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COMING TO TERMS WITH PUBLIC INTERESTS: to Link Power, Wealth and Democracy¹

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ABSTRACT

Acceptance of democracy as global norm, retain debate on its essence, and disagreement of what democracy really means lead to even a wide range of debate on how democracy is institutionalized in real life. Bearing this in mind, imposition of a particular standard to measure the quality of democracy in a particular country—widely known as democracy audit or democracy assessment—is problematic. It invites challenges at two layers. First, challenge on the very idea of democracy, which certainly shapes the challenge at the second layer. In this regard, we witness that the imposed standard happened to derived from the mainstream theory, which heavily rely on liberal philosophy. On the name of preventing abusive power, the imposed standard resort to the centrality of political right of individuals and at the same time heavily criticized by those who are in favor of structuring wealth. In response to this controversy, this paper offers a breakthrough by examining how each side of the controversy deal with the notion publicness. Obviously, in this paper democracy is treated as a matter coming to terms with public issues or interests. By doing so, part of the controversy will be resolved, and hence provide a new basis for debating democracy audit and alike on new ground. Second, challenge lays on institutional expression of democracy. At issue here is that agreement on the theoretical understanding of democracy retain ample room for controversy. Deriving from understanding of power and wealth are at play in democracy and democratization, this second part of the paper will propose alternative way of setting up assessment scheme for a particular country, namely Indonesia.

This paper aims to propose a framework for measuring Indonesia's performance in the process of democratization, and at the same time providing specific guidance in further pursuing its agenda. The country has been performing very well in pursuing procedural democracy, yet it over

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burdened with socio-cultural as well as spatial diversity. More importantly, despite its success in democratization, according to the so-called procedural standard, the countries have deprived public expectation. The kind of democracy the country managed to bring about does not meet public expectation, namely to be economically well-off. Those who are in support of procedural democracy would quickly respond, that democracy is not economic development. Yet, given the fact that democracy is a matter of public interest, exploring the possibility of having a welfare-enhancing model of democracy is a legitimate agenda. The challenge, therefore, is to meet the essential criteria of democracy and at the same time to develop an additional attribute to it.

Cautious Measurement of Democratization

Despite the persistence of controversy on its meaning, democracy has been practically accepted worldwide as a binding political norm. Attempts to bring the idea of democracy into real life seem to be endless, as people in each country bound to recontextualize their understanding. No matter how long the country has been attempting to democratize itself, there is always a new challenge for ensuring democracy to come to life. There is always a new context for democratization. For those reasons, there is no way for setting up an absolute standard for measuring the quality or the degree of democracy. Apart from the changing and the differing context for bringing about democracy, there has been no consensus on the exact meaning of it.² The attempt to develop a democratic global-governance inevitably raises a serious concern on what is the standard or democratic governance look like.

Practical standards for measuring the degree or the quality of democracy have been introduced for some time. It is well known as democracy audit scheme or democracy assessment³. The practical nature of the standard has made the audit or assessment gain popularity. The application of the standard against a particular context eventually leads to new understanding on what is lacking, and hence further directs the agenda of democratization. The application of the same standard in more than one country provides a useful means for comparative study. The popularity of such a practical standard worldwide, nonetheless, raises a legitimate suspicion if it is fixed.

First, the fixed standard disregards the fact that democracy suffers from a deep disagreement on its meaning. There has been disagreement between

² See Guillermo O'Donnell et al. (eds.), *The Quality of Democracy: Theory and Applications*, University of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2004; see also Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, Yale University Press, 1971.

³ See for example; David Beetham, *Democracy And Human Rights*, Polity Press: Cambridge, 2007.

those who in favor of substantive democracy and those who in favor of procedural democracy. Thus, if the fixed standard should be set, it ought to be more than one type.

Second, democracy entails a particular set of values. Disagreements, however, have been taking place over those values. There are some values, which commonly agreed while others are not. Moreover, these values may manifest only in a particular context and hence manifestations of the values of democracy inevitably differ in one place to others. In order to be functional in assisting the real practice of democratization, the assessment needs to be contextual. The problem with the fixed standard is that it potentially disregards them. So, diverse standard should be tolerated.

Third, application of a universal standard represents hegemonic nature of the discourse on democracy and democratization. The countries with longer history of democratic life are in position to offer the standard. While, those with less experienced in democracy are in position only to follow.

