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STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AND COMMUNITY POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN SUMEDANG, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Democracy is a system of governance in which elected representatives govern on behalf of the people, upholding principles of freedom, equal rights, and participatory decision-making. Local political participation refers to individuals' engagement in municipal or community decision-making processes through activities such as voting, council meetings, and civic initiatives. This participation plays a crucial role in shaping local policies, governance, and development, ensuring that peoples align with the needs and interests of the community. Study investigated the relationship between democracy and local political participation in Sumedang, Indonesia. Study employs qualitative methodologies, using primary data from in-person interviews with informants and field observations. Secondary data is incorporated into the analysis equally. Purposive sampling was used to select informants, ensuring that individuals completed study-related requirements such as active participation in community activities and an understanding of local political dynamics. Study findings show that the local community recognizes the value of political engagement. However, certain sectors of the community have lost interest in taking into consideration the political process conducted by local governments due to displeasure with government performance and corruption allegations. Local political engagement has increased in Sumedang, Indonesia, as more people participate in elections and democratic processes. Effective democratic involvement is nevertheless restricted by factors including political indifference, uneven representation, and low awareness among the population. The region's democratic engagement can be further increased by bolstering inclusive decision-making, civic education, and transparency.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, Public Participation, Decentralized System, Accountability, Political Activity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a form of government that sets power in the hands of the people, ensuring that leaders are chosen via active public engagement. It is based on the premise that the government is constituted by the people, serves the interests, and is ultimately accountable [1]. Public involvement is an essential component of democracy; a lack of political participation can undermine the democratic process. One of the key markers of a democratic system is the holding of general elections, which allow citizens to exercise the right to vote, elect representatives, and evaluate the performance of government [2]. Elections are used not just to create a government but also to evaluate the efficacy and integrity of leaders. The discoveries of public evaluations have a significant impact on individuals' political careers, determining whether citizens can continue to hold leadership positions in future elections [3]. Democracy in Sumedang, Indonesia, promotes a more inclusive and representative government by allowing for greater public participation in political decision-making. By ensuring that individuals represent the interests and ambitions of the local populace, the procedure strengthens the democratic character of regional political institutions [4]. Furthermore, decentralization, which includes a range of political and economic facets, such as economic decentralization, governance supervision, public service enhancement, local resource management, and deficiency improvement initiatives, is intimately associated with democracy. The Sumedang local government considers choices that are particular to the requirements of the people because of the decentralization of power [5].

In a democracy, the public has the most control, so individuals can freely shape government policies to ensure that choices serve the interests of the general population. To preserve stability and order in government, this influence must be used responsibly and in a planned way [6]. Sumedang's election system has seen substantial changes as an effect of the democratic transition, indicating a move toward more political engagement. Direct elections have given citizens a direct role in the administration by enabling people to choose regional leaders and parliamentary members. The switch from an indirect selection procedure to a direct vote mechanism for the election of regional leaders was a significant advancement [7]. The move empowering residents to directly elect regional leaders marked a pivotal moment in the advancement of local democracy.

In Sumedang, direct local elections, or Pemilihan Kepala Daerah (Pilkada), characterized the spirit of decentralization and democratic transformation. The public's excitement for municipal elections was very strong in the early phases of its implementation. The anticipation stemmed from the belief that a more efficient government could be achieved by selecting regional leaders from the community [8]. Local communities felt more represented and trusted because Indigenous leaders were perceived as being more sensitive to the particular needs and goals of the areas [9]. The belief that leaders with close local associations can be better able to handle urgent regional concerns, expand public services, and improve government generally was the driving force for the move to direct elections.

What makes this research unique compared to other studies is that it does not look at democracy and political participation just in the lead-up to the regional elections but rather as something that occurs in everyday activities. Several other studies have focused more on analyzing political participation during general elections (presidential and parliamentary) and regional head elections. Arniti analyzed Denpasar residents' increasing political participation during the legislative elections [10]. In his research, Liando observed that political participation in Minahasa tends to be dynamic, and political participation is driven more by transactional factors and emotional closeness [11]. In another study, Salim criticized the weakening role of political parties in educating the public despite increased political participation in Tidore City in the 2019 elections. Instead, civil society groups play a role in building public political awareness to influence bureaucratic policies or determine who is eligible to serve in government and legislative bodies [12].

