

HOW LOCAL DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING? SINGLE CANDIDATE, PRAGMATISM AND UNCOMPETITIVE LOCAL HEAD ELECTION IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT. This paper will examine how pragmatism has created rational choice behavior in candidate selection. Pragmatism has resulted in single candidates for local heads, which makes local democracy uncompetitive. The research method used is an explanatory approach that aims to explain how pragmatism as a rational choice behavior in the local government head election. Data were collected, compiled and analyzed using Nvivo 12 Plus software. The results showed that political parties as political institutions are very pragmatic in the selection of candidates for local heads. The incumbents utilized the support of almost all political parties based on clientelistic and programmatic relations. This has led the candidate selection process to prioritize pragmatic aspects, especially financial support, acceptability, and electability of candidates. The candidate selection process no longer determines ideological values at the official candidate selection process. Financial support for candidates has the highest priority for political parties in determining their endorsements in regional head elections. Meanwhile, the acceptability aspect refers to the dominant acceptance of all elites, cadres, and the mass base of supporters of the selected candidate. Electability is also a priority, although it is considered that electability trends are dynamic and able to change based on the level of competition. The behavior of political party elite actors and local head candidates eventually forms a rational choice pattern that makes local democracy backsliding.

Keywords: pragmatism; single candidate; democratic backsliding; rational choice institutionalism

INTRODUCTION

The first direct local head elections in the reform era were held in 2005. Since then, political parties have become an important pillar of local democracy. Political parties that meet the requirements can nominate candidates as pairs of candidates for provincial and local heads (Governor-Deputy Governor) in 33 provinces and district/city heads (Regent-Deputy Regent and Mayor-Deputy Mayor) in 509 regencies/cities across Indonesia. There are exceptions for regional heads in the Special Province of Yogyakarta and the administrative regencies/cities of the Special Capital Region of Jakarta. Regional heads are elected through direct democracy procedures to exercise decentralized power, while candidates from political parties are decided centrally (Reuters, 2015; Budi, 2020).

Democratic political systems protect the political rights of citizens to be nominated in the momentum of local elections (Djuyandi, et.al., 2023). Ideally, there is wide access for the best prospective leaders to advance in the political event of local head elections. Pragmatic political practices have resulted in local head elections being controlled by political oligarchs (Reuters, 2015; Winters, 2014; Hadiz & Robison, 2013). Politics without competition or with a single candidate has the potential to produce the worst local leaders (Lay et.al., 2017)

Single candidates in political contestation in Indonesia came after the provisions of Article 40 of Law Number 10/2016, which requires a minimum

threshold of 20 percent of seats and 25 percent of party votes. The opportunity is utilized by candidates to make themselves as a single candidate by “buying” all political party supports. Rational political calculations conclude that the chances of victory for a single candidate pair of regional heads are above 50%, compared to contesting with competitors, which will require higher political costs. Furthermore, some political parties do not have strong internal candidates to compete in the local head elections. Parties prefer to provide support to candidates who have a chance of winning even though the candidate has received sufficient support as a condition of candidacy. In the end, the election of a single regional head candidate is inevitable, especially for incumbent candidates (Karyono, 2017). Regional head elections followed by a single candidate are caused by the pragmatism of stakeholders in political parties (Rini, 2016; Rosanti, 2020; Widhiasthini, 2020). The situation is exacerbated by the victory of single candidates in the local head elections, which can hamper the process of local democracy because the checks and balances mechanism does not work (Romli, 2018).

Single candidates might undermine the democratic process because the position of the ballot does not affect the results in the primaries during candidate selection (Koppell & Steen, 2004). Local head elections with a single candidate make people less enthusiastic and unwilling to participate in the election or voting process (Mulyawati, 2017). The phenomenon of pragmatism that could lead to a single candidate is backsliding democracy in Indonesia,

especially local democracy (Waldner & Lust, 2018; Grumbach, 2023). In proper democratic system, there should be a challenger as a counterbalanced, so it will not allow the emergence of a single candidate who fights with an empty box, this is clearly inequitable (Ekowati, 2019).

