



Discourse on Procedural Democracy: Study of the “Empty Box” Phenomenon in Regional Head Elections

Ervan Kus Indarto¹; Sultoni Fikri²

¹ Universitas Airlangga, Surabaya, Indonesia

² Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Surabaya, Surabaya, Indonesia

E-mail: sultonifikri@untag-sby.ac.id

<http://dx.doi.org/10.47814/ijssrr.v5i12.656>

Abstract

The practice of procedural democracy has fostered power elitism. Elitism departs from the argument that democracy is limited as a procedural representation of power to defend or seize political and economic advantages. Elitism gives limited space for the representation of power to citizens. Because citizen participation is widely considered to be a danger to power, elitism has reduced the representation mechanism between citizens and the political elite that controls and determines the common good. The “empty box” phenomenon describes the practice of power elitism as a critical discourse on procedural democracy. This study will demonstrate mapping the development of discourse about the “empty box” phenomenon from various literatures or studies that have been carried out. At least there are two discourses had been carried out about the phenomenon of “empty box” in regional elections, they were pragmatism of power from political elite and the practice of political personalization of the candidates. Both are placed in the section on criticism of the practice of procedural democracy. Elitism as a dominant structure is often legitimized by the rules of the game for general elections that do not reflect the application of the principles of free and fair political competition and participation.

Keywords: *Discourse; Procedural Democracy; Empty Box*

Introduction

The “empty box” phenomenon occurred in 53 regions that held regional head and deputy regional head elections (*Pilkada*) during the 2015-2020 period. This phenomenon occurs when an election is held which is followed by only one pair of candidates. So, in order to fulfill the competition dimension procedurally, in a general election, the “empty box” becomes the opponent to compete in the general election.

The context behind the “empty box” phenomenon occurred around 2015, when the Constitutional Court (MK) Decision Number 100/PPU-XIII/2015 became the basis for the implementation of the “new” norm to implement the regional elections. The Constitutional Court's decision has given political legitimacy to the implementation of the *Pilkada* even though it is followed by only one candidate pair (the Single Candidate). Namely, the selection of one candidate pair is carried out using a ballot paper containing two columns consisting of one column containing photos of the candidate pairs and one blank column with no pictures. The term “Empty Box” is a representation of the competition relationship between “Single Candidate” with an empty column that does not have a picture that was called “Empty Box”.

The competitive dimension that is followed by one pair of candidates was discussed referring to the definition of a democratic general election (free and fair election). Schumpeter (Schumpeter, 2010) and Huntington (Sahat Simamora, 1994) argue that general elections are considered democratic if they meet the elements of competition and citizen participation. Namely, the occurrence of fair competition between political parties or candidates and the participation of citizens who will assess and make decisions on the competition. Competition requires the involvement of at least two political parties or candidates in the competition, so that citizens are presented with alternative choices of providing support to one of the political parties or candidates elected in direct, general, free, secret, honest and fair general elections (Ramlan Surbakti et al., 2008).

The “empty box” phenomenon seems to give the meaning of competition in a narrow, limited and procedural way, voters are given the alternative of voting for the column marked with the image of the candidate pair or voting for the column without the image. The question is, does the “empty box” phenomenon really reduce the meaning of competition and citizen's political participation? Then, how is the development of the discourse on *Pilkada* followed by one pair of candidates (Single Candidate) in the context of democracy at the local level? This question is relevant to explain the political phenomena that occurred in the implementation of the regional head elections during the 2015-2020 period.

The discourse perspective has been widely used to explain various socio-political phenomena that occur. In fact, the discourse perspective, by involving certain topics on socio-political phenomena, can be used to demonstrate the mapping of the theoretical development of certain discourses. Such is the study conducted by Hikam (Muhammad AS Hikam, 1999) which explains the development of civil society discourse among intellectuals in post-New Order Indonesia. Likewise with the study conducted by Alwino (Alwino, 2017) which explains social justice in the perspective of discourse on social justice from the ideas of liberalism-Locke, equality-Marx, and justice as fairness from Rawls. Then, a study conducted by Olimid (Anca Parmena Olimid, 2016) also used discourse perspective to demonstrate the mapping of the development of civil society discourse in the context of post-communism society. Likewise, a study conducted by Muzaqqi (Fahrul Muzaqqi, 2019) using a discourse perspective tries to dialogue the discourse of deliberative democracy as a critique of procedural democracy.

