

Strengthening Local Democracy in Asahan Regency in 2024

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Abstract. The purpose of this research is to analyze the strengthening of local democracy in Asahan Regency in 2024. The problem in this study is that the plurality of society in Asahan Regency is often a threat to unity if it is not accompanied by an understanding of democratic values. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen local democracy in Asahan Regency through three aspects, namely equality, freedom and the capacity of democratic institutions. The equality aspect means that every citizen has a fair equality to be able to participate in the government. The aspect of freedom means that every citizen is guaranteed freedom in his activities and expressing his political choices. The capacity aspect of democratic institutions means that state/government administrators must be institutions that protect the freedom and equality of their citizens. The research method used is qualitative descriptive. Data collection using the Focus Group Discussion method. Data analysis by data triangulation. The results of the research, namely the strengthening of local democracy in Asahan district, were obtained by configuring aspects of freedom, equality and capacity of democratic institutions. This configuration turned out to produce quality democracy in Asahan regency which was marked by the high quality of democracy in Asahan regency.

Keywords: Strengthening Local Democracy, Asahan Regency in 2024

1 Introduction

This study aims to analyze the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency in 2024. The problem in this study is that local democracy is often considered as a complement in building a quality democracy. This is marked by the number of cases of golput in regional elections, oligarchy, corruptions, collusion and nepotism at the local level. In reality, local democracy is a basic element needed to be able to sustain national democracy. Therefore, proper local democracy management is needed so that it can produce quality democracy. The value of novelty in this study, namely the quality of local democracy, will be analyzed based on 3 aspects, namely freedom, equality and the capacity of democratic institutions. These three aspects are considered to be able to present the face of local democracy in Asahan Regency. Therefore, this research is interesting to discuss because it discusses and analyzes the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency through these three aspects.

Asahan Regency is one of the areas in North Sumatra that has high community progress. The plurality of society can be seen from various elements such as religion, ethnicity, race and class as a characteristic in democracy. This plurality is then the responsibility of every Indonesian society to be properly maintained. One way to take care of this diversity is by reviving the attitude of tolerance and harmony between communities [1]. However, to be able to revive the attitude of tolerance between religious people in Asahan Regency is not as easy as imagined. The diversity of society is allegedly a weapon to build its local democracy. However, the commitment of the local government of Asahan Regency to be able to maintain harmony between religious communities can be strengthened. One of the ways carried out by local governments is through the implementation of *good governance*. *Good governance* built by the local government of Asahan Regency is one of them is political communication that runs smoothly with the community. This is in line with Larry Diamond's statement about democracy where democracy is a habituation of norms, procedures and expectations about democracy. Political communication is therefore considered an important part of the consolidation of democracy [2].

The peak of the democratic journey in Indonesia is after the reform rolls out. Without realizing it, reform has brought many changes and hopes to the Indonesian nation. But that hope seems to run aground in the middle of the road with many undemocratic practices [3]. There are still many cases of corruption, collusion and nepotism that have an impact on changing the quality of democracy. The severity of corruptions, collusion and nepotism cases is now starting to spread to the local realm. This is what is allegedly able to worsen the quality of democracy. In addition, the strengthening of oligarchy politics is the negative impact of the implementation of post-reform regional autonomy policies. In fact, regional autonomy is a form of local democracy that the central government gives to local governments to be independent. However, the implementation of the regional autonomy policy is actually colored by the amount of corruption that occurs in the regions [4]. The regional elections are supposed to be a medium in carrying out democracy in the local realm, but the direct and simultaneous elections have not been able to answer the above problems. Democracy is actually a fortress to perpetuate dynastic politics, rent politics, corruptions, collusion and nepotism. So that the democracy that is carried out cannot be maximized. This then affects the quality of democracy both in the local and national realms.

