization and type leadership.

ended. Power is now distributed to political party, politician, market as well as business community, and organized civil society as new local political actors. Apart from democratic argument, the shifted of power from state to non-state actors has its academic ground on the concept of (good) governance (Dwiyanto, Arfani, et.all., 2003; Pratikno, 2005)

Second, in the area of civil society, the dispersion of power is not only attributed to modern organized civil society such as CSOs but also reaches the pre-modern structure of community, a structure that based on consensual authority rather than law as known in the concept of modern-state. This “traditional” structure is now understood politically as part of stake-holders in managing politics and power in the country that used to be monopolized by the state. This shifting, together with the decentralization processes, brings about local democracy both as a value system and procedure into the core of the discussion, even among layman. Contemporary researches on democracy at the local Indonesia are boosting during the last ten years; something that have never been before.

The third is political liberalization. There has been significant political liberalization, such as the release of most political prisoners at the beginning of reform, toleration of opposition, less censorship of the press, and greater space for autonomous organization of the working class and other social groups to voice their views publicly. It is also true that suppression and strictly regulated participation as the rules of the game under Soeharto’s regime are over. Greater space for the people to participate and express their views and opinion is guaranteed. Moreover, more access and chance are given for demos as politically active citizen to enter into public arena. Minority group, especially Chinese-decent Indonesian that used be in the sideline of politics are now entering politics, even

to the very local level. Some of them are no enjoying their new political status as *bupati*, head of district and mayor, while others are posted as members of parliament both at national and local levels. Some even become part of national politics as minister. Even the political prisoners of the past and their relatives that used to be banned from politics during New Order period are enjoying the same chance and access to public and political positions. Their right to elect and be elected is now guaranteed by law.

However, since the very beginning, a substantial number of scholars are aware that it is possible for political liberalization to take place either in a democratic regime or in an authoritarian one, and that political liberalization, though an important step toward democratization, is not a guarantee. Political liberalization is a prerequisite for democracy, but there is a need for both structural and constitutional changes in order to enter into the world of consolidated democracy. For them, therefore, the fall of Soeharto does not necessarily pave the way for democracy to take place. It is still an up hill struggle (Tonrquist, 1998; Linz and Stepan, 1998; Dhakidae, 1998).

Despite all the aforementioned development, as past experiences of 1950s demonstrated, the massive installment of modern democratic institutions, the massive dispersion of power, and political liberalization, assuming to be the pre-conditions for an effective democratic governance to take place, failed to meet public expectation. For most researchers, the ten years of re-democratization has understood as a kind of chaotic-involution at both implementation and ideas levels. This, the argument goes, provides the reasons for the syndrome of dead-locked democracy to take place, failed to establish effective democratic governance which is capable enough in producing and delivering political goods (Wanandi, 2002; Emmerson, 2000; Dibb and Prince, 2001).

This article is aimed to get a clearer picture on the debate of democratization on the country, especially at the local level. To what extend the more than 10 years of democratization has ended up with the emerging of effective democratic governance. What is the basic challenge for effective democratic governance to take place in the country? In doing so, I will elaborate in more detail some unpublished researches and publications, and make use of them as basic of analysis.

Focus on local democracy is very important since, in my opinion, most of the debate on this subject suffered from ambivalence. In one hand, there is a wide range of support to the installation of supposed to be a Schumpeterian-type of procedure democracy in the local area together with the basic idea of dispersion of power and political liberalization. But in the other, there is a strong opposition to such idea, especially in relation to its limitations and negative implication to the local people.

The first view is reflected on the massive efforts from many parts of the society, supported by international donor agencies to help party, parliament and politician, especially at the local level to deal with their technocratic problem. Unaccounted capacity building programs to strengthen the technocratic capacity of individual local parliament have taken place during the last decade in almost every single district and city in Indonesia. All of the programs based on the assumption that the bottom line problem of Indonesia in consolidating its democratic processes is in the lacking of technocratic skills in the part of key democratic actors. So as, the argument goes, a systematic effort to fill this gap will certainly lead to a better performance of the new modern democratic institutions.

