

Political Communications, State, and Institutionalization of Democracy

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Abstract. *The main thesis of this paper is reveals how the process of political communication should take place in order to achieve the idealization of democracy in accordance with the objectives of post-collapse reform of the authoritarian new order era. After nearly 18 years of reformation, substantial issues and basic problems still seem to burden the government. On the other hand, political democratization process seems to be influenced by the old pattern. This paper elaborates how the role of political communication in the process of democratization has been going on. The data obtained through documentation studies from various sources. The results of the study indicate that a state that should be positioned as the main actor in the process of political communication is often overlooked because of the large number of noise that caused by the main message of the state which is not well conveyed. As the result, the institutionalization of democratic values is still not the main commitment of the political parties. In the future, this country needs a strategy that puts the state both as a communicator and a communicant, so that the consolidation of democracy can be realized soon.*

Keywords: *democracy, institutionalization, political communication, political parties, state*

Abstrak. *Tesis utama tulisan ini adalah bagaimana proses komunikasi politik berlangsung agar tercapai demokrasi yang ideal sesuai dengan tujuan reformasi pascaruntuhnya era Orde Baru yang otoritarian. Setelah hampir 18 tahun Orde Reformasi bergulir dengan dinamika politik yang cukup progresif, berbagai persoalan substansial masih membebani pemerintahan. Di sisi lain, proses demokratisasi politik juga tampak masih dipengaruhi pola lama. Tulisan ini mencoba mengelaborasi peran komunikasi politik dalam proses demokratisasi yang selama ini berlangsung. Data diperoleh melalui studi dokumentasi dari berbagai sumber. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa negara yang selayaknya diposisikan sebagai aktor utama dalam proses komunikasi politik, seringkali terabaikan karena banyaknya gangguan (noise) yang mengakibatkan pesan-pesan utama negara tidak tersampaikan dengan baik. Akibatnya, pelebagaan nilai-nilai demokrasi belum menjadi komitmen utama partai politik. Ke depan, diperlukan strategi komunikasi politik yang memosisikan negara sebagai komunikator, sekaligus komunikan, agar konsolidasi demokrasi dapat segera terwujud.*

Kata kunci: *demokrasi, komunikasi politik, negara, partai politik, pemilu, pelebagaan nilai*

INTRODUCTION

The title of this paper covers three main concepts, namely political communication, state and institutionalization of democratic values. The author tries to illustrate how the position of the state in the context of political communication plays a role in institutionalizing the values of democracy in this country.

The main reason for this topic is based on the writer's understanding in looking at how the actual political communication process in Indonesia, especially after the fall of new order era regime that tends to be authoritarian. Like the application of the economic system, which tends to be pseudo capitalism (Kunio, 1986), the political communication system of the New Order era also tends to be one-way and top-down communication. Generally, characteristic of the New Order regime's power is a bureaucratic polity (Jackson and Pye, 1978); corporatist authoritarianism (Robinson, 1993); state officials (Mcvey, 1982); and neo patrimonialism (Crouch, 1968).

In the reform order era (started in 1999) the arrangement of the democratic system is quite dynamic. In this era, the state tries to organize the system of governance in almost all aspects of life. One of them is through the arrangement of a direct election system to get a national leader (presidential and vice-presidential election) or regional leader (governor, mayor, district head), using the principle of one person one vote one value. In addition to the electoral system, there is also a reform of party system.

Along with the election system and party system arrangement, the political communication process in the reform era is quite dynamic, as evidenced by the revamping of the press system that allows people and press institutions to have freedom of expression, and produce many broadcast regulations.

On the other hand, the process of

political communication in the reform era is very different from the previous regime era. Now with the massive uses of information and communication technology through social media, it allows every citizen and institution to become a political communicator. In addition to the massive and intensive use of social media, conventional mass media is still widely used in the process of political communication. The problem is, however, there is a phenomenon of print and visual mass media that are tend to be controlled by owners of capital and business actors who also practice as a politician. This phenomenon is dangerous because the politician can make policies that tend to be more business-oriented and ignoring the interests of the people.