As is known, democracy is not something new for the Indonesian people. Even Hatta once said that democracy can be seen from the lives of rural people. This shows that local democracy is an important element for the development of national democracy. At the beginning of its emergence, democracy was interpreted by competition in choosing leaders. This competition is a mandate given by the people to their leaders. However, in Indonesia, this meaning did not take place in real terms during the New Order period. The practice of democracy is actually considered 'different' from the actual concept. Not only in terms of electing leaders, but also in other democratic practices. So that the collapse of the New Order became a new chapter in political dynamics in Indonesia. The transformation of authoritarian government to democracy is considered one of the solutions to solve various problems. Local politics is no exception which is characterized by rampant decentralization. Decentralization as widely as possible is one of the many demands of reform. This is done so that the regions can also feel the meaning

of reform. Decentralization is a policy that provides freedom for regions to be independent. The goal is for each region to be able to manage its own regions without depending on the central government. Decentralization occurs in two forms, namely decentralization of authority and administration. The impact caused is that local political actors are often 'immune' to government intervention [5].

Interestingly, the term democratization is often only aimed at changes that occur at the central level. However, the demand for change in the local realm is actually synonymous with the term decentralization. In fact, the main goal of reform is to make changes both at the central and regional government levels. These changes are certainly one of the important parts of the democratization journey in Indonesia. The condition of the pluralistic Indonesian society is one of the biggest challenges in realizing democratization in the local realm. Moreover, Indonesia lacks experience to be democratic. This is considering that during the New Order period, the democracy that was carried out was a pseudo-democracy. The power, which was still concentrated in the hands of Suharto, actually made Indonesia an oligarchic state controlled by a handful of political elites. This is what makes the experience of democracy so minimal. Democracy during the New Order period was democracy on paper, without any realization in state life.

2 Metode

This study uses a descriptive qualitative research method. Data collection was carried out through the Focus Group Discussion method. The *stakeholders* involved in the Focus Group Discussion are political parties, Asahan district bawaslu, Asahan district regional general election commission (KPUD), Non Governmental Organization (NGO), Asahan district DPRD, Asahan district police and Asahan district community. Data analysis uses data triangulation.

3 Result and Discussion

Quoting Robert Dahl's statement in *On Democracy* that one of the sources of democracy power is legitimacy [6]. The legitimacy of power comes from the equal participation of the community. This is an important element in building a strong and quality democracy. Democracy is not only interpreted about elections and regional elections, but also how the people can participate equally.

This is what Asahan Regency is doing. As one of the regions with a high level of community pluralism, it is important to see the strength of local democracy that is built. The strength of local democracy owned by Asahan Regency is analyzed based on 3 aspects, namely freedom, equality and the capacity of democratic institutions. The following are the results of the analysis carried out based on these three aspects.

Table 1. Aspects and Indicators of Local Democracy in Asahan Regency

| Freedom | Equality | Capacity of Democratic Institutions |
|---------|----------|-------------------------------------|
|---------|----------|-------------------------------------|

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Guaranteed freedom of assembly, expression, association, and opinion by the state apparatus | Gender Equality | Performance of Legislative Institutions |
| Guaranteed freedom of assembly, expression, association, and opinion between communities | Community participation in influencing public policy through Representative Institutions | Performance of Judicial Institutions |
| Guaranteed freedom of belief | Anti-monopoly of economic resources | Neutrality of Election Organizers |
| Guaranteed freedom of assembly, expression, association, opinion, and belief in every policy | Access of the poor to social protection and security | Decision of the State Administrative Court (PTUN) related to the policy Government officials |
| Guaranteed the right to vote and be elected in elections | Equality of Employment Opportunities Between Regions | Guarantee of the government/local government for environmental conservation and community living space |
| Fulfillment of workers' rights | Public access to public information | Budget Transparency in the Form of Provision of State Budget Information by the Government |
| A free press in carrying out its duties and functions | Equality in basic services | Performance of Bureaucracy in public services |
| | | Political Education for Political Party Cadres |

