



Challenges and weaknesses in political party coalitions for regional head elections in Indonesia

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Abstract

This article explores the challenges that weaken political party coalitions in regional head elections in Indonesia. Political parties must nominate candidates with at least 20% support from the regional people's representative council, but those that fail to do so must form coalitions with other parties. Despite the importance of coalition-building, the article argues that political party coalitions in Indonesia are weak and face several challenges. It identifies several factors that contribute to weak political party coalitions, including centralized control over partner selection, strong central board dominance, high political costs, and limited rights of regional political party administrators. The article emphasizes the importance of political party coalitions in the election process and the need to address these factors. It suggests greater regional autonomy, reduced centralization of power, and better financial mechanisms to support smaller parties as potential solutions.

Keywords: Political Party; Coalition; Election of regional head

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1. Introduction

In Indonesia, the election of governors and deputy governors, regents and deputy regents, mayors and deputy mayors (regional head elections) has been regulated by a separate law since 2014. This arrangement confirms that regional head elections are part of the regional autonomy regime, and have an impact on the institutions that resolve disputes over election results (Safwandy, 2019). The election of regional heads plays an important role in maintaining the quality of regional leadership and building communication with the people, as it is an implementation of the democratic system and a way to achieve general welfare. Therefore, the regional head election should be designed to provide maximum benefits for the community, socially, economically, culturally, religiously, and politically (Nugraha, 2016).

The democratization of the regional head elections, as a form of democracy at the local level, requires the support of all regional people. Implementing democracy in local politics is not easy, and it requires strong support and commitment from all parties to ensure that all citizens can participate optimally (Akbar, 2016). Since 2008, the development of the democratization of regional head elections has been marked by nominations submitted through two channels, political parties or coalitions of parties and individual candidates with certain conditions. Nominations by political parties or coalitions of parties are determined to be supported by at least 20% of the total members of the regional people's representative council (local parliament).

However, the history of the implementation of the regional head elections has been a tug of war between the central government and regional governments regarding whether the regional head election is included in the regional autonomy regime or the central government (Safwandy, 2019). The certainty of the regional head elections as part of regional autonomy is expected to be a means of learning the politics of the regional community. Still, the dominant role of the central authority in determining candidates proposed by political parties weakens the enthusiasm and strength of regional party officials.

The democratization of the candidacy for regional heads since 2012 has been marked by the presence of individual candidates participating in the competition (Constitutional Court, 2007). The election format for the regional head elections is regulated as follows: Participants in regional head and deputy regional head elections are pairs of candidates proposed by political parties or coalitions of political parties and individual candidate pairs supported by several people (Arianto, 2004). The granting of political rights for individual candidates in regional head elections followed the Constitutional Court's decision regarding individual candidates (Constitutional Court, 2007).

The high requirement of support of 20% to get qualified regional head candidates reduces the occurrence of social conflicts that have happened (Humaedi et al., 2018). However, the differences between the candidates for regional heads promoted by political parties can lead to social conflicts between supporters of political parties or pairs of candidates, which is very dangerous to social life as they face each other directly with elite leaders and local political actors (Hikmat, 2014).

To nominate a political party, one must form a coalition or join another party, which is the strength of political parties in Indonesia, both for regional head elections (Wospakrik, 2016). Therefore, the high number of support requirements for nomination makes political parties that do not have sufficient support to seek coalitions or support from other political parties to qualify for nomination, which weakens their position.

2. The function of political parties in Indonesian democracy

Political parties play a crucial role in determining the direction of a nation in a democratic system. They enable individuals to exercise their right to express their opinions about the nation's future and state. (Arianto, 2004). Political parties have five functions: aggregating the interests and values of various societal groups, creating and presenting their political party's election platform to the public, regulating the process of forming political will by providing structured policy alternatives, recruiting and training qualified personnel for public offices and parliament seats, and educating members about effective channels for political participation throughout the inter-election period (Meyer, 2012).

