THE STUDY OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN INDONESIA

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Introduction

This paper aims to review the literature on political culture per se and on political culture in Indonesia. Since its appearance, through paying more attention to the subjective aspect of politics in the classical studies of politics, the study of political culture has stimulated debates among political scientists.[1] The level of interest in political culture, however, has been uneven. While, in the 1960s, studies of political culture were fairly common among political scholars, in the 1970s, many turned to structural perspectives to explain political phenomena after considering that the cultural perspective could not provide satisfactory explanations. However, since the late 1980s, the cultural perspective has once again gained more attention. To begin, then, reviews this paper demonstrating the dynamics of political culture theory, including some critiques of this theory. This is followed by a survey of the study of political culture in Indonesia.

The Study of Political Culture

The emergence of the contemporary study of political culture occurred in the late 1950s and the early 1960s in reaction to a polarization in the levels of analysis by political scientists - a polarization sparked by the absorption of ideas of disciplines such as anthropology, psychology and sociology into politics. On one hand, the political scientists influenced by the behavioral approach were more interested in the individual level and political behavior occurring in informal political institutions, while on the other hand, there were political scientists whose analysis emphasized the macro level and formal political institutions. The latter level was very influenced by sociology and anthropology, while the former was beholden to psychology. Political culture theory was thus developed by political scientists as an attempt to forge a compromise between the two analytical frameworks. As Pye explains:

> The theory of political culture was developed in response to the need to bridge a growing gap in the behavioral approach in political science between the level of microanalysis based on psychological interpretations of the individual's political behavior and the level of macro-analysis based on the variables common to political sociology.[2]

Generally, there are two categories of the concept of political culture.[3] First, political culture is understood structurally. This point of view looks at political culture as part of the political phenomena

consisting of attitudes, orientations, beliefs, emotion and images in society. Second, political culture is viewed functionally or instrumentally. In this sense, political culture functions as the determinant of political behavior. The second point of view seems to be the most popular in political science, such as those considering the contribution of political culture in shaping democracy. It can be seen in the works of Almond and Verba, Pye, Putnam, Rosenbaun, Kavanagh, Eckstein, and Diamond.[4] These authors believe that democracy requires particular values, beliefs and attitudes toward the objects of politics. It can apparently be seen in their cross-national studies of political culture which recognize that to some extent the different political cultures of each nation influences the nature of their democracies.

Perhaps the most influential study of political culture in contemporary political science is Gabriel Almond's and Sydney Verba's study on "civic culture". This is an empirical study of five nations in which the concept of political culture has been elaborated from Talcott Parson's and Edward Shils's concept of "the psychological orientations toward social objects."[5] Almond and Verba claim that "when we speak of the political culture of the society, we refer to the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population."[6] In this sense, political culture is understood by questioning the orientation of people toward political objects, i.e.: the system as general object, input object, output objects, and the self object.[7] The system object is the political system in general, including the roles or structures of political institutions such as the executive, legislature, and bureaucracy. Input object means the demands of society that become materials for the political process in that system. Output object refers to the authoritative policies which are implemented. Finally, the self object is the involvement of individuals in both the political process and the policies' implementation. Almond and Verba categorize three kinds of political orientation:

> (1) "cognitive orientation," that is, knowledge of and belief about the political system, its roles and the incumbents of these roles, its inputs, and its outputs; (2) "affective orientation," or feeling about the political system, its roles, personnel, and performance, and (3) "evaluational orientation," the judgments and opinion about political objects that typically involve the combination of value standards and criteria with information and feelings.[8]

Almond and Verba mention three forms of political culture based on these political orientations. The first is parochial political culture, which refers to those people who have no political orientations toward political objects.[9] The second form is subject political culture, that is, when people have a passive orientation towards a political system and conceive themselves as having minimum influence on the political process.[10] The third form is participant political culture, referring to people who respond positively to all political objects.[11] However, they argue, there is never a single political culture. The nature of a national political culture is a mixture of several political cultures. The ideal sort of political culture which 'fits' well with democracy, and provides a

remarkable foundation for the existence of political stability, is civic culture. Almond and Verba note that this kind of political culture can be found in the USA and Britain.

Almond and Verba emphasize that a democratic political system functions properly if there is a balance between "governmental power" and "governmental responsiveness".[12] Governmental power means elite in the political system gain authority from the people so that they are more likely to decide and implement policies legitimately. Governmental responsiveness refers to the idea that the elite should be accountable so that the people can evaluate what the elite have done. This condition enables the political system to achieve and maintain political stability. The civic culture is appropriate and a necessary condition for democracy and political stability because it is a mixture of parochial, subject and participant political cultures. In the civic political culture, political participation of people occurs without destroying governmental authority because citizens are aware that the continuity of political system needs obedience from them. This condition happens because the government implements its responsibility and accountability, and provides for people's needs according to the abilities of political system. If the government does not do this, it is possible that it will lose its legitimacy and face the possibility of the people seeking to elect another government at the next general election.

