

Political Journey of Indonesia: Dynamics and Challenges

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Abstract: *This research delves into Indonesia's political journey from its independence in 1945 to the era of democratic transition and the associated challenges. It primarily focuses on the shift from the Old Order to the democratic transition period, exploring political changes, societal participation, media roles, and contemporary challenges within Indonesia's political dynamics. The research methodology employs a non-systematic review approach to analyze literature concerning Indonesian politics. Selected articles are assessed based on relevance, quality, and research methodologies used. Literature synthesis is utilized to acquire a comprehensive understanding of Indonesia's political evolution. The analysis highlights significant political transformations in Indonesia from the Old Order era to the democratic transition period, emphasizing the importance of societal participation, the role of media, and addressing challenges such as corruption, inequality, and environmental issues. This study not only provides a deeper understanding of Indonesia's political dynamics but also offers a foundation for improved policy development, enhanced democracy, and sustainable development in the future. The implications of these findings are expected to guide decision-makers and researchers in navigating the continually evolving political landscape in Indonesia.*

Keywords: Indonesian Politics, Old Order, New Order, Reform

1. Introduction

Indonesia, known for its cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, has borne witness to a long journey in its political trajectory. Since proclaiming independence in 1945, Indonesia has traversed various phases and political dynamics that have impacted its social, economic, and political development (Anggara, 2015; Komara, 2015). After decades under the Old Order marked by authoritarianism, the country underwent a monumental political transition towards democracy in the late 1990s (Baderan, 2014).

The political reforms accompanying this transition opened a new chapter in Indonesia's political history. The shift towards democracy brought significant consequences, including increased political participation of the populace, a stronger role for mass media, and dynamic interactions among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (Aminah, 2016; Zuhro, 2018). Additionally, the emergence of new political parties, changes in the electoral system, and rapid economic growth have been influential elements shaping the political process in Indonesia (Nugroho, 2016; Shahreza, 2016).

In recent decades, Indonesia has successfully crafted an image as a democratic nation with active public participation in the political process (Riskiyono, 2015; Sunarno, 2011). Nevertheless, challenges and complexities within the political dynamics cannot be overlooked. Issues such as corruption, inequality, and environmental concerns remain focal points in its political journey (Akbar et al., 2023).

This study aims to delve further into various aspects of the political process in Indonesia. By conducting in-depth exploration, it will analyze factors influencing policy formation, reform implementation, and societal participation

in the political process. The dynamics of the relationship between the government and interest groups will also be a focal point of this research.

Hence, this research is anticipated not only to provide a deeper understanding of the complexity of the political process in Indonesia but also to make a positive contribution to efforts aimed at developing better policies, enhancing the quality of democracy, and fostering sustainable development in the future. Through careful and holistic analysis, it is hoped that this study can offer valuable insights for decision-makers, academics, and the general public.

2. Method

This research will employ a literature review approach. A literature review involves critically examining and re-evaluating the knowledge, ideas, or findings within academic-oriented literature, formulating theoretical and methodological contributions to a specific topic (Snyder, 2019). This study will review relevant articles to synthesize insights regarding Indonesia's political system perspectives and its political journey.

1) Scope of Research

The study will start by determining the scope to be covered in this non-systematic article review. The selection of specific topics and issues in Indonesia's political process will depend on their relevance to the research objectives and academic interests.

2) Article and Literature Search

The article and literature search will be conducted through academic databases, scholarly journals, and online libraries using relevant keywords such as "New Order," "Old Order," "Indonesian Politics," and "Reformasi." This search will

not adhere to a systematic process akin to systematic review methods.

3) Article Selection and Categorization

Found articles will be chosen based on their relevance to the research topic. Selection will consider the quality of research and various approaches used by researchers. Subsequently, these articles will be categorized based on their respective themes and research focus.

4) Research Methodology Evaluation

Selected articles will undergo critical evaluation, primarily focusing on research methodology aspects. Evaluation will encompass assessing research design, analytical approaches, and clarity of findings. The aim is to understand the strengths and weaknesses from the methodological standpoint of each research.

