



THE PARADOX OF DEMOCRACY IN INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AT THE LOCAL LEVEL (CASE STUDY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE TEMEF DAM IN SOUTH CENTRAL TIMOR REGENCY)

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to find out about the consolidation of substantive democratic values at the local level through infrastructure development, which in this case study is the construction of the Temef Dam in South Central Timor District. This research aims to reveal the paradox of democracy in constructing the Temef Dam, where consolidation and deconsolidation of substantive democratic values co-occur. The theory used is Michael Ross's Rentier State theory to see the anti-democratic effects of the TemefDam construction process. In addition, this study also uses Michael Foucault's Governmentality theory and Gramsci's hegemony theory to see the power relations between the government and the community and the internalization of knowledge and cultural values in the democratic space of Temef Dam construction. The researcher used a qualitative approach with a case study type of research. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews and documentation. The results of this study prove that infrastructure development has not been able to consolidate substantive democratic values at the local level. This is because democracy deconsolidates simultaneously in the process of infrastructure development. In the Temef Dam case study, there was an issue of unpaid land compensation to the community. It was also found that the internalization of knowledge and values in the democratic space made the power relations between the government and the community unbalanced.

Keywords: (a) Democracy, (b) Infrastructure, (c) Paradox.

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah

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1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy is simply understood as governance by the people. It emphasizes equality by ensuring every citizen can participate politically in state affairs. Over time, the concept of Democracy has evolved, leading to scholars and political scientists proposing various definitions. As a result, there is no single, universally accepted definition of Democracy.

The complexity of defining Democracy is evident in Charles Tilly's work, *Democracy* (2007), where he classifies Democracy into four major categories: constitutional Democracy, substantive Democracy, procedural Democracy, and process-oriented Democracy. Among these, substantive and procedural Democracy are the most frequently debated by political scientists. Procedural Democracy, as defined by Joseph Schumpeter, refers to a political method and mechanism for electing leaders. Citizens are allowed to choose from competing candidates, and in subsequent elections, they have the power to replace previously chosen leaders.

On the other hand, David Held presents a more comprehensive and maximalist approach by introducing the principle of democratic autonomy. Held argues that Democracy requires voting and social and economic rights (Sorensen, 1993:14–15). Substantive Democracy underscores the importance of fulfilling citizens' welfare, recognizing that Democracy is not confined to political matters but extends to social, economic, and cultural dimensions. Therefore, the democratic nature of a country is measured by the well-being of its citizens.

This study focuses on the paradox of substantive Democracy about infrastructure development. Substantive Democracy emphasizes public welfare, and one means of achieving this is through infrastructure development. Infrastructure is a physical asset that facilitates economic activities and social mobility. It is crucial in improving quality of life and human well-being by increasing consumption, labour productivity, job accessibility, and overall prosperity (Srihardjono, 2019, p. 175).

In Indonesia, infrastructure development aimed at enhancing public welfare is encapsulated in the discourse of the National Strategic Projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional, PSN). These projects, initiated during President Joko Widodo's administration, are essential for promoting economic growth, equity, public welfare, and regional development. Seating several projects as National Strategic Projects reflects the government's effort to consolidate substantive Democracy.

Fauzi (2021) highlights that land acquisition is a primary indicator required to implement PSN successfully. Conflicts often arise between landowners and the government during land procurement for these projects. Hence, infrastructure development through PSN must adhere to the principles of social justice. For instance, conflicts and resistance emerged during the construction of the Rokan Kiri Dam in Riau, where some households faced obstacles in receiving compensation. Similarly, the construction of the Bener Dam saw compensation payments fall short of community expectations. Other recurring issues in PSN projects include unsatisfactory agreements between the government and residents, challenges in relocating landowners, inadequate compensation for affected land, disputes over customary land ownership, and the displacement of villages due to dam construction, resulting in the loss of residents' homes.

This study examines infrastructure development through the case of the Temef Dam. The Temef Dam is one of the National Strategic Projects in East Nusa Tenggara, specifically in Timor Tengah Selatan Regency. This dam's construction aims to meet residents' water needs

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah

Cendana International Conference on Social and Political Science:

Global Knowledge Production from the Southern Region in Social Science 2024



during the dry season and control flooding during the rainy season (Dirgantara & Rohman, 2021). However, the critical issue identified in the Temef Dam project is the compensation process for landowners affected by the construction. Some lands have already been used for dam construction, yet the owners have not received compensation. According to initial data from the National Land Agency (BPN) of Timor Tengah Selatan, 310 parcels of land are affected by the project. Of these, compensation has been paid for 166 parcels during the first phase, while 139 parcels are still in the application process, and five parcels are under verification. Additionally, 125 hectares of land have already been developed for the dam's construction.

