

Between Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Increasingly Restricted Freedom of Expression

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Abstract: *Freedom of speech is a fundamental right guaranteed by law, but in Indonesia today it is increasingly restricted. As a country that adheres to a democratic system, freedom of speech should be the main pillar of state life. However, various regulations and social dynamics show a narrowing of public discussion space. This paper aims to analyze how freedom of speech in a democratic system in Indonesia is increasingly restricted and to what extent these restrictions reflect the characteristics of authoritarianism. The method used is a literature review, namely by collecting, analyzing, and summarizing various relevant reference sources. This paper discusses the concepts of democracy and authoritarianism, the relationship between the two, and offers solutions to strengthen freedom of speech within the framework of democracy in Indonesia.*

Keywords : *Democracy, Authoritarianism, Restrictions, Free Speech*

Abstrak: Kebebasan berpendapat adalah hak fundamental yang dijamin oleh hukum, namun di Indonesia saat ini semakin mengalami pembatasan. Sebagai negara yang menganut sistem demokrasi, kebebasan berpendapat seharusnya menjadi pilar utama dalam kehidupan bernegara. Namun, berbagai regulasi dan dinamika sosial menunjukkan adanya penyempitan ruang diskusi publik. Penulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana kebebasan berpendapat dalam sistem demokrasi di Indonesia semakin terbatas serta sejauh mana pembatasan ini mencerminkan ciri-ciri otoritarianisme. Metode yang digunakan adalah kajian pustaka, yaitu dengan mengumpulkan, menganalisis, dan merangkum berbagai sumber referensi yang relevan. Penulisan ini membahas konsep demokrasi dan otoritarianisme, hubungan keduanya, serta menawarkan solusi untuk memperkuat kebebasan berpendapat dalam kerangka demokrasi di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Demokrasi, Otoritarianisme, Pembatasan, Kebebasan berpendapat

Introduction

Etymologically, the term democracy originates from the Greek words *demos* (people) and *kratos* (power), which together mean "power of the people." In the Indonesian context, democracy is defined as a state in which sovereignty or the highest authority resides with the people. This principle emphasizes that governance must be carried out by and for the people (Simamora, J. 2011). In contrast, authoritarianism is a form of social organization characterized by the centralization of power. It stands in stark opposition to individualism and democracy (Wardaya, F. B. T. 2007). In politics, an authoritarian regime refers to a government in which political power is concentrated in a single leader (Ismanto, I. 2004). Such regimes typically restrict civil liberties, control the media, and suppress political opposition in order to maintain power.

According to data from UNPAD, democracy in Indonesia has experienced significant setbacks, particularly toward the end of President Jokowi's first term in 2019, which was regarded as the lowest point since the fall of the New Order regime. Several governmental policies and actions have diverged from the democratic values once upheld in the country. Therefore, protecting citizens' freedom of expression is crucial to counter existing threats. Legal advocacy, along with democratic governance based on the principles of Pancasila Democracy, is necessary to prevent the further erosion of public freedoms (Bahasoan, S. N. A. 2021).

The right of citizens to express opinions and articulate themselves is a fundamental principle of any democratic state. Criticism of the government does not constitute a legal offense, as long as it remains within lawful boundaries, since freedom of expression is guaranteed by the Indonesian Constitution (Nasution, L. 2020). This freedom not only supports government transparency and accountability but also encourages active civic participation in building a more effective system of governance

Research Method

This article employs a literature review method. A literature review is a fundamental and essential step in the development of a research plan. It involves the exploration and study of various scholarly sources such as books, journals, and other publications related to the research topic, in order to produce a scholarly work on a specific issue or theme (Marzali, 2016). The literature review is also considered crucial as it provides a rationale for the selection of a particular research topic or title. Furthermore, it serves as the foundation that underpins the scope of the work to be reported (Ridwan, M., et al., 2021).

