

Abstention, Democracy and Decentralization: A Case of Direct Election in North Sumatera Province 2013, Indonesia

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Abstract

Indonesians have an acronym for voters who refuse to take part in the elections. They are known as "golput" and these are people who either does not vote or abstentions. This study aims to explain the dynamics of abstention of direct election in North Sumatera. The direct election to vote the governor of North Sumatera was held in 2013. The results of direct election have shown that the voters participation very low approximately 36.62%. This condition also explained that the number of golput or abstentions very high approximately 63.38%. This condition will threaten sustainable democracy. The high number of abstentions is very affected the failures of sustainability democracy in Indonesia. Therefore, research on abstention are needed for improvement of sustainable democracy in Indonesia. We find that several reason why golput exist in direct election in Indonesia, especially in direct election of North Sumatera. It is caused democracy defined as an election only, distrust of government and the problematic concept of citizenship. Therefore, it is needed a good strategy to realize the sustainability of democracy in Indonesia. The abstention has a negative impact on the sustainability of democracy and decentralization in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatera.

Keywords: Abstention, Democracy, Decentralization, Direct Election and North Sumatera Province

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1. Introduction

Decentralization in Indonesia is not a new issue, even decentralization has been around since the independence of Indonesia. But in practice, decentralization does not go well, especially during the New Order Regime under President Suharto. New Order led by Suharto has produced an authoritarian regime (Nisbet, 1986). Suharto's regime did not solve the problem transparently and did not accommodate many demands and claims that arose in areas such as Aceh, Riau, Irian Jaya and East Timor (Jatmika, 2001). Suharto's regime, called New Order, established a pervasive and efficient security apparatus, with broad powers of arrest and imprisonment (Burnell & Vicky, 2005). Under the regime of New Order, Indonesia was described as bureaucratic state where the state was presented as the embodiment of the collectively of its public. Many analyses explain the hegemonic and central position of the New Order had concentrated power into the hands of only view elite circles. Suharto's authoritarian regime was creating demonstrations and people protests to bring down the New Order regime. The fall of the Suharto's regime led to a new regime called reformation era. New style decentralization that was born in the era of reform, concerned of the improvement of the Indonesian political system. One of the expected changing is a centralized system of government to decentralized system. The spirit of decentralization is expected more democratic and provide equitable development to bring the state closer to the society, and to provide better public services (Tuner, David, 1997).

Decentralization has many definitions. The definition of decentralization in general refers to the Rondinelli and the World Bank. Rondinelli stated that decentralization as the transfer or delegation of legal and authority from the central governmental to local government (Rondinelli, 1999). In the same word, Crook argued that decentralization was usually referred to the transfer of powers from central government to lower levels in a political-administrative and territorial hierarchy (Crook, 1998). I argue that transfer of the authority giving the opportunity to the local people to participate in democracy. Therefore the local people can determine directly the governor or mayor. It was also explained by John Mary Kauzya that decentralization was a policy of high priority and used as an instrument of people empowerment, a platform for sustainable democratization (Kauzya, 2001). It means decentralization is a good policy or an instrument for sustainable democracy. Actualizing a sustainable democracy is not easy, especially in a multi-ethnic society. Based on this background, there are two questions that will be explained in this paper; first, based on constructivist explanation, why the abstention rate in North Sumatera is high and the second, How did it impact the quality and sustainability of democracy and decentralization.

Methodology

The methodology designed in this research is qualitative approach by examining reports, documents, in-depth interview, journal, books and media analysis.

