

Democratisation And Decentralisation: A Reflection of Two Decades of Indonesia's Local Autonomy

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Abstract

In Indonesia, decentralisation has emerged in the name of democratisation over the last decades. Decentralisation, politically, has significantly shaped the relationship between the central and local governments. Therefore, many have believed that the decentralisation is equivalent to the democratisation process. In this article, we attempt to answer these questions: (1) is the decentralisation compatible with consolidated democratisation in Indonesia? (2) How is "the rule by people" implemented for the sake of democracy; in other words, how local people fill these spaces? In this article, we argue that there has been a connection between democratisation process and decentralisation. However, the relationship seems to be superficial.

Abstrak

Desentralisasi di Indonesia telah muncul atas nama demokratisasi dalam dua dekade terakhir. Desentralisasi, secara politis, telah membentuk hubungan antara pemerintah pusat dan daerah lebih kompleks secara signifikan. Oleh karena itu, banyak yang percaya bahwa desentralisasi setara dengan proses demokratisasi. Pada artikel ini, kami mencoba menjawab masalah berikut: (1) apakah desentralisasi selaras dengan konsolidasi demokratisasi di Indonesia? (2) Bagaimana "pemerintahan oleh rakyat" diterapkan demi demokrasi; dengan kata lain, bagaimana orang lokal mengisi ruangan ini? Dalam artikel ini, kami berpendapat bahwa telah terjadi hubungan antara proses demokratisasi dan desentralisasi. Namun, koneksi antara dua entitas tersebut nampaknya masih dangkal.

Keywords: decentralisation, democratisation, Indonesia, local autonomy

A. Introduction

Politically, Indonesia has changed over the last decades¹. Indonesia today is considered as part of the “Third Wave of Democracy”, espoused by the Harvard political scientist, Samuel Huntington. That “movements promoting democracy gained strength and legitimacy”. Since the Reformasi era, some scholars believe that Indonesia underwent a transition to democracy². However, over the last two decades, even the most optimistic ones are not sure whether there has been a consolidating and deepening democracy in Indonesia, or the country is still on the transition to democratic practices.

Many people, particularly those in regions (both provinces and districts), have had high expectations that decentralisation and local autonomy will contribute to solving both local and national problems. Soon after the local autonomy laws (22/1999, then 32/2004, and currently 9/2015)³ were launched, provincial and regional governments

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² For example, J. Bresnan, *Indonesia the great transition*. Lanham USA: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005; Olle Tornquist, ‘Indonesia and the international discourse on democratization: problems and prospect’. In Prasetyo, Stanley, AE Priyono, and Olle Tornquist (eds.), *Indonesia post-Suharto democracy movement*, Jakarta: DEMOS, 2003.

³ Indeed, Indonesia has been going through the constitutional changes many times, among others: a) Undang-undang RI No. 1 Tahun 1945 tentang Kedudukan Komite Nasional Daerah; b) Undang-undang RI No. 22 Tahun 1948 tentang Penetapan Aturan-aturan Pokok mengenai Pemerintahan Sendiri di Daerah-daerah yang berhak Mengatur dan Mengurus Rumah Tangganya Sendiri; c) Undang-undang RI No. 1 1957 tentang Pokok-pokok Pemerintahan Daerah; d) Undang-undang RI No. 5 Tahun 1974 tentang Pokok-pokok Pemerintahan di Daerah; e) Undang-undang RI No. 22 Tahun 1999 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah; f) Undang-undang RI No. 25 Tahun 1999 tentang Perimbangan Keuangan antara Pemerintah Pusat dan Daerah; g) Undang-undang RI No. 32 Tahun 2004 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah; h) Undang-undang RI No. 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah; i) Undang-undang RI No. 9 Tahun 2015 tentang Perubahan Kedua atas Undang-undang Nomor 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan

were championing to produce several local regulations. In Indonesia, decentralisation has emerged in the name of democratisation over the last decades. Politically, decentralisation has been seen as “a radical transformation of central-local relations”. It considered that the process of decentralisation in the country equated with a means of democratisation.⁴

Theoretically and constitutionally, Indonesia is now a very different country from that ruled by Sukarno and Suharto. Indonesia has now democratic elections, free press, and colourful civil society. However, we argue that the democratisation has been superficial. The only top layer of the bureaucracy is replaced. Most state officials have today not taken the prerequisite of procedures and standards accompanying decentralisation and democratic reforms. Antlov (2002) sees the decentralisation into two policies: a top-down process of decentralisation and a bottom-up process of citizen participation.