Based on the table, it can be seen that the strength of local democracy built in Asahan Regency consists of 3 aspects, namely freedom (7 indicators), freedom (7 indicators), and the capacity of democratic institutions (8 indicators). These aspects and indicators are an important part of measuring the quality of local democracy in Asahan Regency. Based on the results of the research obtained, it was found that the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency is in the aspect of freedom. The aspect of freedom that can be assessed based on 7 indicators indicates that Asahan Regency has succeeded in guaranteeing the rights and obligations of its people. This can be seen from the last five years, Asahan regency tends to be safe and free from threats or violence against freedom of belief. Although religious conflicts have occurred in Tanjung Balai which is not far from Asahan Regency, in fact it has not had an impact on harmony between religious communities. So that the value for the freedom aspect is obtained quite well. The religious conflict that occurred in Tanjung Balai is one of the representations of tolerance that has experienced escalation [7]. The diversity of society is the reason for a conflict in the name of religion by using violence. According to Sidel, in Indonesia, most cases of religious conflict are colored by acts of violence [8]. If referring to the function of the presence of religion in human life, one of them is to unite all differences towards good. This is

what religious people do not really understand, so they are vulnerable to disputes between religious people. This is supported by the results of the Focus Group Discussion where no acts of threat or violence were found in the issue of freedom of belief. The religious conflicts that have occurred in Tanjung Balai have not had a significant influence on the religious life of the people in Asahan. So that religious freedom in Asahan Regency is considered quite good.

Although the aspect of freedom is the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency, it does not weaken the aspect of equality and the capacity of democratic institutions. In fact, these two aspects are the support in building the strength of local democracy. For example, in terms of gender equality, where the IGS (Gender Empowerment Index) in Asahan Regency is 71.05 (2023). The Gender Empowerment Index has 3 variables that form, namely women's involvement in parliament, women as professionals and women's income contribution.

Women's representation in parliament is not just a trend, but a must. This is because women's representation is one of the tangible manifestations in implementing democratic principles. A good democracy is to provide opportunities for all citizens to participate regardless of differences in race, religion, ethnicity and gender. So that the ongoing democratization process should be able to represent the voices of every existing community group, including women [9]. The presence of women in parliament aims to increase women's political participation. So that later it can produce policies that are in favor of women [10]. In the political paradigm to balance gender equality between men and women, there is still a need for struggle. Women need to be appreciated and affirmed in order to be able to compete in politics. But in reality, the presence of women in parliament is still a difficult problem to solve.

The interesting result in Asahan Regency in terms of equality is that there are still many political parties that do not have female representatives in the Asahan Regency Regional Representative Council. Such as United Development Party (PPP), National Awakening Party (PKB) and Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). This is what makes the value of the equality aspect small when compared to the aspect of freedom. Likewise, the aspect of the capacity of democratic institutions that supports the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency. For example, in terms of budget transparency. One of the forms of transparency is public openness. The spirit of democracy is none other than public openness itself. It is fatal when a country that has established itself as a democracy hides all information that should be freely accessible and consumed by citizens. It will not run every sector of civil society when the state is closed and centralistic. Likewise, public services are also the spirit of democracy. Asahan Regency is one of the regions that has actually begun to improve its area for these three aspects. However, there are still obstacles and challenges faced in improving the quality of local democracy. Therefore, this research was carried out so that the Asahan Regency government is able to improve and improve the quality of its democracy based on the aspects of local democratic strength.

4 Conclusion

Based on the results of the research carried out, it was found that the strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency comes from the aspect of freedom. The strength of local democracy is assessed based on 3 aspects, namely freedom (7 indicators), equality (7 indicators) and the

capacity of democratic institutions (8 indicators). Each aspect has indicators that are supporting elements. So it was found that the aspect of freedom is the greatest strength of local democracy in Asahan Regency. This is supported by one of the indicators of freedom and harmony between religious communities in Asahan Regency. This indicator is one of the strengths in the aspect of freedom when compared to other aspects.

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