

DELIBERATIVE LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY: OPERATIONALIZING HABERMAS'S THEORY IN POST-REFORM INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

Studies of deliberative democracy in Indonesia have yet to comprehensively investigate the influence of leadership on the quality of deliberation and its subsequent impact on political legitimacy. This gap creates a disjunction between normative ideals and the empirical realities of post-Reform political practices. This article analyzes the role of deliberative leadership in bolstering political legitimacy by operationalizing Jürgen Habermas's theoretical framework—communicative rationality, the public sphere, and communicative power—into empirically assessable indicators. Employing a rigorous qualitative methodology, this study undertakes a systematic review of academic publications, policy reports, and institutional documents published between 2015 and 2024. Data are analyzed using descriptive-analytical techniques informed by a deliberative systems perspective. The findings indicate that, notwithstanding the expansion of participatory mechanisms in the post-Reform era, deliberative practices in Indonesia remain largely procedural and symbolic. Institutional arenas such as Musrenbang, citizen forums, and digital public spaces exhibit deliberative potential but are constrained by oligarchic dominance, structural inequality, a weak legal culture, and institutional co-optation. The primary contribution of this article is the formulation of four operational indicators of deliberative leadership—participatory inclusiveness, quality of argumentation, transparency of policy reasoning, and institutional responsiveness—that advance deliberative democracy scholarship and provide an evaluative framework for strengthening political legitimacy and substantive democracy in Indonesia.

Keywords: Deliberative leadership; Deliberative democracy; Political legitimacy; Public sphere; Post-Reform Indonesia.

ABSTRAK

Kajian mengenai demokrasi deliberatif di Indonesia belum secara komprehensif menelaah pengaruh kepemimpinan terhadap kualitas deliberasi serta implikasinya terhadap legitimasi politik. Kesenjangan ini menimbulkan diskoneksi antara ideal normatif dan realitas empiris praktik politik pasca-Reformasi. Artikel ini menganalisis peran kepemimpinan deliberatif dalam memperkuat legitimasi politik dengan mengoperasionalkan kerangka teoretis Jürgen Habermas—rasionalitas komunikatif, ruang publik, dan kekuasaan komunikatif ke dalam indikator-indikator yang dapat dinilai secara empiris. Penelitian ini menggunakan metodologi kualitatif yang ketat melalui telaah pustaka sistematis terhadap publikasi akademik, laporan kebijakan, dan dokumen institusional yang diterbitkan pada periode 2015–2024. Data dianalisis menggunakan teknik deskriptif-analitis yang diinformasikan oleh perspektif sistem deliberatif. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun mekanisme partisipasi publik pada era pasca-Reformasi mengalami perluasan, praktik deliberasi di Indonesia masih didominasi oleh pola yang bersifat prosedural dan simbolik. Arena institusional seperti Musrenbang, forum warga, dan ruang publik digital menunjukkan potensi deliberatif, namun dibatasi oleh dominasi oligarkis, ketimpangan struktural, lemahnya budaya hukum, serta kooptasi institusional. Kontribusi utama artikel ini terletak pada perumusan empat indikator operasional kepemimpinan deliberative—inklusivitas partisipasi, kualitas argumentasi, transparansi penalaran kebijakan, dan responsivitas institusional yang memperkaya kajian demokrasi deliberatif serta menyediakan kerangka evaluatif bagi penguatan legitimasi politik dan demokrasi substantif di Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan deliberatif; Demokrasi deliberatif; Legitimasi politik; Ruang publik; Indonesia pasca-Reformasi.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, deliberative democracy has emerged as a significant paradigm in global political studies, primarily in response to escalating political polarization, the rise of digital populism, crises of representation, and the erosion of public trust in democratic institutions. The phenomenon of democratic recession is evident in global metrics; for example, House (2023) reports that only about 20% of the global population lives in countries classified as Free, a significant decrease from 39% in 2015. Diamond (2021, p. 16) attributes this decline to a deterioration of informational integrity and the manipulation of discourse within the public sphere. In Southeast Asia, the (V.-D Institute, 2024) documents a 10% decline in the Deliberative Component Index from 2020 to 2024, indicating a weakening of the normative foundations of deliberation as a mechanism for democratic decision-making.

In this context, deliberation should not be viewed merely as a procedural adjunct to electoral democracy; rather, it is a critical precondition for the rational, inclusive, and free exchange of arguments. Although Indonesia's 1998 Reformasi opened new avenues for public participation, these opportunities have often been limited to short-term electoral mobilization rather than enhancing the quality of public discourse (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019, p. 88). Furthermore, (V-Dem Institute, 2024b) indicates stagnation in Indonesia's Participatory Component Index, reflecting weak deliberative avenues for citizens to influence policy agendas. These trends reinforce the study's initial hypothesis that a significant gap exists between the normative ideals of deliberation and the realities of post-Reform political practice.

The academic discourse presents two opposing viewpoints. Proponents argue that deliberation enhances the quality of public decision-making, broadens inclusivity, and strengthens political legitimacy through evidence-based argumentation (Bächtiger et al., 2018; Landemore, 2020). An OECD (2021) report suggests that well-designed deliberative institutions can increase public trust by 8–12%. Conversely, critics highlight deliberation's vulnerability to power imbalances, elitist biases, institutional co-optation, and dynamics of discursive domination (Curato et al., 2019; Lafont, 2019). Therefore, the design of deliberative

spaces must be contextualized within broader power dynamics and the leadership roles essential for fostering equitable and rational discourse.

The Indonesian context exacerbates these tensions. A 2022 report by Komnas HAM (2022) reveals that effective representation of women and minority groups in consultative forums is only 10–15%. Although *musyawarah mufakat* is normatively regarded as Indonesia's cultural foundation for deliberation, in practice, it prioritizes consensus-building over substantive argument exchange. Mouffe (2018) posits that democracy necessitates open contestation rather than superficial agreement. In Indonesia's post-Reform political landscape, characterized by the consolidation of oligarchic power (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019), the disparity between deliberative ideals and institutional practices becomes increasingly apparent.