The Concept of Sustainability Democracy

Democracy is considered as an ideal government, which is the best to apply in the countries of the world, and expected to answer the problems of the society and uphold the sovereignty of society. Dahl explained that Democracy is the best form of

government. Public officials should be chosen by majority vote. Every citizen should have an equal chance to influence government policy. The minority should be free to criticize majority decisions (Dhal, 1972). Studies academics about democratisation acquaint two great ideas category, namely concepts of minimalist and maximalist (Muladi, 2004). Minimalist democracy more explain democracy as procedural such general classifier. While maximalists democracy more concentrate on the substance of democracy, not only to see election as main indicator, but also to respect the civil rights and to respect pluralism, is the most fundamental thing in democratic life. It is also delivered by Larry Diamond defines democracy as a system of government that maintain three conditions: (a) meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and groups for all elective positions; (b) highly inclusive level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies, so that no major group is excluded; and (c) a level of civil and political liberties sufficient to ensure political competition and participation, including freedom of expression and the freedom to form and join organisations (Samarasinghe, 1994).

This condition explains that democracy will sustain if all individuals or groups of individuals are treated equal by the state. Equal if the state provides space for active participation in matters of social, cultural, political and economic. Rousseau argued that political participation was an important aspect in the order of democracy. Political participation was an activity undertaken to engage citizens in the decision-making process in order to influence government (Pateman, 1970). Political participation affects government policies (Budihardjo, 1998). This actions include to give voting in elections, to attend the general meeting, to be a member of a party or interest group, to make contact with government officials or members of parliament, and so on. Political participation is an important instrument of sustainability democracy. To realize political participation in society becomes difficult in societies divided along deep social cleavages such as ethnicity because the community has been divided in a few ethnicities (Reilly, 2005). Emilie explained missing from ethnicity debates are arguments stressing the importance of political participation of ethnic from a democratic perspective (Emilie, 2005). The same argument also explained by Kanchan Chandra. Chandra argued that democracy requires fluid ethnic majorities and minorities in order to function (Chandra, 2006). In other words, Chandra want to affirm that democracy takes the role of the ethnic majority and minorities to participate in the realization of democracy. While according to Merkel that heterogeneity potentially destabilizes mature democracies (Merkel, 2012).

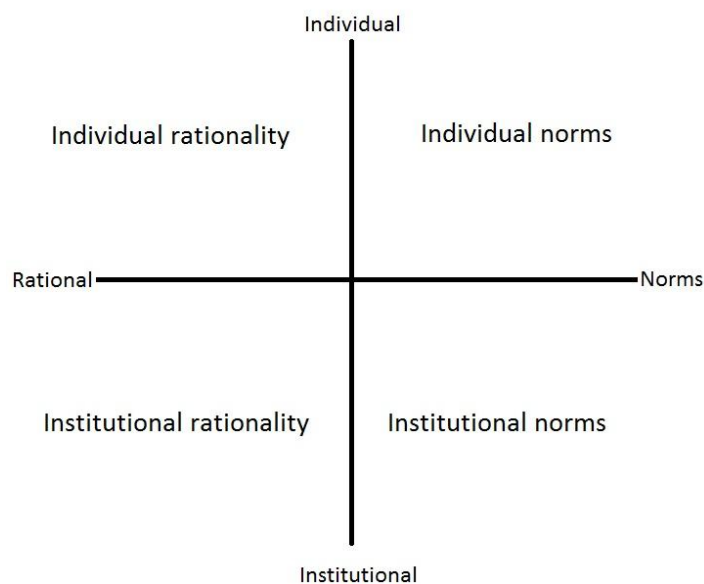
The Concept of Constructivism

In this paper, I will use the constructivism approach to explain the abstention in North Sumatra. Why constructivism? There are two reason, first, I argue that abstention is not given. Abstention born as defined and redefined, constructed for political and social interests. Second, constructivist view this reality of the world as something that was based on evidence (the fact) that materially could be arrested or not by the five senses, but that fact does not lead / not determine how we (humans) see the social reality. Wendt argued that social reality according to constructivist is the result of social construction. In other words, human beings are individually constructed through social reality.

Actually constructivism appears to provide a view that social reality can not be seen as naturally exist by itself (given) and independent of interaction (rationalist) and vice versa can not also be seen as something that is nil or nothing and merely seen as a reflection of human ideas. Wendt argued that structures of human association are determined primarily by shared ideas rather than material forces and identities and interests of purposive actors are constructed by these shared ideas rather than given by nature (Bozdaglioglu, 2007). In this paper I will use the framework of Camilla Tyllstrom to explain about abstention in North Sumatera. Actually, Camilla describes the voting behavior but I will use this framework to explain about abstentions in North Sumatra. I argue that the Camilla's framework not only explain about voter behavior but also the abstention.