These data indicate that the consolidation of substantive Democracy has not been fully achieved, particularly for the affected communities. While the Temef Dam can potentially benefit the public by promoting welfare, the construction process has compromised the well-being of certain groups. Therefore, this study focuses on the paradox within the infrastructure development process, where the goal of promoting public welfare is undermined.

Based on the above background, this study argues that infrastructure development does not fully embody substantive Democracy. The rhetoric surrounding infrastructure projects suggests that the government has implemented substantive Democracy by building infrastructure to enhance public welfare. However, it is during the construction process that the values of substantive Democracy are most vulnerable to violation. Issues such as inadequate compensation and land seizures exemplify breaches of substantive Democracy.

Furthermore, substantive Democracy is violated when the government fails to involve citizens in addressing these issues. Citizen participation in policymaking is a fundamental aspect of substantive Democracy. This participation must be meaningful, not merely symbolic, allowing the public to express their aspirations and demands regarding the infrastructure projects they will receive. The democratic paradox persists if public involvement is limited to internalizing government values rather than genuine engagement with the communities affected by infrastructure development.

This study employs three critical theories—Michael Ross's rentier state theory, Michel Foucault's governmentality theory, and Antonio Gramsci's hegemony theory—to explore how power relations in infrastructure development obstruct the consolidation of substantive democracy, creating a paradox. As Ross (2001) outlined, the rentier state theory explains how resource wealth generates anti-democratic tendencies by enabling governments to use low taxes and patronage to suppress public pressure. In such states, resource distribution replaces domestic production, fostering a social contract where citizens trade political demands for economic benefits (Al-Asyura & Basyar, 2021). These governments, detached from society, avoid accountability by offering services without taxation, ultimately weakening democratic institutions (Ross, 2019).

Foucault's governmentality theory emphasizes how power operates diffusely within society through normalization, aligning public behaviour with the state's objectives (Priyanto, 2017). Power is embedded in knowledge—*savoir*—and internalized by individuals and society, producing a reality shaped by what is considered "true" or "natural." Governmentality extends beyond individual discipline, targeting populations through regulations that foster compliance (Mudhoffir, 2013). This makes the control of society subtle yet effective, as normalized behaviours reinforce state authority.

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah



Gramsci's hegemony theory illustrates how dominance is achieved not through force but through ideological leadership (Siswati, 2017). Ruling elites shape cultural values and norms, ensuring their ideas appear common sense and gaining public consent. This consent-based control is strengthened through cooperation with cultural and religious actors, embedding dominant ideologies within society's consciousness. Gramsci argues that this hegemony requires individuals to internalize the rulers' values and willingly submit to their leadership, sometimes out of fear, habit, or acceptance of established norms (Ali, 2017).

These theories collectively demonstrate how infrastructure development, such as the construction of the Temef Dam, is used to neutralize political participation by shifting the public's focus toward economic benefits. Through rentier state theory, natural resources are tools to reduce democratic engagement. Foucault's concept of normalization explains how welfare discourses surrounding such projects align public perception with government narratives, restricting space for genuine deliberation. Moreover, Gramsci's hegemony theory highlights how cultural and religious actors collaborate with the government to internalize these narratives within the community, making them more acceptable due to their familiarity with local values and traditions.

The findings reveal that infrastructure development alone is insufficient for fostering substantive democracy. Issues such as inadequate compensation and exclusion from decision-making expose contradictions between development practices and democratic ideals. Substantive democracy requires not only open channels for dialogue between the government and society but also equal opportunities for both parties to participate meaningfully in political deliberation. Without addressing these imbalances, the promise of development risks becoming a paradox that undermines the democratic values it aims to support.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study applied a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore complex social phenomena in their natural settings. Qualitative research generates rich, descriptive data that deeply understand individuals' experiences and actions. It focuses on what people say or do and how they interpret their surroundings, making it ideal for studying the nuanced dynamics of power and democracy within the context of infrastructure development. As a case study, this research investigates contemporary phenomena in real-life settings, emphasizing the contextual factors influencing the dynamics between government, local communities, and other stakeholders.

The research focuses on the Temef Dam project in Timor Tengah Selatan Regency, specifically in Pene Utara and Konbaki Villages, along with critical governmental offices, including the National Land Agency (Badan Pertanahan Nasional, BPN) of Timor Tengah Selatan and the Nusa Tenggara II River Basin Authority in Kupang City. These locations were selected due to their central role in the planning, execution, and social impacts of the Temef Dam project. The project critically analyses the interaction between state-led development efforts, local power relations, and community responses.

The researcher employs multiple methods to collect data, including observation, interviews, and documentation. Observational techniques allow the researcher to capture firsthand the



field's interactions and environmental conditions. This method is essential for gaining insight into informal dynamics, such as how government representatives engage with local communities during meetings or compensation negotiations. Interviews, on the other hand, provide in-depth narratives from individuals directly involved or affected by the project, including government officials, community leaders, landowners, and residents. This method ensures that various perspectives are captured, revealing both the public discourse promoted by authorities and the personal experiences of those impacted. Documentation involves analyzing official reports, policies, meeting minutes, and media coverage related to the project, helping to contextualize the findings within broader regulatory and political frameworks.

