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## RECONSTRUCTING DEMOCRACY TO REALIZE BONUM COMMUNE POLITICS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF JOHN STUART MILL

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### Abstract

*This article is focused on discussing the efforts needed to reconstruct democracy in realizing bonum commune politics which is reviewed based on the thoughts of John Stuart Mill. In this paper, the author uses a library study method with the primary source being the book *On Liberty* written by Mill. Political realities that are colored by speculative actions for personal gain or certain groups have damaged the face of democracy in this country. Corruption, collusion, and nepotism have become a scourge that continues to erode the dignity of democracy. Certain individuals act as if other people are not competent, which gives rise to an attitude of ethnocentrism. This damage to the face of democracy is also exacerbated by the weak autonomy of law enforcers such as the Constitutional Court which is then used for the political interests of certain groups. The Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) as an institution that handles corruption cases actually has some of its officials caught in corruption cases. This reality has damaged the face of democracy in this country. In response, there needs to be more concrete efforts. Education on this matter should be intensified so that people understand more about moral politics. The law must be implemented as it should. Those who commit crimes in a democracy must be dealt with firmly without discrimination. Systematically designed lies must be exposed in order to create a transparent democracy. The politicization of religion, culture, and customs must be openly opposed.*

**Keywords:** Democracy, Liberty, Utilitarianism, Bonum Commune

### INTRODUCTION

Democracy and the issues contained in it have become an issue that continues to heat up in this state. Democracy, which is predicted to be the door to the common good or bonum commune,

has lost its identity. The freedom that represents democracy does not fully run as it should. Political terms are like two sides of a metal currency. On the one hand, politics is full of intrigue, cruelty,

and filth, but on the other hand, politics is noble, noble, and humanist (Pandor, 2013). Not a few politicians tend to take advantage of freedom in the democratic space to exploit state wealth for personal interests. The high level of corruption is also revealed in the results of research conducted by Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW). From the study, they revealed that in the first semester of 2021, there were 209 corruption cases with a total of 482 suspects from various professional backgrounds (Anandya et al., 2021). Even though they are not rats who do not understand political ethics or moral politics. But they are people who really understand the ethics of politics. They understand moral politics. They understand how politics must be carried out correctly and well. However, the facts reveal that many politicians have been dragged into cases of gratuities, corruption cases, nepotism cases, and even penetrated to cases of sexual harassment, and other immoral cases. Such cases not only ensnare politicians at the central level but also officials at the village level (Mahpudin, 2023). Such a phenomenon of democracy is no longer new, but it is sad that political figures who carry the mandate of the people betray the people by committing unethical and lawless acts. Democracy seems to be just a label to cover up the depravity that occurs in it. Such a phenomenon is very contrary to the concept of moral politics initiated by Kant, who said that a moral politician is a politician whose every political action is in a moralist frame and makes morality a guideline in every political step (Tumampas, n.d.). This is also contrary to the concept of freedom initiated by John Stuart Mill, who argued that the power of the ruler must be limited so that he cannot use his power to satisfy himself and make decisions that can harm others or in this context the community (Mill, 1859).

The face of democracy is increasingly eroded when the law is played with, law enforcement institutions such as the Constitutional Court (MK) and the Supreme Court (MA) are used for personal interests or also a group of politicians and government officials. The saying goes that nothing is impossible in this world. This saying seems to have predicted the crimes of democracy that have occurred in this country. Law enforcers, government, and community leaders who are considered to have authority as defenders and enforcers of the law have become actors in the destruction of the democratic system in this country. The culture of corruption has formed a hierarchy from the central government to the lowest government even in Islamic financial institutions (Nurhidayatia, Satriya Nugraha, Eka Siskawati, Reslawatid, 2023). In this broken democratic system, the facts that occur in society are easy to speculate for the benefit of certain groups. Honesty seems meaningless. Leaders seem to have absolute authority to determine the future of democracy and the future of the nation. The abuse of power by the executive leadership or by the President opens up opportunities for the emergence of pro and contra attitudes among the community, so this has the potential to create political polarization (Karim, 2019). Politics seems to be only for certain groups. Politics is prone to manipulation, systematic injustice, and confusion (Riyanto, 2009).

