



Evaluation of the Presidential System of Government in Indonesia from a Theoretical and Practical Perspective

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Abstract

The system of government is the fundamental structure in state administration that determines the direction of power management, the relationship between state institutions, and the form of interaction between the government and the people. Constitutionally, Indonesia adheres to a presidential system of government as stated in the 1945 Constitution. However, in practice, this system has undergone adjustments and influences from the parliamentary system, resulting in a unique and distinctive model of governance. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of the presidential system in Indonesia, evaluate its strengths and weaknesses, and examine the dynamics of transformation and adaptation of the system within the socio-political context of Indonesia. This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on literature review by analyzing academic literature, scientific journals, constitutional documents, as well as historical and legislative studies. The findings indicate that Indonesia's presidential system offers strengths such as executive stability, strong legitimacy from voters, policy consistency, and clear separation of powers. However, it also has weaknesses including the potential for power concentration, difficulty in leadership transition, deadlocks between the executive and legislative branches, and lack of flexibility during crises. In practice, Indonesia's presidential system has undergone hybridization through the adoption of parliamentary elements, especially in the legislative oversight mechanisms over the president. Therefore, the presidential system in Indonesia cannot be understood as a rigid model, but rather as an evolving and adaptive system that aligns with the needs of democracy and national political realities. This study recommends the strengthening of checks and balances mechanisms as well as institutional reforms to ensure a more effective, democratic, and accountable system of governance.

Keywords: System of Government, Presidential, Parliamentary, Democracy, Indonesia.

1. INTRODUCTION

The system of government is the basic structure in the practice of state administration that regulates how state power is exercised, divided, and supervised. This system reflects the configuration of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial institutions in a country, as well as describing the pattern of relations between the country's leaders and its people. Furthermore, the government system is a fundamental instrument in ensuring the continuity of democracy, guaranteeing justice, and realizing the welfare of the people. In political science and public administration, the government system is not only a technocratic choice but also a reflection of the values, ideology, and political history of a nation. In general, there are three main models of government systems recognized in modern political literature, namely the presidential system, the parliamentary system, and the hybrid system (Yani, 2018). Each system has its own characteristics, advantages, and disadvantages. The presidential system, as implemented in the United States, is characterized by a clear separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. In this system, the president, as head of state and head of government, is directly elected by the people and has a fixed term of office. Meanwhile, the parliamentary system, as in the United Kingdom, places the parliament at the center of power, and the head of government (prime minister) can be dismissed at any time through political mechanisms such as a vote of no confidence. The mixed or semi-presidential system, as implemented in France, combines elements of both systems. Indonesia, as a country that has been independent since August



17, 1945, constitutionally adheres to a presidential system of government, as stated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Under this system, the president holds a central position as both head of state and head of government. The president is directly elected by the people and is responsible for the exercise of executive power. However, in its historical and political practice, Indonesia has experienced a dynamic evolution of its government system that has not always been linear. Indonesia initially adopted a parliamentary system during the early years of independence (1945–1959), then transitioned to a guided democracy system (1959–1966), an authoritarian centralized system during the New Order era (1966–1998), and a democratic presidential system post-reform (Widodo et al., 2020).

This transformation shows that Indonesia's system of government is dynamic and adaptive to the evolving political and social context. Even today, the presidential system in Indonesia is not entirely pure because in practice there are various elements of a parliamentary system, such as the strong influence of political parties in the formation of the cabinet, legislative oversight of presidential policies, and the involvement of the DPR in the dismissal or approval of high-ranking state officials. This phenomenon has led some academics to refer to Indonesia's system of government as “modified presidentialism” or even semi-presidentialism. The problems arising from the practice of the presidential system of government in Indonesia are quite complex, ranging from the concentration of power in the hands of the president, low accountability, to political deadlock between the executive and legislative branches. On the other hand, there are also arguments that this system provides governmental stability, democratic legitimacy through direct elections, and continuity in the implementation of public policy. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the advantages and disadvantages of the presidential system of government in the Indonesian context.