Recent empirical studies further substantiate this gap. Research on *Musrenbang*, citizen forums, and digital platforms shows that assessments of deliberative quality primarily focus on participant numbers rather than the quality of arguments, voice equality, or policy responsiveness. Gerber et al. (2018) find no correlation between participation size and argument quality, while Wampler and Touchton (2019) emphasize the limited capacity of local institutions to facilitate substantive deliberation. Data from Bappenas (2022) reveal that 63% of *Musrenbang* proposals lack data-driven justification. In digital spaces, a joint report by KPU-ANRI (2023) indicates that about 80% of political discourse is dominated by spontaneous emotional sentiment rather than evidence-based reasoning. This complexity underscores the empirical issue articulated in the abstract: deliberative practice in Indonesia often devolves into electoral ritualism or short-term mobilization.

The urgency of this study is amplified by the broader context of global and national democratic crises. Internationally, Norris and Inglehart (2019) and UNDP (2022) highlight increasing public dissatisfaction with representative institutions. In Indonesia, democratic regression is evident in ongoing issues such as vote-buying, elite co-optation, and transactional participation (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Bawaslu (2024) reports a notable increase in vote-buying incidents in the latest elections, while Indonesia's CPI score (International, 2024a) continues to

classify the country as facing significant corruption challenges. Within this environment, leadership—particularly under President Prabowo Subianto—plays a crucial role in determining whether Indonesian democracy can overcome procedural stagnation.

Against this backdrop, this study poses the central research question: How does deliberative leadership strengthen the quality of deliberative democracy in post-Reform Indonesia, and to what extent can it enhance political legitimacy? This inquiry is particularly relevant given that many participatory forums—both in Indonesia and globally—struggle to establish effective feedback loops, leaving citizens uninformed about the rationale behind policy decisions (Elstub et al., 2022; Suiter & Farrell, 2021).

To investigate this question, the study operationalizes Habermas's (1998) theory into four evaluative indicators: (i) inclusivity of participation, (ii) quality of arguments and evidence, (iii) reasoning behind policy decisions, and (iv) institutional responsiveness. These indicators aim to assess the extent to which deliberative processes foster rational public discourse and hold decision-makers accountable to jointly examinable reasons. Practically, this study offers an evaluative tool that local governments, civil society organizations, and communities can use to assess the design quality and outcomes of deliberative forums in the post-Reform era. Consequently, this introduction establishes a coherent argumentative foundation, fully aligned with the abstract, for evaluating how deliberative leadership can enhance political legitimacy and support the consolidation of substantive democracy in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on deliberative democracy fundamentally draws on Jürgen Habermas's work, which identifies communicative rationality, the public sphere, and communicative power as key foundations for democratic will formation. Communicative rationality refers to the ability of actors to present arguments that can be publicly justified, while the public sphere serves as a discursive arena for rational and inclusive exchanges of reasons. Within this framework, communicative power emerges when arguments articulated through public discourse can

legitimately influence political decision-making. This Habermasian perspective provides a foundational lens for assessing the quality of deliberative processes and their potential to generate political legitimacy rooted in public reason.

Contemporary scholarship has further developed these concepts across various dimensions. Bächtiger et al. (2018) expand the notion of deliberation by examining deliberative mini publics, emphasizing the importance of argument quality, voice equality, and inclusivity within political forums. Landemore (2020) introduces the concept of open democracy, highlighting the epistemic advantages of deliberation, particularly when discursive processes include diverse perspectives. Conversely, Lafont (2019) critiques the tendency for deliberation to be constrained by elite fragmentation, limiting meaningful opportunities for citizen participation in collective reasoning. Additionally, Curato et al. (2019) stress the necessity of considering power relations and material conditions that affect citizens' capacity to engage in deliberation. These discussions highlight that deliberation cannot be separated from its sociopolitical context, including power distribution, institutional structures, and leadership capabilities.

In developing countries, the discourse on deliberative democracy reveals even more complex challenges. Oligarchic dynamics, socioeconomic inequality, and fragmented representation often undermine the quality of deliberation. Wampler and Touchton (2019) show that public participation in developing democracies is often procedural and inadequate to ensure argument quality or substantial influence over policy outcomes. Fung (2015) emphasizes the need for institutional designs that balance openness and effectiveness, particularly in contexts with uneven bureaucratic capacity and leadership competence. These insights are especially relevant in Indonesia, where deliberative practices are shaped by local power dynamics, political patronage, and unequal access to information.

The relationship between deliberative leadership and political legitimacy has emerged as a central theme in the literature. Deliberative leadership is seen not just as a technocratic role but as the capacity to create discursive conditions that enable equitable citizen participation, engagement with arguments in an epistemically open manner, and commitment to publicly defensible reasons. Mansbridge et al. (2012) argue that deliberative leadership is essential for mediating

conflict, structuring discursive agendas, and ensuring the integrity of deliberative processes. In contrast, Mouffe (2018) advocates for an agonistic perspective, cautioning that deliberation must embrace contestation and difference, suggesting that leadership should avoid imposing superficial consensus and instead foster an environment conducive to pluralism.

Collectively, these theoretical discussions suggest that the quality of deliberation is shaped not only by institutional design but also by leadership's ability to manage discursive dynamics. Consequently, this study builds upon the growing body of literature to formulate a conceptual framework that operationalizes four deliberative indicators: inclusivity of participation, quality of arguments and evidence, reason-tracing in policymaking, and institutional responsiveness. These indicators are grounded in Habermasian theory and supported by international research on deliberative design and democratic leadership. Through this framework, the study aims to clarify how deliberative leadership enhances political legitimacy and why this is particularly critical in post-Reform Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design, utilizing a systematic literature review (SLR) approach combined with descriptive-empirical analysis to synthesize deliberative democracy theory with empirical insights on public participation. The choice of a qualitative methodology—specifically, the integration of SLR and discourse analysis—arises from the objective of evaluating the quality of deliberation, public consultation practices, and the effectiveness of participatory spaces. This evaluation necessitates a comprehensive argumentative and interpretive analysis of texts, policy documents, and empirical studies.

