

BEYOND DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE: GUS DUR'S POLITICAL THOUGHT AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF JUSTICE-BASED POLITICS IN INDONESIA

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Abstract

The persistence of social, economic, and cultural inequalities in Indonesia raises a fundamental question concerning how political justice can be conceptualized and practiced within a pluralistic society. This study examines Gus Dur's (Abdurrahman Wahid) conception of political justice in dialogue with John Rawls's theory of justice as fairness and asks how their respective approaches contribute to the construction of justice-based politics in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, the study analyzes Gus Dur's major writings as primary sources and engages relevant philosophical and political literature through critical textual and content analysis. The study's novelty lies in reconceptualizing Gus Dur's political thought not merely as an expression of Islamic pluralism, but as an ethical-political framework that expands the scope of justice beyond institutional and distributive arrangements. The findings demonstrate that both Gus Dur and Rawls emphasize equality, fundamental rights, and the protection of disadvantaged groups as essential to a just democratic order. However, Gus Dur extends this framework by grounding justice in Islamic humanism, religious pluralism, moral responsibility, and local wisdom. Justice, therefore, requires not only fair institutions but also ethical transformation, recognition across differences, and inclusive political praxis. This framework offers a contextual model of justice-based politics for Indonesia's diverse society.

Abstrak

Persistennya ketimpangan sosial, ekonomi, dan budaya di Indonesia memunculkan pertanyaan mendasar mengenai bagaimana keadilan politik dapat dikonsepsikan dan diwujudkan dalam masyarakat yang plural. Penelitian ini mengkaji pemikiran politik keadilan Gus Dur (Abdurrahman Wahid) dalam dialog dengan teori justice as fairness John Rawls serta menganalisis kontribusi keduanya bagi konstruksi politik berbasis keadilan di Indonesia. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif-analitis dengan menganalisis karya-karya utama Gus Dur sebagai sumber primer dan literatur filosofis serta politik yang relevan sebagai sumber sekunder melalui analisis tekstual dan analisis isi kritis. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada rekonstruksi pemikiran politik Gus Dur bukan semata-mata sebagai artikulasi pluralisme Islam, melainkan sebagai kerangka etis-politis yang memperluas cakupan keadilan melampaui pengaturan institusional dan distribusi sumber daya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Gus Dur dan Rawls sama-sama menempatkan kesetaraan, hak-hak fundamental, dan perlindungan terhadap kelompok yang kurang beruntung sebagai fondasi tatanan demokratis yang adil. Namun, Gus Dur memperluas kerangka tersebut melalui humanisme Islam, pluralisme agama, tanggung jawab moral, dan kearifan lokal. Dengan demikian, keadilan tidak hanya membutuhkan institusi yang fair, tetapi juga transformasi etis, pengakuan atas perbedaan, dan praksis politik yang inklusif. Kerangka ini menawarkan model politik berbasis keadilan yang lebih kontekstual bagi masyarakat Indonesia yang majemuk.

INTRODUCTION

It is clear that Indonesia still struggles to attain justice – oriented politics despite increasing inequality across social, economic, and cultural spheres. Even though democracy has advanced since the Reformasi period, justice itself is still unevenly distributed, especially for the less fortunate communities. Such issues have rekindled the interest of scholars in theories that would be able to reconcile democracy with social justice. In this regard, the political philosophy of Abdurrahman Wahid (Gus Dur) becomes significant in providing a different understanding of justice as not only the fair distribution of material goods but also the safeguarding of human dignity, minority rights, and pluralism (Ismail, 1999, p. 142). For Gus Dur, justice is never separated from democracy, humanness, and Islam ethics (Bahar, 1999, p. 10).

Justice has been a subject of extensive philosophical inquiry that has been greatly influenced by John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness. Rawls claims that in a just political community, individuals would be guaranteed equal basic rights but would allow social and economic inequalities only when they would enhance the condition of the worst off (Rawls, 2009). This approach to distribution of social goods has turned into one of the major models in modern political philosophy. However, Gus Dur's conception of justice has been based on principles derived from Islamic ethics, Indonesian pluralism, and indigenous culture. Instead of approaching them as mutually exclusive approaches, the present study considers them two different normative frameworks that coincide in providing the basis for human equality yet differ in their epistemology, ethical values, and implementation of justice. Thus, this comparative analysis of Gus Dur and Rawls aims to trace both similarities and distinctions between them rather than interpret Gus Dur's ideas within Rawlsian framework of distributive justice.