In this context, ‘democratisation’ refers to “political changes moving in a democratic direction”. Decentralisation refers to three different ways: 1) as the delegation of specific tasks while the centre retains its overall responsibility; 2) deconcentration, which refers to the relocation of decision-making within a centralised state; and 3) devolution, which concerns the actual transfer of power to lower levels of government. In the case of Indonesia, these meanings frequently used interchangeably. Constitutionally, according to the Article number 8 of the Law no. 23, 2014 stated that “Decentralisation means the transfer of Government Affairs by the central government to autonomous regions based on the principle of autonomy.”

The definition accordingly based on the principles of the local autonomy which is referring to the Article number 6 of the Law number 23, 2014 states:

“Regional Autonomy is the right, authority, and duties of the autonomous regions to set up and manage their

Daerah; and j) Peraturan Pemerintah RI Nomor 78 Tahun 2007 tentang Tata Cara Pembentukan, Penghapusan dan Penggabungan Daerah.

⁴ Antlov, Hans, 2002, ‘The making of democratic local governance in Indonesia’; see also Aspinall, Edward & Fealy, Greg (eds.), *Local power and politics in Indonesia: decentralisation and democratization*, Singapore: ISEAS, 2003.

own affairs and interests of local communities in the system of the Republic of Indonesia”.

Meanwhile, decentralisation in Indonesia is sometimes associated with “*de-concentration*” which is in the Article number of Law 23, 2014 refers to:

“The transfer of most of Administration under the authority of the Central Government to the governor as the representative of the Central Government, the vertical institutions in certain areas, and/or to governors and regents/mayors in charge on the governmental and public affairs.”

This paper assesses the significance of local autonomy - decentralisation, on the development of democracy in Indonesia. In this article, we attempt to answer the following questions: (1) is the decentralisation compatible with consolidated democratisation in Indonesia? And (2) how the locals respond to decentralisation; in other words, how local people fill these spaces? This paper begins at looking at the correlation between democratisation process and decentralisation. In the next section, this article will look at the current outlook of Indonesia. Finally, this article will highlight practices decentralisation in contemporary Indonesia.

B. Democratisation and decentralisation

There are different opinions about the stages of democratisation. Broadly, the phases of the democratising process include the decline of an authoritarian regime, a transition, a consolidation, and the maturing of democratisation. This preparation phase followed by a transition period where an authoritarian regime replaced by, whether through mass protests or compromised by a more open and democratic system. The transition period will likely emerge if there are conditionally free, regular and fair elections processes have superseded authoritarian political organisations, that is, a new democratic government. The third phase is a process of breeding democratic values. Democracy in this phase

consolidated when democratic values are embedded and accepted as the only conventional procedures for the peoples within a state⁵.

From the stages above, some experts remark that Indonesia has passed the declining of authoritarianism or preparation stage, but has not completed the transition to democracy. However, given mounting problems in the transition periods, especially during the periods of President BJ Habibie, Abdurrahman Wahid, and Megawati, the government could not complete a total reform of the political system. Diamond (2000) suggests that the transition as “a grey area” of democracy that is “neither clearly democratic nor clearly undemocratic” system⁶.

Theoretically, if the goal of a consolidated democracy is to fulfil somehow, the central questions are when and how long the consolidation should take. Unfortunately, consolidation analysts did not give a precise timeframe for this process. They also identify the movement that either approach or move away from democracy.⁷ Consequently, theorists have limited their analysis to only specific political dynamics while disregarding other that might be just as important. We believe that society may learn from experiences to build new democratic institutions more conducive to democracy. Indonesia, in this context, endures a learning process that has to take place in the urgency to democratisation.

