

Strengthening Local Democratic Governance through the Evaluation of Campaign Stages and Electoral Institutional Arrangements in Brebes Regency

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Abstract

Regional head elections (Pilkada) constitute an essential instrument of local democracy that requires not only administrative success but also the establishment of democratic and integrity-based governance. This activity aimed to evaluate campaign stages, the formation of ad hoc electoral bodies, and the institutional arrangements of Pilkada organizers as part of efforts to strengthen local democratic governance in Brebes Regency. The activity was conducted through a Focus Group Discussion organized by the General Election Commission of Brebes Regency involving resource persons, employing lectures, institutional reflection, and the identification of problems in Pilkada administration. The findings indicate that the implementation of campaign stages continues to face several challenges, including weak political competition due to the phenomenon of single candidates, the tendency toward administrative-oriented campaigns, and the challenges posed by digital campaigning. In addition, ad hoc electoral bodies continue to encounter limitations related to human resource capacity, independence, integrity, and institutional coordination effectiveness. Other challenges include the high workload borne by election organizers and institutional efficiency demands in simultaneous Pilkada implementation. This activity contributes to strengthening institutional reflection, enhancing the professionalism of Pilkada organizers, and formulating recommendations for more participatory, transparent, and integrity-based local democratic governance.

Keywords: *Local Democracy; Electoral Governance; Ad Hoc Bodies; Pilkada Integrity; Political Campaigns*

Abstrak

Pemilihan kepala daerah (Pilkada) merupakan instrumen penting dalam demokrasi lokal yang tidak hanya menuntut keberhasilan administratif, tetapi juga kualitas tata kelola demokrasi yang demokratis dan berintegritas. Kegiatan ini bertujuan mengevaluasi tahapan kampanye, pembentukan badan ad hoc, dan kelembagaan penyelenggara Pilkada sebagai upaya penguatan tata kelola demokrasi lokal di Kabupaten Brebes. Kegiatan dilaksanakan melalui Focus Group Discussion Komisi Pemilihan Umum Kabupaten Brebes bersama para nara sumber dengan metode ceramah, refleksi kelembagaan, dan identifikasi problematika penyelenggaraan Pilkada. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa pelaksanaan tahapan kampanye masih menghadapi persoalan berupa lemahnya kompetisi politik akibat fenomena calon tunggal, kecenderungan kampanye administratif, serta tantangan kampanye digital. Selain itu, badan ad hoc penyelenggara Pilkada masih

menghadapi kendala keterbatasan kapasitas sumber daya manusia, independensi, integritas, dan efektivitas koordinasi kelembagaan. Kendala lain yang muncul adalah tingginya beban kerja penyelenggara serta tuntutan efisiensi kelembagaan dalam Pilkada serentak. Kegiatan ini memberikan kontribusi dalam bentuk penguatan refleksi kelembagaan, peningkatan profesionalitas penyelenggara Pilkada, serta rekomendasi penguatan tata kelola demokrasi lokal yang lebih partisipatif, transparan, dan berintegritas.

Kata Kunci: *Demokrasi Lokal; Electoral Governance; Badan Ad Hoc; Integritas Pilkada; Kampanye Politik*

Pendahuluan

Regional head elections (Pilkada) constitute an important instrument within Indonesia's local democratic system, as they serve as a mechanism for exercising popular sovereignty at the regional level. Through Pilkada, citizens are granted the constitutional right to directly determine regional leadership while simultaneously influencing the direction of local government policies through democratic means. From the perspective of modern democracy, the quality of Pilkada is measured not only by the successful conduct of voting procedures, but also by the integrity of all electoral stages, the professionalism of election organizers, the quality of public participation, and the ability of electoral institutions to uphold democratic principles that are free and fair. Electoral integrity constitutes a fundamental element in strengthening the political legitimacy of regional governments and maintaining public trust in democratic institutions (Norris, 2014). Therefore, evaluating the implementation of Pilkada becomes an essential component of efforts to strengthen more accountable and sustainable local democratic governance.