In modern political systems, political parties are the main pillars of democracy. Political parties are political entities that were born to mediate the relationship between the state and citizens. The high expectations of citizens towards political parties require political party governance that is responsive and accommodating to the needs of members and supporters. Political parties are required to carry out the main functions for the continuity of the party system, the electoral system, and the political representation system (Sartori, 2005). One of the main functions of political parties is the sustainable recruitment of candidates. The aim is to educate them, before being promoted to compete for the formation of available public positions. However, weak political recruitment will leave the party lacking in the stock of candidates, making it vulnerable to being exploited by opportunists and political adventurers. On the other hand, the failure of regeneration will also result in party governance that will only be controlled by exclusive oligarchic elites, which in turn makes it difficult to practice internal democratization (Norris & Lovenduski, 1993; Budi, 2020).

Consideration of the candidate's financial strength is the basis for selection, not the candidate's leadership capacities. The phenomenon of single candidates that is increasingly prevalent in political contestation has increasingly questioned the function of political parties as a medium for regenerating political leaders (Prianto, et.al, 2022). The fact that political parties prefer to nominate a single candidate can be interpreted as the main goal of political parties is to protect their pragmatic interests. Political parties finally unite to maintain common interests to continue to survive, regardless of the commonality of ideology and political platforms. Coalitions that are built purely to achieve victory will show the weakness of the vision or ideology of political parties, which should be the basic struggle and benchmark in making political decisions (Yuslaini, 2017).

Political coalitions at the nomination stage are more tactical and based on vested interests. Pragmatism is political behavior that is adjusted to practical goals rather than ideological goals (Bakker, 2021; Lewerissa et al., 2021). This pragmatism has become more prevalent along with the strong ambition to remain in the circle of power or government. In the selection of candidates, the incumbent becomes a luxury goods and becomes the strongest candidate (Mustillo & Polga-Hecimovich, 2020).

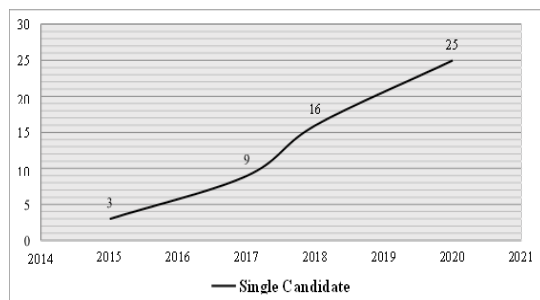
The pragmatism of political parties in selecting candidates for regional heads in Indonesia often means that there is no democratic competition in the contestation. Single candidates are the natural result of the pragmatism of political parties, where these political institutions are only concerned with instant victory, so they do not think about proposing other candidates. This phenomenon is supported by the findings of a case study in the British Parliament by Norris & Lovenduski (1993) which found that the practice of political recruitment processes by political parties is discriminatory, namely in the candidate selection process, the selection team's criteria become part of the instruments that can be used to create discriminatory practices. This study found that personal closeness significantly affects one's chances of being elected as a candidate, especially if the feudalistic and oligarchic party environment is favorable.

The pragmatism of political parties is characterized by the existence of a single candidate in local head elections in Indonesia, which is increasing every year. The existence of a single candidate in political contestation implies that political parties tend to ignore their ideological platforms and show their pragmatic nature to win democratic contestation (Prastya et al., 2021). In the context of rational choice theory, the actions of these elite actors are rational. The actors in political parties have conscious considerations. On the one hand, they are aware of their interests, and on the other hand, they are also aware of their potential. This awareness gave birth to a mutually beneficial relationship pattern between the political elite and the candidates for the promoted local heads.

