

THE PHENOMENON OF EMPTY BOXES IN THE 2024 REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN PAKPAK BHARAT DISTRICT: ANALYSIS OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Abstract

One of the phenomena that has drawn attention in the practice of local democracy in Indonesia is the emergence of a single candidate pair competing against the “empty box” option in regional head elections. This situation reflects issues in democratic competition, the dominance of political party coalitions, and weaknesses in the political recruitment process. The election of the Regent and Deputy Regent of Pakpak Bharat in 2024 serves as a concrete example, where only one candidate pair contested against the empty box. This study aims to analyze the empty box phenomenon in the 2024 Regional Head Election of Pakpak Bharat and to examine it from the perspective of Islamic political thought. The research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method. Data were collected through interviews with informants from the General Election Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), religious leaders, community members, and political parties in Pakpak Bharat, supported by documentation studies of legislation, academic journals, and media reports. The findings reveal that the empty box phenomenon in Pakpak Bharat was influenced by the dominance of a coalition of eleven political parties that supported a single candidate pair, resulting in an unbalanced electoral competition. The absence of independent candidates or alternative pairs meeting the nomination requirements left the public with only two choices: supporting the sole candidate pair or voting for the empty box. From the perspective of Islamic political thought, this condition indicates the suboptimal implementation of the principle of shura (consultation) in recruitment and raises issues of democratic legitimacy due to the limited political leadership options available to society. The study concludes that the empty box phenomenon is a consequence of elite dominance and political party coalitions in the nomination process, which negatively impacts the quality of local democracy. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen more inclusive political recruitment mechanisms and to implement Islamic political values that uphold the principles of shura, justice, trustworthiness (amanah), and public participation in the democratic process.

Keywords: Regional Election, Empty Box, Islamic Political Thought.

INTRODUCTION

Regional head elections (Pilkada) are one of the main instruments in the implementation of local democracy in Indonesia. Through Pilkada, the public has the constitutional right to directly elect regional heads and deputy regional heads who are deemed capable of realizing community welfare and championing public interests. The direct election system, implemented since 2005, is part of the post-New Order political reforms aimed at strengthening the legitimacy of regional governments, increasing public political participation, and promoting the accountability of regional leaders to the people. With this mechanism, the public plays not only a role as voters but also as monitors of the implementation of public policies in accordance with political promises made during the campaign period. Nevertheless, the implementation of direct Pilkada, including the Simultaneous Pilkada that began in 2015, still faces various challenges in realizing a competitive democracy. One increasingly common phenomenon is the emergence of single candidate pairs facing an empty ballot. This phenomenon indicates a decline in political competition, a key characteristic of a democratic system.¹

¹Arif Widodo And Sukataman, “Koko Pede Movement Anticipates Single Candidate in the 2024 Kebumen Regional Election,” *Cakrawala: Journal of Islamic Education Management Studies and Social Studies* 8, No. 2 (2024): 203–26, <https://doi.org/10.33507/Cakrawala.V8i2.2462> Movement.

In the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections, several regions in Indonesia held elections with only one candidate pair, including several regencies in North Sumatra Province, namely Pakpak Bharat, Serdang Bedagai, Asahan, Labuhanbatu, and North Nias. This situation demonstrates a tendency for political party coalitions to increase their dominance in the regional head nomination process.² Pakpak Bharat Regency is an interesting area to study because, for the first time in the history of regional elections, it presented a single candidate pair. Under these conditions, the public was faced with only two choices: choosing a single candidate pair or choosing an empty box. This situation not only demonstrates the limited political choices of the public but also raises questions about the effectiveness of political parties in cadre development, political recruitment, and providing competitive leadership alternatives. Furthermore, the emergence of a community movement campaigning for an empty box indicates that the empty box is not merely understood as a form of political apathy, but can also be interpreted as a democratic expression of public dissatisfaction with the nomination process, which is considered less than competitive. From a democratic perspective, the existence of the empty box can be seen as a corrective mechanism against the dominance of political elites and the practice of party cartelization, which results in a lack of alternative regional head candidates. This phenomenon indicates a problem in political representation that has the potential to undermine the quality of democracy at the local level. Furthermore, there are currently no regulations specifically governing campaign mechanisms or the role of the empty box in regional election contests. This *legal vacuum* has given rise to various legal issues and demonstrates that regional election regulations have not fully adapted to the evolving dynamics of democracy in society.

