



Democratic Consolidation an Indonesian Unity Perspective

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Abstract

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Purpose: This study aims to explore the potential of democratic consolidation in reinforcing national unity in Indonesia, emphasizing the importance of Pancasila values, particularly the third principle, "Indonesian Unity," in addressing key challenges such as political polarization, social fragmentation, and declining public trust in political institutions. The study underscores practical policy recommendations to bridge the gaps identified.

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Study Design/Methodology/Approach: Utilizing a qualitative approach, this study employs a comprehensive literature review methodology to analyze theories related to democratic consolidation and national unity. Sources include scholarly articles, books, and relevant documents that discuss the connection between democracy and social cohesion. Foundational theories by Diamond (1999) and Linz and Stepan (1996) are applied as analytical frameworks to evaluate the necessary conditions for democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

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Findings: The study finds that democratic consolidation can effectively strengthen national unity when supported by robust government performance in legal, bureaucratic, and economic sectors aligned with Pancasila values. Active civil society participation, political society autonomy, and the transparency and accountability of political institutions are essential in fostering public trust and mitigating polarization.

Originality/Value: This research enriches existing literature on democratic consolidation and national unity in Indonesia by advocating for inclusive policies and emphasizing the critical role of political education and media literacy for the public. The recommendations presented aim to promote sustainable political stability and social integration, making this study a valuable reference for future research on Pancasila-based democratic consolidation in the global era.

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INTRODUCTION

The founding leaders of Indonesia wisely established the motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) as a foundation for unity amidst diversity. The nation's diversity, encompassing ethnicity, language, religion, and culture, is regarded as a strength that should be unified within the framework of a unitary state. However, in the course of a complex democratic journey, Indonesia faces challenges in balancing democratic ideals with the preservation of national unity and Pancasila ideology (Sari et al., 2020). Internal challenges arise from political polarisation, social fragmentation, and low public trust in political institutions and governance, which can threaten national unity. Thus, democratic consolidation becomes crucial as a foundation for building political stability, strengthening government legitimacy, safeguarding political rights, encouraging public participation, and fostering transparent and accountable governance (Diamond, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996). Further studies have illustrated the relevance of democratic consolidation as a response to regional complexities, including issues surrounding national defence efforts and geopolitical tensions in the South China Sea, demonstrating how a cohesive national identity is indispensable for political stability and trust within governance structures (Fossati, 2022; Taher, 2021; Ulum, 2020). Democratic consolidation also plays a role in safeguarding unity and reinforcing national integration amid the continuous social and political dynamics, including external challenges such as the impact of information technology on the social order. The colonial-era practice of "divide et impera" (divide and rule) used by colonisers in Indonesia illustrates how social fragmentation was employed to weaken national cohesion. Thus, the spirit of unity is a fundamental value that is upheld and strengthened through the third principle of Pancasila, "Indonesian Unity," which embodies a commitment to unity within diversity and requires democratic consolidation strategies aligned with national unity values.

On the other hand, challenges in democratic consolidation include potential disintegration due to identity politics and misuse of freedom of expression, which can trigger social division and polarisation. Internal challenges to democratic consolidation in Indonesia generally stem from political institutions, social elites, interest groups, and civil society. Political values in Indonesia, as enshrined in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, also need to be actualised to address modern challenges, including the threat of disintegration spurred by social media as a tool for propaganda and the spread of unverified information. External challenges, acting as mediating or moderating variables, are related to information technology developments that can influence various social structures (Doktoralina, 2023). With the passage of time, Pancasila values must continually be actualised to remain relevant in addressing global changes. In a democracy framed by Pancasila, emphasis should be placed on peaceful participation that does not compromise social integrity (Mendrofa, 2021). A Pancasila-aligned democratic consolidation is expected to prevent disintegration caused by political practices that conflict with the spirit of unity and the core values of Pancasila (Lukito et al., 2022). As a cornerstone of national integrity, Pancasila serves not only as an identity reinforcing unity but also as a guiding framework for the implementation of democracy in Indonesia (Sari et al., 2020). Ideally, democracy in the context of Pancasila focuses on peaceful participation without sacrificing social integrity (Kawangung, 2019). Hence, an important aspect of democratic consolidation is realising a democracy that can maintain national unity, avoid disintegration, and remain consistent with the values and spirit of Pancasila (Diamond, 1999).

Based on these phenomena, this study focuses on addressing the following key issues: Firstly, how can democratic consolidation strengthen national unity? Secondly, what factors can impede the process of democratic consolidation aligned with the spirit of unity? Thirdly, how can political elements in Indonesia play a role in maintaining national cohesion through democratic practices consistent with Pancasila? These questions aim to explore a deeper understanding of how democracy can evolve without sacrificing unity and to formulate strategies that support national stability in the context of consolidated democracy. Additionally, this study provides practical policy recommendations for the government and related institutions to design more effective democratic consolidation programmes. Theoretically, this research contributes to the literature on democratic consolidation by considering technology-based information developments, where their integration can address generational gaps among Indonesia's future leaders.