While the second is reflected on, among other things the strong criticisms on performance of political party, parliament and politicians and the persisting problems in the

election processes, including in the direct election of local government leader. In between the two opposite views, recently there has been a growing research on genuine local political order; an order of substantive democracy that believes to exist in local Indonesia, but has been systematically victimized and marginalized by the introduction of previously a type of authoritarian political system of the New Order of Soeharto, and now of liberal model of procedural democracy of *Reformasi*. The clash between local political order for demos by given and stereotype understanding of local politics of no democracy in Indonesia is now being one of the most controversial debates in Indonesia today. So it is important to outline the debate so as a clearer understanding can be drawn.

Mapping-out the Debates

A decade of Indonesian re-democratization process has demonstrated a paradox results. In one hand, the massive installment of modern democratic institutions has reached its saturated point, but on the other, the process of democratic consolidation remains at its very early step. It is also true that the massive dispersion of power throughout among other thing, politics of decentralization has multiplied the political agencies and locus of power in the country, but on the other, political representation remains the core problem. Finally, despite political liberalization has been enjoyed by most Indonesian, political engagement, control, and access of demos to public affairs remain problematic.

The latest researches and publications on contemporary Indonesian politics reveal the above paradoxes. National survey conducted by Demos (Priyono, et.al, 2005) demonstrates the phenomenon of deficit democracy in the midst of massive instalation of modern democratic institutions. Latest reasearch-based publication by Demos (2009), while urges for the building of political block as an

alternative to face the current tendency, re-confirms the persistent of the problem of representation within which the old oligarchy forces remain the central player in mediating demos and public affairs. This oligarchy power not only survives during the democratic era, but also through democratic mechanisms and means. Robison and Hadiz (2006) have spoken about phenomenon of “hijacking” the process of *reformasi* by old political forces. They argued that institutional redesigning through neo-liberal scheme taking place in Indonesia has not paved a better way for demos to have better access to public affairs. In the contrary, this new political and power structure has functioned more for oligarchy powers of the past to remain at the center of Indonesian politics. *Reformasi*, therefore, failed to create new political institution and power structure in favor of democratic order; it also failed to consolidate new democratic forces. It, tragically, has ended up as a process of consolidation of old political power, leading to tragedy of hijacking democracy.

The phenomenon of “hijacking” democracy is also taking place in the very local level. A study by Hari M (2004) on new-established village legislative body in Wiladeg, district of Gunung Kidul, Yogyakarta demonstrates that despite more and more political agencies and actors come to play roles in the village political scene, the continuing domination of old political forces in determining politics of the village remain intact. Memberships of the new established representative body of the village, Village Representative Board, are in the hands of new political actors. However, the real political decision remains in the hands of the old political actors, mostly from local bureaucracy. Pambudi’s study (2004) for his master thesis in Graduate Studies of Local Politics and Autonomy, University of Gadjah Mada identifies the same tendency. He found that local *Kyai* (Islamic traditional teacher) in Kebumen

District of Central Java has been able to maintain their political influence in society despite the growing numbers of political parties and party’s activists in that area. While a study by Mella (2004) in former Dutch sub-district of Mollo, district of Timor Tengah Selatan, East Nusa Tenggara Province testifies the revival of *Usif*, a traditional blood-based local leader as a new strong man during the period of *reformasi*. The political role of *Usif* is so essential both as intermediary power between demos (or most precisely, ethnos) and public affairs, and as patron for local people, determining the political preferential of demos so as puts the role of party as new democratic institution into the sideline of political process. It is also true for the role of *Ketemenggunan* in sub-district Manday, district of Kapuas Hulu, West Kalimantan as Rupinus’s study (2003) shown. Still in the area of Timor Tengah Selatan, a study by Hermawanti (2004) pointed out the superiority of *marga*, kinship, mechanism over modern institution mechanism, i.e., party in the promotion and demotion within party. The massive presence of party structures as well as other modern institutions at these respected areas has a very limited implication in creating alternative intermediary political power for demos. The old political actors or institutions remain the most powerful political forces in performing intermediary function between demos and public affairs.