The boundaries of distinction and identity that distinguish one party from another are increasingly unclear. Party movements and activities are more determined by material considerations rather than the ideological goals of a political institution. The nomination process in political momentum, such as regional head elections, is dominantly recognized by the pragmatic attitude of their elites. This pragmatism deviates from the standard behavior of political parties known in political science literature, namely vote-seeking parties, office-seeking parties, and policy-seeking parties (Strom, 1990). Many parties choose candidates in regional head elections not based on the largest number of votes, not based on the winning of local heads and deputy local heads, and not based on direct control of public policies in the local region area.

In the candidate selection process, there are at least three main problems faced by political parties (Syafhendry et.al, 2023): *First*, the institutionalization of organizational culture - in general, the values,

procedures, and rules of the game, as well as sanctions in political parties are non-negotiable. Almost all parties have Organizational Guidelines for candidate selection processes. Likewise, there are Screening Teams, Candidate Selection Teams, Local Head Election Desks, and the like to conduct internal selection stages, either through survey mechanisms, fit and proper tests, or other mechanisms. However, it also happens that the party always gives privileges for shortcuts to selected figures, which is contradictory to the order of values and organizational culture that it has built itself. *Second*, the practice of internal democratization - although it is the main pillar of democracy, the governance and decision-making of political parties are very undemocratic. Most political parties are personalized through their leaders. There is no federalization or delegation in political party decision-making (Budi, 2021). Everything is top-down; decisions are determined by the party's central leadership elite. Undercurrent aspirations often contradict the wishes of the central leadership, and in the name of unity of command, decisions must be carried out by party leaders in the local area. There can be no resistance, and no choice; it's do it or leave it off totally. *The third* is the ability to win - the capacity, resources, commitment, confidence, and mentality to fight and win. It is surprising to see a political party that has dominant power in the local parliament but allows its "quota" of local head elections to be given to other parties. Political parties such as these do not have a winning mentality, preferring to stay in the comfort zone as followers.



Source: General Election Commissions (2021)

Figure 1. Number of single candidates in regional head elections in Indonesia 2015-2020

Figure 1 shows that the number of single candidates in local head elections in Indonesia increases every year. The existence of a single candidate in political contestation implies that political parties tend to ignore their ideological platforms and show their pragmatic nature to win democratic contestation (Prastya et al., 2021). In the view of rational choice theory, the actions of these elite actors are rational. The actors in political parties have conscious considerations. On one side, they are aware of their interests, and on the other hand, they are also aware of their potential.

Political parties that are managed exclusively and centrally are the "main door" of decision-making under the control of donors and political investors. Money talks become the main value that prioritizes materially-financially strong figures in choosing local head candidates (Hidayaturrahman, et.al, 2022). Despite financial reasons that force party financial management to neglect party idealism, pragmatism in the selection of local head candidates in Indonesia often means that there is no democratic competition in the contestation. Single candidates are the result of political party pragmatism, where political institutions only pursue instant victory (Mazurkiewicz, 2021).

Research on local head elections with a single candidate has been widely conducted. Such as the results of research by Lay, et. al (2017) which found that many variables led to the election of local heads without contestation. Such as the financial strength of incumbent candidates to block competitors in the case of the Pati local head election and zero-sum game competition between local elites in the period before the local head election for the Jayapura case. Meanwhile, the study by Mazurkiewicz (2021) shows that in the case of Poland, the strong incumbent advantage has closed the space for contestation and ultimately weakened the competitiveness of the elections. The paper explains how ideological values and pragmatic values have formed rational choice behavior in candidate selection, resulting in a single candidate for local head that has caused political contestation to become uncompetitive. How pragmatic and ideological values in political parties explain the backsliding of Indonesia's local democracy.

METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with an explanatory approach. The purpose of this research is to produce in-depth findings that explain situations that cannot be measured by numbers. This research obtained qualitative data analysis results using NVivo 12 Plus software. The author chose this method because of the support of relevant secondary data, such as official websites of political parties and official websites of election organizers in electronic documents, statistical data, and digital reports. The secondary data processed consists of electronic documents, official websites of political parties, online news, and trending issues on social media.

