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The Application of Democratic Principles in Indonesia's Electoral System

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Abstract
This study aims to analyse the application of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system, focusing on the suitability of the implementation of the Direct, General, Free, Honest and Fair principle and the factors that hinder the effectiveness of its implementation. The results show that although Indonesia has adopted democratic principles in the organisation of elections, there are some challenges, such as the practice of money politics, unequal access to voters, and low voter participation. However, overall, the principle of Direct, General, Free, Honest and Fair has been applied in various stages of the election, and the role of organising bodies such as the General Election Commission and the General Election Supervisory Agency has increased transparency and accountability. Nonetheless, there is a need to continue improving electoral mechanisms to address existing problems and improve the quality of Indonesian democracy. This research provides recommendations for the strengthening of political education, the application of technology in elections, as well as an evaluation of the threshold policy and the role of mass media in voter education.

Keywords: democratic principles, Indonesian electoral system, money politics, election transparency.

Introduction

The democratic system has become the main choice in the governance of many countries in the world, including Indonesia. Democracy, in its etymological sense, comes from the combination of the word's *demos*, which means people, and *kratein*, which means power, so that literally democracy means "power in the hands of the people" (Budiardjo, 1998). In this context, democracy emphasises the importance of people's active participation in determining the direction of state policy, both through representation in the legislature and in the electoral process. This philosophy of democracy aims to realise balance and social justice for all people, without discrimination, as suggested by classical philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle (Dedi, 2021). This concept then gives birth to the hope that a democratic system of government can create a political order that is fair, balanced, and prioritises the interests of the people.

Over time, Indonesia has adopted several democratic models, starting with parliamentary democracy, continuing with guided democracy, and finally implementing Pancasila democracy

(Haris, 2014; Hutabarat, 2022; Djuyandi, 2023; Farinuddin, et al. 2024) which is more in line with the nation's basic values. However, although Indonesia has undergone significant changes in its governance system post-1998 reforms, the implementation of democratic principles in governance and electoral practices has not always gone as expected. Although Indonesia constitutionally recognises the sovereignty of the people and makes democracy the basis of government, the reality is that the basic principles of democracy are often not fully implemented in the electoral process (Basuki, 2020; Dedi, 2021; Triana, et al., 2023; Ayuningtiyas & Wahyuningtyas, 2023; Cornelia, et al., 2024).

The application of democratic principles in elections, which should reflect the will of the people, often faces various challenges. The electoral system implemented in Indonesia is regulated in the 1945 Constitution and various other regulations, which carry the principle of direct, general, free, honest and fair as the standard of legitimate elections (Lubis, Gea, & Muniifah, 2022; Zahara, et al, 2023; Kirana, Setiawan & Priza, 2024). However, in practice, there are various problems that interfere with the implementation of fair and democratic elections. Some of the issues that arise include unequal political access, the practice of money politics, and the low level of active community participation in the electoral process (Mardiah & Zitri, 2023; Bakry, et. al. 2024; Hidaya, Devi & Ardiansyah, 2024).

In this context, it is important to examine the implementation of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system. Evaluating the conduct of elections in accordance with democratic principles, such as free and fair suffrage and adequate representation in government, is necessary to ensure that democracy in Indonesia is not mired in manipulative practices or authoritarian rule. This study therefore aims to analyse how democratic principles are applied in Indonesia's electoral system, as well as identify the challenges faced in ensuring that elections truly reflect the will of the people and fulfil the basic objectives of democracy itself. By better understanding these issues, it is hoped that solutions can be found to improve Indonesia's electoral system, so that it more effectively reflects popular participation and produces a government that is more responsive to people's aspirations.

This research aims to analyse the application of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system, both within the legal framework and in practice. In particular, this research focuses on identifying the challenges faced in the application of democratic principles such as fairness, freedom, transparency and representativeness in the electoral process. In addition, the research also aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Indonesia's electoral system in providing optimal space for popular participation and how this system reflects the will of the people. Another objective of this research is to examine the impact of the application of democratic principles on electoral outcomes and how these outcomes affect the policies and governments that are formed.

In this study, the hypothesis in this study aims to explore how the implementation of democratic principles in the electoral system in Indonesia, especially related to the implementation of the principles of direct, general, free, honest and fair, and identify factors that hinder the effectiveness of the implementation of these principles. The main questions to be answered are to what extent the implementation of elections in Indonesia has reflected the

expected principles of democracy, and what factors have become obstacles in achieving elections that are fair, transparent, and reflect the will of the people optimally.

This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of democracy studies, especially those that focus on the application of democratic principles in electoral systems in developing countries such as Indonesia. This research will enrich the understanding of how democracy is implemented in the context of modern elections, as well as provide a new perspective on the obstacles faced in its implementation. From a practical perspective, the results of this research can provide recommendations for the improvement of the electoral system in Indonesia, especially in improving the quality of elections to be more fair, free and transparent. In addition, this research also aims to encourage an increase in public political awareness regarding the importance of active participation in elections and its impact on the quality of political and social life.

