

# Building Indonesian Democracy: Maintaining The Balance Between Civility, Reconciliation, and The Role Of Opposition In Monitoring Power

Ida Ayu Gerhana Saraswati Dharmmesta<sup>1\*</sup>, Bambang Satriya<sup>2</sup>, Supriyadi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of Social Science, Universitas Merdeka Malang, Indonesia

## Abstract

This research aims to discuss the function of the opposition in the context of democracy and the important role of the opposition in monitoring power. The research method used is a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. The research findings show that Indonesian democracy requires a harmonious balance between maintaining social harmony through civility and reconciliation and ensuring the role of an effective opposition as a watchdog of power. The opposition is vital in maintaining transparency and accountability and encouraging government policies that are more responsive to public interests. Without constructive opposition, democracy risks losing its essence as an open and accountable system. This research contribution highlights the importance of the opposition as a partner to the government in creating inclusive and effective policies. It also emphasizes the need for regulations that strengthen the opposition's position in parliament and build a competitive yet polite political culture. Research recommendations include strengthening opposition rights, reducing fat coalitions, and increasing freedom of speech and media to strengthen a more mature and sustainable Indonesian democracy.

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Corresponding Author:  
Ida Ayu Gerhana Saraswati  
Dharmmesta  
(ida.dharmmesta@gmail.com)

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## 1. Introduction

Indonesia is known as one of the largest democracies in the world, and it upholds freedom of speech, transparency, and active participation of the people in government. Since the reform era, the principles of democracy have continued to be developed to realize a government that is accountable and responsive to the needs of the people. However, the practice of democracy in Indonesia is not free from challenges, especially in the era of the new president in 2024, who voiced the view that democracy should be run with civility and reconciliation without the presence of formal opposition. This view has caused debate because, in an ideal democracy, the opposition has an important role as part of the check and balance system. The opposition monitors power, provides constructive criticism, and evaluates government policies. Without an effective opposition, government accountability can be weakened, and improvements in public policy risk being hampered (Suyatmiko & Nicola, 2019).

Democracy is not just about creating harmony but also about how dissent can be managed productively for the benefit of the wider community. In political practice, the recognition and implementation of democracy would be meaningless without an effective counterbalance or control from the opposition. The opposition plays an important role in maintaining the balance of power and preventing governments that tend to be oligarchic or authoritarian. Governments without opposition tend to lose the control mechanisms needed to ensure accountability (Solihah, 2018). However, to date, Indonesia as a democracy still faces challenges in fostering a strong and effective opposition. The absence of strong opposition can weaken the democratic

system and make achieving a truly transparent government responsive to the people's needs difficult.

A major problem in a democracy without opposition is losing control and oversight of power. Governments that are not effectively monitored are prone to abuse of power (Rusdianti et al., 2022), poor policy-making, and reduced transparency. Without an opposition, there is no strong mechanism to question or correct the government's policies, opening the door to authoritarian governments that are less responsive to the needs of the people. In addition, the absence of an opposition also reduces alternative political choices for the people. In a healthy democracy, people can choose from various alternative policies and leaders. The opposition offers different programs and ideas from the government, providing more diverse choices. Without opposition, the quality of democracy has the potential to decline due to the absence of healthy and dynamic political competition.

Another issue in a democracy without opposition is the decline in public participation in decision-making. Without active opposition, criticism and input from the public tends to be poorly accommodated. The government may feel that it has no obligation to listen to different voices, so the resulting policies risk not representing the interests of the entire community. As a result, the gap between the government and the people can widen, government legitimacy diminishes, and social cohesion weakens. This issue is even more relevant in the context of a statement in the new presidential era, where the Vice Chairman of one party stated that "...we don't need opposition, we need gotong royong" (Andini, 2024). He also supported the concept of gotong royong democracy without opposition, emphasizing the importance of harmony and reconciliation. However, while social peace is important, neglecting the role of the opposition can weaken the foundations of democracy and hinder the improvement of public policies.

Based on the background that has been described, this research aims to discuss the important role of the opposition in the context of democracy. One of the main focuses is to explain the definition of opposition and its various functions in a democratic system, including as an important element in maintaining the balance of power. In addition, this research also examines how the opposition performs the function of monitoring the government, providing constructive criticism, and ensuring transparency and accountability in decision-making. By understanding its role and function, it is hoped that the results of this research can provide insight into the importance of strong opposition to support a healthy, dynamic democracy that is responsive to the needs of the wider community.

## **2. Methods**

This research method uses a qualitative approach with descriptive analysis. The research aims to understand the dynamics of Indonesian democracy, especially related to civility, reconciliation, and the role of the opposition in monitoring power. Data were collected through a literature review of various primary and secondary sources, such as laws, government policies, and scientific literature on democratic systems and opposition (Schmitter & Karl, 1991). The analysis used a normative approach to evaluate how the concept of opposition is applied in Indonesian democratic practice and its implications for accountability and control of power (Malta & Rusdianti, 2023). A political philosophy approach explored democratic principles relevant to the Indonesian context, focusing on managing dissent and the vital role of opposition in maintaining the balance of power.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **Definition of Opposition in the Context of**

Opposition is an integral part of democracy because, without opposition, the implementation of democracy in a country cannot work properly. In an election, the winning party will hold power, while the loser will become the opposition and be out of power. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), the opposition is an opposition group or

party that criticizes the ruling government's policies and functions as a counterweight in the political system by offering different policy alternatives. After the General Election Commission (KPU) determined the elected president and vice president in 2024, several political parties began to determine their attitude, either joining the government or opposing it. In essence, the opposition is tasked with guarding and criticizing government policies by the law.

