

# Strengthening Democratic Institution and the Need for Political Literacy An Evaluation to the Simultaneous Election in Indonesia

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**Abstract** - The simultaneous election is a strategic step to strengthen the process of institutionalizing democracy in Indonesia, for example, about enhancing the presidential system. The existence of parallelism between the executive and legislative power, for instance, makes the political systems and processes running more stable than before. It can be achieved, among others, by holding of the elections simultaneously. However, it is not easy to realize it. There are at least three challenges to make elections simultaneously as a road to strengthening democratic institutions. Firstly, the modernization of political parties. There is hardly any political party in this country that is truly modern. Some characteristics of current political parties at least can be seen from three aspects: first, recruitment of members. In this context, the main problem is the pragmatic consideration that often stands out, for example, a person who has a high popularity or financial capital were prioritized despite having weak political capability; Secondly, the election of KPU and Bawaslu commission. Until nowadays, this process is still not free from the problem of impartiality and lack of professionalism that is undoubtedly very influential in the election process. Thirdly, public or civil society. The issues related to it are the phenomenon of money politics (vote buying), and so forth. Those are the three threats faced by the simultaneous election about the strengthening of democratic institutions. It is in this context that it needs for the continuity of political literacy efforts at its various levels so that the purposes of the simultaneous elections are in line with the public expectations.

**Keyword** : simultaneous election, political literacy, modernization

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since Indonesia entered a new era, known as the Reformation Era after the fall of the New Order regime which was unexpected [1], general elections were held directly. The people of Indonesia no longer choose the political party. Instead, they directly elect their representatives for the legislative and president-vice president in the executive. Not only at the national level, but also at the level of the region known as Regional Election (Pilkada).

Since 1999 in which the elections are held directly, Indonesia has experienced four elections, namely in 1999, 2004, 2009, and 2014. During that time, there were many evaluations, either in the context of rules or the Election Law and its implementation. Among other things is the simultaneous election to begin in 2019. In the previous four elections, legislative and presidential elections were held at different times. Firstly, legislative elections were held until it was known which political party was the winner and which party passed the electoral threshold as well as the

parliamentary threshold. Afterwards, the presidential election would be held.

Undoubtedly, the elections, both at the national and regional level are indicators of democracy [2]. The moment of local elections repeatedly, even in one province can happen many times, is allegedly consuming too much energy and cost in a short time. People in certain degrees experience saturation when they have to follow the election process repeatedly. Moreover, *pilkada* sometimes runs not as they are expected. In some places or regions, a conflict, horizontal or vertical [3] often occurs because, for example, of dissatisfaction of the losers. Violence, sometimes, can be transformed into physical abuse. On the other hand, repeated or continuous *pilkada* is very costly. The enormous cost is not only at the level of state-run operation, but also the value that *pilkada* contestants have to pay. Within this context, the simultaneous elections become very important.

## II. DEFINING MODERNIZATION OF POLITICAL PARTY AND POLITICAL LITERACY

The notion of modernization of political party is an attempt to make political parties run on modern systems. Simply put, modern political parties are political parties who are capable of performing the functions of the party well. Usually, the focus of political party modernization is at least on three aspects: recruitment, regeneration, and distribution of cadres to sources of power.

Recruitment is a function of the first and decisive political party's existence and contribution of related political parties. If a political party recruits qualified cadre candidates, conducted through rigorous selection, the political parties will be satisfied by reliable human resources. Their existence undoubtedly will significantly assist the performance of the political party itself so that its contribution, both to the country and the people or the constituents will be maximized. However, unfortunately, many political parties in Indonesia today do not perform yet such this recruitment. They prefer, for instance, to recruit the more popular or base-financial new members. That becomes a problem of pragmatic politics. It will cause a severe impact on both following aspects: regeneration and distribution of cadres to sources of power.

The term political literacy has only recently emerged, which was previously known in media studies as media literacy. Media literacy simply can be explained as an attempt at how audiences or media consumers, regardless of media type: print, electronic, or online, do not merely consume

media content as it is. The audiences understand what is behind the text or the context of the media content.

Political literacy is not much different from media literacy. Both invite objects or targets to be critical. If the first goal is the consumer media, then the second is all citizens. In general, it can be explained that political literacy is an attempt to make every citizen participate politically and critically by equipping themselves with administrative capabilities and capacities. Thus, if people politically literate, they understand the differences between parties and know basic political concepts and facts [4].

Bernard Crick in Andi Faisal et al. [5] explains that political literacy is a practical understanding of concepts drawn from everyday life and language. In general, political literacy deals with three skills, namely cognitive, affective, and conative skills.

The simultaneous elections are expected by many to be an appropriate alternative to the improvement of democratic systems in Indonesia, especially with the goal of strengthening the democratic institutions. In the context of democracy, the election is a parameter or a benchmark of how democracy takes place in a country. The general election, in addition to direct, general, free, and confidential, also honestly and fairly is an indicator of the quality of democracy itself. Simultaneous elections are not merely emphasizing the effectiveness and effectiveness, but more importantly improving the quality of democracy itself.

However, it is not an easy way to realize the noble purpose of implementing the simultaneous elections. There are some potential obstacles or challenges facing this nation to achieve the objectives of the general election. In this case, there are three challenges, namely at the level of the political party, election organizers, and the public or civil society.

At the level of political parties, it seems that political parties in Indonesia are not ready for the realization of the qualified election. The problem of modernization of political parties is the most significant problem to face. All political parties are challenging to call a modern political party [6], and sometimes, the change toward current political party brings about the problem to the party itself [7]. The push for political pragmatism often makes political parties take shortcuts, both in recruiting and distributing their cadres to sources of power. The recruitment of celebrities and entrepreneurs into political parties in a natural way is one of the indicators.