This evaluation is important to determine the extent to which this system is relevant to be applied in the midst of evolving political and social realities. This study aims to analyze the presidential system of government in Indonesia, both from a theoretical and empirical perspective. This study is conducted through a descriptive qualitative approach based on literature review, examining various academic literature, legal documents, journal articles, as well as relevant historical and policy sources. The focus of this study includes the origins and basic principles of the presidential system, the dynamics of its implementation in Indonesia, its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the potential for developing or modifying the system to make it more effective and democratic. This research is expected to contribute to the development of discourse on Indonesian state administration and to provide input for the design of a more accountable, stable, and people-oriented system of government (Subianto, 2020).

The main issue that is the focus of this study is how the characteristics of the presidential system of government in Indonesia are implemented in constitutional practice, and to what extent this system faces challenges and deviations from the principles of pure presidentialism. The issues that arise are not only normative but also implementational, such as the potential for concentration of power in the hands of the president, the low effectiveness of legislative control, and political deadlock between the executive and legislative branches. In addition, it is also important to understand how this system contributes to the stability of the government and the sustainability of national development.

Based on this background, this study aims to critically analyze the model of the presidential system of government in Indonesia from a theoretical and practical perspective. The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the basic principles and characteristics of the presidential system; (2) to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this system in the Indonesian context; and (3) to examine the potential for institutional modification or reform that could support the realization of a more democratic, stable, and accountable system of government. This research is expected to contribute to the development of Indonesian constitutional discourse and serve as an academic and practical reference for policymakers in creating democratic and accountable governance.



2. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with library research as the main technique for data collection and analysis. A qualitative approach is used because it is considered capable of providing an in-depth understanding of complex and contextual phenomena, such as the presidential system of government implemented in Indonesia. According to Moleong (2010), qualitative research aims to understand the meaning behind the social phenomena being studied through in-depth description, rather than through statistical measurement (Bahiyah & Gumindari, 2024).

The library research method was carried out by reviewing and examining various relevant literature sources, both national and international. These sources include scientific books, academic journal articles, constitutional documents such as the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, laws and regulations, as well as historical studies and the thoughts of experts in the fields of political science, constitutional law, and public administration. Literature was searched for and analyzed using keywords such as “presidential system of government,” “Indonesian presidentialism,” “checks and balances,” and “separation of powers”.

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods, which involved interpreting and comparing existing theories with empirical practices of the system of government in Indonesia. This procedure includes identifying key themes, grouping information, and drawing conclusions based on logical arguments and supporting literature evidence. To enhance data validity, source triangulation techniques were used, which involve comparing information from various references to obtain a more comprehensive and objective picture (Sugiyono, 2017; Mustori, 2012). The purpose of using this method is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the characteristics of the presidential system in Indonesia, including its strengths, weaknesses, and modifications in the context of modern Indonesian democracy. With this approach, it is hoped that the research results can contribute theoretically and practically to the development of constitutional discourse and public policy-making in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Thahir (2019) explains that the presidential system adopted by Indonesia was the result of a consensus among the nation's founders at the BPUPKI session, which referred to the US model of government. The main objective of this choice was to create political stability through a clear separation of powers between state institutions. However, in practice, this system has not been fully implemented in its pure form, as parliamentary practices continue to influence relations between institutions, particularly in terms of political control over the president. This is in line with the agreement of the nation's founders, according to the BPUPKI (Indonesian Independence Preparatory Investigation Committee) session that took place from May 29 to June 1 and July 10 to July 17, 1945. The system used in the United States government is a presidential system, which is classified as a separate category. This system is primarily based on the idea of separation of powers. There is a strong desire to establish a fair and orderly government (Sinaga, 2022).

There is no shared responsibility between the president, who is the leader of the executive branch, and the ministers in Indonesia. The ministers have a significant responsibility to carry out their duties in accordance with the president's orders. The president does not have the authority to dissolve the House of Representatives (DPR), as the president is elected by the Electoral College. Therefore, the presidential system implemented in the United States is considered effective. The aim is to explain the parliamentary system of government, which falls under the category of the presidential system in Indonesia. In a parliamentary system of government, it is permissible to dissolve the government if the parliamentary system is to be dissolved. The government has the authority to dissolve various government systems known as parliamentary systems. If there is no motivation from the members of parliament, then parliament can dissolve the government consisting of the president if he is deemed unable to carry out his duties and convey the wishes of the people (Saldi, 2018).