In the era of the New Order regime, with the full support of the three pillars of ABG (ABRI-Bureaucracy and Golkar), Soeharto was very good in controlling the state by tightly dividing the role of citizens. In the New Order era, Soeharto was able to organize who acted as a politician, who was the businessman, who was the organizer of the state and who played as ordinary people passively.

In the reform era, the wave of change has hit almost every aspect of life in this country, but unfortunately the prepared regulations are still not able to accommodate the rapid demands of the times. As a result, there is a group of people who in the New Order era only given the role as economic actors now they actually control the mass media industry as well as control political institutions.

It can be observed several capital owners who establish media institutions also establish political parties. This means that capital owners are also involve in the political world in a structured manner. Through the media that they have, they form public opinion in producing important policies. This phenomenon, not in accordance with the values of the democratic system that emphasizes justice for the interests of the people

rather than the interests of the group.

Regarding the context above, simply to understand how the state actually stands specifically to explore the position of the state in the process of political communication in terms of institutionalizing democratic values.

State

States, as exemplified by Benedict Anderson –in his book *Old State, New Society* (1990: 94)– can be illustrated as an organization or company, which in it has a system and a certain procedure to achieve common goals, and for that reason the state also has a self-preserving and aggrandizing impulse, and as a consequence it tends to accumulate impersonal power continuously (building relationships based on a standard system).

To make a better understanding of the state and nation, this paper distinguishes them essentially. The concept of the nation, according to Anderson, is the extrastate solidarity movement (outside the country based on solidarity) with its own goals and interests. This means that the impulses in the nation are not based on corporatist principles. The basic reason for the existence of a nation, as stated by Ruth McVey (1996:11) is to construct “collective commitment, its impulses are egalitarian, its foundation is sentiment” (common promise or responsibility, impulse is equality, essentially a conscience). In other words, the relationships built up within the nation are personal, that is to indulge in feelings and conscience. Thus, the conflation of two words or the concept of “nation” and “state” (nation-state) in essence is not appropriate. However, structurally conflation is “forced” to occur due to sociological-political factors and international performance settings.

This is because, on the one hand, the legitimate nation’s community and the right to self-determination has become an acceptable norm in modern life, finding its autonomous gage within

a state “of its own.” On the other hand, a country that can not legitimize its demands for the performance and wealth of the community of the nation solely because of its existence finds the nation as its modern legitimacy, then [t]he nation-state is thus a curious amalgam of the legitimate fictions and the concrete illigimacies.

It can be seen from this context, the “state” is an organization that acts to manage all the economic, political and socio-cultural resources and defenses of the “nation”. To achieve this goal, the “state” must be given political and legal authorities. In this sense, the definition of “state” fits into Max Weber concept. Here it is stated that “state” is a:

[s]et of organizations invested with the authority to make binding decisions for people and organizations juridically located in a particular territory and to implement these decisions using, if necessary, force.

(In Dietrich Rueschemeyer and Peter B. Evans, “The State and Economic Transformation: Toward an Analysis of the Conditions Underlying Effective Intervension”, in Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer & Theda Scocpol, (eds.), *Bringing the State Back In* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 46-47)

In summary, the “state” is a “managerial organization” that is given political and legal authorities to manage, develop and sustain the resources of a “nation”. In carrying out these tasks, the given authority includes the organization of the whole society to create socio-economic and social political order through administrative engineering and the legal system. In the international context, the “state” becomes the official representative of a “nation” in the whole of global relations. A great authority in the domestic level and becoming the official representative in the international level this “state” becomes the main actor

in a “nation-society”. The advancement and economic prosperity of a “nation”, thus, depends on the performance of the “state” greatly.

Political Communication

Discussing about political communications is talking about the function of political system, as stated by Gabriel Almond in his book *The Politics of The Development Area* (1960: 45):

All of the functions performed in the political system, political socialization and recruitment, interest articulation, interest aggregation, rule making, rule application, and rule adjudication, are performed by means of communication.