The research was conducted on single candidate elections in Soppeng Regency and Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. This research explains the interaction and behavior of elites and organizational functionalization in operationalizing

political values in political party institutions. The object of this research is party leaders and elites at the provincial level. The selection of this object considers the position of the Provincial Leadership Council and as a strategic actor and a party that mediates the interests of the Branch/Chapter Leadership Council in selecting candidates.

This research focuses on measuring the ideological and pragmatic values of political party elites in selecting regional head candidates. The selection of proposing political party is based on ideological bases and new political parties as supporting parties, which represent aspects of recent trends in candidate selection.



Figure 2. Political parties that are the object of research

This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis. Data in the text analysis came from various research documents such as field interviews, news, and public opinion in mass media and social media. Primary and secondary data were analyzed in the form of an analysis spiral. There are five stages of the data analysis spiral, namely: (1) organizing data, (2) reading and making memos, (3) describing, classifying, and interpreting data into codes and themes, (4) interpreting data, and (5) presenting and visualizing data (Creswell, 2016). The qualitative data analysis spiral was analyzed with the help of the Nvivo 12 Plus software.

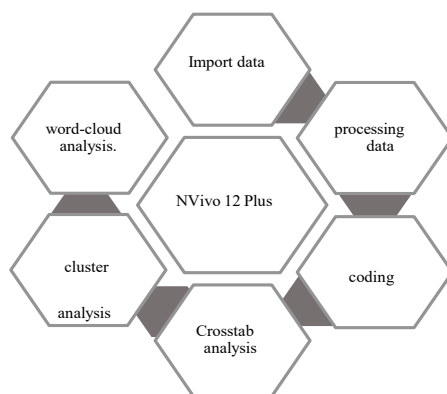


Figure 3. Data analysis techniques with Nvivo 12 plus software

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A Case of Single Candidate and Uncompetitive Local Democratic in Soppeng and Gowa Regencies

Candidate selection in political parties generally adopts open and closed methods. The open method involves the requirement and procedure to bring a

figure to be well known. Therefore, political parties function as a tool for qualified political elites to get public support. In general, the selection process of local head candidates internally within political parties is closed. The existence of formal and legal recruitment standards is not considered adequate to control non-formal behavior in the candidate selection process, making the selection arena vulnerable to material pragmatism. Opportunistic, pragmatic, and transactional behavior of party elites in the selection process will produce local leader candidates with low quality and integrity (Budi, 2020; Hidayaturrehman et al., 2020).

As part of political recruitment, the candidate selection process becomes a strategic arena in internal party power struggles. The historical comparison shows that the candidate selection mechanism is identical to the closed, mysterious, and secret arena of political parties. There is no room for citizens and party members to access the selection arena and activities. This condition is sarcastically referred to as *full of muddy water* to describe how dirty the determination of political party elites in the arena and candidate selection activities.

The role of political parties is very important in generating candidates for local heads in Indonesia. Political parties are positioned as promoters of elites from within the body and circles around their political parties to nominate candidates. As a result, the public does not have access and opportunity to assess the ability of the elites nominated by the party, which in turn will result in limited political choices. As a new emerging democracy, the challenge of political party governance will be faced with weak institutionalization that nurtures a political culture based on economic pragmatism (Jonhson Tan, 2015). Political parties are managed oligarchically and centrally, and the decision-making mechanism is based on the corporatization of politics which is based on profit-loss equations.

The governance of political parties in Indonesia requires enormous costs. Party organizations that are national and limited sources of party financing from the state and a high-cost general election system make parties seek funding from closed mechanisms. Pragmatism is characterized by the increasing number of single candidates in local political contestation. Many aspects of political parties can be attributed to the defects of the democratic process, ranging from the ideal value base to the value of pragmatism in political parties. The political value base will shape the collective actions and preferences of individuals and groups of political parties in achieving a goal (Krook, 2010).