Studies that reveals the centrality of old institutions in determining local politics has been conducted in many areas by scholars. Study of Wikrama (2003) in local politics in Bali shows there is a kind of “dual politics” in the village of Bali. Traditional village and institution, *Pakraman* live side-by-side with modern village and institution in dictating politics of Bali’s villages. However, *Pakraman* which has its root dated back to 9 century remains the most important institution for Balinese in managing public affairs. Within the structure of *Pakraman*, Meniarta’s study

on *Banjar* (2007) also in Bali demonstrates there are number of autonomous institutions performing specific function that have a very strong influence among Balinese villagers. His study concludes that *Banjar* is the one with its very specific function limited to its given territory. *Banjar* performs functions related to spatial planning (*pelemahan*), religious matters (*parahyangan*), and society as a whole (*parwongan*). Another study on rural Bali by Riyadi (2003) found the centrality of *Saba Kreta Desa*, a law-making institution within *Pakraman* consists of representatives from *Banjar* responsible in producing binding regulations (*awig-awig*) for the sake of harmony. While a study by Arimbawa (2005) on *Subak* in Mendoyo Dangan Tukad village, district of Jembrana, Bali demonstrates the centrality of *Subak*, an autonomous traditional institution dedicated to water management function in maintaining the sustainability of their very effective agrarian system. A function similar to what has been performed by traditional institution, *Sasi*, of central Maluccas and *Lubuk Larangan* in Pulau Aro village, subdistrict of Tabir Ulu, district of Marangin, Jambi province (Saleh, 2007). All of these the above institutions are playing a principle role as intermediary power between both individual and public affairs, and among citizens of the community.

Another study in Aceh by Wahyuning-sih (2003) on *Gampong*, traditional village of Aceh shows the revival of *Menunasah*, an institution within *Gampong* in providing basic services to the people; a function that has been abandoned for years during Soeharto era. While a study by Rahmad (2003) in the city of Padang, West Sumatra demonstrates the revivals of traditional institution of *Tungku Tigo Sejarangan*, consisted of religious leaders, traditional leaders (*ninik mamak*), and senior bureaucrats in determining the policy processes in the city, by passing the role of political party.

In a broader picture, a study by Norholdt (2004) has come to the conclusion about the continuation of the old political practices in today's Indonesia. A practice that deeply rooted in the past Indonesia. Norholdt says that reform era in Indonesia is marked by "strong continuities of patrimonial patterns" or, to put into Harris, Stokke dan Turnquist (2004) words, "changing countinuites". This patronage type of political practices has frequently reappeared in different kind of symbolic manner but with the same essence in phases of Indonesian political development.

In the context of decentralization as a whole, Robison and Hadiz concluded that decentralization has been an arena for new power holders to imitate the dirty political practices of the past: phenomenon which also has been identified by scholars in a book edited by Aspinall and Faley (2002). In this book, most of the writers argued that despite political actors of the local have to make a radical adjustment to the new political climate of decentralization in fact they still can manage to make the system work for their own benefit. In many local areas, as argued by Pradjna. R. (2002), these politicians have able to organize their political and economic interest to such a level within which they can manipulate formal regulation and utilize the weakness of the regulation to lift-up their power. In this situation, the old power, due to their long standing experiences, retain their monopoly over local politics.

So it is not surprising to see that scholars like Priyambudi dan Foucher (2005) who are compiling papers from various scholars starting to question the validity of decentralisation as the solution for the country as argued by proponents of decentralization policy. The simple fact that decentralisation has ended up with widespread of corruption in the local area, violence conflict (van Klinken, 2007; Tomagola, 2006, Hadi, Widjajanto, et. all., 2007) and repression to

local community is more than enough for them to doubt the very notion of decentralisation.