Gus Dur's theories continue to be relevant even to contemporary academic debates as illustrated by recent studies. Theories on Islamic education, for instance, show how his philosophies encourage pluralism – based education and character development based on humanity and religious moderation (Agung & Aly, 2021). Related studies point out that the philosophy of Gus Dur is an important aspect in multicultural education in Indonesia (Sari & Dozan, 2021). Researchers have also noted his views on pluralism as an example of *rahmatan lil-'alamin* in the complex religious and cultural environment in Indonesia (Zainuri & Al-Hakim, 2021). Academic work on Islamic laws also highlights how he brought Islamic philosophies and local cultures together through his inclusive legal philosophy (Mustofa, Syarifudin, & Santoso, 2021). Chaniago for his part, shows how his philosophy of *tawhid* brings religious obligations and universal ethical responsibilities together (Chaniago, 2024).

Further research has analyzed Gus Dur's leadership, humanism, and democratic ideas. His leadership style is understood as the integration of religion and society's knowledge in the formation of ethics in public administration (Maulana, Marpaung, & Dahlan, 2025). There are other studies which analyze his role in the formation of *Islam Nusantara* and Islamic discourse (Ritonga & et al., 2024). On the other hand, Supriyanto (2018) focuses on the humanistic nature of Gus Dur's educational idea; Safitri (2024) analyzes his pluralistic view as the basis of social harmony; Rosidi et al. (2023) prove the relevance of his humanism in answering contemporary human rights issues.

Even though these works discuss Gus Dur from the viewpoints of education, pluralism, leadership, Islamic law, democracy, and humanism, there is a lack of literature on Gus Dur's political justice from a comparative perspective with existing theories of justice. Most of the literature discusses Gus Dur within the normative

framework of Islam or analyzes Rawls separately in Western political theory. Comparative research that critically examines the philosophical convergence and divergence between Gus Dur's concept of humanism and Rawls's theory of justice remains insufficient.

To fill the gap, the study adopts a comparative approach to explore the concept of political justice within the scope of the political thought of Gus Dur by considering the theory of justice in the context of John Rawls' theory of justice. Instead of trying to examine the consistency of the political philosophy of Gus Dur with the theory of distributive justice of Rawls, the study seeks to determine how Gus Dur broadens the discourse of justice by taking into account spiritual ethics, pluralism, culture, and moral responsibility in politics.

The first stage involved the process of data collection from books and articles on topics concerning the topic of discussion. The second stage involved the process of data analysis. This process of data analysis was done using content analysis which is the process of defining the information in an objective way. The third stage involved the process of making conclusions. These conclusions were made based on the purpose of content analysis which is describing the information or data.

The first phase in carrying out the research was to collect the primary and secondary literature sources about the investigation. The primary literature sources were Gus Dur's works and John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Secondary literature sources included scholarly books and academic journal articles about political justice, Islamic political thought, and Rawlsian philosophy. The second phase in carrying out the research was to perform the qualitative content analysis in an attempt to find, classify, and interpret the main concepts of justice developed in each thinker's writings. The analysis focused on comparable analytical categories, including concepts of justice, equality, and human rights; the protection of vulnerable groups; the role of the state; and the ethics of political organization. Such analytical categories were used as the basis for comparison because they helped compare the ideas of two thinkers with different philosophical backgrounds and from different cultures. The final stage in conducting the research was the synthesis of the results of the comparison, which enabled the discovery of conceptual similarities and differences, especially concerning the interrelation of distributive justice, ethical responsibility, pluralism, and human dignity (Abdussamad, 2021, p. 33).