5) Literature Synthesis

Literature synthesis will involve organizing information from evaluated articles. This includes identifying key findings, comparing studies, and gaining an in - depth understanding of emerging issues. This synthesis aims to form a more comprehensive understanding of the political process in Indonesia.

6) Writing the Review Article

The review article will adhere to an academic structure comprising an introduction, a description of the non - systematic article review methodology, main findings, and conclusions. The conclusion will encompass a summary of the results and implications, along with directions for further research.

3. Discussion

Indonesia's political system is a reflection of the dynamics of decision - making processes that have undergone progressive development throughout its history (Anggara, 2015) . This political process is significantly reflected in three fundamental periods shaping Indonesia's political journey: the Old Order, the New Order, and the Reform Order. The Old Order period was characterized by the dominance of a single political party governing the administration, while the New Order was marked by power centralization in the hands of the president. The emergence of the Reform Order in 1998 marked a significant turning point in Indonesia's political history, ushering in significant changes with the introduction of multi - party democracy and increased public participation in the political process.

A. Old Orde Era

The Old Order era in Indonesia encompassed two critical periods in the political system's development: the Liberal Democracy (Parliamentary) Era from 1945 to 1959, followed by the Guided Democracy Era from 1959 to 1966 (Akbar et al., 2023; Muksin, 2018) . Initially, the Liberal Democracy Era featured a parliamentary system based on the 1945 constitution (Nada et al., 2023) . This period was marked by robust political pluralism with numerous political parties actively participating in the national political process.

However, the transition to the Guided Democracy Era in 1959, under President Sukarno's leadership, significantly altered the political landscape. The concept of "Guided Democracy" signified a paradigm shift leading to power centralization in the hands of the president. This period witnessed reduced political pluralism and increased authoritarianism in the political system, reflected in the consolidation of power in the hands of the central government (Nada et al., 2023).

1) Liberal Democracy Period

The Liberal Democracy Era in Indonesia, particularly from 1945 to 1959, was known as a period of parliamentary democracy adopted in the 1945 and 1950 constitutions. Although the concept of parliamentary democracy had been successful in some other Asian countries, it wasn't entirely suitable for Indonesia's conditions at that time (Nada et al., 2023).

According to the 1950 constitution, the parliamentary system governed the executive branch, consisting of the President and a cabinet responsible politically (Noviati, 2016) . However, the success of this system in Indonesia was hindered by political party fragmentation. Each cabinet relied on a dominant major party, with several smaller parties offering support (Akbar et al., 2023) . Coalition collaborations often failed, and conflicting parties tended to withdraw their support abruptly, leading to cabinet collapses due to internal divisions.

The average duration of a cabinet was only about eight months, hampering the political process, particularly in the pre - 1955 election period. Despite this, parliament held a robust position, strengthening the role of political parties. Parliament members played a critical role in state policy debates, both through parliamentary forums and individually, ensuring that all decisions related to the nation underwent thorough debate processes. Despite the system's flaws in cabinet stability, the strength of parliament and the critical role of political parties in decision - making highlighted the importance of people's control and representation in the political process (Nada et al., 2023) .

The Liberal Democracy period in Indonesia's Old Order Era can be divided into several periods based on the constitution prevailing at specific times, including:

a) First Period (1945 - 1949), Initial Constitution:

At the country's inception, Indonesia adopted the 1945 Constitution, which established a presidential system of government (Sartono, 2009) . However, in practice, a more democratic parliamentary system was applied. The unevenly distributed power was redirected to the president due to the absence of balancing state institutions (Ahmadiani et al., 2021) .

Centralizing power in the president drew criticism from parts of society, fostering the perception that Indonesia was not a democratic but an authoritarian or fascist country, led by a dictator - like figure. Efforts to establish a more democratic governance structure emerged through the creation of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) and pressing the president to promptly establish representative bodies (Yani, 2018) .

