

## **ARISTOTLE AND ROUSSEAU'S THOUGHTS ON CITIZENSHIP IN THE CONTEXT OF MODERN INDONESIAN DEMOCRACY**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze Aristotle's and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thoughts on the concept of citizenship and their relevance to modern Indonesian democracy. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, the research examines the primary texts of both philosophers and situates their ideas in critical dialogue with Indonesia's contemporary socio-political realities. For Aristotle, a citizen is one who actively participates in governance and public life to achieve *eudaimonia* or collective well-being. Rousseau, on the other hand, emphasizes the *general will* (*volonté générale*) as the foundation of political legitimacy, where the ideal citizen prioritizes the common good over individual interests. In the Indonesian context, these perspectives resonate with the participatory principles of Pancasila democracy, which upholds deliberation, mutual cooperation, and social justice. Nevertheless, Indonesia's democratic practice continues to face challenges such as political apathy, oligarchic dominance, and low civic literacy. The findings suggest that a synthesis between Aristotle's political rationality and Rousseau's collective morality could strengthen Indonesian citizenship toward a more substantive democracy. Thus, philosophical reflection on classical concepts of

citizenship provides an ethical and normative framework for enhancing a civilized and socially just democratic life in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Citizenship, Democracy, Aristotle, Rousseau

## INTRODUCTION

Citizenship has long been one of the most contested and evolving concepts within political philosophy, encompassing not only legal membership within a state but also moral participation in public life and shared responsibility for collective welfare. Aristotle and Jean-Jacques Rousseau stand as two monumental figures whose reflections on the nature of political life, virtue, and communal belonging continue to shape theoretical debates about civic identity in democratic societies. As Gilmore (2025) explains, both thinkers conceive human existence as fundamentally political, rooted in the necessity of cooperation, moral virtue, and economic interdependence, yet they diverge in their visions of how civic participation should align with justice and equality. The modern relevance of these ideas becomes particularly evident when they are placed within the framework of Indonesia's democratic transformation, which aspires to harmonize individual freedom with collective solidarity under the principles of Pancasila.

Aristotle's concept of citizenship emphasizes rational participation in governance and the pursuit of *eudaimonia*, or human flourishing, through political virtue and deliberation within the *polis*. According to Ikbal et al. (2024), Aristotelian philosophy in education and politics represents the foundation of civic moral formation, promoting intellectual virtue as a prerequisite for just political participation. Rousseau, conversely, perceives citizenship through the moral lens of the *general will*, asserting that authentic freedom arises only when individuals subordinate personal desires to the collective good (Christman, 2022). Both frameworks highlight that citizenship is not merely a matter of legal status, but a moral and participatory commitment to the sustenance of justice and equality in the civic order.

The dialogue between Aristotelian and Rousseauian thought becomes even more relevant when interpreted through the dynamics of Indonesian democracy, where the state seeks to balance collective moral values with pluralistic freedom. As Junaedi (2024) notes, Pancasila democracy embodies a philosophical synthesis between individualism and collectivism, emphasizing harmony, mutual respect, and civic participation as democratic virtues. Solosumantoro (2025) further elaborates that Rousseau's moral ethics can serve as a corrective to Indonesia's political practices, where the dominance of elites and oligarchic structures often undermines the spirit of the general will. Thus, these classical ideas provide a normative foundation for rethinking the moral dimensions of democratic citizenship in the Indonesian sociopolitical context.

Within Indonesia's current legal and political framework, the challenge of realizing substantive democracy remains deeply tied to questions of justice and civic morality. As Alifianto et al. (2024) explain, legal justice in Indonesia often faces the problem of inconsistency between normative ideals and practical implementation, revealing a gap between democratic values and institutional reality. The tension between individual rights and collective responsibilities, similar to the debates found in Hobbesian and Rousseauian traditions, continues to shape the philosophical discourse on state legitimacy (Wijanarko & Riyanto, 2021). Therefore, revisiting Aristotle and Rousseau's insights is essential to reconstructing a model of citizenship that fosters civic virtue and moral engagement in Indonesia's democratic development.

The philosophical examination of citizenship in Indonesia invites a reflection on the human moral condition as a basis for state life. As Mujiwati (2022) suggests, the notion of the "state of nature" provides a lens to understand how human morals evolve from self-preservation to collective cooperation, a transition central to both Aristotelian teleology and Rousseau's social contract. The qualitative descriptive approach employed in this study enables an interpretive analysis of these philosophical ideas while grounding them in Indonesia's socio-political realities. By reinterpreting the classical theories of citizenship through the lens of Indonesian democracy, this study aims to illuminate the ethical, cultural, and participatory dimensions necessary for cultivating an inclusive and morally grounded democratic citizenship.

## **METHODS**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive method designed to interpret and analyze philosophical texts by Aristotle and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in relation to the contemporary context of Indonesian democracy. The study focuses on textual analysis of primary philosophical works and secondary literature, including academic interpretations such as Gilmore (2025), Christman (2022), and Solosumantro (2025), which provide critical insights into moral, political, and civic dimensions of citizenship. Data collection involves a library research approach, examining journals, books, and scholarly articles that discuss the intersection between classical political thought and modern democratic practices, particularly those relevant to Indonesia's socio-political framework as discussed by Alifianto et al. (2024) and Junaedi (2024). The data are then analyzed through hermeneutic interpretation, emphasizing conceptual clarification and comparative synthesis to reveal how Aristotelian rational virtue and Rousseauian moral collectivity can be integrated into the philosophy of Pancasila democracy. The results of this qualitative analysis are presented descriptively to illuminate theoretical linkages between Western philosophical ideas and the moral-political identity of Indonesian citizenship in the 21st century.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

#### A. Aristotelian Citizenship and Rational Virtue in Democratic Life

Aristotle's conception of citizenship is fundamentally rooted in his understanding of the human being as a *zoon politikon*, a political animal whose fulfillment depends upon participation in the *polis* and the pursuit of *eudaimonia* or collective flourishing. According to Ikbal et al. (2024), Aristotelian political philosophy emphasizes that education and rational deliberation form the moral basis of civic virtue, enabling citizens to act not merely as subjects of law but as co-creators of justice. Gilmore (2025) argues that Aristotle views political and economic interdependence as essential for nurturing moral agency, since the citizen's duty is to deliberate for the common good rather than private gain. In this framework, democratic participation becomes a moral activity through which individuals actualize their rational capacities and sustain the ethical harmony of the community.