For those three reasons, democracy audit or assessment needs to be country-specific or context-specific. The scheme should be sensitive to context so much so that the scheme would bring about specific information to direct democratization process in the particular country. Prior to proposing a specific model of democracy assessment for a specific country—in this regard: Indonesia—it is worthwhile make a brief overview of what it is the potentially hegemonic model.

David Beetham has formulated one of the most influential notion and framework of democracy audit. Beetham built his notion and framework on democracy audit based on his own definition of democracy, which ultimately geared on two principles of political equality and popular control over political equality.

In many regards, his formula is very much different and goes far beyond the orthodox definition and classification of normative and procedural democracy. He is one among the first to treat democracy and human rights as two closely related phenomena. He did so by relating democracy and human rights and gearing on the concept of citizenship that entitles political, social, and economical rights for its holder and this obliges the state to guarantee of their fulfillment.

Beetham chose to formulate his framework by building his own definition on the first hand. This enables him to build more robust criteria and specification for assessing democracy. This is due to the complex and much debated nature of the idea of democracy and its implementation.

In fact, Beetham has the ambition to formulate a framework and instrument for democracy audit to go beyond the conventional one. In doing so, he built his framework and instrument to be able to measure the level of democracy throughout the complexity of the edifices of the idea of democracy

and its implementation and overcome the hotly debated criteria and benchmark for an audit.

To overcome the problematic issue of criteria and benchmark, Beetham addressed his framework and instruments for audit to answer three main questions, which had been raised toward the existing frameworks and instruments for democracy audit and assessment.

The first question or objection he wanted to deal with through his framework is that democracy is not something that could be measured through 'merely' measuring and treating several criteria separately, especially when encountered with the issue of contextual exceptionalism. Beetham deals with this issue by setting up new logic and perspective in using his framework and instrument, which no longer intended to encourage all to conform to one single model, but in order to specify how those widely different arrangements may meet democratic criteria, which has been specified in intentionally generalizable terms. He emphasizes on the importance to distinguish between the difference of institutional arrangements for achieving generally similar democratic goals and the difference, which may indicates the different degree of democracy.

The second question is the measurability of indices used in democracy audit. Beetham sees democracy more than merely all-or-nothing affair but rather as a continuum. Thus, he presents the questions derived from his indices in comparative terms, like "to what extent...?"; "how far...?" etc. The problem of setting benchmark for determining whether particular country is democratic or not is overcome by setting a benchmark by referring other comparable countries

The third question Beetham wanted to answer is to differentiate his framework for democracy audit against the conventional democracy assessment. In doing so, he moves beyond the conventional criteria commonly used by other framework. Here he contrasted how his framework measure the degree of democracy of universal suffrage by adding the criteria of equal opportunity to stand for public office, fair access for all social groups and parties to the means of communication with the electorate etc. besides the equal vote criterion. He makes this in order to keep consistence with the principle of political equality that underlies the edifice of his framework. Beetham adds many more criteria, like the level of openness and accountability of the government to his indices based on the same reason.

Still in responding the same question, Beetham treats his framework for democracy audit not to rank the countries audited by summing up the scores of the countries assessed. He rather intends his framework to inform the public of the audited country where its institutions and practices are satisfactory, from a democratic point of view, and where there is particular cause for concern or improvement.

In general, Beetham framework relatively succeeds in responding those three objections or questions. Many parties has adopted this framework and, without or without adjustment, been using it in their own democracy audit. In some sense, Beetham and his framework has reached the hegemonic position in the discourse of democracy and democracy audit or assessment.

Despite his formidable contribution and succeed in developing a new framework for democracy audit which has been ascending in its popularity, there is still some deficiency which still need further improvement. The following section will discussed the aforementioned deficiency of the Beetham framework, especially when it is applied in the Indonesian context.

Uncovering the Models

Beetham, though he expands his conception of democracy to include social and economical; still builds his conception and framework of democracy and democracy audit based on the premise of liberal democracy. The conception of liberal democracy departs from the assumption that individual liberty is the basic requirement and the cornerstone of the edifice of democracy. When applied into condition and context where the idea of individual liberty does not serve as the central idea or, even, non-existent, without proper adjustment, this framework is very likely to give misleading picture.

The case of Indonesia may serve as an illustration. Most of Indonesian society is established and function based more on the idea of collectivism than the individualism one. This implies that fulfilling one's obligation toward the whole collectivity comes before demanding one's rights, even the progenial ones, for the collectivity to fulfill. This one particular illustration represents that Beetham's framework, moreover the less advance framework for democracy audit, is insufficient to give the enlightening picture of democracy in Indonesia.

