






Repeated Single Candidate Local Elections in Indonesia: Political Party Pragmatism in North Bengkulu and Ngawi

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Abstract: The recurrence of single candidate regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies in the 2020 and 2024 elections raises questions about the effectiveness of institutional reform in expanding local electoral competition. Although Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024 lowered the nomination threshold and theoretically opened wider opportunities for political parties to nominate alternative candidates, this study shows that such institutional change did not automatically alter the configuration of electoral contests in the two regions. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach, utilizing secondary data from official election documents, Constitutional Court decisions, laws and regulations, academic publications, and media reports related to regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies. The analysis employs the perspective of political party pragmatism and the office-seeking orientation in coalition formation. The results of the study show that the recurrence of single-candidate elections was shaped by the consolidation of political party support into large coalitions behind dominant candidates who possessed strong political capital, incumbency advantages, wider political networks, and higher electability. Under these conditions, political parties, including smaller parties, tended to prioritize electoral victory and access to power rather than promote alternative candidates. As a result, coalition building became increasingly pragmatic and contributed to the weakening of electoral competition across two consecutive electoral periods. This study shows that the recurrence of single-candidate elections is better understood not merely as an institutional issue, but as a reflection of pragmatic political party behavior in local electoral politics.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of regional head elections with a single candidate has become increasingly common in Indonesia over the past decade (Ishak, 2020; Syam et al., 2026). In

several waves of simultaneous regional elections, a number of regions were contested by only one pair of candidates, who faced an empty column on the ballot. This situation has sparked debate about the quality of competition in local electoral democracy. Although the elections are still carried out procedurally, the presence of a single candidate shows that political competition does not always run ideally. Voters are left with limited choices: supporting the single candidate or voting for the empty column. This situation then raises questions about local political dynamics and the behavior of political parties in the regional head nomination process (Sufirman et al., 2025).

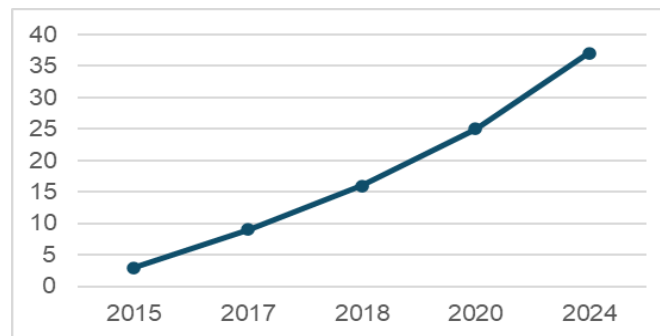


Figure.1 Increase in the Number of Single Candidates in Regional Elections in Indonesia
Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

Empirically, the data in Figure 1 shows that the number of regions holding regional elections with a single candidate is on the rise. In several previous simultaneous regional elections, for example in 2020, there were 25 regions with only one candidate pair. A similar situation also reappeared in 2024 with an increase to 37 regions that had to face contests with single candidates (Anggraini, 2024). The increase in the number of single candidates shows that the recurrence of this phenomenon is part of the electoral political dynamics that are difficult to avoid in the regional head election system in Indonesia.

A number of studies have attempted to explain the emergence of single candidates in regional elections. Several studies emphasize institutional factors, particularly the high nomination threshold, which is considered to limit the opportunities for alternative candidates to emerge in the contest (Muharam et al., 2023; Prianto & Yuslimi, 2024). Other studies highlight the high cost of politics and the weak process of political party regeneration as causes of the limited number of candidates who can compete (Aminah et al., 2020; Hidayat, 2024; Prianto et al., 2025). At the same time, there are also arguments that see the phenomenon of single candidates as the result of political party strategies that tend to support candidates with the greatest chance of winning (Prastya et al., 2021; Rosanti, 2020; Syahid et al., 2024). Thus, the existing literature shows that the emergence of single candidates is influenced by a combination of institutional factors, political economy, and political party electoral strategies in the regional head candidacy process.

However, the existing literature still provides limited explanations regarding how political party behavior shapes the recurrence of single candidate elections at the local level. Several studies show that political parties in Indonesia tend to adopt pragmatic strategies in building electoral coalitions, prioritizing electoral victory rather than ideological compatibility (Ekowati, 2019; Samnuzulsari & Yudiantmaja, 2018). In situations where certain candidates possess strong electoral capital or incumbency advantages, political parties are more likely to consolidate their support into large coalitions to maximize their chances of winning the election (Nurhasim, 2025; Syafhendry et al., 2023). Such pragmatic considerations may reduce incentives for political parties to nominate alternative candidates, thereby contributing to the emergence and even the recurrence of single candidate contests in regional head elections.