- b) Second Period (1949 - 1950), Republic of the United States of Indonesia (RIS) Constitution:

Indonesia transitioned to a federal state with the adoption of the 1949 RIS Constitution. This new constitution embraced a parliamentary system and regulated a federal government. The federal system demonstrated a power balance between the central government and the constituent states (Efriza, 2008; Mahfud MD, 2020; Rusadi, 2004).

- c) Third Period (1950 - 1959), Return to the Unitary State with the 1950 UUDS:

The return to a unitary state occurred with the enactment of the 1950 UUDS. This constitution affirmed the full implementation of the parliamentary democratic system with parliament's dominance. Parliament played a strong role in national politics, frequently issuing votes of no confidence against existing cabinets, leading to government instability (Army et al., 1959; Santoso, 2013). Although relative press freedom was preserved, some anti - press incidents occurred. Nevertheless, the press's freedom of expression remained relatively unrestricted in criticizing the government during that period (Harahap, 2009; Syafriadi, 2010).

The Liberal Democracy era marked a determined effort to fight for a more democratic governance system through a parliamentary approach. Parliamentary dominance in national politics, relatively free press, and political instability due to frequent cabinet turnovers and votes of no confidence characterize this era (Nihaya M, 2016; Sulfachriadi, 2015).

2) Guided Democracy Period

Guided Democracy represented a total reversal from the liberal democracy system, emphasizing "people's sovereignty guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation" (Sunarso, 2018). According to Sukarno, this system was more aligned with the character and basic life of the Indonesian nation. This concept encompassed all aspects of statehood and society, not only formal politics but also social, economic, and cultural aspects. Its primary goal was to achieve a just and prosperous society in line with the aspirations of independence (Wahdini & Ariyadi, 2022).

Guided Democracy was seen as a tool to achieve the revolution's objectives, ensuring the material and spiritual welfare of the people (Maarif, 1996). However, limitations were imposed concerning freedom of thought and speech, in line with the broader interests of the masses, national morality, and the state's safety. During this period, there was a dominance of Sukarno's authority that diminished the roles of political parties and the parliament (Suryana et al., 2022). The government became highly centralized under the president, while previously influential political parties weakened. The DPR (People's Representative Council) also weakened due to Sukarno's influence, which controlled almost all aspects of national politics. Press freedom was highly restricted with numerous anti - press actions, including detentions, imprisonments, and media suppression.

Guided Democracy marked an authoritarian, centralized era dominated by Sukarno (Hati & Ginting, 2022). Despite the constitutional existence of political parties and the

parliament, substantively, they did not function as intended. Sukarno played a central and dominant role in all political processes, leading to an authoritarian political environment and a lack of political freedom and opposition to the government (Wahdini & Ariyadi, 2022).

The Guided Democracy era in Indonesia began in 1959 after President Sukarno issued the Decree on July 5, marking the end of the deemed unstable liberal political system. This instability was evident in increased political tensions among parties, coupled with unrest within the military and divisions within the Army (TNI - AD). The decree restored the 1945 constitution, replacing the UUDS 1950 (Risdiarto, 2018). TNI - AD's role in realizing the July 5, 1959 Decree marked the starting point for the end of the parliamentary democracy system and Indonesia's entry into the Guided Democracy period. The complex interaction between political dynamics, the roles of key individuals like General Nasution, and the socio - political conditions at that time determined this significant change. Nasution's role in politics underwent a significant change since the Madiun Incident in 1948. Although there was initial conflict with some of his colleagues, Nasution later positioned himself as an ally of Sukarno and became part of the group supporting the system's change (Hati & Ginting, 2022).

During the Guided Democracy period, President Sukarno held an extremely dominant role in Indonesian politics. The enactment of the July 5, 1959 Decree became the main pillar of his increasingly authoritarian power (Risdiarto, 2018). The Nasakom concept, encompassing Nationalism, Religion, and Communism, formed the unique ideological foundation for Sukarno in realizing Indonesia's distinctive democratic vision. In his political role, Sukarno sought to maintain military loyalty, support PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) policies, and maintain a balance between the military and PKI. Although his political experiments were deemed irrational in unifying non - communist forces against PKI, Sukarno remained confident in the success of his experiments in Indonesia (Hati & Ginting, 2022).