GUS DUR'S CONCEPT OF JUSTICE

Gus Dur, whose full name is Abdurrahman Wahid, is an Indonesian Muslim intellectual whose ideas on justice have had a significant influence on political and social discourse in Indonesia. Gus Dur's concept of justice cannot be separated from his background as a cleric, leader of the Nahdatul Ulama organization, and former president of the Republic of Indonesia. His thoughts on justice are a unique synthesis of Islamic values, democracy, and Indonesian local wisdom. Gus Dur sought to establish and implement justice in the context of a diverse society (Berton, 2002).

Gus Dur argued that justice is not an abstract philosophical concept, but a principle that must be realized in the daily lives of society (Wahid, 2005). Gus Dur saw justice as the main foundation for building a harmonious social order. Justice cannot be separated from universal human values, including respect for human rights, protection of minority groups, and impartial law enforcement. Gus Dur emphasized that justice must be

applied without discrimination, regardless of a person's religious, ethnic, racial, or social background (Wahid, 2007, p. 287).

An important aspect of Gus Dur's concept of justice is his emphasis on tolerance and pluralism. For Gus Dur, true justice can only be achieved in a society that respects diversity and upholds mutual respect among fellow human beings. Gus Dur consistently fought for the rights of minority and marginalized groups, including ethnic Chinese, religious minorities, and groups that were often discriminated against. For Gus Dur, justice should provide equal space for all segments of society to contribute and participate in the life of the nation and state (Wahid, 2006).

Gus Dur advocated fair politics, namely politics oriented towards the welfare of the people, respecting civil rights, and guaranteeing freedom of expression. Democracy is the system best suited to realizing justice. Democracy without the values of justice and humanity is merely a formality. Gus Dur strongly criticized political practices that exploit religious views solely for power. Abuse of power in leadership can threaten justice, which is why Gus Dur emphasized the importance of checks and balances in the government system.

Gus Dur strongly criticized economic systems that only benefit the elite and ignore the welfare of the people. Gus Dur argued that economic justice can be achieved through the equitable distribution of resources, economic empowerment of the people, and fair policies. He emphasized the importance of ethics in business and rejected exploitative practices that harm society and the environment. Consistent and impartial law enforcement is needed to achieve justice. In many cases, the law is often discriminatory and only favors the upper class. Gus Dur emphasized the importance of the rule of law being enforced fairly and free from political intervention (Khasanah, 2018).

Quality education will create an intelligent and conscientious society. Good education makes people think before they act; thus, education becomes a means to create a just society. Gus Dur emphasized that education should not only focus on intellectual development but also on character building and human values. On an international scale, Gus Dur also criticized the injustice in the world order that tends to benefit developed countries and harm developing countries. Gus Dur sought to encourage fair international cooperation, especially in terms of technology-based trade and handling global issues such as terrorism (Wahid, 2001, p. 181).

It is important to note that Gus Dur's concept of justice was not static, but evolved in line with the socio-political dynamics he faced. The flexibility of his thinking allowed him to keep his concept of justice relevant to the challenges of the day. Nevertheless, basic principles such as respect for humanity, pluralism, and equality remained at the core of his thinking on justice. Gus Dur's legacy of ideas about justice is still relevant today, especially in the context of Indonesia, which is still struggling with various issues of social, political, and economic injustice. His inclusive and humanistic concept of justice offers an alternative amid the rise of identity politics and populism. His thinking reminds us that true justice can only be achieved through a shared commitment to respect humanity in all aspects of national and state life (M. Hamid, 2010, p. 188).

IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CONTEMPORARY ERA

Gus Dur's concept of justice, when applied to the contemporary era, presents both challenges and opportunities for Indonesia in facing increasingly complex social and

political dynamics (Agung & Aly, 2021). Amidst the rise of identity politics and populism, Gus Dur's ideas about inclusive and humane justice are becoming increasingly relevant. The implementation of this concept can be seen through efforts to strengthen the democratic system, not just procedurally significantly. This includes strengthening democratic institutions, eradicating corruption, and enforcing fair and non-discriminatory laws. Policies that protect the rights of minority and vulnerable groups, such as employment creation laws that address workers' rights, or the review of election laws that guarantee fairer representation, can be seen as efforts to implement Gus Dur's vision of justice.

