

Democracy and Decentralization in Regional Autonomy

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Abstract

Since the implementation of regional autonomy, local communities have had the space to participate in any public policymaking. Every individual and group in society has the same opportunity to convey their aspirations. During its development, for approximately 12 years, these individuals and community groups found their existence in the local political constellation in their regions. However, in North Sumatra, political openness during the reform era did not provide equal opportunities for progress for all levels of society. Those who have money that can commit violent practices are the perpetrators who control local democratic institutions in North Sumatra, such as political parties, the parliament, and the head of government. At least, their success in getting important positions in these institutions is related to individuals and groups in society who practice money politics and violence. They intend to form a new patronage network to gain access to state power and local resources. Observations on the case of the 2008 election for the Governor of North Sumatra Province have relevance to the ongoing debate about the direction and development of new democracy in Indonesia. This paper explained the phenomenon of democratization practices in North Sumatra, through direct regional head elections observations, which are moved by the logic of money politics and violence.

Keywords: *democracy, decentralization, regional autonomy, society, government*

1. INTRODUCTION

The decentralization policy is one way to ensure the aspirations of the community and to reduce various kinds of problems [1]. Decentralization is also seen as an instrument to improve the quality of democracy at the local level because it can bring closer relationships between the government and stakeholders in society. Although there are many opinions that state decentralization and democracy are two different concepts [2]. Generally, decentralization refers more to the relationship between the central government and the regions. Meanwhile, democracy is concerned with the processes and procedures for various political activities that involve the people both at the central and regional levels [3]. Empirically, the two also do not always coincide. Decentralization, for example, can be found in countries with authoritarian or totalitarian governments [4]. Decentralization ultimately does not mean democracy. For an explicit link between the two of them, they then developed what is called as *democratic decentralization*, which is more referred to as the decentralization of power or devolution from the central government to the regions [5].

Democratic decentralization becomes an impetus for implementing decentralization policies, namely granting greater authority to local governments to manage their regions to become better. It will have a positive effect in the context of improving government performance. It also makes

the consolidation of democracy work better. This hope resulted from the idea that decentralization would bring the public policy-making process closer to the people at the bottom and in a smaller area so that the opportunity for the community to participate increases [6].

This community participation will foster democratic practices at the local level and at the same time increase the efficiency of government by eliminating various obstacles in decision-making regarding the policy implementation. The accommodation of various interests and needs of the community will increase the degree of acceptance of decisions made by the government [7]. To realize effective community participation, there are several basic prerequisites that must be available, including the existence of *political equality* and adequate local accountability.

These two requirements not only provide greater opportunities for everyone (*equal opportunities*) but also the existence of fairer welfare for all citizens. This is inseparable from the fact that the capital possessed by individual citizens when they have to take advantage of these *opportunities* is different. Consequently, what is produced also varies. Such an idea is needed to develop the importance of institutionalizing participation and a form of public decision-making that processes from below (*renewal of politics from below*). The demand that democracy must provide wider autonomy to individual citizens is reflected in the effort to bring individuals directly involved in political processes [8]. The presence of a discourse on direct democracy does not mean that systems of political representation have lost their essence. This concept is then used as the basis for conducting direct regional head elections.

However, in practice, some of these conceptions have become fundamental problems faced by many developing countries in implementing decentralization [9]. So that the implementation of decentralization does not always have a positive correlation with the consolidation of democracy and the structural efficiency of governance at the local level. The direct regional heads election which is expected to provide greater space for interaction between leaders and their communities cannot be guaranteed with certainty. In fact, in North Sumatra, direct governor elections in 2008 were won by strong individuals and local communities who practice money politics and violence.

2. The Phenomenon of Violence and Money

The phenomenon of the presence of violent groups has traditional roots before Indonesia was born as a state. The dynamics sometimes experience ups and downs depending on the developing political constellation [10]. The main character may become disempowered by physical limitations and may have died. However, traditions and their habitats do not necessarily disappear and even in every rite of violence, they always give birth to new figures along with the moving phase of the era. Many terms are used to identify violent groups in Indonesia that continue to grow, including *preman*, *jagoan*, *jawara*, *blater*, *bromocorah*, *weri*, *gali*, and so on. The people of North Sumatra say that such violent groups are better known as *preman*.

Preman (*free man*) is the term for members of society who commit crimes and criminal acts. The word *preman* comes from the Dutch *vrije man* and this term is attached to men who refuse to work on Dutch plantations. The meaning of the word refers to a free man who cannot be regulated. However, in line with the times, the understanding of *preman* has changed. *Preman* are then known as people or individuals or groups of people who have no fixed income, do not have a definite job. They live on the support of people who are affected physically or psychologically afraid. They have a territory of power and are not bound by the norms and values that exist in society and tend to commit criminal acts. The attitudes, actions, and behavior of *preman* are known as thuggery.