In an article entitled "Flawed Village Democracy: The Dysfunction of Bpd's Role as an Institution of Village Political Representation" written by Mahpudin, explains how political practices in this country, especially in villages, have deteriorated (Mahpudin, 2023). In addition, in an article written by Luthfi Hasanah Bolqiah and Riady Raffiudin, with titled "The Domination of Oligarchy and the Absence of Green Political Parties in Indonesia" at least provides readers with the dominance of certain groups that have

indirectly controlled democracy in this country. Through this article, they reveal how the policies issued by the rulers have not fully favored environmental preservation (Bolqiah & Raffiudin, 2020). Their concern for the environment can also be seen in their idea to encourage the formation of a green party or a party that cares about environmental issues (Bolqiah & Raffiudin, 2020).

The article does not directly write about the damaged face of democracy, but at least the article they wrote displays problems in democracy, especially related to the dominance of oligarchs who have not sided with environmental issues. In addition to this article, the article published in *Morality: a Journal of Legal Science* also discusses "Corruption Culture and Money Laundering Eradication Policy" (Nurhidayatia, Satriya Nugraha, Eka Siskawati, Reslawatid, 2023). Through this article, they conveyed to readers about corruption that seems to have become a culture and as a habit that is not contrary to the law. This new research complements what is missing from the above studies that emphasize on broader democratic issues that are not only about ecological issues and money laundering, but also mainly about efforts to rebuild a sustainable democratic system. The novelty of this paper lies in the holistic understanding of reconstructing a broken democracy to realize the politics of *bonum commune*, i.e. politics for the common good based on John Stuart Mill's perspective.

## THE RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is the literature study method. This method is carried out by utilizing literature sources such as books, scientific journals, and mass media. The primary source is a book written by John Stuart Mill entitled "On Liberty" which was published in 1859. In this research, the author also uses previous studies that are relevant or in accordance with the scope of this paper to critically examine scientific findings by drawing from various literatures that discuss democracy and its problems. The choice of this method is inseparable from what is discussed in this paper, namely about efforts to rebuild damaged democracy to realize *bonum commune* politics. In the process, the researcher tries to trace various books, journals, and sources available online and then digs deeper to reveal the facts of democracy in this country. After doing this process, the author raises values that can be used to rebuild this damaged democracy in order to achieve the common good.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### John Stuart Mill and His Thought

John Stuart Mill was an influential British philosopher and politician, especially in the fight for civil liberties and the involvement of women in politics, which at that time was still a minority. As a politician, he was also active in voicing freedom and the limits of power between the ruler and the ruled. His efforts are contrasted in his work entitled *On Liberty*. In his work, John Stuart Mill discusses the nature and limits of authority that can be legitimately exercised by one person over another. However, Mill also straightforwardly says that liberty does not apply to all individuals and all existing societies without considering certain things. Freedom, which is a principle, does not apply in circumstances where humans are not yet capable of self-improvement through free and equal discussion (Mill, 1859). He emphasized that the only goal that justifies every human being, individually or collectively, namely to achieve freedom of action of individuals, is to protect themselves from various problems that are contrary to the principles of freedom and utilitarianism or the

principle of happiness. Mill's utilitarian approach also plays an important role in collective life. In the utilitarian perspective, actions taken should result in the greatest possible happiness for the greatest number of people (Mill, 1859).

As a philosopher and politician who lived in the 19th century, Mill also contributed innovative ideas regarding political and moral concepts. He championed the rights of citizens and opposed attitudes that discredited women. Mill was of the view that social freedom was an act of protection from the tyranny of political rulers (Mill, 1859). He also introduced several different concepts of the forms tyranny can take, which he referred to as social tyranny and tyranny of the majority. Social liberty for Mill meant limiting the power of the ruler so that he could not use that power to further his desires nor use his power to make decisions that could harm others (Mill, 1859). This is so that everyone has equal rights and everyone's freedom can be guaranteed.

