The Public Sphere and Political Participation

“By ‘the public sphere’ we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed.” (Habermas, Lennox, and Lennox 1974)

Jürgen Habermas’s concept above illustrates the importance of the public sphere in our day to day lives. The public sphere is the realm in which individuals can exchange ideas about issues in society. The public sphere is also the ‘theater’ in which political participation occurs because it allows modern society to interact and deliberate (Fraser 1990). These interactions and discussions shape public opinion and influence political decisions.

In democracy, the role of the public sphere is crucial. However, one of the biggest criticisms towards the public sphere is its domination by the political elites who have manipulated and transformed it from the realm in which people can rationally deliberate to one that is passive and taken advantage of for their own private gain. Moreover, public opinion that should represent public’s view is also formed by polls or media experts, not by the those who represent the public itself (Durham and Kellner 2001). Consequently, citizens are effectively excluded from the discourse.

In Indonesia’s history, public discourse has often been constructed to support the interest of the elites. At the beginning of Indonesia’s independence, President Soekarno used the press to spark debates and mobilize public opinion (Hill 2007). In the time of the New Order, almost every media was under the control of the regime (Hanitzech 2006; Tomsa 2007). At that time, mass media was one of the regime’s most powerful tool to maintain its legitimacy. The public sphere began to open up in the reformation era, as the media affairs were liberalised and freedom of speech was more established (Kitley 2003).
The main theme of the articles published in this edition is the public sphere and political participation in Indonesia. The articles discuss the discourse on the interpretation of the state ideology (*Pancasila* and its relation to religion in an article by Muhamad Iswardani Chaniago and the implementation of *Pancasila* as a tool to legitimize development in the post-New Order era in an article by Fredick Broven) and the role of volunteers in elections (the relationship between volunteers and democratic consolidation in an article by Hurriyah and the partisanship of political volunteers in an article by Ari Ganjar Herdiansah).

This issue is *Jurnal Politik*’s first edition published in full English. Similar to our previous issues, this issue consists of five articles and one book review. Our first article is by Muhamad Iswardani Chaniago, titled *Examining Pancasila’s Position in the Public Reason Scheme: A Critical Analysis*. The article analyzes *Pancasila* using John Rawls’s concept of public reason. Chaniago argues that the secular perspective proposed by several Indonesian scholars in viewing the relation between *Pancasila* and public reason is flawed due to the inapplicability of several principles of the concept towards *Pancasila*.

Our second article in this issue, written by Indah Merdeka Putri and Ali Muhyidin, raises the issue of the conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. *Cambodian and Thai Political Actors’ Interest in Preah Vihear Temple Border Conflict in 2008-2011* analyzes how the Preah Vihear Temple Border Conflict was utilized by Thai and Cambodian political elites to address political issues at the domestic level. The analysis shows that border conflicts can function as a tool for political actors to maintain power and acquire legitimacy.

The third article, *The Myth of Civil Society’s Democratic Role: Volunteerism and Indonesian Democracy* by Hurriyah, analyzes the rising instrumentalization and role of volunteer activism in the 2014 presidential elections due to the dysfunctional state of Indonesian political parties. The article argues that volunteerism can impede Indonesia’s democratic consolidation due to its inability to fulfil civil society’s expectations after the elections.
The fourth article, *Political Participation Convergence in Indonesia: A Study of Partisan Volunteers in the 2019 Election*, is written by Ari Ganjar Herdiansah and discusses the political participation of volunteers in the Indonesian 2019 presidential election. The article aims to explain the importance of volunteers in an electoral contest. Herdiansah argues that the participation of volunteers occurs as a response to the low level of people’s trust in political parties. Unfortunately, the participation of partisan volunteers in electoral contestation is then utilized to satisfy political parties’ pragmatic interests and paves way for transactional politics.

The fifth article is written by Fredick Broven. *Ideology and Pragmatism: Discourse Factors in Infrastructure Development in Indonesia’s Jokowi-JK* analyzes the factors shaping the discourse on the role of the state in infrastructure development in Jokowi’s first period of presidency. The article aims to show that ideological discourse is not always employed as a tool to legitimize and underline political decisions, but can also be utilized to mask pragmatic policies.

This edition of Jurnal Politik is concluded by Sunardi’s review of Vedi Hadiz’s book *Islamic Populism in Indonesia and the Middle East*. The review, titled *Islamic Populism: Social Mobilization Based on Asymmetrical Multiclass Coalition*, discusses the correlation between populism and Islam, which is rarely brought up in academic debates. Sunardi praises Hadiz for comparing political Islam in Indonesia and countries in the Middle East and his use of political economy in analyzing how populism and political Islam can go hand in hand in Indonesia. The review concludes that Islamic populism and its exploitation by the oligarchs will continue to prevail in Indonesia’s electoral contestation.

We hope this eighth edition of Jurnal Politik can spark and contribute to academic discussions among our readers. We also hope the use of English in this edition can make our articles more accessible to broader audience.

Happy reading!
REFERENCES


