

Safeguarding democracy in a presidential system

Plato's protégé Aristotle argued that constitutional democracy is considered the worst of the good governing regimes, although it was still better than all other deficient ones. It was thus the form of government most capable of delivering justice, if it was based on the highest possible moral and ethical standards.

This is the governmental system under which a multitude of people from different socioeconomic classes can respect each other's rights. It can only succeed when citizens of different socioeconomic classes participate equally in free and fair elections to elect and to be elected through the so-called procedural minimum, such as competitive general elections (Schumpeter, 1947; Dahl, 1971).

Thus, democracy is neither a fragile nor feeble system, but rather a highly resilient regime where a single debilitating factor is unlikely to bring about democratic collapse (Diskin et al., 2005).

It is therefore imperative for democratic citizens to comprehend both conceptually and practically what constitutes democratic stability and collapse, along with their possible causes.

By one fundamental definition, democratic stability is a condition in which there is no interrupted democratic government in at least one generation, while democratic collapse is a condition in which the existence of a democracy col-



By **Wibawanto Nugroho Widodo**
and **Surya Wiranto**
Jakarta

Wibawanto Nugroho Widodo is a political science assistant professor at Pelita Harapan University and the deputy head of defense and security affairs at the Strategic Center of the National Resilience Institute Alumni Association (IKAL). Surya Wiranto is an adjunct professor at the Indonesian Defense University and secretary-general of the IKAL Strategic Center.

lapses, not only from a stable systemic format but also from the process of consolidation.

Diskin et al. ran a statistical study in 2005 involving 32 countries with democratic stability and 30 countries with democratic collapse. From the study, they found at least four determining factors (11 variables combined) that determine the collapse of democracy: institutional factor (federal systems as opposed to unitary state systems, presidential or semi-presidential systems as opposed to the parliamentary ones, proportional electoral systems and political systems with low constitutional stability); societal factor (deep social cleavages based on status, religion and ethnicity, weak and unstable malfunctioning economies and a history of no democratic culture); mediating factor (party systems with a high level of fragmentation, party systems with a level of high polarization and unstable

governing coalitions); and extraneous factor (foreign intervention in domestic politics).

Conclusively, the strongest variables that can cause democratic collapse are: deep social cleavages based on status, religion and ethnicity; weak and unstable malfunctioning economies; history of no democratic culture; unstable governing coalition; and foreign intervention in domestic politics.

We must be highly cautious, since these five variables exist in Indonesia.

In a recent private conversation, Emil Salim, 95, an economist and the oldest living high-level government official, told me that the collapse of democratic regimes throughout Indonesian history was highly unpredictable and that therefore, understanding these determining variables of democratic stability and collapse was important.

To exacerbate the matter, the choice of the presidential system

of government is also fateful for long-term democratic stability, as presidential or semi-presidential governments are more prone to democratic collapse than the parliamentary system (Diskin et al., 2005).

However, this does not mean the parliamentary system is superior to the presidential or the semi-presidential system. The choice of governmental structure should mainly reflect the competitive aspect of democracy that includes the two main entities of political parties and the separation of powers, while accommodating all factors determining the stability or collapse of democracy.

If public participation is a crucial part of constitutional and liberal democracy, it is logical to argue that such a right is limited if the public is denied any choices.

An election that has only one candidate or party is not a democracy, as a democracy requires competition between candidates, individuals and ideas, each seeking to realize their own political goals regarding freedom and equality (O'Neil 2004:163).

Again, the chosen governmental system, at its best, facilitates the reality of social cleavages and can minimize the negative effects of such a reality, ensures a functioning economy, corresponds with that country's history, ensures governmental stability and minimizes the risk of foreign intervention in domestic politics.

That said, given the overall Indonesian characteristic of deep social cleavage, the parliamentary system is hypothetically more suitable because this system has cabinet members that represent existing social cleavages.

In contrast, the presidential system bestows the president with the authority to appoint as cabinet members those in whom he or she has personal confidence and preference (Linz, 1990:89).