Based on the constructivism approach, ideas are important for politics and voting or abstention and understanding how voters view the act of voting or abstention. To investigate how voters perceive and make meaning of the concept of voting and turnout, Camilla has developed a theoretical according to individual rationality, individual norms, institutional rationality or institutional norms when they talk about voting and voter turnout. The graph below is influenced by rational choice, norms, social identity and new institutionalism. The divisions are according to the four theories with "individual" representing social identity, "rational" representing rational choice, "norms" – representing (obviously) the theories about norms and institutional representing new institutionalism (Tyllstrom, 2012)

Figure 1. The Divisions Of Voting



Source : Camilla's Framework

Camilla explained that the individual rationality section represents self and/or group interest in form of beneficial outcomes of voting, for example that one vote's for a candidate that promises benefits to one's group or oneself. The institutional rationality section deals with outcomes as well, but in terms of national institutions, that an individual think of the vote in a system-aspect, how the vote affect the system, how turnout might indicate something about the voting system, how the outcome of the election might affect the country and such.

Individual norm section, where social identity-factors such as group belonging and group norms play the biggest role in the understanding of the vote. Groups could be one's family, if everyone in the family votes it might be embarrassing not to do it or it could be the people one feels that one belongs to in terms of work, social groups etc. The institutional norm section is where the vote is understood in the national institutional context and those norms, that for example the state diffuses norms that voting is good.

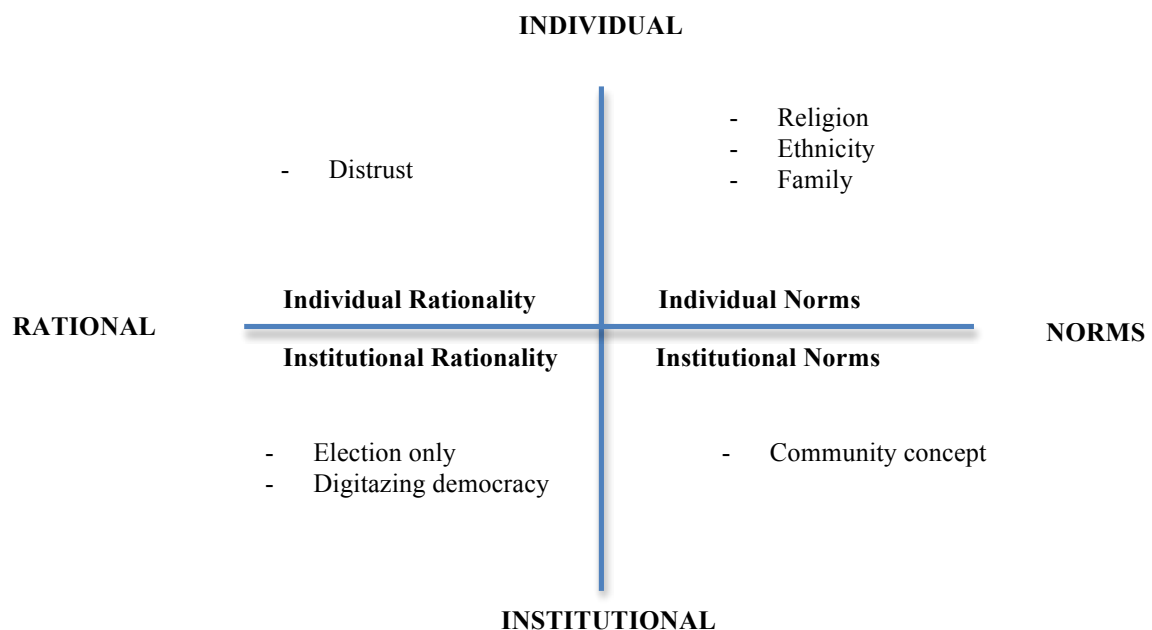
Direct Election In North Sumatera Province

