

SINGLE CANDIDATE AND THE DYNAMICS OF THE 2024 MAROS REGIONAL ELECTION

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Abstract

The 2024 Simultaneous Regional Election (Pilkada) in Maros Regency featured a single candidate pair, Chaidir Syam and Muetazim Mansyur, who were supported by the majority of political parties in the local parliament. This phenomenon reflects the dynamics of local politics characterized by the formation of large coalitions, weak party cadre regeneration, and the dominance of political elites that encourage pragmatism in nominating regional leaders. This paper aims to analyze the strategies and considerations of political parties in supporting a single candidate, as well as its implications for the quality of local democracy. The method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques including documentation studies, interviews with party officials, and a review of KPU and Bawaslu regulations related to the nomination process. The findings show that political parties tend to prioritize stability and electoral certainty rather than opening space for healthy political competition. This leads to fewer political choices for voters and potentially lowers public participation. These findings indicate the need for stricter regulations regarding candidacy and the strengthening of party cadre development within the local democratic system.

Keywords: 2024 simultaneous regional election, single candidate, political parties, Maros regency, local democracy, coalition, cadre regeneration

A. INTRODUCTION

The process of regional head elections (pilkada) serves as an instrument of local democracy that functions not only as a political contestation arena but also as a reflection of the dynamic relationships among political actors, both individuals and institutions. In Indonesia, the implementation of simultaneous regional elections has become a routine agenda within the framework of democratic consolidation, where the involvement of political parties plays a central role. This is because political parties hold essential functions as vehicles for political recruitment, interest aggregation, and the formal mechanism for nominating regional leaders, as regulated in Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors. Thus, every political configuration that emerges in regional elections, including the phenomenon of a single candidate, cannot be separated from the strategic role of political parties in determining the direction of support and the map of political competition.

The phenomenon of a single candidate has become one of the political dynamics that is particularly interesting to examine. Since its first appearance in the 2015 simultaneous regional elections, the presence of single-candidate pairs has often sparked debate. On one hand, the single-candidate phenomenon is considered a consequence of a political system that provides space for large party coalitions to unite behind one candidate—usually a figure with high electability, a strong track record, and access to significant political and economic resources.

In the context of the 2024 Maros Regency Regional Election, this dynamic is clearly reflected. Maros Regency, located in South Sulawesi Province, became one of the regions exhibiting a notable phenomenon: the emergence of the candidate pair Chaidir Syam and Andi Moetazim as the sole contestants, supported by all political parties holding seats in the Maros Regency Regional House of Representatives (DPRD). This occurrence is certainly not accidental, but rather the outcome of a long political process involving rational party calculations, elite negotiations, and electoral considerations oriented toward securing victory. The unanimous support from all political parties for a single candidate pair demonstrates how internal party mechanisms—both at the local level and through central party intervention—operate in shaping strategic decisions.

The success of Chaidir Syam and Andi Moetazim in securing complete support from political parties is also inseparable from their personal image and leadership qualities. As incumbents, the pair brought strong electoral capital, in the form of high popularity and government performance that was relatively well appreciated by the public. Meanwhile, Andi Moetazim strengthened the political legitimacy with a broad and stable social support base. Their combination presented a pair perceived as the most capable and highly likely to continue leadership in Maros for the next five years. From the perspective of political parties, supporting this pair meant avoiding significant political risks—whether losing the chance of victory or being sidelined from access to regional power. However, behind the decision to support a single candidate lies a complex internal bargaining process within political parties. Each party has its own mechanisms for recruitment, candidate screening, cadre preparation, and candidate selection—whether through internal deliberations, recommendations from the Central Executive Board (DPP), or electability and popularity surveys that serve as key considerations. In the 2024 Maros regional election, the unified support of all parties indicates that these internal mechanisms ultimately converged on a single point: the shared conclusion that supporting Chaidir Syam and Andi Moetazim was the most rational choice. This is

where the significance of this study lies, as it reveals how the internal processes of various parties could collectively arrive at a consensus without producing alternative candidates.