Data sources include secondary materials such as journal articles indexed in Scopus and Web of Science (2015–2024), academic books, research reports, global indices (e.g., V-Dem, CPI, and the EIU Democracy Index), and public policy documents related to Musrenbang and citizen participation. Additionally, primary document-based data—including outputs from Musrenbang, official local government reports, and documents pertinent to participatory policy implementation—are examined as written artifacts within a discourse-analytic

framework. Both primary and secondary data are considered complementary in assessing Indonesia's deliberative capacity.

The literature identification process was conducted using databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis Online, and Google Scholar, following the SLR protocols outlined by Snyder (2019). The stages of the SLR include: (i) defining keywords such as deliberative democracy, public participation, Musrenbang, deliberative systems, and policy uptake; (ii) screening articles based on inclusion criteria (publication year, indexation status, thematic relevance); and (iii) thematic coding to identify deliberative patterns. This methodology is enhanced by conceptual mapping of public deliberation using Bächtiger and Parkinson's (2019) deliberative quality framework.

Data collection methods encompass document retrieval, thematic coding, and the extraction of theoretical arguments and empirical findings from studies on Musrenbang, citizen forums, and digital participation landscapes. Within this research's conceptual framework, literature is viewed as an “intellectual informant,” while empirical data are sourced from contemporary qualitative studies examining public deliberation practices in Indonesia.

Data analysis employs two primary techniques: (i) content analysis to identify deliberative patterns and clarify the relationship between institutional structures and participatory behaviors; and (ii) discourse analysis to evaluate the quality of arguments, public rationality, and discrepancies between normative ideals and political practices, as articulated by Curato and Böker (2016). These analyses are integrated with contemporary deliberative frameworks addressing democratic crises, deliberative quality, and deliberative uptake, as developed by Dryzek et al. (2019) and Elstub et al. (2022). This approach connects Habermas's public sphere theory, Dryzek's deliberative systems, and the concept of uptake—specifically, the extent to which public arguments are considered in political decisions—with empirical findings on Musrenbang and participatory practices in Indonesia.

The validity of the research is strengthened through source triangulation (academic literature, international institutional reports, government documents), theoretical triangulation (including works by Habermas, Rawls, Dryzek, and

Mouffe), and peer debriefing with experts in political science. The trustworthiness of the data aligns with Lincoln and Guba's (1985) qualitative criteria, which encompass credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The credibility of the literature is assessed based on journal reputation, scientific indexation, methodological rigor, and the availability of supporting data.

The empirical findings of this study are further supported by a diverse range of international scholarship, including analyses of deliberative complexity in collaborative governance (Wampler & Touchton, 2019), the limited policy uptake of deliberative innovations (Fung, 2015), and challenges related to representation and participatory effectiveness in participatory budgeting studies (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017). The overall research process adheres to contemporary standards of social research ethics, including the mitigation of interpretive bias, integrity in citation practices, and responsible data usage, in accordance with the guidelines proposed by (Nowell et al., 2017).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Public Sphere and Deliberative Democracy: The Relevance of Habermas for Indonesia

Jürgen Habermas's theoretical contributions regarding the public sphere and deliberative democracy are rooted in the historical context of post-World War II Germany, a period marked by a crisis in political legitimacy that profoundly influenced his intellectual development. His middle-class upbringing and national anxieties led him to emphasize communicative rationality as a crucial foundation for democratic life. As Habermas (1998, p. 287) asserts, modern political legitimacy must arise from publicly testable discourse rather than relying solely on electoral mechanisms. This concept is further explored in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1984), which provides the philosophical basis for contemporary deliberative democracy, as elaborated by Lafont (2019, p. 3).

The Habermasian framework for the public sphere underscores the need for a discursive space free from state or market interference, where citizens can form opinions through equitable exchanges of arguments. Recent academic discourse indicates that the public sphere has gained significance amid political polarization,

digital fragmentation, and declining trust in democratic institutions (Dryzek et al., 2019, p. 1145). While Habermas champions communicative rationality as the foundation of democratic legitimacy, Benhabib (2016, p. 25) emphasizes that effective deliberation requires both participatory inclusiveness and the protection of freedom of expression. However, in Indonesia, the post-Reformasi public sphere often falls short of achieving ideal deliberative quality due to socio-political inequalities and the dominance of local bureaucratic structures (Elstub et al., 2022; Wampler & Touchton, 2019).

To understand these challenges, it is essential to recognize that the limitations of deliberation in Indonesia stem not only from deficiencies in procedural design but also from socio-political inequalities that create discursive hierarchies. Such disparities hinder citizens' ability to engage on equitable terms and undermine the public sphere's capacity to function as an arena for communicative rationality. This perspective is illustrated in the following analysis:

“Deliberation fails not because citizens lack interest, but because structural inequalities and entrenched hierarchies shape who gets to speak, who is heard, and whose arguments are considered legitimate. In contexts where bureaucratic dominance persists and socio-political disparities remain wide, public forums risk reproducing existing power asymmetries rather than correcting them. Effective deliberation, therefore, requires active institutional mechanisms that counterbalance inequality and protect discursive fairness.” (Siu, 2017, p. 120).

Habermas redefined critical theory by shifting its focus from economic determinism to communicative interaction. He posits that structural change alone is insufficient for achieving emancipation; rather, communication free from domination, embedded in everyday life, is essential (Habermas, 1984, p. 86). This perspective serves as a normative foundation for contemporary inquiries into deliberative democracy, conceptualizing collective legitimacy as arising from discursive processes in which citizens engage on equal footing.