Gus Dur's concept of justice can be seen as an effort to promote tolerance and pluralism among the various communities in Indonesia (Sari & Dozan, 2021). Government programs and civil society initiatives that encourage interfaith and intercultural dialogue are manifestations of Gus Dur's vision of a just and harmonious society. For example, education policies that promote the values of *Pancasila* and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, as well as cultural exchange programs between regions, can be seen as an application of Gus Dur's concept of justice, which emphasizes respect for diversity. At the local level, the establishment of interfaith communication forums and conflict resolution based on local wisdom also reflect the spirit of Gus Dur's thinking (Syaedy, 2018, pp. 15–17).

Justice in the economic system can be realized by reducing inequality and promoting inclusive development, such as people's empowerment programs, namely "Kredit Usaha Rakyat (KUR)", which can be seen in the economic justice that Gus Dur fought for (A. Hamid, 2024). Gus Dur also sought to establish a *sharia* economy that could organize the economy fairly and prioritize human values. Efforts to involve indigenous peoples and local communities in natural resource management also reflect Gus Dur's vision of economic justice that takes local knowledge into account.

Strengthening the "Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK)" and improving public access to justice through legal programs can be concrete steps toward realizing Gus Dur's concept of justice in the legal sphere. Various laws need to be revised to eliminate discrimination and protect the rights of vulnerable or minority groups. Gus Dur's concept of justice can also be implemented in international relations, such as Indonesia's active role in international forums to fight for the interests of developing countries and humanitarian issues in order to create a more just world order. These issues can include the Palestinian–Israeli conflict or the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, which emphasize a diplomatic and humanitarian approach.

Education policies such as Kartu Indonesia Pintar (KIP), scholarships for poor students, and increased government spending in the education sector can be seen to normatively align with Gus Dur's concept of social justice, especially his focus on equal education access and development of human dignity through education (Mahmud, 2021, p. 115). Curriculum policy changes that advocate for tolerance, pluralism, and citizenship democracy can also be said to have values that align with Gus Dur's theory of education despite not being implementation of the idea without the presence of policy. Social protection policies like "Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (JKN)", "Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH)", and emergency aid during the COVID–19 pandemic can also be cited as policy directions that seek to advance the well-being of disadvantaged communities. It would not be accurate to say that these policies drew inspiration from the philosophy of Gus Dur. Rather, this research proposes that such policies reflect the norms that Gus Dur's ideas are based on social inclusivity, safeguarding of vulnerable

groups and the ethical duty of the state to work toward justice. It is in this way that Gus Dur's idea of justice can be used as an analysis tool to assess modern public policies.

The development of media that provides freedom of expression and the application of the concept of justice can be seen through efforts to protect freedom of media use and prevent information monopoly. Policies that promote digital inclusion, combat fraud and hate speech, and protect freedom of expression in public spaces reflect Gus Dur's vision for a democratic and just society. However, new challenges such as security threats and information manipulation through social media require a new approach that remains in line with the principles of justice and freedom that Gus Dur fought for.

Many efforts can be made to implement Gus Dur's concept of justice in the contemporary era. However, economic disparities persist due to rampant corruption and the rise of intolerant movements, which pose challenges to achieving justice. The implementation of Gus Dur's concept of justice requires long-term commitment and collaboration with various parties, including the government, civil society, and the private sector. It is also important to redefine and reorganize Gus Dur's philosophy so that it remains relevant to today's challenges, while maintaining the core principles of his vision of justice and humanity (Syaedy, 2018, p. 20).

GUS DUR'S REVIEW IN JOHN RAWLS' THEORY OF JUSTICE

John Rawls presented the concept of justice as fairness in his work "A Theory of Justice" (Edor, 2020). The idea of a hypothetical social contract forms the basis of this theory, in which individuals in the "original position" are behind a "veil of ignorance." In this condition, they do not know their social position, talents, or abilities in society. Rawls argues that in this situation, individuals will agree on two principles of justice: first, equal liberty for all, and second, social and economic inequality is only permissible if it benefits everyone, especially the least fortunate in society (Rawls, 2009).