1.1. Objective

The goal is to examine the democratic process in Sumedang, Indonesia, with an emphasis on governance, electoral changes, and public involvement. It attempts to connect attention to how local political institutions and policymaking are affected by decentralization.

1.2. Methodological Approach

Study employs qualitative research methods, with data collected through field observations and direct interviews with various stakeholders, including community leaders, youth organization representatives, and local government officials.

The following informants were interviewed a Community Leader (Founder of Madrasah Kurmatillah), a Local Government Apparatus or Village Government (Mr. Mulyadi and Mr. Dedi),

and the head of Local Youth Organizations (Karang Taruna) in Jatinangor.

The primary data were supplemented by secondary sources such as official documents, voter attendance records, and demographic data. Study investigation was conducted over six months, from August 2017 to January 2018, focusing on suburban communities in Jatinangor and Tanjungsari. Purposive sampling was used to select informants, ensuring that individuals completed study-related requirements such as active participation in community activities and an understanding of local political dynamics. An in-depth understanding of Sumedang's political environment was given by the documentation analysis, which covered a variety of facets of community political engagement.

2. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF DEMOCRACY

Democracy, as a system of governance, is rooted in the principles of popular sovereignty, political participation, and institutional accountability. Classical theorists emphasized the social contract, where government legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed. In the context of Sumedang, Indonesia, democratic decentralization was intended to enhance local governance, ensuring that decision-making aligns with public needs and aspirations [13]. However, declining political participation, rising voter apathy, and governance inefficiencies have challenged the democratic ideal, raising concerns about elite dominance and weakening civic engagement. To strengthen democracy in Sumedang, it is crucial to reinforce inclusive participation, political education, and institutional transparency, aligning democratic practice with its philosophical foundations.

3. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The voluntary acts that the general public takes to influence elections or public policy, either directly or indirectly are referred to as political engagement. Actions include voting in elections, lending support to political campaigns, giving money to a cause or candidate, contacting authorities, petitioning, demonstrating, and working with others on various projects [14]. Since ancient times, political involvement has been a key component of philosophical debates concerning democracy and representative government, giving people a platform to express their opinions. Then, there is a great interest in politics and political activity [15]. To understand why some people choose particular occupations and why others are inactive, scientists search for systematic patterns. In addition to reflecting and influencing the structure of political power, patterns also reflect the political situation.

3.1. Concepts of Democratization and Decentralization

Decentralization and democratization are strategies used by public sector organizations worldwide to address issues. It's inspired by popular dissatisfaction with centralized economic planning, leading reformers to seek decentralization to reduce national government influence and promote democratic governance [16]. Local governments, closer to the people, can better understand the needs and deliver appropriate public services. Debatable methods that question established power structures and establish decision-making authority are decentralization and democratization [17]. Decentralization is a political process that goes beyond local government reform to address general issues, not a technological one. Over the past 60 years, a substantial body of theoretical literature on democratization has emerged, along with various empirical research in contemporary political science [18]. Figure 1 denotes the significance of democratization and decentralization.

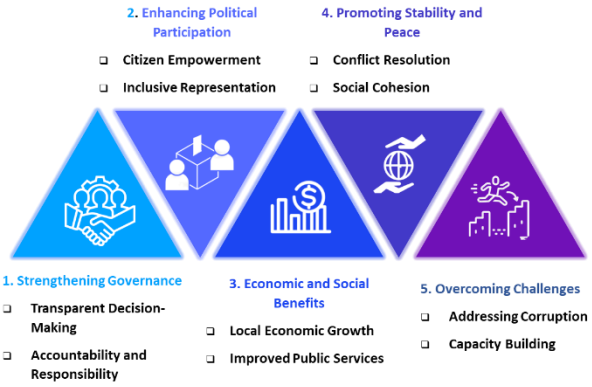

Figure 1: Significance of Democratization and Decentralization.

