Democracy and Conflicts in Local Politics

“Democracy is a system of conflict regulation that allows open competition over the values and goals that citizens want to advance.” (Stepan 2000)

Alfred Stepan’s statement above illustrates the ability of democracy to open up great opportunities for citizens to have political expression and compete according to the rules. For Stepan (2000), a democratic political system can regulate conflict so that people who compete do not use violence and harm other citizens. According to many experts, countries with democratic systems are considered better than non-democratic countries, specifically in maintaining international peace (Small and Singer 1976; Dixon 1994). However, there are doubts that democracy can prevent domestic violence (Swain 2008). The competitive nature of democracy, especially in multiethnic societies, can lead to divisive competition and facilitate ethnic politicization, ethnic extremism, and political violence (Esman 1994; Reily 2001). Democracy can also create the tyranny of the majority which can lead to ethnic cleansing (Mann 2004).

The argument that democracy has the potential to create conflict can also be seen from Indonesia’s experience. Indonesia’s post-New Order democratic transition was not as smooth as initially thought. Many communal conflicts, rebellions, and identity-based violence have been taking place (Bertrand 2004; Sidel 2006; van Klinken 2007). Unlike in the New Order era, everyone can express themselves in democracy. However, not everyone commits to channel their political expression positively so that bad people such as thugs (Hadiz 2004a), corruptors (Hadiz 2004b), local mafias (Sidel 2005), and intolerant people (Mietzner 2018) can also pursue their goals in the political arena. Democracy through decentralization and regional elections also increases clientelistic practices such as money politics (Hidayat 2009). Decentral-
ized power and the possibility of being directly elected has made the positions of regional heads and members of local parliaments highly contested. This opportunity ultimately increases the intensity of conflict at the local level (Hadiz 2003; 2010).

This issue discusses conflicts that have occurred in the course of consolidating Indonesia’s democracy. The first article, written by Saiful Mujani, explains how Indonesian democracy’s progress was experiencing setbacks in at least the last five years. With the title “Intolerant Democrat Syndrome: The Problem of Indonesian Democratic Consolidation,” Mujani argues that the decline of democracy in Indonesia can be seen through the increasing political intolerance in society as indicated by public survey data. In this article, Mujani argues that Indonesian society, in general, experiences what he calls as “intolerant democrat syndrome.” They have a preference for democracy but it is not accompanied by political tolerance. Mujani then speculates that the source of this intolerance comes from the Indonesian constitution, which is considered not accommodating the diversity of groups in society.

The second article, “Desa Mawacara, Negara Mawatata: Bali’s Customary Village-Based State Policies in the Time of the Covid-19 Pandemic,” was written by I Ngurah Suryawan. This article explains how traditional villages’ effectiveness in carrying out policies to handle the Covid-19 pandemic in Bali. The author argues that the state utilizes traditional village structures to represent its interests in dealing with the pandemic. During the pandemic, customary village officials, who have been co-opted by the state, play an important role as the backbone of the local government’s task force as an extension of the state power.

The next article is entitled “Role of the Botoh as Political Brokers and Gamblers during the Tulungagung Local Election of 2018.” This article, written by Mohammad Darry Abbiyyu, discusses local gamblers (botoh) who also act as political brokers in the Regent election in Tulungagung. In his writing, the authors argue that this dual role occurs due to the amount of money and prizes that can be obtained as well as the direct election system. This article shows that the role of botoh is
quite significant in winning the elections because they can influence voters’ choice to choose an underdog candidate.

The fourth article is entitled “Drivers of Conflict in Urban Infrastructure: Case Study of the New Yogyakarta Airport.” In this article, Muchamad Imam Fitrantoro explains the triggers for land conflicts in the context of urban development by taking the case of the construction of a new airport in Yogyakarta. Using a political economy framework, this article wants to show the relationship between elite interests and conflicts in infrastructure development. The author argues that conflicts occur not only because of poor governance and social factors but also because of government ambitions and pressure from local and national elites to convert land into urban areas.

Vishnu Juwono wrote the last article entitled “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: The Retrogression of Governance Reform and Anti-corruption Measure in Indonesia 1999–2001.” In his work, Juwono looks back at the governance reform efforts and anti-corruption initiatives during the presidency of President Abdurrahman Wahid to understand why the government failed to stop corruption. According to Juwono, at that time, there was an opportunity to make significant changes because the administration received tremendous public support. However, this could not be done optimally due to the elite competition to take the state resources.

As usual, we end the issue with a book review entitled “Voting Behavior in Indonesia: Critical Democrats.” This time, the book reviewed is the work of one of the authors of this issue, Saiful Mujani, co-authored with William R. Liddle and Kuskridho Ambardi. The book is entitled Voter Behavior in Indonesia since Democratization: Critical Democrats. Al Ghozi begins his review of this book by providing the context for the emergence of “critical democrats” and their role in the elections after the downfall of Soeharto’s New Order. According to Al Ghozi, this book provides a deep understanding of rational voters and voting behavior in post-Reform Indonesia.

We hope that this issue can provide readers with the latest insights of political science and contribute to the contemporary discourse. We
also hope that we can widely disseminate more articles from Jurnal Politik and reach more readers. Happy reading!

REFERENCES