The development progres on the discourse of direct election keep developed from since 1945 until today. This is proven by the release of various laws such as Law No. 1 of 1945, Law No. 22 of 1948, Presidential Decree No. 6 of 1959, Law No. 18 of 1965, Law No. 5 of 1994, Law No. 22 of 1999, and Law No. 32 of 2004 (Prihatmoko, 2005). Due to the issuance of Law No. 20 of 1999, which was renewed into Law No. 32 of 2004 about the local autonomy that the Indonesian people may participate directly in determining the local leader. In June 2005, Indonesia did direct elections. This is the form of the establishment and enforcement of democracy in Indonesia. Direct election in North Sumatera followed by 5 governor candidates in 2013: 1. Gus Irawan Pasaribu - Soekirman, 2. Effendi Simbolon – Jumiran Abdi, 3. Chairuman Harahap - Fadly Nur Zal, 4. Amri Tambunan-RE Nainggolan, 5. Gatot Pudjo Nugroho - Tengku Erry. Generally, candidates came from a different ethnic.

Why Abstention Was Very High In Direct Election of North Sumatera

The author will use the Camilla's framework to explain the dynamics of abstention in North Sumatra. This framework will explain the abstention in North Sumatera based on constructivism approach.

Figure. 2. Abstention Framework Based On Constructivism Approach



Individual Rational : Distrust and Political Gangster

Based on individual rationality reason, that person's abstentions because there is beneficial outcome by choosing one of the candidates. In the other words, people do not believe the candidates. Generally, respondents felt pessimistic or sceptical, even do not believe at all at the government to bring change for the better, the government considered to have no influence, especially good effect on pone's life, because the government's failure to carry out his duties, and political promises have not been fulfilled by the government to the public, as well as the "track record" was very disappointing the government. So it can increase the rationality disappointment in seeing the political reality, as well as political awareness for the society that can increase the distrust of the government in bringing change for the better. This figure is quite high and worrying, because it could threaten the government legitimation anytime. So it can be concluded that the distrust of government affects people not to give their right to vote.

Another reason people do not believe the government is the political gangster. Political gangster known by Indonesia as preman. Hadiz explained that Post authoritarian regime increasing the political gangster in Indonesia, especially in North Sumatera. Political violence or political gangster is not new issue in North Sumatera. In 1950's, New Order regime nurtured youth gangster organization- Pemuda Pancasila (PP). Military first decided to mobilize youths and local toughs to confront pro-communist party (PKI). Other important New Order regime youth organization included FKPPI, the communications forum of the children of retired military forces. Notwithstanding the status of Pemuda Pancasila in North Sumatera is the association of functional group youths (Ikatan Pemuda Karya). It is widely believed to dominate the illegal gambling industry in North Sumatera (Hadiz, 2010)

Currently, Pemuda Pancasila, FKPPI and IPK become a political instrument to support one candidate mayor or governor in the election. Meanwhile, the candidate also needs the support of the youth organization to mobilize society to support the candidate. Post-Suharto regime, the collaboration between the candidate and the youth group is new style of work. They have thus been forced to seek new strategies of survival, including providing political parties with a well-oiled apparatus of violence especially when necessary during election periods.

Individual Norms : The Power Of Ethnicity, Religion And Family

Individual norm section, where social identity-factors such as ethnicity, religion and family play the biggest role in the understanding of the abstention. The use of ethnic identity in the political struggle is still a lot going on in almost all parts of Indonesia, including North Sumatera. According to the BPS (Indonesian Central Statistics Agency) in 2013 that the population of North Sumatera are 13 million people made up of diverse ethnic.