DPT in Province	DPT in Regency/City	Percentage of Valid Votes
2.000.000	250.000	10%
>2.000.000—6.000.000	>250.000—500.000	8,5%
>6.000.000—12.000.000	>500.000—1.000.000	7,5%

>12.000.000	>1.000.000	6,5%
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Table.1 Threshold Classification for Regional Head Candidates Based on Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024
Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

In recent developments, changes to the nomination rules have also undergone a transformation that is expected to open up wider competition in regional elections. Constitutional Court Decision No. 60/PUU-XXII/2024, which lowered the threshold for regional head nominations, has provided a breath of fresh air for political parties or coalitions to put forward alternative candidates. Theoretically, lowering the threshold is expected to encourage more candidates to emerge and strengthen electoral competition at the local level (Aji & Wahyuni, 2025). However, empirical evidence shows that such institutional changes do not always result in an increase in the number of candidates in regional elections.

This phenomenon can be observed in the regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies. Both regions experienced regional head elections with a single candidate in the 2020 regional elections and experienced a similar situation again in the 2024 regional head elections (Fatihah, 2024; Saputra, 2024; Tamarozzi & Julizar, 2024). The recurrence of this phenomenon is interesting because it occurred after a change in the nomination rules that lowered the nomination threshold of support for political parties in nominating regional head candidates. In other words, institutional reforms aimed at expanding opportunities for political competition did not automatically result in changes in the configuration of electoral contests in the two regions. This situation raises questions about the factors that influence the local head nomination process (Rusnaedy et al., 2021).

To explain this phenomenon, this article refers to the office-seeking perspective in coalition formation, which sees political parties as strategic actors that tend to prioritize electoral victory and access to power rather than ideological considerations in making political decisions (Laver, 1998). In the context of local elections in Indonesia, coalition building among political parties often does not strictly follow ideological lines, but is more likely to be directed toward candidates who are considered to have higher electability, stronger political capital, or incumbency advantages (Lay, 2007). Through this perspective, political party pragmatism can be understood as a pattern of behavior in which parties are more likely to support candidates with greater chances of winning than to promote alternative candidates, which in turn may weaken electoral competition.

This article argues that the recurrence of single candidate elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies reflects strong political party pragmatism in the candidate nomination process. In situations where there are candidates who are considered to have a very high chance of winning, political parties tend to make pragmatic decisions by supporting these candidates rather than promoting alternative candidates who have a smaller chance of winning (Prajoko et al., 2024). These pragmatic decisions ultimately form a large coalition of political parties for a single pair of candidates, thereby preventing the formation of adequate electoral competition. Based on this framework, this study aims to analyze how political party pragmatism plays a role in explaining the recurrence of the single candidate phenomenon in the regional elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of single candidates in regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies. The main focus of this study is to examine how the dynamics of political party support in the regional head nomination process can result in a contest with only one candidate pair in two different election periods. Using the perspective of political party pragmatism, this study seeks to explain how the strategies and considerations of political actors in determining candidate support influence the configuration of electoral competition at the local level. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach (Creswell, 2018). This approach was chosen to understand political phenomena contextually by describing the dynamics of the regional head nomination process in the two research areas. North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies were selected as research cases because both regions experienced repeated single-candidate elections in the 2020 and 2024 regional elections,

making them relevant cases for examining the role of political party behavior in shaping local electoral competition. Through this approach, the study explains the relationship between political party strategies and the emergence of single candidates in regional election contests.

The data collection technique used was library research. Data was obtained through the collection and review of various written sources relevant to the research topic, such as official documents from election organizers, reports from state institutions, scientific journal articles, books, and mass media reports related to the implementation of regional elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies. The data used in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data included official documents such as Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024, Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors, and General Election Commission Regulations related to regional head candidacy. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from journal articles, books, research reports, and news sources discussing the phenomenon of single candidates in regional elections. The collected data were then analyzed qualitatively to identify patterns of political party support, coalition formation, and candidate nomination dynamics in the regional head elections in both regions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Dynamics of Regional Head Elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies

