Volume 3, No. 3 March 2025
p-ISSN 3032-3037 | e-ISSN 3031-5786

ADVANCES IN SOCIAL HUMANITIES RESEARCH

THE DYNAMICS OF CONSTITUTIONAL LAW AND THE CHALLENGES OF DEMOCRATIC PRACTICES IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The development of constitutional law in Indonesia has significantly transformed since the 1998 reform, especially through amendments to the 1945 Constitution aimed at strengthening democracy, the rule of law, and government transparency. However, challenges persist in fully realizing democratic principles and good governance, including political oligarchy, biased election organizers, weak checks and balances between state institutions, money politics, and the high presidential threshold, which hinder fair political competition. This research aims to analyze the dynamics of constitutional law in Indonesia, identify challenges in the practice of democracy, and formulate the reconstruction of an ideal constitutional legal system to strengthen the rule of law and substantive justice. Using the normative juridical and empirical approaches, this research examines the applicable regulations and compares them with the constitutional system in several other countries. The results show that reforming the electoral system, strengthening the independence of the EMB, and increasing the effectiveness of law enforcement are the main steps needed to improve the constitutional law system in Indonesia. As a solution, this study recommends the reconstruction of constitutional law regulations that are more responsive to the challenges of the times by emphasizing the strengthening of the supremacy of the constitution, improving the electoral system, and increasing transparency and accountability in government. The novelty of this research lies in analyzing the weaknesses of the post-reform constitutional legal system and strategic proposals to build a more substantial and equitable democracy. With a more comprehensive legal reform, Indonesia is expected to build a more inclusive, accountable, and democratic system based on the rule of law.

Keywords: Constitutional Law, Democracy, Elections, Rule of Law, Political Oligarchy, Constitutional Reform, Checks and Balances

Introduction

Constitutional law in Indonesia underwent a major transformation after the 1998 reform, which was marked by the amendment of the 1945 Constitution in 1999-2002 (Reyhan et al., 2024). These amendments brought about fundamental changes in the structure of government, the electoral system and the relationship between state institutions. One of the most significant changes was the shift from a centralized system of government to a more democratic and decentralized system (Djumadin, 2022), with the aim of providing wider space for public participation in political and governance processes.

In addition, reform also gave birth to various new institutions, such as the Constitutional Court (MK), which is tasked with guarding the constitution and resolving election disputes, and the General Election Commission (KPU), which is an independent election organizer (Eddyono, 2016; Kristian Siburian, 2023). Local governments have also gained broader authority through decentralization and regional autonomy, as stipulated in Law Number 23/2014 on Regional Government (Fauzi, 2019). This aims to bring public services closer to the community and reduce the dominance of the central government in decision-making.

However, while constitutional law reform has structurally strengthened democracy, its implementation still faces challenges. One of the main problems is political corruption, which is still rampant, both in the legislative process, public policy, and in the electoral system. Elections, which are supposed to be an instrument of democracy, are often characterized by money politics, nepotism, and the dominance of political oligarchs, leading to inequality in access to public office (Sahdan et al., 2019).

In addition, Indonesia's electoral system still faces challenges in its effectiveness and fairness. Although direct elections have been implemented to elect the president, regional heads and legislative members, there are still debates over nomination mechanisms, high presidential thresholds and weak oversight of money politics. The non-neutrality of the election organizers is also a recurring issue in every election, with the KPU and Bawaslu often accused of not being independent or under political pressure.

On the other hand, decentralization, which is supposed to strengthen local governance, often faces challenges in the form of overlapping authority between central and local governments, weak capacity of local apparatus, and the emergence of corrupt practices at the local level. Several elected regional heads have been implicated in corruption cases, which shows that the decentralization system still needs improvement in order to not only provide authority, but also ensure accountability of local governments.

In addition to problems in the governance and electoral systems, the mechanism *checks and balances* between state institutions is still not optimal. On the one hand, the DPR has the authority to oversee the executive, but in practice the oversight function is often weakened by the political relationship between the executive and the legislature, especially in coalition government systems. In addition, the independence of judicial institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court, is also often questioned due to allegations of political intervention in several important decisions.