3.2. Types of Distribution Politics in a Democracy and Decentralised System

Politics distributes goods similarly to markets. Government initiatives provide residents with access to funds, employment, credit, and a wide range of other resources; elected officials give benefits to the preferred constituencies; and political parties hand out anything from pamphlets to trinkets to win votes [19]. Politics can change taxes and transfers to redistribute income around the community. Figure 2 explores various types of distribution politics in a democratic and decentralized system.

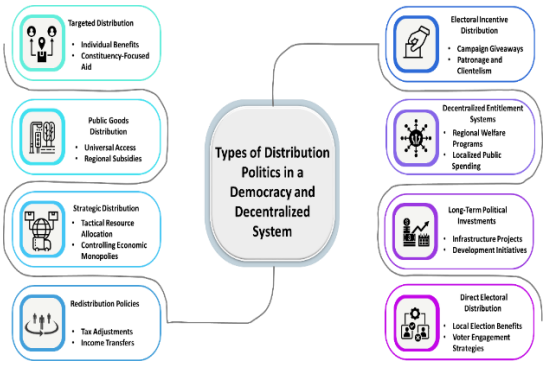

Figure 2: Various Types of Distribution Politics.

Particularly in regions with a sizable disadvantaged population, decentralization enables regional governments to establish entitlement systems. Political distribution of products is becoming more and more significant, and political strategies are linked to the decisions taken by political authorities at various governmental levels. There are several distributive techniques, including the ones that target people and the ones that provide public goods [20]. All contributors can profit from public goods, or individuals can provide subsidies for public spending in more specific geographic areas. Political parties can invest in long-term initiatives by providing tactical distributions on margins. Economic monopolists can control benefits, while incumbents can be controlled [21]. Strategic distribution is crucial for ensuring that the right people receive the items, using various tactics. Direct local elections, or pilates, were introduced as a result of Indonesia's democratization efforts in its first democratic election. The system is a major accomplishment in democratic change as it gives residents the ability to vote for governors, mayors, and district leaders [22]. Direct elections at the municipal level have increased grassroots involvement despite obstacles including clientelistic politics and patronage.

3.3. Official and Community Responsibilities in Achieve Indonesian Democracy

The state's and civil society's involvement in Indonesia's democratic transition is one of the responsibilities that has to be carried out as effectively as feasible. Because the existing state and country, especially the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, are based on these two elements, which have grown to be extremely strong, solid, and formidable. The stability of the democratic system is largely maintained by state initiatives to create a more responsive civil society and uphold democratic ideals based on Pancasila and the Constitution. This led to the emergence of social groups demanding all citizens participate directly in the political process, as seen in the Republic of Indonesia Constitution. In Indonesia, where the majority of voters have similar ideologies, direct democracy is a crucial tool that fosters a steady pattern of liberal viewpoints as well as stability in institutional confidence and public engagement [23]. Because of its long-term benefits, this political system is appropriate for decision-makers looking to enhance democracy through civic intervention. Public engagement and institutional trust are intimately linked to liberal viewpoints and stability; direct democracy is a viable option in Indonesia. Indonesia is not operating fully in line with what the general public and other socioeconomic sectors expect. The Unitary State of the Republic of Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia (NKRI) needs significant progress, and Indonesia's democratic process is far from realizing its full potential. These democratic understandings are based on Pancasila democracy, which is rooted in the character and viewpoint of the Indonesian people [24]. With attempts to achieve excellence for the upcoming, the public and private sectors have been actively participating in Indonesia's democratic process, which has been progressing effectively. The preamble of the Constitution and the Indonesian people’s efforts to accomplish this intention has an impact on the development of democracy in Indonesia.

