

## Degradation of democracy with the existence of a single candidate for regional head elections in Indonesia

### *Degradasi demokrasi dengan adanya calon tunggal dalam pemilihan kepala daerah di Indonesia*

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#### Abstract

Regional head elections are part of the implementation of a democracy which is essentially indicated by political participation. The political elite at the central government also influences political competition in the regions. Every regional head election has to have a recommendation letter from the central board of the political party. The recommendation letter is a requirement for candidates for regent or mayor who will register to the General Election Commission (KPU). The general elections for regional heads are carried out to meet the demands of the community to elect their regional leaders directly with the spirit of democracy. Political elites often misuse democracy in pursuing power for personal or group interests so that a single candidate appears in the regional head elections. This study analyzes the relationship between the political elites and a single candidate using qualitative methods with descriptive analysis based on credible data sources. The results of this study stated that the political elite manipulate a significant role in gathering all-party support with a separate agreement so that a single candidate emerged in the regional head elections. This study concludes that the existence of a single candidate in the regional head elections results in a degradation in the democracy in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** party cadre; political dowry; political elite; single candidate

#### Abstrak

Pemilihan kepala daerah menjadi bagian implementasi dari demokrasi sebuah negara yang pada hakikatnya ditunjukkan dengan adanya partisipasi politik dari setiap warga negara. Pertarungan politik di daerah tentu juga dipengaruhi oleh elit politik di pusat. Dapat kita lihat bahwa setiap pemilihan kepala daerah harus mendapatkan mandat atau surat rekomendasi dari pengurus pusat partai politik. Surat rekomendasi tersebut menjadi syarat bagi calon bupati atau walikota yang akan mendaftar ke Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU). Pemilihan umum kepala daerah merupakan tujuan untuk memenuhi tuntutan masyarakat memilih pemimpin daerahnya secara langsung dengan semangat demokrasi, namun semangat demokrasi itu sering disalahgunakan oleh kaum elit dalam mengejar kekuasaan hanya untuk kepentingan pribadi maupun golongan, sehingga muncul calon tunggal pada pemilihan kepala daerah. Penelitian ini menganalisis hubungan elit politik dengan calon tunggal dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan analisis deskriptif berdasarkan sumber data yang kredibel. Hasil penelitian ini menyatakan bahwa elit politik berperan besar dalam mengumpulkan semua dukungan partai dengan kesepakatan pembagian kekuasaan di berbagai sektor sehingga muncul calon tunggal dalam pemilihan kepala daerah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan, adanya calon tunggal dalam pemilihan kepala daerah menunjukkan degradasi dalam proses demokrasi di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** kader partai; mahar politik; elit politik; calon tunggal

## Introduction

On December 9, 2020, Indonesia again held the Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) simultaneously, which was participated by 270 regions throughout Indonesia, covering nine provinces, 224 regencies, and 37 cities (KPU 2020a). The holding of direct and simultaneous Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) is an effort by the Indonesian people to improve the quality of local democracy and regional governance, following the post-New Order democratization agenda (KPU 2020b). However, the recent Pilkada has experienced a significant setback, evidenced by the existence of a single candidate every time the Pilkada is held. Political parties gather in one block, nominate one partner in the Pilkada contestation. The presence of a single candidate is indeed constitutional because there is a legal umbrella, based on the Constitutional Court Decision and Law Number 10 of 2016.

Political parties take shortcuts and instants by utilizing the legal umbrella so that the phenomenon of the emergence of a single candidate is rife in several regions (Kurniawan & Wawanudin 2019). The single candidate is rooted in the threshold regulatory system and the failure of political parties to carry out the function of a cadre of candidates for regional leaders (Hanan 2015). In the 2020 Pilkada, there were 25 regions with a single candidate against the empty election box (KPU 2020c). The phenomenon of single candidates in each regional election continues to experience a significant increase. Simultaneous regional elections in 2015 only had three single candidates, nine single candidates in 2017, and 16 single candidates in 2018 (KPU 2018), implying that there is a doubling of single candidates in each regional election from time to time.