Several previous studies have highlighted the phenomenon of single candidates and empty ballots in regional elections. Puspitasari emphasized that the existence of single candidates has the potential to undermine the quality of democracy by eliminating healthy political competition.³ Harahap and Rangkuti explained that the victory of the empty box reflects a form of public rejection of the legitimacy of the single candidate pair.⁴ Hendrawan and Agass assessed that the increasing phenomenon of the empty box indicates the need for reform of the local democracy system and regulations for regional head nominations.⁵ Hidayat's research on the impact of the empty box phenomenon on voter participation in the 2024 North Bengkulu Regency Election also shows that the presence of a single candidate influences the level of public political participation and becomes a means of expressing public disappointment with the available candidates.⁶ Some people view the empty box as a form of expression of disappointment with the single candidate who is considered not to represent public aspirations.

However, most previous research has focused on constitutional law, the quality of democracy, and the level of public political participation. Few studies have examined the empty box phenomenon from the perspective of Islamic political thought, particularly using the concepts of *shura*, leadership legitimacy, and *amanah* as the basis of analysis. These values, however, are strongly relevant in assessing the process of forming democratic, just, and community-oriented leadership. Therefore, a research gap exists in the absence of studies integrating local democracy analysis with an Islamic political perspective to understand the phenomenon of single candidates and empty boxes in the 2024 regional elections. Based on this situation, this study offers novelty through an analysis of the empty box phenomenon in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency elections, combining local democracy approaches, election law, and Islamic political thought. This analysis is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors behind the emergence of single candidates, their implications for the quality of local democracy, and their compatibility with Islamic leadership principles. This study aims to analyze the factors that led to the emergence of a single candidate pair in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Election, examine the legal status of single candidate

²Nizar Aldi, "All Empty Election Boxes in North Sumatra Fell, Here's the Vote Count," Detik Sumut, 2024, <https://www.detik.com>.

³Yopa Puspitasari, "The Phenomenon of Single Candidates in Regional Head Elections from the Perspective of Democracy and Siyasah Dusturiyah," *Qiyas: Journal of Islamic Law and Justice* 6, No. 2 (2021): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.29300/qys.v6i2.2987>.

⁴Muhammad Fadly Syahwala Harahap And Rahmad Efendi Rangkuti, "Empty Box As Winner: The Perspective of Siyasah Dusturiyah in Regional Head Elections in Indonesia," *Malikussaleh Journal of Social and Political Sciences (Jspm)* 6, No. 1 (2025): 205–19, <https://doi.org/10.29103/jspm.v6i1.19945>.

⁵Rikki Hendrawan and Muhammad Adhe Agassi, "Implementation of Blank Vote in Regional Head Elections in Indonesia: Solution or Anomaly for Democracy," *Jurnal Hukum Mimbar Justitia (Jhmj)* 10, No. 2 (2024): 271–92, <https://doi.org/10.35194/jhmj.v10i2.4711>.

⁶Renaldi Wahyu Hidayat Et Al., "Analysis of the Impact of Empty Boxes on Voter Participation in the 2024 Regional Elections in North Bengkulu Regency," *Mimbar: Journal of Social and Political Research* 14, No. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.32663/X0defn16>.

pairs facing an empty box based on the Indonesian Pilkada legal system, and analyze this phenomenon from the perspective of Islamic political thought through the concepts of *shura*, legitimacy, and leadership mandate. The results of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of local democracy and Islamic politics studies, as well as serve as evaluation material for election organizers, political parties, and the government in strengthening the quality of democracy to be more competitive, participatory, and just.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with field research *combined* with a normative-philosophical approach. Qualitative methods were chosen because they provide a deep understanding of the socio-political phenomena occurring in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Pilkada, particularly regarding the emergence of a single candidate pair and the phenomenon of the empty box. Meanwhile, a normative-philosophical approach was used to examine these phenomena through the perspective of Islamic political thought, employing the concepts of *maslahah 'ammah* (community welfare), *shura* (community syura), and popular sovereignty.⁷

The research was conducted in Pakpak Bharat Regency, North Sumatra Province, which is one of the regions holding the 2024 Regional Election with a single candidate pair. The location was selected because the regional political characteristics show the dominance of party coalitions, the emergence of empty boxes as an expression of community politics, and its relevance to the focus of the study on local democracy from an Islamic political perspective. Research informants were determined using a *purposive sampling technique*, namely selecting individuals considered to have knowledge, experience, and direct involvement in the 2024 Regional Election in Pakpak Bharat Regency. Informants consisted of election organizers (KPU and Bawaslu of Pakpak Bharat Regency), political party officials, religious leaders, and community leaders.