A fundamental similarity can be seen between Gus Dur's thinking and Rawls' theory. Gus Dur and Rawls both emphasize the importance of equality and the protection of basic individual rights. Rawls' first principle of equal liberty is in line with the principles of pluralism and tolerance championed by Gus Dur. Gus Dur always fought for the rights of minority and marginalized groups, which can be seen as an effort to fulfill Rawls' second principle of inequality, which is only permissible if it benefits everyone, especially the less fortunate (M. Hamid, 2010, p. 195).

However, there are significant differences between the two approaches. Rawls' theory is highly abstract and formal, rooted in Western philosophy. Meanwhile, Gus Dur's thinking is closely related to Indonesian cultural and Islamic values. Gus Dur combined international law with local knowledge and religious teachings, resulting in a unique theory that is very easy to understand and accept in various regions of Indonesia. Gus Dur's exemplary behavior can be seen as an effort to standardize international norms of justice (Wahid, 2007, p. 3).

Rawls focuses more on the basic structures of society and social institutions. Rawls proposes the concept of "justice as fairness" as a guideline for building fair social institutions (Fattah, 2013). Gus Dur, however, focuses on structural aspects, emphasizing the importance of dialogue, intercultural understanding, and social attitude change. Gus Dur's approach reflects his understanding that justice is not only about the distribution of material resources, but also about recognition and respect for different identities and values.

Rawls' idea of the "veil of ignorance" is consistent with anthropological philosophy (Harefa, 2020). Gus Dur's religious beliefs often emphasize the importance of treating people as human beings, regardless of their race or social status. This reflects Rawls' view that principles of justice must be developed without regard to personal position or advantage. However, Gus Dur added a spiritual and cultural dimension, inviting society to see everything through the lens of spirituality and community knowledge.

Regarding economic justice, Rawls and Gus Dur recognized the importance of overcoming inequality. Rawls' difference principle, which states that economic inequality is only acceptable if it benefits everyone, especially the most disadvantaged groups, is in line with Gus Dur's vision of the people's economic power (Pogge, 2007, p. 107). However, Gus Dur was directly critical of the economy and emphasized ethics in business and the economy.

Rawls' view of reflective equilibrium explains that the principle of justice must be in line with our moral adjustments, which is most in line with Gus Dur's approach that emphasizes the importance of introspection and dialogue. Gus Dur often invites us to reflect on our own religious and cultural values amid today's challenges. This implies that authenticity is not a static concept but must be represented and negotiated within society (Pogge, 2007, p. 162).

Regarding religious freedom and the separation of religion and state, Gus Dur's thinking differs slightly from Rawls'. Although both support religious freedom, Rawls does not view religion and the state as entities that must be completely separated (Rawls, 1985). On the other hand, Gus Dur advocates a dynamic relationship between religion and the state, where religious values can be a source of inspiration for public policy without dominating or discriminating. This differs from Rawls' approach, which emphasizes the neutrality of the state towards comprehensive concepts of goodness, including religion.

While both Rawls and Gus Dur recognize education as a necessary tool for the construction of a just society, each of them gives a different normative role to education. For example, in contrast to Gus Dur, who sees education as an ethical and cultural process of fostering respect for diversity, dialogue, and common humanity, Rawls sees education as a means of providing individuals with equal opportunity to participate in just social institutions. The difference stems from the different theoretical bases of these scholars. In particular, while Rawls is concerned with designing just institutions, Gus Dur contributes to his theory with value considerations drawn from Islamic and cultural heritage of Indonesia such as *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, *musyawarah*, and character education. In fact, these cultural values help in making the idea of justice more practical through intercultural awareness, trust in society, and a sense of ethics, which are the dimensions that get less focus in the institutionalist approach of Rawls. In this way, the education philosophy of Gus Dur adds value to the concept of justice of Rawls without replacing it.