Based on these various problems, this research aims to analyze the dynamics of constitutional law in Indonesia, identify challenges in the practice of democracy, and formulate the reconstruction of an ideal constitutional legal system to strengthen democracy based on the rule of law and substantive justice. By understanding the existing weaknesses and comparing with state administration practices in other countries, it is hoped that a more appropriate solution can be found to build a stronger and more equitable democratic system in Indonesia....

Reseach Methods

This research adopts a normative juridical method with an empirical approach to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implementation of regulations in practice (Fajar & Achmad, 2010; Ibrahim, 2006; Soekanto & Mamudji, 2011; Suhaimi, 2018). The normative approach in this research is conducted through a review of various relevant laws and regulations, including the 1945 Constitution, the Election Law, the Local Government Law, and other regulations related to democracy and human rights. Meanwhile, the empirical approach is used to analyze how these legal provisions are applied in practice and identify various challenges that arise in their application.

In analyzing the issues studied, this research is based on several main theoretical frameworks. First, the Theory of Popular Sovereignty, which emphasizes that in a democratic system of government, public participation must be guaranteed in every political decision-making process. Second, the Supremacy of Law Theory, which emphasizes that the law must serve as the main instrument in governing to prevent abuse of power and ensure justice and order. Third, Lawrence M. Friedman's Legal System Theory, which provides a perspective on legal effectiveness by considering three main elements, namely the legal structure, legal substance, and legal culture that develops in a country. By using this approach, this research is expected to provide a clear picture of the relationship between existing regulations and the reality of their implementation in state life.

Results and Discussion

The Dynamics of Post-Reform Constitutional Law

The 1998 Reformasi was a turning point in the development of constitutional law in Indonesia. It was marked by the amendment of the 1945 Constitution, which was carried out in four stages (1999-2002). These amendments changed many aspects of Indonesia's constitutional system, including the strengthening of the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and the decentralization of power.

Before the reformation, Indonesia embraced a centralized system of government with very dominant executive power (Sofian, 2022). The President had broad authority without an adequate checks and balances mechanism (Kurniawan, 2018). After the reform, the constitutional system underwent fundamental changes with the establishment of the Constitutional Court (MK) as a guardian of the constitution, direct elections for the

president and regional heads, and an increase in the role of the DPR and DPD in overseeing the government.

However, although the constitutional amendment has brought significant structural changes, its implementation still faces various challenges. One of the main challenges in implementing the constitutional amendments is the imbalance in the system of checks and balances. The amendments have given the House of Representatives (DPR) greater authority to oversee the executive branch, hoping to improve government transparency and accountability. However, in practice, the DPR's oversight function is often undermined by the political dynamics within the government.

Political coalitions formed in government often make parliament lose its independence in overseeing the executive. As a result, some strategic policies are dominated by the executive, while parliamentary criticism of government policies is minimal. This situation can potentially create a concentration of power in the hands of the executive and reduce the effectiveness of the checks and balances system.

On the other hand, judicial institutions such as the Constitutional Court (MK) and the Supreme Court (MA) also face independence challenges in carrying out their functions as guardians of the Constitution. Allegations of political intervention in several important decisions show that there are still gaps in ensuring the neutrality of judicial institutions in guarding the Constitution and the rule of law.

In addition to challenges in checks and balances, another problem that arises in implementing constitutional amendments is the imbalance in the system of decentralization and regional autonomy (Nurmandi et al., 2021). Reforms that promote decentralization aim to strengthen local governments and improve public services more effectively. However, in practice, there are overlapping authorities between the central and local governments, leading to administrative conflicts in various public policies.

The disagreement in the division of authority between the central and local governments often hampers the effectiveness of the implemented policies. Many regional policies collide with national regulations, causing legal uncertainty for communities and businesses. As a result, the main objective of decentralization, namely regional empowerment, is often disrupted by regulatory disharmony between the central and regional governments.

In addition, political corruption at the local level is a serious problem that hampers the success of decentralization. Many regional heads have been implicated in corruption cases due to the weak supervisory system in local government. This factor shows that decentralization has not been fully matched by a strong supervisory system, which risks exacerbating the abuse of power at the local level.