The research data includes primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and non-participatory observation of the implementation of the regional elections and political dynamics in the regions. Secondary data were obtained through documentary studies in the form of laws and regulations, official documents from the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), election recapitulation results, books, journal articles, and other relevant literature. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation and technical triangulation were used by comparing information from various informants and methods. Furthermore, *member checking* was conducted with several informants to ensure the accuracy of the interview results with the stated objectives, thus maintaining data credibility.

Data analysis used the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data *display*, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis was carried out continuously from the data collection stage until the research was completed, resulting in a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of single candidates and empty boxes in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Election.

In the analysis process, the concepts of *maslahah 'ammah*, *shura*, and popular sovereignty were used as a framework for interpreting data from interviews and documentation. The data were categorized into themes such as the regional head nomination process, political party dominance, community participation, leadership legitimacy, and community response to the empty box. Each theme was then analyzed by comparing empirical findings in the field with conceptual indicators, namely the principle of *shura* which emphasizes deliberation and participation, *maslahah 'ammah* which assesses orientation towards the public good, and the principle of popular sovereignty which emphasizes the community's right to elect leaders democratically. The results of the analysis were used to assess the suitability of the practice of single-candidate regional elections in Pakpak Bharat Regency with democratic values and Islamic political thought.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Bharat Regency in the Context of Local Democratic Dynamics

Based on the results of field observations, the candidate pair for Regent and Deputy Regent Franc Bernhard Tumanggor Tumanggor Mutsyuhito Solin were the only candidates who registered in Pakpak Bharat, so their opponents on the ballot paper were in the blank column.

⁷Lexy J. Moleong, *Qualitative Research Methodology*, Revised Edition (Bandung: Pt Remaja Rosdakarya, 2021).

Table 1.1 Recapitulation of Vote Acquisition per District

No	Subdistrict	The vote for candidate pair 01 (Franc Bernhard Tumanggor) & Mutsyuhito Solin)	The voice of candidate pair 02 K is empty-headed
1	Sitelu tali urang jehe	3,073	2,464
2	Kingdom	3,570	1,613
3	Snakefruit	3,524	1,377
4	Sitelu tali urang julu	1,452	617
5	tangled balls	1,639	684
6	Pagindar	635	79
7	Tintato	1,729	760
8	Siempat rube	2,068	662
	Final amount	17,690	8,256

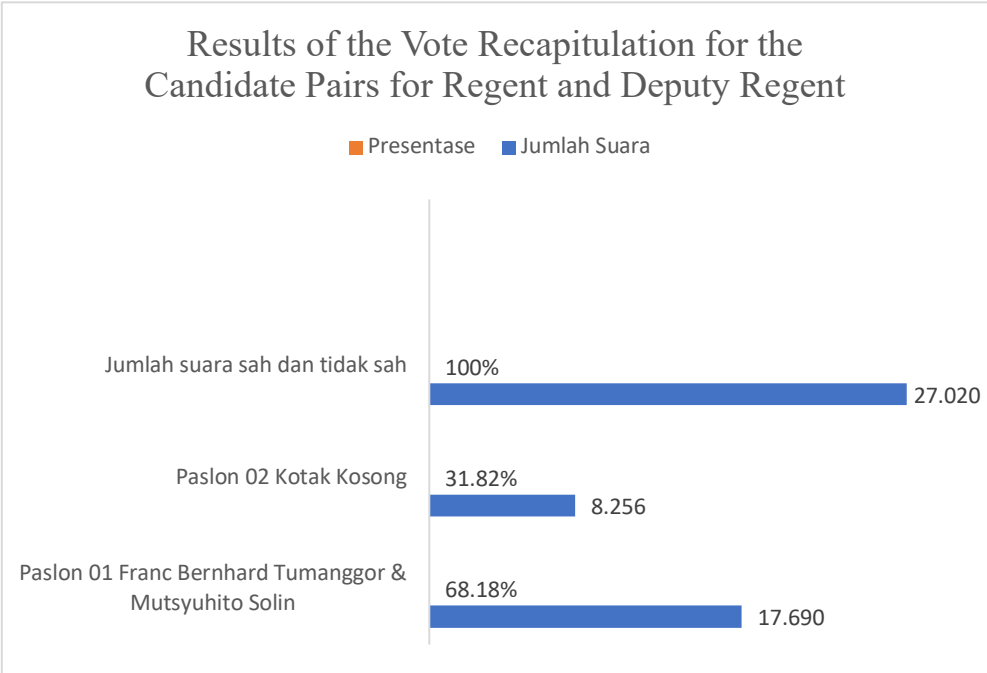
Source: Pakpak Bharat Election Commission for the 2024 Regional Elections

Overall, the strong political legitimacy of the candidates is demonstrated by the success of the single-candidate pairs in each sub-district. Nevertheless, the high percentage of blank ballots indicates that the democratic process is still functioning well, particularly in several sub-districts. The public can use the blank ballots to voice their dissatisfaction or preferences with different candidates. This phenomenon demonstrates that local democracy in Pakpak Bharat Regency is characterized by critical and rational public political engagement in exercising their right to vote, in addition to the success of the single-candidate pairs.