Today the term *preman* in the minds of the people of North Sumatra is considered negative behavior because they do things in ways that are not good to others for their benefit by using violence, intimidation, threats, hurting, injuring and even killing. When viewed from the appearance, most *preman* have scary faces, aggressive characters, speak or use harsh language. They are usually expressed as they are without good manners. Such behavior is carried out by *preman* because the courage or strength they have comes from physicality and weapons.

However, in contrast to the appearance and style of *preman* in Medan, they are no different from other *ambtenars*. The *preman* who joined youth organizations did not find the grim impression. They appear with dapper clothes, cool hair, shiny shoes plus fragrances. Smoking middle class

cigarettes and drinking alcohol, marrying and having ancestry, building a household with one or more women. Therefore, the desire to seize and control more resources is unavoidable.

The existence of '*preman*' in North Sumatra is inseparable from the role of the state which uses them as a buffer for their strength in society. At this stage, the existence of *preman* is not because the state allows them but because the state cannot deny their existence. Even the state needs them. During the colonial rule in North Sumatra, *preman* were used to secure the plantation industry due to rampant theft of plantation products by plantation workers whose lives were poor. Most of the *preman* who were young were immigrants who were deliberately paid by the colonial government and plantation owners to maintain the production of garden products. But, on the eve of independence, they criticized the social inequality, the oppression of the garden workers, and the establishment of the feudal system [11]. Sharp criticism, resistance to the policies of the Dutch colonial government gave birth to warrior figures who spread issues of resistance, rejection (negation) to the policies of the colonial government, and the feudal system run by the rulers at that time.

Because of their claims as security, it is not uncommon for *preman* to equip themselves with a set of "martial arts" skills (Silat, Karate, and others). It is not uncommon for them to have inner knowledge, which means "*ilmukebal*" (a way on how to make one's body inviolable by others) or "invulnerability". The people with "extra skills" appear as *heads* of the group. A person who becomes a captain must be brave, strong, respected by his opponents and friends, be loyal and protect members, and be able to maintain the integrity of the group.

Entering a period of political instability in Indonesia, namely the period of parliamentary democracy, there are not many political parties in North Sumatra have looked at the existence of *preman* to be recruited to become members or sympathizers of political parties. Various groups of students, students, workers/employees/laborers, farmers, fishermen, artists, the press, and others are "subscribers" of the party's efforts to expand the mass of supporters. Its targets are not limited to people living in urban areas but also people living in rural areas [12]. So that there is no longer a single social group in society that is not touched by a political party that wants to seize power, except for the social group, namely street children, who at that time were seen as having very little power to recruit the masses [13]

3. The Presence of *Premantsin* Political Parties

The only political party that has looked at the existence of *preman* and street children in North Sumatra is *Ikatan Pendukung Kemerdekaan Indonesia Party* (IPKI) which was formed by several army officers who rejected the existence of the Communist Party of Indonesia (PKI). IPKI then formed a youth wing organization called *Pancasila Youth* which was founded in 1960 in North Sumatra. This youth organization then recruited *preman* and street children as administrators and members [14]. Effendi Nasution, who is known as a symbol of *preman*, street youth, and cinema kids, was appointed chairman of *Pancasila Youth* which political power organizations have yet to cultivate. Effendi is a symbol that creates a united atmosphere among *preman* youths who are members of *Pancasila Youth*. In further developments, the presence of *Pancasila Youth* is more easily accepted by *preman*. It is hoped that it will direct them in planned and programmed organizational activities [15]. The persistence and ease of facilities provided to *Pancasila Youth* members some *preman* have found themselves as influential local figures in North Sumatra.

Currently, several *Pancasila Youth* figures experience vertical mobility. Many of them are engaged in the business world both as contractors. The main pioneer is Anif Shah who is considered successful as an elder of the *Pancasila Youth* who is engaged in entrepreneurship or business. Meanwhile, other figures are more engaged in practical politics [16] as members and administrators of political parties as well as members of the legislature, both district/city and provincial of Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). Even some *Pancasila Youth* figures are elected as regional heads.