In his recent work, *A New Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere and Deliberative Politics*, Habermas (2024, p. 146) reiterates that the public sphere constitutes an autonomous space in which citizens collaboratively formulate opinions through rational discourse. In Indonesia, participatory frameworks such as *Musrenbang* have been formally institutionalized; however, they frequently

become mired in administrative proceduralism. *Musrenbang* forums struggle to meet deliberative standards due to bureaucratic dominance and the limited argumentative capacity of participants (Wampler & Touchton, 2019).

Extensive empirical research indicates that *Musrenbang* has not functioned as a robust deliberative forum. Analyses reveal low levels of active participation, weak argumentation, and a lack of clear policy outcomes (Baiocchi & Ganuza, 2017; Fung, 2015; Wampler & Touchton, 2019). These conditions demonstrate that public communication does not occur in domination-free environments, thereby failing to meet Habermasian deliberative criteria.

To further contextualize Indonesia's circumstances, it is imperative to compare them with nations that have successfully implemented deliberative mechanisms. The literature on deliberative systems underscores that deliberation generates legitimacy only when it is institutionally connected to policy processes. This assertion is encapsulated in the following analysis:

“Deliberative systems thrive only when public reasoning is institutionally connected to decision-making. Where participatory forums lack procedural authority or institutional uptake, they become symbolic rituals rather than engines of democratic legitimacy.” (Fishkin, 2018, p. 64).

Table 1. Comparison of Institutional Indicators and Deliberative Quality

| Country | Deliberative Practice | Participation/Representation Data | CPI 2024 | Freedom House 2024 | Deliberative Quality |
|-----------|-------------------------|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------|---|
| Indonesia | Musrenbang | 28 attendees; 3 actives (~20%) | 37 | 56/100 (Partly Free) | Consultative; bureaucratic dominance |
| Brazil | Participatory Budgeting | ~17,200 citizens; ±USD 160 million | 34 | 72/100 (Partly Free) | Institutionalized; strong policy impact |

| | | | | | |
|---------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|----|-------------------|--|
| Finland | Citizens' Jury (2021) | 33 randomly selected citizens | 88 | 100/100 (Free) | Official; integrated into national policymaking |
| Germany | Bürgerrat Klima | 160 representative citizens | 75 | 93/100 (Free) | Formal recommendations to the Bundestag |

Sources: International (2024b); House (2024); Wampler & Touchton (2019); OECD (2020); Geissel & Gherghina (2023).

This comparative analysis emphasizes that deliberative quality is significantly influenced by institutional capacity and the connection to policymaking processes. Brazil and Finland exemplify how robust participatory frameworks can yield public decisions with tangible impacts. In contrast, Indonesia's CPI score of 37 and its designation as *Partly Free* by Freedom House indicate governance deficiencies and limited political openness that hinder the deliberative potential of *Musrenbang*.

The findings affirm that Indonesia is situated within procedural democracy, characterized by a public sphere of low effectiveness. *Musrenbang* deliberations are marked by passivity, inequality, and a lack of substantive argumentation, failing to establish strong deliberative legitimacy. In contrast, countries with well-developed deliberative institutions leverage citizen participation to enhance policymaking and strengthen public trust (Fishkin, 2018; Landemore, 2020).

The primary contribution of this study lies in synthesizing Habermas's public sphere theory with empirical data from *Musrenbang* and cross-national institutional indicators. This research addresses a gap in the literature that often emphasizes electoral democracy without assessing the quality of public discourse. Theoretically, the study advances deliberative democracy scholarship in developing contexts by highlighting the significance of deliberative leadership. Practically, the findings provide a framework for local governments to enhance *Musrenbang*, making it more deliberative, inclusive, and responsive to citizen needs.

Deliberative Democracy in Practice in Indonesia: *Musrenbang*, Citizen Forums, and Digital Spaces

The discourse on deliberative democracy in Indonesia has emerged in response to the limitations of procedural democracy, which prioritizes electoral legitimacy while often neglecting the quality of substantive representation. Hardiman (2009) states that deliberative democracy seeks to revitalize radical democracy by linking the constitutional state with citizen engagement as a normative foundation. This aligns with contemporary deliberative theory, which argues that political legitimacy is grounded not only in the aggregation of preferences but also in reasoned justifications for collective decisions (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Mansbridge et al., 2012). Global indicators highlight the urgency of addressing these issues: Institute (2024) reports that Indonesia's deliberative quality is low, as reflected in its Deliberative Component Index, which significantly trails behind countries like Finland and Germany (V-Dem Institute, 2024b). These findings underscore the fragile deliberative foundations typical of many developing democracies.

To align with the theoretical framework, this study explicitly connects empirical findings on public participation and argument quality with Habermas's public sphere theory, Dryzek's deliberative systems concept, and Elstub et al.'s notion of deliberative uptake. This analytical approach allows the study to not only describe issues but also to evaluate how effectively deliberative theories account for Indonesia's empirical realities.

Field findings indicate limited deliberative capacity within formal participatory forums such as *Musrenbang*. Participation rates in many regions range from 20% to 30%; yet fewer than 10% of participants provide substantive arguments, revealing a pattern of passive and symbolic participation. This aligns with studies that document the low effectiveness of *Musrenbang* as a deliberative arena (OECD, 2020; Wampler & Touchton, 2019). Such dynamics suggest that formal forums fail to provide equitable spaces for argumentation, undermining *Musrenbang*'s deliberative functions. These findings reinforce the central research

question: to what extent can formal participatory mechanisms serve as arenas for substantive deliberation?

These limitations imply that while the Indonesian public sphere is legally open, it struggles to foster discourse that significantly influences policy. This is evident in Indonesia's House (2024) score of 56/100 (*Partly Free*) and a Voice and Accountability score of -0.07 (WGI 2023), both indicating weak deliberative channels of representation. These results support Habermas's (1998) assertion that political legitimacy cannot rely solely on elections but must arise from domination-free public communication. Patronage networks, bureaucratic co-optation, and class segmentation undermine communicative rationality and obstruct meaningful public argumentation.