Another research conducted by Department of Government Studies, Gadjah Mada University (2002) undertaken just before and during the early stage of *reformasi* period, 1988–2000, in 14 sub-districts across 7 provinces in the country spells out the phenomenon of what we called “floating state”. This research found that despite modern institutions have been long introduced to local society, they have never been able to penetrate to and work effectively in the very local level of society. Instead, these modern institutions such as bureaucracy, political institutions (party, parliament), even social institutions such as NGOs have been functioning mostly as principle arenas for the working of deeply-rooted informal networkings of tribes, extended family, oligarchy, kinship, etc. Ethnic capture and hijacking of modern institutions and mechanism by old institutions and forces are the main features of local Indonesia ever since. However, a more detail study in the case of sub-district of Amarasi in district of Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara, suggested that in regards to democracy, the persistent role of traditional power, the Fetor, is two folds: in one hand a Fetor is enemy of democracy, but on the other he is a friend of democracy (Lay, 2006).

There is no doubt that in relation to election, the Fetor play a very negative role (Lay, 2006). It so because a Fetor always dictates, even force people to vote for government party, Golkar, jeopardizing the notion of a free and fair election as the core concept in procedural democracy. However, in performing their mediating function, Fetor has a very crucial role in managing and preventing conflict among conflicting parties. There were number of cases especially in regards to land conflicts involving different villages that only can be solved after a Fetor come to play his role. A critical role that also performed well

by *Keteui Adat* of Rejang community in North Bengkulu (Nurfaizal, 2003) and Dayak Simpang community in Ketapang, West Kalimantan as Repalianto’s study (2004) reveals.

If we agree that a democratic order is a system that has capacity to manage and prevent conflict, then we would agree that a Fetor is a valuable ingredient of this order. Furthermore, a Fetor is also an effective agency in channelling demos demand to public affairs. For example, after years of fighting — using all modern means available, starting from lobby to members of parliament and bureaucracy up to set up a street parliament — to have their own senior high school, people of Amarasi finally get what they want only after Fetor of Amarasi used his position as traditional leader to speak on behalf of his people to the head of the district. He has substituted the intermediary role of party’s activists and member of parliament to channel his people aspiration.

Apart from studies that revealed the superiority of old institution over modern one as discussed above, there are some important studies showing that both traditional and modern institutions are not always in competing situation. They in fact, have worked together to serve their own interests through a kind of “hybrid institution and practices”. They, therefore, are far from democratic.

The “dark side” of political practices stemming from the meeting between old institutions and modern one in regards to democratic development in Indonesia has been one of the most important studies in Indonesia. Samuel & Nordholt argued that power structure in Indonesia has been characterized by the working of formal institutions mechanism together with various type of informal networkings. As in the case of Thailand and India, both seen that political domain and formal economy have always connected to illegal economic activities and

criminal where bureaucracy, politicians, military people, police and criminal have built a kind of mutual relationship. Consequently, there is no clear cut difference in character of these actors based on their profession. Furthermore, They argued that type of democracy built is a kind of disjunctive democracy characterised by electoral democratic process together with political violence and criminalization of political institutions and the state. As in the case of the Philippines, the persistent of the problems of law enforcement, corruption, and organised criminals has paved the way for local strongman to take charge and the increasing of using violence against society of lower class.

The latest point has been study by Armuji (2004). He study speels out the rise of *Jawara*, a local organised criminal society that has a very long history in the area of Banten, in city of Cilegon, province of Banten as new coersive forces in the face of declining state legitimacy in the local area and economic crisis. This study reveals that the *Jawara* has taken over the coersive roles of the New Order's military function during the early period of *reformasi* before the local state of Cilegon retained its role once again. A broader study by Hidayat (2007) for the whole area of Banten even said that *Jawara* has transformed itself into a kind of local shadow state, undermining the function of local state. *Jawara*, due its ability and monopoly over coercive force, in fact is the most important political forces in decision making process in Banten province, including in budget allocation for projects.