Sukarno's controversial ideas, including his vision to unite Islamism, Nationalism, and Marxism, were reflected in the Nasakom politics he espoused. Sukarno's political power extended far beyond the symbolism of an ordinary president; he had the ability to dissolve political parties deemed to contravene the Nasakom ideology (Alfian, 2013). However, Sukarno's political dominance was not without challenges; resistance from the military group and some political forces indicated dissatisfaction with the increasing control over PKI and the anti - West orientation of his regime.

There were deviations in Guided Democracy, with criticisms over the misuse of Pancasila values and the 1945 Constitution in forming institutions such as MPRS (People's Consultative Assembly) and GBHN (State Guidelines for Policy) (Hati & Ginting, 2022). Although Masyumi was dissolved, the major political forces in Indonesia consisted of Sukarno, PKI, and TNI - AD (Bathoro, 2018). PKI strengthened its position, becoming a threat to TNI - AD. Towards the end of the Guided Democracy era, both versions of revolution, PKI's and Sukarno's, were shut down.

Despite Sukarno being the President of the Republic of Indonesia, his position was treated similarly to the PKI's revolution at that time.

Sukarno's central position in the 1960 - 1965 period was immensely powerful; his charisma as a national leader and his role as president made him the most influential figure of that time. Sukarno's political dominance, fraught with controversy and complex internal conflicts, became a crucial part of Indonesian political history (Alfian, 2013).

In the Guided Democracy era, its hallmark lay in the leader's dominance, power centralization, and limitations on political freedom. This system emphasized consultation with the leader at the decision - making center, leading to his incredibly strong influence on national political dynamics (Indrajat, 2016) . The characteristics of Guided Democracy included:

- a) **Emphasis on Highest Leadership:** Sukarno as the leader played an extremely dominant and authoritarian role in the national political decision - making process.
- b) **Centralization of Power:** A highly centralized government under the president, with weakened roles for political parties and the parliament.
- c) **The Guided Aspect in Consultation:** Political decisions were based on consultation and consensus, often directed by the president's desires and decisions.
- d) **Limitation of Freedom:** Restrictions on freedom of thought, speech, and opinion regulated according to the interests of the masses, national morality, state safety, and accountability to God.
- e) **Goal of a Just and Prosperous Society:** This concept aimed to achieve a fair and prosperous society, in line with the aspirations of Indonesia's independence proclamation.

Guided Democracy was a political concept emphasizing collaboration in decision - making, encompassing all aspects of political, economic, social, and cultural life (Argenti & Istiningdias, 2017; Indrajat, 2016) . This concept underscored the importance of the leader's direction in embracing people's interests, aiming to achieve Indonesia's independence proclamation's aspirations for a just, prosperous, and happy society, both materially and spiritually (Maarif, 1996) . The essence of Guided Democracy includes:

- a) **Not a Liberal Democracy:** It represented a complete reversal from the liberal democracy system, emphasizing "people's sovereignty guided by the wisdom of representative deliberation. "
- b) **Encompassing Statehood and Society Aspects:** It did not only cover formal political aspects but also social, economic, and cultural aspects.
- c) **A Tool to Achieve Revolutionary Goals:** Categorized as a tool to achieve a just and prosperous society, aligning with Indonesia's independence aspirations.
- d) **Limits on Freedom:** Enforced limitations on freedom of thought and speech, considering the interests of the masses, national morality, state safety, and accountability to God.

B. New Order Era

The shift of power from Sukarno to Suharto was a crucial moment in Indonesia's history, marking the transition from the Old Order to the New Order. Initially, the New Order was determined to rectify various deviations from the 1945 Constitution that occurred during the Old Order. A series of programs outlined in the State Policy Guidelines (GBHN) and Development Plans (Repelita) were efforts to improve the nation's condition, aiming to enhance various aspects of life (Sartono, 2009).

