

# Gamapi Insight

## **To What Extent Does Social Stratification Support Social Mobility in Indonesia as a Democratic Society?**

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Social stratification is a phenomenon that occurs all across the world, Indonesia as a nation is not exempt from it. This term refers to a set of social categorizations that exists in society and is supported by various factors attributing to a specific socioeconomic state. Democracy is a governmental system that adopts the representation system selected by the citizens of the country. Indonesia is an example of a country that adopted this system. At a glance, the two terms mentioned above may seem just like any other socio-political terms, but in reality social stratification and democracy are two terms that are interrelated with one another in the context of Indonesia and its people. Thus, this paper will discuss the valued factors in social stratification, in particular the social mobility phenomena whilst relating it to the current governmental system of democracy, in hopes to improve it.

The term social stratification is a familiar concept existing in Indonesia as it can be traced back through its history. There exists the connotation that the world has never really been an equal place and people have lived according to societal labels referring to their social standings within the population. From the published works entitled *Religion of Java* by Clifford Geertz and *Changes in Indonesia's Social Stratification* by W.F. Wertheim, one's able to recognize how it's implemented and understood in Indonesian society.

The book *Religion of Java* (1976) is a pioneering anthropological paradigmation of the trichotomy variants of Santri, Abangan, and Priyayi. Santri refers to the group of people in Java practicing the orthodox version of Islam, Abangan refers to the group of people practicing syncretism or what is known as a coexisting cultural values including Hindu, Buddhist, Islam, and Animism, and lastly Priyayi refers to the people coming from an aristocratic background who were mostly educated to earn a position in bureaucracy. Though I'm not going to fully discuss the content of the book, I can point out that these labels attached to the people of Java are deemed to be based on cultural values more than beliefs, as it clearly explores the implication of traditions and perspectives. This trichotomy theorized by Geertz is an exemplification of social standings, and falls under the social stratification spectrum as the people are divided based on their socioeconomic characteristics.

The article *Changes in Indonesian Social Stratification* by W.F. Wertheim evaluates the past social structure existing in the past colonization period of Indonesian history. What was known in the past was based on the social hierarchy of racial disparities. During the colonization era of the dutch, Indonesian societies were positioned in a social pyramid wherein the dutch were at the utmost position, the interracial indos were below them, and native Indonesians were at the bottom (Wertheim, 1955); this form of social stratification can be attributed the rise of Indonesian intellectuals, as they were at the bottom of the pyramid the only chances where they are able to work their way up is through education, though it should be

recognized that economic conditions fuel opportunities in enhancing their way of life. The Japanese on the other hand took a different approach in the beginning as they opted for fraternization by instilling the sense of belonging to oneself; this then supported how Indonesians were able to welcome them into the existing social stratification in the beginning by lifting the degree of Indonesian. By analyzing these two prominent colonization periods, it is understood how both cultures limited the growth of Indonesia through socioeconomic factors, as they avoided the shifting values of democracy to be adopted and for them to consolidate their power.

The real question lies beneath the long history of social stratification in Indonesia of today's world. Social stratification can be interpreted through various different aspects as society will never be a duplicate of each other, hence the need to view social stratification through the intersectional lens; the approach that acknowledges processes of inequality converged to form the lives of individuals and to classify them into hierarchies (Cole, 2019). Social stratification takes on this unique approach that is applied differently in existing community contexts. By this, various factors like race, religion, ethnicity, and occupation plays an important part in defining class systems, but in order to fully understand the association between social stratification and Indonesia as democratic society, it is important to put the focal point in the education and economic factors as the most prominent separation existing in the current society.

Before delving into the specific socioeconomic factors of education and economics it is essential to know more about the existence of democracy in Indonesia to better understand how social stratification is condoned as a threat to this governmental system. Democracy values the specific governmental system adopted by a nation, but it is fundamentally based upon the equal rights of participation in dealing with decision making matters; this basic idea guarantees that citizens and social classes are treated respectfully and have the autonomy and freedom to thrive within the society. The previous statement depicts how the threshold of democracy is contrasting with the phenomena of social stratification. Indonesians have long fought for the battle for democracy to be embraced in society, but with the negative connotation of social stratification it will be difficult for stakeholders to reach the 'ideal' democracy. Social stratification is believed to be intergenerational, referring to as something inevitable caused by the 'starting points' inherited by the older generation (Erikson, 2002), but for the sake of enhancing democracy in Indonesia, is it possible for individuals to perpetuate equality based on their socioeconomic standings?

In the utopian world, meritocracy defines individual's standing through their personal efforts and merits, which gives a loophole for people to possibly travel to a level of stratification that is higher than their own; this phenomena refers to the term social mobility. Social mobility is a study of change and movement (Miller, 1960), and in ways social mobility influences the apparent difference found within the sector that deeply influences democracy like the qualitative factors of economics and quantitative factors of education in Indonesia. According to the latest EIU Democracy Index, Indonesia scores at 74,92 points this year signaling a moderate state of democracy (EIU, 2020), leaving room for them to develop more as a nation. Democracy has yet to go full circle in Indonesia, and social mobility may have been the primary solution to solve this problem; correlating it to the previous socioeconomic factors of education and economy that is based on the Global Social Mobility Index conducted by the World

Economic Forum (2019). Statistics stated that Indonesia ranks at 67th with a band score of 49.3, mainly due to the limitation in the education sector followed by economic opportunities.