Table 1. The Percentage Of Ethnic Groups In Medan

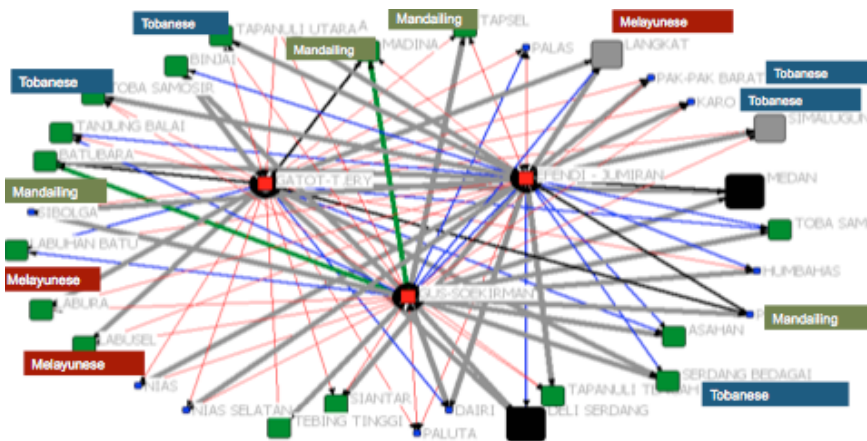
Number	Ethnic	Percentage
1	Javanese	33,04 %
2	North Tapanuli/Batak Tobanese	22,03 %

3	Mandailingnese	9,05 %
4	Nias	7,01 %
5	Melayunese	6,00 %
6	Batak Karonese	5,05 %
7	Batak Angkolanese	4,01 %
8	Chinese	2,07 %
9	Others	2,06 %

Source: BPS 2012

Ethnic be used as a means of campaigning, and attracting of society, especially those from the certain ethnic. The influence of this ethnicity can be seen from community that comes from a particular ethnicity, such as Batak Toba, Batak Mandailing, and Chinese. This can affect other ethnic groups to be more primordial, and created a political culture in which one candidate selected one of which is based on ethnicity. Ethnic majority support in each district / city on the candidates can be seen in the following figure

Figure 3. Ethnic Support Based On The Ethnicity In Each District/Municipality



Source: survey 2013

In the direct elections of North Sumatera 2013, the ethnic factor plays an important role. Voters tend to vote for candidates from the same ethnicity. In other words, the issue of "native" is very effective to attract the attention of society (interview with Evi Novida, a Head of Election Commission of North Sumatera Province).

Figure 3 explained that ethnic similarity factor influencing people to choose a candidate for governor. However, at the same time those abstentions are also influenced by ethnicity. Sihalohe explained that there are several reason the abstention influenced by ethnicity, first, there are some different political view and attitude and constitute ethnic idea orientation ethnic to take choice governor candidate. Second, weakening support of ethnicity because pragmatic reason (Sihalohe, 2006). Pragmatic reason based on the argument of constructivism is flexible and changeable. In other words, ethnicity is very dynamic (Yang, 2000). This dynamic ethnic condition ultimately affects the ethnic political behaviour or abstention on the direct election in North Sumatera. Ethnic pragmatism can be proved based on giving a title or clan seems to be a commonplace and easy to do. Gatot Pudjo Nugroho, who came from the ethnic of Javanese, was awarded as "Marga Lubis" (a clan in

Mandailingnese) by head of Mandailingnese community. Gus Irawan Pasaribu whose identity as Mandailingnese awarded as "Marga Bangun" (a clan in Karonese) from Karo society and much more. It is a fact that is always found on the eve of direct elections. This condition explained the public that ethnicity was very open to receive even to give such awards to others. But on the other hand, this condition led to the negative effects namely ethnic internal conflict between them. When governor candidate earned a title clan from certain ethnic, it apparently led to protest and abstention from the same ethnicity conducted by the other public figures. This internal ethnic conflict was often prolonged conflict.