Political parties in Maros chose to set aside traditional differences and rivalries to build a large coalition considered politically safer and more advantageous. This illustrates that political parties function not only as democratic institutions but also as entities driven by cost-benefit calculations. Consequently, the single-candidate phenomenon in Maros in 2024 provides a concrete example of how the function of political parties in local democracy may shift from competition to consensus-building.

Furthermore, this study on party bargaining in the emergence of a single candidate in Maros Regency is important not only for understanding local political constellations but also for assessing the extent to which democracy at the regional level is capable of ensuring healthy political competition. If the phenomenon of single candidates continues to recur, it must be analyzed within the broader framework of democratic sustainability in Indonesia. Democracy requires not only voter participation but also diverse political choices as a manifestation of popular sovereignty.

Based on these considerations, this paper focuses on analyzing how Chaidir Syam and Andi Moetazim succeeded in consolidating the support of all political parties in Maros Regency, as well as how the internal bargaining processes within parties unfolded to produce a consensus leading to a single-candidate outcome in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections. The author hopes this study contributes to a deeper understanding of local democratic practices in Indonesia, particularly in explaining the interactions among political parties, candidates, and society within the context of a single-candidate regional election. Moreover, examining party bargaining in producing a single candidate in Maros is essential not only for understanding local political dynamics but also for evaluating whether regional democracy remains capable of generating healthy competition. If the single-candidate pattern persists, it deserves further scrutiny in the broader context of Indonesia's democratic endurance, as democracy requires not only voter participation but also the availability of diverse political choices as an expression of the people's sovereignty.

B. WRITING METHOD

This paper employs a qualitative approach with a case study method in which Maros Regency serves as the main unit of analysis. Data collection techniques include documentation studies of regulations, media reports, and political party documents, complemented by in-depth interviews with key informants such as party leaders and officials, election organizers, community figures, and local observers. The data were analyzed descriptively and analytically to reveal internal party dynamics, elite negotiation processes, and their implications for local democracy.

C. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Political Dynamics and Responses in Maros 2024

In the 2024 regional elections nationally, several regions had only one candidate pair (paslon) instead of two or more. In Maros Regency, the final decision also resulted in only one candidate pair being officially determined: incumbent Regent Chaidir Syam paired with Muetazim Mansyur as the vice-regent candidate. Initially, Chaidir and his previous running mate registered together, but the registration was canceled because the vice-regent candidate failed the health examination and was thus declared ineligible. Following this, Chaidir Syam replaced his running mate and re-registered at the Maros Regency General Elections Commission (KPU). After the verification of the candidate requirements and nomination documents, the pair of Chaidir Syam and Muetazim Mansyur was declared eligible to run for Regent and Vice-Regent of Maros and became the sole candidate pair officially endorsed by the KPU Maros.

This decision was made after the initial running mate, Hj. Suhartina Bohari—the incumbent vice-regent—was declared Not Meeting Requirements (TMS) due to health evaluation results. As a consequence, an official replacement process was conducted by KPU Maros, including an extended schedule for health examinations. Ultimately, only this pair was confirmed as candidates, resulting in the Maros 2024 election becoming a contest between a single candidate pair and the empty box (—kolom kosong). This situation gives the Maros Pilkada its distinct character compared to regions with multiple candidates, and raises important questions about the quality of local democracy.

The 2024 Maros Regent and Vice-Regent Election was therefore held against an empty box, meaning voters could either choose the candidate pair or choose the empty box as a form of protest, disagreement, or an alternative to a competition-free election. As part of preparation, the General Elections Commission of Maros even held special voting simulations for a single-candidate election to anticipate technical challenges and ensure voting and vote-counting procedures remained valid and secure. Voters were presented with only one candidate or the option to reject them through the empty box, a situation widely considered unusual and far from ideal in a competitive democracy.

