

Conference Paper

The Influence of Culture on General Elections in Indonesia

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Abstract

Introduction. Culture in society has an influence on general elections. It has particular influence over the legislative elections in South Nias district. Customary and kinship system living in the society as a law affect the legislative elections. The influence can be constructive and destructive. In order to investigate the influence of culture over the general elections, the researchers carried out a case study on legislative elections in Nias Selatan district, North Sumatra province, Indonesia in 2014. **Method.** This research is a qualitative research conducted through in-depth interviews to the people of South Nias district. **Results.** The findings showed that culture has influenced the general elections.

Keywords: Influence, Culture, Legislative Election, Indonesia.

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1. Introduction

Culture has long-standing relationship with local community. Herder contends that culture lives as a convergence known as *Volksseele* (the spirit of society) leading to a complete social homogeneity. Constructs on culture emerging in the early 20th century define culture as internal coherence [1] or consistency of idea and action patterns in a group of people. Another definition of culture refers to collective idea programming [2]. Culture is also defined as universal organization applied to certain society. Hofstede makes important point that certain aspects of culture are physically visible, but their meanings are not. The meaning of culture can only be seen and practiced by the members of society.

Nias island, one of the islands in the Indonesian archipelago, is located in North Sumatera province. Its capital city is Teluk Dalam. Nias tribe are a kind of society living in strong customs and culture. Their ancestor was *Boronadu* people also known as *Sadawamolo* (interview results with Sumangeli Mendrofa as the chief of General

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Elections Commission in South Nias district). In south Nias district (Teluk Dalam), the term 'Bela' means friend, a term which shows friendship. The term is used to develop intimacy as well as to avoid hostility. Nias tribe have been applying clan system following patrilineal line.

Nias tribe realize that their customs and laws are source of living rules used to achieve serenity, peace, and happiness as well as to unite the society in a good place. The smallest kinship of South Nias people is known as *sangambato*, or main family which consists of mother, father, and children. The important group, on the other hand, in South Nias tribe refers to *sangambato sebua*, a big virilocal family which embraces senior main family and their children's family living in the same house and creating a household with an economic unity. The alliances of *sangambato sebua* derived from an ancestor is then known as *Gana* in South Nias.

South Nias district was established in 2003, and it held legislative election in 2004, 2009, and 2014. However, the implementation always seems to cause national problem. Massive frauds frequently occur in South Nias district. Therefore, in this case the researchers attempt to investigate how culture can influence general election. This study presents findings or facts in terms of general election.

2. Method

Problems of legislative elections in South Nias district arises as culture in the society does not work properly. The researchers regard social culture as an extraordinarily valuable source in general election. The use of culture as political means by group of elites is considered negative in general election. Such condition leads to legislative elections without democracy in South Nias district.

This study aims at investigating the influence of culture over general elections in Indonesia. This study is a part of national research examining cultural values of society. Assigning the *key-informant* to be interviewed was carried out through *purposive sampling*. The interviewees were those involved in organizing the legislative elections.

The data of this study was obtained through in-depth interviews and relevant literature. The interviews were conducted with the organizers of general elections and the observers of general election in South Nias.

The analysis process of this study involved the interaction between interview results and relevant literature. The process used as well as included interaction and the researchers' emotion so that it provided more comprehensive understanding about

the influence of culture in society [3]. Nadig considers this type of self-reflection as mind-checking and researchers' experience [4].

The results of qualitative was analyzed by examining the interview results between the researchers and the research objects. The researchers then observed the interview results and discussed what the data said regarding the objectives of this study. The findings of the qualitative analysis, furthermore, were integrated to the relevant literature in order to prove them.

3. Discussion

Culture is human, and that seems to be the reason that everyone has ideas about anything. Acholonu affirms that culture is a process developing mind and soul. According to him, culture involves everything [5]. Humans bear all of the consequences due to representing their existence. Khalil begins his definition of culture with positive assumption that everyone knows what culture is [6]. Everyone agrees that culture is a way of life including belief, moral, language, political organization, their economic activities, their tools, techniques, and art as well as literature. In other words, culture is everything involving one's entire existence.

Every work of man which comes from sense, idea, and desire is culture. The word '*budaya*' (culture) is derived from Sanskrit '*budhayah*', which is plural form of the word '*budhi*' which means '*sense*'. Culture is defined as things related to sense. In addition, culture refers to things created by humans based on their intellectual abilities. Culture shares general characteristics in which it is learned, inherited, continued, alive in society, developed as well as transformed, and integrated.

The important concept in understanding culture is universal culture which also refers to cultural elements. Universal culture comprises seven elements which are language system, knowledge system, kinship and social-organization system, living tool and technological system, economic and livelihood system, religious system, and art system. There are several factors encouraging the creation of culture, and they are geographic, environment, race, and economic system. Each element, however, must be analyzed through cultural forms which involves three components: idea system, activity system, artifact system. Understanding culture holistically does not mean combining every cultural element but examining relationship and effects of one element to another.

