

Civic Education and Civic Politics: Dimensions, History, and the Formation of Critical Citizens in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explain the conceptual differences between Civic Education and civic politics, outline the dimensions of citizenship, and trace the development of civic politics in Indonesia since the early 20th century. This article uses a literature study method with a conceptual-historical approach. The sources analyzed include classical and contemporary works on citizenship studies, citizenship theory, and historical studies of civic politics in Indonesia. The results of the study indicate that Civic Education is in the pedagogical realm as a process of forming civic knowledge, values, and skills, while civic politics is in the practical realm as citizens' actions in fighting for recognition, rights, representation, and justice in the public sphere. Citizenship itself is not only related to legal status, but also includes membership, rights, responsibilities, and participation. In the Indonesian context, civic politics develops through three main fields, namely the politics of recognition, the politics of welfare redistribution, and the politics of representation-democracy. Historically, this development can be traced from the national awakening in the early 20th century, continuing through the Old Order, New Order, and Reformation eras. This article emphasizes that the formation of critical citizens requires Citizenship Education that does not stop at the transfer of normative knowledge, but moves towards strengthening political awareness and active civic engagement

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1. INTRODUCTION

Discussions about citizenship in recent decades have shown a significant expansion of its meaning. Citizenship is no longer understood solely as a legal status inherent to individuals within a state, but also as a socio-political relationship encompassing membership, rights, participation, and the struggle for recognition (Santoso, 2020). In this context, the terms Civic Education and civic politics are often loosely used interchangeably, even though they refer to different domains. Civic Education operates at the

pedagogical level as a process of citizen formation, while civic politics exists at the practical level as the articulation of citizen action in the public sphere (Prakoso, Rokhman, & Handoyo, 2024).

In the educational tradition, Civics Education is generally understood as a vehicle for developing civic knowledge, values, attitudes, and skills. It aims to shape citizens who understand their rights and obligations, respect democracy, obey the law, and have social responsibility. However, in practice, Civics Education often stops at the normative and instructional dimensions. As a result, civics learning often produces formal knowledge about the state, but does not necessarily encourage citizen engagement in critically addressing public issues (Prayogi, Komalasari, & Nurgiansah, 2023).

Meanwhile, the study of citizenship politics has developed within civic studies and political science, with an emphasis on how citizens or groups of citizens struggle for rights, recognition, representation, and welfare in their shared lives. This perspective is important because it demonstrates that citizenship is never neutral or completely resolved through formal rules. Citizenship is always linked to power relations, exclusion, and socio-political struggles. Hiariej et al. (Jusmin, Simatupang, Pramita, & Pd, 2023) emphasize that citizenship rights are not generated and protected solely by institutional frameworks but are always political in nature, fought for by social groups experiencing political, economic, and cultural exclusion.

In the Indonesian context, this issue is relevant because the development of citizenship has unfolded through a long and layered history. Since the early 20th century, the formation of "Indonesia" as a shared political community has opened up space for the emergence of citizenship politics. The anti-colonial struggle, the formation of the post-independence state, political restrictions during the New Order era, and the opening of participation after the Reformation demonstrate that citizenship in Indonesia has always been shaped through processes of recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fikriyah, 2024).

Several studies have discussed Civic Education as the formation of democratic citizens, while others have highlighted civic politics as citizens' struggles in the public sphere. Historical studies have also traced the development of citizenship in Indonesia across various political periods. However, discussions of Civic Education, civic politics, the dimensions of citizenship, and the formation of critical citizens still tend to proceed separately. This gap serves as the starting point for this article (Lawatta, 2019).

This article argues that Civic Education and civic politics must be understood in a hierarchical relationship, not positioned as the same concept. Civic Education is an arena of formation, civic politics is an arena of practice, while critical citizens are the ideal outcome of the relationship between the two. Based on this argument, this article aims to (Megasari, Syam, Setiawan, & Nugraha, 2025): first, explain the conceptual differences between Civic Education and civic politics; second, outline the dimensions of citizenship; third, trace the development of civic politics in Indonesia since the early 20th century; and fourth, formulate the relevance of both for the formation of critical citizens (Fazira & Budimansyah, 2024).