Factors Behind the Emergence of a Single Candidate

Based on preliminary analysis and existing literature:

a. One of the national causes behind the emergence of single candidates is the suboptimal cadre development within political parties. Many parties are either unwilling or unable to prepare alternative candidates. As a result, when one candidate pair fails to meet administrative or health requirements, no replacement candidates are available. In the 2024 context, a structural factor also played a role: the close timeframe between the national legislative elections and the regional elections. This pushed political parties to focus on national-level contests and—securely—incumbent candidates, leading to oversized coalitions and making it difficult for rivals to emerge. In Maros, the immediate trigger was the health-test failure (TMS) of the initial running mate; replacing the candidate caused delays in registration, and since no other candidates registered, only one valid candidate pair remained.

b. Additionally, political strategy and the formation of a large coalition contributed to this situation. In Maros, the single candidate pair was supported by numerous parties, demonstrating that the political configuration effectively—locked in—a single-candidate outcome.

Thus, a single-candidate election is not merely a procedural accident but also a product of party structural conditions, regulatory frameworks, and local political dynamics.

Democratic Implications: Opportunities and Risks

Some argue that although there is only one candidate pair, the election can still carry democratic meaning: voters still have the option to choose the candidate pair or vote for the empty box (kolom kosong). For election organizers, this situation can even be technically simpler. In Maros 2024, for example, the Maros Election Commission (KPU) still carried out all stages fully, including ballot-casting simulations specifically designed for a single-candidate election to ensure validity and procedural accuracy. On one hand, if the single candidate is genuinely representative and accepted by the public, the result may enjoy broad acceptance—sometimes even more than a victory obtained through a fiercely contested race, especially when the dominant party already holds strong influence.

Risks and Criticisms Toward Local Democracy in the Maros 2024 Single-Candidate Election

Both the case of Maros and findings from broader literature highlight several serious concerns:

1. Declining quality of local democracy.

Regional elections are supposed to be arenas of competition—of ideas and leadership figures. When only one candidate pair participates, citizens lose the opportunity to choose alternatives. Democracy becomes a formality, rather than an expression of free choice.

2. Risk of apathy and abstention. With limited choices, many voters may choose the empty box or abstain entirely, raising questions about the legitimacy of the elected leader.

3. Political parties losing their cadre development function. The single-candidate phenomenon reflects a failure of parties to prepare alternatives, hindering the emergence of new political figures. For smaller or mid-sized parties, this can be especially harmful in the long term.

4. Potential dominance of elites/incumbents and misuse of power by civil servants (ASN).

Opportunities for abuse of power increase. For instance, there were reports of alleged violations of ASN neutrality in Maros, where civil servants were perceived to be openly supporting the single candidate pair. These cases were processed by election oversight bodies.

5. Weakening perceptions of legitimacy and political fairness. Citizens may feel their choices are overly restricted, leading them to view the election results not as genuine representations of the people's aspirations but as administrative impositions shaped by structural political conditions rather than collective public will.

6. Even with only one candidate pair, KPU Maros still held a public debate—though not between competing candidates, but rather a presentation of the candidate's vision and mission. This reflects efforts to maintain transparency and offer the public space to understand the candidate. To prepare for voting in a single-candidate context, the election organizers conducted special simulations to ensure ballot papers, polling stations, empty box procedures, and voting booths complied fully with regulations. In Maros, this simulation was carried out by the Indonesian General Elections Commission (KPU RI).

D. CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the 2024 Maros Regional Election and the broader phenomenon of single-candidate elections allow us to conclude the following:

The presence of a single candidate is an indicator of structural problems within local democracy, particularly concerning the quality of political parties, cadre development, and local political dynamics or coalition-building. Although procedurally the pilkada can still be considered valid through mechanisms such as the empty box option, public debates, and voting simulations, these do not automatically guarantee a healthy and representative democratic process.

Civil society, political parties, and election organizers need to collaborate in strengthening candidate pluralism, encouraging the emergence of alternative candidates, strengthening party institutions, and building mechanisms that ensure more competitive elections. For academics, researchers, activists, students, and democracy advocates, the 2024 Maros Pilkada serves as an important case study of local democratic anomalies, demonstrating that the quantity of voting and vote-counting processes does not necessarily equate to the quality of democracy.

Moving forward, it is essential to push for structural reforms in candidacy regulations, political education, transparency, and public oversight to ensure that local democracy remains vibrant—supported by real choices,

debates, and alternative leadership options.

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