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Digital Democracy in Indonesia: Challenges, Participation, and Hybrid Democracy Models

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Abstract:

The development of digital technology has transformed the way people obtain information, communicate, and participate in democratic life. While digital spaces open up opportunities for expanding political participation and creating a more open public sphere, they also present problems such as disinformation, weak critical literacy, unequal access, and the dominance of particular interests. This study aims to analyze how the development of digital democracy influences public political participation in Indonesia and examine how a hybrid democracy model can respond to the challenges of digital democracy. The study uses a qualitative approach through a literature review of literature on democracy, the information society, digital media, and political participation. The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia provides the constitutional basis for people's sovereignty, freedom of expression, the right to information, and the exercise of rights within legal limitations. The results indicate that digital technology expands political participation through digital communication, activism, virtual communities, criticism, and information production, but its effectiveness is affected by disinformation, polarization, unequal access, and low critical literacy. A hybrid democracy model can combine digital participation with conventional democratic institutions while considering Indonesia's social, political, and cultural characteristics.

Keywords:

Digital Democracy; Digital Media; E-Democracy; Political Participation; Public Space.

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1. Introduction

Democracy has been one of the main foundations of Indonesian political life since the end of the New Order government in 1998. These political changes opened up wider space for freedom, public participation, and citizen involvement in the government process. However, Indonesia's democratic journey has not yet fully produced a form of democracy with a consistent orientation, principles, ethical foundations, and philosophy. Differences in meaning among political actors and society have caused democratic practices to develop in various forms, making the boundaries between the substance of democracy and certain interests increasingly complex (Boy Anugerah, 2018). This condition shows that democracy is not sufficiently understood only through the existence of elections or political procedures, but also through the quality of participation, citizen freedom, and the fulfillment of constitutional rights.

Constitutionally, Indonesian democracy is firmly grounded in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Article 1 paragraph (2) affirms that sovereignty rests with the people and is exercised according to the Constitution, while Article 1 paragraph (3) positions Indonesia as a state based on the rule of law. These two provisions demonstrate that the implementation of democracy is not solely based on the will of the majority, but must also take place within a legal and constitutional framework. In the context of technological development, this principle becomes increasingly relevant as the space for public participation has expanded into the digital environment.

The public's right to participate in democratic life is also related to the guarantee of constitutional freedoms. Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia guarantees the freedom of association, assembly, and expression of opinion. Meanwhile, Article 28F grants everyone the right to communicate and to seek, obtain, possess, store, process, and convey information through various available channels. Thus, the development of the internet and digital media can be seen as a new environment for the implementation of these constitutional rights. However, freedom in the digital space remains unlimited because Article 28J emphasizes the obligation to respect the rights of others and the possibility of restrictions based on law in a democratic society.

These changes have become increasingly complex as advances in information technology have given rise to a new digital-based political environment. The internet and social media enable people to obtain information, express opinions, build communities, and interact with the government without being limited by geographic distance. This development provides an opportunity for the formation of digital democracy, which can expand public participation. Digital democracy can strengthen communication between the government and citizens, expand the dissemination of public information, and provide opportunities for the public to engage more directly in the political process (Sardini, 2018). Given Indonesia's archipelagic nature, the use of digital technology also has the potential to reduce geographic barriers to communication and political participation.

However, the expansion of digital space does not automatically result in a better quality democracy. Digital space also presents problems such as the spread of inaccurate information, opinion manipulation, polarization, the public's poor ability to evaluate information, and the use of media for specific political interests. People who lack adequate digital literacy skills can more easily become consumers of information without verifying the accuracy of the information they receive. In such conditions, a space that should strengthen participation can instead potentially become an arena for the reproduction of conflict and disinformation (Baihaqi, 2020; Tamara, 2021). This issue demonstrates that guarantees of freedom to obtain and

convey information must go hand in hand with responsibility in exercising that freedom.

Beyond information issues, digital democracy is also related to the changing position of media and society in the public sphere. Digital spaces enable the formation of more open virtual communities that are less dependent on conventional political structures. Citizens can build networks, voice criticism, conduct oversight, and organize support for various public issues. However, this openness can also result in a disorganized communication space if it is not accompanied by critical thinking skills and an understanding of democratic principles (Fatanti, 2019). Therefore, digital technology needs to be positioned as a tool that can strengthen democracy, not as a replacement for all existing democratic institutions and mechanisms.

Several previous studies have discussed the relationship between democracy and the development of digital technology. Sardini (2018) identified the opportunities and challenges of digital democracy in Indonesia, while Badrun (2018) highlighted the issue of digital democracy in relation to national political resilience. Setiawan (2017) discussed freedom of individual expression in the digital environment, while Fatanti (2019) examined the position of netizens in the practice of digital democracy. Herdiansah et al. (2019) also pointed out the importance of understanding Indonesian political culture in facing changes in the digital environment. These studies demonstrate that digitalization has changed the relationship between society, media, and power. However, a more integrated discussion is needed that links constitutional guarantees, opportunities for digital participation, and various issues that can affect the quality of democracy.