The understanding of the “empty box” phenomenon has been based on the implementation arguments and the implications of procedural democratic practices (Lay et al., 2017), (Rahmanto, 2018), (Romli, 2018), (Chabibi, 2018). To complete the argument, this phenomenon needs to be placed in the context of democratic discourse as a critique of the practice of procedural democracy. The practice of power elitism which tends to place citizen participation solely as a source of legitimizing power. The political structure of procedural democracy has been proven to have created distant political relations between political representatives and the citizens represented, the culture of political pragmatism increasingly emphasizes that power elitism thrives among democratic practices that should place the political rights of citizens as holders of sovereignty as a pillar of the legitimacy of democratic power. The principle of competition and the participation of citizens as free will which has been neglected has degraded the essential value of the implementation of free and fair elections.

Discourse on Democracy: Criticism of Procedural Democracy

The study of democracy in the last decade provides an important note on the condition of the development of democracy in the world. Some democracy experts have a very pessimistic opinion about the condition of democracy. Levitsky and Ziblatt call it a democratic recession, a condition of decline in democratic norms that results in a crisis of public confidence in the democratic system in a country (Steven Levitsky & Daniel Ziblatt, 2018). Not because of ideological clashes after the cold war (1990s), but the decline of democracy occurred because political elites were elected from democratic procedures, hijacking democratic norms that brought political elites to power. The democratic recession begins with ignoring the essence of a free and fair democracy, attempts to hijack democracy "legally" in the sense that it is approved by modern democratic institutions, and even narrated through an agenda of efforts to improve democracy. An anxiety about the future of democracy that has hit countries in the Americas, which can be categorized as established democracies, but also becomes a similar concern in developing democracies. Countries that are experiencing stages of democratic transition to consolidated democracy.

The criticism of the modern democratic practice is not aimed at changing or replacing the democratic system with another political system. However, it provides a critical analysis of the narrative of procedural democracy that has trapped the practice of democracy into liberal democratic elitism.

The elitism of democracy departs from the argument that democracy is limited to representation of the power of political elites who benefit economically and politically from this power. Political elites control the political structure, hold power or are in the circle of power. On the other hand, democratic elitism gives limited space for "ordinary" citizens to represent power. Citizen participation is widely considered a danger to democracy. Then, democratic elitism reduces the mechanism of citizen representation by political elites who control and determine the common good. The practice of democracy is interpreted unilaterally (narrowly) as an instrument of legitimizing the power of the political elite without being able to significantly increase the participation and the living standard of the community through the process of making decisions and determining the common good. In the end, democracy is interpreted as strict procedures from the mechanism of competition of political elites for power, dichotomous division between political and private areas, and interpreting citizens' freedom negatively as a result of the reductions resulting from these strict democratic procedures (Fahrul Muzaqqi, 2019). Schumpeter and Huntington viewing democracy as a procedural mechanism for the legal transfer of elite power that will realize people's sovereignty through participation in political decision-making for the common good (Schumpeter, 2010), (Fahrul Muzaqqi, 2019).