In a separate work, Verba explores how political culture is formed.[13] He argues that political culture is a result of the social processes throughout the life of individuals, namely, a learning process or the so-called process of political socialization. That is why one of the focuses of the study of political culture is political socialization.[14] Verba mentions two sources of political culture. First, it comes from the individual's experience in non-political situations such as in the family, school, and peer group. The values and beliefs coming from these institutions are assumed to influence the individual's attitude toward political objects. Second, it comes directly from the operation of the political process. As he argues, "one's attitudes toward governmental output will obviously be affected by what the government produces."[15] Another factor that influences the performance of political culture concerns the political history of the nation.

According to Verba, the study of political culture helps us in understanding and explaining political change and modernization. By considering that political culture is "the system of beliefs about patterns of political interaction and political institutions" he believes that political culture might be a guide to the development and changing of political institutions.[16] His explanation, however, seems to be ambivalent when he states "to a large extent these beliefs may represent stabilizing elements in a system."[17] Perhaps, because of such ambiguity, many critics say that the perspective offered by political culture was "conservative, static, tautological, ignored power relations, and could not explain change."[18] It is also understandable why many social scientists in the 1970s and the 1980s favored a structural approach which emphasizes economical factors in explaining social and political change, an approach for example informing the work of O'Donnell,

which explains authoritarian phenomena in Latin America.[19]

The relationship between political culture and political structure, and the significant contribution of political culture in the appearance of democracy and political stability, is also questioned, as has been discussed by Barry and Pateman.[20] Barry argues that, even though Almond and Verba provide magnificent data, there is insufficient explanation about the relationship between public attitudes and the working of a political system.[21] The relationship between political culture and political structure, and also with democracy and political stability, is not simply linear. As Pateman notes, political structure or the democratic political system can produce civic culture because, through democratic institutions such as political parties, elections, parliament, and a set of rules of law, people and political elite eventually work in the democratic framework as well. From another point of view, Wiatr also questions that relationship.[22] Departing from the Marxist perspective that political consciousness reflects the development of political economics of society, he agrees with Pateman that political structure (including the people's social, economic and status), contributes to political culture. However, he differs from Pateman's position that the relationship is interdependent, viewing instead that political structure as a more independent variable. This notion refers to the vulgar Marxist thought that existence determines consciousness. Political culture, therefore, is one of the forms of superstructure which is determined by the mode of production. Thus, he suggests there is a need to analyze the relationship between socio-economic reality and political institutions, and then to discuss the impact of this relation on the political culture.[23]

Since the middle of the 1980s, some political scientists have attempted to revive the glorious days of the study of political culture. Inglehart calls this effort the "renaissance of political culture".[24] The revival of the cultural approach, according to Inglehart, is occurring because the rational choice model which focuses on economic variables and which has dominated perspectives in political science since the late 1960s, could not provide satisfactory answers to some political phenomena, such as the influence of the church in Latin America and the involvement of religions (Islam, Judaism and Christianity) in the political tensions of the Middle East.[25] Basically, culturalists argue that the cultural factor is one of the main variables determining political behavior. As Wildavsky mentions, culture, in the sense of "shared values legitimating social practices", provides guidance for individual's political behavior.[26] It means that when individuals participate in politics, their basic consideration is not merely one concerning costs and benefits as rational choice suggests, but also their values.

In addition, Eckstein defends the argument that political culture is dynamic. To support the argument that political culture can explain political change, he reminds us of some postulates of social scientists using the cultural political orientations are not homogenous but have variations and are not solely "subjective" reflections of the objective conditions. According to this postulate, the socialization of individuals influences their orientations. This leads to the third postulate of "cumulative socialization", meaning that socialization occurs during

the whole life of an individual. [27] In explaining political change, it seems that Eckstein refers to Parson's theory of "pattern-maintaining change". In this sense, change happens under the direction of certain patterns through which the values and norms of society play an important role.