In line with this perspective, Dryzek (2019) and Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) argue that democracies lacking deliberative foundations are susceptible to regression. Mansbridge et al. further contend:

“Deliberative democracy collapses when participation becomes merely symbolic, as formal inclusion without meaningful reasoning erodes the communicative foundations of democratic legitimacy. When citizens lack both voice and influence, systems drift toward elite-driven proceduralism that mimics democratic form while undermining its substance. The absence of deliberative uptake—where public arguments fail to shape decisions—creates a vacuum in which inequality, polarization, and strategic manipulation thrive. In such contexts, elections alone cannot stabilize democratic governance; only sustained public reasoning can anchor legitimacy and counterbalance concentrated power.” (Mansbridge et al., 2017, p. 183).

This analysis clarifies that Indonesia's empirical conditions are not anomalies but rather reflect structural failures in establishing an equitable deliberative space. When public argumentation does not influence policy, the political process becomes ensnared in elite proceduralism. Thus, Indonesia's deliberative crisis is systemic, necessitating institutional transformation rather than merely increasing formal participation.

The study finds that Habermas's deliberative ideal—characterized by rational, inclusive, and domination-free communication—remains unfulfilled in Indonesia's post-Reform political practice. While the public sphere is legally open, it has not been institutionally configured to support deliberation. Institute (2024)

reports that Indonesia's Equality Before the Law Index stands at 0.52, significantly lower than Finland's 0.89. Furthermore, rising digital polarization and diminishing media integrity impede the formation of rational public opinion. These findings reinforce Rawls's (2005) assertion that *public reason* can only flourish within stable and inclusive institutional cultures. Consequently, Indonesia's deliberative practices fall short of Habermas's normative standards of open, rational, and domination-free communication.

Comparative analysis further highlights the deliberative gap between Indonesia and other countries. In Brazil, participatory budgeting engages an average of 17,200 citizens annually and directly influences budget allocation (Wampler & Touchton, 2019). In the United States, deliberative polling has been shown to enhance argument quality by 30–40% (Fishkin, 2018). Across Europe, citizens' assemblies in Ireland and Belgium have led to strategic policy decisions through sortition-based participation. As Landmore explains:

“Countries that institutionalize deliberative practices tend to achieve higher policy legitimacy, civic trust, and democratic resilience. Sortition-based assemblies, participatory budgeting, and structured deliberative polling create conditions under which diverse citizens can reason together, generating informed public judgment rather than reactive opinion. Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America demonstrates that these institutions reduce elite domination, integrate marginalized voices, and produce decisions perceived as fairer and more accountable. Consequently, deliberation operates not merely as a participatory ideal but as a practical mechanism for enhancing policy effectiveness and democratic stability.” (Landmore, 2020, p. 48).

This statement reinforces the argument that deliberative effectiveness is determined not solely by the scale of participation but by institutional design that facilitates equitable dialogue and reason-based decision-making. In Indonesia, the absence of sortition mechanisms, limited formal deliberative channels, and persistent elite dominance elucidate why deliberation remains largely symbolic. These findings further support the assertion that institutional redesign is essential to ensure that public participation meaningfully shapes policy.

Table 2. Comparison of Deliberative Democracy in Developing and Advanced Democracies

| Country | Deliberative Practice | Participation | CPI 2023 | Freedom House 2024 | Deliberative Quality* |
|-----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Indonesia | Musrenbang | 20–30%; <10% speaking | 34 | 56 (Partly Free) | 0.46 |
| Brazil | Participatory Budgeting | ±17,200 citizens | 36 | 72 | 0.55 |
| Finland | Citizens' Jury | 33-99 | 87 | 100 (Free) | 0.82 |
| Germany | Bürgerrat Klima | 160 | 79 | 93 | 0.78 |

*Deliberative Quality refers to the V-Dem Deliberative Component Index.

Sources: House (2024); Geissel and Gherghina (2023); OECD (2020); International (2024); Institute (2024); Wampler & Touchton (2019).

Conceptually, Abdalla interprets deliberative democracy as an effort to deepen representative democracy through civil society empowerment and the inclusion of marginalized groups (Setiawan & Tomsa, 2023). Some fundamentalist Islamic perspectives view democracy as theologically problematic, while Maududi's conception of theo-democracy accepts democracy solely as a procedural mechanism. Liberal perspectives, such as Zakaria's, highlight the dangers of *illiberal democracy*, while leftist critiques emphasize the superficiality of procedural democracy in many Global South contexts. Given Indonesia's low civil society participation indices, this study's findings reinforce leftist critiques that hierarchical structures constrain citizens' deliberative capacity.

Structural barriers emerge as critical factors contributing to the low quality of deliberation. Many studies attribute stagnation in substantive democracy to political oligarchy, patronage networks, and citizens limited critical capacity (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Mietzner, 2020). Institute (2024) reports Indonesia's Political Corruption Index at 0.32—higher than Finland's 0.11—demonstrating

how normative barriers directly affect participation. Formal forums such as *Musrenbang* are often dominated by elites, restricting the argumentative space available to citizens. This study addresses a research gap concerning public argumentation quality and deliberative uptake, two dimensions rarely explored within Indonesian democracy scholarship.

The study's novelty lies in integrating Habermas's normative theory of communication with contemporary empirical indicators such as deliberative uptake, voice inclusivity, and global deliberative indexes. Unlike previous research focused on patronage and electoral behavior (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Mietzner, 2020), this study examines the quality of public argumentation as a core deliberative indicator. Its theoretical contribution involves the development of the concept of *deliberative leadership*—political actors who facilitate dialogue rather than merely administering procedural participation.