Since the 2015 local head elections, there has been an increasing trend in the number of single

candidates. This state of affairs is usually attributed to the strong influence of economic and political oligarchies in the selection of local head candidates. A seamless path to backsliding local democracy

Table 1. Single candidate in local head elections in Indonesia 2015-2020

Year	Amount	Regency/City
2015	3 regions	Blitar Regency, Tasikmalaya, and Timor Tengah Utara
2017	9 regions	West Tulang Bawang, Pati, Landak, Buton, Central Maluku, Jayapura City, Tambrauw, Sorong City, and Tebing Tinggi City
2018	16 regions	Deli Serdang, North Padang Lawas, Pasuruan, Lebak, Tangerang, Tapin, Southeast Minahasa, Bone, Enrekang, Mamasa, Central Mamberamo, Puncak, Jayawijaya, Prabumulih City, Tangerang City, and Makassar City
2020	25 regions	Humbang Hasundutan, Pematang Siantar City, Gunung Sitoli City, Pasaman Regency, Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, South Ogan Komering Ulu, North Bengkulu, Kebumen, Wonosobo, Boyolali, Sragen, Grobongan, Semarang City, Kediri Regency, Ngawi, Badung, West Sumbawa, Kutai Kartanegara Regency, Balikpapan City, Gowa Regency, Soppeng, Central Mamuju, Raja Ampat, South Manokwari, and Pegunungan Arfak.

Source : *General Election Commissions (2021)*

Table 1 shows that the number of single candidates in Indonesia's local head elections is increasing yearly. In 2015 only 3 regions held regional head elections with a single candidate, then in 2017 and 2018, 9 regions and 16 regions, respectively. The local head election in 2020 drastically increased to 25 regions, giving rise to one candidate in the regional head election contestation. This condition raises a question mark: a country with a multi-party system does not show its existence as a democratic political institution.

The 2020 local head elections in Soppeng Regency and Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, also featured a single candidate after the incumbent local head bought all political party support. Incumbent local heads want to eliminate competition before going to the ballot box by not providing access for competitors to emerge. Local heads gain privileges as incumbents through clientelistic and programmatic relationships with voters and political parties, which in turn deny access to candidates for competitors and eliminate competition in local elections (Prianto, 2012; Mazurkiewicz, 2021).

Table 2. Political Parties Proposing and Supporting Single Candidate in the 2020 local head elections

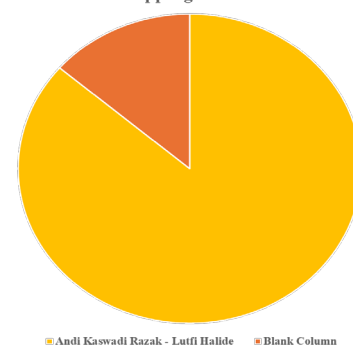
Candidates	Regency	Proposing & Supporting political parties
Andi Kaswadi Razak -Supriansah	Soppeng	Proposing Party: 1 Golkar 2 NasDem 3 PDIP 4 Demokrat 5 Gerindra 6 PKB 7 PPP Supporting Party 1 Gelora Party 2 PSI
Adnan Purichta Ichsan -Abdul Rauf Malaganni	Gowa	Proposing Party: 1 PKB 2 PDIP 3 Golkar 4 NasDem 5 PKS 6 Perindo 7 PPP 8 PAN 9 Demokrat Supporting Party 1 Gerindra 2 Gelora Party 3 PSI

Sources : *General Election Commission & Various Sources (2021)*

The results of candidate selection in political parties that resulted in a single candidate gave voters only the option of a single candidate and an empty ballot form. Since the designation of the single candidate, there has been no more competitiveness to get the best political leaders in the local elections. This single candidate dominates the political space in socialization and political campaigns during the preparation until the decisional results of the local head elections.

The results of the 2020 local head elections with a single candidate without competition in Soppeng Regency and Gowa Regency, placed majority support for the single candidate, as shown below:

Voters turn-out of Soppeng Local Head Election 2020

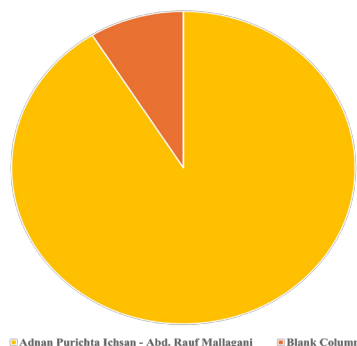


Source: *General Election Commissions (2021)*

Figure 4. The percentage of votes turned out by a single candidate in the 2020 Soppeng local head elections.