Considering Democratic Consolidation Theory and Unity Theory, this study highlights the importance of balancing political freedom with national unity in Indonesia's democracy, especially in the post-reform era (Abdulbaki, 2008). The level of democratic consolidation and institutionalisation still needs improvement to strengthen democratic institutions and ensure sustainable political stability, thereby protecting the political rights of citizens within a transparent and accountable system (Aspinal, 2013; Diamond, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996; Othman et al., 2023; Rasyid, 2018). Unity Theory, inspired by Pancasila values—especially the third principle, "Indonesian Unity"—emphasises the need to maintain social integrity amid ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity (Aspinal, 2013). This approach helps to identify the challenges faced by Indonesia in democratic consolidation harmonised with the spirit of unity, especially in addressing issues of political polarisation and social fragmentation.

Literature Review

Democratic consolidation within the context of national unity is a significant topic in political studies (Fossati, 2022; Taher, 2021; Ulum, 2020), particularly in Indonesia, where ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural diversity pose unique challenges. As a foundational principle, Pancasila with its motto "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika" (Unity in Diversity) emphasises the importance of unity amidst diversity, thus serving as a basis for national integration (Sari et al., 2020). Democratic consolidation in this sense is essential for establishing political stability, strengthening governmental legitimacy, protecting political rights, and fostering public participation through transparent and accountable governance (Diamond, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996). Diamond (1999) highlights that a consolidated democracy requires civil liberties, political rights, and robust democratic institutions, while Linz and Stepan (1996) stress the need for a strong civil society, autonomous political society, adherence to the rule of law, a professional bureaucracy, and an institutionalised economy as foundations for sustainable consolidation.

In Indonesia, the internal challenges to democratic consolidation include political polarisation, social fragmentation, and low public trust in political institutions, all of which threaten national cohesion (Doktoralina, 2023). Political polarisation often stems from identity politics that prioritises specific group interests, leading to social division. Such group interests, frequently intensified by social media and unverified information, underscore the need for media literacy to mitigate identity-based conflicts and social

fragmentation, which are critical for upholding Pancasila's unifying role in democracy (Heryanto, 2020; Lukito et al., 2022). Identity politics, therefore, not only weakens national integration but also threatens the spirit of unity that serves as a pillar of the democratic political system envisioned by Pancasila.

Furthermore, as Bondarenko et al. (2022) indicate, external challenges such as the development of information technology add further complexity to democratic consolidation. Information technology and social media, while beneficial in expanding access to information, often reinforce disintegration caused by social fragmentation and identity politics (Feldstein, 2021; Mendrofa, 2021; Roy et al., 2024). Social media can amplify differences among community groups, particularly in political contexts, thereby creating a fragmented social climate. This phenomenon necessitates a strategic approach to strengthening media literacy within society, particularly to mitigate the negative impacts of unverified information dissemination. Media literacy is essential to maintaining social cohesion and curbing polarisation that could lead to horizontal conflicts in society (Heryanto, 2020).

In addressing these challenges, democratic consolidation rooted in Pancasila values functions as a tool to balance political freedom with national unity (Harefa and Fatolosa Hulu, 2020). Democratic consolidation is expected not only to reinforce political legitimacy but also to facilitate peaceful and ethical participation without compromising social integrity (Diamond, 1999; Linz and Stepan, 1996). Furthermore, Rusfiana and Kurniasih (2024) argue that effective democratic consolidation requires the active involvement of all societal elements, including the government, political parties, and civil society, to maintain political stability within the framework of sustainable national unity. Therefore, a democratic consolidation aligned with the spirit of Pancasila can serve as a strong foundation for addressing both internal and external challenges, ensuring that Indonesian unity endures amidst evolving socio-political dynamics.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach using a comprehensive literature review to analyze democratic consolidation and national unity in Indonesia. The methodological framework aligns with Creswell dan Poth, (2024), focusing on systematic data collection and thematic analysis to synthesize findings from existing literature. This approach enables an in-depth exploration of theories and practices related to democratic consolidation and national unity within the context of Indonesia.

The literature review process involves identifying and selecting scholarly articles, books, and official reports that are pertinent to the research questions. Sources were chosen based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to understanding the challenges and mechanisms of democratic consolidation. Emphasis was placed on both contemporary sources from the last decade for current perspectives and seminal works, such as those by Diamond (1999); Linz dan Stepan (1996), to provide foundational insights.

Key themes identified in the literature include political polarization, social fragmentation, and public trust in political institutions. These themes were analyzed in relation to Pancasila's third principle, "Indonesian Unity," which serves as a framework for maintaining social cohesion in a diverse society. The study synthesizes these themes to propose practical recommendations for strengthening democratic practices.

The analysis process included coding the literature to identify recurring patterns and drawing connections between theoretical concepts and real-world applications. The study also evaluated strategies for enhancing political education, institutional transparency, legal reforms, and inclusive economic policies. Additionally, attention was given to the impact of social media on public discourse and the importance of media literacy in mitigating misinformation.