In regional head elections, political parties are essential for nominating candidates and recruiting members and potential leaders. They serve at least four functions: facilitating political communication, political socialization, political recruitment, and conflict management (Budiarjo, 2008).

According to Article 11 paragraph (1) of the Political Party Law, the functions of political parties are: a) to provide political education to members and the wider community to increase awareness of their rights and obligations as Indonesian citizens; b) to create a conducive climate for the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation for the people's welfare; c) to absorb, collect, and channel the community's political aspirations in formulating and determining state policies; d) to promote the political participation of Indonesian citizens; and e) to recruit political leaders through democratic mechanisms, taking gender equality and justice into account.

Political parties are fundamental pillars in the Indonesian constitutional system, helping to realize the nation's ideals as stated in the constitution (Ethan, 2021). In the process of political development, parties play a role in building a political system through national education (Rosana, 2012). Political parties also act as intermediaries and communicators between the government and the people, both in the process of policy-making and in disseminating the results of government policies (Wicaksono, 2017).

In regional head elections, political parties carry out strategic functions, recruiting and proposing candidates and providing socialization to supporters and the general public. They are also the driving force in gaining voting support for the candidates proposed by the parties.

The important function of political parties requires hard work from party officials at all levels to improve their performance and quality. Enhancing parties' performance and quality will significantly improve the quality of democracy and the political system's performance. Therefore, it is crucial to continuously improve the capacity, quality, and performance of political parties to realize the aspirations and volition of the people (Artis, 2012).

3. Direct election of regional heads in Indonesia

During the reform era, Indonesia saw significant changes in the election of regional heads. Prior to 2005, the Regional People's Representative Assembly was responsible for electing regional heads. However, Law Number 32 of 2004 paved the way for direct elections by the people.

Direct elections were implemented to address the weaknesses of the previous selection model, which often involved money politics and corrupt practices. By directly electing regional heads, citizens could have a more significant role in the recruitment process for regional political officials. This democratic approach would also help reduce the potential for corruption and ensure that regional heads are accountable to the people they serve.

In addition to promoting democratic values, direct regional head elections also have a constitutional basis. Article 18 paragraph (4) of the Indonesian Constitution stipulates that regional heads are appointed by the central government in consultation with the regional legislative council and the local community. Direct elections, as provided for under Article 6 paragraph (1) of the Constitution, also serve to align the presidential and vice-presidential election models.

Overall, direct election of regional heads has helped to promote democratic values in Indonesia by increasing citizen participation in the political process and reducing the potential for corrupt practices. However, there have been challenges in implementing these elections, including issues related to voter education and political campaign funding. Nonetheless, Indonesia's commitment to direct regional head elections is an essential step towards building a more participatory and accountable political system (Pratikno, 2007).

4. Weakness of political party coalitions in electing local heads

Indonesia's political landscape has been marked by weak political party coalitions in the process of electing local heads. One of the indicators of this weakness is the disharmony between regional heads and their representatives in implementing regional governance, which often leads to a split in the pair of regional heads/representatives during the administration of regional government (Indonesian Media). This situation highlights the need for stronger and more cohesive political party coalitions.

The weakness of party coalitions can also be examined in the nominating process for regional head elections. Several factors contribute to this weakness, including personal interests, factionalism within political parties, and a lack of political party ideology. These factors often lead to a fragmented political landscape, where political parties fail to present a united front and struggle to find common ground.

Moreover, the absence of a strong political party coalition poses a significant challenge for regional governance in Indonesia. Without a cohesive and unified coalition, regional heads may find it difficult to implement their policies and programs effectively, which can negatively impact their performance and the overall development of their regions.

To address these challenges and strengthen political party coalitions, political parties should prioritize developing a strong ideological foundation and strengthening their internal structures to reduce factionalism. Additionally, a concerted effort should be made to prioritize the common good over individual interests, and political parties should work towards building a unified front to better represent the interests of their constituents.

The following is an analysis of the factors that contribute to the weakness of party coalitions in the election of local heads in Indonesia.