The single candidates show the pragmatism of political parties to win (Ekowati 2019). Political parties do not want to nominate candidates with low electability even though they have integrity and capacity. Still, political parties together carry out a single candidate pair, even though they lack integrity and lack capacity. Suppose we relate it to the basic principles of democracy and the general election itself. In that case, the phenomenon of the emergence of single-candidate indirect elections is certainly very hurtful and contradictory. The essence of democracy and elections is participation and contestation. However, with single candidates, these two basic principles do not work. Participation only goes one way; the public is only directed to choose a single candidate so that there is no contestation, no competition, no battle of ideas, visions, and missions (Lestari 2019). Public campaigns and debates are monotonous because only a single candidate carries them out. This is certainly very influential on the quality of our democracy, which means that people are not allowed to choose other alternative candidates.

The existence of single candidates in the regional head elections is also influenced by the political elite in power at the center, either in the government or party management. Central political elites often use regional politics to realize the interests of the central government rather than learning regional interests and needs. It is evidenced from the nomination process for regional heads who must obtain a letter of recommendation from party administrators (Haris et al. 2016). Political elites at the center still play an essential role in determining who can run as a candidate for a regional head, and this will undoubtedly provide convenience to a handful of political elites who have access to the central party management and collect all letters of recommendation from supporting parties, with the agreement of sharing of power or political dowry. Political elites who garner all-party support then appoint their children, wives, or relatives to run as the sole candidate for a regional head. As a result, the single candidate pairs in the election contestation mostly came out as winners (Darmawan 2017).

The Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) took place after the reform began with the Regional Head being elected by the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). Then, regional heads are directly elected by the community at the provincial, district, and city levels. The direct election then became a simultaneous election in all regions of Indonesia. The emergence of single candidates in every regional head election is a problem in the democratic process. Ideally, each party produces the best cadres to advance in every public official election event, including regional leaders (Yunus 2018).

Many factors cause the existence of a single candidate pair in each election; First, the existence of single candidates as a result of two mutually interested parties, namely the incumbent and the political party. The incumbent is interested in maintaining the status quo, staying in power, and tackling rivals through "buying the party" (Saksono 2020). Second, the party failed to carry out regeneration, and on the other hand, there has been a leadership crisis in the regions. Parties as part of social institutions to prepare candidates for leaders to seem to be used only for pragmatic purposes by their elites. As a result, in the Pilkada, there are no competing ideas, visions and missions, and work programs offered by candidates for regional heads. A few political elites force the public to choose a single candidate and do not provide alternative candidates. The ruling political elite is a class consisting of those who have succeeded in occupying a position of dominance in the political system. Political elites are actively involved in the decision-making process with their inherent advantages, then gather all-party support to have no opponents in regional head elections (Fadli et al. 2018).

This study is compelling and important to carry out because, after the general election in 2019, many new parties had emerged between 2019 to 2021. Ahead of the 2024 election, a number of new parties have sprung up, such as the *Partai Gelora*, *Partai Ummat*, *Partai Masyumi Reborn*, *Partai Dakwah Rakyat Indonesia* (PDRI), *Partai Rakyat Adil Makmur* (Prima), and maybe there will be more (Hanan 2021). These political parties should not nominate single candidates in the election (Ekowati 2019). The founders argued that these parties were founded to compete in elections and gain seats in the legislature as a forum for participation in democracy. This is in contrast to the regional head elections. Although there are more and more political parties in Indonesia, single candidates always appear in every regional head election. This study was conducted to see the extent of the influence of political elites and political parties in creating single candidates who are oriented towards winning "*Berorientasi Pada Kemenangan*". As a result, this pragmatic attitude will ruin the democracy in Indonesia.