Generally speaking, culturalists argue that the cultural approach has a significant function in explaining political events, even in shaping political behavior and democracy. In addition, in explaining this notion, Diamond argues that many critics of the cultural perspective misunderstand cultural determinism for three reasons.[28] First, referring to Almond's theoretical argument, he emphasizes that culture does not solely determine democracy - it is one of the factors that affect democracy. In this sense, political culture is seen as an intervening variable.[29] The second reason is empirical. As Diamond points out, democracy is not shaped and reshaped by culture alone but also by other factors as well, such as the changes of economical and social structures, international factors, and political practices in the political system.[30] The last is a normative reason. He argues that political culture is open to evolution and change. This notion can be seen in the fact that a number of states, such as Germany, Japan, Spain, and Italy, evolved into democracies even though formerly they were not considered to have those particular values related to democracy because of their authoritarian and totalitarian characteristics.

Diamond also criticizes some political scientists such as Almond, Verba, Lipset, Dahl, Putnam and Inkeles who argue that, in developing and maintaining democracy, a country should have certain values such as "moderation, cooperation, bargaining, and accommodation among political elite".[31] For these scholars, those values implying the existence of tolerance and pragmatism are important for democratic society because with them, distrust and political conflicts, among others, can be minimized. According to Diamond, their point of view has weaknesses due to the fact that they ignore the importance of mass culture as another element of political culture. They also do not give much attention to the complexity of processes which embody political behavior, focusing more on the behavior itself.[32] Probably, this notion appears because Diamond considers (coming from a pluralistic point of view) that in order to study the political culture of the nation, one must consider the sub-political cultures of that society, including the mass who support the entire political system. Diamond appears to be saying that if one ignores the political culture of the mass, this implies that the mass do not have the same level of tolerance and pragmatism political culture as the elite, while in fact this feature is also found in the mass.

The critiques of Diamond are probably right since we must look at the complexity of political culture and the important of mass culture in its establishment. However, the argument of those who pay attention to the elite is also probably right since we argue that, in the indirect model of democracy, which is commonly implemented in the democratic states, the position of elite is inevitably more important in terms of the power they wield than the position of the masses. This notion becomes more relevant when we analyze the political culture of societies

which, to some extent, still embody paternalistic values such as in Indonesian society. In this sense, the study of politic al culture among elite is still important.

Studying Indonesian Political Culture

The model of "civic culture" in studying political culture has not really been applied by those who have studied Indonesian politics. Notwithstanding, as Robison points out, "culture has long been a prominent explanatory for Western analysts of Indonesian politics, in part because orientalist approaches have strongly influenced Western studies of non-Western societies."[33] He argues that social scientists studying Indonesian politics such as Kahin, Geertz, Feith, Castles, Anderson, Liddle, and others, have been heavily influenced, for instance, by Weber's concept of "systems of meaning" and the Parsonian concepts of structural-functionalism such as "role," "norms," "values," and "legitimacy". In this sense, it can be concluded that social scientists studying Indonesian politics have applied a cultural perspective in which culture is assumed as one of the important instruments in understanding political phenomena in Indonesia.

The concept of the stream of beliefs (*aliran*), for example, according to prominent anthropologist Clifford Geertz, contributed to the rise of the political tensions in Indonesian politics. By means of this, essentially, Weberian concept he argues that the political affiliation of the Javanese relates to their culture which he defines as an:

> historically transmitted pattern of the meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about attitudes toward life.[34]

On the basis of this sense, and then connecting with the Javanese social structures of "market," "village," and "bureaucracy," he mentions three forms of Javanese culture, namely *santri*, *abangan* and *priyayi*.[35] The *santri* is a devout Muslim who is associated with a market social structure and affiliated with the modernist scripturalist party, Masyumi, and the traditionalist scripturalist party, NU. The *abangan* is a Javanese based peasant Muslim who performs Islam partially, being heavily influenced by the pre-Islamic traditions, and who was affiliated with the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and the Indonesian National Party (PNI). The *priyayi* is the Javanese noble and bureaucrat who is inf luenced by Indic traditions and is associated with the PNI.

Geertz's framework has been used by a number of social scientists, such as Howell, in explaining the political behavior of the Javanese voters.[36] Donald Emerson also use the concepts of *santri* and *abangan* with several critiques while analyzing the political culture of the Indonesian elite.[37] In his research he has found that the Indonesian political elite with *santri* background were less compromising, and less pragmatic than the *abangan.* In addition, whilst also using a cultural perspective, but with difference point of view, Herbert Feith explains the political conflicts among the Indonesian political elite in the early decades of

Indonesian independence as being due to the fact that the elite had different values as well as different idea on the ways to develop Indonesia. In this Feith has distinguished two types of Indonesian elite, namely "administrators" and "solidarity makers".[38] The first elite are those who are "leaders with the administrative, technical, legal and foreign-language skills". They are reflected in the figure of Vice President Muhammad Hatta. Meanwhile, the second elite are those who are "skilled as mediators between groups at different levels of modernity and political affectiveness, as mass organizers, and as manipulators of integrative symbols" as personified by President Soekarno. Conflicts between the two were ended when Muhammad Hatta withdrew from the position of Vice President in 1956. After that, power became concentrated in President Soekarno and, in the New Order, with President Soeharto.