4.1. Centralization of political parties and its impact on coalition partnerships

In Indonesia, political parties must have the support of at least 20% of their members to nominate regional heads. Since it is not easy to gain this amount of support in the current multi-party system, political parties often have to form coalitions with other parties to fulfill the nomination requirements (Partono, 2008). The theory of political party coalitions is widely accepted, with three main points: electoral, government, and policy arenas (Strom, K., 1990; Cox, 1997; Kollman, 1998). However, the strength of political parties in determining coalition partners has significant implications for the election outcomes and governance at both regional and national levels.

The primary purpose of party coalitions in regional head elections is to fulfill the nomination requirements. Therefore, coalitions between parties are necessary under a multi-party system for parties to be able to nominate candidates. The magnitude of the requirements to nominate is intended to ensure that political parties in the regional head election contest have a strong coalition, which would have a higher chance of winning the election (Partono, 2008). However, the strength of political parties in determining coalition partners can also lead to disharmony and conflicts among regional heads and their representatives during the administration of regional government, which negatively affects governance and development (Indonesian Media).

Moreover, at a broader level such as the presidential election, political party coalitions in Indonesia are often marked by splits in the management of political parties due to differences in coalition objectives, followed by the formation of new parties by those with opposite directions of support (Romli, 2018). This situation can lead to party splits and fragmentation, as experienced by the Golongan Karya (Golkar) and the Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP) parties during the 2014 presidential election (Beritasatu, 2014).

To overcome these challenges and strengthen political party coalitions, political parties should prioritize developing a strong ideological foundation and internal structures to reduce factionalism. Additionally, a concerted effort should be made to prioritize the common good over individual interests, and political parties should work towards building a unified front to better represent the interests of their constituents. This would not only enhance the stability and effectiveness of regional and national governance but also improve democracy and political representation in Indonesia.

4.2. The strong domination of central party management

The current Indonesian party system, as outlined in the Political Party Law, is designed as a national party system, meaning that only one national political party operates across the entire country. This structure leads to a significant concentration of power in the hands of central party management, with control over all party matters throughout the regions. The dominance of the central board makes it difficult to separate party leadership from the personal chairman or party leader, resulting in a strong oligarchic system within political parties (Witianti, 2019).

According to Law Number 2 of 2011 Article 17 (1), the management structure of political parties in Indonesia is divided into three levels: national, provincial, and district/city administrators. The central level officials have the authority to determine the candidates for regional head who are proposed by political parties in regional head elections. This shows the strength of the party oligarchy system, marked by the authority of a

handful of political party elites or even just one central figure, to determine regional head candidates, regardless of the aspirations of party members (Witianti, 2019).

Law Number 10 of 2016 Article 42 paragraph (4) regulates the authority of the central management of political parties, emphasizing that the registration of regional head candidate pairs (governor/vice governor, regent/vice-regent, and mayor/vice mayor) is carried out by a political party signed by the chairman and secretary of the provincial/regency/provincial level political parties, accompanied by a decree from the management of political parties at the central level regarding the approval of candidates proposed by the management of regional political parties.

Furthermore, Law Number 10 of 2016 articles 41 and 42 paragraphs (4a) and (5a) authorize the central management of political parties to register regional head candidates themselves if the party officials in the regions fail to carry out the registration of candidate pairs that have been approved by the central level officials. Despite regional administrators being given the space to propose candidates, the central committee still determines the candidates for regional heads to be nominated in the election.

This significant control of the central management of political parties in determining regional head candidates can negatively impact the commitment and enthusiasm of regional party officials. The disappointment of regional administrators can lead to their resignation from the management of the party, feeling neglected at a time when the party should be working to win the proposed candidates (iNewsBali.id, 2020; suara.com, 2021).