In addition to checks and balances and decentralization challenges, regulatory weaknesses in the electoral system are major obstacles to implementing constitutional reform (Thalib, 2017). The direct elections introduced post-reform aimed to increase political participation and strengthen government legitimacy. However, this mechanism also opened up opportunities for money politics and political oligarchy, which became stronger in the electoral process.

One glaring problem is the high presidential nomination threshold, which inhibits the emergence of alternative leaders. A high nomination threshold strengthens the dominance of large parties in the election, while small parties or independent candidates find it difficult to compete fairly. As a result, the electoral system does not fully provide space for diverse political choices and can potentially reduce the quality of democracy.

In addition, the abuse of authority by election organizers, such as the General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu), shows that supervisory mechanisms still need to be strengthened. Several cases that have surfaced in the organization of elections indicate allegations of non-neutrality and lack of accountability in the management of the electoral process. Therefore, electoral regulations need to be improved to guarantee the independence of electoral institutions and create a more transparent and fair electoral system.

While changes in Indonesia's constitutional law have brought much progress in terms of democracy and the rule of law, challenges in implementing checks and balances, decentralization, and electoral regulation remain major obstacles that need to be addressed. If these challenges are not properly addressed, the potential for abuse of power, administrative conflicts, and weakening of the quality of democracy will continue.

Therefore, more serious efforts are needed to correct these weaknesses through regulatory reform and strengthening state institutions. The government, parliament, and civil society need to work together to ensure that any changes in the constitutional system are in line with the principles of democracy, justice, and the rule of law. Thus, Indonesia can build a stronger, more transparent constitutional system that can ensure the welfare of all its people.

Challenges in Democratic Practice and Constitutional Law Enforcement

The practice of democracy in Indonesia, after more than two decades of reform, still faces various challenges related to the enforcement of constitutional law, strengthening democratic institutions, and the effectiveness of organizing elections (Tarigan, 2024). Although various regulations have been updated to strengthen the democratic system, the reality shows that there is still a gap between legal norms and their implementation. This challenge not only affects the quality of democracy but also hinders the achievement of the principle of the rule of law, which should be the main foundation of democratic governance.

One of the fundamental problems that continues to hamper the development of democracy in Indonesia is the strengthening of political oligarchy in various aspects of government and elections. The existing political structure allows certain elite groups to control the course of government and monopolize access to political and economic resources. One of the main factors that strengthen this oligarchy is the high presidential threshold, which ultimately narrows the opportunities for independent candidates or small parties to compete in elections.

As a result of the dominance of this political oligarchy, the quality of democracy has been degraded. Political decisions are more often determined by the interests of

certain groups rather than the aspirations of the people at large. In addition, leadership regeneration has also become increasingly limited, as political dynasties and economic elites continue to dominate elections, leaving the public with little choice in determining truly competent leaders. Not only that, the high political costs in the current electoral system also encourage the practice of money politics and power transactions, which further distances elections from the principles of fairness and openness.

In addition to the dominance of political oligarchy, another challenge in the practice of democracy in Indonesia is the problem of integrity and neutrality of election organizers (Nugroho & Sukmariningsih, 2020). As the main pillars in ensuring the implementation of transparent and fair elections, the General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) have a crucial role. However, in recent elections, the independence of these two institutions has often been questioned due to potential political interference and a lack of transparency in decision-making.

Non-neutrality in the nomination and verification process of political parties is one of the main problems hamper public trust in the electoral management body. Some decisions made by the KPU and Bawaslu seem to be influenced by certain political interests, thus creating inequality in the treatment of election participants. In addition, the lack of sanction mechanisms against election violations, such as money politics and misuse of state facilities by incumbent officials, further shows the gaps in the election monitoring system.

Limited public access to information also worsens election administration transparency. The lack of openness in the vote recapitulation process and complaint mechanisms makes it more difficult to conduct independent oversight of the elections. As a result, many cases of alleged election fraud are not handled effectively, further eroding public confidence in electoral democracy in Indonesia.

In addition to the problems of political oligarchy and the neutrality of election organizers, rampant political corruption and weak rule of law continue to haunt Indonesian democracy. Although anti-corruption regulations have been widely implemented, corrupt practices remain a systemic problem that hampers the effectiveness of the constitutional system. Many executive and legislative branch officials are involved in corruption cases related to project procurement, political bribery, and misuse of public funds.