The dynamics of regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies show the emergence and recurrence of the phenomenon of single candidates in local political contests. In the 2020 regional head elections, both regions were contested by only one pair of candidates who faced an empty column. This condition reflects the low level of electoral competition caused by the consolidation of political party support into one large coalition supporting the same candidate pair. Interestingly, a similar pattern reappeared in the 2024 regional head elections, indicating a recurrence of the single candidate phenomenon in both regions. This phenomenon is interesting to study because it occurred after changes to the rules for regional head candidacy through a Constitutional Court decision, which lowered the candidacy threshold and theoretically opened up wider opportunities for political parties to propose alternative candidates. However, the reappearance of single candidates shows that institutional factors alone are not sufficient to explain this phenomenon. Therefore, it is important to look at how the dynamics of support and political party strategies shape coalitions and determine support for specific candidates in regional head elections in both regions.

1. Political Party Coalition in the 2020 Regional Head Elections

In the 2020 regional head elections, the configuration of political party support in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies showed a highly concentrated coalition pattern. Political parties with seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in both regions tended to direct their support to the same candidate pair, resulting in a very large political coalition. This accumulation of support resulted in all DPRD seats being aligned in support of the candidate pair running in the regional head election contest. This situation not only reflects the strong position of the candidate pair, but also indicates a tendency for political parties to build large consolidations of support in the face of electoral competition at the local level. The configuration of political party support for candidate pairs in the 2020 regional head elections in both regions is shown in the table below.

Region	Candidate Pair	Supporting Parties	DPRD Seat Support	Percentage of Seats	Election Result
North Bengkulu	Mian and Arie Septia Adinata	1. PDIP 2. Golkar 3. Gerindra 4. Nasdem 5. PAN 6. Hanura 7. PKPI 8. PKB	30/30	100%	71.1%

		9. PKS 10. PPP			
Ngawi	Ony Anwar Harsono and Dwi Rianto Jatmiko	1. PDIP 2. Golkar 3. PKB 4. Gerindra 5. PKS 6. PAN 7. Nasdem 8. PPP 9. Hanura 10. Demokrat	45/45	100%	94.42%

Table.2 Political Party Coalitions in the 2020 Regional Head Elections
Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

The table above shows that in the 2020 regional head elections in North Bengkulu Regency, the pair of Mian and Arie Septia Adinata received support from all political parties that hold seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD). Ten political parties, consisting of PDIP, Golkar, Gerindra, NasDem, PAN, Hanura, PKPI, PKB, PKS, and PPP, jointly supported the pair, controlling all 30 DPRD seats or 100 percent of the total available seats. Judging from the composition of the DPRD seats, political parties still have the opportunity to nominate their best cadres and build alternative coalitions to compete in the regional head elections. However, the dominance of support for the pair of Mian and Arie Septia Adinata shows that political parties tend to consider the electoral strength and winning probability of candidates before deciding to nominate or support particular candidate pairs. Mian's position as the incumbent, his political experience, and his relatively high popularity are factors that encourage other political parties to give their support rather than nominate alternative candidates who may have a smaller chance of winning (Kartika, 2021).

Meanwhile, in the 2020 regional head elections in Ngawi Regency, the pair of Ony Anwar Harsono and Dwi Rianto Jatmiko received support from all political parties that hold seats in the Ngawi Regency Regional People's Representative Council. Ten political parties, consisting of PDIP, Golkar, PKB, Gerindra, PKS, PAN, NasDem, PPP, Hanura, and Demokrat, jointly supported the pair, controlling all 45 DPRD seats or 100 percent of the total available seats. The electoral strength of this pair was a major consideration for political parties not to field other candidates. This pair possesses strong political capital, bureaucratic experience, and high popularity, making other political parties reluctant to nominate their cadres in the contest (Dwiono, 2020).

The nomination of this pair was also inseparable from the internal processes of political parties, particularly the PDIP as the main supporting party. The PDIP successfully engaged in political communication with various political parties, community organizations, and local figures in Ngawi Regency to build broader support. Through this political communication, the PDIP succeeded in garnering support from other parties that had seats in the Ngawi Regency DPRD, forming a large coalition that included all the parties in the regional parliament (Adrian, 2020).

The configuration of political party support concentrated in the 2020 regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies shows a tendency for political parties to build large coalitions by supporting the same candidate pairs. Although institutionally political parties still have the opportunity to nominate alternative candidates, the decision to consolidate support for one candidate pair shows that electoral considerations and calculations of the chances of victory are important factors in nomination strategies. This situation ultimately resulted in a contest with a low level of competition due to the absence of other candidate pairs that could become challengers. The pattern of support consolidation is important to note because it shows that the emergence of a single candidate was not only influenced by the nomination rules at the time, but also by the dynamics of political parties' strategies and preferences in determining their support for certain candidates in the regional head elections.