## **Research Method**

This study used a qualitative approach using secondary data from reliable sources, including the General Election Commission, the Election Supervisory Board, international and national journals, proceedings, and information from the website. Qualitative research methods emphasize problem analysis in nominating regional heads, supporting parties, and political dowries based on accurate data. Through a qualitative approach, this study is expected to comprehensively explain the problems related to the regional elections, which in turn bring up to a single candidate (Jamaluddin 2015).

This study collected data via the internet and used data from the official website of the General Election Commission (KPU), the General Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and combined them with data from previous research in the form of articles that have been published in national and international journals. The data will be analyzed descriptively and comprehensively in order to obtain a conclusion that will answer the purposes of this study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Role of political elites**

The implementation of direct regional head elections is still felt to be in a difficult situation. Democratization as the goal of holding direct and simultaneous regional elections is in fact still colored with various weaknesses in its implementation. The selection of regional head candidates is one of the important stages in the current simultaneous regional head elections. Decision-making within political parties greatly determines the candidates who will be promoted by a political party. The candidates of the regional head elections who will compete are often an unobserved part by prospective voters who only know the final results of the recruitment and candidate selection process carried out by internal parties (Witianti 2019).

The reality is that members of mass groups often make various efforts to enter into elite networks. If possible, they want to enter into the elite network that is controlling power directly. Mass groups that seek to enter into the elite network are not explicitly referred to as individuals in the upper layers of the masses. This counter elite is at the top layer of the masses because it is a group that has the potential to face and replace the position of the ruling elite. However, it is possible that those who are not in the upper layers of the mass group can try to penetrate the elite network. Someone who has closeness to the political elite has an excellent opportunity to become a capable national leader of the region.

The general agreement states that the ongoing political participation carried out by community members is determined by several factors influencing it. One of these factors and a relatively dominant element is the political elite's attitude towards the nature of political participation carried out by the community (Haryanto 2017). Elites who control power usually tend to dislike political competitors, even though they can do so for their political interests. The ruling elite believes that the existence of political competitors is a threat to the ongoing status quo, which according to them, is more profitable for them. They are less interested in doing so because they are afraid that it will shake the power in their hands. As a result, with all the efforts of the political elite in setting up the election, only a single candidate will participate (Rosanti 2020).

Political elites in maintaining their power will make efforts to limit competition in society. The existence of restrictions on competition will automatically limit ongoing political participation. Then, the elite can take various actions, such as monitoring the activities of community members to threatening or sanctioning those who intend to participate. For example, La Nyala Mataliti was failed to become a candidate for Governor of East Java because he did not get support from the political elites (Amaluddin 2017). In addition, the difficult political consolidation factor and the demand for political dowries are one of the factors that influence the direction of party elite support. The actions of these elites can reduce the level of participation. All of this aims to maintain the power of the elite concerned (Haryanto 2017).

Restriction of political participation by the ruling elite is a typical trend, but there may be ruling elites in certain circumstances that encourage the expansion of political participation. The elites concerned are fully aware that they need one or several groups in society as a source of strength. Elites expect these groups for support. Therefore, in this case, the elites' expansion of political participation is an attempt to build a new foothold to support their power (Husen 2016). Most elites want to take advantage of the expansion of political participation in the form of support for themselves or the policies they issue. However, most of these elites are still reluctant to take risks with the expansion of political participation. The impact of the political elites trying to limit the existence of competitors in the Pilkada is one of the critical factors in the presence of single candidates.

Another thing that must be taken into account by all parties is the electoral impact of the existence of single candidates. Almost certainly, community participation will be reduced; they are lazy to come to the polls because the incumbent will win. Furthermore, the high cost of implementing democracy will feel more expensive and tend to be redundant because of the lack of participation. Single candidates not only make democracy taste bland but also run a deficit. Apart from that, our country is the third-largest democracy globally, with a relatively large number of parties; the existence of a single candidate in the regional head election is undoubtedly ironic. Democracy feels bland because elections are not competitive (Haryanto 2017). Surely single candidates will emerge as the winner, without working hard in the campaign and arguing with other candidates. Other impacts related to the emergence of single candidates are both a gap for political parties and the development of democracy, as well as the stagnated journey of decentralization and regional autonomy.