The emergence of single-candidate pairs facing empty ballots in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Election highlights the limitations of political competition in local democratic processes. Although single-candidate pairs won in every sub-district, the large number of empty ballots in several locations demonstrates that people are still exercising their freedom to vote critically and wisely. The empty ballot is seen as a political representation of the public's desire for alternative candidates who can compete democratically, in addition to serving as a formal choice within the electoral system. Therefore, the empty ballot phenomenon suggests that some individuals remain optimistic about the development of a more open, competitive democracy that offers more opportunities for political engagement.⁸

⁸ Wahyu Wiji Utomo and Muhammad Aswin, "SPIRITUALISM AND POLITICS (PHILOSOPHY IN POLITICS IN INDONESIA) ," *Jurnal Review Politik* 10, no. 01 (2020): 141–66.

Table 1.2 Results of the Vote Recapitulation for the Candidate Pairs for Regent and Deputy Regent



Source: Pakpak Bharat Election Commission for the 2024 Regional Election

The results of the study show that the majority of voters still support the single candidate pair in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Pilkada, so that the pair obtains formal political legitimacy to lead the region. However, the existence of empty ballot boxes reflects that some people use their voting rights as an alternative to the available candidate pairs. This phenomenon is a new dynamic in Indonesian local democracy, especially in the implementation of the 2024 Simultaneous Pilkada. ⁹Legally, Pilkada with a single candidate pair has a clear legal basis. Constitutional Court Decision Number 100/PUU-XIII/2015 confirms that regions with only one candidate pair can still hold regional head elections. This provision is then regulated in General Election Commission Regulation Number 14 of 2015 which has been amended by General Election Commission Regulation Number 13 of 2018. Article 14 paragraph (1) states that voting is carried out using ballot papers containing photos of the candidate pairs and one blank column as an alternative choice for voters. ¹⁰Thus, the existence of empty ballot boxes is a legitimate part of the single candidate Pilkada mechanism according to statutory regulations.

Based on the General Elections Commission (KPU) recapitulation results, Pakpak Bharat Regency is one of 37 regions in Indonesia holding the 2024 regional elections with a single candidate pair, and is also one of five regions in North Sumatra Province experiencing similar conditions. Although the single candidate pair secured a majority of the vote, the blank box vote still indicates an alternative political choice used by some members of the public. ¹¹This finding demonstrates that even though the single candidate pair dominated the election results, the presence of the blank box vote remains significant as an alternative choice for the public.

Based on information obtained through an interview with Tina Banurea, a voter in Pakpak Bharat Regency, the presence of an empty ballot box impacts public perception of the quality of local democracy. According to the informant, the presence of only one candidate pair leaves the public with no adequate alternatives to objectively compare the visions, missions, and capacities of prospective leaders. As a result, the democratic process is running according to law, but it does not fully provide the freedom of choice expected in a competitive democratic system.

⁹Arikatul Firdaus And Mohammad Fais, “The Empty Box Phenomenon in the 2024 Regional Head Elections Based on a Legal Politics Perspective,” *Rewang Rencang: Jurnal Hukum Lex Generalis* 5, No. 10 (2024): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.56370/Jhlg.V5i10.911>.

¹⁰Ahmad Yantomi, “Legal Study of the Victory of the Empty Box in the General Election of the Head of the Regions in Indonesia,” *Journal of Legal Certainty and Justice* 3, No. 1 (2021): 14–25, <https://doi.org/10.32502/Khk.V3i1.4524>.

¹¹Kanya Anindita Mutiarasari, “What If an Empty Box Wins the 2024 Regional Election? Here Are the Rules,” *Detik News*, 2024, <https://news.detik.com/pilkada/D-7569980/bagaimana-jika-kotak-kosong-menang-pilkada-2024-ini-aturannya>.

This finding indicates that the legality of single-candidate regional elections does not always align with the quality of substantive democracy. From a democratic perspective, political competition is an important mechanism for presenting diverse leadership options so that the public can determine their leader based on rational considerations. When competition does not occur, the public's space for political participation is limited even though all stages of the regional election have been carried out in accordance with the law.