A system considered a parliamentary system applies if the head of government is the prime minister, who serves as the head of the executive branch appointed by the head of state, such as the president or king. The system known as parliamentary was part of the system of government implemented in Indonesia from 1949 to 1959 by applying a constitution that had differences, namely the 1949 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and the 1950 Basic Law of the Republic of Indonesia.

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Presidential System of Government

The presidential system of government is a system in which the executive (president) and the legislature (parliament) are elected separately by the people, and both have fixed terms of office. This system is widely used in countries that seek executive stability, a clear separation of powers, and direct legitimacy from the people to the executive leader. Indonesia constitutionally adheres to the presidential system as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, but in practice, there are dynamics in its implementation that combine elements of the parliamentary system (Syauiyid Alamsyah & Nurdin, 2023). The advantages of the presidential system are :

1) Executive Stability

Government stability is one of the main advantages of the presidential system. The president, who has a fixed term of office, typically five years, cannot be removed by parliament except through a lengthy and legally rigorous impeachment process. This ensures continuity in governance and avoids political crises caused by the frequent collapse of cabinets, as often occurs in parliamentary systems. In a parliamentary system, a motion of no confidence can be used as a political tool to bring down the government at any time, whereas in a presidential system, this mechanism is replaced by a more stable and accountable constitutional process (Sukandi, 2021). This stability allows the government to focus on completing its long-term development agenda.

According to Linz (1990), the presidential system has a tendency toward instability and concentration of power, especially if balancing institutions such as parliament and the judiciary are unable to effectively carry out their oversight functions. In this system, the president, who serves as both head of state and head of government, has enormous authority over the running of the government. This situation becomes highly vulnerable if it is not balanced by a strong system of checks and balances. This phenomenon was clearly evident in Indonesia during the New Order era, when President Suharto consolidated power not only in the executive branch but also dominated the legislative branch through Golkar and had the full support of the military and bureaucracy (Sukandi, 2021). In such conditions, power that should be distributed proportionally becomes centralized and difficult to control, ultimately contributing to weak accountability, a decline in the quality of democracy, and the emergence of authoritarian practices. Therefore, a presidential system implemented without adequate institutional oversight has the potential to create power imbalances in the constitutional system (Fawzia, Diana, et al).

2) Strong Mandate from Voters

In a presidential system, the president is directly elected by the people through democratic elections. This means that the legitimacy of executive power comes directly from the will of the people, not from political parties or parliament. This advantage gives the president strong political authority to implement government programs in line with campaign promises. According to Cheibub (2007), the legitimacy of the president in a presidential system is obtained directly from the people through elections, which makes the president a political actor with independent authority from parliament. In the Indonesian context, this mechanism strengthens the symbolic and political relationship between leaders and the people, as well as clarifying vertical accountability. Direct elections also increase clarity of responsibility, where the public can evaluate the president's performance directly without the intermediary of the legislature. Direct presidential elections increase clarity of accountability because the people can directly evaluate the performance of the president as the holder of the main



executive authority (Azaria, 2014).

3) Balance of Power

The principle of separation of powers is the foundation of the presidential system. In this case, state power is divided into three main branches: executive, legislative, and judicial, each of which has clear and independent functions and authorities. Each branch is given the power to oversee and limit the other branches through a system of checks and balances. With this mechanism, the possibility of abuse of power can be minimized, and transparent and accountable governance can be achieved. Ferejohn (1986) emphasizes that the success of substantive democracy is highly dependent on the effectiveness of checks and balances between state institutions. In a presidential system, the division of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches must be designed in such a way that each institution can oversee and balance the others. If this principle does not function optimally, the system may experience power imbalances that undermine public trust in democracy itself. In Indonesia, the legislative branch's ability to oversee the president is often constrained by practical political interests, so the effectiveness of checks and balances is frequently questioned.