Although different and controversial, both Rawls' theory of justice and Gus Dur's philosophy of justice share the same goal of creating a more just and equitable society. Gus Dur's unique contribution is based on his ability to apply the principles of universal justice in various aspects of Indonesian society, integrating an understanding of Islamic tradition, local wisdom, and modern democratic values. Thus, Gus Dur's approach is seen as an effort to reconcile abstract theories of justice with complex sociocultural realities and provide practical guidelines for justice in a pluralistic social context.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN BUILDING JUSTICE-BASED POLITICS IN INDONESIA

The development of political justice in Indonesia is a complex issue with many aspects that combine the country's socio-cultural and political history with contemporary challenges (Tarigan, 2024). One of the main challenges is economic recession. Although Indonesia's economic growth has been stable in recent decades, the distribution of wealth is still very uneven. This crisis occurs not only between individuals but also between regions, with northern Indonesia tending to be separated from the western regions. This economic stagnation can lead to social and political instability and weaken efforts to build a fair political system. On the other hand, however, increased awareness of this issue offers opportunities for more progressive and inclusive policies, such as equitable development programs and community economic empowerment.

Corruption not only destroys a country's wealth but also erodes public trust in political and legal institutions. Systemic corruption creates structural inequalities determined by bribery and access to resources and opportunities, rather than interests and needs. However, intensive efforts to eradicate corruption over the past two decades, such as the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission and the strengthening of bureaucratic reforms, show that there is still room for change. Raising public awareness of government oversight and increasing civil society participation are positive processes that encourage clean and fair policies (Bahar, 1999, p. 20).

The diversity that should be Indonesia's strength is often exploited for short-term political gain. Religious, ethnic, or regional sentiments are often used to mobilize political support, which can create social tensions and threaten national unity. Polarization also complicates efforts to build a national consensus on development and policy reform. However, amid these challenges, there are opportunities to strengthen social learning and intergroup dialogue. Popular initiatives that promote tolerance and cross-cultural understanding can lay the groundwork for more inclusive and equitable policy development.

Access to justice continues to be one of the problems facing Indonesia even after many reforms toward democracy. While there has been an improvement through institutional reforms in the legal and governance structures, there are still citizens who cannot access legal protection because of economic reasons. The poor, people from rural areas, and the marginalized are some of the disadvantaged groups in Indonesia whose inability to access affordable and effective legal services limits them from enjoying their constitutional rights. Technological advancement and legal aid programs are ways in which the country can improve access to justice. Digital legal services, legal consultation online, community-based legal aid programs, and public legal awareness can enhance legal access while creating equality of treatment before the law. These approaches are inline with the vision of justice by Gus Dur.

Although Indonesia has undergone legal reforms since the reform era, there is still a large gap in public access to an adequate legal system. High costs, complicated procedures, and a lack of public understanding of the law make it difficult for many citizens, especially marginalized groups, to fight for their rights legally. However, technological advances and initiatives in the field of legal services have opened up greater opportunities for access to justice. Programs such as online legal advice and legal advocacy groups can help bridge this gap (Faisal, 2017, p. 60).

Gender imbalance continues to exist in Indonesian politics and society. Although there has been progress in women's participation in the public sphere, the proportion of women in political decision-making remains low. Gender stereotypes, structural barriers, and discriminatory socio-cultural norms continue to limit women's roles in politics (Balgis, 2022). However, raising gender awareness among the younger generation and adopting effective policies such as a 30% quota for women's representation in parliamentary elections create opportunities for change (Barkah, 2024). The growth of feminist movements advocating for gender equality can also lead to more racially inclusive policy reforms.

Resource constraints and environmental degradation. The inefficient use of natural resources not only damages the sustainability of ecosystems, but also perpetuates intergenerational injustice. The tension between short-term economic growth and long-term environmental protection often results in policies that are unfair to indigenous peoples and the communities that depend on them. However, increased global awareness of climate change and sustainable development opens up the possibility of using more environmentally friendly and equitable professional models. Initiatives such as empowering indigenous peoples in the areas of the circular economy, renewable energy, and natural resource management can be strategic environmental solutions (Wahid, 2007, p. 15).

Access to the Internet is an important component of political and economic participation. However, there is still a large gap in Internet access and digital literacy between urban and rural areas and between different socioeconomic groups. This inequality has the potential to create new gaps in political participation and access to public services. However, the rapid development of digital infrastructure and government initiatives to increase broadband penetration will be able to bridge this gap. Digital literacy and e-governance programs, if implemented correctly, can increase government transparency and involve citizens in the political process (Nurhakim, 2014).