The expanding domain of *Pancasila Youth* figures cannot be separated from the role of the New Order government which required them to be operators of political policy in North Sumatra. In this context, the New Order political engineering played the central role of *Pancasila Youth* as an effort to stem the growing power of communism in North Sumatra. The *Pancasila Youth* leaders later became the party of functional groups (*Golkar*) cadres and supporters who acted as a

political machine to mobilize the masses in the North Sumatra region. When *Pancasila Youth* figures began to be difficult to control by Jakarta elites, especially the army, the New Order regime then created a youth organization that rivaled the existence of *Pancasila Youth* figures. This control was then realized by some *Pancasila Youth* leaders. They only enjoyed political privileges by creating a network of power in the bureaucracy and relying on practical political skills. The closeness of *Pancasila Youth* leaders to the ruling group has made this group the local boss in North Sumatra who has many facilities to build its economic strength. The *privileged* opportunities given by the patronage model of the New Order were not only used to accelerate development but also as a means of supporting loyalty to the regime [17].

After the decline of the New Order regime, the involvement of *Pancasila Youth* figures in North Sumatra in politics and business increased. In the political field, *Pancasila Youth* cadres and figures are no longer only members and administrators of the Party of Functional Groups (Golkar), but spread to almost all political parties in North Sumatra. Several *Pancasila Youth* figures obtained strategic positions in the political party, at least in the core management. They are no longer only function as political operators to maintain security, but they become determinants in the world of politics. These *Pancasila Youth* figures later became relatively newcomers but were able to exert influence by getting closer to groups that had greater resources in terms of access to money and power [18]. They then feel the benefits of regional autonomy which is able to provide opportunities to gain political and economic access autonomously [19].

The expansion of the influence of *Pancasila Youth* leaders can be seen from their role and involvement during the election for the Governor and Deputy Governor of North Sumatra Province in 2008. In a very open way, they displayed their authority and were able to color the governor election process. There were five pairs of candidates for the Governor of North Sumatra Province in 2008, namely (1) H. Ali Umri-H. Maratua Simanjuntak, (2) Major General (ret) Tritamtomo-Dr. Ir. Benny Pasaribu, (3) Ir. R.E. Siahaan-H. Suherdi (4) H. Abdul Wahab Dalimunthe-H. M. syafii, SH, M. Hum (5) H. Syamsul Arifin-Gatot Pudjonugroho, ST. Of the five candidate pairs, Syamsul Arifin-Gatot Pudjonugroho is a candidate supported by the Regional Advisory Council(MPW)*Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra.

SyamsulArifin, the governor candidate who is supported, is a youth leader and is listed as a member of the *MPO Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra for the 2007-2012 period. One of SyamsulArifin's first supporting parties was the North Sumatra Pancasila Patriot Party which was very active in lobbying, convincing, and influencing other political parties to seek candidacy support. Although some *Pancasila Youth* cadres and figures split in supporting the candidate for Governor of North Sumatra. However, most of the influential *Pancasila Youth* elders ordered the Chairman of the *MPW Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra to support SyamsulArifin as a candidate for governor and deputy governor. The elders who ordered the *MPW Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra board to support SyamsulArifin as governor were inseparable from the economic interests he had controlled in North Sumatra.

The lack of cohesiveness or the split in support of the cadres and leaders of the North Sumatra *Pancasila Youth* for Syamsul Arifin was the beginning of the emergence of internal conflicts among the management. The cause of the split in support was because each cadre and figure felt that they had the same opportunity to play an important role in the election for governor and deputy governor [20]. They never got that opportunity before the decentralization and regional autonomy policies after the rolling of reforms [21]. In addition, each *Pancasila Youth* leader and the committee have different interests, are more flexible, and competes with one another. In fact, the ranks of the interests of the *Pancasila Youth* leaders and administrators were more varied than during the New Order era. Thus, it is actually difficult for *Pancasila Youth* administrators to ensure that their organizational network works effectively to win the candidates they support.

In the election, despite the split support from the *Pancasila Youth* network of North Sumatra Province to Syamsul Arifin. However, some Pancasila Youth cadres and figures can understand each other the way Pancasila Youth is supporting Syamsul Arifin. To ensure the potential of the organization to support Syamsul Arifin 's victory, some of the efforts made by Pancasila Youth figures are transactional, intimidation, and mobilization by means of violence against all members, cadres, figures, and networks that have been controlled [22].

The transactional action was an agreement between Syamsul Arifin and the the Regional Advisory Council of(MPW)*Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra management regarding the number of funds submitted by Syamsul Arifin. In addition to assist organizational activities and other interests related to the *Pancasila Youth* of North Sumatra. Although the documents of the agreement could not be found, Syamsul Arifin, who was "raised" by a youth organization in North Sumatra, understood exactly what the *Pancasila Youth* leaders wanted. Cadres and administrators of *Pancasila Youth* also helped Syamsul Arifin to get the support of the 8 political parties that nominated Syamsul Arifin as Governor of the province of North Sumatra for the 2008-2013 period by giving a sum of money or what was called "boat money".