Based on these conditions, the main issue of this research lies in how digital technology can be utilized to expand democracy without eliminating the principles, values, and character of Indonesian politics. Digital democracy requires equal access to technology, the ability of the public to process information, responsible freedom, and oversight mechanisms for the use of digital space. At the same time, the development of digital democracy cannot be separated from a constitutional framework that places popular sovereignty, the rule of law, freedom of expression, and the right to information as essential components of national life. This framework serves as the basis for assessing whether the development of digital space truly strengthens democracy or instead produces forms of participation that deviate from democratic principles.

In this context, a hybrid democracy model is an alternative worth considering. This model does not position digital technology as the sole means of democracy, but rather combines various forms of participation and representation while still considering Indonesia's social, political, and cultural conditions (Rahimallah, 2022). This approach allows digital democracy to flourish without severing ties with conventional democratic mechanisms and the constitutional principles that have been the foundation of Indonesian political life.

Based on this background, this study aims to answer two research questions: (RQ1) How does the development of digital democracy influence the form of political participation of the people in Indonesia? (RQ2) How can a hybrid democracy model be used to respond to the challenges of digital democracy in Indonesia? These two questions form the basis for analyzing the relationship between technological development, public participation, digital public space, constitutional guarantees, and the need to build a democratic model that suits Indonesia's characteristics.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to examine the development of digital democracy in Indonesia, particularly in relation to public political participation and the potential implementation of a hybrid democracy model. This method was chosen based on the nature of the research

problem, which relates to concepts, ideas, and the development of democracy, as well as various issues arising from the use of digital technology as a political and public communication space.

The research data sources consist of library materials relevant to the themes of democracy, digital democracy, e-democracy, the information society, digital media, political participation, freedom of expression, and the development of political culture in Indonesia. The materials used include journal articles, proceedings, books, and other available scientific literature related to the research focus. In addition, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia is used as a constitutional basis for understanding the position of people's sovereignty, freedom of expression, and the public's right to obtain and convey information.

The data collection process involved identifying, selecting, and reviewing literature relevant to the research questions. The collected literature was then grouped based on its main topics, namely the development of digital democracy, opportunities and issues for political participation in the digital space, and the concept of hybrid democracy.

Data analysis was conducted descriptively and analytically. Each relevant material was examined and compared to obtain an overview of changes in patterns of public participation resulting from the development of digital technology. Subsequently, these findings were analyzed by relating them to democratic principles and the political context of Indonesia. The analysis also focused on examining the balance between the opportunities offered by digitalization to expand public participation and the risks posed by disinformation, unequal access, low critical literacy, and misuse of digital spaces. The results of the analysis were then used to formulate the relevance of a hybrid democracy model as an alternative for the development of digital democracy in Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Influence of Digital Democracy Development on Political Participation of Indonesian Society

The findings show that the development of digital technology has changed the way Indonesian citizens participate in political life. Political participation is no longer limited to formal mechanisms such as elections, political organizations, representative institutions, and face-to-face forums, but has expanded through digital media. Citizens can express opinions, provide criticism, follow political issues, build networks, mobilize support, and participate in public discussions without being restricted by geographical distance. This development is supported by the constitutional framework of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, particularly Article 1 paragraph (2), which places sovereignty in the hands of the people, Article 28E paragraph (3), which guarantees freedom of association, assembly, and expression, and Article 28F, which guarantees the right to communicate and obtain and convey information.

Digital media therefore provides a new environment for exercising these constitutional rights. Sardini (2018) points out that digital democracy offers opportunities to expand public involvement because technology enables faster communication and reduces barriers of space and time. Setiawan (2017) emphasizes individual freedom of expression in the digital environment, while Paskarina (2020) demonstrates the relevance of digital activism in the development of Indonesian democracy. Fatanti (2019) also shows that netizens have an important position in digital democracy because virtual spaces become places for communication and political discourse. Digital media further changes the position of society from merely receiving information to producing and distributing information, enabling citizens

to form virtual communities and networks based on shared concerns. Thus, the development of digital democracy has expanded the forms and opportunities for political participation in Indonesia.

However, the expansion of digital participation does not automatically improve the quality of democracy. High levels of participation through comments, posts, or content sharing do not necessarily represent substantive political engagement because democratic participation requires citizens to understand issues, consider available information, and form opinions based on accountable reasons. Baihaqi (2020) shows that digital technology creates both opportunities and challenges because people do not necessarily have the same ability to assess information. Tamara (2021) emphasizes the importance of changes in the information environment, particularly the ability of society to evaluate information. Disinformation can spread rapidly and influence public perceptions before its accuracy is verified, while low critical literacy can make citizens more vulnerable to information shaped by particular interests.

Digital spaces can also become places for personal attacks, conflict, irresponsible information, and polarization. Badrun (2018) connects digital democracy with challenges to political resilience, while Herdiansah et al. (2019) emphasize that Indonesia's political culture must be considered in understanding political change in the digital era. In addition, unequal access to devices, internet connections, and digital skills can create a digital divide and prevent some groups from participating equally. Article 28J of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia also emphasizes that the exercise of rights and freedoms must respect the rights of others and remain subject to restrictions established by law in a democratic society. Therefore, the answer to RQ1 is that digital democracy expands political participation through digital communication, activism, virtual communities, criticism, and information production, but the quality of such participation remains dependent on critical, responsible, inclusive, and democratic use of digital technology.