This means that the function of the political system that includes political socialization, political education, recruitment and others can only take place using tools of political communication.

Conceptually, there are three main elements in the process of forming political action namely: (1) political organizations (such as government, political party, individual, pressure group, public organization, terrorist, etc), (2) audiences (the purpose of the political communication process is to persuade and the target of this persuasion is the audience which is the second element, which without this, the process becomes meaningless. Regardless of the size and nature of these audiences, all political communication is aimed at generating an impact on the recipient of the message), and (3) is the media (which consists of print media, broadcast media, and internet media). In the political system of democracy media serves as a channel for political communication that comes from outside the media itself, and also as a sender of political messages constructed by journalists. Political actors must use the media to communicate their message to the desired audience. Political activities, policy, campaign, and pressure group

programs effectiveness are depending on how they are reported and accepted messages that are delivered by the media to the potential audiences. If audiences did not receive the political message, the political activity is meaningless.

On the other hand, in the context of elections as a manifestation of the democratic political system, there are three main conditions:

Constitutionality, meaning that there should be a set of approved procedures and rules to govern the elections.

There must be participation, which means the real participation not political mobilization,

There must be a rational choice, meaning there must be a choice (candidates of more than one with a good quality) and the ability of the people to use their choice rationally.

Regarding this, it is reasonable why the importance of knowledgeable and informed voters argue that democratic politics should be implemented in public areas (in contrast to autocratic regimes where politics is kept secret from the people). The knowledge and information on which citizens' political choices should be spread freely and visible to all. In the process of democracy, citizens who have the right to vote should act collectively in making decisions about who is entitled to lead them.

All opinions of these individuals join and form what is called public opinion. This public opinion according to Jurgen Habermas was formed in the public sphere which is made up of the communications institutions in society, and are used to spread facts and opinions and gather knowledge as the basis of collective political action; in this context, the mass media become the source and focus of shared experience for society, for gathering of opinions, until a public opinion was formed.

From the explanation above, in Indonesia context, is the political

discussion communicated through the media meets the ideal terms? It is naive for us to understand that the media and politics work perfectly. Therefore it is important for us to understand what deficiencies exist in the process of political communication and how significant these deficiencies are.

Brian McNair (2007) points out one critique of liberal democracy in the context of political communication is the failure of Education,

“One promise that liberal democracies can not fulfill is the failure of the educational system to produce rational voters, this failure is reflected in the development of apathetic characteristics of politics in major democracies. Those with multiple suffrages have refused to exercise the right.” (*An Introduction to Political Communication*, 4th ed, Routledge, 2007: 19)

Furthermore, McNair defines political communication as a deliberate communication of politics. This includes:

All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and political actors in order to achieve certain goals.

Communication addressed to these actors from non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists.

Communication of these actors and their activities, contained in news, editorials, and other discussions about politics in the media.

Democracy

In the literature review, the most widely understood concept of democracy is the statement of Abraham Lincoln, a system of the government which organized from the people, by the people, and for the people.

In addition Samuel Huntington puts the essence of democracy into technical decision-making through elections, “Democracy exists if the most powerful collective decision-makers in a system are selected through a fair, honest and

regular elections and in that system the candidates are free to compete for votes and most of the adult population can vote” (“Democracy’s Third Wave”, *Journal of Democracy*, Spring 1991)

Meanwhile, Aa Bambang A.S. in his article entitled “Demokrasi, Komunikasi Politik Indonesia dan Globalisasi (Identifikasi dan Harapan Perencanaan Ulang)”, states that, today, Indonesia really adopts a Western-style liberal democracy (communication). No one politician who is a “major” political communicator realizes much less wants to explore that we actually have a democratic character of its own. In other words, none of our politicians become statesmen let alone ideologues. They are more concern with and maintain power by exploiting the weakness of Western democracy while at the same time utilize the people who still do not understand exactly what the democracy is. They do not want to educate the people, but prefer to master it, or in other words, they choose to be communicators who dictate and manipulate the state of political communication. (*Jurnal Studi Komunikasi & Media*, Vol. 19 No. 2, July - December 2015: 303 - 316).