The researchers, regarding this study, carried out a study on a cultural element, kinship and social-organization. It is an anthropological attempt to understand how humans create society through various social groups. According to Koentjaraningrat, life of every

group of society is governed by customs and rules concerning on various kinds of unity in surrounding in which they live and interact every day. The closest social unity – the basic one – is relatives which can be the main family and other relatives.

In the next process, human will be categorized into geographical locality levels to form social organizations in life. It is due to the fact humans are social creature who cannot live without the others. Human interactions create social-organization means agreed upon by the members of society. This social system embraces kinship to broader system such as association, fellowship, and finally nation.

Within this context, it is interesting to investigate kinship system as a part of culture which influences the process of general elections. The 2014 legislative general elections in South Nias district became the object of this study regarding how the effects of culture (kinship system) influenced the general elections.

Legislative general election is a means of public sovereignty to elect members of house of representative as well as members of regional house of representative which is carried out directly, publicly, freely, privately, fairly, and equally in the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (UUD 1945).

Kinship system of South Nias society adopts patrilineal lines which follows man kinship. South Nias tribes coming from one lineage are called *sisambua mado*. They are bound by blood ties established by men. The smallest kinship of South Nias people is known as *sangambato*, or main family which consists of mother, father, and children. The important group, on the other hand, in South Nias tribe refers to *sangambato sebua*, a big virilocal family which embraces senior main family and their children's family living in the same house and creating a household with an economic unity. The alliances of *sangambato sebua* derived from an ancestor is then known as *Gana* in South Nias.

Kinship system of South Nias people is held firmly due to strong and well-respected culture in the society. The society tend to adhere to customary sanctions rather than state laws. It can be seen from customary ceremonies which involve all relatives. The manners are showed in the way every member of family greets each other, but the way greeting to the elders is different from the one to the young people. The elders must be more respected than the young people. The relationship between in-laws and their son-in-law or daughter-in-law is as close as the relationship to their own children. To the same extent, a spouse considers his/her brother-in-law or sister-in-law as his/her brother/sister. No separation exists among them, so they can freely talk – they young just needs to respect the elders. Banter is allowed within politeness norms, but no banter is allowed between a spouse and his wife's sister.

Wife's family, especially the elders or her brothers, deserve greater respect from the other family groups. Once they give their first visit to their sisters, their sisters must slaughter a piglet. There is no reason for lack of resources – even loan is taken out if possible. Moreover, the host needs to give another piglet as gift. Once such requirements are not fulfilled, the host will be ashamed of themselves. Under this phenomenon, it can be seen how kinship is strongly and firmly bound. In this stage, kinship is considered good as a diversity in Indonesia.

A fact shows general elections in South Nias district create problems as well as mess (Interview results with South Nias person, Jhon Hendra Patar Siregar). It contradicts to the reality that South Nias people is culturally united. Governance and social harmony seem to be messed up and provoke conflicts. This problem leads to violation against moral and ethics as well as administrative and criminal laws of election. A temporary condition which makes a kinship system vanished.

Legislative general elections in South Nias could be considered full of violations. The Election Supervisory Agency has accounted South Nias district as the laboratory of general-election violation in Indonesia. Every kind of violation occurred in South Nias district – no words could describe how infuriated it was to witness massive frauds in the general elections in South Nias district. There were lack of respect, fairness, beneficial attitudes, avoidance of money politics, etc. Those in fact did not reflect the culture of South Nias people. The question is why culture is not able to influence general elections, and even it seems to disappear?

The problems on the general elections of House of Representatives (DPR), Regional Representatives Council (DPD), and Regional Legislative Councils (DPRD) did not represent democratic election as practices such as adding, decreasing, and transferring votes, manipulation of voter list, and neutrality of general-election organizer existed. The problems in gaining power and economic interests in fact could temporarily get rid of culture, in this case social kinship. The society were divorced, and horizontal conflicts arose within every line.

Conflict is defined as a perception towards perceived interest or a belief that the aspirations of the conflicting parties cannot be achieved simultaneously. Economic, political, and ideological interest, as well as beliefs make general elections very vulnerable to a variety of violent acts that even possibly lead to social conflicts. Conflict refers to contradiction such as opinion differences, competition, and disagreement between individuals and individuals, individuals and groups, groups and individuals, or groups with government. kelompok dan individu atau kelompok dengan pemerintah. Label as an undemocratic region in terms of the implementation of general elections began to

exist in South Nias district. Individuals and community groups begin to divorce and be involved in dispute within court.