The implementation of simultaneous Pilkada in Indonesia has generated increasingly complex institutional challenges. Such complexity is reflected in the heavy workload associated with Pilkada stages, local political dynamics, potential conflicts of interest, and growing demands for the professionalism of election organizers. Within the framework of electoral governance, electoral quality is strongly influenced by the institutional capacity of electoral management bodies to administer all stages effectively, transparently, and independently (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). This condition is particularly significant because election and Pilkada organizers function not merely as administrative executors, but also as guardians of democratic integrity. At the same time, various challenges-including limited human resources, local political pressures, and institutional coordination problems-remain persistent issues in the implementation of Pilkada across various regions in Indonesia.

One of the strategic stages in Pilkada is the campaign process. Campaigns should not merely be understood as political activities aimed at securing electoral support, but also as spaces for political education through the communication of candidates' visions, missions, and programs to the public. Provisions regarding campaign methods have been regulated under General Election Commission

Regulation (PKPU) Number 2 of 2024 and PKPU Number 13 of 2024, which provide guidelines for conducting campaigns in an orderly and democratic manner. Nevertheless, in practice, the campaign stage continues to face various challenges, one of which is the phenomenon of single-candidate elections. The presence of a single candidate in Pilkada creates specific problems for the quality of local democracy because it potentially reduces political competition, weakens the quality of public deliberation, and limits citizens' electoral alternatives. Several studies indicate that the single-candidate phenomenon reflects weak political party cadre development and the high level of local political pragmatism, both of which contribute to the declining quality of democratic competition (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

In addition to the campaign stage, the quality of Pilkada is also strongly influenced by the existence of ad hoc electoral bodies such as the District Election Committee (PPK), Voting Committee (PPS), and Voting Organizing Group (KPPS). These ad hoc bodies occupy a strategic position because they are directly involved in the technical implementation of electoral stages at the local level. Therefore, independence, integrity, professionalism, impartiality, and transparency constitute essential prerequisites for maintaining the quality of Pilkada administration. In practice, however, various problems continue to emerge, including limited human resource capacity, weak regulatory understanding, excessive workloads, and challenges in maintaining the neutrality of election organizers. In several cases, the heavy workload borne by ad hoc electoral bodies has become a serious concern in Indonesia's electoral governance (Mietzner, 2020). This condition demonstrates that institutional strengthening and capacity building for election organizers are urgent necessities in reinforcing Pilkada integrity.

Against this background, the evaluation activities concerning campaign stages, the establishment of ad hoc bodies, and institutional arrangements conducted by the General Election Commission (KPU) of Brebes Regency constitute an important component of post-Pilkada institutional reflection. These activities function not only as evaluative forums for assessing the implementation of Pilkada stages, but also as mechanisms for identifying various problems that emerged throughout the electoral process. Through participatory and reflective approaches, these activities are expected to contribute to strengthening the institutional capacity of election management bodies, particularly in enhancing professionalism, integrity, and the effectiveness of local democratic governance in Brebes Regency.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this article aims to analyze the implementation of evaluation activities concerning campaign stages, the establishment of ad hoc bodies, and the institutional arrangements of Pilkada organizers as efforts to strengthen local democratic governance in Brebes Regency. The analysis focuses on the problems associated with campaign stages, the institutional challenges faced by ad hoc bodies, and the importance of

strengthening the institutional capacity of Pilkada organizers in maintaining democratic quality and electoral integrity.

Implementation of the Activity

This community service activity was conducted in the form of a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) organized by the General Election Commission (KPU) of Brebes Regency on 19 February 2025 at Almayra Convention Hall, Grand Dian Hotel, Brebes, with the author serving as one of the resource persons alongside other invited speakers. The activity focused on evaluating campaign stages, the establishment of ad hoc bodies, and institutional reflection following the implementation of the 2024 Pilkada. The forum functioned as a dialogical space between academics and election organizers to identify various issues that emerged during the Pilkada process. In addition, the activity was intended to strengthen the institutional capacity of Pilkada organizers in responding to the increasingly complex challenges of local democracy.