The learning process of democratisation had begun in the early period. Indeed, Indonesia at the commencement of its sovereign existence widely perceived as a “nascent democracy”.⁸ In fact, in his seminal work book, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, Herbert Feith (1962) identifies that there are, at least, six characteristics of democracy which existed in Indonesian politics particularly in the early 1950s, among others: civil societies dominated the state's roles, political parties were of great importance, political players showed respect for the

⁵ Abubakar Hara, ‘The difficult journey of democratization in Indonesia’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 2001. See also JH Pierskalla & A. Sacks. Unpacking the effect of decentralized governance on routine violence: lessons from Indonesia. *World Development*, 90, 2017, p. 214-5.

⁶ Diamond (2000)

⁷ Hara, *ibid.*

⁸ Clear, ‘Social legacies and possible futures’, In John Bresnan (ed.), *Indonesia the great transition*. Lanham USA Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005.

constitution, which set the rules of the game, most of the political elite was committed to democratic symbols, the freedom of civilians rarely disrupted, and finally, the Indonesian state seldom resorted to violence or coercion.

Newton and van Deth (2005) suggest that there is several primary arguments have been put forward for decentralisation. First and foremost is that decentralisation fundamentally aims at supporting and deepening democracy. Local government adds an essential dimension to democracy by allowing people in small communities to participate in and have some control over, their local affairs. Because it is also closer to citizens, the local governments may also be more accessible and democratic. Second, decentralisation model can be efficient because decisions are taken by people who have far removed the implementation of the decisions and from first-hand knowledge of their effects. Third, it leads to adaptation to local circumstances because policies decided by local people according to their wishes and understanding of local conditions. Fourth, decentralisation allows empowering local minorities. It is due to geographically concentrated minority groups to control their local affairs. Fifth, decentralisation is believed vital governance to educate the democratic values because by decentralising local authorities will be citizen training ground for democracy; and as a result, it is also functioning to recruiting ground for national politics. Finally, in the decentralisation system, state and local government can experiment on a small scale with new services and methods of delivering services⁹.

As examined further in next section of this paper, Indonesia continues to reform the political institutions, such as election processes and system of governance. First, let us highlight few essential political outlook of this observed country.

C. Indonesia: Political Outlook

Broadly, Anders Uhlin divides the fundamental characteristics of democracy discourses in contemporary Indonesia. First, a radical

⁹ K. Newton & J. Van Deth, *Foundations of comparative politics democracies of the modern world*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 2005, p. 93.

discourse aims to achieve more popularly oriented participatory form of democracy. This discourse includes Marxist, left-populist and feminist discourses. Second, there is a liberal discourse, which focuses on individual rights and takes market-economy as a starting point. This discourse can be divided into social democratic, political liberal and liberal economic discourses. Third, there is a conservative discourse, which aims at the rule of law according to the 1945 constitution, but it would not allow any profound socio-economic reforms. Finally, there is a specific Islamic democracy discourse that consists of modernist, neo-modernist, and transformer discourses.¹⁰ Indonesia's democracy characteristic can be seen in the following table¹¹.

Table 1: Characteristics of democracy discourses in contemporary Indonesia.

<i>Discourse type</i>	<i>Preconditions</i>	<i>Extension</i>	<i>Form of democracy</i>	<i>Democratisation</i>	<i>Content</i>
<i>Radical</i>	Equality	All social spheres	Participation	From below	Emancipator policies
<i>Liberal</i>	Market economy	Politics	Representative institutions	From above & below	[Not relevant]
<i>Conservative</i>	Social stability	Politics	Representative institutions	From above	[Not relevant]
<i>Islamic</i>	<i>Ijtihad</i>	All public spheres, especially politics	<i>Shura, majlis, etc.</i>	From below & above	In accordance with basic Islamic values

Source: Uhlil, 1997: 129

Schulte Nordholt (2007) goes further to suggest that in Indonesia there are three different processes. According to Nordholt, a shift from centralised to a decentralised government is neither always identical with a shift from authoritarian to democratic rule nor does it instinctively

¹⁰ Andres Uhlil, *Indonesia and the "Third Wave of Democratization"*, the Indonesian pro-democracy movement in a changing world. (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1997, p. 129.