3.4. Advancement of Indonesia's Democratization Procedure

Accelerated democratization in a republic requires a conducive environment influenced by various factors. Some believe economic factors are the main prerequisites, while others believe a modern industrial society with high economic capacity can create a democratic state. Political experts support this assumption, stating that richer nations have a greater chance of achieving democratization. According to sophisticated concepts, modernization and wealth can bring about democratic-friendly elements, including more urbanization, education, literacy, and mass media development. Empirical evidence, however, contradicts these claims in nations where authoritarianism has persisted for several generations in spite of high levels of per head income and blooming economies [25]. An additional need for democratization is political culture, which clarifies the background and significance of political action. The protestant movement, for instance, has been viewed as impeding democracy, but it also

significantly contributed to the region's resistance against authoritarian rule. The socioeconomic structure of a country also plays a role in the growth of a democratic atmosphere. Different socioeconomic classes can support or oppose democracy, and there are internal factors like the social coating system. However, there is a relativity component; subsequently, democracy can be hampered by the class system that supports it. External factors such as political, ideological, and economic conditions can also affect a country's democracy [26]. Because third-world countries' reliance on the global economic system can result in economic inefficiency and inequality, dependency academics reach inconsistent decisions.

3.5. Indonesia: Transition and Persistence

The South Asian nation of Indonesia has undergone a democratic transition from a centralized, authoritarian government. With competitive general elections, direct mayor elections, and more freedom of speech and assembly, the nation has moved from an oppressive to a democratic government. As a consequence, local reformers were elected, and individuals have significantly improved the communities. Freedom House has declared Indonesia a free and democratic country. The country's transformation has seen significant changes in the relationship between government and citizens, the development of a more vibrant public domain, and the improvement of a more inclusive society. Second, the nation's government has shifted from being very centralized to being decentralized [27]. sub-national governments have been given the authority to provide public services, and local legislative councils Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah (DPRD) are in charge of budgets and rules while accounting for regional requirements and variations. Large-scale social transformation and entrepreneurship by recently founded civil society organizations (CSOs) have also occurred among citizens. The legal foundation for public participation was established with the performance of national regulation on legislative drafting, local government, and participatory planning. Development programs on civil society participation in local governance were started by numerous funders and international organizations.

Anti-political administrative systems have long existed in Indonesia; a hierarchical local administration system was established through the New Order. Growth and stability were given priority in this technocratic approach, which resulted in a culture of upward responsibility, technocratic decision-making, deep-rooted patron-client relationships, and prevalent corruption. Because the Indonesian public service is oriented toward higher levels of authority rather than citizen participation, it is especially unsuited to consolidating democratic decentralization. Indonesia's strong state and long-standing governmental procedures present a significant obstacle to the country's democratic consolidation. People who were trained under the totalitarian government, which has been oriented away from serving the public interest, continue to dominate the bureaucracy. Many officials see citizens as end consumers rather than stakeholders or clients who can be consulted or served, and individuals continue to exploit the positions to pursue their interests rather than those of the citizens [28]. However, there are elements that present a varied but positive image of local politics and governance patterns if one turns attention from the larger political economy to the local level. Evidence suggests that long-standing political ties are being questioned locally, with potentials rooted in freedom of assembly, electoral accountability, and citizen participation emerging. Due to the density of social forces, political recruitment, constituency building, and the translation of national policies into local programs and issues into national ideology, local governance is at the forefront of social and political change in Indonesia currently. Presently Indonesia is a country full of experimentation and innovative forms of governance, like budget hearings, town hall meetings, and public forums. Politics in the area is being revitalized. In Indonesia, CSOs are transforming the interactions with the government in ways that advance the country's decentralized democracy. There is also evidence of new power dynamics, higher accountability standards, and modifications to state policies and procedures.