2. Institutional Change and the 2024 Regional Head Elections

Institutional changes in the rules governing regional head nominations were introduced through Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024. This decision lowered the nomination threshold for political parties and coalitions to propose candidates in regional head elections. The reduction of the threshold was intended to expand opportunities for political parties to nominate alternative candidates and to encourage greater electoral competition at the local level. In theory, lower nomination requirements should allow more political actors and parties to participate in electoral contests, thereby reducing the likelihood of single candidate elections.

However, several studies show that institutional reforms in nomination rules do not always lead to more competitive elections. Research on the 2024 regional head elections indicates that although the nomination requirements have been simplified, the number of competing candidate pairs in many regions remains limited. In a number of cases, political parties tend to form broad coalitions to support a single candidate pair rather than encouraging wider electoral competition. As a result, dozens of regions in the 2024 regional head elections were still contested by single candidates (Hafid, 2025; Holqi et al., 2025). These findings indicate that institutional reforms alone may not be sufficient to explain the persistence of single candidate elections in regional contests.

Empirical developments in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies reflect a similar pattern. Despite the lowering of the nomination threshold, the 2024 regional head elections in both regions were again contested by only one pair of candidates facing an empty column on the ballot. This situation is particularly noteworthy because both regions had previously experienced single candidate elections in the 2020 regional head elections. The recurrence of single-candidate contests in the 2024 elections indicates that institutional reforms aimed at expanding electoral competition did not automatically lead to the emergence of alternative candidates in these regions. The configuration of political party support in the 2024 regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies is presented in Table on below.

Region	Candidate Pair	Supporting Parties	DPRD Seat Support	Percentage of Seats	Election Result
North Bengkulu	Arie Septia Adinata and Sumarno	1. PDIP 2. Golkar 3. PAN 4. Gerindra 5. Nasdem 6. PKB 7. Demokrat 8. Perindo 9. PKS 10. PPP	30/30	100%	94.45%
Ngawi	Ony Anwar Harsono and Dwi Rianto Jatmiko	1. PDIP 2. Golkar 3. PKB 4. Gerindra 5. Demokrat 6. PKS 7. PAN 8. Gelora 9. Nasdem 10. Hanura 11. PPP 12. Perindo	45/45	100%	94.08%

Table.3 Political Party Coalitions in the 2024 Regional Head Elections
Source: Processed by the authors, 2026

The data presented in Table above shows that the 2024 regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies were again contested by only one pair of candidates. In North

Bengkulu Regency, the pair of Arie Septia Adinata and Sumarno received support from ten political parties that hold seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), namely PDIP, Golkar, PAN, Gerindra, Nasdem, PKB, Demokrat, Perindo, PKS, and PPP. This coalition controlled all 30 seats in the DPRD or 100 percent of the total seats. As a result, the election was contested by only one candidate pair facing an empty column on the ballot. The pair eventually won the election with 94.45 percent of the valid votes.

This overwhelming electoral support indicates the strong consolidation of political party backing behind the candidate pair. Arie Septia Adinata himself was not a new political actor in the local political arena. In the previous 2020 regional head election, he served as the running mate of Mian and was elected as the Deputy Regent of North Bengkulu. His status as an incumbent regional executive provided him with strong political capital, extensive political networks, and high public visibility (Tamburian, 2024). These factors contributed to the formation of a large coalition of political parties supporting his candidacy in the 2024 regional head election.

A similar pattern also occurred in Ngawi Regency. In the 2024 regional head election, the pair of Ony Anwar Harsono and Dwi Rianto Jatmiko received support from twelve political parties, consisting of PDIP, Golkar, PKB, Gerindra, Demokrat, PKS, PAN, Gelora, NasDem, Hanura, PPP, and Perindo. This coalition controlled all 45 seats in the Ngawi Regency DPRD or 100 percent of the total seats. Consequently, the election was also contested by only one candidate pair facing an empty column on the ballot. The pair won the election with 94.08 percent of the valid votes, demonstrating a very high level of electoral dominance. It is important to note that both candidates were incumbents who had previously won the 2020 regional head election. The re-nomination of the same candidate pair in the 2024 election indicates a continuity of local political leadership that had already been established in the previous electoral cycle. The strong political capital, incumbency advantages, and electoral popularity possessed by the pair made other political parties reluctant to nominate alternative candidates in the contest (Maulida, 2024).