### **Broken Democracy**

The democratic system in Indonesia faces various problems and challenges that can lead to a decline in the quality of democracy. Dynastic political practices, money politics, transactional politics, corruption, nepotism, collusion, and abuse of power have caused democracy to lose its spirit. According to John Stuart Mill, such actions must be dealt with firmly because they have damaged and harmed the rights of others (Mill, 1859). The pattern of political reform that was originally used for the common good is even more damaged because it is disrupted by the uproar of superficial political maneuvers to quench the thirst for power. Too many politicians have been punished, either by judges for corruption and other criminal matters or by the people in elections for neglecting their mandate. However, they have not been deterred (Sujito, n.d.). Indonesia's democratic system is highly vulnerable to damage and could collapse if hit by the tidal wave of economic and political crises as happened in 1998. Events that exert more pressure than the strength of democracy's foundations are easily manipulated and crumble into insignificance. In fact, with such a democracy we cannot achieve the goals of the state as mandated in the Constitution. The rise of populism in world politics reflects that irrationality and ignorance have further exacerbated the damage to the democratic system (Adon, 2021). For that, we need a robust and unbending democracy. Overcoming mere ritual, routine, or instrumentation practices to rebuild a democracy that has been damaged to achieve the *bonum commune*.

The basis of corruption is money politics. Unfortunately, corruption and money politics are often seen as mere morality and legal issues (Fortunatus Hamsah Manah, n.d.). This is a substantial problem in the life of democracy. The high practice of money politics in this country places Indonesia as the country with the third largest record of money politics in the world. This condition is very concerning for this great nation. This reality is further exacerbated by Indonesia's political situation, which is currently experiencing lameness because it was undermined by the uproar that began with the Constitutional Court's decision Number 90/PUU/XXI/2023, which was then considered a very controversial decision that drew a lot of criticism from various elements of society. In addition, the Honorary Court of the Constitutional Court (MKMK) stated that the Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court who presided over the ratification of the Law violated the code of ethics so that he had to be dismissed from his position as chairman of the Constitutional Court (Wahyu Prasetyo, n.d.).

Indonesian democracy, which should be more mature and more ethical, has deviated and shown its damaged face. Democracy is increasingly showing its damaged face when the law is played and law enforcers are no longer in favor of the common interest. For example, the violation of the code of ethics by the chief justice of the Constitutional Court reflects that the Constitutional Court has become a commodity used for political manipulation. The high level of corruption, collusion, nepotism, and the widespread practice of misuse of democratic space illustrates how damaged democracy is in this country. The democratic space is eroding and deteriorating. Voices to rebuild democracy continue to be echoed. Rebuilding a broken democracy is a demand that must be answered immediately.

### **Reconstructing the Broken Face of Democracy**

Reconstructing or rebuilding a broken democracy is a must to realize *bonum commune* politics. This is not an option, but a necessity. There is no other choice and no bargaining chip in alleviating the depravity of democracy in this country other than rebuilding it with stronger pillars. One of the foundations of John Stuart Mill's thinking is the principle of individual freedom. According to him, true democracy must give full freedom to every individual as long as his actions do not harm others. Individual freedom provides the foundation for a dynamic and innovative society, creating the conditions for collective growth (Mill, 1859).

In reconstructing a broken democracy, the state needs the involvement of all elements of society. Efforts to prevent political practices that do not reflect efforts for the common good, including corruption, collusion, and nepotism, must be a demand and not just an offer. Prevention needs to be done because these three forms of political deviation are the basis for the birth of very complex problems in social life. Corruption gives birth to a greedy attitude towards wealth. Collusion and nepotism give birth to an attitude that always wants to be in power with various versions and does not give space to other people to become leaders. This indicates how damaged the face of democracy in this country is. Therefore, efforts to rebuild this damaged democracy are no longer an offer but a necessity. A necessity that must be implemented immediately. It aims to prevent further damage to democracy.

Rebuilding Indonesia's democracy is not an easy task, but it is an important step in maintaining stability and realizing politics that aims for the common good. These efforts require a joint effort between the government, civil society, and democratic institutions. Encouraging bureaucratic reform and independent, professional, and accountable law enforcement is one step toward *bonum commune* politics. Through reform, community empowerment, and active participation of all parties, Indonesia can build a stronger, more inclusive, and sustainable democratic system for future generations and above all build a political system that promotes the common good. Ethical politics is needed in every condition, be it normal, orderly, controlled, or even chaotic conditions. Especially during chaotic conditions, because ethical politics helps realize good and correct political legitimacy to achieve common interests (February & Dewi, 2021). The following authors will explore and present various efforts that can and should be made to strengthen democracy in Indonesia as follows:

#### **First, Empowering Political Education**

One of the obstacles to achieving politics for the common good is the low level of human resources (HR) in Indonesian society regarding good and correct political practices. In other words, the people in this country are still experiencing a crisis of insight into

the world of democracy. Mill argues that education is an important pillar in achieving the politics of bonum commune. Universal education provides equal opportunities for all individuals to develop and contribute to the common good (Mill, 1859).