According to Noor (2016), two main perspectives define democracy. First, the minimalist view focuses on the electoral approach, where democracy is understood as the core of the electoral process. This view emphasizes that democratic life depends on the successful conduct of elections, which determine the officials and direction of state life. This approach is widely embraced by democracy theorists such as Schumpeter (1975) and Przeworski (1991). Second, the maximalist view views democracy as more than just the conduct of elections. From this perspective, democracy is considered a culture and ideology encompassing equality, participation, freedom, tolerance, justice, universal rights, and mutual consent. Active participation of the people and the ability to provide corrections to the government are seen as more important than simply conducting elections.

The similarity between the two views is that they both place the issue of popular sovereignty as the main thing. In connection with the people's sovereignty, the opposition finds its relevance. This is because there is no guarantee that popular sovereignty can be fully accommodated and translated by the government. History shows that it is not uncommon for governments that act in the name of popular sovereignty to move away from the essence of popular sovereignty in practice. Therefore, there needs to be a force outside the government that can help maintain the sovereignty of the people, which still exists and functions. In this context, the role of those outside the government or the opposition becomes important, especially to ensure that the current government remains on the track of the people's interests. In other words, the existence of the opposition is closely related to the interests of upholding popular sovereignty itself.

In the context of participation, opposition impacts people's freedom to respond and criticize government policies to suit their interests better. Young (2002) cites Ian Shapiro's study in *Democratic Justice*, which emphasizes that democracy is closely related to two important things: participation and anti-subordination. Apart from power sharing, the main root of opposition is the concept of checks and balances. This concept is a development of the idea of power-sharing that was first implemented in the United States. The essence of the concept of checks and balances is that each branch of power must control and balance each other. With this mechanism, each branch of power is expected to act based on its interests and maintain the public interest fairly and transparently.

### **The Function of Opposition in a Context**

Opposition is a phenomenon that appears in many fields and is generally defined as "opposite" or "something that has a different position from another". Opposition as opposition or resistance to something. In a political context, opposition can be understood as an informal disagreement or contestation between power-holding institutions. Meanwhile, according to Barnard (1972), political opposition is a form of contestation regulated or guaranteed by the constitution. Opposition also refers to groups outside the government legally having the right to voice opinions, criticize, and monitor government attitudes, views, or policies. These opposition activities are based on ideological perspectives, empirical realities, or specific interests to ensure a healthy balance of power and democracy.

The opposition has several important functions in a democratic system. First, the opposition is a policy watchdog and counterweight to government power. Its existence ensures that the policies taken by the government do not deviate from the interests of the people. If a democratically elected government makes policies against the people's will, the opposition serves to remind and provide corrections. Second, the opposition prevents a monopoly of power. With alternative voices, the government cannot easily ignore dissenting views or act arbitrarily. Third, opposition encourages public participation by raising political awareness. By presenting alternative views, opposition helps people understand the available options and strengthens their role in political decision-making.

## **The Opposition's Role in the Oversight of**

The role of the opposition in monitoring power is very important, especially in creating civility in politics. Civility is a basic element that can create a conducive atmosphere for dialogue and discussion. In the context of Indonesian democracy, civility serves to reduce political tensions and facilitate better communication between the government and society. By applying the principle of civility, leaders, and politicians can avoid costly conflicts and create a harmonious political climate. Although opposition politics is an important part of democracy to prevent the monopoly of truth, institutionalizing opposition in Indonesia is still difficult to realize. The ineffective role of the opposition is due to the half-hearted interpretation of the opposition, where the public wants an opposition that acts as a counterweight and controller, not as a radical force in opposition to the government.

Reconciliation is key in bringing together the different views and interests that exist in society. This process involves open dialogue between parties with different views to reach a common agreement. In a democratic context, the government must listen to the opposition's and civil society's voices. Through reconciliation, the government can reduce political polarization that risks exacerbating social tensions and strengthen the legitimacy of its policies. By bringing different parties closer together, reconciliation also allows for greater understanding, which supports more inclusive decisions accepted by all levels of society.

The opposition in Indonesia's political system has an important role in exercising oversight of power and maintaining democracy. As part of the checks and balances, the opposition controls government power by Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution, which regulates the sovereignty of the people. The opposition also offers alternative policies that can enrich the democratic process by providing solutions other than government policies. Thus, the opposition helps to increase government accountability, which is in line with democratic principles, by encouraging transparency in policy-making and budget use. Without an effective opposition, government policies can be implemented without adequate oversight, potentially harming the people's interests in the long run.