The novelty of this article lies in its attempt to synthesize four layers of analysis that have often been discussed separately: Civic Education, civic politics, dimensions of citizenship, and the history of civic politics in Indonesia. This article not only clarifies the conceptual distinction between Civic Education and civic politics but also demonstrates their relationship in the formation of critical citizens. Thus, this paper's primary contribution is to present a framework that connects the pedagogical, theoretical, historical, and practical aspects of civic studies in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This article employs a literature study with a conceptual-historical approach. This method was chosen because the research objective is not to empirically test the relationship between variables, but rather to construct a theoretical synthesis regarding the relationship between Civic Education, civic politics, dimensions of citizenship, and the formation of critical citizens in the Indonesian context.

The data sources consist of primary and secondary literature relevant to the theme of citizenship. Primary literature includes classical and theoretical works such as Marshall (Abdulkarim & al., 2018). Secondary literature includes books, journal articles, and scholarly works discussing the history of citizenship politics in Indonesia, particularly the work of Hiariej et al. (2016). Source selection was based

on three criteria: relevance to the topic, conceptual contribution to citizenship studies, and historical significance in explaining the development of citizenship politics in Indonesia (Rachmadtullah & Syofyan, 2020).

The analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the identification and categorization of key concepts that distinguish Civic Education from civic politics. Second, a theoretical synthesis of the dimensions of citizenship based on liberal, republican, and radical traditions. Third, a historical reading of the development of civic politics in Indonesia from the early 20th century to the Reformation era. With this procedure, the literature review does not stop at summarizing the literature but is directed toward producing an argumentative synthesis (Setiawan, Aman, & Wuryandani, 2021).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Civic Education and Civic Politics: Two Different Domains

Civics and civic politics both discuss citizens, but they start from different focuses. Civics focuses on the process of formation. It emphasizes how citizens are equipped with knowledge of rights, obligations, democracy, law, national identity, and social responsibility. Traditionally, the emphasis is on values learning, character building, and participation skills (Santoso & Murod, 2021).

In contrast, civic politics focuses on how citizenship is practiced, negotiated, and fought for in real life. Civic politics is not simply about what citizens should know, but about how citizens act as political subjects. Here, rights are not presented as abstract categories, but rather as something contested and negotiated through participation, solidarity, demands, and even conflict (Triyanto & al., 2023).

This distinction is important because, in both higher education and the public sphere, Civics Education is often considered sufficient to convey normative material. However, if it is not connected to practice, Civics Education risks becoming merely formal knowledge without transformative power. Therefore, a more appropriate relationship is: Civics Education as an arena for formation, civic politics as an arena for practice, and critical citizens as the ideal outcome.

Citizenship Dimensions in Citizenship Studies

In citizenship studies, T.H. Marshall is a key figure in explaining citizenship through the development of civil, political, and social rights. This perspective provides an important foundation for understanding citizenship as the institutionalization of citizens' rights in modern society. Civil rights encompass individual freedoms and legal protection, political rights relate to participation in government processes, and social rights encompass welfare and access to basic services (Marshall, 1950).

However, Marshall's perspective also has limitations. His approach tends to view citizenship as a linear, legal, and evolutionary development. However, in socio-political reality, citizenship is often shaped through conflict, exclusion, and struggle. This critique has given rise to the expansion of citizenship studies (Susanti, 2020). Hiariej et al. (Nasution, 2022) caution that overly static and legalistic ways of thinking are no longer adequate to explain the dynamics of contemporary citizenship.

The republican tradition emphasizes that citizenship is not just about having rights, but also about civic virtue, public responsibility, and active participation in common affairs (Walzer, 1992). From this perspective, a good citizen is not simply a rights holder but also a subject willing to engage in political and social life (Predescu & Darjan, 2010).

Meanwhile, a radical perspective, particularly through Mouffe's (Puspita Sari & Suryaningsi, 2023) thinking, suggests that citizenship is never entirely harmonious. Shared life is always shaped by tension, difference, and contestation. Therefore, civic politics must be understood not only as orderly participation, but also as a space for articulating the demands and struggles of marginalized groups. This argument is reinforced by Laclau and Mouffe (1985), who view political communities as never-ending hegemonic projects.

To summarize these various approaches, Stokke (Westheimer, Westheimer, & Kahne, 2002) offers four key dimensions of citizenship: membership, legal status, rights, and participation. Membership relates to who is recognized as part of a political community. Legal status concerns formal recognition

within the legal system. Rights refer to the entitlements attached to citizenship. Participation indicates citizens' involvement in public affairs. These four dimensions demonstrate that citizenship is much broader than merely administrative identity (Prayitno et al., 2019).