4.3. The high political costs of regional head elections

The candidacy in regional head elections is not only marked by the severity of the nomination requirements but also by the large political costs involved. The high cost of regional head elections has an impact on the performance and integrity of regional heads/representatives in regional government administration (PUSKAPOL, 2021). According to the Ministry of Home Affairs survey followed up by the Research and Development of the Corruption Eradication Commission, the costs incurred by candidates for regents/mayors averaged Rp. 20 to Rp. 30 billion, while the governor elections were in the range of Rp. 20 billion to Rp. 100 billion per election (Kompas, 2020). These high political costs create a significant financial burden for each candidate pair proposed, and if they cannot be borne equally, it weakens the party coalition and leads to disharmony between regional heads and representatives.

Furthermore, the high cost of regional head elections can be a driving force for corruption. The significant differences in the amount of the political cost burden can have an impact on the distribution of job positions in the regional government, potentially leading to a breakdown of governance and disharmony relations between the regional head and deputy. The unclear position and duties of deputy regional heads in regional government is the cause of disharmony between them, particularly if they are from different political parties (Pahlevi, 2012).

In fact, records from the Corruption Eradication Commission show that since the direct elections in 2005, as many as 300 regional heads have been arrested for corruption-related crimes (KOMPAS.com, 2020). Thus, the high political costs of regional head elections not only impact the election process but also the overall integrity of regional governance. It is crucial to address this issue and reduce political costs to ensure fair and transparent regional head elections.

4.4. Limited rights of regional party officials

The current structure of political parties in Indonesia is divided into three levels: central, provincial, and district/city. However, the political authority and rights are mainly granted to the central management in the nomination of regional heads, leaving the regional party officials with weak decision-making power. This results in the candidates proposed by the central management of political parties being less connected to the regional administrators unless the candidate is the leader of the management of the political party in the region.

This weak decision-making power of regional party officials can have negative implications on the election process and government administration. The lack of right to decide for themselves who will be nominated in the election can lead to candidates who are not suitable for the local needs and social and political conditions. Furthermore, without the right to determine coalition partners politically, regional party officials cannot form a strong coalition fabric in the election process to win the nominated candidates and in the government if they win.

If the regional administrators had the right to determine candidates and form coalitions, it would lead to a more participatory process. Regional party officials know more about the local context and have a better understanding of social and political conditions in their respective regions, making them more qualified to determine proposed regional head candidates and the political parties that should be invited to form a coalition.

5. Conclusion

Political parties play a crucial role in a democratic system, performing various functions, including the nomination of regional head candidates in the regional head election system. However, political parties in Indonesia that lack a 20% vote support system for regional head elections must form coalitions with other parties. Unfortunately, party coalitions in regional head elections in Indonesia remain weak, which can be attributed to several factors, including the strong centralization of political parties in determining coalition partners, the dominant role of the party's central administrator, the high cost of regional head elections, and the limited rights of regional political party administrators.

The issue of weak party coalitions in regional head elections in Indonesia is a complex problem that requires a more in-depth understanding and resolution. The centralization of political parties in determining coalition partners is a significant issue, as it hinders the participation of regional party officials in the decision-making process. This situation results in political parties proposing candidates that may not necessarily be suitable for local needs, and the failure to form a strong coalition can impact the government's administration.

Furthermore, the dominance of the party's central administrator and limited rights of regional political party administrators also contribute to weak party coalitions. Regional party officials must have the right to determine candidates and form coalitions that are based on their knowledge and understanding of social and political conditions in their respective regions. This empowerment of regional party officials would lead to a more participatory process that would ultimately benefit the government and the people.

Moreover, the high cost of regional head elections also plays a role in weakening party coalitions, as smaller parties may not be able to afford to participate. This issue could be addressed by implementing measures to reduce the cost of regional head elections and making them more accessible to smaller parties.

In summary, the weak party coalitions in regional head elections in Indonesia pose a significant challenge that needs to be addressed. By empowering regional party officials, reducing the cost of regional head elections, and promoting a more participatory process, Indonesia can strengthen party coalitions, promote good governance, and ensure that the needs of local communities are better represented in the government.

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