

Public Political Participation in the 2020 Regional Head Election: The Case of Denpasar, Indonesia



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ABSTRACT: Employing a qualitative approach, the present study outlooks the political participation of people in Denpasar, Bali, with regard to the 2020 regional head election in the city during COVID-19 pandemic. Data were garnered through observation and documentation. The findings of this study informed that societies participated in the election with the belief that their interest are accommodated by political parties. Although the election was done during pandemic, the stakeholders carried out strict health protocol of COVID-19 in order to prevent the virus dissemination among societies. Based on the findings, this study suggest that the regional head election has an impact on the relationship between political parties at the regional level and the central level, in which, the central executive board always exercises hegemony towards regional party administrators in providing support recommendations for regional head candidates.

KEYWORDS: political participation, Balinese, regional head election, party

INTRODUCTION

Direct regional head election is a form of returning democracy to people and increasing public political participation. With direct regional head election, it is expected that it responds to various aspirations of community groups and leads to the formation of regional government that are acceptable to the regions. Regional government would not run democratically without a process of electing regional government leaders who are elected using democratic methods. Direct regional head election is one way to create a regional government that is democratic, accountable, and supported by all levels of society.

Direct regional head election is an effort to establish a democratic political culture in society. The reality of the emergence of elections which took place peacefully is often associated with the existence of a good political culture in society. As stated by Diamond (1994), the existence of certain values in society such as moderation, cooperation, bargaining, and accommodation is central in democracy. Such values are contrary to extremist and rigid values which are often seen as incompatible with democracy, especially liberal democracy. Through democratic values, the struggle to gain and maintain power is carried out peacefully, not through a series of violent actions. When a political conflict occurs, it is channeled and resolved through the available political institutions. Election is an institution to resolve political conflicts related to efforts to obtain and maintain power peacefully (Marijan, 2006).

The 2020 regional head election in Indonesia is different from the previously held election. Even, the voting that was supposed to be held on September 23, 2020 was postponed to December 9, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has plagued almost all over the world, including in Indonesia. The pros and cons of postponing the regional head election administration had become a prolonged polemic in the mass media, both print media, electronic media, as well as on social media. However, in the end, the government issued regulation number 2/2020 concerning postponement of regional head election.

The General Election Commission (KPU) in carrying out the stages of the regional head election is obliged to implement a health protocol to prevent local transmission of the COVID-19 outbreak. There are even election organizers at the sub-district and village levels that have contracted COVID-19, such as KPU, Election Supervisory Board (BAWASLU), and other administrators. General Election Commission Regulations (PKPU) serve as the technical regulations for regional head election administration, the regional head election administration procedures, and health procedures. The 2020 regional head election is a different regional head election. The registration of candidates for regional head and deputy regional head to the KPU is limited to participants, while open campaigns involving large numbers of masses are prohibited, as well as campaigns in a closed room. The participants are limited to a maximum of 50 people and must keep their distance each other. The candidate debate is also limited by its participants, even when voting at the polling stations, the health protocol is still strictly carried out. When the voting went smoothly, there were no reports in the voting areas (TPS) that became a local transmission for the spread of COVID-19.

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Based on the above-mentioned background, three main questions can be formulated as follows: (1) what is the form of political participation of the people of Denpasar City in the 2020 regional head election?; (2) what factors do influence the political participation of the people of Denpasar City in the 2020 regional head election?; and (3) what is the impact of the political participation of the people of Denpasar City on the 2020 regional head election?

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with the data collection in the forms of observation and documentation. Three theories were used in this study. First, the theory of sovereignty of the people by Thomas Hobbes, who contends that individuals should be willing to surrender the rights of self-government to a single authority as it is legitimate for their interests. If all individuals do this simultaneously, it will create a condition of political governance that is effective, safe, and peaceful for the long term. A distinctive authority relationship will be created, a relationship between rulers and citizens and a distinctive political power will be established. Governing power or sovereignty is the legitimate use of state power. Therefore, it is true from the perspectives of a person or assembly that is declared as the ruler. Citizens have obligations and duties to submit to the ruler since the position of "ruler" is the result of their agreement, and "sovereignty" is the quality of the person who occupies it.

Second, according to Cohen and Uphoff (in Karatasubrata, 1986), participation is only a descriptive term covering various activities and various situations. There is a high probability of an error regarding cause and effect and the scope of its spread. Participation is approached by looking at specific and concrete components. Distinctions between dimensions and contexts of participation are urgently needed. The participation dimension includes ongoing participation, the individual groups involved and how the participation process takes place. Meanwhile, the context of participation focuses on voluntary and spontaneous or mobilized self-will.

Third, the theory of Hegemony by Gramsci which states that ideology does not only exist but also has a very significant influence on historical changes. Gramsci views ideology as a material and political force. Muhadi described Gramsci's ideological conception as an instrument of liberation. From these descriptions, the premise of the importance of ideas and the insufficiency of mere physical strength in socio-political control, so that those who are controlled must not only feel ownership and internalize the values and norms of the ruler. Moreover, they must give approval for their subordination which is mastering with moral and intellectual leadership consensually in character. In this context, Gramsci seems to occupy hegemony and opposes the supremacy of one group over another, which is called domination (Simon, 2000).