4) Consistency in Policy

A significant advantage of the presidential system is its ability to maintain consistency and continuity in policy, especially in the context of national development. With a fixed term of office, the president and his cabinet have sufficient time to plan, implement, and evaluate strategic policies in a planned manner without being distracted by the short-term political dynamics that commonly occur in parliament. This is crucial for developing countries such as Indonesia, which are in the process of consolidating democracy and development. Setiawan (2021) argues that the presidential system provides space for medium- to long-term policy consistency, as the president has a fixed term and cannot be easily replaced by parliament as in a parliamentary system. This is crucial for developing countries such as Indonesia, which are facing structural development challenges. Leadership stability allows the government to design and execute major programs such as infrastructure development, digital transformation, and bureaucratic reform in a more planned and sustainable manner, without being disrupted by short-term political dynamics. In this context, the presidential system can provide greater legal and political certainty than other systems of government.

Disadvantages of the Presidential System of Government

Although the presidential system of government offers a number of advantages, it cannot be denied that this system also has inherent weaknesses, both in theory and in practice. In the context of developing countries such as Indonesia, these shortcomings become even more relevant to analyze critically. Several structural weaknesses in the presidential system can have a direct impact on the effectiveness of governance, political stability, and the quality of democracy. The following is a more in-depth explanation of the disadvantages of the presidential system of government:

1) Risk of Centralized Power

The most prominent criticism of the presidential system is the potential for excessive concentration of power in the hands of the president. Since the president serves as both head of state and head of government, they have full control over executive power and significant influence in shaping national policy. If not balanced by a strong system of checks and balances and independent legislative and judicial institutions, this can pave the way for authoritarianism or absolute power. In Indonesian political history, this phenomenon was evident during the New Order era under President Soeharto, where power that should have been distributed proportionally was instead centralized and untouched by institutional controls. The president at the time not only led the government but also dominated the legislative branch, the military, and the bureaucracy. As a result, widespread abuse of power occurred, leading to a multidimensional crisis in the late 1990s. This experience shows that in



a presidential system, great power without adequate oversight has the potential to weaken the principles of democracy and the rule of law (Sukandi, 2021).

2) Difficulties in Leadership Transition

Unlike in a parliamentary system, which allows for leadership transition through political mechanisms such as a vote of no confidence, a presidential system only allows for the replacement of the president through two formal channels: elections and impeachment. Elections can only be held after the end of the term of office, while impeachment is a complex legal-political procedure that requires evidence of serious violations such as treason or serious criminal acts. This difficulty becomes a particular obstacle if the incumbent president lacks adequate leadership capacity, commits fatal mistakes, or loses public trust. The country is forced to wait until the end of the term to make leadership changes, even though the government may have reached a deadlock or lost legitimacy. According to Cheibub (2007), the inflexibility of the presidential system can actually exacerbate an ongoing political crisis because there is no quick and effective way to respond to public dissatisfaction or leadership failure (Andriana, 2014).

3) Conflict between the Executive and Legislative Branches

In a presidential system, the president and members of the legislature are elected through separate elections and are not dependent on each other. Although this separation provides clarity of responsibility, it can also lead to serious political conflict if the president and the majority of parliament are from different political parties (the phenomenon of divided government). This lack of synchronization often results in tension, policy deadlock, and even gridlock in the legislative process or decision-making. In Indonesia, tension between the president and the House of Representatives has occurred, especially when the president does not have majority support in parliament. This conflict hinders the preparation of budgets, the formation of laws, and the implementation of national programs. Mainwaring & Shugart (1997) state that disharmony between the two branches of power in a presidential system can lead to government stagnation, reduce the effectiveness of the bureaucracy, and lower public trust in democratic institutions (Andriana, 2014).

4) Lack of Flexibility in Responding to Crises

A fundamental weakness of the presidential system is its inflexibility in responding to rapidly changing political dynamics, especially in crisis situations. Because the president has a fixed term and the procedures for replacing him are very limited, it is very difficult for the country to make a quick leadership transition when needed. This contrasts with the parliamentary system, which allows for more flexible leadership rotation through mechanisms such as no-confidence motions or the replacement of the prime minister by the majority party.