Practically, this study proposes an evaluative instrument for deliberation encompassing four dimensions: (i) inclusion of marginalized groups, (ii) quality of argumentation, (iii) effectiveness of feedback loops, and (iv) degree of policy adoption (*deliberative uptake*). Comparative evidence indicates that states with institutionalized deliberation tend to exhibit higher political integrity and more responsive policymaking. Without enhanced citizen capacity, expanded public spheres, and bureaucratic reform, Indonesian democracy risks remaining ensnared in proceduralism. The findings thus provide both empirical and theoretical foundations for strengthening substantive democracy in Indonesia.

Post-Reform Deliberative Deficits: Structural and Comparative Analysis

In the post-Reformasi period, the discourse on deliberative democracy in Indonesia has evolved in response to the limitations of procedural democracy, which often becomes entangled in electoral rituals. Empirical research demonstrates a dynamic interplay between Habermasian principles—emphasizing communicative rationality, a domination-free public sphere, and the formation of rational political will—and more adaptive local deliberative practices (Habermas, 1998). At the grassroots level, *Musrenbang* is often viewed as a deliberative arena; however, it is frequently obstructed by patronage, bureaucratic control, and

disparities in citizen engagement (Antlöv et al., 2016; Bodin & Nohrstedt, 2016). These conditions highlight the fragility of Indonesia’s deliberative foundations amid increasing societal demands for meaningful participation.

To maintain theoretical relevance, this analysis connects empirical findings directly to Habermas’s public sphere framework, Dryzek’s deliberative systems approach, and Elstub et al.’s concept of deliberative uptake. This integration is essential, as these perspectives illuminate not only how citizens engage but also the extent to which their arguments are genuinely heard, processed, and translated into decisions. Consequently, this study goes beyond mere descriptive accounts of participation to evaluate the depth of Indonesia’s deliberative practices using normative indicators discussed in the literature review.

The research combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive assessment of deliberative capacity. Data from V-Dem and TheGlobalEconomy indicate that Indonesia ranks low to medium on participatory and deliberative indexes (V-Dem Institute, 2024b; TheGlobalEconomy, 2024). Qualitatively, participation in Musrenbang tends to be more symbolic than substantive, with citizen proposals rarely making a significant impact on policy. These findings are directly relevant to the research question: formal forums have yet to fulfill their role in substantive deliberation. Cross-national comparisons further clarify Indonesia’s standing within the global democratic context.

The results also suggest that Habermas’s theory only partially accounts for the Indonesian situation. While the public sphere is legally accessible, it lacks systematic integration with decision-making processes, as highlighted by Dryzek’s concept of deliberative systems. Even when citizens participate and express their views, mechanisms of deliberative uptake—referring to the extent to which policymakers consider citizens’ arguments—often fall short. Thus, Indonesia’s deliberative shortcomings are structural rather than merely a result of inadequate formal participation.

Table 3. Comparison of Participation and Deliberative Democracy Indexes

| Country | Civil Society Participation | Participatory Index | Deliberative Index | Notes |
|---------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------|
|---------|-----------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------|

| | | | | |
|-----------|------|-------|-------|--|
| Indonesia | 0.48 | 0.318 | 0.409 | Low participation; weak formal deliberation |
| Brazil | 0.61 | 0.507 | 0.531 | Strong PB; variation in implementation |
| Finland | 0.83 | 0.602 | 0.796 | Institutionalized deliberation; mini publics |

Source: Compiled from V-Dem Institute (2024)

This table illustrates that Indonesia’s deliberative deficit is systemic and cannot be attributed solely to technical issues surrounding Musrenbang. Comparisons with Brazil and Finland reveal that the quality of deliberation is significantly influenced by institutional designs that promote inclusivity, robust accountability mechanisms, and the capacity of civil society to articulate its interests effectively (Christensen et al., 2017; Wampler, & Touchton, 2019).

Further interpretation indicates that Indonesia’s public sphere suffers from deliberative fragmentation. Dryzek et al. (2019) argue that ideal deliberation serves as a means to “clear communicative blockages” between society and the state. However, in Indonesia, Musrenbang often functions more as an administrative channel than as a space for rational discourse (Antlöv et al., 2016). Bächtiger and Parkinson (2019) similarly emphasize that deliberative quality relies on equal access, open argument exchange, and a willingness to revise preferences—all of which are inconsistently present in Indonesia’s deliberative practices.

Habermas’s concepts are particularly relevant in explaining why the political freedoms gained post-Reform have not automatically led to rational deliberation. He contends that the public sphere can only operate effectively when supported by stable, transparent discursive institutions that are not co-opted by power. He asserts:

“Political freedom yields emancipation only when it is bound to deliberative institutions that facilitate the rational formation of collective will. Without

a stable institutional framework, the public sphere is easily driven by emotion, mass pressure, or elite agendas. Freedom without a normative grounding in public discourse generates instability rather than democratic consolidation.” (Habermas, 1998, p. 110).

This quotation highlights the core of Indonesia’s deliberative issue: freedom that does not coincide with the strengthening of discursive institutions leaves the public sphere vulnerable to distortion. This creates a paradox where the expansion of freedom of expression allows for domination by actors with greater political, economic, and informational resources. Absent institutional mechanisms that ensure equality of voice, transparency, and rational argument exchange, freedom does not automatically lead to high-quality deliberation. Consequently, the public sphere becomes susceptible to populism, misinformation, and communicative oligarchy, obstructing the formation of inclusive and legitimate political decisions.

International comparisons provide valuable insights into the variety of deliberative practices. In Aceh, discussions around Qanun Syariah have involved religious scholars, academics, and civil society, showcasing the potential for substantive deliberation, even if it is not fully institutionalized (Feener, 2013). In Brazil, Participatory Budgeting (PB) has amplified the voices of the poor in budgetary decisions, although implementation varies across municipalities (Sintomer et al., 2012; Wampler & Touchton, 2019). Meanwhile, Finland incorporates deliberation into its political framework through citizens’ juries, citizens’ panels, and public consultation mechanisms (Christensen et al., 2017; Setälä & Smith, 2020).