3.2. Hybrid Democracy as a Response to the Challenges of Digital Democracy in Indonesia

The findings indicate that Indonesia requires an approach that does not place conventional democracy and digital democracy in opposition. Digital democracy provides opportunities to expand participation, but conventional democratic institutions remain important for representation, legitimacy, and rule-based decision-making. Hybrid democracy can therefore be considered a model that combines the strengths of conventional democratic mechanisms with opportunities for participation provided by digital technology. This model does not eliminate representative democracy but positions digital mechanisms as a complement that can strengthen the relationship between citizens and political institutions. Citizens continue to participate through representative institutions while also having opportunities to express aspirations directly through digital channels.

Rahimallah (2022) discusses the need for a democratic model that responds to Indonesia's future needs in the development of digital democracy, showing that democracy needs to adapt to technological change without losing its political foundation. In practice, digital media can be used to expand public consultation and deliberation, allowing citizens to provide input on public policies and discuss public issues without physical presence. Sardini (2018) points out that digital democracy provides opportunities to expand public engagement, while Paskarina (2020) highlights digital activism as a means of conveying criticism and addressing public

issues. Digital participation can also strengthen the public's oversight function without eliminating formal oversight mechanisms within state institutions.

The implementation of hybrid democracy nevertheless requires attention to equitable access, digital literacy, constitutional principles, and Indonesia's political culture. Communities without adequate access to technology or digital skills may be excluded from digital participation, while low literacy can make the digital environment vulnerable to unreliable information and manipulation. Baihaqi (2020) and Tamara (2021) emphasize the information challenges arising from the digital era, making digital literacy an important civic capacity in ensuring meaningful participation. The constitutional foundation is also important: Article 1 paragraph (2) establishes popular sovereignty, Article 1 paragraph (3) establishes Indonesia as a state based on law, Article 28E paragraph (3) and Article 28F provide the basis for freedom of expression and the right to information, while Article 28J establishes responsibility in exercising these rights.

Herdiansah et al. (2019) emphasize the importance of Indonesia's political culture in understanding digital political change, while Badrun (2018) shows the consequences of technological development for political resilience. Therefore, the answer to RQ2 is that a hybrid democracy model can respond to the challenges of digital democracy by maintaining political representation as a formal decision-making mechanism, expanding digital participation, developing public deliberation through digital spaces, strengthening public oversight through technology, and ensuring digital literacy and equitable access. Digital democracy and conventional democracy can consequently operate in a complementary relationship, with technology providing means for communication and participation while democratic institutions provide structure, legitimacy, and legal certainty.

4. Conclusion

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to democratic practices in Indonesia, particularly in how people obtain information, express opinions, build networks, and engage in political issues. The digital space provides broader opportunities for public participation without relying entirely on conventional political mechanisms. The presence of digital media also enables people to become information producers, build communities, express criticism, and monitor various public issues. This situation demonstrates that digitalization has the potential to expand participation and strengthen the relationship between the public and the political process.

However, expanding participation through digital spaces does not automatically indicate an improvement in the quality of democracy. Digital democracy faces various challenges, particularly the dissemination of inaccurate information, the public's low ability to evaluate information, polarization, disparities in access to technology, and the potential misuse of digital spaces for specific interests. High levels of political activity in digital media also do not necessarily indicate substantive participation, as public engagement can occur spontaneously without adequate understanding of the issues being discussed. Therefore, the quality of digital democracy is greatly influenced by the public's ability to use technology critically, responsibly, and respectfully.

Based on the discussion, digital democracy in Indonesia needs to be developed while maintaining democratic principles and the constitutional framework. Technology should not be positioned as a substitute for existing democratic institutions, but rather as a means to strengthen public participation. This approach can be realized through a hybrid democracy model that combines political representation mechanisms with various forms of digital participation. Through this

model, the public still has space to express their aspirations directly through technology, while conventional democratic institutions continue to fulfill their functions of representation, decision-making, and legitimacy.

A hybrid democracy model can be an alternative response to the challenges of digital democracy because it provides space for the integration of technology, public participation, and political institutions. Its implementation needs to be supported by equitable digital access, increased information literacy, a strengthened culture of dialogue, protection of freedom of expression, and oversight mechanisms capable of preventing the misuse of digital space. Thus, technological developments will not only result in increased public activity in virtual spaces but can also lead to more meaningful political participation.

Ultimately, the future of Indonesia's digital democracy will be determined not only by technological developments but also by the ability of citizens and institutions to direct these technologies for democratic purposes. Hybrid democracy can be a relevant approach if developed in accordance with Indonesia's social, political, and cultural characteristics. By balancing digital participation with conventional democratic mechanisms, technology can be leveraged to expand citizen engagement while upholding the principles of popular sovereignty, accountability, and the quality of democratic life.

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