4. CONCEPT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Municipal resource accountability is crucial for improving services and infrastructure for the poor. Decentralization can lead to better resource use; however, it necessitates an efficient system where all residents, even the impoverished, are informed about policy decisions, can influence decisions, and hold decision-makers accountable, which can be lacking in local governments. A crucial component of governance is accountability, which calls for substantial institutional reforms. It entails recognizing and resolving issues, praising devoted employees, and shielding them from the conduct. It includes public discussion, performance monitoring, government responses to public interests, and

examination of public spending management [29]. Accountability can serve a number of purposes, such as constitutional, legal, administrative, monetary, and political. **There are several ways accountability can be carried out** (i) horizontal accountability, (ii) vertical (downward) accountability, and (iii) vertical (upward) accountability. Accountability is predicated on formal accounting procedures as well as how the general public views what citizens observe occurring. For instance, audited accounts offer a more comprehensive examination of what is readily apparent.

4.1. Horizontal Accountability

In a democratic administration, to be successful, government personnel must answer to elected representatives. Systems for reporting are examples of horizontal checks and balances that are part of institutional forms of accountability. However, insufficient attempts at decentralization frequently result in bureaucratic accounting to elected politicians being weak in local government. When civil officers refuse to accept postings to local government, citizens report to elected officials vertically instead of horizontally. Employees of local governments sometimes lack the necessary skills, which leads to wrongdoing and problems with internal accountability, especially in accounting. Accountability initiatives are hampered by lower-level overstaffing, which frequently reflects political objectives rather than real staffing needs [30]. Tensions and political squabbling can arise from the competence gap between elected council members and senior bureaucrats. The ability of elected officials to make decisions, oversee, and impose accountability is frequently hampered by low literacy and educational levels. The ability of mayors and senior local government servants to reprimand employees is diminished by central control's weak local staffing power. Public dissatisfaction with vertical accountability's effectiveness and a lack of confidence amongst various levels of local government result from the typically negative perception of horizontal responsibility in developing nations.

4.2. Vertical Accountability (Downward)

In a liberal democracy, accountability via representation is essential to good government, and the primary instrument for this is electoral choice. The form of the electoral system, the frequency of elections, and actual voter choice all affect how strong this citizen power is. Free media, government transparency measures, and civil society lobbying all promote public accountability. Elections, parties, civil society, and media are more useful, but no single mechanism can achieve effective accountability. Particularly in nations with universal suffrage, local elections are essential for providing information and ensuring accountability in urban government [31]. However, intimidation and vote-buying tactics frequently cause these elections to be faulty. Vote buying and bargaining are significant aspects of municipal government. Ward council members are approachable and answerable to low-income voters in places where citizens can exchange votes for the advantages citizens can provide. Elections at the local level draw large crowds, with low-income districts seeing the highest attendance. Minorities can be better represented under mixed or proportional representation systems, while quota systems cast doubt on the representation of those holding reserved seats. A locality's political system setting affects vertical responsibility as well. Micro-regions and the barangay system are two instances of easily accessible elected local entities that promote active citizen participation and have some say in spending choices. Although it is crucial to municipal administration, civil society is not always successful there. Public hearings, public audits, participatory information-generation exercises, and citizens' juries to assess public policy are examples of current initiatives that aim to involve citizens more fully in the institutions of horizontal accountability.

4.3. Vertical Accountability (Upward)

The central government is essential in ensuring that local governments are held responsible. By sharing information about government initiatives, educating the public about the tasks of civil servants, and highlighting the significance, it promotes and supports civic organizations in exercising control over local government and establishes a three-way dynamic. Tendler contends that greater centralization and complexity are necessary for effective decentralized local administration and that strong political support from the federal government increases the likelihood that accountability can be successful. Upward accountability is necessary because downward accountability is frequently inadequate. Effective public affairs depend on strong leadership and efficient oversight systems [32]. Corruption can be fought and appropriate performance can be guaranteed via incentives and close district supervision. However, creating and enforcing incentives and penalties for public sector accountability is challenging. Corruption and cooperation can interfere with the collection of taxes

and the accountability of politicians, and accountability institutions and legal frameworks are frequently deficient.