However, the 1945 Constitution and open democracy operate in the presidential system, thus making an Indonesian president very powerful compared to their counterparts (80 percent of power lies in the central government, with 20 percent in provincial administrations), coupled with a collective, feudal-paternalistic and no democratic historical background, as opposed to an individual, egalitarian-industrialized and democratic historical background.

The country also has deep social cleavages, huge economic disparity, low constitutional stability, poor literacy in a huge proportion of the population and significant foreign influence in domestic politics, including economic affairs.

Consequently, to prevent democratic collapse, one must pinpoint not only the classical necessity of separation of powers but also emphasize how the personality and style of the national leadership can handle political disagreements.

A well-managed political disagreement is always healthy for a thriving, enlightened society; otherwise, it will give rise to a security fiasco that could cause the collapse of the Indonesian constitutional democracy and nation-state.

History shows that Indonesia's constitutional democracy will not be defeated by any other political ideologies but itself. When a democracy fails to serve the national interests, it will defeat itself.

The Asia 2025 open-source assessment made in 1999 has predicted the possibility of an internal struggle in Indonesia. Can it be prevented? Certainly. And the answer rests with the Indonesian people, specifically the person holding the presidency as the most powerful office in the country.

Moving forward beyond 2024, the ultimate challenge for Indonesian leaders is to manage all political disagreements by diligently looking at the characteristics examined above.

Any political disagreement should be managed with political persuasion, where the government must safeguard constitutional stability and consistently uphold the rule of law with the strictest sense of dignity.

Indonesia is a big, promising nation-state. If it is a country where no political disagreement is left unsettled and has a dignified national leadership style in 2024 and moving forward, we can keep this nation strong and great.

The AI question we should be asking



By **Refik Anadol**
and **Karel Komárek**

Project Syndicate/ Los Angeles, United States/
Lucerne, Belgium

Refik Anadol, a lecturer at the UCLA Department of Design Media Arts, is director of RAS LAB. Karel Komárek, founder of KKCG, is a cofounder of the Karel Komárek Family Foundation and the Dvořák Prague International Music Festival.

Although our age is defined by humanity's disproportionate influence on the planet, we ourselves are undergoing profound changes. Tasks that previously could be accomplished only through human labor are increasingly being performed by machines, including many tasks that rely on creativity.

Far from a distant theoretical possibility, artificial intelligence (AI) has arrived—and it is here to stay.

In considering AI's potential, it can be tempting to channel the techno-optimism of the 1990s, when IBM's Deep Blue triumphed over the world chess champion, unleashing a wave of interdisciplinary interest in how AI might be deployed and commercialized in other domains. But it can also be tempting to adopt the opposing view and insist that AI will become an intolerable threat to most people's livelihoods and perhaps even to human existence itself.

Both reactions are not new: They have often accompanied the emergence of major innovations. They also make similar mistakes, because both treat technological progress as if it were something separate from us.

Nowadays, the optimists fixate on what AI might do for us, while the pessimists worry about what it will do to us. But the question we should be asking is what AI will do with us.

This question is as pertinent to fine art as it is to finance, despite the apparent differences between these domains of quintessentially human activity. New-media art is best understood as a dialogue between experimentation and tradition.

The human longing for novelty and tradition are mutually dependent: Only by appreciating what came before an artwork can we comprehend what makes it new.

Investing, too, is a hybrid enterprise. Success lies in recognizing genuine forms of innovation, which in turn requires an appreciation of what has already been done.

This interplay between past and present also describes generative AI itself. By drawing on vast stores of previous human expression—data—AI can achieve near-universal applicability and facilitate innovation across many areas of culture and industry.

It was this understanding of AI that led us to pur-

sue our collaborative project Dvořák Dreams. By harnessing the power of machine learning, we transformed the 19th-century Czech composer Antonín Dvořák's compositions, visual archives, and legacy into a 100-square-meter installation that was exhibited throughout the annual Dvořák Prague Festival in September in front of the UNESCO-listed Rudolfinum. As the inaugural project of the OxCollection, a new cultural initiative dedicated to digital art, the piece exemplified AI's potential as a tool for both transforming human creativity and enriching cultural heritage.