The participants consisted of commissioners of the KPU of Brebes Regency, secretariat personnel, community leaders, representatives of the local government, and parties involved in the implementation of Pilkada stages. The activity was carried out through presentations, participatory discussions, and reflective evaluation sessions concerning the various dynamics that emerged throughout the Pilkada stages. The discussion proceeded actively, as participants not only shared technical experiences encountered in the field but also expressed perspectives regarding the institutional challenges they faced. Through this dialogical approach, the activity succeeded in producing an initial mapping of various challenges in the implementation of Pilkada in Brebes Regency.

The materials presented during the activity included an evaluation of campaign stages based on prevailing regulations, the problems associated with single-candidate elections, and the challenges related to the formation of ad hoc Pilkada bodies. The discussion also emphasized the importance of maintaining the independence, integrity, professionalism, and impartiality of election organizers throughout every stage of Pilkada implementation. Beyond the technical aspects of election administration, the discussion highlighted the importance of fostering a culture of public service (*service mindedness*) within electoral institutions. Issues concerning institutional efficiency and discourse on strengthening the institutional system of election management bodies in the future also constituted important components of the discussion. The atmosphere of the activity, as illustrated in the following figures:

Figure 1. Activity Atmosphere



Through this activity, participants were provided with a collective space for reflection on both the achievements and shortcomings of the Pilkada implementation that had been carried out. The evaluation process was intended not only to identify administrative and technical problems, but also to strengthen awareness regarding the importance of democratic and integrity-based electoral governance. The activity also functioned as a medium for knowledge transfer between academics and election as well as Pilkada organizers in developing a more comprehensive perspective on strengthening local democracy. Accordingly, the outcomes of the activity are expected to serve as evaluative materials and recommendations for improving the quality of future election and Pilkada administration.

Discussion

1. Evaluation of Campaign Stages and the Problematics of Electoral Democracy

The campaign stage constitutes one of the most strategic phases in the implementation of Pilkada because it serves as the primary arena of interaction between candidate pairs and the electorate. Within the framework of local democracy, campaigns function not only as electoral instruments for securing political support, but also as mechanisms of political education for the public. Law Number 10 of 2016 affirms that Pilkada must be conducted based on democratic principles, while the technical regulations concerning campaign stages and methods are further governed through PKPU Number 2 of 2024 and PKPU Number 13 of 2024. From the perspective of electoral integrity, the quality of campaigns is closely associated with the quality of democracy because voters require access to political information that is open, rational, and competitive (Norris, 2014). Therefore, campaigns cannot merely be understood as procedural

political activities, but also as spaces for shaping the quality of democratic participation within society.

PKPU Number 13 of 2024 regulates various campaign methods, including limited meetings, face-to-face interactions and dialogues, public debates, dissemination of campaign materials, installation of campaign props, and advertisements in mass and electronic media. Such regulations reflect efforts to establish orderly and equitable political competition among candidate pairs. Nevertheless, campaign effectiveness is determined not solely by compliance with administrative regulations, but also by the substance of political communication developed throughout the Pilkada stages. In practice, campaigns continue to be dominated by mass mobilization, political symbolism, and candidate image-building rather than by programmatic exchanges of ideas addressing public needs. This condition demonstrates that electoral democracy at the local level continues to face challenges in fostering a substantive and deliberative political culture (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

One of the major problems in Pilkada is the increasing phenomenon of single-candidate elections. This phenomenon has become a serious concern because it indicates the weakening of political competition within local democracy. The General Election Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI) recorded that the phenomenon of single candidates has continued to increase in simultaneous Pilkada across various regions in Indonesia (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2024). Although the existence of a single candidate is legally permissible under Law Number 10 of 2016, democratically such a condition reflects the limited availability of political alternatives for society. As a consequence, the quality of political contestation declines because Pilkada no longer operates through balanced competition among candidates.