In an ideal view, democracy requires healthy and diverse political competition to provide broad choices for the public. The presence of a single candidate facing an empty box shows the limitations of the local political system in accelerating the spirit of positive competition, so that voters' choices are very limited. The implementation of regional elections without adequate competition often indicates the dominance of political elites or certain parties, no longer a figure representing the aspirations of the wider community, which ultimately causes the quality of democracy at the local level to decline.¹² Interview results show that the community feels the available choices are very limited, thus impacting the decline in the quality of political participation. In terms of numbers, people may still come to vote, but the quality of their participation decreases because they do not have enough choices to compare.

This suggests that public participation is more formal (simply voting), rather than truly thoughtful involvement. The phenomenon of the empty box in the 2024 regional elections in Pakpak Bharat Regency not only demonstrates limited political choices but also reflects the social and political dynamics within the community. Support for the empty box, in some cases, is an expression of public disappointment with the available candidates and the previous leadership. Support for the empty box is more than simply a refusal to vote; it reflects general dissatisfaction. As part of the community's political rights, the news report actually emphasizes that voting for the empty box is a legally valid choice. The announcement of support for the empty box demonstrates that the public is still involved in politics, albeit in a different way, namely by rejecting existing candidates. Participation in politics is seen as a way to critique and assess the current political system beyond electing candidates. One way to interpret the empty box phenomenon is as a form of critical political engagement. People are using their right to vote to spread political messages rather than simply remaining passive.

According to official data from the General Elections Commission (KPU) of the Pakpak Bharat Regency, 71.59% of voters cast their ballots in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat regent and vice-regent election, with 71.204% male voters and 71.912% female voters. While participation is considered high, this situation may not accurately represent the ideal aspects of democracy, as people's political views may be limited by the small number of candidates. This suggests that while democracy still operates procedurally, there are substantive dynamics of dissatisfaction that need to be addressed to strengthen local democracy. This pattern suggests that the quality of choices available to people is as important as the level of engagement in local democracy. When choices are available to people, when choices are limited, people tend to express their political attitudes through alternatives such as the empty box.¹³

Factors Behind the Emergence of Empty Boxes in the 2024 Regional Elections in Pakpak Bharat Regency

Many factors influence local political dynamics, and regional head election laws that permit the acceptance of candidates have led to the phenomenon of regional elections without qualified candidates, which has been observed in several regions in Indonesia. A lack of political rivals, the dominance of incumbents, closed political party coalitions, an electoral system that allows empty boxes, transactional politics and limited local democracy, and a lack of public political awareness are some of the main causes of this phenomenon. For several reasons, simultaneous regional elections in 2024 could undermine regional democracy. One of the main causes of single candidates and competition without qualified candidates in the elections is the lack of candidates. It is common knowledge that to run for regional head, political parties at the national and regional levels must offer sufficient financial support¹⁴.

However, upon closer examination, these various factors cannot be separated from the structural factors in the nomination of regional heads. This is in line with the regulations stipulated in Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning

¹²Radians Krisna Febriandy and Rini Sudarmanti, "The Empty Box Phenomenon in 2024"

Simultaneous Regional Elections: Democracy Challenge Or People's Choice?," *Journal of Communication Spectrum (Jsk)* 2024, No. 10 (2024): 452–64,

<https://doi.org/10.37826/Spektrum.V12i4.813>.

¹³Juniker Berutu, "A Number of Pakpak Bharat Community Elements Hold a Declaration Supporting Empty Boxes in the 2024 Regional Elections," *Klik Sumut*, 2024, <https://kliksumut.com/Sejumlah-Element-Masyarakat-Pakpak-Bharat-Gelar-Deklarasi-Dukung-Kotak-Kosong-Di-Pilkada-2024/>.

¹⁴Hendrik Kurniawan, Priyo Handoko, and Wendari Iga Susilo, "Regional Elections: The Impact of Empty Boxes on Indonesian Democracy," *Sosio Yustisia: Journal of Law and Social Change* 5, No. 1 (2025): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.15642/Sosyus.V5i1.805>.

regional elections. The nomination rules in Pakpak Bharat for 2024 follow the national rules for simultaneous regional elections, namely being nominated by political parties/supported by political parties or through an independent path, both of which have quite strict provisions in the political party path, the existence of a nomination threshold *encourages* the formation of large coalitions between parties to meet administrative requirements.¹⁵ Based on the results of an interview with Mr. Tridah Lulun Dapt Berutu as a member of the Pakpak Bharat KPU, the registration process for regional head candidates in Pakpak Bharat Regency was opened on the specified date, including for independent candidates. However, in its implementation, no candidates registered themselves through the independent path. In contrast, all candidates participating in the regional elections were supported by political parties, whose nomination process was carried out through coalition mechanisms and lengthy administrative stages. This indicates that political parties remain the sole dominant channel in the nomination process. This phenomenon demonstrates that political party support in regional elections is dynamic and influenced by elite-level negotiations. This confirms that coalition stability is a crucial factor in determining the direction of candidate pairs' candidacies in the 2024 regional elections in Pakpak Bharat Regency.