The conceptual framework of this study links various concepts relevant to the application of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system. The basic principles of democracy, which include popular sovereignty, active participation of the people, fair representation and transparency, are the main foundation for analysing Indonesia's electoral system. The application of these principles can be seen in the organisation of elections that prioritise the principles of direct, general, free, honest and fair and the existence of mechanisms that support public participation in the electoral process. However, the implementation still faces various obstacles, including the problem of money politics, unequal access for various groups of society, and low levels of trust in the electoral system itself. External factors such as the political party system and the quality of political education also significantly affect the quality of elections and popular participation. Therefore, this study aims to explore the relationship between democratic principles and the challenges faced in their implementation, and provide recommendations to improve the effectiveness of an electoral system that better reflects the will of the people.

Literature Review

This research examines the application of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system by referring to several relevant main theories, namely democracy theory, political participation theory, and electoral system theory.

The Theory of Democracy

Democracy, as explained by Aristotle, is a system of government in which power is vested in the people (Syifa, 2022). In the Indonesian context, democracy is exercised through a representative system, which allows the people to elect their representatives to make political decisions. Jimly Asshiddiqie (2021) argues that representative democracy is necessary in a country with a large population like Indonesia, as the implementation of direct democracy is not possible. Democracy aims to realise an inclusive and participatory government, which can strengthen people's sovereignty.

Theory of Political Participation

Robert Dahl (2020) argues that political participation is one of the indicators of the success of democracy. Participation is not only limited to the right to vote, but also includes involvement in the policy-making process. In the Indonesian context, Banducci et al. (1999) show that open proportional electoral systems can increase political participation by providing more space for people to directly elect their representatives.

Electoral System Theory

Fair and transparent elections are key to ensuring equitable political representation. Azmi & Riyanda (2020) highlight that Indonesia's open proportional system, which allows voters to directly elect legislative candidates, is considered fairer and more transparent. However, Ighodalo (2012) warns that a winner-takes-all system can create injustice in a pluralistic country like Indonesia. Therefore, fair and inclusive elections should be a major concern in Indonesia's electoral reform.

The Role of Political Education

Political education plays an important role in increasing people's political awareness and participation. Graudiņa (2019) points out that effective education policies can strengthen political participation and support the strengthening of an electorally active civil society. In Indonesia, better political education can encourage citizens to better understand their rights and obligations in the democratic process.

Implications of the Application of Democratic Principles in Elections

This research focuses on the application of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system, considering factors such as representation, transparency and participation. While Indonesia's open proportional system aims to promote fairer representation, challenges remain regarding political inequality and voter access. This research aims to identify solutions to improve the quality of democracy through a more inclusive and participatory electoral system.

Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a normative juridical approach to analyse the implementation of democratic principles in the electoral system in Indonesia. This research aims to describe and understand the implementation of democratic principles in the electoral process based on applicable laws and regulations, especially the Election Law and the Constitution. The data sources used are secondary data obtained from literature reviews, such as books, scientific articles, official government documents, and related literature. Data analysis was carried out descriptively analytically by reviewing and interpreting these sources to identify the relationship between democratic principles and the implementation of elections in Indonesia. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Indonesia's electoral system and how democratic principles are implemented in practice.

Result and Discussion

The implementation of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system has a clear and solid legal foundation, as stated in various constitutional provisions and laws and regulations. The electoral system in Indonesia, despite facing a number of challenges, has succeeded in implementing substantial democratic principles with the main objective of realising elections that are fair, transparent and reflect the will of the people. In practice, the application of these democratic principles can be seen through the implementation of direct, general, free, secret, honest and fair elections-a principle known as direct, general, free, honest and fair as well as efforts to strengthen the professionalism and independence of the EMB.

Juridical Basis and Principles of Democracy in Indonesian Elections

Elections in Indonesia are based on the principles of democracy contained in the 1945 Constitution, which explicitly states that sovereignty rests with the people. Article 1 Paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution states that: "Sovereignty is vested in the people and exercised according to the Constitution." This principle indicates that the people have the ultimate power in determining the direction of state policy through elections, which are conducted in a transparent and fair manner.

In addition, Article 22E Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution affirms that elections must be held "directly, generally, freely, secretly, honestly and fairly every five years" which becomes a reference in every election in Indonesia. This direct, general, free, honest and fair principle is a form of democracy implementation that prioritises the people's right to choose their leaders and representatives without any intervention or pressure from other parties.

Freedom in elections is also guaranteed by Article 28E Paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution, which states: "Everyone has the right to express his opinion freely in accordance with his conscience." This gives every individual the right to vote freely according to their political beliefs, without fear or pressure.