¹¹ Compare with Jeremy Mencik, *Islam and Democracy in Indonesia, Tolerance without Liberalism*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 94.

mean a change from absolute state power to more democratic civilians. It means that because of more local democracy is not spontaneously making the central power weaker. On the contrary, decentralisation can under certain conditions, accompanied by new forms of authoritarian regimes¹².

However, MacIntyre and Ramage (2008)¹³ Schulte Nordholt (2007) further argues that in Indonesia there are three different processes. According to Nordholt, a shift from centralised to a decentralised government is neither always identical with a shift from authoritarian to democratic rule nor does it instinctively mean a change from absolute state power to more democratic civilians. It means that because of more local democracy is not spontaneously making the central power weaker. On the contrary, decentralisation can under certain conditions, accompanied by new forms of authoritarian regimes.

In addition, the following shift from “centralised” to “decentralised” of power to provincial and especially districts and municipalities government, there have been over 542 autonomous regions (consist of 34 provinces, 415 districts, 93 municipalities; including 5 administrative of Jakarta 350 of 471 districts/municipalities conducted direct *Pilkada* (local elections) (Direktorat Penataan Daerah Kemendagri, 2014;)¹⁴. This proves that Indonesians not only vote in more elections but it is also an indication that Indonesia is one of the most electorally competitive countries in the world. Close examination of the 105 local/regional elections from 2006 to early 2008 shows not only highly competitive but also consistently high voter turnout; on average, 65-70% of eligible voter cast ballots.

As it has been argued elsewhere that decentralisation in Indonesia is sometimes equated with ‘*pemekaran*’ (literally, administrative ‘blossoming’), that is, administration splitting and local autonomy¹⁵. In

¹² See also HS Nordholt. Decentralization in Indonesia: less state, more democracy,, 2005, p. 41.

¹³ A. MacIntyre & D. Ramage, Seeing Indonesia as a normal country: implications for Australia, 2008.

¹⁴ See also Pierskalla & Sacks, Unpacking the effect of decentralised governance 2017, p. 214-5

¹⁵ Mukrimin, ‘Decentralisation and ethnic politics: a reflection of two decades of Indonesia’s decentralisation’, (Forthcoming).

the range of its governmental type, Indonesia has changed remarkably¹⁶. As a result, Indonesia significantly has experienced governmental boom over the last two decades, as shown in table 10 below.

Table 1: The levels of government in Indonesia, as of end-2017.

<i>Type</i>	<i>Head administration of</i>	<i>Number of autonomous districts, municipalities & provinces in specific years</i>		
		<i>2000</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>2015</i>
Central	President (elected)	1	1	1
Province	Governor (elected)	26	33	34
District & Municipality	Regent & Mayor (elected)	268 & 73	398 & 93	416 & 98
Sub-district	Head of Sub-district (appointed)	4049	6699	7 160
Village	(elected for village, appointed for kelurahan)	69,050	77,548	83,184
Total		73,467	84,772	90,893

Source: BPS, 2015; Nasution, 2016: 4; OECD, 2016: 60; Harmantyo, 2011: 9-10.

As we can see in table 1 that, first, the number governmental composition and administration bodies are blossoming (pemekaran) due to the consequence of decentralisation. Furthermore, except for Jakarta's municipalities and all sub-districts across Indonesia, all these

¹⁶ See also, HS Nordholt & G. Van Klinken (eds.), *Renegotiating boundaries local politics in post-Suharto Indonesia*, 2007, p. 19; Ehito Kimura, *Provincial proliferation: vertical coalitions and the politics territoriality in post-authoritarian Indonesia*, 2006, p. 22; Dormeireir-Frere & JL Maurer, *Le dilemma de la decentralization en Indonesia*, 2002, p. 266-7; Cornelis Lay, *Otonomi daerah dan keIndonesiaan*, 2001, p. 149-152; Kai Kaiser, et al., *Decentralization, governance and public services in Indonesia*, 2006, p. 166-172.

administration heads are directly elected by the people. This pattern, in turn, signifies the process of democratisation¹⁷. Subsequently, Pilkada is now being held at different places in Indonesia today. Therefore, politically the region and local have now become a battleground of power championship. It has to be taking into account that thanks to decentralisation, Indonesia continues to split its regions in the years to come. Until very recently, there are about 314 new proposals for the formation of new autonomous regions¹⁸. A research projects that by 2025 Indonesia will consist of 44 provinces and 545 districts and municipalities¹⁹.