Therefore, reconstructing democracy must also prioritize investment in education to create an educated and competitive society. Political education for every citizen is the first step in achieving political bonum commune. Political education has a very crucial role in shaping citizens to be aware of their rights and obligations as citizens. People must and must be given a complete understanding of everything related to politics. To encourage the achievement or improvement of public understanding of politics, it is necessary to improve the quality of political education both in schools and in other places that are more suitable for educating the public. Increasing people's knowledge about proper and good political practices encourages them to become smart political actors who are critical of the system in place to achieve common needs. Increasing knowledge about ethical politics also helps create a generation that is more aware of the values of democracy, tolerance, and active participation in the political process. And not politics that is full of manipulation. It also helps to prevent the politicization of religion (Adon, 2022).

Comprehensive political education should be strengthened to help people better understand the principles of democracy, their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and the importance of participating in the political process in this country. Political education must be done to create a critical society that actively participates in every democratic event. A good knowledge of politics is needed, especially for the 2024 elections. Increased knowledge about politics is needed so that people do not choose the wrong leaders so that they do not choose leaders just because of the same ideology, or even just based on emotions. Education is becoming increasingly important so that people become smart voters and not voters who follow the crowd. Moreover, they only vote because they are paid with money. This is the initial capital to rebuild a damaged democracy to realize politics for the common good.

### **Second, Strengthen Law Enforcement Institutions**

A country that adheres to a good democratic system is a country that has good legal governance. The state should have credible and trustworthy law enforcement agencies. Rule of law means that every individual, including government officials, is subject to the law and is not exempt from legal compliance. The law is not monopolized manipulated or exploited for personal gain. In addition, in its implementation, it is necessary to emphasize the transparent aspect so that every citizen knows the law and its implementation properly. To support this, establishing a fair and efficient legal system is one of the steps in reconstructing democracy. The sustainability of legal reforms should be a focus, by guaranteeing the independence of judicial institutions and ensuring that human rights are consistently respected. Law enforcers must also be able to feel the moral message of the law, namely justice that is highly expected by justice seekers (iustitabelen) (Suhardin, 2012).

Strengthening legal institutions such as the Constitutional Court, Religious Court, Corruption Eradication Commission, and other legal institutions is no longer an offer, but a demand. Strengthening institutions that are present to unravel political problems is very important. In addition, strengthening anti-corruption institutions is one very important step in eliminating corrupt practices that damage the political system in this country. Ensuring the

independence and sustainability of these institutions is an important investment in building a strong democracy. To support these efforts, the laws determined by the government must have certainty of legality (Hidayat, 2019).

### **Third, Transparency And Accountability.**

A good and healthy democracy is run on the principles of transparency and accountability. A democracy that stands on the principle of openness and prioritizes the common good. Thus, the need for transparency and accountability is necessary. Indeed, reaching that level is not easy, but that does not mean it cannot be done. This must be done and realized. There is no other choice but to strive for this. Bringing a high level of transparency to the government is key to building public trust. Hence, there is a need for reform in the area of public policy. One of the pillars of democracy is the principle of trias politica, which divides the political power of the state into three institutions, namely the executive, judiciary, and legislature, which are independent of each other and are in a level or equal position to each other (Sahya Anggara, 2013). Politics is carried out by involving the wider community. This aims to build a positive perspective from the public on the prevailing system. In addition, there must be greater and harder efforts to eradicate criminals who have damaged the face of democracy. Independent oversight institutions must be strengthened to ensure full accountability at all levels of government.

### **Fourth, civil society participation**

Society is a very important element in the democratic space. Politics without society is not the hallmark of democracy. Politics and society certainly have interrelated and inseparable ties. Therefore, community participation in the world of democracy is a very important point to note. John Stuart Mill argued that every individual should be given the freedom to express their aspirations and involve themselves in the life of the nation (Mill, 1859). Civil society organizations, which are also a forum for people to fight for their rights as citizens, have an important role in supporting and overseeing democracy. Thus, efforts to strengthen the role and capacity of civil society organizations, as well as provide greater space for citizen participation in decision-making, can increase the responsiveness of the government to the needs of the people. As a supporting tool, there is a need to educate the public about politics. This is based on the fact that, when political education is inadequate, people can experience a knowledge crisis about the importance of democracy and their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Improving the quality of political education helps to create a society that is more aware of the importance of being actively involved in politics. This aims to encourage community involvement in realizing politics that aims for the common good. At this stage, the people need and must be actively involved in every inch of democratic space in this country. People must not just stand by and watch the political inequality that is happening. Active involvement from the community is very important, especially in guarding the sustainability of democracy in this country. To present a responsible nation, the nation must not ignore the rights of its people (Riyanto, 2011).