In addition, various fundamental weaknesses still worsen the situation in the context of constitutional law enforcement. One of them is political intervention in the judiciary, which has caused some court decisions to appear unindependent. When the judiciary does not have full autonomy in its duties, justice becomes difficult to realize, and the law loses its usefulness as an instrument to uphold social justice.

In addition to political intervention, the weak checks and balances mechanism is also a major factor hindering the rule of law. The constitutional system is supposed to ensure that any executive action that could potentially violate the Constitution is subject to strict oversight. However, in practice, the oversight mechanism is still very limited, so

many controversial policies can still be implemented without effective control from the legislative and judicial institutions.

Furthermore, inconsistency in sanctioning law violations is also an issue that needs serious attention. Several corruption cases involving high-ranking officials often receive lighter sentences than those involving lower-level officials. This creates inequality in applying the law, which reinforces the perception that the law in Indonesia still tends to be sharp downwards but blunt upwards.

From the perspective of the Supremacy of Law Theory, the success of a country's democracy is highly dependent on how the law is enforced fairly and without discrimination. Therefore, strengthening an independent legal system is urgent. The reform of law enforcement agencies should be directed at eradicating political intervention in the judicial system and increasing the effectiveness of checks and balances mechanisms in government.

On the other hand, oversight mechanisms for public officials also need to be strengthened to ensure that actions that contravene democratic principles are subject to immediate legal action. This can be done by establishing independent oversight institutions that have greater authority in overseeing government transparency, the organization of elections, and the integrity of the judiciary.

With reforms in the legal and democratic aspects, it is hoped that the challenges that have hindered the effectiveness of the constitutional system can be minimized. If these steps are implemented consistently, Indonesia will be closer to a more transparent, accountable and equitable democratic system for all its people.

Regulatory Reconstruction to Strengthen Democracy and Constitutional Law in Indonesia

Based on the various problems identified in the practice of democracy and constitutional law in Indonesia, regulatory reconstruction is needed to strengthen the foundations of democracy and ensure a stronger rule of law. This reform aims not only to correct weaknesses in the electoral system but also to optimize the role of the EMB and improve the effectiveness of law enforcement in the constitutional system. Thus, various strategic recommendations are needed to create a more democratic, transparent and accountable constitutional legal system.

One of the main steps in regulatory reconstruction is reforming the electoral system to make it more democratic and inclusive (Azhar, 2019). So far, the high presidential threshold has become an obstacle for independent candidates and new parties to participate in elections. Therefore, lowering the presidential threshold is a necessary step to make political competition more open and fair for all parties.

In addition, regulations against money politics must also be strengthened. The practice of money politics not only undermines the integrity of elections, but also strengthens political oligarchies that limit people's access to more qualified leadership (Agus Dedi, 2022; Firdaus Arifin, 2025). For this reason, sanctions against perpetrators

of money politics must be toughened, accompanied by a stricter monitoring system for the sources of campaign funds.

In addition, transparency in every stage of the election must also be improved. The process of political party verification, nomination, and vote counting must be conducted openly, involving public participation and independent monitors to prevent fraud. With these reforms, it is hoped that the electoral system in Indonesia can better reflect the principles of honest, fair and competitive democracy.

In addition to reforms in the electoral system, institutional strengthening of the EMB is also a crucial aspect of regulatory reconstruction. The General Election Commission (KPU) and the Election Supervisory Body (Bawaslu) must operate independently and free from political intervention. One important step in realizing this is to ensure that the recruitment process of KPU and Bawaslu commissioners is open, transparent, and based on competence, not political interests.

Furthermore, the election monitoring system also needs to be strengthened. So far, there are still many loopholes that allow election violations to occur without clear consequences. Therefore, the role of independent institutions in monitoring the performance of election administrators must be strengthened, both through the involvement of civil society organizations and through direct supervision by authorized state institutions.

In addition, the sanction system for election violations must also be reformed to have a deterrent effect. Currently, many election violations are only subject to light administrative sanctions without strict legal consequences. For this reason, it is necessary to apply heavier penalties for violators, either in the form of large fines, disqualification, or criminal sanctions if necessary. With these reforms, it is hoped that the implementation of elections in Indonesia can be more professional, transparent and free from fraud.