Equally important, Indonesia has now a presidential form of government with a system of check and balances between the executive branches of government, the legislative, and the judicial. An obvious example of check and balance of power is that recently the Constitutional Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*) has expanded and abolished the law that criminalised speech criticised the president.

Furthermore, many have seen that the democratisation of judicial systems is the second democratic framework of Indonesia. Initially, the judiciary was politicised and notoriously corrupted. However, since the reformasi emerged, reform on the judiciary was one of the critical demands of the governmental system²⁰. Current public opinion polling shows that although Indonesian citizens perceive the legal change to be lagging and low, performance to be improving and nearly three-quarters of citizens believe the courts would protect them from unjust treatment by the government²¹. The new legal institution, the Constitution Court (*Mahkamah Konstitusi*), has provided critical oversight and made the most progressive decision: the restoration of political rights of the Indonesian Communist party members and followers, and importantly, a ruling to allow independent candidates in local elections.

¹⁷ For recent update on the Pilkada Serentak, see for examples: Z. Tjenreng, Pilkada serentak: penguatan demokrasi di Indonesia, 2016. Sarundajang, Pilkada lansung: problematika dan prospek, 2012. T. Kumolo, Politik hukum pilkada serentak, 2017.

¹⁸ Kemendagri, 2017.

¹⁹ D Harmantyo, Desentralisasi, otonomi, pemekaran daerah, dan pola perkembangan wilayah di Indonesia, 2011, p. 10.

²⁰ For example, A. MacIntyre & D. Ramage, Seeing Indonesia as a normal country: implications for Australia, 2008.

²¹ The Asia Foundation, 2008.

Besides, it can be added here that the third critical dimension, namely the role of Islam in Indonesia. Many argued or at least doubted that Islam is likely problematic when the religion deals with consolidating and deepening democracy. It is particularly “Islam politics” while looking at the Islam as “imported” value from the Middle East region, notoriously the Arab springs. Nonetheless, it has argued that Islam in Indonesia is typical; and therefore, it is different with its characteristic with those in the Arab world²².

Andres Uhlin, furthermore, believes that the most important streams within Indonesian Islam are not a threat against democracy. On the contrary, the new Islamic thinking is an essential factor favouring democratisation. Indeed, he believes that Indonesian pro-democracy actors base their arguments for democracy more on Islamic values and principles than on any Western ideas. Leading Muslims are active in many groups and organisations demanding democratisation. Muslim intellectuals often argue that the main features of Islamic political movements in Indonesia are their democratic and anti-authoritarian characteristics. There might be many instances of practical use of “democracy” to achieve other goals (i.e. a strengthened political position for Islam), but the consistency over an extended period with major Muslim leaders and intellectuals have demanded democratisation, indicates true commitment.²³

In Indonesian case, Robert Hefner emphasises that democratic governance depends not only on regular elections or constitutions but also on natural endowments found in society as a whole. These endowments include a political culture emphasising citizen's independence, trust in one's fellows, tolerance, and respect for the rule of law. To support the democratic governance, Hefner further reminds us to fully acknowledge the cultural resources through strong social institutions, such as civil society organisations.

Furthermore, Hefner suggests that democratic consolidation will require not only just a civil society of independent association (although these are important too) but also a public culture of equality, justice, and universal citizenship. In this majority-Muslim nation, and in the

²² Mukrimin, *Islamic parties and the politics of constitutionalism in Indonesia*, 2012a.