However, over time, the New Order started transforming into an authoritarian regime. Manipulated interpretations of the articles of the 1945 Constitution were used to maintain power (Dapu, 2014) . The brief and flexible 1945 Constitution was misinterpreted for the rulers' interests. The strong presidential power, as in the Old Order, reappeared in the New Order. The legislative branch was under the president's control, while the people's human rights were restricted. Unchecked power led to deviations in various aspects of life, such as the rampant Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (CCN) (Sartono, 2009).

These conditions created disparities in development outcomes, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, and escalating national debt, leading to a multidimensional crisis. As a result, students and the public began demanding reforms in various fields. Eventually, the New Order regime collapsed with Suharto's resignation on May 21, 1998 (Sartono, 2009).

The genesis of the New Order can be traced through three significant stages, starting with the September 30 Movement in 1965. This event involved the Army, Sukarno, support from the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI), and the Commander of the Air Force, Omar Dhani. The climax was the killing of six generals and a lieutenant, where three were shot dead in their homes for resisting, while the others were executed in front of PKI cadres and rebellious military officers (Renhoard, 2019) .

The event led to a misunderstanding among the rebels who believed that the Commander of Kostrad, Major General Soeharto, would support the movement. However, Soeharto opposed it. The second stage involved the military mobilizing civilian volunteers to detain and even massacre PKI members in various areas. Additionally, an anti - Sukarno movement emerged, reaching its peak in mid - March 1967. In this dramatic event, Sukarno was forced to step down from power, and Soeharto was appointed as acting president. A year later, Soeharto officially became president, and his government was known as the New Order (Renhoard, 2019).

The New Order era was characterized by the political dominance of Golkar and two other parties, PPP and PDI, as part of simplifying the party system (Hasan, 1998; Romli, 2011). Addressing society's demands was done through three socio - political forces, resulting in material control of demands by a large coalition between Golkar and ABRI. In the context of periodic elections, the emphasis on a pragmatic style in channeling aspirations led to a decrease in conflicts.

The government in the New Order era strengthened the governmental structure based on the 1945 Constitution, affirming its commitment to implement Pancasila purely (Asshiddiqie, 2022). Although there was flexibility in granting mandates, tolerance, and political concessions to national leaders, there were criticisms of the lack of disclosure of ideologicalism in managing the values of various existing political forces (Rabu, 2014).

The New Order era was seen as a period of less democratic political configuration according to some experts. The focus on national integration and stability in economic development logic made the state's role extremely dominant. This political configuration centered on building a strong political apparatus, especially the military and Golkar, as the main pillars of Suharto's political power (Mahfud MD, 2020).

C. Reform Era

The Reform Era in Indonesia, which began with the downfall of the New Order, is categorized as a period filled with important and complex events. Crouch (2010) and Seo (2013) highlighted in their research that this transition was not smooth. Initiated with increasing tension and conflict, particularly after the economic crisis and the fall of Suharto in 1998, ethnic and religious community clashes intensified in Indonesia.

Events such as riots in various regions and a series of conflicts between Christians and Muslims, like the May 1998 riots, provide a picture of the complexity and violence accompanying these events. These conflicts not only had economic and infrastructural impacts but also claimed numerous lives, especially among the Christian community across different areas in Indonesia (Aritonang, 2004).

In efforts to amend the 1945 Constitution and undergo the process of Reformasi, several religion - tinged conflict events were recorded as part of highly damaging political and social upheavals. The emergence of crucial issues related to the Islamization of Indonesia, including attempts to implement Islamic Sharia through regional regulations (sharia ordinances) in various regions, sparked unavoidable tensions between minority and majority communities (Renhoard, 2019).

Efforts by political Islam to achieve their goals, such as advocating the reinstatement of the "seven words" into the Jakarta Charter or pushing for the implementation of Islamic Sharia, although some initial attempts failed, eventually succeeded in implementing certain Sharia - based regional regulations. This led to unfairness for minority communities, especially Christians, who felt marginalized by policies that favored a specific religion. Conflicts and tensions between religious groups continued to escalate with the emergence of various discriminatory regulations and policies (Daulay, 2015).