Citizenship Politics in Indonesia: Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation

A historical study of citizenship politics in Indonesia shows that citizenship did not develop in a single entity. Hiariej et al. (2016) show that citizenship politics in Indonesia moved through three main areas of struggle: the politics of recognition, the politics of welfare redistribution, and the politics of representation. This framework is important because it helps interpret the development of citizenship as a concrete socio-political process (Predescu & Darjan, 2010).

The politics of recognition relates to struggles for identity, membership, and inclusion within political communities. The politics of redistribution concerns demands for social justice, welfare, and resource distribution. The politics of representation relates to citizens' efforts to secure political participation and substantive channels of representation. These three forms of struggle are not mutually exclusive but often overlap in the realities of Indonesian history.

This demonstrates that civic politics cannot be reduced solely to electoral participation. It also encompasses the struggles of indigenous groups, workers, farmers, women, minorities, and various other social groups seeking recognition, prosperity, and political space. This perspective broadens the understanding of citizenship from mere status to the practice of struggle.

History of Citizenship Politics in Indonesia since the Early 20th Century

The early 20th century is crucial as a starting point for this discussion because it was during this phase that "Indonesia" began to be imagined as a shared political community. Modern organizations, education, the press, and youth movements became the medium through which national consciousness emerged. The 1928 Youth Pledge was a crucial symbol of the formation of this collective membership. At this point, citizenship politics emerged as a struggle to be recognized not as a colonial subject but as a nation with the right to determine its own destiny (Carr & Power, 2020).

During the Old Order, citizenship politics developed within debates about the foundations of the state, the form of democracy, ideology, nationalism, and redistribution. This period demonstrated that citizenship was never neutral, but was always intertwined with a contest of ideas about who should represent the people, how the state should be structured, and how citizens' rights should be understood (Prianti, 2020).

During the New Order era, citizens' political space was severely restricted. In the name of stability and development, the state disciplined citizens and restricted political expression from below. In this situation, citizenship was largely reduced to administrative loyalty to the state, while criticism, opposition, and dissent were marginalized. Civic politics did not disappear, but instead took on hidden, sectoral, and limited forms (Billo, 2020).

The Reformation era opened up new spaces for civic politics. Democratization, decentralization, freedom of association, and the strengthening of civil society created opportunities for the emergence of various citizen movements. Post-reformation civic politics is evident in the struggle for human rights, women's movements, environmental movements, indigenous peoples' rights, minority rights, and demands for welfare and political representation. However, this openness also demonstrates that civic politics in Indonesia is pluralistic and fragmented. There is no single form of citizenship, but rather many articulations of citizenship born from diverse experiences of exclusion (Martaulina, Sianipar, & Harianja, 2021).

Formation of Critical Citizens

Within this framework, critical citizens can be understood as those who not only know their rights and obligations but are also able to reflect on public issues, formulate opinions argumentatively, and participate responsibly in communal life. Therefore, developing critical citizens requires more than just normative learning (Kłodkowski, Kossowska, & Siewierska, 2025).

Civics Education remains a crucial foundation. Through Civics Education, citizens acquire conceptual language about democracy, law, human rights, nationality, and public responsibility. However, this foundation only becomes meaningful if it develops into political awareness (Kjaran & Naeimi, 2022). This political awareness then serves as a bridge to civic politics (Okot, 2022).

Thus, the relationship between the three can be formulated in stages: Civic Education shapes civic knowledge and values; political awareness fosters sensitivity to public issues; civic politics translates these issues into action; and critical citizenship is the result of this process. This formulation explains that the formation of critical citizenship is not an automatic result of the curriculum, but rather the relationship between education, reflection, and practice.

4. CONCLUSION

Civics Education and civic politics are two distinct but interrelated concepts. Civics Education falls within the realm of pedagogical formation, while civic politics falls within the realm of citizens' practical struggles for recognition, rights, representation, and justice. Citizenship itself must be understood multidimensionally, encompassing membership, legal status, rights, and participation.

The history of citizenship politics in Indonesia shows that citizenship has never been merely formal or legal. From the early 20th century through the Reformation era, citizenship was shaped through struggles for recognition, redistribution, and representation. Therefore, developing critical citizens in Indonesia requires Civic Education that goes beyond the transfer of normative knowledge but fosters political awareness and encourages citizen engagement in public life.

The main contribution of this article is to demonstrate that Civic Education will only be substantively relevant when connected to civic politics. In this relationship, critical citizens emerge not solely as a result of learning about citizenship, but from the ability to use civic knowledge as a basis for action in the public sphere

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