METHODS

This study is a qualitative research paradigm in the form of desk research where the data obtained through observation techniques and literature review from various sources such as Journals articles and articles from mass media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on explanation above, it can be seen that the process of democracy in Indonesia until 2017 has already succeeded in giving five presidents to run the organization with various formulations of strategy and policy. The success of the democracy process is also one of the indicators that can be seen from the success of the direct

presidential elections in 2004, 2009 and 2014. The democratic procedure has been going on in accordance with the rules of legislation and the formation process of the government based on the results of the people's choice. However, it seems that the old political system still strongly influenced in recent political life. Party system is more likely apply oligarchic rather than implement institutional democratic values which in the same time ignore the open and competitive cadres.

Commenting on it, Jimly Asshidiqie, a professor from University of Indonesia, in the Opinion column entitled "The Irony of Political Parties", (*Kompas*, Saturday, 22 September 2017), said that "All our political parties tend to grow old, the average leaders are elderly. Mostly of them are 60 years old. The young characters huddled. The regeneration process is not going well and the political party becomes more oligarchic..." "The phenomenon of corruption cases among politicians of political parties and regional heads, one of which can be seen from the 'Operasi Tangkap Tangan' (OTT) by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), becomes an evaluation's indicators for the political parties's performance.

Indonesia Today

Talking about political situation in Indonesia today, it can not be separated from the economic situation. Below is the brief description about the situation of Indonesia economic development today where the state has a powerful role.

European history notes that economic development is essentially created not by individual initiative as is often claimed by the neo-classical. In contrast, due to the state's engineering in creating an economic system that gives a wider place for the development of the capitalist system. Similarly, it also occurs in Asia where the country, especially by imitating Japanese development models -as said by Robert Wade, in his book *Governing Market: Economic Theory*

and the Role of Government in East Asian Industrialization (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1990)- is the party most responsible for economic development in the region (Linda Weiss & John M. Hobson, *States and Economic Development: A Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995).

In the Indonesian context, it has the same pattern; the "state" acting as the main actor in economic development, which has also been clearly demonstrated. This occurred especially during the New Order period (1968-1998), in which the "state" fantastically succeeded in transforming agrarian economic resources, recompensing entirely to the plantation and extractive sector (mining), to the modern industrial economy. The "state" engineering transformation led Indonesia for less than two decades (1968-1986) succeeded in emerging as an economic power since the beginning of independence (Richard Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

But the problem is that this astounding (see Hal Hill, [ed.] *Indonesia's New Order: The Dynamics of Socio-Economic Transformation* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994) economic development is structurally problematic (Richard Robison, *Indonesia: The Rise of Capital*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986)- and rapidly all of its "greatness" is erased by the financial crisis that began in the mid of -1997 and culminated in 1998-1999 (Widigdo Sukarman, "Liberalization: Political-Economic Review of the New Order's Banking Economy", doctoral dissertation, Political and Social Science Program, Department of Social Sciences, Graduate Program of Gajah Mada University, Yogyakarta, 2003).

Regardless of the debate over whether this financial crisis is a failure of the "state" to adapt to the global market system or because of the fragility of the "state" system itself, as Linda Weiss and John M. Hobson in their essay "State

Power and Economic Strength Revisited: What's So Special about the Asian Crisis?", (in Richard Robison, Mark Beeson, Kanishka Jayasuriya and Hyuk-Rae Kim, (eds.), *Politics and Markets in the Wake of the Asian Crisis*. London and New York; Routledge, 2000: 53-74.) inquired, this "catastrophe" becomes so decisive in changing the role of "State" in determining the direction of national economic policy. It is because since then, through the "intervention" of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Indonesia has already began to implement market-oriented economy policy. The essence of this policy is that, as postulated by the Adam Smith, the British great 18th-century economist who is the great role model of today's neo-classical supporters -is the perfect market. (Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Western Thought* (New York; Anchor Books, 2003: 51-83).