The existence of single candidates in each election is caused by, first, the value of "political dowry" requested by political party administrators to candidates who are interested in running for regional elections (Utami et al. 2020). Second, the pragmatism of political parties. Political parties, through shortcuts, do not want to carry other candidates for fear of losing. As a form of pragmatism, they take a

single candidate who will definitely win (Rosanti 2020). Third, the existence of single candidates cannot be separated from the complex requirements to become a candidate, either through political parties or individual (independent) channels. In the end, those who want to advance to become candidates for regional heads have to spend a lot of money. On the other hand, the Pilkada only provided for those who had sizeable financial support (Khairi 2020).

In the end, the Pilkada was only procedural, which in practice was also flawed and distorted by the increasing number of single-candidate pairs in the Pilkada event. Political parties and/or oligarchs take advantage of democracy as a vehicle for power, which controls resources, including political, economic, and natural resources (Ekowati 2019).

### **Juridical factors of single candidacy**

The elections before 2015 continued as usual until the emergence of a single candidate who raised questions from various parties about whether the regional head elections would continue or not (Pahlevi et al. 2021). This is because no statutory regulation addresses single candidate issues (KPU 2020d). The General Election Commission (KPU) then issued the General Election Commission Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 14 of 2015 concerning the Election of Governors and Vice Governors, Regents and Vice Regents, and Mayors and Vice Mayors with One Candidate Pair. In the provisions of Article 14 paragraph (1) it reads:

“The means used to vote in the Election of 1 (one) Candidate Pair uses a ballot containing a photo of a Candidate Pair, the name of the Candidate Pair and a column to give the choice of agreeing or disagreeing.”

Furthermore, in 2018, the KPU made another regulation with the provisions of Article 18 of the General Election Commission Regulation Number 13 of 2018 concerning Amendments to the General Election Commission Regulation Number 14 of 2015 concerning the Election of Governors and Vice Governors, Regents, and Vice Regents, and/or Mayors and Vice Mayor with One Candidate Pair (KPU 2020a), reads: “Voting for the Election of 1 (one) Pair of Candidates by casting 1 (one) time on the column containing the photos of the Candidate Pairs or the blank column without a picture.”

According to the 2020 regional head elections Law (UU Pilkada 2020), a single candidate can win if he/she can get more than 50 percent of the votes. If less or less than empty boxes, the regional head elections are postponed to the next regional head elections, and the regional head is filled with an acting officer (Pelaksana Jabatan) appointed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (*Kementerian Dalam Negeri*). The following are the provisions in Article 54D of the Election Law: First, Provincial KPU or Regency / Municipal KPU shall determine the elected candidate pair in the election of one team of candidates if more than 50% of the votes are valid. Second, if the number of votes from the candidate pair is lacking, the candidate pair that loses the election may run again in the next election. Third, the next election, as referred to in paragraph (2), shall be repeated in the following year or carried out following the schedule contained in the statutory regulations. Fourth, if no pair of candidates have been elected regarding the election results as referred to in paragraph (2) and paragraph (3), the Government shall assign the acting Governor, the acting Regent, or the acting Mayor. Fifth, KPU Regulations regulate further provisions regarding the election of 1 (one) pair of candidates.

The rules for selecting a single candidate during the regional head elections 2020 are regulated in articles 18 and 18A. The voting for the election of one pair of candidates is carried out by casting one vote at: (1) Column containing the photo or name of the Candidate Pair and (2) Empty column with no image. Besides, the list of Candidate Pairs in the election of 1 (one) pair of candidates contains: (1) Serial number, photo, name, vision, and mission of the pair of candidates and (2) Empty column with no image. Ballot papers in the election of a single candidate are declared valid if signed by the chairman of the KPPS and given a punch mark in the column containing the photo or name of the pair of candidates or the blank column without a picture.