The recurrence of single candidate elections in both regions is particularly noteworthy because it occurred after the issuance of Constitutional Court Decision, which lowered the nomination threshold for regional head candidates. In theory, the reduction of the nomination threshold was intended to provide wider opportunities for political parties to nominate candidates and encourage greater electoral competition at the local level. However, the empirical findings in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies show that the lowering of the nomination threshold did not automatically lead to the emergence of alternative candidates in regional head elections. This situation suggests that institutional reforms alone are not sufficient to explain the persistence of single candidate elections. Instead, the dominance of incumbent political actors with strong electoral capital appears to encourage political parties to consolidate their support into a single large coalition rather than promote competing candidates. Consequently, the recurrence of single candidate elections across two consecutive electoral periods indicates that political party strategies and considerations in determining candidate support play an important role in shaping the configuration of electoral competition at the local level.

This pattern shows that the recurrence of single candidate elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies cannot be understood only as the result of limited institutional change. The lowering of the nomination threshold through the Constitutional Court Decision did provide wider formal opportunities for political parties to nominate alternative candidates. However, in practice, political parties did not automatically use this opportunity to promote other candidate pairs. In both regions, political parties were still confronted with candidates who had stronger political capital, wider political networks, higher public visibility, and greater chances of winning the election. Under these conditions, the tendency of political parties to direct their support toward candidates with the strongest electoral position became more apparent.

This tendency can also be explained through the office-seeking perspective, which sees political parties as actors that tend to prioritize electoral victory and access to power in making coalition decisions. In this Laver (1998) perspective, the decision of political parties to support dominant candidates is not only influenced by institutional opportunities, but also by political

calculations regarding the probability of winning and the benefits of being part of the ruling coalition. For smaller parties in particular, supporting candidates who are considered more likely to win can be seen as a more realistic option than promoting alternative candidates with uncertain electoral prospects. Therefore, the recurrence of single candidate elections in both regions after the lowering of the nomination threshold indicates that institutional reform alone is not sufficient to encourage electoral competition, because political party strategies and electoral considerations continue to play an important role in shaping candidate support in regional head elections.

3. Political Party Pragmatism in Regional Head Elections

Political party pragmatism has increasingly become an important perspective for understanding the dynamics of candidate nomination in regional head elections. In democratic political systems, political parties are expected to function as institutions that represent societal interests and promote political competition through the nomination of alternative candidates. However, in practice political parties often face strategic choices that require them to balance ideological commitments with electoral considerations. In many cases, the decision to support certain candidates is determined not by ideological alignment, but by calculations regarding electoral viability and the probability of winning an election (Noor, 2016).

From the perspective of political pragmatism, political decisions are evaluated based on their practical consequences and the extent to which they help political actors achieve desired outcomes. Pragmatism emphasizes the importance of practical results and strategic adaptation to political realities rather than rigid adherence to ideological principles (Petersen et al., 2022). Within electoral politics, this orientation often encourages political parties to adopt pragmatic strategies in determining candidate support, particularly when certain candidates possess strong political capital, incumbency advantages, or high levels of electability. In such situations, political parties tend to prioritize the likelihood of electoral victory over the promotion of competitive electoral contests.

This pattern of pragmatic political behavior can also be observed in the regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies. As shown in the previous sections, political parties in both regions consolidated their support into large coalitions behind a single candidate pair, resulting in regional elections contested by only one pair of candidates facing an empty column. The recurrence of this phenomenon in two consecutive electoral periods indicates that political party strategies and electoral calculations play a crucial role in shaping the configuration of political competition at the local level. This finding also suggests that institutional reforms aimed at expanding political competition, such as the reduction of nomination thresholds, do not automatically lead to the emergence of alternative candidates when political parties adopt pragmatic electoral strategies. Therefore, examining the role of political party pragmatism becomes essential for explaining why single candidate elections continue to emerge and even recur in regional head elections.

The formation of large coalitions in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies also cannot be separated from the bargaining and political communication processes that took place among political parties before candidate registration. In local electoral politics, political parties do not make decisions in isolation, but rather through a series of considerations, negotiations, and adjustments to the existing political situation. When there are candidate figures who are considered to have stronger electability, broader networks, and a greater probability of winning, political parties tend to read the electoral map in a similar way. Under these conditions, bargaining between parties is not always oriented toward presenting alternative candidates, but more often toward negotiating positions within a coalition that is considered to have the greatest chance of winning the election.