Meanwhile, the advent of democracy in the Reform Era brought significant changes to Indonesian politics. With Soeharto stepping down after a long reign, Indonesian democracy began to grow and evolve. Press freedom, multi - party systems, and citizen participation in politics were

implemented more extensively. Elections became more democratic, power shifted from the center to the regions, and human rights were increasingly acknowledged as an integral part of Pancasila democracy (Nada et al., 2023).

Citizens' opportunities to assemble, gather according to their political ideologies, and the obligation to protect democracy became crucial elements in this era. Recruitment patterns for public positions also became more open, allowing competent citizens the chance to hold political office without discrimination. However, challenges persisted in ensuring the protection of fundamental rights for all citizens, especially in the context of ongoing religious conflicts (Nada et al., 2023).

During the Reform Era in Indonesia, the process of amending the 1945 Constitution was considered a crucial necessity to accommodate increasing aspirations and anticipate increasingly complex global developments (Siahaan, 2022). Amendments to the 1945 Constitution were made four times in 1999, 2000, 2001, and 2002 with the primary goal of reflecting the desires and aspirations of the people and representing the changes of the times (Suryana et al., 2022).

Following the amendments to the 1945 Constitution, the structure of Indonesia's state system underwent significant changes, firmly establishing sovereignty in the hands of the people and fully adhering to the 1945 Constitution. The division of power in the 1945 Constitution demonstrates seven state institutions with equal standing, including the President, MPR, DPR, DPD, BPK, MA, and MK (Pangaribuan et al., 2023).

This restructuring of the state system signifies a clear separation of powers, with abolished state institutions and the birth of new ones (Ismail MZ, 2019; Yani, 2018). The DPR and DPD as legislative bodies, the President and Vice President as the executive branch, the MA as the judicial authority, and the MK as a new institution (Pangaribuan et al., 2023). Some previous state institutions, like the Supreme Advisory Council (DPA), have been abolished, while the BPK remains with its separate arrangements.

This division of power ensures a balance of state power and the implementation of checks and balances. It is reflected in the formation of laws that require cooperation between the DPR, DPD, and the President, judicial reviews by the MK of laws deemed inconsistent with the 1945 Constitution, and the autonomous regions' ability to challenge central decisions (Basri, 2013; Maksudi, 2011).

4. Conclusion

Indonesia, in its journey as a culturally diverse nation, has witnessed an intriguing political transition since its proclamation of independence in 1945. Through the Old Order, New Order, and towards the Reform Order, its political dynamics are reflected in changes in the governance system, the role of political parties, and the influence of society in the national political process.

The Old Order era was marked by early liberal democracy that later shifted into a guided democracy era. Nonetheless, this period showed the importance of control and representation of the people in the political process, despite experiencing instability in cabinet stability. The transition to Guided Democracy showed authoritarian dominance, with Soekarno's central role in political decision - making. Although it was driven by aspirations to build a fair and prosperous society, this system emphasized the leader's power and limitations on political freedom.

During the New Order period, an authoritarian regime that began as a correction to deviations from the constitution evolved into a system that restricted the people's rights. Political domination by Golkar, limitations on freedom of speech, and the emergence of various cases of Corruption, Collusion, and Nepotism (KKN) became hallmarks of this era.

The reform period, following the downfall of the New Order, marked a significant step in Indonesia's political history. Despite tensions and conflicts, particularly after the economic crisis and Suharto's fall in 1998, this era provided more space for public participation, opened up freedom of speech, and brought about structural changes in the political system.

Indonesia's political dynamics depict a long journey from authoritarianism towards a democracy increasingly emphasizing people's participation. Despite facing challenges like corruption, inequality, and environmental issues, Indonesia has shown significant development in its political processes.

From early democracy to the current political dynamics, through an analytical framework, we observe an evolution that portrays the transformation of Indonesia's political system. The hope is that a profound understanding of Indonesia's political history not only provides insights to decision - makers and academics but also serves as a foundation for policy improvements, enhanced democracy, and sustainable development in the future.

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