Based on the 2015 and 2018 General Election Commission Regulations, the ballot papers in the election of one pair of candidates to be punched contain two columns consisting of one column containing photos and names of the pairs of candidates and a blank column with no pictures (Hafid & Nugroho 2019). As a result, juridically, it has resulted in a crowd of Regional Head General Elections with one pair of candidates fighting against the empty column. This happens at the regency and city in various regions in Indonesia, such as Kediri Regency, Sragen Regency, and Semarang City.

### **Political dowry**

Political dowry seems to be commonplace because it is considered a political expense that will later be used as financing to run the wheels of the party vehicle. Political dowry, in this case, can be interpreted as a special gift in the form of money given to political parties to buy recommendations for political party decisions, as one of the conditions for becoming a candidate for the regional head (Yunus 2018). The practice of political dowry is alleged to be one of the causes for the emergence of a single candidate; this is thought to be related to the attractiveness of how much dowry the candidate has issued so that the candidate who cannot fulfill the dowry of politics cancels his/her candidacy at the last moment because of the lack of support gained from the party (Aspinall et al. 2017). Often, candidates who are considered capable of leadership capacity have to run aground halfway because they cannot pay the political dowry that is requested. This study agrees with the previous study (Anggraini 2018) that a person who wants to become a regional head must spend money as a political expense (political dowry) in Indonesia. Of course, this condition must be criticized as a severe problem in the mechanism for regional head elections starting from the provincial to regency and city levels.

The factors causing political dowry (Aspinall & Sukmajati 2016) include; First, parties lack funds because the campaign costs for winning campaigns are very high and expensive, making prospective regional head candidates must hand over money to parties which will later be used as party operational costs and victories. Second, oligarchy, in which political parties are only run by a few influential people from certain groups by showing excessive power. Third, the position of the offer where someone who does not have or is not a member of a political party but wants to run for the regional head elections, then tries to approach a political party that can raise his/her own popularise (Anggraini 2018). There is demand and supply in the form of a person offering himself/herself to be supported in regional head elections and a party asking for a political dowry.

Based on a legal review, political dowry is prohibited by Law Number 8 of 2015, which is amended into Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning regional head elections (Patarai 2019), which states; "Every person or institution is prohibited from giving compensation to a political party or coalition of political parties in any form during the nomination process for governors and deputy governors, regents, and vice regents, as well as mayors and vice mayors." This is an effort to improve the implementation of regional elections, considering that in the past, the practice of political dowry did not interfere with the law so it was only a discourse without being able to be supervised or even given sanctions.

Political dowry in Indonesian is political practice understood as an illicit deal that involves the provision of large sums of funds from candidates for elected office in the general election with political parties as the political support (Aspinall & Mas'udi 2017). Based on transactional tradition, it is almost certain that the candidate for the regional head, when elected, will not be concerned with the people who have voted for him/her; on the contrary, he/she will seek various ways to return the money that has been spent in the election (Patarai 2019). It is as if this threat is currently dominating when money becomes the main determinant in the procession of changing the country's leader (Farida 2019). The essence and purpose of political dowry are actually the same as money politics. Political dowry is intended to gain support from political parties to run for office, while money politics is intended to gain support from voters. In addition to having implications for high political costs, political dowries will produce leaders who are held hostage by the interests of a few elites. Therefore, it is important to monitor and ensure law enforcement against the giver and recipient of political dowry.

## Regeneration in political parties

Political parties have an important position in the Indonesian political system. In terms of the recruitment of political posts, for example, the results of the Amendment to the 1945 Constitution of 1999-2002 mandated the recruitment to fill political positions in government (executive), representatives (legislative), and judiciary both at the central and regional levels. By using a political party mechanism, this constitutional mandate shows that the function and existence of political parties are essential concerning filling state positions through democratic political mechanisms. Consequently, in this case, the process of regeneration and recruitment of political parties is necessary (Hanafi 2014).