The strong tendency to use violent force in political processes in Indonesia makes Indonesianist like Hefner (2005) seen the future of Indonesian democracy through pessimistic lense. According to Hefner, community as well as social associations in local Indonesia not only non democratic in nature, but also has a strong tendency to sectarian-

ism. This kind of society is far from potential to be a democratic one.

Epilog: The Problem of Democratic Linkage

Questioning the whole process of redemocratisation is not monopoly of scholars in Indonesia. It is also the main concern of ordinary Indonesian as reflected from the results of all surveys and polling in Indonesia. Most of surveys and polling expressed the high level of dissatisfaction on electoral process amongst Indonesian. Some surveys and polling shown the high level of dissatisfaction to the figures resulting from the election both for parliament and local executive (governor, *bupati* or head of district, and mayor. In every single survey and polling, the result is very consistant: political party and parliament have seen as the most corrupted and the least trusted institutions in the country. The level of confidence to political party, parliament, politician and member of parliament is lowest in in comparison with other institutions and actors, such police, military people, and bureaucracy.

Our discussion so far clearly demonstrate that despite there is no clear cut clue on the question of why and how, the basic political problem faced by the country is clear: the problem of democratic linkage. To put into optimistic view, the massive instalation of democratic institutions have not yet followed by the uplifting of intermediary function of such institutions in mediating demos and public affairs. Even worse, in the middle of multiplying processes of democratic institutions, some researches have shown there is a tendency of "dis-connecting" between demos and their representative body and state in policy processes. A phenomenon of "broken linkages" as Andersen dan Torpe quoted in Clark (2003) described it. What is happening is that the presence of these institutions almost solely endep up in creating a more dense and complex demo-

cratic institutions with no impact on the process of democratic consolidation. This high level of institutional density and complexity has further implication: it pushes Indonesian politics to an even higher level of political competitiveness, not only among modern political institutions themselves, but also between modern democratic institutions and various type of traditional institutions. And it creates an even complex power relation and longer process for demos in order to get into public affairs. This has led the country into a process that might be called bureaucratisation of democracy. Massive installment of democratic institutions, do not make demos become more autonomous and have more alternative channels to public affairs. But in the contrary, it makes public affairs become a far-away institutions to be reached.

The failure of democratic institutions, especially party and parliament to perform their hidden or *meta* function as democratic linkage would have a far reaching implication for Indonesian democracy in the future. Study of Lawson, et.al., (Lawson and Merkl, 1988) in various countries has demonstrated there is a strong tendency of the roles and significance of established political parties to decline over time, and the rise of political significance of alternative institutions, i.e., six environmental groups, three supplementary groups, four communitarian organizations, and three anti-authoritarian organizations. The main explanation to the above opposite development lies in the failure of political party to perform its intermediary function as it suppose to. As Wright (1971) argued, despite model of democracy developed, linkage remains the central function of party.

To some extends, the above tendency is starting to take place in Indonesia. As Graduate Program of Local Politics and Autonomy of Gadjah Mada University research conformed (PLOD, 2006), numbers of non-political (party) organizations are growing tremendously during the last ten years, and

they are starting to take over political linkage functions of party. But unlike Lawson's, et.al., cases, the challenge to political party in Indonesia is even bigger. They not only have to compete with each other and with new established social institutions in order to win the heart of the people, but also with the long-established traditional institutions whose have traditional monopoly over intermediary role. And, as our discussion suggested, in this polycentrism situation, it seems that political parties are lacking behind.

From the perspective of democratic consolidation, the above development is not a promising sign for the future of Indonesian democracy. The reason is simple. As argued by Lawson (Lawson and Merkl, 1988: 36), "*(w)e can have linkage without such organizations, but we cannot have democratic linkage*". This even worse for Indonesia, since "*well educated, well informed, and above all well equipped with electronic means to convey his or her opinion on any subject at any time to any one, can play the role of the true democratic as never before*" (*ibid*) are hardly found in today's (local) Indonesia.

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