Under such party conditions, it is difficult to expect that simultaneous elections will result in improved political and democratic qualities. With minimum human resources in political parties, their contribution to the elections will be minimum as well. Now they are fighting, for example, more on rules such as regulatory threshold which incidentally only related to their pragmatic political interests only. If this is the case, the elections will simultaneously contribute only to the aspect of effectiveness and efficiency.

At the level of election organizers, there are many challenges faced both by General Election Commission (KPU) or the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu). There are at least three challenges that can be identified. The first one is impartiality or neutrality. The organizer of an event, regardless of the type and form of the show, is like a referee in a match. The game will run well or take place in fair play when the referee who leads the game runs its duties and functions well. S(he) does not stay on one side or any team, for example, because of his emotional closeness and even kinship with the team.

Similarly, it happens in the implementation of elections. Why do elections often lead to horizontal unrest in some parts of Indonesia? In addition to the factors of unpreparedness of the candidates in accepting defeat as part of the democratic culture, the consideration of organizational involvement is also pointed out as one of them. There are some cases of elections that have been blazed by riots that allegedly involved the impartiality of election organizers, in this case, KPU.

Various cases of election abnormalities of many election organizers became the findings of The Election Organization Ethics Council (DKPP). According to the Chairman of DKPP, Prof. Dr. Jimly Ashshidhiqy, throughout the year 2016, the most election violation findings were the involvement of organizers. It is in contrast to the year 2015 in which the election fraud was dominated by money politics. DKPP itself laid off as many as 44 election organizers in Indonesia for violating the code of ethics. Violations of the code of ethics are, among others, related to alleged organizational alignments such as the mode of vote manipulation, bribery, and so forth [8].

The second one is professionalism. Professionalism refers to capacity and capability of a person in the work field involved. Professionalism can be seen, among others, from the background of relevant education or related work experience. People who have work experience in the related field can usually perform their duties well. Besides, someone's track record also plays a role in professionalism. It is not strange that many qualifications of work are seen from his track record. The commissioner of KPU and *Bawaslu* reflects more representation, whether social, regional, academic and so on. Unfortunately, sometimes this element of representation can defeat professionalism. For the sake of accommodating all groups, it may be that unqualified individuals are still elected to become a member.

The third one is the selection of election organizers. Indeed, the selection of members is made by the selection team (*Timsel*) formed by the president. *Timsel* members are quite good, independent, and are also experts in their fields. Their work also gives good results. Unfortunately, *timsel* is not the final determinant of the election process of election organizers. The results they release, after being handed over to the president, must conduct a fit and proper test in the House of Representatives (DPR).

Here is the main problem. When candidates for KPU and Bawaslu commissioners are tested in Commission II of DPR, the issue of capacity and capability of the candidates is no longer critical. Their ability to approach or lobby to the members of parliament is the most decisive. It is not surprising that in the run-up to the feasibility and feasibility test, they conduct political guerrilla, not only to members of Commission II but also to related political parties. During the last process, we can see directly how qualified or highly qualified candidate of commissioners are forced to be left out, because of their inability, or perhaps their reluctance, to conduct political guerrillas.

On the other hand, the DPR itself seems to want to also conduct political intervention against the selection process of KPU and Bawaslu commissioners by trying to include members of the election organizers. They have even sought to amend the provisions of the Election Law stating that the requirement to become a member of the KPU and Bawaslu for political parties is to resign from a minimum of five years of political activity.

The next one is the issue of integrity. Integrity is a crucial factor, especially for public officials. From the perspective of communication, honesty is a crucial aspect for communicators, including political communicators [9]. One of the things related to integrity is the status of a candidate, whether a person is declared clean of criminal cases or has been involved. In this case, the election organizers have been tarnished by the accommodation of persons with defendant status or ever convicted to become members of election organizers.

The last challenge is the public or civil society level that apparently has a vital role. Their political participation is a parameter for seeing democracy [10], in which the higher the political participation of the society in the election the more well-regarded the quality of democracy itself.

But the problem is that society is still easily manipulated by political elites. A large number of mass mobilizations, the rampant money politics (vote buying), the provision of basic needs for political interests and the like pointed out that they have not been able to provide its political role substantively fully. In the term of simultaneous elections, this reality, of course, is not conducive.

### III. NEED FOR POLITICAL LITERACY

Challenges or obstacles that fall on these three levels: political parties, election organizers or local elections and the public or the society would need to be given the right solution. One solution is political literacy as political literacy itself is a set of abilities that are deemed necessary for citizens to participate in government. It includes the understanding how governments work and critical issues related to society, as well as essential thinking skills, to evaluate different views.

Who are the actual targets or political literacy targets? Although it is mentioned that citizens are the primary focus of political literacy, anyone can be the target of political literacy. From citizens in the sense of ordinary people to those who are occupying a political office in government. In short, political literacy should be a commitment of all people living in the democratic country.

Within this context, political parties, simultaneous election organizers, and the public or society need to obtain political literacy. Three aspects of political literacy are cognitive, affective, and conative, in which if they are held firm by the three parts above, will contribute much too good simultaneous election in 2019 It is not only to result in effectiveness and efficiency but also to improve the quality of democracy, especially the objective for strengthening the democratic institutions.

The political elites who are politically literate, of course, will not think for the benefit of themselves and their groups, but the interests of the nation as a whole. When discussing the Election Law (RUU), they would be more concerned about the law being made not only for the benefit of its political parties, but also for the sake of all political parties, and especially for all people in Indonesia.

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