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Soeharto and the Politics of Democratization: Managing Openness in Indonesia's New Order

ABSTRACT

This study examines the democratization process during the New Order government. The study attempts to understand and trace President Soeharto's response to the current of democratization in Indonesia, influenced by the global political constellation. The analysis reveals that President Soeharto had his own unique approach to responding to this trend. He did not simply accept the liberal Western democratic ideals, but instead sought to adapt them to suit his own Indonesian context. This study utilizes historical methods, including heuristics, verification, interpretation, and historiography. The conclusion is that the democratic space developed by Soeharto was a "half-hearted" democracy. This study demonstrates that the New Order government was not overly rigid, and the political dynamics it fostered resulted in political compromises.

Keyword: democratization, democracy, openness, Soeharto, New Order

INTRODUCTION

Research of democratization in Indonesia tend to be executed after the end of New Order. Reformation was regarded as open gate for democracy which oriented to west liberal democracy. Reformation demanded many policies of free speech and free market. Most academician or historian from inside and outside country regard that reformation is opening era for democracy in big scheme. That idea wasn't false, reminding liberalisation's wave in politic, economic, and culture was heavy.

Manifestation of democracy which attending in reformation era connect to research that relate to civil rights and freedom. The issue of law enforcement, civil supremacy, voice people, mass media, or returning military to the barracks became researches that always to be written. The essence of democracy was impressed concerning to West thought that as if eroded essence of democracy on Indonesia characteristic which was built.

Behind emerging of many democracy issue, there has no many researches of how democratization happened before democracy, especially New Order. In

regime with last 32 years, the research that related with democratization is not many reveals. Most researcher regard that New Order was not regime that prioritizing democracy. This regime was regarded otoritarian, according to various historical research in general. Nevertheless, New Order still keep anomaly toward democratization issue attending in 90's. President Soeharto didn't remain silent democracy extremely, but in other things tried to accommodate with his ways.

This research tries to analysis how far President Soeharto responded democratization wave that grow up in all of the world. Democratization occurred in 80's until 90's was the transition of global political phenomena. Huntington (1993) thought that the wave of democratization was the transition from nondemocratic state to democratic state in certain periodic of time and amount in global significantly. This idea was enhanced back by Francis Fukuyama concerning on book *The End of History and the Last Men*. For him, the democratization phenomena became final point for the evolution of men ideology (Imawan, 2000).

The transitions of democratization world countries, since 1922 until 1990, was always increase, according to Huntington's note. In 1973, from 122 countries, there are 30 democratic countries and 92 nondemocratic countries. Transition progress to 58 democratic countries and 71 nondemocratic countries from amount 129 countries of the world in 1990. Presentation at that time dor democratic countries as 45%, and increased by the notes 1973 approximately 24,6% (Huntington, 1995). In continue, Huntington also explains process of democratization since 1980's begun from communist countries in Europe. For example, in 1988, Hungary began system of multiparty. Then, the national congress in Soviet Union on 1989 caused losses on communist leaders so that resulting national parlement which more democratic. One year later, Solidarity Party in Poland winning election of national parlement that finally established non-communist government. At the same year, communist regime in East Germany, Czech, and Romania was collapse. Meanwhile, communist regime in Bulgaria attended liberalization which symboling democratization (Huntington, 1995).

The resonance of democratization was spreading globally, including Indonesia. This research tries to understand how far the democratization occurred in Indonesia in the late of 20th century. The New Order became pulse point of democratization in Indonesia seems unique, but the problem was not be

studied in depth. The author tries to analysis the problem in order to achieve novelty.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses historical method as basic research. This historical method consists of heuristic, verification, interpretation, and historiography. Heuristic, as searching and finding the sources, is executed by searching the sources in internet and private collections of sources. In internet, the author finding through google search such as electronic journals and books. Finding of private collections is form the books related with democracy and New Order. In verification, the author checks the sources truly known as textual and physique, include primary and secondary sources. Interpretation is carried on in order to interpretate through finding sources that origin on scientific research, journalistic report, opinion essay, and autobiography. The author interprets sources objectively. Historiography, as historical writing, is executed through writing in according applicable journal rules, followed by objective interpretation. The writing is performed through explanative-descriptive style that be scientific and could be accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Openness Issue and Political Contestation