This insufficiency is very likely to give misleading picture since the cases like Indonesian one pose another problem, besides transformation from un-democratic to democratic, of how to make the un-liberal to be liberal or how to arrange that the un-liberal nature of the Indonesian society for it to contribute positively toward democracy. The existing framework, including Beetham's one, only serves the purpose of measuring how democratic a particular country is and, at best, to give the pictures of on which parts a country is already democratic and on which parts it has to give more attention and effort to make itself more democratic, as intended by Beetham's for his framework.

Such misleading picture is very likely to lead to miscalculation and, thus, misjudgment on what further efforts are necessary to develop democracy in Indonesia. Thus, it is necessary for us to build and adjust the existing

frameworks or models of democracy audit to be able to catch the contextual differences in the case of Indonesia.

In Search for Indonesian Model

This particularly so when the countries, which are endowed with different socio-cultural background and historical pathways are judged from a particular criteria. The slippery argument lays behind public acceptance of the standard is that democracy contains set of universal values and connotation. Suppose that democracy is universal value, its manifestation bound to be different. Expression the core value of democracy is different from time to time, from time to time. Yet, the practical need to have a compare democracy in each country, easily drift the scheme to end up in a fixed standard.

There is a need to have a country-specific model of democracy audit or assessment scheme, which, on the one hand, secures theoretical ground and on the other hand, is context-sensitive, and more importantly useful in providing practical guidance for directing the very process of democratization. To serve the practical need, the scheme should be able to pin point the critical issues of democratization process in question. It measures not only the achievement but also the underlining process.

It is worth to emphasize that democratization is a matter of expressing democratic values in a particular socio-cultural setting, in a particular institutional set up. Miss match between democratic values with their sociocultural and eventually within their institutional set up is the tragic indication of the absence of the democracy. For this reason, setting up a context-specific democracy audit or democracy assessment is vital for defending democracy itself. Contextually-designed democracy audit scheme is not only deeply needed by the global South, but also deserve serious support from the global North. Moreover, practical exercise of contextual-style of democracy audit or assessment would potential promote a shared meaning of democracy worldwide, and at the same time leave an ample room for creating process of bringing about democracy into practice.

This need of compatible framework of democracy audit in Indonesia does not go unnoticed since there are many efforts have been made in order to get a compatible and effective framework for democracy audit in Indonesia. This framework is expected to give clearer picture on the condition of democracy in Indonesia and may indicate the necessary efforts to improve it.

One of these effort is made by the Indonesian *Badan Pembangunan Nasional*-Bappenas (National Development Body). It has formulated Indonesian Democracy Indices (IDI). These indices serve as framework to guide the development of Indonesia democracy and as instrument to measure the performance democracy in parts of Indonesia. This framework, however, is still trapped to view and treat the Indonesian context through liberal lens without proper adjustment. Thus, it tends to arrange and designed democracy

in Indonesia with liberal framework without considering the necessity preparation to set the existing context feasible for such arrangement.⁴

This is proven dangerous and disastrous for Indonesian society and democracy Indonesia, since the sudden liberalities enjoyed after decades of authoritarian rule has been responded with some sort of euphoric and hedonic attitude. In this situation, each sought to maximize their gain, and they will compromise others if necessary. This situation is very likely to bring Indonesian society into chaos situation and it may mean the end of democracy in Indonesia. The liberality, which is considered as equal to democracy, is proven wrong since there is no ethical based which framed this liberality as part of public interest.

In general, as this framework is based on the premises of liberal democracy, this framework failed to distinguish between the measurement of degree of liberality and degree of democracy. Thus, it tends to disregards the Indonesian contextual and social diversity to conform to single unitary form. We could see this as a set back, as Beetham himself has stated that his framework is not intended for such purpose and it would rather see how varying arrangements could meet democratic criteria.