The historical-comparative perspective illustrates that the journey of democratization in 'young' democracies is very diverse, even tends to experience a non-linear process. This means that not all countries that have experienced democratic transitions easily achieve conditions of more established and consolidated democratization. The democratic transition does not necessarily remain within the framework of a consolidated democracy, the democratic transition can fail and return to an authoritarian regime of power, perhaps even a 'new' authoritarian power regime actually gets political legitimacy from the democratic system itself. The prerequisite for consolidated democratization occurs when the regime of power as a result of these democratic processes is able to maintain (likely endure) political stability on an ongoing basis. This kind of democratic consolidation perspective is considered to be more focused on the continuity of the democratic regime which sometimes ignores the participation dimension as a representation of the relationship between the political elite and citizens. Supposedly, the consolidation of democracy as the linkage of empirical facts with the assumption of causality from the behavior of actors, actors' attitudes, and the political structure that surrounds them. This means that the consolidation of democracy is influenced and determined by the context of the political structure that influences the attitude of the officeholders, and the attitudes of the actors will influence their behaviour. So that the condition of a stable democracy is influenced by the relationship between the political structure-attitudes

of the political actors. The democracy paradox is a critique of procedural democracy so far. Democracy is not merely the existence of free and fair elections, democracy also demands accountability from representatives to those who are represented, even democracy essentially demands opportunity for citizens to participate in the political process (Kris Nugroho, 2001) (Zamroni, 2007) (Kacung Marijan, 2010) (Legowo et al., 2013) (Nainggolan, 2016) (Valina Singka Subekti, 2015).

Elections are the simplest (and narrowest) meaning of the democratization process, or often referred to as procedural democracy, namely the competition of political parties and/or political leaders candidates to convince the people to elect them to occupy positions in government (legislative or executive) at the central or regional government. Elections are a very important democratic instrument to realize the democratic state that has been echoed so far (Sultoni Fikri, 2021). Democracy is understood as the right of political parties or candidates who win elections to govern and to make and implement policies related to the public interest. Thus, democracy is understood as the practice of contestation/competition between political parties and/or election candidates (contestants) as well as the involvement of citizens who make decisions in the form of support or rejection as a result of the competition. Democratic procedures and democratic institutions represent a single norm, so that the degree of democracy in a general election is considered a democratic election (free and fair election) if it fulfills the principle of predictable procedure (certainty of the rules of the election game).

However, it is often that the dynamics of competitive politics as a political arena of contestation cannot be fully controlled by democratic procedures that represent a single norm (neutral, autonomous, without interpretation), a provision of the rules of the game is a procedure that is obeyed by all elements of the election as an arena of competition to maintain or seize power. The rules of the game are a form of single norm, regulating the electoral procedural mechanism, namely the provisions in the constitution and other statutory regulations regarding the implementation of elections.

Political Pragmatism

The study of the "empty box" phenomenon is positioned in a critical discourse on the practice of power pragmatism as a form of electoral democracy anomaly at the local level. For example, a study conducted by Mujiburrohman explains that the involvement of investment of politics has influenced the local level contestation map, it can even affect the nomination map until political parties agree to carry a single candidate in the *pilkada* (Mochammad Alexander Mujiburrohman, 2017). The concept of investment of politics is a form of fund commitment with a definite amount to get an uncertain return in the future. Generally, political investment is in the form of financing the candidate's win, to ensure the candidate's win rate, a person or group acting as a political investor provides prerequisites (even guarantees) of the candidate's victory. So that the phenomenon of a single candidate is explained as a competition that is followed by a pair of candidates, thus the victory rate of a candidate to win is very large, it is unlikely that an election with a single candidate can be defeated in the election.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Romli explained that in order to achieve victory, political parties tend to carry candidates with high electability even though they have low integrity and capacity (Romli, 2018). Political parties jointly carry a single candidate pair, even though they lack integrity and capacity. The defeat of a single candidate in the 2018 Regional Head Elections in Makassar City gave a signal and message to political parties and oligarchs that the people would not choose a leader who did not represent the aspirations of the voters. This is in line with the study conducted by Ngenget which explains the *pilkada* with a single candidate as a phenomenon of political pragmatism from political parties (Ngenget, 2020). Kusmayadi responds to the "empty box" phenomenon as a cartel political practice (Kusmayadi et al., 2019). The characteristics of political cartel, among others: first, the loss of the role of party ideology as a determinant of coalitions between parties. Second, permissiveness in forming coalitions. Third, there is no opposition that really criticizes the government. Fourth, elections

have no effect in determining party behaviour. Fifth, political parties tend to act collectively as groups. Different from previous studies, Yashinta Sastaviana Hikmania (Yashinta Sastaviana Hikmania, 2018) and Cornelis Lay (Lay et al., 2017) use the concepts of Contested Election and Uncontested Election to explain the phenomenon of *pilkada* with one candidate pair.