²³ Uhlin, *Indonesia and the “Third Wave of Democratization”*, 1997, p. 63-83.

aftermath of a tremendous Islamic revival, the creation of such a public culture of democratic civility will be impossible unless it can build on the solid ground of civil Islam. Therefore, Hefner indicates that to make democracy well functioning, both civil society institutions and local cultures must go hand in hand. It is because a democratic state needs active and healthy civil societies. Thus, the collaboration between humanitarianism of civil Islam and the state required in Indonesia. According to Hefner, this partnership is one of the achievements of Indonesia in the facing of the global democratisation challenges.²⁴

D. Decentralisation in contemporary Indonesia

Broadly, decentralisation in this article refers to “delegation of power to lower levels in a territorial hierarchy”²⁵. Others describe decentralisation as “the transfer of authority and responsibility from higher to a lower level of government”²⁶. Although it is perhaps problematic with his ‘half-decentralization’, Philip Mawhood’s definition is more detail, that is, “*deconcentration*”, where:

“[...] the creation of bodies separated by law from the national centre, in which local representatives are given formal power to decide on a range of public matters.... The sharing of power between members of the same ruling group having authority respectively indifferent areas of state; political structures which essentially represent the interests of the central rulers and depend upon their support, functioning in areas away from capital city; and units of local administration in which formal decision-making is exercised by centrally appointed officials”²⁷.

The implications of decentralisation to the democratisation of Indonesia are getting progressive. However, there are some crucial issues regarding

²⁴ Robert Hefner, *Civil Islam democratisation in Indonesia*, 2000, p. 20.

²⁵ Brian Smith, *Decentralisation: the territorial dimension of the state*, 1985, p. 1.

²⁶ S. Kriestiensen & Pratikno, *Decentralising education in Indonesia*, 2006, p. 519.

²⁷ P. Mawhood, *Decentralization: the concept and the practice*, 1985, p. 3.

decentralisation in the country. Firstly, the move toward decentralisation has significantly changed the features of Indonesian politics is not only concerning the dynamics of the relationship between the national government and regions but it also the dynamics between the regions themselves. Both the national government and the provincials and the districts have to reorganise and rearrange the nature of the relationship, away from top-down to a more give-and-take kind relationship. Secondly, the decentralisation raises concerns regarding the neo-liberal agenda advocated by the coalition of domestic pro-reforms and those of the Western countries and international institutions, such as, the World Bank, International Monetary Foundation (IMF), and the United Development Fund (UNDP), the Asia Foundation, and the Ford Foundation - that have poured funding and technical assistance into decentralisation programs in Indonesia. These multilateral institutions see decentralisation as part of a global democratisation process²⁸.

Critics from scholars and authors give a more “realistic pessimistic attitude”²⁹. In fact, the precise demarcation of responsibilities and claims between central government, province, and districts and municipalities does not yet exist. There seems to be a tendency for regions to issue their own regulations in fields that are not yet regulated by the central government, which may lead to confusion and contention.

Furthermore, districts parliament (Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah, DPRD) is slow in initiating legislation and has a limited capacity to do so. Also, there has been lacking mechanisms to resolve conflicts between DPRD and the executive administrators, while members of the DPRD do not show eagerness to represent their constituencies. This pessimism, according to Nordholt and van Klinken (2007), demonstrates that decentralisation does not necessarily result in democratisation, good governance and strengthening of civil society at the regional level.

²⁸ For example, Priambudi Sulistiyanto & Maribeth Erb, ‘Introduction: entangled politics in post-Suharto Indonesia’, 2005, p. 7-9; Nordholt, HS and Van Klinken, *Renegotiating boundaries...* 2007, p. 15; Nordholt, *Decentralization in Indonesia: less state, more democracy...* 2005, p. 39; and Pierskalla, 2016.

²⁹ Among others: Nordholt and van Klinken 2007; Hadiz 2003; Dormeier-Freire and Maurer 2002; Kingsbury and Aveling 2003)

Instead, the tendency is the witness of corruption, collusion, and political violence that once belonged to the centralised of the New Order, and now moulded into the existing patrimonial patterns at the regional level.³⁰

Others predicts that the decentralization will lead to “rooted corruption, informal governance, horizontal conflict, hijacked administration, political violence, parochialism, or even disintegration, as the other side effects weakening the state” if the “social capital and substantive democracy” are not accurately encouraged³¹.