Despite several reform efforts, inefficiency, convergence of power, and poor quality of public services continue to occur. Corrupt and incompetent officials not only hinder economic growth but also create inequalities in access to public services. However, the application of a neoclassical approach in public administration and increasing public demand for better services have opened the door to public sector reform. Programs such as convenient service centers can improve the efficiency and productivity of public services.

Economic integration and infrastructure development on the island of Java have led to regional disparities. This has not only caused inequality in access to income and social services, but has also created regional sentiments that threaten national unity. However, government policies that develop Indonesia's borders and focus on infrastructure development outside Java open up opportunities for growth. Decentralization of power and regional autonomy, if managed properly, can be utilized to achieve regional equality and equitable development.

Indonesian politics is still dominated by racism and patronage rather than debates on policies and ideas. This is not conducive to building a political system that is truly dedicated to justice and the common good. However, the expansion of public education and the development of a critical middle class open up opportunities for political and cultural change. Highly educated young people with good connections can engage in meaningful, solution-oriented political discourse.

Overcoming these challenges using available resources requires a long-term commitment from all sectors of society. The development of rights-based policies in

Indonesia requires the participation not only of the government, but also of civil society, the private sector, academics, and citizens as a whole. Through a holistic and inclusive approach, Indonesia has the potential to create a fair political system and become a model for other developing countries in managing social and political conflicts and complexities (Syaedy, 2018, p. 28).

CONCLUSION

Abdurrahman Wahid's (Gus Dur) thoughts on political justice have made an important contribution to the development of an inclusive political and social paradigm in Indonesia. For Gus Dur, justice is understood not only as material equality but also as the recognition of human dignity, the protection of minorities, and the enforcement of the law without discrimination. In the context of a pluralistic and democratic Indonesia, this thinking became the moral and philosophical foundation for political development based on human and Islamic values.

A comparative analysis of John Rawls' theory of justice makes it clear that Gus Dur's theory of justice shares similarities with Rawls' concept of justice in the recognition of equal rights and the protection of vulnerable classes. However, it is different from Rawls' concept in terms of its epistemological basis and normative approach to justice. While Rawls based his idea of justice on the procedural legitimacy of the social contract and the institutional concept of justice as fairness, Gus Dur's concept of justice rests on the moral – spiritual dimension of justice through Islam and culture, as well as on democracy. Indeed, Gus Dur goes further, transforming the liberal idea of social contract into a transcendental moral obligation by grounding political responsibility in the ethical values of *tawhid*, *rahmatan lil-'alamin*, and human dignity. In this view, justice does not derive its legitimacy from rational agreement and/or institutional arrangements alone but rather from an inner moral obligation that constrains both the individual and the state to practice compassion, solidarity, and responsibility towards all members of society.

As revealed by this study, the norms proposed by Gus Dur regarding justice remain normatively significant for assessing contemporary public policies in Indonesia, rather than serving as the basis for their historical emergence. Through the comparative approach, it becomes evident that policy proposals aimed at equal access to education, social support for disadvantaged individuals, equality before the law, and tolerance towards religions and cultures are normatively justified in terms of principles associated with Gus Dur's vision of substantive justice. Nevertheless, the results of this research also reveal that these normative principles have not yet become institutionalized due to the presence of such phenomena as corruption, economic inequality, intolerance, and discrimination. Hence, the realization of Gus Dur's vision of justice presupposes both institutional changes and the formation of moral responsibility and civic engagement among people.

This research opens up space for further studies on the actualization of Gus Dur's concept of justice in the context of educational institutions, bureaucracy, and civil society in the era of the Industrial Revolution 5.0. Further studies are expected to examine the implementative aspects of Gus Dur's values of justice, pluralism, and humanism in public policy, governance, and digital ethics. In addition, interdisciplinary research combining perspectives from theology, political philosophy, and public policy studies will enrich our understanding of the relevance of Gus Dur's thinking in building a just, democratic, and civilized social order in Indonesia.

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