DISCUSSION

Public awareness and concern in voter registration are determined by the population administration. The large number of citizens who do not have a population identity and chaotic population administration causes low political participation in the community. The traditional structure of society is hard to deal with the bureaucracy, especially if it is deemed not necessary. The bureaucratic structure that is still considered too convoluted and requires money to take care of public administrative interests also causes people to be reluctant to deal with the bureaucracy. Likewise, in responding to the registration of candidates for regional head and deputy regional head, not all political parties participating in the 2020 election which are entitled to participate in the Regional head election, attended the delivery of votes and seats held by the KPU in Denpasar. Until the determination of candidate pairs by the KPU in Denpasar, among 20 parties participating in the 2019 election, only 7 political parties who won seats in the Denpasar House of Representative participated in the candidacy, either from parties that had met the 20% seat requirement in the 2019 election or were a combination from a political party.

The campaign, which is a space for candidates to convey their vision, mission, and to show their influence to constituents, was carried out in a different way due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Campaign procedures and limiting crowds or involving large numbers of masses, as well as closed meetings are done to a maximum of 50 people and keep a minimum distance of 1 meter. The campaign is more directed at virtual world mode or social media. Candidates for regional heads and deputy heads or campaign teams can create official social media accounts for a maximum of 20 official accounts for all regional head election applications, 30 official accounts for all provision regional head election applications for campaign purposes and must be registered with the KPU. Candidate debates are held in a different way, where candidate supporters enter a restricted database and must follow health protocols.

During the voting, the voting areas (TPS) in accordance with the aesthetics of the community. TPS is made up of local cultural arts as a characteristic of Balinese people and people who exercise their voting rights come to the TPS wearing traditional clothes. The implementation of health protocols in the voting areas is also very strict. For instance, the voters who come to the voting areas are scheduled to avoid crowds and accumulation of voters. Officers and voters are required to wear masks, checking body temperature, and washing their hands before entering the TPS. After voting, vote counting was carried out in an orderly manner witnessed by the witnesses of each candidate and the local community. Until the ratification of the elected regional head and deputy regional head on January 23, 2021, there have been no lawsuits from the participants or the community.

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The COVID-19 pandemic that hit Indonesia in early March 2020 caused an economic and financial downturn. All parties panicked in facing an outbreak that had never been predicted and had never been anticipated before. The government makes a changing policy which creates a crisis of public trust in the government. The government's appeal to stay at home has been understood as a prohibition not to come to the voting areas. The economic growth of Bali Province, which had reached its lowest low point of minus 12%, was also a factor that greatly influenced the political participation of the people of Denpasar City. Bali Province is very dependent on the contribution of tourism for the continuity of its development. The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the Balinese people. All tourism-related workers are laid off, people's incomes decline, unemployment increases followed by increased crime. This psychological factor also affects people's political participation, because they prioritize fulfilling their economic interests rather than being involved in bureaucratic and political affairs. Money politics also occurs in *dharma asylum* visits made by candidates to the public.

From sociological factors, the people of Denpasar City, which consist of various ethnicities, cannot be separated from patronage, and they seek recognition and protection through *puri* groups. Psychologically, the people of Denpasar City are traditional people who have emotional ties to a political party. Family is also a factor that largely determines the pattern of forming political participation for an individual. Likewise, there are not a few clan groups in the city of Denpasar who express their support for candidate pairs. Regional head election which is carried out directly has an impact on party decisions on a national basis. The hegemony of the Central Executive Board (DPP) towards party officials in the regions in the nomination of regional heads and deputies existed.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

People's political participation is a people's political right that derives from the inherent dignity of humans. Every member of society who participates in the process through elections, is motivated by the belief that with elections, their interests are accommodated in the existing political institutions or are at least taken care of. The 2020 regional election of Denpasar City is an arena for competition and a place for the growth of competition between individuals who are qualified, have high morality and are supported by adequate leadership capabilities. Each public office is an arena of competition that is fairly contested and involves every citizen without discrimination of racial, ethnic, religious, class and other stereotypes. The political participation of the people of Denpasar City in the 2020 regional head election is appreciated and given a special place for those who have the capability and competence to become leaders. The right to be elected and to vote is a political right that is owned by all citizens without exception.

The regional head election of Denpasar City on December 9, 2020 was held when the COVID-19 pandemic hit almost the entire world with various obstacles, limitations, and shortcomings held in its spirit, so that government reform is in accordance with the mechanisms supported by government regulation number 2 of 2020 concerning regional head election. Despite the various pros and cons, in general, it went well and there was no spread of the local transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic. The structural conditions of the people of Denpasar City which include social and economic factors, where they are still in economic trouble due to the prolonged Covid-19 pandemic, causes the people of Denpasar City to place more importance on meeting their economic needs rather than being involved in political affairs.

Meanwhile, the cultural condition of the people of Denpasar City, which consists of various ethnicities and religions, is very dependent on traditional figures. The people of Denpasar City cannot be separated from the patrimonial culture, in which they function the figures of the *puri* and *geria* as patrons who provide protection in the form of power or attention to material assistance. While the community as a client provides loyalty, support, or contribution of resources in the form of manpower. The cult of the individual cannot be separated from the political participation of society.

The 2020 regional head election has an impact on the relationship between political parties at the regional level and the central level, in which the central executive board always exercises hegemony towards regional party administrators in providing support recommendations for regional head candidates. Meanwhile, for the government, although many doubted its capabilities, however, it was more democratic, accountable, and supported by all levels of society. For the people, the regional head election has an immediate impact on the culture of education and political socialization because the community has accepted the norms, belief systems, and values in the regional head election stages.

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