The vote turnout of 86,3 percent indicates the absence of competition. The mobilization of all political resources resulted in a majority of votes. The political power domination of incumbent candidates results in the loss of competition in free and fair elections.

Voters turn-out of Gowa Local Head Election 2020



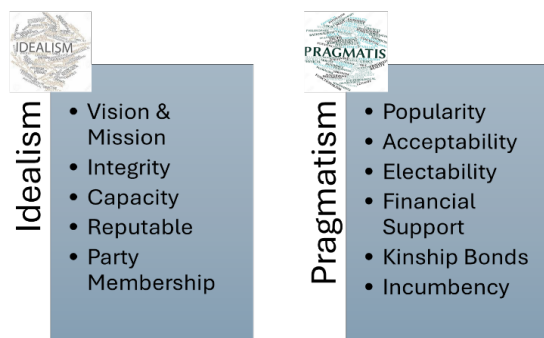
Source: *General Election Commissions (2021)*

Figure 5. The percentage of votes turned out by a single candidate in the 2020 Gowa local head elections.

The biggest result was in the local head election in Gowa. The absolute turnout of 91.1 percent showed the absolute superiority of the incumbent candidate. The political dynamics that occurred during the pre-election period become anti-climactic during the voting stage. The political competition was over when the voting had not started.

The existence of a single candidate in political contestation implies that political parties ignore ideological platforms and show their pragmatic behavior to prioritize being victorious in the contestation of local democracy. Based on the context of rational choice theory, the actions of this group of elite actors are rational. The actors in political parties have conscious considerations. On the one hand, they are aware of their interests, and on the other hand, they are also aware of their strengths. This awareness has created a unique pattern of relations between political elites and the candidates for local heads who are promoted.

Based on the content analysis of the values that influence political parties in the selection of local head candidates, the resulting map is as shown below

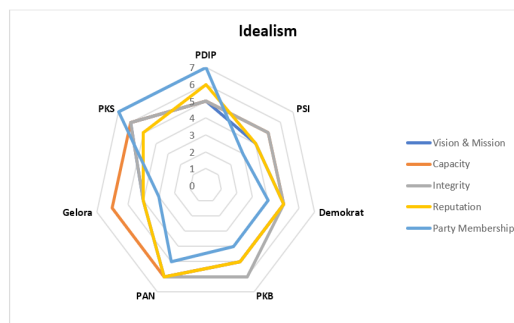


Source: *Source: Processed by researchers, 2024*

Figure 5. map frequency of pragmatic and ideological values in political parties

Declining idealism within political parties

The values of idealism are ideological-normative, showing the quality of candidates such as the vision-mission principle, capacity, integrity, leadership reputation, and membership in political parties. The operationalization of idealism is examined when encountering the practical challenges of selecting local head candidates in political parties.



Source: *Processed by researchers, 2024*

Figure 6. The idealism of political parties in the selection of local head candidates

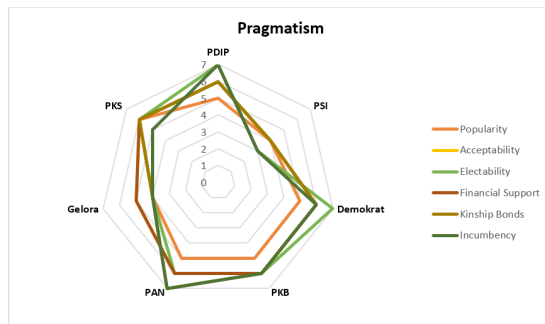
Figure 6 shows that the idealism of political parties in the local head elections of Soppeng Regency and Gowa Regency can be measured through vision and mission, organizational capacity, integrity, reputation, and party membership. Each political party has strengths in different aspects, PDIP and PKS have a high priority value in governing party membership by measuring the recruitment and regeneration system inside the party. Then PAN has a priority value on organizational capacity by measuring the level of education and track record of candidate leadership in political parties and bureaucracy. Meanwhile, PAN, PKB and the Democratic Party consider the integrity of candidates more than other parties. Then PSI and Gelora Party are new political parties that get low scores compared to other parties. In the 2020 Soppeng and Gowa elections, PSI and Gelora Party only played a supporting role, not as a proposing party. None of the political parties are optimal in internalizing the vision of the political party platform, even though the idealism of political parties can be achieved if the vision and mission of the party can be realized in political life.