The single-candidate phenomenon also indicates problems within political party cadre formation and the consolidation of local democracy. In many cases, political parties prefer to establish broad coalitions to secure political victory rather than encourage healthy competition. Such circumstances narrow the space for candidacy and reinforce the dominance of local political elites. Aspinall and Berenschot (2019) explain that local democracy in Indonesia remains heavily influenced by patronage practices, clientelism, and political oligarchy, all of which affect the quality of electoral competition. Thus, the problem of single candidates is not merely related to the procedural aspects of Pilkada, but also reflects structural problems within Indonesia's local political system.

The issue of single candidates also affects the quality of political representation within society. Democracy fundamentally requires competition among ideas, programs, and leadership alternatives so that citizens may make rational political choices. When only one candidate pair is available, the space for public deliberation becomes increasingly limited because society does not adequately receive alternative visions for regional development. The Constitutional Court has indeed affirmed that the "empty box" mechanism serves

as an alternative option in single-candidate Pilkada (Mahkamah Konstitusi, 2024). Substantively, however, such a mechanism remains incapable of fully replacing the importance of political competition among candidate pairs in electoral democracy.

In addition to the problem of single candidates, the development of digital technology has introduced new challenges into the Pilkada campaign stage. Social media provides broader, faster, and more accessible channels of political communication for society. However, at the same time, the use of digital media also increases the risks of disinformation, hate speech, manipulation of public opinion, and political polarization. Digital campaigns frequently emphasize image warfare and propaganda rather than the substantive communication of regional development programs. Such conditions may affect voter rationality and reduce the quality of deliberative democracy at the local level.

Within this context, election organizers bear an important responsibility for maintaining the integrity of campaign stages. The KPU performs not only administrative functions, but is also tasked with ensuring that all Pilkada participants receive fair and equal treatment throughout the campaign process. From the perspective of electoral governance, the quality of election management bodies substantially determines the level of public trust in electoral outcomes (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002). Therefore, the professionalism, independence, and transparency of election organizers constitute essential factors in preserving the legitimacy of local democracy. When organizers are able to maintain the integrity of the campaign process, public trust in Pilkada outcomes becomes increasingly strengthened.

The evaluation of campaign stages conducted together with the KPU of Brebes Regency demonstrates that post-Pilkada institutional reflection constitutes an important step toward improving the quality of local democracy. The evaluation was directed not only toward the administrative aspects of campaign implementation, but also toward the quality of political communication, public participation, and the effectiveness of political education throughout the Pilkada stages. The evaluation forum provided a space for election organizers to identify various weaknesses and challenges encountered during the campaign process. In addition, the evaluation also functioned as a mechanism for strengthening the institutional capacity of election organizers in responding to increasingly complex local political dynamics.

Accordingly, the evaluation of campaign stages must be understood as part of strengthening local democratic governance that is more democratic, participatory, and integrity-based. High-quality campaigns depend not only on compliance with regulations, but also on the ability to create healthy political competition and substantive political education for society. The phenomenon of single candidates, the weak substantive quality of campaigns, and the challenges of digital campaigning demonstrate that local democracy continues to require stronger institutional frameworks and a more mature political culture. Therefore,

strengthening the professionalism of election organizers, improving public political literacy, and reforming political party cadre systems constitute important agendas for enhancing the quality of Pilkada in Indonesia.

2. Strengthening Institutional Capacity and the Professionalism of Ad Hoc Electoral Management Bodies

The quality of Pilkada administration is determined not only by electoral regulations and election participants, but also significantly influenced by the institutional capacity of election management bodies. Within Indonesia's electoral system, election administration is carried out by the KPU as the principal institution, supported by ad hoc bodies such as the PPK, PPS, and KPPS. Ad hoc bodies occupy a strategic position because they are directly involved in implementing electoral stages at the local level and serve as the frontline providers of electoral services to society. Therefore, the professionalism and integrity of ad hoc bodies constitute essential factors in maintaining the quality of electoral democracy. From the perspective of electoral governance, electoral success is highly dependent upon the institutional capacity of election organizers to manage electoral stages effectively, independently, and accountably (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002).