The study adopts a purposive sampling strategy to select research informants. *Purposive sampling* is a non-random technique that targets individuals based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This method ensures that participants with firsthand knowledge and critical involvement in the Temef Dam project are included in the study. Key informants include village leaders, local government officials, BPN and River Basin Authority representatives, and affected residents and landowners. By focusing on informants who play significant roles in the planning, implementation, and social negotiation processes surrounding the dam, the researcher ensures the collection of relevant and meaningful data.

The case study design allows for an in-depth exploration of the Temef Dam as a site where multiple interests converge, including those of the state, local communities, and environmental stakeholders. Through this design, the researcher investigates how infrastructure projects, such as the dam, become arenas for exercising governmentality, as described by Foucault. Observing interactions between government officials and residents reveals how state actors attempt to normalize certain narratives around development and welfare. Additionally, this design sheds light on how the dam project reflects rentier dynamics, where natural resources—such as water—become political tools used to stabilize government authority and pacify local resistance by offering economic incentives.

The case study also provides a framework to analyze the hegemonic practices following Gramsci's concept of *cultural hegemony*. It examines how government and cultural leaders collaborate to reinforce ideologies that align with state interests, ensuring public acceptance of the project despite its contentious aspects, such as compensation disputes. This collaborative effort highlights the subtle ways cultural norms and religious values are mobilized to promote state-led agendas, blurring the lines between public consent and compliance.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The Temef Dam, one of seven National Strategic Projects (Proyek Strategis Nasional, PSN) in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), began construction in 2017. According to the Nusa Tenggara II River Basin Authority (BWS NT II), the central government allocated IDR 2.6 trillion for its early construction phases. The project aims to address the severe drought affecting Timor Tengah Selatan Regency and surrounding areas, providing essential raw water and irrigation



infrastructure. While the project holds potential for public welfare, this study finds that the construction process generates democratic consolidation and deconsolidation, resulting in a paradox that challenges substantive democracy.

Democratic consolidation refers to equalizing power relations between the government and citizens within a democratic space. In infrastructure development, consolidation occurs when both government and citizens have opportunities to influence the development process. Public participation, through consultations and discussions in the villages of Konbaki, Pene Utara, and Oenino, serves as an example of this consolidation. These activities foster dialogue and cooperation, promoting substantive democratic values by addressing public welfare needs through infrastructure projects. Consequently, the government's narrative frames the Temef Dam as part of its effort to promote democracy at the local level through development.

However, the study also reveals factors contributing to democratic deconsolidation, where actions or processes obstruct or undermine democratic consolidation. Deconsolidation occurs through government dominance, the internalization of values, and unfulfilled promises of public welfare. In this context, a democratic paradox emerges as deconsolidation practices compromise the efforts to consolidate democracy. Although consultations and public discussions represent democratic spaces, unresolved compensation issues and delays hinder substantive democratic outcomes. The government initially planned three phases of compensation payments, completing the first phase in February 2023 and the second phase in June 2023. However, by April 27, 2023, the third phase remained stalled, with land acquisition incomplete, disrupting further compensation.

Government actors' normalization of these delays reflects Foucault's theory of governmentality. Through interactions with citizens, the government internalized the complexities of the compensation process, gradually framing delays as inevitable outcomes of bureaucratic procedures. Local actors, including the Timor Tengah Selatan National Land Agency (BPN), village and subdistrict governments, and the Public Works and Housing Agency (Dinas PUPR), played significant roles in managing public frustration. The BWS NT II helped mitigate public protests and road blockades, reinforcing the acceptance of delayed compensation through this normalization process. As Foucault's theory suggests, power operates not through force but through internalizing norms, where citizens begin to regulate themselves according to government expectations.

This normalization is further supported by the distinction between invited and popular spaces proposed by Cornwall (2004). Invited spaces, such as consultations and discussions organized by the government, provide formal channels for public engagement. These meetings, held in churches and village offices, offer opportunities for interaction and consensus-building. The government uses these spaces to align public expectations with its development narrative, establishing power relations that foster temporary democratic consolidation. In contrast, popular spaces emerge from spontaneous public actions, such as demonstrations and protests over

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah

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delayed compensation. These protests represent attempts by citizens to reclaim agency and enforce equal power relations by demanding accountability.