Phenomena of political democratization which occurred since 1980's also enter to Indonesia. It symbolized by emerging issue of openness (*Keterbukaan*) existed in House of Representative (DPR). As legislative, DPR would be renewal of political condition which hope could strengthen DPR function as executive supervisor (Assegaff, 2013). The issue of openness, which DPR discussed, influenced by democratization phenomena in Europe, especially on communist countries. The DPR roles was not significant, weak function. Thus, the democratization issue became trigger for DPR to bundling of political transformation bigger. The democratization phenomena were not only be response DPR positively, but also by minister on Soeharto's Government itself. The minister of demography and environment, Emil Salim, response

democratization positively. In formal discussion, attended by Yayasan Wakaf Paramadina, Emil emphasized significance of economic development that paralel with political development. The purpose was creating democratization process (Assegaff, 2013). In other words, democratization process was not only temporary discussion, but also became sustainable issue.

President Soeharto realized democratization phenomena was serious thing in Indonesian politic. In Southeast Asia, he saw the falling of Ferdinand Marcos as the ruler of Philippine in 1986, regarded as dictator and corrupt by his people. It seemed, Soeharto worried toward condition and scared that affair befell him (Ricklefs, 2008). Meanwhile, the policy made by Soeharto before 1990 seemed repressive and fully violence. Soeharto, accompanied by two strengths general, Ali Moertopo and Soedjono Hoemardhani, executed policy which fully several affairs of catastrophe. The series of affairs such as Malari Affairs 1974, Cicendo Affairs 1981, Mysterious Shooting (*Petrus*) 1983-1985, Tanjung Priok Affairs 1984, and Talangsari Lampung Affairs 1989. From the series, several affairs of catastrophe judge to Islam extremism controversially. Judgement was signing Soeharto as Islamophobic ruler and undemocratic.

Besides that, Soeharto performed many repressions toward moslem through restricted policies. Several policies that repress moslem freedom was prohibiting Islamic clothes/hijab for female student in schools; erasing of vacation on fasting month that not occurred before; applicating married law 1974 that restricting basic Islamic law related with polygamy and divorced. In other things, the New Order Government made policy that opposing Islamic faith, namely legalising gamble covering by lottery (Gaffar, 1993). That policy was regarded restricting movement of Islam. It gave perception that Islam as “enemy” for New Order regime.

After all affairs occurred, there was change of attitude on Soeharto. He began to adapt himself from otoritarian attitude, becoming more moderat. This attitude was seemed since 1988 when process of election for vice president in People’s Consultative Assembly (MPR) session. When chosen again as 5th term president, Soeharto that early choose vice president directly according to himself tried to democratized election on vice president. Before that, the vice presidents were directly chosen by Soeharto, began from Sri Sultan Hamengku Buwono IX, Adam Malik, until Umar Wirahadikusumah. This election process became different when Soeharto giving movement space to MPR, aimed to open space for competition on election. In the context, Soeharto began to respect MPR as the highest political institution, meanwhile Soeharto as a president was only their

mandate. He declared that his own didn't have rights to choose and lift vice president, but MPR authority.

"I assert for all that the authority to choose and lift vice president is on MPR. I didn't have to choose, even lift him... I give criteria to become vice president... the candidate must have five criteria of requirement, namely: have attitude of constitution (UUD 45) and Pancasila both mentality and ideology; have private integrity; capable; have achievement which proof by work; acceptable for all people layers who was declared through supporting of social politic power dominantly... Whoever the man, requirement didn't based on like and dislike, happy or not as personally, but according to criteria that I submitted. I also wouldn't dictate MPR members," Soeharto said (Dwipayana & Kartahadimaja, 1989).

In election, several candidates were be submitted in contestation of vice president election, such as Secretary of State Sudharmono and H. J. Naro from faction of *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan* (PPP). The name of Benny Moerdani as chief commander of *Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia* (ABRI) emerged, but couldn't become candidate because his position was replaced by Try Sutrisno. Try was submitted as candidate for vice president, but the time is very short, remind he just a new chief commander of ABRI (Pambudi, 2009). The contestation established political competition in MPR body, even political manuver which based on every faction group would to get victory. Finally, the candidate tapered between Sudharmono who was supported by dominan faction and Naro who was supported by PPP faction. Sudharmono got victory, then assisted President Soeharto as a vice president.