Strengthening Pragmatism in Political Parties

Pragmatic values are based on electoral calculations such as aspects of popularity, acceptability, electability, financial support, family and kinship networks, and incumbency factors.

The pragmatism of political parties in Indonesia can be seen in Figure 7, from the priority of financial-based support, such as from the Democratic Party, PKB, PAN, PKS, and PDIP which are “top-tier” parties that get the highest scores, while PSI and Gelora, which are new

parties, have not sufficiently determined financial criteria for political support. Then in terms of incumbency, PDIP and PAN in Gowa district get the highest score because currently these parties are the ruling parties that place many of their political elites in the local legislature. This implies that the party will prefer the incumbent to be re-nominated in the local head election, even encouraging the contestation of a single candidate in the local head election with full support by all political parties.



Source: Processed by researchers, 2024

Figure 7. Political Party Pragmatism in Candidate Selection

Family bonds are also an important pragmatic factor for political parties in candidate selection. Figure 7 also shows that large political parties tend to have family ties in recruiting cadres and forming party membership. This certainly allows family ties to be influential in the candidate selection process. The other factor is electability, all political parties are most pragmatic and prefer candidates with high electability. Meanwhile, the popularity measure tends to have the same value in each political party, and the value tends to be low. This indicates that in candidate selection, popularity is not the main pragmatic reason for political parties to nominate candidates in political contestation.



Source: Processed by researchers with the Nvivo 12 Plus application, 2024

Figure 8. Word cloud analysis based on word frequency

Word cloud analysis is a metadata visualization of keywords in digital discourse, visualized textually from various source websites. The higher the level of frequency of keywords used, the more prominent

the word is compared to other keywords. Based on word cloud analysis processed with the NVivo 12 plus application, the election of local head candidates in Soppeng and Gowa Regencies displays keywords formed from the values, preferences, and organizational culture of political parties. The results of the analysis show that from a combination of all indicators of pragmatic and ideological values. The financial support of candidates gets the highest priority value for political parties in selecting candidates in the local head elections. Meanwhile, the acceptability aspect refers to the majority acceptance of all elites, cadres, and the support mass base of the elected candidate. Electability is also a priority, although it is considered that electability trends are dynamic and fluctuate according to the candidate's electoral political movements.

Based on the data available in the research object areas, the trend of the decline of local democracy is a inevitability. High-quality of democracy, which requires open competition with the availability of qualified alternative choices, has been eliminated from the candidate selection process in political parties. The failure of political parties, as important pillars of democracy, to present competitive local head candidates in aggregate has further weakened the quality of local democracy. Political parties, through the pragmatic interests of their strategic elites, prefer to avoid free and fair political competition. They want to have completed the contestation before the balloting is conducted.

More Pragmatism, Less Ideological; Contemporary Political Parties Behavior in Local Elections