Institutional Rational : Its All About Election and Digitizing Democracy

After the fall of the Soeharto regime, it happened a very drastic expansion of the area, so the latest data from the Ministry of Home Affairs of Indonesia show that Indonesia consists of 34 Provinces (North Borneo is the latest province), 542 regencies/cities. Thus, the total is as much as 537 direct elections (in Jakarta, it is governor's race only), 2 national elections (legislative and presidential). This data does not include village elections at the village level, amounting to 76.655 villages. Post-New Order, this nation is more preoccupied to prioritize democratization process in terms of politics. This is reflected in many local and national elections in Indonesia. But unfortunately, this State is stuck in a procedural democracy. In fact, democracy is not just about elections. Moreover, democracy after the 1998 reform did not provide for the public welfare. When the highest number of vote measures democracy in election, ethnicity becomes a commodity for the political elite to gain the voice or the support of the multi-ethnic society. That multi-ethnic society could be analogous to "Pandan Leaves (Screw pine Leaves)" which is used for cooking. When cooking has become fragrant, the leaf is discarded. It means that when the political elite has gained the public position, then ethnicity is not considered anymore. The same thing described by Cornelis Lay. Lay explained that currently the concept of governance, the people are not something given but rather a political process (Lay, 2005). People have elections to determine the people's representative; actually the concept of representation is not a representation of the people but the other part of people. These conditions clearly impacted the great distance between the people and the people's representatives. This condition makes people become apathetic towards the political elite and democracy. Public apathy can be seen from the following survey.

Table 2. Is It Necessary To Follow The Election?

Respondents Response	Percentage
Yes	18 %
No	82 %

Source : Survey of Political Department, University of North Sumatera, 2013

Table 2 describe that the majority of respondents 82 % say that it is not necessary to follow the elections. Respondents who said no more need for the elections; they are alienated and marginalized in the political process so as to withdraw or avoid getting involved in the electoral process. Because there was a presumption that any mayoral candidate will not be able to bring change for the better that can be beneficial to the people. This is further influenced by the mistrust of the government as well as the

history of "track record" of the candidates for mayoral which are only considered bring "fresh air", but when they have the power, the candidates are just fighting for personal interests and their group, so that it can be said that politics do not have any meaning for them. Once, democracy is only understood as an election, and then it will lead to a change the meaning of democracy. I argue that the substance of democracy changes into a democracy digitizing as if democracy was just about the numbers. This condition has continued to grow rapidly when the media also supported. Democracy is only about elections and majority vote. In the other words, democracy is about numbers.

Institutional Norms : The Problematic Concept Of Citizenship

Besides the issue of public mistrust of the government, there are still important things that greatly affect the high abstentions, the problematic concept of citizenship. Citizens as supporters of a country are the basis for the country. In other words, citizens are one of the essential elements for a country, in addition to other elements. The people as part of a population, which remains the country, can interpret citizens themselves. Marshal explained that citizenship is the full membership of the community. He argued that citizenship as status bestows upon individuals equal rights and duties, liberties and constraints, power and responsibilities (Held, 2000). Citizenship will be turned into a modern nation when the national consciousness. In other words, it appears that the concept of nation inspired by equal members of the community. Meanwhile Giddens describes citizenship understood as an area of contestation or conflict. Each community will certainly struggle for rights. Giddens argued that state sovereignty helped foster the identity of subjects as political subjects as citizens. Nationalism is the solution to bring cultural sensibility of sovereignty. And the role of the State is required to maintain the relationship between communities. Then the state has an obligation to treat all as equal for community.

Lets have a look at the citizenship in Indonesia. Actually, Indonesia has a citizenship law is law No. 12 of 2006 on Citizenship of the Republic of Indonesia as a substitute for the previous Law No. 62 of 1958 and 1976. Law No.12 of 2006 was created because of the experience of discrimination against certain groups that discriminate between native citizens and foreigners (not original) primordial basis (race, ethnicity). Original concept of the Indonesian people as stated in the Law No. 12 of 2006 and chapter 2 explanations is "that became an Indonesian citizen since birth and never acquired another citizenship on his own." The question now is whether Law No. 12 of 2006 has succeeded in establishing the concept of citizenship that affect the creation of nation building. In fact there are still many cases of discrimination against certain ethnic or inter-ethnic conflict. This also describes the conditions of the Nation Building in Indonesia is not yet finished.