Laws regulate and controls humans in social life. Cicero asserts that there is always a legal system (*ubi societies ibi ius*) in society. In order to analyze the existing problems, the concept of legal system proposed by Lawrence Friedman was used. Friedman states argues that legal system is complex, and there is interaction between structure, substance, and culture or legal culture. While structure and substance are real components of legal system, legal culture is an element of social behaviors and values. Legal system proposed by Lawrence M. Friedman consists of: [7]

1. *"The substances is composed of substance rules and rule about how institution should behave. A Legal systems is the union of primary rules and secondary rules. Primary rules are norm of behaviour, secondary rules are norm about those norm, how to decode whether they are valid how to enforce them, etc."*
2. *Structure to be sure, is one basic and obvious element of the legal systems.... The structure of a systems is its skeletal frame work it is the permanent shape, the institutional body of systems.*
3. *Legal cultures refers, them to this part of general culture, customs, opinions, ways of doing thinking that bend social forces towards om aways from the law and particular ways.*

Friedman claims that legal system serves four functions as follows:

1. Laws are part of social control which regulates human behaviors.
2. A means of dispute settlement
3. Legal system serve function as social engineering function, and
4. Laws as *social maintenance*, a function which emphasizes legal roles as *status quo* maintenance which does not call for changes.

General elections as philosophical construction means that public votes must be maintained from any fraud. Defective votes also mean degrading democratic values. Power and economy are not comparable to the voters' expectations and wishes to the elected representatives even if it is only one vote. Rights to vote are guaranteed by the Acts. Violations and frauds of those rights infringe human rights.

Public's sociological construction realized in their lack of awareness and democratic understanding, especially in South Nias district, cannot be ignored in the preparation

process of holding legislative elections. Public awareness needs to be continuously developed into political and democracy awareness. It is based on the fact that Nias people are basically not ignorant and vulnerable to conflicts.

Under this view, it is needed a means of making culture exist and influence the following legislative general elections. Culture becomes a means to settle election problems. It has to be a means of public unity, and it needs to be able to create democratic election. The solution lies in the public's intellectual ability as well as their awareness in implementing culture entirely in general elections.

Pancasila exists as an extraordinary work, and it unites the nation. As a means of unity, Pancasila should exist as a whole. It contains strong unifying values, so it can be regarded as a philosophical system among other philosophical systems in the world [8]. Pancasila as a national culture comprises five intrinsic values: divinity value, humanity value, unity value, democracy value, and social justice for all Indonesian.

Pancasila is able to embrace and eliminate all boundaries and divisions separating the nation. Pancasila becomes a reference of national life regarding of its underlying values as a source and model for creating national culture. Candidates of public representative seem to preferably accuse each other and commit frauds, that are obviously prohibited by the Laws instead of showing fair actions that they are equally elected through political-party selection with extraordinary visions for the sake of the development of Indonesia.

National culture contains local values and norms comprising love and pride in the nation and its sustainability, values of fellowship, respect, love, and mutual assistance to mutually maintain national sovereignty and dignity. In daily life, national ethnic culture and religious culture along with living guidance influence our behaviors and activities. The varieties of culture complete one another dependently, even adjust each other (flexible) in every day life. Culture must be maintained as national asset for its understanding about the environment, tradition, and potential for achieving national development.

Groups of elites have realized that position in order to achieve pragmatic and political interests – using culture to achieve political goals. It is essentially allowed as long as it does not contradict the existing culture and laws. In practice, in fact, culture is spoiled by money politics as well as approaches with particular purpose. That needs to be realized as it can possibly lead to various problems in general elections.

An effort that can be carried out is that stakeholders including general election organizers, observers, local government, and society which involves religious, customary, and academic organizations must employ national culture which comprises branches of local culture in general elections. The output resulted will be:

1. Improving the substance of electoral laws. Electoral laws must embrace local and national culture as part of political education. Culture is effectively and efficiently realized in general elections. There is a need to embrace customary values living in the society in terms of its role in encouraging participations in general elections. Affection, respect, honesty, and customary sanction can lie on the national laws.
2. Legal structures need to be able to see opportunities for culture in order to realize democratic elections. Mindset of legal apparatus, legal-enforcement practitioners, and election organizers must internalize that culture is able to influence and settle problems dealing with undemocratic elections in Indonesia. Involvement of figures from customary party, religions, mass and social organizations is needed, as well.
3. Legal culture is an emphasis from cultural side in general, behaviors, opinions, ways of thinking and behaving directing social powers existing in the society of the importance of democratic general elections. General election is regarded as the most civilized means of achieving national objectives. Uncivilized elections can ruin the nation. In other words, civilized elections represent a way of realizing the democratic ones.

4. Conclusions

Indonesia as a national asset extending outward the archipelago (from Sabang to Merauke, and from Miangas to Rote, especially South Nias district) is a place for diverse entities to live. The intellectuals are responsible for transforming diversity (*kebhinekaan*) to unity (*bhina ika*), known as Pancasila. Culture can have positive and negative effects in general elections. Culture needs to become the resource of realizing democratic elections in Indonesia. Culture can prevent disintegration. Moreover, employing national culture of Indonesia in general election is considered the most effective and delicate way in achieving the national goals which involve protecting the whole people of Indonesia and the entire homeland of Indonesia, and advancing general prosperity, developing the nation's intellectual life, and contributing to the implementation of a world order based on freedom and lasting peace.

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