The relevance of Aristotelian virtue ethics in Indonesia's democratic context lies in its potential to restore moral substance to civic participation beyond procedural formalities. As Junaedi (2024) observes, the principles of Pancasila democracy resonate with Aristotle's idea of balance between individual autonomy and communal responsibility, especially through the values of *gotong royong* and deliberation. This connection suggests that Indonesian democracy can be understood not only as a political system but as a moral endeavor to cultivate virtuous citizens guided by reason and justice. Therefore, Aristotle's rational model of citizenship provides a philosophical lens to strengthen civic education and ethical governance within Indonesia's democratic culture.

#### B. Rousseauian Citizenship and the Moral Foundations of Collective Will

Rousseau's conception of citizenship, unlike Aristotle's, is grounded in the moral transformation of individuals who voluntarily subordinate their personal interests to the *volonté générale* or general will, thereby achieving true freedom within a collective moral order. Christman (2022) highlights that Rousseau's silence on certain political injustices, such as trans-Atlantic slavery, exposes the tension between moral universality and practical exclusion within his civic philosophy. Nonetheless, Solosumanthro (2025) argues that Rousseau's moral ethics remain deeply influential for interpreting political life in Indonesia, particularly in critiquing elitism and promoting civic equality in democratic participation. Through the general will, Rousseau envisions a moral democracy in which obedience to collective law signifies freedom rather than submission, as citizens actively co-author the conditions of justice.

In the Indonesian democratic landscape, Rousseau's moral vision offers valuable insights into reestablishing civic trust and solidarity amid growing political disillusionment. Alifianto et al. (2024) point out that the gap between normative ideals of justice and their institutional realization reflects a crisis of moral responsibility among

both leaders and citizens. Integrating Rousseau's principles into Indonesian democracy entails reimagining citizenship as a moral vocation grounded in sincerity, equality, and participation for the public good. Thus, as Gilmore (2025) and Solosumantro (2025) jointly affirm, Rousseau's moral conception of the social contract remains a vital foundation for cultivating a democratic ethos that transcends mere formalism and aspires toward ethical citizenship in Indonesia.

### **Analysis**

The synthesis of Aristotelian and Rousseauian perspectives reveals that both philosophers conceive citizenship not merely as a legal or political designation, but as an ethical practice that situates human beings within the moral structure of communal life. According to Gilmore (2025), both thinkers understand politics as an extension of human moral development, in which participation and cooperation become the primary expressions of freedom and rationality. Aristotle's emphasis on rational deliberation aligns with the foundational spirit of Indonesian civic education, where citizens are encouraged to engage in thoughtful participation that upholds justice and harmony. This shared moral dimension indicates that democratic citizenship, whether ancient or modern, depends on cultivating virtues that bridge the gap between personal autonomy and collective responsibility.

In the Indonesian context, the Aristotelian focus on civic virtue and Rousseauian idea of moral freedom can together serve as philosophical antidotes to the ethical erosion in contemporary democratic practice. As Solosumantro (2025) observes, Indonesian political life often suffers from a lack of moral accountability and excessive individualism, which weakens the sense of shared civic duty. Rousseau's notion of the general will thus becomes essential to reinvigorate collective moral consciousness, ensuring that freedom operates within the bounds of mutual respect and social justice (Christman, 2022). Similarly, Aristotle's call for rational participation can support civic institutions that promote education, dialogue, and active involvement in governance, strengthening the moral infrastructure of democracy itself (Ikbal et al., 2024).

The philosophical integration of these ideas points toward a more substantive conception of democracy one that unites the ethical depth of classical philosophy with the social ideals of Pancasila democracy. Junaedi (2024) argues that Indonesian democracy should transcend procedural formalities and embrace the moral vision of human dignity as central to national life, echoing Aristotle's and Rousseau's shared belief in the formative power of civic participation. Alifianto et al. (2024) further emphasize that legal justice in Indonesia can only achieve legitimacy when supported by civic virtue and moral awareness, both of which are core to Aristotelian and Rousseauian ethics. Therefore, the analysis demonstrates that revitalizing Indonesian democracy requires reinterpreting citizenship as an ethical project one that harmonizes rationality, morality, and collective purpose for a just and civilized political order.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the ideas of Aristotle and Rousseau offer complementary philosophical foundations for understanding and strengthening modern Indonesian democracy through the moral renewal of citizenship. Both thinkers emphasize that true citizenship is not defined solely by political rights or legal status, but by the ethical commitment of individuals to participate actively in the pursuit of justice and collective well-being. In Indonesia, where democracy often faces the challenges of moral decline, political apathy, and elitism, these classical frameworks provide a valuable reminder that freedom must be grounded in virtue and shared responsibility. By integrating Aristotelian rational virtue with Rousseauian moral will, Indonesian citizenship can evolve toward a more substantive and ethically grounded form of democratic participation. Ultimately, this philosophical synthesis underscores that the sustainability of democracy depends not only on institutional structures but on the moral integrity and civic consciousness of its citizens.

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