Change of Attitude

After became 5th president, Soeharto run into changing of political attitude. He originally was regarding Islam as "enemy", then made Islam as a "friend". He opened space more democratic for moslem in all fields. One of his efforts was revoking the policies which disturb moslem people. In education, the policy of prohibiting hijab was revoked, including fasting month given to semi vacation so that focus to do fasting. In economy, Soeharto began to open economy based on Islamic law. The measurement was established the first Islamic Banking, Bank Muamalah, a bank which use Islamic economy system and avoid conventional system such as bank interest (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010). In addition, Soeharto began to create the rules which accommodate Islam such as Islamic Law compilation in 1991, and Decision in Ministry Level related with *zakat*, *infaq*, and *shadaqah* in 1991 (Syamsuddin & Fatkhan, 2010). Soeharto

also revoked program about *Sumbangan Dermawan Sosial Berhadiah* (SDSB) which was regarded by people as gamble covered with lottery. He revoked the program because many students, especially Islamic movement, attending protest for the program. Aspinall (2005) mentioned huge protest occurred in 1991 and 1993 until the program was revoked in 1993.

In cultural, Soeharto also accommodated preacher's need for preaching Islam in all of archipelago through Yayasan Amal Bakti Muslim Pancasila. The institution even deployed one thousand preachers to transmigration area. Preachers got financial aids as amount Rp100.000 every month and a bicycle for transportation. The institution also help to develop hundreds mosques and renovated the facilities in all homeland (Gaffar, 1993). In other thing, Soeharto supported moslem intellectual for getting scholarship to foreign who didn't get before. Several famous names such as Kuntowijoyo, Amin Rais, Ahmad Syafii Maarif, and Yahya Muhaimin (Gaffar, 1993).

The most highlight was establishing *Ikatan Cendekiawan Muslim Indonesia* (ICMI) which was regarded as symbol of unity for intellectuals and moslem organizations. This organization became Soeharto's peak affirmation for giving space to moslem intellectual expressing idea and movement. Establishing ICMI was Soeharto's path to create balance of power between civil movement/Islam and military which was previously very dominant. He tried to prepare compete power for military so that didn't get abuse of power. Bertrand (2012) explained clearly that ICMI became a stabilisator for network group of *Jawa-Abangan* and Catholic which connected with military network Benny Moerdani and Ali Murtopo, also related with Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). ICMI replaced CSIS as think tank of New Order in 1990's. Other thought revealed, focus on the way of Soeharto co-opted moslem people for getting control through ICMI (Bertrand, 2012). Despite all that, ICMI movement became new theme in democratization of Indonesia that accommodating space of moslem-civil more progressive in New Order government. ICMI movement also revealed that there was effort for New Order Government to enforce solidarity among moslem by developing the organization.

Liberalization & Deregulation

Democratization which occurred in New Order Era not only opening space to moslem, but also opening space for liberalization wider than before in all field. Since 1988, military domination in government was reduced, whereas civil

position was stronger. It showed from decreasing number of military members entering cabinet. In 1988 until 1993, there was only four minister who was active military. Then, this number decreased far away in 1993 (Rabasa & Haseman, 2002). Soeharto also did liberalization of mass media which was started since 1987 as part of freedom of expression and commentary channel. The New Order government revoked monopoly of TVRI, only one of television channel at that time, for expanding market in mass media field. Since revoking monopoly, there was emerge many television channels in Indonesia began from *Rajawali Citra Televisi Indonesia* (RCTI), *Surya Citra Televisi Indonesia* (SCTV), *Televisi Pendidikan Indonesia* (TPI), *Indosiar*, until ANTV (Sudibyo & Patria, 2013). Though many of media owner had kinship or close relationship with Cendana family, but it made progressive path for democratization in Indonesia. People was given many choices to enjoy television channels with many programs, compared before that only one channel.

Similarly, area for freedom of speech which more open. In late 1980's until 1990's, there was appearing of social phenomena as form activity of Non-Government Organization (NGO) more massive. Aspinall (2005) explained there were two categories in highlighting the NGO. First, NGO moving in community development field. This NGO was searching, analysing, and evaluating activities related through average salary, alternative technology, housing, health, or education development for poor people. One example in this category famously was Bina Swadaya. This model didn't make position itself as opposition, but as critics partner to government. Second, NGO moving in civil rights. In this context, NGO help protection of environment, protection of consumer, peasant, worker, and women rights; include legal aids and protection of natives. For example, *Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia* (WALHI) and *Lembaga Bantuan Hukum* (LBH). They moved in social movement which structurally regarded as criticism media to government in 1990's (Aspinall, 2005). However, the existence of NGO as critics medium at that time showed that New Order began to open itself for evaluation and critics from civil movement. As private organization, NGO became tool for civil intellectual to encourage freedom of speech to reveal space of democratic in New Order regime. NGO became funnel of legal democracy for people that positioning themselves as opposition government.