Eleven political parties have fully endorsed Francis Bernhard Tumanggor and Mutsyuhito Solin, M.Pd., as candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent of Pakpak Bharat in the November 2024 regional head elections (pilkada). These eleven supporting political parties include the National Awakening Party (PKB), Gerardo, PDI-P, Golkar, PKS, Hanura, PAN, Demokrat, PPP, Nasdem, and PSI. Therefore, in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat regional head election, it is highly likely that only one candidate will advance. This is because, as of the final day of registration for regional head candidate pairs at the General Elections Commission (KPU), only Francis Bernhard Tumanggor and Mutsyuhito Solin were officially registered and received by Basra Muntthe, Chairman of the Pakpak Bharat General Elections Commission (KPU), and his staff.¹⁶ This requirement often results in only one candidate pair being nominated. However, there are several shortcomings to the independent candidate approach as an alternative, particularly related to gaining significant popular support and difficult verification procedures. Furthermore, the opportunities for alternative candidates to emerge are increasingly limited by party coalition structures, which are typically based on agreements between political elites. Therefore, the phenomenon of single candidates and blank ballots in regional elections can be explained primarily by these structural factors.

Based on the results of the interview with Mr. Jono Solin, Secretary of the DPD PKS Pakpak Bharat Regency, he stated that the emergence of only one candidate pair in the regional elections was due to the absence of other candidates who were deemed to meet the qualifications and competencies deemed sufficient to compete in the contest. This made the nomination space more concentrated on the existing candidate pairs. Furthermore, regarding the reasons why political parties chose to form a coalition in supporting one candidate pair rather than nominating alternative candidates, the informant explained that the candidate pair for regent and deputy regent who were nominated had the same vision and mission as the supporting political party. This alignment of vision is the main basis for the formation of collective political support, so that parties prefer to consolidate support in one candidate pair rather than open other nomination options. The explanation above shows that the nomination process is not solely influenced by the quantity of potential subjects that can be involved, but also by political agreement and alignment of interests between parties in determining the direction of support.

From the perspective of Islamic political thought, the coalition mechanism dominated by agreements among party elites can be viewed as a political practice that does not fully reflect the principle of *shura*. In Islam, *shura* is not only interpreted as deliberation among political elites, but also as an open, participatory decision-making process that provides space for public aspirations. When political decisions are determined primarily through negotiation and consolidation at the elite level, resulting in a single candidate pair, the space for public deliberation becomes increasingly limited. As a result, the public loses the opportunity to openly assess and compare various leadership alternatives. Thus, although political party coalitions are a legitimate mechanism in Indonesia's democratic system, the dominance of elite negotiations in the nomination process has the potential to diminish the quality of substantive democracy because the essence of *shura* as a principle of public participation has not been optimally realized.

¹⁵Titin Herawati Wahyu and Qorizha Islamiah Ningrum, "Reducing the Threshold for Regional Head Nominations in 2024 Regarding the Empty Box Phenomenon," *Jurnal Wetgeving* 1, No. 1 (2026): 43–66, <https://doi.org/10.56013/Wetgeving.V1i1.5166>.

¹⁶Abdi Tumanggor, "Sole Candidate for Pakpak Bharat Regional Election, 11 Parties Support Franc Bernhard Tumanggor and Mutsyuhito Solin," *Medan Tribune*, 2024, <https://medan.tribunnews.com/2024/08/29/Calon-Tunggal-Pilkada-Pakpak-Bharat-11-Partai-DukungFranc-Bernhard-Tumanggor-Dan-Mutsyuhito-Solin>.

According to an interview with Mr. Feisal Alfredi Berutu, Head of the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) of Pakpak Bharat Regency, all stages of the 2024 regional elections were supervised, from the nomination process to the determination of the results. Furthermore, Bawaslu implemented preventive and law enforcement procedures to ensure that the procedures followed all relevant requirements. These findings and conversations led to the conclusion that Bawaslu will play a crucial role in managing the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency regional elections, even though there is only one candidate. This oversight aims to maintain the integrity and quality of democracy and ensure compliance with the rules. Limited political competition continues to be a significant obstacle to achieving more substantive democracy, despite the success of regional election procedures. Therefore, to encourage the development of a more transparent and competitive political system and provide a wider range of choices to the public, broader efforts are needed from all political actors.