The regeneration of political parties is two things that are interrelated in the development of political party organizations. Cadreization is crucial in an organization because regeneration is an effort to support the formation of personality integrity and the ability to intensively move others to prepare them to become leaders in the future (Shakerzadeh & Hamrahi 2016). There are two kinds of the regeneration process. First, informal regeneration, which is the process that can be seen from the operations of daily life in the community. This is seen from childhood to adolescence and adulthood as a process of forming identity and thought patterns. Second, proper regeneration, is the process of regeneration in a planned, systematic, directed, and institutional manner by the applicable laws and regulations within the organization or the political party (Harahap 2017).

The provisions show that political parties have an important position and role in the democratic system. Political parties play a role as a very strategic liaison between government processes and citizens. The higher the part and function of political parties, the more quality a democracy will run (Fealy 2014). However, recently, political parties have experienced a decline in the regeneration process. This can be seen from the increasing number of single colonies in the 2020 regional head elections with 25 single candidates, from the 2018 regional elections with 16 single candidates (KPU 2020b). The emergence of these single candidates is due to the failure of the regeneration process of political parties, which causes political parties not to have strong figures that can be nominated as regional heads. As a result, the parties prefer and support strong figures who are expected to win in regional head elections. This pragmatic attitude has led to the emergence of single candidates and instant cadres with the principle of "the important thing is to win" even though they are not the party cadres themselves (Aspinall & Sukmajati 2016).

Political parties should focus on cadre programs and party's political schools so that the parties can produce quality cadres. Cadreization is one of the things interrelated to the development of political party organizations. The cadre system must be implemented properly; this will create more qualified party cadres, thus closing the incident of parties bringing in regional head candidates who are not original party cadres (Sari & Fitria 2018). This regeneration system can be carried out by providing political education, character, and ethics to party cadres during the regeneration process. When there is an election moment, the party's regional head will have no difficulty finding cadres nominated as regional heads.

Pragmatism is widely practiced by political parties in terms of cooperation to build coalitions. This coalition was built in a very fluid and random way, without regard to the ideologies of opposing parties because this was considered a more effective strategy (Ekowati 2019). In addition, coalitions of political parties tend to carry popular candidate pairs with qualified electability. The purpose of a coalition that dominates and carries qualified candidates is more because these two things can be one of the factors in winning the election.

## Conclusion

The holding of direct and simultaneous Regional Head Elections is an effort of the Indonesian people to improve the quality of local democracy and regional governance, following the post-New Order

democratization agenda. The presence of single candidates is indeed constitutional because it is legal. Political parties take shortcuts and instants by utilizing the legal umbrella so that the emergence of single candidates is rife in several regions. The single candidates are rooted in the threshold regulatory system and the failure of political parties to carry out the function of a cadre of candidates for regional leaders.

Political elites are actively involved in the decision-making process with their inherent advantages, then gather all-party support to have no opponents in regional head elections. The impact of the political elites trying to limit the existence of competitors in the Pilkada is one of the critical factors in the presence of single candidates. The existence of single candidates in the regional head elections is undoubtedly ironic. Political dowries and the ineffectiveness of the party cadre system in producing regional leader candidates are one of the main factors for the emergence of single candidates in the 2020 Pilkada. The high political costs, ranging from dowries to obtain party recommendation letters to campaign costs to win political contestations, have become a serious problem in the regional head elections. The process of nominating regional heads cannot be separated from political transactions. By obtaining a letter of recommendation from a political party, a candidate for regional head must pay a dowry of up to billions of rupiah. This then hinders potential candidates with integrity from advancing in regional head elections. As a result, the letters of recommendation are bought up by regional head candidates who have a lot of money and single candidates appear in the regional head elections.

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