4.4. Community Participation in Policy-Making

A core principle of democratic governance is the active participation of citizens in policy formulation. However, observations and interviews reveal that local governments in Sumedang have not optimally engaged the community in decision-making processes. Many residents remain passive in political affairs due to limited opportunities for political expression and inadequate policy socialization efforts by local authorities. The lack of accessible channels for political aspirations has led to mismatched development priorities. For example, infrastructure projects such as roads, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities often fail to reflect the community's actual needs. Beyond physical infrastructure, non-physical aspects like education, healthcare, and public welfare remain underdeveloped due to weak public engagement [33]. This philosophical dilemma raises questions about the legitimacy of democratic representation and the ethical responsibilities of elected officials.

4.5. Public Participation in Development

The suburban neighborhoods of Sumedang, have rapidly transformed into metropolitan areas, highlighting the relationship between regional growth and political engagement. Theoretically, democracy gives citizens the ability to shape development policies, but empirical research indicates that public opinion is frequently disregarded. The socioeconomic structure of the area has changed as a result of industrialization and urbanization, although many community-driven projects have not yet been completed. Due to time constraints and restricted access to information, the majority of citizens who work in industry find it difficult to participate in political conversation [34]. Even though individuals have a lot of potential to be change agents, young people are also not very involved in developmental activities. Disillusionment with the political system and economic pressures are the two main causes of this indifference. This scenario depicts a crisis in civic responsibility and participatory democracy from a philosophical perspective. A strong democracy requires more than just election participation; it also requires continuous civic engagement in governance and policy debates. The blame-sharing between citizens and government officials, the former accusing the latter of lacking inclusive governance, and the latter of pointing to public disengagement, highlights the need for structured dialogue spaces to bridge the communication divide.

4.6. Political Awareness and Democratic Institutions

The citizens of Sumedang have become more politically conscious in spite of these obstacles. People are becoming more aware that democratic processes give them the chance to hold the leaders accountable. Nevertheless, active participation is not necessarily a direct result of this awareness. Elections are seen by many locals as ineffective tools for enhancing the socioeconomic circumstances, which breeds disenchantment.

4.7. Ethical Implications of Political Apathy

A concerning development in Indonesia's political process is the increase in voluntary voter abstention or Golput. Dissatisfaction with political corruption and the belief that elections don't produce significant change are the main reasons for choosing not to cast a ballot. Abstention undercuts the democratic process by permitting unaccountable leadership, even though it can be viewed as a form of protest [35]. Money politics, where candidates use financial incentives to secure votes, poses an ethical challenge as it perpetuates corrupt leadership and creates a cycle of governance failure. This raises moral responsibility questions in a democracy, requiring citizens to decide whether to participate in a flawed system or boycott it as a form of resistance. Strengthening political education and fostering integrity in electoral practices can resolve this dilemma.

4.8. The Role of Information in Democratic Decision-Making

Access to political information has increased in the internet era, yet disinformation is a major problem. Many suburbanites find it difficult to separate reliable information from political propaganda, according to informant interviews. Voters' views are influenced by the dissemination of incorrect information, which can occasionally result in unjustified mistrust of particular politicians or political organizations. Voters' critical thinking and media literacy must be encouraged to combat misinformation [36]. This challenge has philosophical ramifications that touch on epistemology and the definition of truth in political debate. A fair and logical democracy cannot function without an informed electorate. Therefore, efforts to

increase the transparency and veracity of information are essential to creating a society that is politically aware.

5. CONCLUSION

In Sumedang, Indonesia, civic involvement, government efforts, and traditional values all contribute to democracy and local political participation. Even while municipal elections and village debates (musyawarah) provide residents a voice, problems including political indifference, ineffective bureaucracy, and restricted information availability exist. A more inclusive and successful democratic process depends on initiatives to raise political consciousness, improve government transparency, and encourage digital engagement. Sumedang can keep creating a participatory political culture that represents the needs and goals of its citizens by encouraging cooperation between civil society, community leaders, and government agencies.

5.1. Limitation and Future Scope

Sumedang's really inclusive democratic engagement is hindered by problems such as political apathy, inefficient bureaucracy, and unequal access to information, despite the fact that local political activity has expanded. to improve political involvement and guarantee more responsive local administration in the future, it is possible to strengthen digital governance, expand civic education, and promote more openness.

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