This means that the process of distribution and allocation of economic resources will only be effective and efficient through market mechanisms. It is in this context that the term invisible hand, also introduced by Adam Smith, means that any distortion within the mechanism must be avoided by prohibiting "non-market" interventions into market mechanisms. The interference of the "state" in the economy, thus, is considered as a "non-market" force that potentially distorts the market mechanism itself.

Based on description about how state acting as a main actor in economic development, there is a question arise; if the state in the economic context becomes the main actor, then how is the position of the state in the context of political communication? It is important to understand that post-Suharto's era the role of the state is divided radically because of changes in the distribution of political power.

From the political side, Indonesia Post Suharto is a "free and independent" Indonesia. The state no longer has the

ability to limit the political aspirations of the people in coloring the changes. Political legislation which was previously very powerful in favor of state hegemony, now is no longer exist. Any attempt that is made to limit the birth and growth of political parties are seen as an engineering of undemocratic form. The House of Representatives, originally the instrument of democracy in the Suharto Regime, has recently grown into a considerable executive and supervisory power. Civilian Army and Bureaucracy which were in the past became dominant political actors at the moment are encouraged to abandon the practical political arena. The contemporary Indonesian political climate is characterized by two keywords which, according to Robert A Dahl, are at the core of democracy, contestation and participation (*Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition*, New Haven, Yale University, 1971).

The state is no longer the only center of power. As a result of these contestations and participation, new political forces emerged outside the state (non state actors), namely political parties, professionals, businessmen, mass organizations, non-governmental organizations and various interest groups carrying various primordial sentiments.

This fundamental political changing is possible because, on the one hand, the weakening of the role of the government in empowering the country's political and economic resources, while on the other hand, there is the increasing demands of democratization.

After many years the state holds a monopoly of interpretations of democracy, the situation has changed when the reformation era. The reformation era has been initiated by the people themselves which determine how participation should be institutionalized, and what political parties are eligible to involved in the democratic contest.

These changes have implications for different electoral organizers. At

President Soeharto's era, the Political Law severely restricted the number of election participants, but in the 1999 elections that put forward the principle of "luber" (direct, open, free and secret) and "jurdil" (honest and just) no political power capable of preventing euphoria. starting election 1999, we have seen how the fate of a political party is determined. There are several parties that survive because they can compete in a democratic contest, but not a few political parties are bounced, disappearing from political competition.

Furthermore, mass participation was no longer restricted by the electoral organization as it was in the New Order period. The restriction is done by all citizens and social groups that wishing to spoke up their aspirations. With the non-enactment of the Law on Mass Organization (UU No. 5/1985), the government is no longer has a legal basis to regulate mass politics outside of political parties. The state corporatism approach formerly used to cooptate social organization, but since the era of political reform it increasingly unpopular. Even a number of mass organizations that were previously very proud of being a quasi-state power, later sought to sever links with the Suharto's crony and pledged themselves as independent mass organizations. Alternative social forces that in the past have sheltered behind the "red plate" non-governmental (NGO), also shifted colors and have to compete with other radical and progressive new NGOs.

Last but not least, the press - as one of the fourth power branches (the fourth estate) in a democratic political system - is undergoing a very exponential development. Both journalist organizations and the type of mass media with the content of their news are no longer determined by the state. The realm of freedom has been truly enjoyed once President Soeharto is no longer in the supreme power. The fear of mass politics

seems to disappear, once the central forces are displaced. The current optimism is that real democracy must be developed in the place of an authoritarian old system or at least adopting a limited pluralism model. In this context, it is important to understand the role of the state in the process of political communication. When the media has returned to enjoy its freedom, is it enough to push the state as a major political actor.