William Liddle situates Indonesian political culture in the context of the transformation from traditional to modern culture. Traditional political culture, he states, is symbolized by the various ethnicities, religions and other local cultures, whereas modern political culture is understood as part of western political culture. In the traditional political culture, Indonesia is dominated by Javanism which, in terms of the relationship between the ruling elite and the people, is characterized by patron-client relationships. In this sort of relation, Liddle highlights that "the leader should be benevolent and the people should be obedient".[39] To some extent, the Javanese culture opposes both Islam and western political culture. Both of the latter are less hierarchical than Javanism. However, there is also a contradiction between Western political culture and Islamic political culture. The former is secular and the latter is more theocratic. Liddle is concerned with the contrast between the indigenous political culture and Western political culture. In view of his argument (of a transition from transition from tradition to modernity) he suggests that the modern political culture of Indonesia should be dominated by the liberal and 'rational' (read, modern) ideological system. This notion is similar to the argument of political development theorists that the ultimate goal of political development basically is a democratic secular state in which the influence of traditional values, including the religions, are marginalised.

Actually, the contradiction within the building of Indonesian political culture is not as sharp as Liddle seems to suggest. Since Islam came to Indonesia in the thirteenth century, for instance, there has been an acculturation process in which, to some extent, Islam absorbed the pre-Islam traditions whilst Javanism also took on parts of Islamic values. That is why the Islamic feature in Java, including the tradition within NU, seems more paternalistic than in Islam as stated in the holy Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad tradition. The *kiai*, for example, has particular privileges and "should be benevolent", and the *ummat* (people) follows the teachings of Islam from *kiai* and "should be obedient". Processes of "acculturation" and mixture, may occur between all indigenous cultures and Western culture. Therefore, the future form of the Indonesian political culture

might be different from Liddle's prediction.

Furthermore, in applying a cultural perspective to the study of Indonesian politics, Liddle places culture in the dynamic process. He understands culture as "pattern of values, beliefs, and customs," not a permanent and immutable thing but immanent and improvised in accordance with its environmental context, changing from one generation to another.[40] In an attempt to explain this point of view, Liddle looks at the interplay between political culture of the "defenders" and the "innovators" in Indonesia. The "defenders" political culture is a set of beliefs to maintain the political status-quo. Liddle describes the "defenders" as having resources such as:

> a supporting cast of tens of millions of believers, many of whom are mobilisable against change; the cultural and social inertia that typically accompanies long-held beliefs, a high degree of 'recoverability' or capacity to adapt to new situations; and powerful networks of social forces and institutions with an interest in their preservation.[41]

The concept of "defender" seems to me similar to Gramsci's concept of hegemony in which, a particular class attempts to obtain support from other classes through coercion and persuasion.[42] Creating a culture which provides supports for the ruling class is included in this process. Liddle's perception of "defenders" is different from the concept of hegemony, however, because in his understanding, it means more pluralism. Gramsci's concept of hegemony, however, deals with classes of society in which the interests of people is not embodied by horizontal heterogeneity but more by vertical heterogeneity or class.

In contrast, the "innovators" attempt to improvise political culture in order to obtain a more democratic political system. This group, according to Liddle, consists of a number of political activists, intellectuals, and parts of state apparatus.[43] In demanding a more democratic system they are also supported by international forces which, since the late 1980s, have been concerned with democratisation in authoritarian and totalitarian states. The target of "innovators" might be a sort of "civic culture" as Almond and Verba suggest.

Conclusion

Studies of political culture basically attempt to look at the subjective aspect of political life. A set of values, beliefs, and attitudes, is often regarded as political culture which underlines democracy and political stability or otherwise. Some studies, alternatively, suggest that political structure contributes to the establishment of political culture. The civic culture, for instance, is determined by democratic political structure, rather than vice versa. In this sense, political culture is part of political context, as this study suggests. In studying the Indonesian political culture many scholars realize that there are various cultures in Indonesia since Indonesia is regarded as a plural society in terms of ethnicity, race, religion, and class. As a consequence, the portrait of the Indonesian political culture is basically still one of a process of interactions, even contradictions, among its components. The most important part of that process in

contemporary Indonesia, as Liddle has emphasized, is the interplay between the supporters of the ruling groups political culture and the supporters of a more democratic political system.