This comprehensive methodological approach ensures that findings are robust and applicable, providing policymakers and scholars with actionable insights to enhance democratic consolidation and sustain national unity in accordance with Pancasila's principles

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to the theories of democratic consolidation by Diamond (1999); Linz dan Stepan (1996), achieving stable and lasting democracy in Indonesia requires meeting certain key conditions. Linz dan Stepan (1996) emphasize the importance of a strong civil society that can express shared values and foster solidarity, a political system that allows healthy competition, respect for the rule of law, an efficient state bureaucracy that supports democratic governance, and an established economy. These elements are essential for building political stability and advancing democratic consolidation in Indonesia.

Furthermore, Diamond (1999) adds that democratic consolidation includes protecting civil liberties, safeguarding political rights, institutionalizing political practices to prevent power abuse, and promoting policies that strengthen political legitimacy. This goes beyond election cycles and requires continuous support for democratic institutions to maintain public trust and representation.

In Indonesia, challenges such as political polarization, social fragmentation, and low public trust in political institutions threaten national cohesion. Pancasila, as a unifying ideology, plays a key role in maintaining social harmony and preventing disintegration caused by identity politics and misuse of free speech.

The findings of this study show that a comprehensive approach is necessary for democratic consolidation in Indonesia. This approach involves strengthening civil society, fostering an inclusive political community, and ensuring transparent and accountable governance. Applying theories of democratic consolidation and unity demonstrates that balancing political freedom and social integrity is crucial. Strengthening democracy based on Pancasila values and adherence to the rule of law can create a stable political environment that supports national unity.

Community-led initiatives, such as youth organizations promoting voter education, have proven effective in boosting political engagement and unity. For example, programs like "Democracy Watch" in major Indonesian cities have encouraged active civic participation, showcasing the potential of grassroots movements to support democratic consolidation. In comparison, South Korea's civil society movements have significantly contributed to democratic practices, offering a model that Indonesia can adapt.

Empowering civil society is crucial because community groups, organizations, and social movements play important roles in democratic processes. However, social polarization, often exacerbated by social media and identity politics, can worsen social

divisions. Political education that emphasizes tolerance, unity, and Pancasila values is essential to reduce these divisions and maintain social harmony in a diverse society.

Indonesian political parties face challenges such as limited funding and leadership development, which impact democratic consolidation. Many parties focus more on election outcomes than on building inclusive and representative platforms. Therefore, improving transparency in political funding and strengthening party structures to be more representative are vital for creating a healthy political environment. For instance, adopting stricter regulations similar to Germany's oversight of political party funding could be a useful reference for Indonesia.

The rule of law is a cornerstone of democratic consolidation. Indonesia's low Corruption Perceptions Index reflects ongoing issues with law enforcement and public trust in legal institutions, often due to corruption cases. Judicial reform and better accountability of legal institutions are needed to restore public trust. Additionally, a strong and fair bureaucracy is crucial for effective public services, especially in areas outside Java where disparities are more evident. Inclusive infrastructure projects and fair distribution of resources can promote economic growth and reduce social inequalities.

Economic gaps between urban and rural areas present additional challenges to democratic consolidation, as they can lead to social unrest. Inclusive economic policies that extend beyond major cities are needed to ensure equal opportunities for all segments of society. Brazil's "Bolsa Familia" program, which successfully reduced inequality, could serve as an example for policies in Indonesia. While social media can support democracy, it also poses risks by spreading misinformation and inciting conflict. Increasing media literacy and enforcing stricter information regulations can help counter these negative effects and support social cohesion.

Overall, the prerequisites for democratic consolidation, as outlined by Diamond (1999); Linz dan Stepan (1996), are highly relevant to Indonesia. Despite significant challenges, a strong commitment by political actors to uphold democratic principles and Pancasila values can promote a stable political system and gradual democratic progress. This study provides valuable insights into how Indonesia can move forward with its democratic goals while maintaining national unity and offers strategic recommendations for enhancing policies that align with Pancasila's principles.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that democratic consolidation can significantly strengthen national unity by meeting several prerequisites, including optimising government performance in the areas of law, bureaucracy, and the economy, all aligned with Pancasila values, particularly the third principle, "Indonesian Unity." In terms of mechanisms for democratic consolidation to enhance unity, this research finds that the main obstacles stem from low levels of healthy political participation and high levels of social polarisation. Therefore, the role of political elements in maintaining national cohesion becomes essential, achieved through increased transparency and accountability within political institutions and strengthened understanding of a fair and equitable legal framework. These measures, if implemented, are expected to contribute to an improved Indonesian Democracy Index (IDI) while preserving stability and social integration within a sustainable framework of national unity.

This study recommends that the government adopt more inclusive and equitable policies to support effective regional autonomy implementation and fair distribution of social welfare across all regions. The study's contribution to society lies in enhancing understanding of the importance of Pancasila-based democratic consolidation and the need for political education and media literacy to prevent misinformation and mitigate the negative impacts of social media. Academically, this research enriches the literature on the relationship between democracy and national unity in Indonesia and serves as a reference within political science, law, and citizenship education, providing a foundation for further research aimed at developing the concept of democratic consolidation in a global context.

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