However, the opposition's role in Indonesia faces several challenges that reduce its effectiveness. Large coalitions formed in government often weaken the opposition's oversight, making it less than optimal in performing its check and balance function. In addition, the opposition often focuses more on criticism than on offering constructive solutions, leading to political tension and instability. The culture of consensus in Indonesian politics also limits the opposition's room for maneuver, as the consensus-first system emphasizes mutual agreement over dissent. Fragmentation of an uncoordinated opposition can reduce the effectiveness of criticism, while excessive politicization can potentially undermine public trust in the democratic system. Nevertheless, the opposition still plays an important role in ensuring continuity and control in long-term government change.

In recent years, the practice of oligarchy or elitism in Indonesia has continued even though Indonesia's political life is believed to be much more democratic (Aspinall, 2015). Observers of contemporary Indonesian politics generally note a paradox where Indonesia serves as an example of how democratic mechanisms and the existence of oligarchy or elitism can coexist. Particularly in the executive and legislature relationship, the developing pattern shows that solid democracy has not yet been achieved. Instead, it reflects the tendency of political cartel relations, where both institutions benefit from each other covertly and overtly, which causes ineffective control over power.

Views on the need for opposition indicate that the existence and development of democracy in Indonesia are far from perfect, as it provides space for political practices that reduce the nature of democracy itself. Indonesianists' views on the strong presence of oligarchy or elitism indicate that the exercise of power has lacked control, as adequate balancing forces have not been sufficiently established. In this context, strengthening the existence of balancing forces in the opposition group is very important. There is an urgent need to reduce oligarchic practices and the various negative aspects they cause. The opposition is a vital counterweight to ensure a healthier and more controlled democracy.

A different view emerges from the government, which sees the opposition as a threat to its power and tries to maintain it at all costs. Opposition is needed to oversee potentially corrupt activities. In addition, opposition is needed because goodness and truth in politics must be fought for (Maranti et al., 2021). A healthy democracy requires a balance between civility and opposition that serves as a watchdog of power. While civility and reconciliation are important for maintaining social cohesion, the role of opposition should not be ignored. The opposition is not a threat to the government but rather a partner in creating a better government. In Indonesian democracy, opposition is essential to ensure transparency and accountability in policy-making.

The opposition has several strategic roles in a democratic system. First, the opposition serves as a check and balance mechanism to prevent abuse of power by overseeing and evaluating every government policy by the constitution and the public interest. Second, the opposition provides criticism and feedback on government policies, which are important for improving policies and ensuring they are well-targeted. Third, the opposition offers alternative policies and programs that differ from the government, giving the public a choice and ensuring healthy political competition. This competition encourages the government to perform better and be more responsive to the needs of the people. Fourth, the opposition encourages government openness and accountability so that the government cannot take unilateral policies without considering their impact.

## **4. Conclusion**

Based on the results of the previously described research on the development of Indonesian democracy, it can be concluded that Indonesian democracy requires a balance between civility, reconciliation, and the presence of an effective opposition. While social harmony and peace are essential, basic democratic principles such as checks and balances should not be ignored. The opposition has a vital role in maintaining transparency and accountability of power and ensuring government policies align with the people's interests. Without an opposition, democracy risks losing its essence as an open and accountable system. A government that is not effectively monitored is vulnerable to abuse of power and ill-targeted policy-making. Therefore, the opposition should not be perceived as a threat but rather as a partner of the government that helps create better, inclusive, and responsive policies to the needs of the people.

Civility and reconciliation can go hand in hand with a constructive opposition role. Criticism delivered well can encourage dialog and cooperation between the government and the opposition. Thus, Indonesian democracy can grow more mature and sustainable thanks to the presence of active and constructive opposition. The spirit of gotong royong and collaboration between the government and the opposition is the key to creating a strong, responsive, and pro-people democracy. A healthy democracy prioritizes harmony and how differences can be managed wisely for the common good. With civility, reconciliation, and an opposition that serves as a watchdog of power, Indonesia can realize an inclusive and sustainable democracy.

Based on these conclusions, there are suggestions for strengthening Indonesian democracy through several strategic steps. First, regulations are needed to strengthen the opposition's position and rights in parliament, such as providing the right to file a vote of no confidence or formally presenting policy alternatives. Second, fat coalitions should be reduced by incentivizing parties to remain outside the government so that the opposition can function effectively without focusing solely on consensus. In addition, the opposition should be encouraged to be more constructive and solution-based by prioritizing solution-based oversight and providing clear policy alternatives, not just political criticism.

In addition, it is important to increase freedom of speech and provide a wider public space where criticism from the opposition and the public can be properly received as part of the democratic process. The government should also ensure media freedom to criticize policies objectively. In addition, a competitive yet polite political culture should be built, emphasizing ethics and civility in political competition. Political education for the public also needs to be improved so that the public is more critical and understands the role of the opposition in

democracy. Finally, reconciliation between the government and the opposition must be fostered to work together on strategic issues that benefit the people without sacrificing their identities and roles.

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