Furthermore, the effects of decentralisation are perceived differently by various groups and layers society. For example, from optimistic groups, such as NGOs like SMERU, and financial institutions such as Asia Foundation, Ford Foundation, the World Bank and Asian Development Bank, actively support decentralisation and proclaim a firm ideological belief in its success³². In fact, the World Bank sees it as a huge financial operation – with the ominous title ‘Big Bang’ – which can be successfully managed. Asian Development Bank perceives it as “the great achievement” of Indonesia. The perception continues to rise because decentralisation is supposed to strengthen democracy and civil society organisations³³.

In this regard, the basic tenets of international institutions currently support projects in Indonesia’s decentralisation and democratisation. For example, Olle Tornquist³⁴ maintains that the support of those international bodies to decentralisation because it is broadly to support the effort to: (1) Human rights, and thus, also the rule of laws that are considered to be just; (2) Good governance and hence even the ‘rule of law’ that is not always just; (3) The promotion of pacts between the elite – in order to

³⁰ Nordholt & Van Klinken, *Renegotiating boundaries local politics*, 2007, p 17-8; see also Pierskalla & Sacks, *Unpacking the effect of decentralised governance...* 2017; Pierskalla, *Splitting the difference...* 2016.

³¹ Ahmad K Umam, *The two edge knife of decentralization*. *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial dan Ilmu Politik*, 2011, p. 88.

³² Nordholt, *Decentralisation in Indonesia: less state, more democracy*, 2005, p. 39.

³³ Nordholt & Van Klinken, *Renegotiating boundaries local politics*, 2007, p. 15-6.

³⁴ Tornquist, *Indonesia and the international discourse on democratization*, 2003.

encourage the majority to accept some democracy in return for: [a] the protection of its private economic powers, and (b) agreements between reformist incumbents and moderate dissidents, in order to marginalise radicals (like the Indonesian students) and instead provide legitimacy to invigorated leaders from the elite through limited but 'free and fair' elections; (4) The privatization of the economy and the decentralisation of politics and administration; and finally, (5) The strengthening of civil society in terms of 'good citizenship' namely taking responsibility for most of their own problems and special interests, for instance in their neighbourhoods or with regard to social welfare and education.³⁵

Apart from mentioned efforts above, however, as Olle Tornquist³⁶ contends that decentralisation promptly proved inadequate, and the decentralisation put the democracy at risky position. This is partly because, according to Tornquist, firstly, the struggle for human rights and freedom of speech and freedom of association has largely been based on pressure groups and lobbying. These efforts have been separate from less genuine and forceful attempts at building institutional channels for a functioning democracy. In fact, the undermining of *KOMNAS HAM* (the National Human Rights Commission), the weakness of the attorney general's office, and the return of the military into politics and administration.

Secondly, there is a tendency of the contradictory pattern. For example, Tornquist sees that the efforts to promote good governance and the rule of law are up against the fact that the anti-corruption movement is also largely extra-parliamentary also based on pressure groups and lobbying. Hence, there is an urgent need for further democratisation to do away with monopolistic actors and pave the way for social and political forces that have the will and the capacity to carry through a viable anti-corruption agenda.

³⁵ Tornquist, *ibid*, p. 101-102.

³⁶ Tornquist, *ibid*, p. 102-105

Thirdly, when powerful private business is given guarantees and a free hand, based on the assumption that there will be space for the moderate democratisation of politics, neither business nor politics (or military) are capable of giving up their structural linkages. The understanding brokered between moderate leaders and the mainstream opposition effectively marginalised almost all genuine pro-democratic forces (as well as dissidents in the provinces and at the local level). Therefore, what we have are elections where it becomes all but impossible for genuine pro-democrats to be elected. So, why then would such a democracy make sense to the demos, to the people?

Fourthly, there has been the rise of localism in the case of decentralisation in Indonesia. It is only logical that groups turn against the previous state-centralism. However, while decentralisation may be good in principle in which is inseparable from the different contextual institutions and relations of power. Yet, superficial decentralisation practices have continued to be seen contemporarily. So, now there is a greater need than ever before for an analysis of the dynamics of localised politics and political economy. Thus, we must identify what options remain available to local pro-democracy in order to make a difference.