Conceptually, the media should be seen not only as a channel of political communication but also as an important political actor. They are not only conveying the message, but they are transforming the message through the process of making of the news. In addition, the importance of media in democracy is to oversee and prevent abuse of power. The media is not only providing cognitive knowledge, but also constructing the political realities; determine whether or not an event has a significant impact for their agenda. Audience is given stories that are considered important by the media. That is why, in political communication, the media is not only act as a channel but also as a communicator or a political actor, because through the news they are made, they define the political realities. This is in line with what is stated by Walter Lippmann - in his popular statement: "*world outside and pictures in our heads*", - that the media function as a constituent of meaning and through its interpretation of events that can radically change people's interpretation of a reality and pattern of their actions (1992: 3 - 28). Various forms of political messages are delivered through editorial media. News is represented by journalists, opinion columns, features, public debates in talk shows, political interviews with political figures or candidates, and others. All of them are inseparable from the ideological frames and interests of the media, this is the basic assumption of the theory of the Agenda Setting of McCombs and Shaw in 1972.

State as a Political Actor

Theoretically, a democratic political communication is as stated by Novel Ali in his book “Peradaban Komunikasi Politik”, -(1999) that democratic political communication is a bottom-up communication, not top-down or authoritarian and one-way communication from government to the public.

It is inline with the statement of Yenrizal in his essay, “Budaya ‘Politik Kulit’ dan Komunikasi Politik Demokratis di Indonesia” (Jurnal *MediaTor*, Vol 4 no 1, tahun 2003, p: 151-156) that said it is necessary to initiate a change of political culture on political institutions at both the infra and supra-structural levels, by building democratic political communication through political education. At this point, in my opinion, one of the main subject of political education is the institutionalization of democracy’s values by political parties. It is the main function of political party which is needed to be enhanced to increase the political participation of people. In this context, political party act as a political communicator to support the state become a main actor in the political communication process. This is the challenge for the political party which is now busy in delivering buzz instead of sending a constructive’s political messages.

In this connection, if we refer to what McNair stated that political communication is a deliberate communication by politician actor to convey political messages in order to achieve the purpose of communication in the sense of producing a communication effect, then the state in this case as the main actor not only in the economic process but also the political process, - It is necessary to have a grand design of political communication that is truly effective. That includes the formulation of messages and the selection of appropriate media for each intended audience.

From the explanation above about the role of the state in the process of institutionalizing democracy, and observing the development of behavior and political culture of the elite at this time, the political communication strategy becomes a necessity. Therefore, I argue that to reach the state’s political communication effectively there are formulation of key messages. They are (1) to make the formulation of the main message first, such as institutionalization of democratic values. The second main message is, if in the New Order period which was about stability which was being a paradigm in governing, now (2) the pluralism and implementation of checks and balances should be developed among the three branches of existing powers: the legislative, the executive and the judicative. This has consequences for the realization of a representative body of people with a clearer function. The third main political message which is (3) the realm of branches of power, the government (executive) must really carry out the “mandate of the suffering of the people reform”, that is to overcome economic difficulties and income gap between sectors and among groups. In every event it is necessary -even explicitly- to state that “the State is present” -in the various problems of the nation, giving new promise from the national leadership. The fourth political messages are (4) emphasizing the role of political parties and various pressure groups to become facilitators for the development of civil society. Political parties should not merely serve as a medium for the vertical mobility of their activists, but are sincerely encouraged to develop two main functions: inputs and outputs. The inputs are: articulation and aggregation of interests, socialization and political education of the people, to be proven. The function of outputs in the form of involvement in decision-making and supervision of policy implementation must also be realized.

In addition to the formulation of key messages, the selection of appropriate media according to the capacity of each audience is also to determine the effectiveness of political communication. It means that creating a media regulation based on the interests of the people should be a priority program.

Finally, the state as the main actor should put itself in the position as not only a communicator, but also as a communicant. The main task of the state in political communication poses is not only to speak political messages but also to listen more to people's aspirations.

CONCLUSION

The state must be positioned as the main actor in the process of political communication, so it will not be disturbed by the amount of noise that resulted in the main messages of the state which is not well conveyed. In the future, a political communication strategy is needed which puts the state as a communicator and communicant, so that the consolidation of democracy can be realized soon.

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