There's no denying that education plays a vital role in the upbringings of individuals, due to the existing standard expected society which values education as the utmost important criteria in the working field. Education enables individuals to have a lifetime income of development. Though most people tend to forget that it is just as important to society as a whole as education is an investment in the human capital sector intended to develop skills valuable to the advancements planned in the coming future; a sector of urgency to be implemented equally by the government to ensure a standardized high-quality education that supports personal efforts and merits. Unfortunately, the possibilities of Indonesian citizens finishing tertiary education is pretty low at 36.31% (Unesco, 2020) despite tertiary education being the bare minimum standard of education applied globally. In addition, the quality of education provided falls in the lower stratosphere compared to Indonesia's neighbouring countries, with only 77% (JPPI, 2017) ; resulting into functional illiteracy at 55% (WENR, 2020).

Social mobility is hard to achieve, but education will aid opportunities to open which will result in improving the democratization of Indonesia. How can social mobility in education support democracy in Indonesia? By having a general 'equal' standpoint of educational incentives, 'ideal' democracy is reached through the acts of political participation. An improved education system supports the growth of democratization (Dahl, 1971); this statement is then supported by analyzing the quality of education system and rate of democracy in a country. Take Finland as an example; by valuing egalitarianism, they have adopted one of the best education systems around the world by having a high performance in student assessments and quality of instructors; this effort is then translated through the democratic index that remains high at 5th place globally (Dickinson, 2020). Generally speaking, attaining compulsory education allows individuals to be more politically aware of surrounding issues, give critical inputs, able to make sound arguments based on formal information learned, and determine suitable representatives by evaluating performance rather than 'populism' approaches. In a way, being educated serves as legitimization of an individual's position in the social hierarchy to avoid being looked down upon by the people of power. Indonesian citizens have the direct right to politically participate in decision making processes by being a member of the legislative parliament (DPR), but to enter the position one would need a minimum of a highschool diploma and that a higher achieved education predicate will result into a higher position and received salary. Citizens who are intellectually active, urges the government to be more accountable.

Educational attainment is associated with class origins, as a way to consolidate positions in the hierarchy (Breen, 2010). Though it will be difficult to separate the attachment between the factors listed above, social mobility can be positioned as a breakthrough. Education should be of the utmost importance on the basis of human developments involved in all stakeholders especially the government, which is why the government should provide a compulsory education system that is comprehensive and legitimate that is accessible to every citizen. Indonesia in particular needs to highlight the urgency of education by allocating additional funds to the budgetary expenditure plan in order to compete globally.

Following education, economic opportunities seems to be the factor that restrains the growth of democracy in Indonesia. Being the 4th most populated country in the world puts

Indonesia in hopes of a higher pedestal in the future as it connotes the high amount of human resources at a productive age. Despite that, it is pivotal to recognize that economic conditions still remain to be an obstacle in Indonesia; mainly supported by the common ideology of class systems that connotes the belief that ‘those who have money, have power’. Money politics is not a rare occasion in the field of Indonesian politics and is often deemed as a procedural standardization, posing a threat to an achieved ‘ideal’ democracy. Being on top of the social stratification economically allows individuals to control the political sphere in Indonesia due to its low ecological validity. Money allows people to buy their positions, this can be attributed to their desire of being in the higher stratification; data shows that 30% of public service positions in Indonesia were acquired through bribery (GCB, 2020). This threat to democracy is further supported through the recent changes made in the UU Pemilu applied in the 2019 presidential elections, which tremendously increased the amount of donation maximization; this act can possibly impose certain private interests in the governmental body which negatively affects the livelihood of the general population. Social stratification allows those coming from the same economic class to collectively abuse their power. Despite the conditions mentioned, Indonesia does not limit itself to economic growth due to its visionary plans of economic mobilization led by the middle class. To ensure social mobility, a restructuring of a new social contract that ties the state and its relatively wealthy people to a mutually beneficial relationship needs to be implemented. Government policies to provide good-quality public services and build an upward mobility route through better employment and economic resilience through improved social security and higher tax revenues will be essential (World Bank, 2020).

Indonesia is facing the reality of the set social stratification globally, what started out as something inherently local has turned into an international playing field for the nation to continuously expound their democracy. The social stratification factors that challenge democracy, which are education and economics do encourage the values of social mobility to an unpredictable extent, as the conditions of the country are constantly involved. That said, the fundamental values of social stratification does not always prohibit negativity but more so on igniting possible changes that sets Indonesia on a higher pedestal globally through improving the nation as a democratic society.

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