Implementation of Direct, General, Free and Fair Elections

The direct, general, free, honest and fair principle is the main foundation in the implementation of elections in Indonesia. Law No. 7/2017 on General Elections (Election Law) explicitly regulates this principle in Article 7 of the Election Law, which states that "Elections are conducted under the principles of direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair." This principle ensures that every voter has the right to vote without pressure, confidentially, and free from political manipulation, and provides space for voters to make choices consciously and thoughtfully.

In addition, Article 56 of the Election Law states that “the General Election Commission” is responsible for the implementation of elections, which includes the stages of elections, election programmes and schedules, nominations, campaigns, voting, and vote counting." This reflects

the continuous efforts made by the General Election Commission to manage all stages of the election in a transparent and accountable manner.

The Role of the General Election Commission (KPU) in the Context of Democracy

The General Election Commission plays a central role in ensuring that elections are conducted in accordance with democratic principles. Law No. 15/2011 on Election Organisers further regulates the duties and obligations of the General Election Commission, with Article 3 stating that "Election organisers are the General Election Commission, General Election Supervisory Agency, and the Honorary Council of Election Organisers." In this case, the KPU is expected to work with full integrity to organise honest, fair and transparent elections, by prioritising the prevailing democratic principles.

One form of KPU's professionalism efforts is the use of information technology in the election process. In KPU Regulation Number 14 of 2019 concerning the Fifth Amendment to KPU Regulation Number 7 of 2017 concerning Stages, Programmes, and Schedules for the Implementation of the 2019 General Elections, the KPU has designed an electronic-based vote counting system that allows the public to monitor election results in real-time and ensure transparency of election results. The application of this technology helps minimise the potential for fraud, speed up the vote counting process, and increase the accountability of the election.

People's Participation in Elections

One of the positive indicators in the implementation of Indonesian elections is the increase in people's political participation. Elections that are held directly and freely provide ample space for the people to be involved in determining the fate of the nation. Article 1 Paragraph (1) of the Election Law affirms that "Elections are a means to exercise people's sovereignty in electing the President and Vice President, members of the House of Representatives, Regional Representative Council, and Regional People's Representative Council." This ensures that every citizen has equal rights in choosing leaders and representatives, which in turn reflects the people's sovereignty in government.

In addition, the General Election Commission success in organising various political education campaigns has also contributed to increasing public awareness of the importance of their voting rights. General Election Commission Regulation Number 20 of 2023 concerning Amendments to General Election Commission Regulation Number 15 of 2023 concerning General Election Campaigns, regulates campaign procedures that must be carried out in an educative manner, guarantee equal access to the media for all parties, and provide useful information for voters.

Transparency and Openness of the Election Process

Transparency in elections is a key factor in ensuring that elections are fair and that no one is disadvantaged. In this regard, Law No. 32 of 2002 on Broadcasting (Article 14 Section 2) states

that "Broadcasting media shall provide equal opportunities for political parties or candidates in elections to convey campaign messages." This ensures that all candidates and political parties have equal rights to access the media to convey their vision and mission, allowing voters to make more informed decisions.

In addition, Law No. 40/1999 on the Press affirms that the national press acts as "a medium of information and education for the public" (Article 3 Paragraph 1). This allows the mass media to educate the public on political issues, as well as provide accurate and objective information on the electoral process, which in turn supports the creation of transparent and fair elections.

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Closing

Conclusion

The implementation of democratic principles in Indonesia's electoral system has shown significant progress. Through a solid juridical basis in the 1945 Constitution, the Election Law, and other related regulations, Indonesia has laid a strong foundation for the implementation of fair and transparent elections. The direct, general, free, honest and fair principles applied in every stage of the election, coupled with the independence and professionalism of election management institutions such as the General Election Commission and General Election Supervisory Agency, show that Indonesia is committed to maintaining the quality of democracy. Elections that are conducted in a direct, general, free, secret, honest and fair manner are the main means for the people to express their political will, thus creating a government that is more accountable and responsive to the needs of the community.

Suggestion and Recommendation

Based on the research results and conclusions, it is recommended that the government and related institutions, such as the General Election Commission and the General Election Supervisory Agency, improve election supervision and strengthen transparency in every stage of the election, including utilising information technology to prevent fraud and speed up the vote counting process. In addition, it is important to improve political education among the public to increase voter participation, especially among first-time voters. As well as ensuring that the mass media fulfils its role in providing objective and educative information during the election period. With these steps, it is hoped that elections in Indonesia can better reflect the will of the people and strengthen a fair and transparent democracy.

As recommendations for future researchers, it is recommended to conduct more in-depth research on the impact of threshold policies and electoral systems on political pluralism in Indonesia, as well as explore the role of technology and social media in increasing participation and transparency in elections. Research that focuses on comparative studies with other democratic countries may also provide greater insight into the challenges and solutions in organising more effective and democratic elections.

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