Political Personalization Practice

The study of the “empty box” phenomenon is positioned in a critical discourse on the personalization politics of candidates or candidate pairs. Damanik reviews the implementation of the *pilkada* with a single candidate to explore the candidate's perception as a single candidate in the *Pilkada* (Damanik, 2020). The concept of *the desire of power* becomes interesting in the search for meaning to the candidate as the sole candidate in the *Pilkada*. The phenomenon of single candidate as a form of clientelist-based political exchange and patron-client politics (Chabibi, 2018). A single candidate as a patron controls the power resources that come from political parties and other political elites. Clientelist relationships occur when political parties and local political elites act as clients by providing support for candidacy as a practice of political exchange. Quoting the theory of political exchange (connection with the exchange), political exchange occurs between political support for a single candidate as a patron, while political parties and political elites as clients will get certain benefits as the value exchanged (Chabibi, 2018). The implications of the practice of political exchange on the emergence of a single candidate are, among others: first, mobilized participation. Single candidates gain political legitimacy from political parties, political elites, and voters through a support mobilization model with rewards as exchanged values. Second, the degradation of the quality of local democracy. Third, clientelism and patron-client relations have the potential to give birth to a government at the local level that is more likely to distribute political and economic resources to political elites in the power circle. The elitism of democracy, behind democratic procedures, is political legitimacy obtained by manipulating support, so that the resulting government practice is a reflection of the power of the political elite at the local level.

The manifestation of citizen sovereignty through the right to vote when faced with the practice of choosing only one candidate pair (Rahmanto, 2018). The implementation of the *pilkada* should be accompanied by a guarantee that the election mechanism is held in a democratic contest where the rights of the people as the holders of sovereignty should not be ruled out or ignored, even more so. The single candidate as a practice of electoral democracy has degraded the right to vote and the right to vote for citizens as well as the principle of free and fair competition. First, competition/contestation without coercion that involves democratic procedural mechanisms to maintain or fight for positions as state administrators who have effective government power. Second, broad citizen participation in determining political representatives as state administrators (read: leaders) through regular and fair elections, in such a way that no group is excluded.

Summary

The elitism of power as the dominant political structure is the result of an interpretation of norms in the electoral rules (written text) of democratic institutions. Analysis of the interpretation of written texts (legal norms, other election rules, laws and regulations regarding the election of regional heads and deputy regional heads) becomes a fundamental point of departure for understanding the working political structure and the resulting structural changes. Constitutional determinism has a significant influence on reducing the meaning of competition norms as well as reducing the meaning of the voter voting formula in the *pilkada* where one pair of candidates participates.