Endnotes

[1]See, G. Almond, "The Study of Political Culture," in G. Almond (ed.), *A Discipline Divided: Schools & Sects in Political Science*, (California: Sage Publication), 1990.

[2]L. Pye, "Introduction," in L. Pye and S. Verba (eds.), *Political Culture and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 8.

[3]J. Pammett and M. Whittington, "Introduction: Political Culture and Political Socialization," in J. Pammett and M. Whittington (eds.), *Foundation of Political Culture and Political Socialization in Canada* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada, 1976), p. 31.

[4]See, G. Almond and S. Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, First Sage Printing (London: Sage Publications, 1989); L. Pye, *op. cit*.; R. Putnam, "Studying Elite Political Culture: The Case of Ideology," *The American Political Science Review*, Vol LXV, September 1971; D. Kavanagh, *Political Culture*, (London: Macmillan, 1972); W. Rosenbaum, *Political Culture*, (London: Nelson, 1975); H. Eckstein, "A Culturalist Theory of Political Change," *American Political Science Review*," Vol. 82, No. 3, 1988; L. Diamond (ed), *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, (London: Lynne Riener Publishers, 1994).

[5]Almond and Verba, *op. cit*., p. 13.

[6]*Loc. cit*.

[7]*ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

[8]*ibid*., p. 14.

[9]*ibid.*, p. 16.

[10]*ibid.*, p. 17.

[11]*ibid.*, p. 18.

[12]*ibid.*, p. 341.

[13]S. Verba, "Comparative Political Culture," in Pye and Verba, *op. cit*., p. 550.

[14]Kavanagh, *op. cit.*, pp 28-36; D. Cattell and R. Sisson, *Comparative Politics: Institutions, Behaviour, and Development*, (California: Mayfield Pub. Co., 1978), pp. 142-235.

[15]Verba, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

[16]*ibid.*, p. 516.

[17]*ibid.*, p. 519.

[18]M. Thomson, et.al., *Cultural Theory*, (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990), p. 215.

[19]See, G 'Donnell, *Modernization and Bureaucratic-Authoritarianism: Studies in South American Politics*, (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1973).

[20]B Barry, *Sociologists, Economists and Democracy*, (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1970). C. Pateman, "Political Culture, Political Structure and Political Change," *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1, 1971, and "The Civic Culture: A Philosophic Critique," in G. Almond and S. Verba (eds), *The Civic Culture: Revisited*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).

[21]Barry, *ibid.*, p. 48.

[22]J. Wiatr, "Civic Culture from a Marxist Sociological Perspective," in Almond and Verba (eds), "Civic Culture: Revisited," *op. cit*.

[23]*ibid.*, p. 114.

[24]R. Inglehart, "The Renaissance of Political Culture," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 2, 1988.

[25]*ibid.*, p. 1203.

[26]A. Wildavsky, "Choosing Preferences by Constructing Institutions: A Cultural Theory of Preference," *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 81, No. 1, 1987, pp. 5-6. This notion seems similar to the concept of ideology. The different is, culture constitutes many kind of social practices, while the ideology is more related to the political sphere.

[27]Eckstein, *op, cit.*, pp. 790-791.

[28]Diamond, "Introduction," in Diamond (ed), *op. cit*., pp. 9-10.

[29]*ibid*., p. 9.

[30]*ibid.*

[31]*ibid.*, p. 10.

[32]*ibid.*

[33]R. Robison, "Culture, Politics, and Economy in the Political History of the New Order," *Indonesia*, No. 31, 1981, p. 1.

[34]C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 89.

[35]C. Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (London: Free Press, 1960).

[36]J. Howell, "Javanese Religious Orientations in the Residency of Surakarta," in Carol A. Smith (ed), *Regional Analysis, Vol. II: Social System* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

[37]D. Emerson, *Indonesia's Elite: Political Culture and Cultural Politics*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976).

[38]H. Feith, *The Decline of Constitutional Democracy in Indonesia*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), pp. 113-123.

[39]W. Liddle, *Politics and Culture in Indonesia*, (Columbus: The Ohio State University, Centre for Political Studies Institute for Social Research The University of Michigan, 1988), p. 1.

[40]W. Liddle, *Leadership and Culture in Indonesian Politics*, (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996), p 143.

[41]*ibid.*, p. 153.

[42]R. Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction*, (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982), pp. 20-28

[43]Liddle, "Leadership…" *op. cit.*, p. 159.

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