The Empty Box Phenomenon Analyzed from the Perspective of Islamic Political Thought

The phenomenon of empty boxes in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Election can not only be understood as a consequence of electoral democracy mechanisms, but can also be analyzed through the perspective of Islamic political thought that emphasizes the principles of *shura*, legitimacy, and the mandate of leadership. These three principles serve as a normative basis for assessing whether the political process not only fulfills legal aspects but also reflects the values of justice, participation, and the welfare of society. The Qur'an mentions the importance of deliberation in verse Asy-shura: 38.

وَالَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِرَبِّهِمْ وَأَقَامُوا وَآمَرُهُمْ شُورَىٰ بَيْنَهُمْ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ
(الشورى/42:38)

This means "(it is also better and more lasting for) those who accept (obey) God's call and perform prayers, while their affairs are (decided) by deliberation between them. They spend part of the sustenance that We have bestowed upon them" (Ash-Shura/42:38)

This verse emphasizes that decision-making, including determining leadership, should be carried out through deliberation that allows for community participation. Research shows that the nomination process in the Pakpak Bharat Regency Pilkada was largely determined through consolidation and agreement between political parties, resulting in only one candidate pair.

According to an interview with Mr. Abdul Rahman, a religious figure in Pakpak Bharat Regency, an ideal leader election procedure should allow the public to properly consider various candidates. However, this space for deliberation is limited in regional elections where there is only one candidate, as voters have fewer options. Because optimal deliberation requires a broader exchange of ideas and decisions, this suggests that the principle of *shura* has not been fully achieved. Furthermore, elected leaders still obtain formal approval through a voting process, but this legitimacy is usually procedural and does not truly represent the best level of public support. He further emphasized that Islamic leadership is a primary moral obligation that must be fulfilled with integrity, fairness, and a focus on the welfare of the community. In this regard, regardless of how the election process is conducted, the principle of trust serves as the primary basis for evaluating a leader's quality. According to an interview with Mr. Abdul Rahman, a religious figure in Pakpak Bharat Regency, an ideal leader election procedure should allow the public to consider several candidates before making a choice. However, in the 2024 Pakpak Bharat Regency Pilkada, this space for deliberation is limited because there is only one candidate pair competing. This situation leaves the public with insufficient alternatives to compare the vision, mission, capacity, and integrity of prospective leaders. According to the informant, although elected leaders obtain procedural legitimacy through a voting mechanism, this legitimacy does not necessarily fully reflect the level of moral acceptance among the public. He also emphasized that in Islam, leadership is a mandate that must be carried out with integrity, justice, and an orientation toward the public good. Therefore, the quality of leadership is determined not only by the legitimacy of the election procedure, but also by public trust in the process that produces the leader.

These findings align with the principle of *shura* in Islamic political thought, which places deliberation as the primary foundation for political decision-making. As emphasized in QS. Asy-Shura, verse 38, matters of leadership should be decided through deliberation involving public participation. In this context, *shura* is not only interpreted as a consultation process among political elites, but also as a mechanism that ensures openness, participation, and the availability of choices that enable the public to rationally determine their leaders. Therefore, when the nomination process produces only one candidate pair, the space for public deliberation becomes narrower, thus the substance of *shura* is not fully realized. In addition to the principle of *shura*, the research results also demonstrate the importance of the legitimacy of leadership. In Islamic political thought, legitimacy is based not only on formal legality but also on the public's moral acceptance of the chosen leader. Therefore, the presence of empty box votes in the Pakpak

Bharat Regency Pilkada indicates that the legal legitimacy obtained by a single candidate pair is not necessarily fully followed by substantive legitimacy from the public. This phenomenon indicates that some people use their voting rights as a form of evaluation of the nomination process which is deemed not to have provided adequate leadership alternatives.¹⁷