Artists working with AI can map out a path for the technology's role across society more broadly. Today's algorithmic models rely on massive quantities of training data, most of it created by and for human consumption, and this makes them immensely powerful tools for pursuits like research and development. From hundreds of hours of classical music to more quantitative types of data, it is human input that makes AI's output meaningful and intelligible.

Only by maintaining this symbiotic connection between us and our rapidly evolving technologies can we ensure that AI's development brings more benefit than harm.

Make no mistake: The benefits of machine learning could be profound. As novel and alien as it may seem to us now, AI is uniquely capable of serving human ends—from optimizing technological efficiency to aiding in the creation of artwork that can be appreciated by audiences around the world.

There is no denying that AI will play an expanding role in our increasingly digitalized world. What we need is a strategy of co-existence that respects, elevates, and optimizes both human and machine.

An "artificial" intelligence, guided by human intervention, made a past cultural production real to us in the present. It both revived history and created it anew. Finding value lies in uniting tradition with novelty. Without both elements, the final product would not move us.

The role of artists, investors, and innovators in the AI revolution is the same: to combine openness toward the future with informed appreciation of the past.



Facility check: Em Yunir (left), head of endocrinology in the internal medicine department of Cipto Mangunkusumo General Hospital (RSCM) in Central Jakarta, inspects on Aug. 8, 2016 a room in the hospital's newly launched Integrated Diabetes Mellitus Education Polyclinic.

The unique role of religion in managing diabetes in Indonesia

By **Iman Permana**
360info/Yogyakarta

An associate professor at Muhammadiyah University Yogyakarta and a researcher in the Centre for Islamic Medicine and Health Studies, Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at the same university. The article is republished under a Creative Commons license.



Of the 34 provinces in Indonesia, Yogyakarta has one of the highest rates of people with diabetes.

Risikesdas, a household health survey conducted every five years, showed Yogyakarta had a 5.1 percent prevalence in 2018, higher than the national number of 2 percent.

One reason for this may be that as Yogyakarta has one of the highest life expectancy rates in Indonesia, the proportion of elderly people increases, and with that comes the possibility of chronic illnesses, especially diabetes.

Despite its devastating effects, diabetes is considered preventable. A healthy diet, regular physical activity, stress management and avoiding smoking are among the preventive measures that reduce the possibility of developing diabetes mellitus.

As culture and religion are intertwined in daily life in Java, the way Javanese patients manage stress, for instance, is influenced by a blend of cultural and religious customs.

The influence of Islam, the main religion in the Javanese society, has a big influence on many aspects of daily life.

Submission is a concept that is shared between Islam (tawakkal) and Javanese culture (pasrah).

Javanese virtue, is the act of accepting what God has given, without resistance. Some women with diabetes who practiced this form of submission were found to be more likely to tolerate pain without resisting.

The submission also offers individuals a useful way to regain control by emphasizing their capacity to remain calm, gracious, and appreciative in the face of adversity.

Although, to some point, *nrima* is reached when a person's ability to cope with daily social activities is still fulfilled.

Indeed, this concept reflects how the idea of submission supports preventive diabetes management. It resonates with a theme of submission to fate as an active position, instead of passively accepting the condition as it is.

Nevertheless, different understanding still exists among various societies where *nrima* leads to a negative fatalism, in which God is the main actor who gives rise to the disease as well as its cure. This notion is a demonstration of the complex contribution of religion and spirituality in a society with a rich culture.

The increasing prevalence of diabetes, along with its physical, psychological and social effects, makes clear that the preventive approaches that have been taken are still inadequate to reduce its progress.

A more comprehensive approach could be implemented, one that considers the social and cultural aspects of a society in developing more appropriate measures critical to the success of diabetes prevention.