To facilitate the fulfillment of the wishes of *Pancasila Youth* leaders and administrators in winning activities, Darwin Nasution (Secretary of the Regional Advisory Council(MPW)*Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra) was approved as the head of the success team formed by a coalition of political parties. Some of Darwin Nasution's strategic decision mechanisms were always intimidated by the cadres and administrators of the *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra. The reason was that Darwin Nasution was unable to fulfill the wishes of *Pancasila Youth* officials although they doubted Darwin's explanation regarding the rejection of the request.

Other acts of intimidation committed by *Pancasila Youth* in the election for governor were through organizational instructions to cadres who were members of the legislature to support Syamsul Arifin as a candidate for governor. Although some members of the council have different choices of candidates, it is not justified to discuss, invite, and influence members of *Pancasila Youth* to choose a candidate other than Syamsul Arifin. If the action is found out by the *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra board, they will be subject to sanctions in the form of dismissal as a member and other social sanctions that are common in *Pancasila Youth*.

Besides, members, cadres, and administrators of *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra who became bureaucratic officials and even regents/mayors were asked to mobilize the state apparatus they lead to elect Syamsul Arifin. The request was conveyed by the North Sumatra *Pancasila Youth* committee through informal meetings to the cadres. For members, cadres and administrators of *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra who become bureaucratic officials and regents/mayors who cannot fulfill the request, they are asked not to impose sanctions on government employees [23] and officials who side with Syamsul Arifin. However, *Pancasila Youth* cadres who become regents/mayors and executive officials who support Syamsul Arifin will threaten sanctions against their subordinates if they take sides other than Syamsul Arifin.

Support from a network of entrepreneurs fostered by *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra was also involved in the election for governor. The businessmen were asked to participate in providing financial assistance to organizations to mobilize members in regional elections [24-28]. All costs needed to mobilize *Pancasila Youth* members in the election for governor are the responsibility of the organization's management. Apart from donations from entrepreneurs, there are other efforts by *Pancasila Youth* officials that generate money for the operational needs of the board and organization.

Apart from having political, bureaucratic, and business networks, the North Sumatra *Pancasila Youth* committee also has networks to local print media. Even though *Pancasila Youth* figures do not have direct print media, their influence on local print media from the reporting side can be felt by the managers and media journalists on duty. During the election for governor, *Pancasila Youth* figures contacted several managers and owners of local print media to provide support to Syamsul Arifin. Journalists who know the *Pancasila Youth*'s request will not dare to write bad news about Syamsul Arifin if they don't want to get terror, threats, or physical torture.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on these explanations, it can be seen that the group of violence perpetrated by *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra played a role in the contestation for the election for the Governor of North Sumatra Province in 2008 among the elites and other community groups in North Sumatra. The role of the *Pancasila Youth* North Sumatra in the governor election emphasized that the violent groups organized by the *Pancasila Youth* bosses were at least able to influence the network they had against local political institutions and businesses in North Sumatra. The core group (*the*

ruling group) in Pancasila Youth North Sumatra can build a new patronage network that is more localization, flexible, and competes with each other to gain access to existpower and resources. These interests are also the basis for the decision to provide support to governor candidates who historically and pragmatically understand the patterns of local political power in North Sumatra that they are exercising. The following are some of the important roles played by Pancasila Youth North Sumatra in the election for Governor of North Sumatra Province in 2008.

First, the candidate for governor who is supported is part of the Pancasila Youth family of North Sumatra Province, which certainly already understands the organizational culture. *Second*, mobilizing the potential for organizational members spread across the North Sumatra Province to elect Syamsul Arifin as the supported candidate. *Third*, ordering cadres who are leaders of political parties and members of the Regional People's Representative Assembly(DPRD) of North Sumatra Province to elect Syamsul Arifin as a candidate for governor. *Fourth*, establish relationships with bureaucratic officials and regional heads in districts/cities to help win governor candidates who are supported. *Fifth*, empowering a network of entrepreneurs fostered by Pancasila Youth to provide financial assistance to win Syamsul Arifin. *Sixth*, being able to control the local mass media in order to provide a positive portion of news for the supported candidates for governor.

The point of the discussion that we want to put forward here is that political openness applied in the context of democracy and decentralization does not produce equal opportunities to have political access in North Sumatra. Those who have the power of money and violence become individuals and groups who enjoy access to state power and resources at the local level. They then form a new patronage network that is localization, flexible, and competes with each other to gain access to exist power and resources. This phenomenon is known as the direction and character of the new democracy in several regions of Indonesia.

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