In politic, New Order government also began playing people aspiration. Soeharto instructed his vice president, Sudharmono, for receiving people's aspirations through program *Tromol Pos* (TP) 5000. This program was made to receive reports from people, plus evaluating government or control social in

development by post (Sudharmono, 1997). Normally, evaluation was done through formal institution, such as department inspector general, regional inspector, *Badan Pengawasan Keuangan dan Pembangunan* (BPKP), and *Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan* (BPK). This evaluation nature was *top-down*. Program of TP 5000 provided evaluating system and receiving aspirations. With this program, aspirations could be achieved through bottom-up scheme, namely people can report directly. Thus, official of vice president cooperated with official post of Jakarta so that succeed this program.

Performing program TP 5000 was appraised by people. Thousands report enter every year, mainly from middle-bottom class people. The public complaint was attended by TP 5000 consist of complaints, problems occurred in institution, and people perception about government performance. This post channel became check and balance from people toward government performance directly. Sudharmono (1997) noted that until 1993, almost 70 thousand from people submit to official of vice president. Administrator official of vice president carried on the mails to related institution as evaluation sources. It signed huge readability participation of people in executing evaluation of development. Element of democratization in the program TP 5000 seemed significant, because providing check and balance through bottom-up approach.

Soeharto regime also more performed economic liberalization as effort to response democratization occurred in global. Economic liberalization formed deregulation in several sectors. Deregulation was an effort to eliminate current borders in economic policy of state. Deregulation was made to improve foreign investment ecosystem so that taking investor. Deregulation occurred in export, financial, and banking fields. In banking context, example, private bank sectors could be established by simple requirement. The bank which established was allowed to build branches, even allowed to operate in outland Jakarta with certain borders. For stimulating development of capital market, bank deposit was charged cutting tax for taking up as 15% (Wie, 2002). Deregulation became economic alternative to pull up foreign funds. This policy was executed after profit derived from oil boom already empty. New Order tried to adapt itself toward changing era happening globally, through adaptation of economic policy. Deregulation policy got critics. It was assessed be the first caused of monetary crisis 1998 because there was human error in banking sector (Wie, 2002). This caused was a time bomb which wasn't be realized, then resulting trap to crisis in Indonesia.

The period in 1988 to 1996 was prosperous era. Soeharto got the golden era and recognized by the world. He achieved three awards from United Nations related with successful of economic and welfare maintained: (1) succeed food self-sufficiency from Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) 1986; (2) program of *Keluarga Berencana* from UN Population Award 1989; (3) succession of national education on Avicenna Award dari UNESCO (1993). Indonesian prosperity significantly increased than 1960's era. In historical notes, economic growth occurred since 1990 to 1997 was above 6%. In 1990-1994, economic growth rate was 7,3%; in 1995 was 8,2%; in 1996 was 7,8%; in 1997 was 6,2% (Zon, 2004). The amount of poor people at that time decreased. As in 1990, amount of poor people was 15,1% from total resident. The amount reduced to 11,3% in 1996. Economist from World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz, explained that in Soeharto era, program of eliminating poverty was running well, where occurred decreasing of poverty from 64% in 1975 to 11% in 1995 (Zon, 2004).

CONCLUSION

Research of democratization in New Order era showed that the democracy which growth rapidly in Reformation 1998 couldn't grow rapidly without support from previous government. This research revealed that the space of democratization actually was opened by New Order regime, even though didn't complete. The phenomena of democratization occurred in New Order era could be said as a "half heart" democracy, democracy where space of freedom and expression was only opened half, not complete. In this context, Soeharto's interest was how New Order government still followed the development of globalization and democratization attending in 1990's, but still adapted with Indonesian principles.

According to explained above, then could be understand that New Order government under Soeharto leadership was not rigid government. But, in progress, there was political dynamics which constantly had nature of ups and down. In the last power, New Order era was era where government did political compromise that previously didn't do. Political compromise tried to defuse political tensions occurred so that made situation more stabilize. Opening space of democracy to people's life was 'gifts' given by Soeharto to the parties that be restricted, repressed, even hurt previously by regime and apparatus.

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