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of cross-national quantitative data with qualitative findings from local forums, addressing a gap in Indonesian deliberative scholarship that has rarely combined these two analytical levels simultaneously. The analysis reveals that the primary challenge for deliberation is not merely low participation rates but a crisis of legitimacy in the policy process. Rawls provides a strong normative basis for this argument:

“Rawls (2005, p. 217) maintains that political authority is legitimate only when decisions can be reasonably justified to all citizens based on principles of freedom and equality. Political decisions emerging from closed elite compromises or transactional politics neglect citizens’ moral status as free and equal persons.”

This perspective underscores that Indonesia's deliberative crisis is fundamentally one of legitimacy rather than a procedural issue. The problem extends beyond the design of participatory mechanisms; it encompasses the failure of political institutions to create discursive spaces that are both equal and free from elite control. When deliberative processes cannot guarantee equality of voice, accountability, and high-quality argument exchange, the legitimacy of public decisions is compromised. Consequently, the deliberative crisis is rooted in power structures, not solely in formal mechanisms.

Theoretically, this study enhances the literature on how institutional design, civic capacity, and public accountability influence deliberative quality in developing democracies (Bächtiger & Parkinson, 2019; Dryzek et al., 2019). Practically, it recommends measures to strengthen citizens' argumentative skills, develop deliberative facilitation, enhance local government responsiveness, and reform Musrenbang to prevent it from becoming merely an administrative ritual. The values of musyawarah in the Pancasila tradition can provide a normative foundation for constructing more inclusive and context-sensitive deliberative models.

In summary, the study demonstrates that post-Reform deliberative democracy in Indonesia faces structural challenges, including fragmented public spheres, elite domination, weak civic capacity, and fragile legal institutions. However, opportunities for transformation exist through citizen repoliticization, participatory innovation, and the strengthening of deliberative mechanisms rooted in Indonesia's musyawarah tradition. Deliberation is essential for political legitimacy and vital for the consolidation of substantive democracy.

Deliberative Leadership, Political Corruption, and Democratic Legitimacy

Habermas's concept of deliberative democracy emphasizes the importance of a vibrant public sphere as the cornerstone of political legitimacy. This public sphere facilitates rational communication between leaders and citizens, ensuring that public policy is developed through inclusive and accountable discourse rather than being imposed unilaterally by elites (Habermas, 1998). In post-Reformasi Indonesia, a critical examination arises regarding the alignment of national

leadership, particularly under President Prabowo Subianto, with these deliberative principles. Empirical evidence reveals a significant gap between deliberative ideals and political practices, largely due to patronage, elite co-optation, and the fragmentation of the public sphere (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019b; Robison & Hadiz, 2017).

The current landscape of Indonesian politics indicates that Habermasian communicative leadership is far from institutionalized. Leadership at both national and local levels tends to be top-down and paternalistic, with public office often perceived as a source of political rent. Notable corruption cases—including the e-KTP scandal, the East Java grant-funding controversy, and graft operations related to road projects in North Sumatra—underscore this issue. International (2024a) assigns Indonesia a CPI score of 34/100, categorizing it as facing a *serious corruption* problem, indicative of low institutional integrity and a persistent crisis of public trust. This situation highlights the urgent need to cultivate deliberative leadership rooted in transparency, accountability, and openness to criticism (Mietzner, 2020).

Deep-seated corruption not only undermines legal institutions but also erodes deliberative democracy from within. Patronage and clientelism commodify public office, transforming votes into bargaining chips and policymaking into closed-door negotiations among elites. This deprives citizens of the opportunity to articulate their aspirations rationally and discursively. Aspinall and Berenschot succinctly illustrate this dynamic:

“Political corruption in Indonesia severely undermines the integrity of state institutions and the principles of democratic governance. Patronage networks, characterized by the commodification of public office and the exchange of votes for access to state resources, reinforce elite dominance and diminish the moral authority of leadership. This reduces democracy to a mere procedural formality, lacking genuine deliberation and offering limited opportunities for inclusive dialogue and civic empowerment.” (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019a, p. 65).

This passage encapsulates the core issue of Indonesia’s deliberative deficit: a procedural democracy that lacks meaningful public dialogue and ethical oversight. While electoral mechanisms are in place, the quality of democracy suffers as the public sphere fails to provide citizens with equitable opportunities to

scrutinize, critique, and influence policy. The minimal rational discourse and absence of ethical political reasoning reduce participation to a formal ritual, causing democracy to lose the deliberative dimension essential for legitimacy and political justice.

Parliamentary dynamics further reveal the shortcomings of deliberative leadership within the legislative process. Debates surrounding the Omnibus Law (UU Cipta Kerja), revisions to the Anti-Corruption Law (UU KPK), and the 2024 Asset Confiscation Law highlight the predominance of political lobbying and interest-based bargaining, while civil society participation remains severely limited. These practices starkly contrast with countries that have institutionalized public deliberation, such as Germany with its *Bürgerdialog* (Nanz & Steffek, 2004) and Canada through citizens' assemblies (Smith, 2009). This aligns with the literature on democratic regression and oligarchic dominance in post-Reform Indonesia (Hadiz, 2017; Winters, 2011).

The political legacy of the New Order presents another structural barrier to deliberative leadership. Decades of depoliticization have entrenched authoritarian and anti-dialogical leadership norms, where *musyawarah* served more as a tool for regime legitimacy than as a venue for genuine deliberation. Although Reformasi opened electoral competition, dynastic politics, patronage networks, and elite co-optation remain pervasive, particularly in regions such as Banten and South Sulawesi (Robison & Hadiz, 2017). In Weberian terms, deliberative leadership relies on legal-rational authority, whereas Indonesian leadership styles continue to depend heavily on traditional or charismatic authority.