Findings and Discussion

The Concept of Democracy

The concept of democracy refers to a system of government in which political power is held by the people. This means that citizens have the right and responsibility to participate in political decision-making processes that affect their lives. Democracy is often defined as a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. In such a system, governmental authority is derived from the citizens and exercised in accordance with their will. Public participation is a crucial element in a democracy, encompassing active involvement in various political aspects such as elections and collective decision-making (Mulyadi, 2019). Citizen engagement plays a vital role in upholding democratic values, ensuring government transparency and accountability, and providing a platform for the public to be heard in political decision-making. Without active civic participation, democracy risks losing its essence and becoming meaningless (Rahmatullah, R., et al., 2024).

In the Indonesian context, democracy cannot be separated from Pancasila, the foundational ideology of the state. The core values of Pancasila serve as a basis for national life, including democratic principles reflected in the fourth principle (Trisno, B., et al., 2024). When discussing democracy in Indonesia, it is inseparable from Pancasila, which serves both as an ideological foundation and a moral compass for the nation. Pancasila contains noble values that not only guide national and societal life but also underpin the implementation of democratic principles. As the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, Pancasila provides a moral guide for citizens to live together in a just, democratic society. A key aspect of Pancasila is the spirit of justice, the pursuit of prosperity, and the creation of public welfare—values deeply embedded within its principles (Aisyah, N., et al., 2025).

Democracy in Indonesia operates on principles such as regular elections, freedom of expression, freedom of the press, and the protection of human rights. Since the Reformation era in 1998, Indonesia has made significant progress in building a stronger and more open democratic system. Regular elections offer citizens the opportunity to elect their representatives at the national, provincial, and regional levels (Ulfiyyati, A., et al., 2023). In a democratic governance system, active public participation is essential to ensure that public policies reflect the aspirations and needs of citizens. However, in practice, civic participation remains relatively low. Many individuals feel excluded or lack sufficient access to engage in the policymaking process. As a result, policies are often unrepresentative of the broader public interest, especially those of vulnerable groups, thereby exacerbating social inequality.

This study aims to examine the low level of civic involvement in monitoring public policy in Indonesia, focusing on identifying barriers to participation and their implications for social injustice (Yasinta, M., et al., 2024). According to Erich Fromm, authoritarianism is a social character that arises from the existential human drive to form relationships, but in an unhealthy manner. Whereas ideal relationships

are built on affection and care, authoritarianism is the opposite—it is based on the dynamic between domination and submission (Fromm, E., 2021). Altemeyer defines authoritarianism as an attitude or tendency marked by strong obedience and submission to authoritative figures, such as political or military leaders.

Authoritarian individuals strongly uphold rules, norms, and discipline, and believe that the state and its leaders must be respected and obeyed unconditionally (authoritarian submission). Such individuals also tend to be harsh or even aggressive toward those with differing views, lifestyles, or values (authoritarian aggression), perceiving such differences as threats to the principles they hold dear. This attitude began to develop as society transitioned from feudal systems to modern industrialized societies. During this time, many people began encountering diverse lifestyles that clashed with the traditional values taught by official authorities, giving rise to fear and a sense of threat toward new or different ways of life (Altemeyer, B., 2007).

The Relationship Between Democracy, Authoritarianism, and Freedom of Expression

The choice between implementing a democratic or authoritarian system of governance largely depends on the extent of citizen participation in overseeing the government. Historical experience shows that democratic regimes can gradually turn authoritarian. This shift often begins with the election of a leader who is skilled at manipulating public emotions (a demagogue) or is power-hungry (a political predator) through legitimate electoral means. In order to appear legitimate in the eyes of the public, authoritarian governments often continue holding elections. However, these elections typically involve only a single dominant party or are manipulated to suppress opposition through intimidation and coercion, thus rendering them far from free or fair (Rachmawan, M. D., 2024).

Although elections may still be held regularly, they are often engineered in such a way that the people appear to be participating, when in reality they have no genuine choice. Incumbent leaders frequently use the power and resources of the state to entrench their position, control the media to disseminate only favorable narratives, and suppress political opposition. Consequently, election outcomes tend to be predictable—not due to genuine public support, but because the entire process has been orchestrated in their favor (Gilbert, L. & Mohseni, P., 2011).