In emergency situations, such as economic crises, social conflicts, or leadership failures, the presidential system tends to be slow in taking corrective political action. As a result, crises can be prolonged or even worsened due to the lack of quick options to change the direction of government. Linz (1990) asserts that the presidential system is structurally more vulnerable to institutional tensions and political elite polarization, making it unsuitable for pure implementation in countries with high levels of political fragmentation, such as Indonesia. Indonesia's current form of government has elements of both presidential and parliamentary systems (Coates, 2016). Furthermore, Indonesia's governmental structure has undergone a number of modifications throughout its history. From 1945 to 1949, Indonesia implemented a parliamentary cabinet system. Subsequently, Indonesia adopted a pseudo-parliamentary form of government between 1949 and 1950. Indonesia continued to use a parliamentary form of government with pseudo-liberal democracy from 1950 to 1959. Meanwhile, Indonesia adopted guided democracy from 1959 to 1966. Indonesia is referred to as a country that adheres to a presidential system of government in the 1945 Constitution, which was ratified on August 18, 1945. However, after three months, deviations from the 1945 Constitution



began to emerge when Sultan Syahrir was appointed as Prime Minister of the First Cabinet and a parliamentary cabinet was formed. To address the shortcomings of the presidential system, this form of government also incorporated aspects of the parliamentary system.

However, after deviations from the 1945 Constitution emerged, namely the formation of a parliamentary cabinet with Sultan Syahrir as Prime Minister of the First Cabinet. To overcome the shortcomings of the presidential system, this form of government also incorporated aspects of the parliamentary system and implemented changes. Some variations of the presidential system of government in the Republic of Indonesia include the President can be dismissed at any time by the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) on the recommendation of the People's Representative Council (DPR). Thus, the People's Representative Council (DPR) retains the authority to oversee the president, albeit indirectly; the president appoints state officials with the consideration and/or approval of the People's Representative Council (DPR). For example, the conclusion of international agreements, the conferral of titles, awards, honors, amnesties, and abolitions; and Parliament is granted greater authority in terms of lawmaking and budgetary rights (Muhammad, 2015).

4. CONCLUSION

Based on an in-depth study of the presidential system of government, both in theory and practice in Indonesia, it can be concluded that Indonesia adheres to a presidential system of government that has undergone adjustments and modifications, so that it is not entirely pure like the presidential system in the United States. This system is actually a combination of the presidential and parliamentary systems that has developed dynamically to suit the political, social, and historical conditions of Indonesia.

Constitutionally, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia states that Indonesia's system of government is presidential, with the president as both head of state and head of government, who is directly elected by the people and has a fixed term of office. This system provides political stability, a strong mandate from the people, a clear separation of powers, and consistency in the implementation of government policies. However, in practice, Indonesia has also adopted several mechanisms and principles from the parliamentary system, such as the need for the approval of the House of Representatives (DPR) in the appointment of high-ranking state officials, legislative oversight of presidential policies, and the authority of the DPR and the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) to remove the president through specific procedures. This demonstrates that Indonesia's presidential system has been adapted to national political and historical realities, particularly since the era of Parliamentary Democracy, Guided Democracy, and Reform.

On the other hand, the presidential system is not without structural weaknesses, such as the risk of power concentration in the hands of the president, the difficulty of replacing leaders mid-term, the potential for conflict between the executive and legislative branches, and a lack of flexibility in dealing with political crises. The experience of the New Order era shows how a presidential system that is not effectively controlled can lead to authoritarian and unaccountable governance. Therefore, for the presidential system of government in Indonesia to function optimally and democratically, it is necessary to strengthen the mechanisms of checks and balances, enhance the role of the legislature as a policy watchdog, and encourage public participation in political decision-making. Institutional reform and consistency in the enforcement of the law are also key to ensuring that the presidential system implemented can address the challenges of the times and fulfill the principles of good governance.



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