Based on interview with Hanif, researcher in Local Politics and Regional Autonomy, UGM explained that maybe Indonesia does not have citizenship concept. Indonesia only has the community concept in the state. It can be easily seen in real life when people of Indonesia easy to close access to major roads for weddings or other events. This condition is often encountered because of the approach taken is the community. Therefore, closing the road is not unusual because of the way it is his community.

Decentralization And Corrupt Elite

The next question is how the impact of decentralization in the city of Medan. Explained at the beginning that decentralization is the transfer of authority from central government to local government. Transfer of the authority intended that local government can provide better services to the local community. In other words, make people closer with decentralization of public service. But the fact that poverty is increasing in the city of Medan. Central Statistics Agency (BPS), as of January 1, 2011, the number of poor people in the city of Medan increased to 9.92% from 6.40% in 2010. Ironically is the guardian of Medan and North Sumatra Governor Province always experience the same case, namely corruption. Corruption cases had experienced Medan since 2005 at which time it was first held direct elections. The impact of corruption is from 2005 to 2010 there have been five times Mayor of Medan changes. History repeated when elected mayor in 2010 exposed cases of corruption. It is explained that the low level of community participation not only hinders the sustainability of democracy but also impact the implementation of decentralization. Community participation should result transformative leadership but in fact the low people participation create a corrupt leader.

What Can Be Done?

Create Harmony among Democracy Activities, The State Capability and Citizenship.

I argue when democracy is more focused on the issue of elections, then the sustainability of democracy is very hard to be realized. A very large budget to implement the state elections led to only focus on the election. The result is the first, election spending State funds do not have a significant impact on improving people's welfare. Secondly, the fact that election in Indonesia always ends up with a conflict between supporters or ethnic conflict. This suggests that state institutions were not able to perform well without violent elections. In other words that there should be efforts to improve or increase state institutions in implementing democratic activities. The forms of democracy such as elections and free speech must be protected or covered by an excellent capability of state institutions. State institutions must always be present in a very pluralistic society. Democracy activities protected by the State should be implemented with a clear concept about citizenship.

Appreciation To The Multi-Ethnic Community To Be Patriotism By The Government

Ghia Nodia explained that the illiberal flesh of ethnicity cannot be wholly denied, but it can be tamed if dealt with reasonably. Ethnic pride in common ancestors, a glorious history, great traditions, a shared language, a noble culture and so on; can be sublimated into patriotic esteem for the institutions and achievements created by a democratic not just ethnic "we" (Diamond, 1994). This patriotism will be a bridge between ethnicity and country. During this time, the State is less able to build the spirit of patriotism. When the spirit of patriotism can be realized, then all the multi-ethnic community actions will speak about the goodness of the State. The problem now is the State is often not present when a multi-ethnic society in conflict. State presence is needed in the midst of people who are very vulnerable to conflict. The presence of the State should not only be a problem solver for a while but the State

must also give appreciation to the community to build a spirit of patriotism. The spirit of patriotism is performed to establish the concept of citizenship and nationalism. State building and the concept of citizenship to all ethnic nationalism was without a majority or minority ethnic importance. When this concept is not present emerging racism, chauvinism or even fascism.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of ethnicity and sustainable democracy, there were several things that could be concluded, first abstention is not given. Abstention born as defined and redefined, constructed for political and social interests. Second, there are four abstention framework based on constructivism approach that it's a individual rationality, individual norms, institutional rationality and institutional norms. These four basic arguments are greatly affecting the abstention in direct election. Third, abstention affect the low people participation and hinder sustainability democracy and decentralization, such as corruption and poverty. Fourth, there are several solutions to create sustainability democracy, for example create aligned citizenship or nationalism with democracy activities and the state capability. Beside that the state must establish and gives appreciation to the multi-ethnic community to be patriotism for the country.

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