Challenges to Democracy and Efforts to Strengthen It

The challenges of practicing democracy in Indonesia are part of a continuous learning process that has contributed to the country's political maturity. Given that Pancasila is the state ideology, it is only natural that Indonesia's approach to democracy cannot be separated from the values embedded in Pancasila, which serve as the foundational guide for national life (Saputri, W. D., & Prayogo, B. E., 2018). As a democratic nation grounded in Pancasila, Indonesia inevitably faces various challenges in implementing its democratic system in the modern era. These

challenges often manifest within a complex political dynamic, sometimes unfolding as a "drama" in the nation's political journey.

A study using data from numerous countries between 1972 and 1996 found that political system changes, including democratic transitions, are often influenced by shifts occurring in most other countries. In other words, the development of democracy in a given country does not occur in isolation, but is shaped by global currents and international trends (Brinks, D., & Coppedge, M., 2006). In Indonesia, corruption remains one of the major issues, undermining the fair and transparent functioning of democracy. Additionally, economic disparities, and unequal access to education, healthcare, and infrastructure, pose significant challenges that must be addressed seriously. If these problems remain unresolved, not all citizens will be able to experience the benefits of democracy in a fair and inclusive way (Ulfiyyati, A., et al., 2023).

Indonesia's democracy must continue to evolve and be strengthened to effectively address such challenges and truly enhance public welfare. This requires active participation from all societal groups, just law enforcement, protection of human rights, and a more transparent and accountable government. Several key steps must be taken. First, political education and civic participation must be prioritized. Second, the government must become more open and accountable for its policies. Additionally, freedom of expression and freedom of the press must be protected so that journalists and activists can express their views safely and freely. By acknowledging existing challenges and committing to ongoing improvements, Indonesia can build a stronger democracy that listens to and serves its people (Ulfiyyati, A., et al., 2023).

The government must also ensure that all social groups have equal access to public services, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure. Effective monitoring will help identify and address inequalities in service distribution and prompt corrective action (Ariiqoh, H., et al., 2025). In this regard, Pancasila Education should not focus solely on cognitive knowledge, but must also emphasize affective and ethical dimensions—specifically, the development of character and attitude. Pancasila Education aims not just to transfer knowledge but to cultivate affective and moral values that shape individual character. However, the implementation of these values in educational institutions still faces several barriers. Its success depends largely on the commitment of all stakeholders in the education sector, including their willingness to respect local culture as an essential element in the nation-building process.

Thus, Pancasila Education must be positioned as a strategic tool to develop a generation with strong character, ethical integrity, and a high sense of national consciousness. The influence of this educational process is long-term, shaping future social behavior. Therefore, consistent and earnest implementation is essential to produce a better-quality future generation (Zahra, A. M., et al., 2024). Moreover, the application of Pancasila principles in the workplace significantly impacts the

quality of healthcare services and overall well-being. Emphasizing open and inclusive communication, as well as building solidarity and mutual respect, empowers individuals and fosters a sense of safety and comfort in interactions. Furthermore, promoting awareness of these values among healthcare workers enhances their moral and ethical responsibility, which ultimately increases professionalism. Upholding the values of Pancasila is expected to foster a more just, empathetic, and sustainable healthcare culture that benefits both individuals and society as a whole (Aidi, F. W. A., et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study examines how freedom of expression in Indonesia, which should serve as a key pillar of a democratic system, is increasingly facing restrictions. Through a literature review method, the paper highlights that strict regulations, social pressure, and control over public spaces have narrowed opportunities for citizens to freely voice their opinions. This phenomenon indicates a shift in democracy toward covert authoritarian practices. In a democratic system, freedom of expression is fundamental to ensuring accountability and public participation. However, when such freedoms are curtailed, the core values of democracy begin to erode. This paper also emphasizes the importance of protecting civil rights, press freedom, and open forums for dialogue to maintain the quality of democracy. It calls on readers to build collective awareness and take concrete actions to safeguard democracy from the threats posed by authoritarian tendencies that may undermine individual freedoms.

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