To bolster the empirical foundation of this analysis, the study incorporates international quantitative indicators on corruption and democratic quality. A comparison with both developing and advanced democracies situates Indonesia within the broader global democratic ecosystem.

Table 4. Corruption and Democracy Indicators: Indonesia, Developing Countries, and Advanced Democracies

| Country | Political– Economic Status | CPI 2023 (0– 100) | Democracy Index 2023 (0–10) | EIU Category | Implications for Deliberative Leadership |
|-----------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| Indonesia | Developing country | 34 | ~6.7 | Flawed democracy | Weak deliberative space; dominance of patronage; high corruption |
| Brazil | Developing country | 38 | ~6.7 | Flawed democracy | Deliberative innovations (PB) exist but remain unstable |
| Germany | Advanced economy | 79 | ~8.8 | Full democracy | Institutionalized public consultation; high integrity |
| Finland | Advanced economy | 87 | ~9.2 | Full democracy | Established citizens’ juries; strong deliberative ecosystem |

Source: International (2024a); Unit (2023).

These data indicate that Indonesia and Brazil are categorized as *flawed* democracies, whereas Germany and Finland are classified as *full democracies* characterized by low corruption and robust deliberative structures. This contrast reinforces the argument that the quality of deliberation is influenced by both the integrity of leadership and the institutional frameworks that foster equitable, reasoned public dialogue. Quantitative evidence thus supports the theoretical

assertion that substantive democracy necessitates clean governance and leaders willing to create space for justificatory reasoning.

Domestically, national leadership is scrutinized through significant policy initiatives such as the development of the new capital city (IKN) and food security programs. Surveys conducted by Indonesia (2024) reveal public skepticism regarding the benefits of IKN, while environmental organizations warn of potential deforestation exceeding 20,000 hectares. Statistics Indonesia (Statistik, 2023) indicates that 11.25% of households continue to experience food insecurity, with stagnant rice productivity. Compared with Brazil's Participatory Budgeting, examined by Wampler and Touchton (2019) and Baiocchi (2005), it becomes evident that Indonesia lacks the deliberative architecture necessary to enhance policy legitimacy. Without robust deliberative mechanisms, strategic policies are often perceived as elite-driven initiatives rather than outcomes of inclusive public reasoning.

In deliberative theory, leadership does not equate to the absence of conflict. As Mouffe argues, mature democracies manage conflict within an agonistic rather than antagonistic framework:

“Mature democracies do not suppress conflict but transform it into an agonistic relationship, in which opposing parties confront one another through legitimate contestation rather than destructive antagonism. Instead of pursuing consensus that erases differences, agonistic democracy recognizes the permanence of conflict and channels it into robust yet respectful political engagement.” (Mouffe, 2000, p. 103).

This concept is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where identity-based polarization and closed political bargaining are prevalent. In the absence of an agonistic-deliberative framework, conflicts can be exploited by elites for electoral gain, turning political disagreements into tools for power mobilization rather than democratic negotiation. The lack of equitable dialogue exacerbates social fragmentation and undermines the public's capacity to hold elites accountable. In such an environment, democracy loses its corrective mechanisms—those that facilitate compromise, transform conflict, and promote shared public reasoning.

This study's theoretical contribution lies in integrating Habermas's deliberative theory, Dryzek's deliberative systems, and Mouffe's agonistic democracy to analyze Indonesia's political dynamics. Practically, it proposes a

systematic framework for assessing deliberative leadership across four indicators: inclusivity of participation, quality of arguments, transparency of policy justification, and institutional responsiveness. These indicators provide a means for evaluating the extent to which national and local leadership embraces substantive democracy. In conclusion, deliberative leadership in Indonesia remains in its early stages. Deliberative spaces are constrained by patronage, corruption, political polarization, and weak legal institutions. However, opportunities for transformation exist through the enhancement of discursive public spheres, governance reform, and leadership committed to communicative ethics and openness to criticism. Substantive democracy can only thrive when leaders are willing to bear the political costs associated with dialogue, deliberation, and public accountability.

CONCLUSION

This study's conclusion addresses the central research problem without reiterating previous results or discussions. The findings demonstrate that post-Reformasi deliberative democracy serves as a vital corrective mechanism for the deficiencies in Indonesia's procedural democracy, which has historically been susceptible to elite domination, patronage, and institutional co-optation. By evaluating four deliberative indicators—namely inclusiveness, argument quality, policy reason-traceability, and institutional responsiveness—this study confirms that deliberative leadership is essential for promoting meaningful participation, ensuring policy transparency, and establishing stable political legitimacy amid democratic stagnation and declining public trust. Consequently, the objective of assessing the potential of deliberative democracy as a foundation for substantive democracy has been successfully achieved.

Theoretically, this study enhances the existing literature by applying Habermas's normative framework in a developing country context and introducing deliberative leadership as a key variable linking the public sphere to policymaking processes. Practically, it provides a deliberative evaluation tool that national parliaments, local governments, ministries, agencies, and civil society organizations can use to assess the quality of policy processes. These practical implications include opportunities for institutional reform through more inclusive

policy design, improved public consultation mechanisms, strengthened citizen deliberative capacity, and the integration of musyawarah values as operational principles in Indonesia's democratic governance.

This study has limitations, particularly its reliance on qualitative literature and secondary sources, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings at the national level. Future research should focus on developing empirical case studies on deliberative leadership in strategic policy areas such as the development of the new capital city (IKN), food security, legal reform, and energy transition. Additionally, cross-national comparative studies should examine how deliberative frameworks function in various institutional contexts and political cultures. Subsequent research should also incorporate mixed methods—including public discourse analysis, citizen perception surveys, policy ethnography, and systematic assessments of deliberative quality—to strengthen the empirical foundation and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the prospects for deliberative democracy in Indonesia. By pursuing these avenues, future research can build on this study's findings and significantly contribute to the advancement of Indonesia's democratic consolidation.

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