Political parties, as pillars of democracy in a country, have conducted many undemocratic practices. Various pragmatic reasons for political parties in candidate selection have been internalized in party institutions. In electoral politics in Indonesia, institutional factors such as centralization, oligarchy, corporatization, and personalization in political parties have made political practices further away from democratic procedures (Budi, 2020; Crouch, 2004; Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Hopkin, 2005; Musella, 2015; Reuter, 2015; Winters, 2014). Political parties are previously initiated, formed, and developed by certain figures and groups, so that they will play a central role as party leaders. This historical capital is the main basis for political figures and their relatives in building exclusive circles of power in political parties. The existence of these figures and elite groups on the one hand will maintain the internal stability of the party, but on the other hand, it also plays a significant role in encouraging the birth of a centralized party governance model. Centralized party governance and various pragmatic decisions

have given birth to many undemocratic political practice phenomena, one of which is the emergence of single candidates in political contestation in Indonesia (Ekowati, 2019; Lewerissa et al., 2021; Rini, 2016; Romli, 2018; Rosanti, 2020). The rise of local head elections with a single candidate will gradually declining democracy, in a multi-party political order (Prianto et. al. 2022).

The value of idealism in political parties can be strengthened if the party performs concurrent internal party democratization. Furthermore, the idealism of political parties also has a positive impact on the candidate selection process, provided that democratic values are properly instilled. The institutionalization of idealistic values in politics provides a positive transitional impact towards a strong democracy (Ka-lok Chan, 2001). The democratic rules and procedures for political parties have been developed in political practice, but internal practices are still distorted. In the end, the democratic procedures will be subject to certain candidate qualifications based on experience, political connections, kinship, party service, financial resources, family prominence (big name), and organizational capabilities (Hazan & Rahat, 2006).

The cases of single-candidate elections in Soppeng Regency and Gowa Regency provide examples of how incumbents utilize the support of almost all political parties based on clientelistic and programmatic relations (Prianto et.al, 2021; Syafhendry et al. 2023). It has made the candidate selection process prioritize aspects of pragmatism, especially financial support, acceptability, and electability of candidates. The candidate selection process is not considered to be ideological at the stage of decision-making and validating supports.

The power and consolidation of political parties in relation to resource management is often undermined when elites or small groups have extensive access to party leadership at the central level, which should underline the importance of autonomy (Vedeld, 2000). In the neo-institutionalist perspective, collective action will be constrained by strong hierarchical networks. However, such predictions may be too simplistic as they do not consider the social and economic context in which patron-client networks exist (Shami, 2012). Diverse elite groups have the potential to build clientelism in the regional head nomination process. Clientelism can be the root of collective action (Auyero et al., 2009). The networks owned by political parties further strengthen the occurrence of collective action in choosing candidates for local heads. Various groups of external forces that have direct access to elites and political party leaders will open opportunities for political practices based on closeness, kinship, and

family relations (Hodgson, 2011). The pragmatic practices behind the emergence of a single candidate in local head elections have built the institutionalized practice of rational choice. The practice of selecting regional head candidates in political parties is characterized by principal-agent mechanisms, game theory, and rule-based.

CONCLUSION

The pragmatism of political parties is characterized by the existence of a single candidate in regional head elections in Indonesia, which is increasingly every single year. This fact has eliminated the race in a competitive democracy. The existence of a single candidate in political contestation indicates that political parties tend to ignore ideological platforms and show their pragmatic natures. This paper finds that ideological values and pragmatism have shaped the behavior of rational choice institutionalism in candidate selection, which results in uncompetitive single candidates for regional heads. The incumbent has the advantage of capitalizing on the support of almost all political parties, with a clientelist and programmatic relationship base. Meanwhile, the candidate selection process prioritizes aspects of pragmatism, especially financial support, acceptability, and electability of candidates. The candidate selection process is less ideological at the stage of decision-making and the validating of support. The pragmatic practices behind the emergence of single candidates in local head elections have ultimately declining local democracy in Indonesia.

The weakening of ideology and the strengthening of pragmatism in political parties are prerequisites for the decline of local democracy. Political parties as the most prominent actors in democracy are unable to encourage electoral democracy to become increasingly competitive. Pragmatism has become the main value for party elites in determining strategic political decisions, which has an impact on the quality of local government leadership. Political parties have drawn the competition into the pre-election period, through various ways of domination, political blocking, and the mobilization of formal power resources. Political parties have calculated that it is more affordable to have competition without competitors, even though it further weakens the quality of democracy.

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