Lastly, the emphasis on civil society is no less problematic. This idea is not just part of international efforts at de-politicising development and conflicts of power and interest. It also neglects both the need to analyse actors in terms of collective organising and their constituencies in terms of the interests that they deal with. Ultimately, there is nothing wrong with increasing citizen's autonomy against authoritarian states through civic associations, but this kind of civil society promotion does not help much against the major and common problems of popular based democratisation.

E. Conclusion

To conclude this article, let us retell an anecdote of an Indonesian sociologist, Ignas Kleden (2008): "When you talk to people at the district level about democracy [in Indonesia], you might be surprised if someone

stands up during the discussion and asks, is a democratic system an alternative to religion?"

It is worth to note that most Indonesian communities are still very religiously oriented, but this remains a serious question. It seems naïve question; it should deal with carefully otherwise suspicion about democracy may arise, causing an unnecessary commotion. We can respond firstly by answering "no", nonetheless, further explanation needed. This anecdote may not demonstrate so much the need to talk explicitly about democracy, as the need to find suitable metaphors and analogies to provide a reliable answer. Democracy, under no circumstances, is not an alternative to religion, just because it is entirely different. Religious preaching tells us to keep the drive towards corruption under control and, if possible, eliminate all corrupts ideas. Democracy, however, takes the human tendency toward corrupt behaviour into account but creates no illusion to be able to eliminate it. Democracy, however, provide the legal mechanism to handle corruption, such that those who tempted to corrupt, and perhaps have opportunities to use public funds for private purposes. Politics in a democratic sense means taking particular issues and giving them universal attention and interest and contextualising general matters into the more specific needs and challenges.

The three dimensions mentioned above, i.e. political institutions and process; judicial system; and Islam, will influence how democratisation moves forward. We believe that if reform and democratisation of these dimensions successfully, Indonesia's future would be brighter. Although it is not fair to equalise the quality of democratisation in this 'new' democratic country than those that have established, we are sure Indonesians can learn much from their nation's experience and other states. Consolidating democracy in such a big country, of more than two hundred and fifty million populations; of 34 provinces; and of more than 400s districts and municipalities and more than 60,000 sub-districts (Kemendagri, 2017) certainly needs a long-time effort.

Finally, there have been two recent amplifications that directly influenced by the decentralisation policy in Indonesia. The first is local election -- the so-called "*Pilkada serentak*" (joint local elections) that means governor, district heads, and major are being elected all at once.

This policy is taken into account due to the practical and efficiency considerations. These *elections are* partly useful in tackling challenges related to “the distance in decentralised Indonesia through local elections”, as Gabriel Lele (2012) put is. Thus, to bring government closer to people, according to Lele, the arrangement of democracy “is institutionally engineered” through local elections. For example, there will be more than ten governors and one hundred district and municipality heads to be elected in 2018.

The immediate development of current Indonesia’s constitutional change is the arrangement of the village autonomy. We believe that the political landscape through this village autonomy change, i.e. *Undang-undang Desa*, will bring the democratisation through decentralisation delivered to the lowest layer of society, the villagers. Eventually, we believe that Indonesia’s experiences to decentralisation and its current development will bring something useful to the world to share.

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For example:

- *Undang-undang RI No. 1 Tahun 1945 tentang Kedudukan Komite Nasional Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 22 Tahun 1948 tentang Penetapan Aturan-aturan Pokok mengenai Pemerintahan Sendiri di Daerah-daerah yang berhak Mengatur dan Mengurus Rumah Tangganya Sendiri*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 1 1957 tentang Pokok-pokok Pemerintahan Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 5 Tahun 1974 tentang Pokok-pokok Pemerintahan di Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 22 Tahun 1999 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 25 Tahun 1999 tentang Perimbangan Keuangan antara Pemerintah Pusat dan Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 32 Tahun 2004 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah*
- *Undang-undang RI No. 23 Tahun 2014 tentang Pemerintahan Daerah*
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