To Link Power, Wealth and Democracy: Assessing Democracy and Democratization in Indonesia

We agree with Beetham that audit scheme on democracy should aims at various layer of the polity. First of all the audit should uncover: (1) the existence or the strength of the core values embedded in democratic system, (2) institutional expression of the core values, and (3) infrastructural bases upon which the institution perform, and the actors act and decide. The values that serve as the thrust of democracy include, among other: trust, solidarity/voluntarism and peace. They are the essential in ensuring that other values, such as equality, freedom and civil liberty are functioning in real life, moreover, all together, they save-guard the fate of the public. Arguably, they are the prerequisite for exercising democratic practices. Operational questions to reveal such values are numerous, some of the important one are: (1) Does the citizenship exist? If that is the case, what are the characteristic; (2) Does *demos* or active citizen exist? If that is the case, what kind of the citizenship does it adopt?

⁴ Santoso, Purwo, Indeks Demokrasi Indonesia: Komentar; Comment on the Indicators and Methodology Advancing of Indonesia Democracy Indices formulated by State Ministry of National Development Planning (Bappenas); presented in Peer Review at Jakarta, August 7 2009.

| Level of assessment | Object of Assessment | Basic questions |
|--|---|---|
| Values | Core values in the polity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trust ○ Solidarity/Voluntarism ○ Peace | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does the citizenship exist? ○ Does demos exist ? ○ What is the characteristic of citizenship and the demos ? ○ How public affairs are governed ? |
| How to make these values manifest and reproduced within polity ? | | |
| Instrument/ Institutional Expression | The way the polity functioning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Market-based (voluntary exchange process) ○ State-citizen (authoritative exchange process) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does market function properly ? ○ Does the state exist ? ○ Does it function properly? |
| How to make the state and market function properly through infrastructural bases ? | | |
| Infrastructural bases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public facilities ○ Rules and regulation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Formal ○ Informal arrangement ○ Wealth distribution | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does sense of public exist in the policy process. ○ How are the rules and regulation consistent? ○ Are the public facilities available and equally accessible? ○ How wealth is distributed in the policy |

The second layer of the assessment is related to the need to understand the institutional expression of those values (trust, solidarity/voluntarism, and peace) in the daily life of the polity. In this second layer, there are two fundamental institutions, which governed or framed the public life. These two institutions are state and market. We may attribute the authoritative exchange process to the state as its nature, while for the market this one is voluntary. For democracy audit, we must find out whether the aforementioned values are expressed and work throughout these two institutions. The operational questions for this second layer of the assessment may include: “Does the state exist?”; “How far it function properly?”; “How the state governed its people?”; “Does the state acknowledge and guaranteed the political rights of its citizens?”; “Does the state provide channel and guaranteed the rights for its citizens to voice their aspiration?”; etc. For the market, the questions may include: Does the market function properly? Does the market function also

serve as an instrument for wealth distribution? Does the market function contribute positively in nurturing civic liberty and sense of publicness among the citizens?

In order to build a democracy work properly, it is necessary to see how those values and institutional expressions work through infrastructural bases in the policy process. At this level, the audit is carried on how the values of citizenship, trust, and peace, implemented through either market or state institutions, are manifested in policy, rules and regulations, public facilities, and wealth distributions. The operational questions at this level may include: “Is there a sense of publicness in the policy process?”; “Does the public have equal access toward public facilities?”; “Is the development of infrastructure planned and carried within the framework of building citizenship; publicness; and peace?” etc. (*For the arrangement and details of this framework see Table I*)

Conclusion

The immense challenge for further democratizing Indonesia is to improve the way the polity governing public affairs. Enhancing civil liberty or political freedom, at some point is important, but the failure to address the difficulty in dealing with public interest, has made the polity miserably disoriented. Further progress in democratization is much harder from time to time, and the swing back to authoritarian rule is difficult to arrest.⁵ Assessment of Indonesia's performance in democratization shall not miss the rooted cause of the involution, if not half-hearted, democratization. Democracy audit or democracy assessment for Indonesia should not miss the critical issue, namely how people coming to terms with the publicness. The issue of publicness, at least to Indonesian experience, is the heart of democracy. Uncovering its "composite" values, namely trust, solidarity/voluntarism and peace, is difficult but extremely important to do.

Restructuring the polity is a necessary process for pushing the democratization to move forward on the ground that the failure to do so will obstruct the expression of democratic value. In this case, the restructuring copes with the development of accessible public facilities; consistent rules and regulations; and, more importantly, wealth distribution. Democratization is more than merely about guaranteeing civil right, but also a matter of controlling the huge power, including one that based on wealth accumulation.

⁵ Willy Purna Samadi and Nicolaas Warouw, *Building Democracy on the Sand: Advances and Setbacks in Indonesia*, DEMOS and PCD Press, 2009

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