In addition to improving the electoral system and strengthening the EMB, regulatory reconstruction should also focus on improving the rule of law in the constitutional system. One of the main steps in this regard is to strengthen the role of the Constitutional Court (MK) as the guardian of the constitution. In order for the Constitutional Court to carry out its functions optimally, it needs to ensure that every decision it makes is not influenced by certain political interests, so that its decisions truly reflect the principles of justice and legal certainty.

In addition, the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies must also be improved. Currently, there are still many challenges in ensuring the independence and professionalism of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), the Attorney General's Office, and the Police. Therefore, reform within law enforcement agencies is crucial so that they can act without political pressure and are truly oriented towards fair law enforcement.

On the other hand, the checks and balances mechanism between state institutions also needs to be strengthened. Parliament must be more optimal in carrying out its oversight function over the executive and the judiciary, so that policies taken are truly in line with democratic principles and the constitution. With more effective checks and

balances, abuse of power can be prevented, and the principle of the rule of law can be more consistently upheld.

With this regulatory reconstruction, it is hoped that the constitutional law system in Indonesia can be more democratic, transparent, and uphold the rule of law. Reforms in the electoral system will open wider opportunities for potential candidates to compete fairly. Institutional strengthening of the EMB will ensure that every electoral process takes place honestly and with integrity. Meanwhile, improving the rule of law will ensure that every government policy is based on the principles of justice and does not violate the constitution.

Furthermore, this regulatory reconstruction will also contribute to increasing public trust in democratic institutions. In recent years, the level of public trust in the democratic and legal system has declined due to various problems that have occurred. With systematic and comprehensive reforms, the public will again believe that the state is committed to running a transparent and accountable government.

stronger, fairer, and more people-oriented . If these changes can be implemented properly, then Indonesia will be closer to the ideals of true democracy, where every citizen has equal rights to participate in the political system and government.In the end, this regulatory reconstruction is not only a legal necessity, but also the main foundation for Indonesia to build a democracy

Conclusion

The development of constitutional law in Indonesia has undergone a major transformation since the 1998 reform, especially through the amendment of the 1945 Constitution which aims to strengthen democracy, the rule of law, and a more transparent government system. Nevertheless, in its implementation there are still various challenges that hinder the optimization of democratic principles and good governance. One of the main problems is the dominance of political oligarchy, which causes the electoral system to favor certain elite groups and hampers leadership regeneration. The high presidential threshold and rampant money politics further narrow the space for independent candidates and new parties to compete fairly. In addition, the integrity of the election organizers is also a crucial issue in the democratic system in Indonesia. The non-neutrality of the KPU and Bawaslu, as well as weak oversight of electoral fraud practices, often creates public distrust of the electoral process. This is exacerbated by weaknesses in law enforcement, where many cases of political corruption are not dealt with firmly, thus weakening the principles of the rule of law and transparency of government.

In the context of checks and balances between state institutions, although the DPR has been given greater authority in overseeing the executive, political practice in Indonesia shows that legislative oversight of the executive still tends to be weak, especially due to the influence of political interests in a coalition-based government system. On the other hand, the independence of judicial institutions, such as the Constitutional Court and the Supreme Court, is also often questioned due to allegations of political intervention in several important decisions.

To overcome these various problems, a reconstruction of constitutional law regulations is needed that is more oriented towards substantive democracy and the rule of law. Some recommended strategic steps include reforming the electoral system, by lowering the presidential threshold and strengthening the monitoring mechanism for money politics, strengthening the independence of election organizers, and increasing the rule of law in the constitutional system, so that any violation of the law, including cases of political corruption, can be dealt with fairly and transparently.

With more comprehensive reforms in the constitutional law system, Indonesia is expected to realize a more inclusive, accountable and equitable democracy. The rule of law must be used as the main pillar in managing the government, so that no party is immune to the law, and every policy taken is truly based on the interests of the people. Success in building a strong legal system and a healthy democracy will be the foundation for the nation's progress in facing global challenges in the future.

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