Legitimacy of leadership: Islamic political thought bases legitimacy not solely on the legal formalities of government, but also on the willingness and moral acceptance of the leader by the people. In Islamic perspective, a legitimate leader is one who is supported and accepted by his community and who is able to fulfill the principles of *shura* and justice. The phenomenon of the empty box vote, in which a large number of voters consciously reject a single candidate, reflects that a candidate's legal legitimacy does not automatically guarantee moral legitimacy in the eyes of the public. In Islamic society, this moral legitimacy is closely related to the candidate's ability to fulfill the mandate, namely the moral mandate to carry out just, honest, and responsible leadership for the benefit of the people. Normative studies, such as those discussed in *fiqh siyasah*, indicate that public satisfaction with political representation is a crucial component of the legitimacy of Islamic governance.¹⁸ According to Islamic political theory, an elected leader must be recognized and approved by the people. This legitimacy is crucial because, in the Islamic political system, a leader's power is only considered legitimate if it is based on the people's consent, either through an open election process or broad acceptance of his existence. Because there is no competition in regional elections, often seen as a way to gauge genuine public acceptance and support for a candidate, the leader's legitimacy can be compromised. The public lacks the opportunity to make informed decisions based on a variety of factors without a competitive process. In this regard, the lack of competition can undermine the legitimacy of electing a single candidate through a legal process free from coercion or manipulation. Therefore, while regional elections with a single candidate are legitimate under Islamic law, they have the potential to undermine public acceptance of the elected leader, especially when considering freedom of choice.

The principle of trustworthiness serves as a moral standard for assessing leadership quality. Trustworthiness implies that a leader possesses not only authority but also responsibility to govern honestly, fairly, and with a focus on the public good (*maslahah 'ammah*). In the context of the Pakpak Bharat Regency Pilkada, the choice of an empty box by some members of the public can be understood as a demand that the political process produce a leader who is not only legally legitimate but also possesses integrity, competence, and high moral responsibility. Thus, the empty box phenomenon not only reflects the dynamics of electoral politics but also indicates that the public desires a more participatory, competitive democratic process that aligns with the principles of *shura*, legitimacy, and trustworthiness in Islamic political thought.

A single-candidate election cannot effectively implement healthy competition. In a single-candidate election, the public cannot fairly and comparatively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each candidate in the election. Consequently, determining whether applicants truly meet the required standards can be difficult. There would be no open and accountable procedure for assessing potential leaders without competition, which could result in the election of less qualified leaders. Prospective leaders can be evaluated and compared through competition based on a number of factors, including their vision, experience, abilities, and integrity. Furthermore, the public will be better able to assess prospective leaders, choosing those who not only meet the requirements but also demonstrate dedication to the public interest. Besides improving public welfare, healthy competition can democratize the leadership selection process.¹⁹

CONCLUSION

The empty box phenomenon in the 2024 regional elections in Pakpak Bharat Regency represents a dynamic form of local democracy that emerged due to the presence of a single candidate with dominant support from a coalition of political parties. This situation indicates a tendency toward party cartelization, a weak political cadre development process, and limited alternative figures capable of competing in regional political contests. Consequently, democratic competition is less than ideal because the public does not have a diverse choice of candidates. From a legal perspective, the existence of a single candidate facing an empty box has a legitimate legal

¹⁷Rian Dani Anjarsari, "Change of Head of State According to the Thoughts of Ahlus Sunnah Wal Jama'ah and Shi'ah in the Perspective of Modern Democracy in Indonesia" (Raden Intan State Islamic University of Lampung, 2021), [https://Repository.Radenintan.Ac.Id/14582/2/Perpus Pusat.Pdf](https://Repository.Radenintan.Ac.Id/14582/2/Perpus+Pusat.Pdf).

¹⁸Eza Tri Yandy, Faishal Taufiqurahman, And Devi Andani, "Empty Box In Regional Elections: Democratic Legitimacy And Institutional Imbalance In Government," *Journal Of Constitutional Law* 5, No. 1 (2025): 131–46, <https://Doi.Org/10.24042/As-Siyasi.V5i1.27226>.

¹⁹Asiyah Et Al., "Single Candidate Regional Elections in the Siyasah Syari'yyah Perspective," *Tasyri' Journal of Islamic Law* 4, No. 1 (2025): 559–81, <https://Doi.Org/https://Doi.Org/10.53038/Tsyr.V4i1.224>.

basis according to statutory regulations. However, this study found a lack of norms regarding the campaign mechanisms and political representation of the empty box, thus creating uncertainty in the implementation of electoral democracy and not fully guaranteeing the principle of equality in political competition.

From the perspective of Islamic political thought, the phenomenon of single candidates and the emergence of the empty box movement demonstrate that the principles of shura (deliberation), justice, trustworthiness, and openness have not been optimally implemented in the leadership circulation process. Islam emphasizes the importance of equal opportunity for every individual who has the capacity and integrity to participate in public leadership. Therefore, public support for the empty box cannot be viewed as a form of political apathy, but rather as an alternative political expression and an instrument of social control over the quality of local democracy. The findings of this study emphasize the need for reform of election regulations related to the position and campaign of the empty box, strengthening political party cadres, and improving public political education to realize a democracy that is not only procedural, but also substantive, participatory, and based on integrity in accordance with Islamic political values.

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