Instead, the state should recognize them and try to renovate them. In this bang, it is also clear how important the role of supervision carried out by civil society is. Civil society also plays a very important role as a watchdog and advocate for our democracy in this country.

Fifth, independent mass media and ethical journalists The involvement of an independent mass media and ethical journalism system is very important in the democratic space in this country. Independent media and strong journalism ethics are needed to provide accurate and balanced information to the public. This is very important considering that the mass media has a very strong power in influencing people's perception of democracy. In addition, the media can also be a power that can damage harmony in social life. Therefore, the demand for independent media supported by ethical journalists is an absolute necessity. They are needed to report on democratic issues that continue to roll out objectively.

To rebuild a strong democratic foundation, Mill emphasized freedom of speech as a very important instrument. The political bonum commune can be achieved through open discussion and the free exchange of ideas (Mill, 1859). Democratic reconstruction must make room for healthy dialogue, where controversial ideas can be considered without fear of repression. Democracy will be better and wiser if it is supported by good media coverage. To support this, there needs to be an effort to ensure the sustainability and independence of the media. Regulations must be strengthened and supervision of regulations and the media must be improved. In addition, there needs to be a concrete boundary between practical politics and the mass media to prevent abuse of the use of the news media. To support a credible system, the state is required to provide and protect press freedom in combating the spread of false information. This is an absolute requirement for the sustainability of media that is independent and can be trusted for the accuracy of its information. Thus, the mass media can be a means used for reporting on democratic issues and become a means to support the realization of politics for the common good or bonum commune politics. Sixth, Electoral System Reform

Reforming electoral systems and ensuring fair representation for all sections of society is a priority. Efforts to rebuild a broken democratic system will not go smoothly if they are not matched by an evaluation of the system in place. Evaluating the electoral system, both in terms of representation and process, is an important step. This is part of the effort to ensure that every vote has equal value and prevent political manipulation so as to create a democratic system that is free from manipulation, free from interest politics. The reform of the electoral system is also not just a formality but should be a key target. The government, which is mandated to regulate the electoral system in this country, must protect the existing system instead of weakening it for the benefit of certain groups.

As a first step in reforming the electoral system, the government needs to bring in people who are competent in professionally handling various needs. There must be figures who have credibility and a sense of responsibility with the tasks assigned to them. In addition to bringing in professionals, the government must also give them the right to autonomy in carrying out the tasks assigned to them. The granting of autonomous power aims to make them more free in carrying out their duties, and not under the control of other parties that can affect their professionalism. At this stage, the KPU has a very important role in the success of the democratic party (Hasanah & Djumadin, 2023). As a complement, the government must also provide a transparent election system and not an election system that is only known by a group of people. This is very important so that the public also knows that the democratic system is still running according to its role.

## CONCLUSIONS

Reconstructing democracy in Indonesia is a demand that must be carried out. This is not just a bargaining chip, but it is a necessity, namely the need for a democratic system that is clean from unlawful practices. Indeed, the effort to reconstruct or rebuild a damaged democracy is not easy. Therefore, there needs to be a joint effort from all elements of society. Increasing citizen participation, strengthening democratic institutions, and building an ethical political culture of change are integral parts of the journey towards Bonum Commune politics or politics that aims for the common good.

Through the insights of John Stuart Mill, the reconstruction of democracy towards the politics of Bonum commune offers a solid foundation for a more just and effective political system. By integrating the principles of liberty, utilitarianism, protection of minority rights, freedom of speech, education, and representative democracy, we can achieve the ultimate goal of democracy: creating a common good that encompasses the interests of the entire society. The reconstruction of democracy is therefore an important step in meeting the challenges of changing times, creating a more inclusive and sustainable political foundation. By taking concrete steps to address these challenges, Indonesia can build a more solid, responsive, and inclusive democratic foundation. Through such steps, the ideal of rebuilding democracy is increasingly wide open, especially towards the politics of Bonum Commune.

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