This pragmatic bargaining process also helps explain why smaller parties or parties that do not hold a dominant position tend to support incumbent or strong candidates rather than remain outside the coalition. For these parties, promoting alternative candidates would require greater political costs and carry a higher risk of defeat, while joining a dominant coalition provides a more realistic opportunity to remain connected to political power at the local level. In this situation, political parties are more likely to prioritize strategic accommodation than electoral opposition. As a result, coalition building becomes not only a process of gathering

formal support, but also a process of pragmatic adjustment among parties that share the same interest in supporting the candidate pair considered most likely to win.

This pattern was closely related to the dominance of certain political actors who possessed strong political capital and incumbency advantages. Previous studies on local electoral politics in Indonesia show that political parties often form large or “grand” coalitions when they perceive a candidate as having a very high probability of winning the election (Damanik, 2020; Makhasin, 2016). In such circumstances, political parties tend to align themselves with the strongest candidate rather than nominate alternative contenders who have a lower chance of electoral success. This pattern reflects a pragmatic orientation in coalition building, where parties prioritize strategic alliances that can secure political office instead of maintaining ideological distinctions between parties.

The role of incumbency also becomes an important factor that reinforces pragmatic political behavior. Incumbent candidates generally possess several structural advantages in electoral competition, including greater public visibility, access to political networks, and the ability to mobilize political resources (Egner & Stoiber, 2007). These advantages often make incumbents more attractive to political parties seeking to maximize their chances of electoral victory. In the context of the regional head elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi regencies, the presence of dominant political actors with strong political capital encouraged political parties to consolidate their support rather than promote alternative candidates. Consequently, political parties collectively formed large coalitions that effectively eliminated electoral competition.

Such pragmatic coalition strategies ultimately contribute to the emergence of single candidate elections. When most political parties decide to support the same candidate pair, the opportunity for other candidates to enter the electoral contest becomes increasingly limited. In this situation, political parties prioritize electoral certainty and risk avoidance rather than fostering competitive democratic processes. The persistence of this strategy across different electoral periods also explains why the phenomenon of single candidate elections can recur in the same regions. Once a dominant coalition has been established and proven electorally successful, political parties have strong incentives to reproduce the same strategy in subsequent elections.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the recurrence of single-candidate elections in North Bengkulu and Ngawi Regencies cannot be explained solely by institutional factors related to nomination thresholds. Although Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUU-XXII/2024 lowered the nomination requirements and theoretically opened wider opportunities for political parties to nominate alternative candidates, the empirical findings indicate that electoral competition did not necessarily increase. Instead, political parties in both regions continued to consolidate their support into large coalitions behind a single candidate pair. This pattern demonstrates that political party pragmatism plays a crucial role in shaping the configuration of electoral competition in regional head elections.

Political parties tend to prioritize electoral calculations and the probability of winning when determining candidate support. In situations where certain candidates possess strong political capital and incumbency advantages, political parties are more likely to align themselves with these dominant candidates rather than nominate alternative contenders. As a result, pragmatic coalition strategies lead to the formation of oversized coalitions that ultimately produce single-candidate elections. The repetition of this pattern in two consecutive electoral periods suggests that pragmatic political behavior can reproduce similar electoral configurations in subsequent elections.

These findings imply that institutional reforms aimed at increasing electoral competition need to be accompanied by broader efforts to strengthen political party recruitment and candidate regeneration processes. More specifically, regulatory reform should not only focus on nomination thresholds, but also on institutional incentives that encourage parties to carry out cadre formation in a more systematic way. One possible measure is to link public financial assistance for political parties to clear and measurable indicators of cadre training, political

education, and candidate preparation at the local level, so that parties are encouraged not only to compete electorally but also to invest in long-term recruitment. In addition, parties could be required to adopt more transparent and accountable internal recruitment mechanisms in the nomination of regional head candidates, thereby reducing the tendency to rely solely on dominant or incumbent figures. Such measures are important to ensure that political parties do not merely act as electoral vehicles, but also function as institutions for political regeneration and democratic competition. However, this study is limited to two regional cases and relies primarily on qualitative analysis of secondary data sources. Future research may therefore expand the scope of analysis to other regions experiencing similar electoral patterns and incorporate primary data, such as interviews with political party elites, in order to better understand the internal dynamics of political party decision-making in the candidate nomination process.

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