While popular spaces temporarily shift the balance of power, the government often co-opts them, turning them into arenas for further normalization. This reflects a form of democratic deconsolidation, where power relations initially perceived as equal are neutralized through government hegemony. Gramsci's theory of hegemony offers insight into this process, explaining how the ruling class maintains control by securing public consent through cultural and ideological manipulation. In the case of the Temef Dam, the government collaborates with religious and cultural leaders to disseminate information, leveraging local traditions and religious values to reinforce its narrative. Community leaders, respected for their cultural authority, help internalize government messages, making citizens more receptive to delayed compensation and other government decisions.

This co-optation aligns with Ross's rentier state theory, which argues that governments reliant on resource wealth use patronage to suppress public demands. In this case, the government's social contract with the community shifts focus from political engagement to material benefits, reducing citizens' demands for immediate compensation. By emphasizing future welfare benefits from the dam project, the government neutralizes dissent, creating a political environment where citizens are more inclined to accept delays and disruptions.

The interplay between these democratic spaces illustrates the paradox of democratic consolidation and deconsolidation. Although consultations and public discussions are intended to balance power relations, they are often used to transmit government values, shifting the purpose of these spaces from facilitating dialogue to enforcing compliance. As the government internalizes its narrative within the community, public protests diminish, not because citizens' concerns are resolved but because they have accepted the normalized discourse of delays and procedures.

In conclusion, the Temef Dam project exemplifies the complexities of infrastructure development in promoting democracy. While it creates opportunities for democratic consolidation through public participation, the normalization of power by government actors leads to deconsolidation, undermining substantive democratic values. The involvement of cultural and religious figures further complicates these dynamics, reinforcing the government's narrative and limiting citizens' ability to demand accountability. This study highlights how infrastructure development, despite its potential to enhance public welfare, can paradoxically erode democratic principles through subtle but persistent deconsolidation practice.

4. CONCLUSION

Democratic consolidation in infrastructure development refers to the equalization of power relations between the government and the public, granting both parties equal opportunities to influence the development process. Consolidation occurs when the government, as the authority holder, opens democratic spaces for citizens to express their aspirations. Beyond this,

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah

Cendana International Conference on Social and Political Science:

Global Knowledge Production from the Southern Region in Social Science 2024



infrastructure development consolidates democracy by embodying the values of substantive democracy, mainly through the fulfilment of public welfare.

However, infrastructure development can also lead to democratic deconsolidation. Deconsolidation arises when power is unequally distributed within democratic spaces, with the government holding more dominance than the public. As a result, public participation becomes superficial, as citizens are unable to exert meaningful influence over the development process. Furthermore, deconsolidation occurs when the construction process violates the welfare of affected communities, which constitutes an essential aspect of substantive democracy that must also be fulfilled.

In the case of the Temef Dam, this study finds that deconsolidation issues undermine democratic consolidation throughout the construction process. The discourse surrounding the Temef Dam itself exemplifies democratic consolidation, as it aims to enhance the welfare of local communities, reflecting the core values of substantive democracy. Consolidation is also evident through the establishment of democratic spaces where local citizens can participate in the development process. Forums such as consultations on compensation and discussions about its value, as well as socialization activities, represent forms of daily life democracy, which integrate democratic practices into the lives of the local population. Protest actions and demonstrations further exemplify efforts by citizens to consolidate democracy by influencing the construction and compensation processes.

However, the study also reveals that these efforts toward consolidation are hindered by simultaneous deconsolidation issues. The first deconsolidation issue is the incomplete compensation for landowners, particularly those whose land has already been used for dam construction. The second issue concerns the internalization of values within public discourse. The delayed compensation has prompted protests and frequent citizen inquiries during democratic forums. In response, the government has utilized these democratic spaces to normalize its ideas and narratives among the public.

The initial goal of democratic consolidation—to create balanced power relations between the government and the public—was ultimately negated by these deconsolidation issues, resulting in an imbalanced power dynamic. The daily life democracy initiated by citizens was neutralized through the government's normalization of knowledge. Cultural hegemony was also observed, as the government employed community and religious leaders and respected cultural values to disseminate knowledge regarding the appropriate use of compensation funds.

Thus, this study confirms the research argument that achieving substantial democratic consolidation at the local level is challenging due to the interplay of power relations governed by the logic of the rentier state, governmentality, and hegemony. These dynamics are perpetuated by critical actors, including local governments, the Timor Tengah Selatan National Land Agency (BPN), the Nusa Tenggara II River Basin Authority (BWS NT II), the Public Works and Housing Agency (Dinas PUPR), the Housing and Settlement Agency (Dinas PRKP), village governments, as well as community and religious leaders.

Rudi Rohi, Salomo Z. Tungga, and Theny I.B.K Pah



This study demonstrates that while infrastructure development holds the potential to consolidate democracy, the inherent power relations and the use of hegemonic practices result in deconsolidation, complicating efforts to achieve substantive democratic consolidation. The interplay of these forces reflects the difficulty of establishing equal power dynamics within local democratic spaces, ultimately highlighting the complexities of governance and participation in infrastructure projects.

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