References

- Alwino, A. (2017). Diskursus Mengenai Keadilan Sosial: Kajian Teori Keadilan dalam Liberalisme Locke, Persamaan Marx, dan “Justice as Fairness” Rawls. *MELINTAS*, 32(3). <https://doi.org/10.26593/mel.v32i3.2696.309-328>.
- Anca Parmena Olimid. (2016). Managing the Concept Mapping of Civil Society: A Relational Analysis of its Targeted Topics for Public Participation and Democratization Practice. *Revue Des Sciences Politiques*, 49, 42–55.
- Chabibi, M. (2018). Pertukaran Politik Calon Tunggal Dalam Pilkada: Studi Kasus Pilkada Kabupaten Pasuruan 2018 Political Exchange of Single *Journal.Unair.Ac.Id*, 5(4).
- Damanik, E. L. (2020). The desire of power: Candidate ambiguity and incumbent monopoly in local leaders’ election. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.20473/mkp.v33i32020.286-298>.
- Fahrul Muzaqqi. (2019). *Diskursus Demokrasi Deliberatif di Indonesia*. Pusat Penerbitan dan Percetakan Universitas Airlangga (AUP Press).
- Kacung Marijan. (2010). *Sistem politik Indonesia : konsolidasi demokrasi pasca orde baru*. Kencana Prenada Media Group.
- Kris Nugroho. (2001). Konsolidasi Demokrasi. *Masyarakat, Kebudayaan Dan Politik*, 14(2), 25–34.
- Kusmayadi, E., Satori, A., & Agung, S. (2019). Cartel Politics Model in Single Candidate Election in Tasikmalaya Regency. *Proceedings of the Proceedings of the 1st International Symposium on Indonesian Politics, SIP 2019, 26-27 June 2019, Central Java, Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.25-6-2019.2287977>.
- Lay, C., Hanif, H., Ridwan, & Rohman, N. (2017). The rise of uncontested elections in Indonesia: Case studies of Pati and Jayapura. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 39(3). <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs39-3b>.
- Legowo, S., Krisnadi, I., & Sumartono, H. (2013). Dinamika Politik Rezim Orde Baru Di Indonesia Studi Tentang Kegagalan Konsolidasi Politik Rezim Orde Baru Pada Tahun 1990-1996. *Publika Budaya*, 1(1).
- Mochammad Alexander Mujiburrohman. (2017). *ANOMALI DEMOKRASI: STUDI PROSES KEMUNCULAN CALON TUNGGAL DALAM PILKADA KABUPATEN BLITAR 2015* [Thesis]. Universitas Airlangga.
- Muhammad AS Hikam. (1999). Diskursus Intelektual tentang Civil Society di Indonesia. *Jurnal UNISIA*, 22(30), 15–24.
- Nainggolan, P. P. (2016). Peran Kapital dan Gagalnya Konsolidasi Demokratis Indonesia: Pendekatan Ekonomi-Politik. *Politica*, 7(1).
- Ngenget, I. (2020). Single candidates in direct election in Tangerang City, Tangerang Regency, Lebak Regency, Makassar City. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, 13. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v13i1.1956>.
- Rahmanto, T. Y. (2018). Calon Tunggal dalam Perspektif Hak Memilih dan Dipilih di Provinsi Banten. *Jurnal HAM*, 9(2). <https://doi.org/10.30641/ham.2018.9.103-120>.

- Ramlan Surbakti, Didik Supriyanto, & Topo Santoso. (2008). *Perekayasaan Sistem Pemilu Untuk Pembangunan Tata Politik Demokratis*. Partnership for Governance Reform Indonesia.
- Romli, L. (2018). Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal. *Jurnal Penelitian Politik*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.14203/jpp.v15i2.757>.
- Samah Simamora. (1994). *Partisipasi Politik Di Negara Berkembang*. Rineka Cipta.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (2010). Capitalism, socialism and democracy. In *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203857090>.
- Steven Levitsky, & Daniel Ziblatt. (2018). *How Democracies Die*. Baror International.
- Sulton Fikri. (2021). Upaya Hukum Dalam Penyelesaian Sengketa Hasil Pemilihan Kepala Desa. *Maleo Law Journal*, 5(1), 86–103.
- Valina Singka Subekti. (2015). *Dinamika Konsolidasi Demokrasi: Dari Ide Pembaharuan Sistem Politik Hingga Ke Praktik Pemerintahan Demokratis*. Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia.
- Yashinta Sastaviana Hikmania. (2018). *Pergulatan Konsep Contested Election Dan Uncontested Election: Studi Kasus Pilkada Kabupaten Pati Tahun 2017* [Thesis]. Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Zamroni, M. I. (2007). Jalan Terjal Transisi Demokarsi Relasi Negara-Masyarakat Menuju Konsolidasi Demokrasi. *Unisia*, 30(63). <https://doi.org/10.20885/unisia.vol30.iss63.art4>.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).