The establishment of ad hoc bodies in elections and Pilkada forms an important component of electoral management governed by Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, Law Number 10 of 2016, and various technical regulations issued by the KPU. Normatively, ad hoc bodies are established to ensure that all electoral stages can be implemented down to the village level and polling stations. In practice, however, the formation of ad hoc bodies frequently encounters various obstacles, particularly concerning the availability of human resources possessing adequate capacity, integrity, and understanding of electoral regulations. In many regions, the recruitment process for ad hoc bodies also faces challenges in maintaining the independence of election organizers from local political influence. This condition demonstrates that the quality of ad hoc bodies is determined not solely by the administrative aspects of their establishment, but also by the quality of recruitment systems and continuous institutional development.

One of the primary problems faced by ad hoc bodies is the limited capacity of human resources. Ad hoc election organizers are required to understand complex electoral regulations within a relatively short period of time, while the dynamics of Pilkada stages continue to evolve rapidly. Such conditions frequently generate technical problems in the field, ranging from administrative errors and weak coordination to inconsistencies in the interpretation of electoral regulations. In several national cases, the limited technical capacity of ad hoc bodies has even contributed to disputes over electoral outcomes and procedural violations. Therefore, strengthening human resource capacity constitutes an important agenda within the reform of electoral institutional governance in Indonesia.

In addition to capacity-related issues, the independence of ad hoc bodies also represents a serious challenge in Pilkada administration. Election organizers at the local level often occupy vulnerable positions due to their social proximity to political elites and local communities. Under such circumstances, maintaining neutrality and impartiality is far from easy. In fact, the principle of independence constitutes the fundamental basis of democratic and integrity-based election administration (Norris, 2014). When the independence of election organizers weakens, public trust in Pilkada outcomes also declines because society perceives the democratic process as failing to operate fairly and equally.

Issues concerning the integrity of ad hoc bodies are also closely related to the professionalism of election organizers. Professionalism should not merely be understood as technical competence in administering electoral stages, but also as encompassing ethical responsibility, work discipline, and commitment to maintaining the quality of public service. Within the context of democratic service delivery, election organizers must be capable of performing their duties transparently, responsively, and in an orientation directed toward public interests. This is important because elections fundamentally constitute a form of public service directly related to the constitutional rights of citizens. Therefore, a culture of *service mindedness* constitutes an essential component of strengthening electoral institutions.

The evaluation conducted together with the KPU of Brebes Regency demonstrates that the relationship between commissioners and the secretariat also constitutes an important factor in the institutional effectiveness of election management bodies. Commissioners perform policymaking and oversight functions over electoral stages, while the secretariat carries out administrative and institutional technical support functions. In practice, suboptimal coordination may affect the effectiveness of Pilkada administration. Therefore, strengthening institutional communication and establishing clear functional divisions are essential for maintaining the organizational stability of election management bodies. Harmonious institutional governance will reinforce decision-making effectiveness and improve the quality of public service in Pilkada administration.

Beyond internal institutional issues, Pilkada administration also faces challenges related to budget efficiency and organizational effectiveness. Discourse concerning the institutional efficiency of election management bodies continues to develop, particularly in relation to the high costs of simultaneous Pilkada and the temporary nature of ad hoc bodies. The government and various state institutions have repeatedly emphasized the need for electoral governance reform to achieve greater efficiency without diminishing democratic quality. The KPU RI has also stressed the importance of institutional evaluation as part of efforts to improve the electoral management system in the future (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2024). Within this context, institutional efficiency concerns not merely budget reduction, but also the effectiveness of work systems and the sustainability of the institutional capacity of election organizers.

The workload borne by ad hoc bodies has also become an important concern in the evaluation of electoral institutions. During previous elections and Pilkada, the excessive workload experienced by KPPS personnel even generated health and safety problems among election officers. This phenomenon demonstrates that Indonesia's electoral institutional design continues to face challenges in work distribution and human resource management. Mietzner (2020) explains that the complexity of political and bureaucratic governance frequently imposes substantial pressure on the capacity of public institutions. Within the context of election and Pilkada administration, such conditions reveal the need to reformulate the working system of ad hoc bodies in order to make it more effective, humane, and sustainable.

The institutional evaluation activities conducted together with the KPU of Brebes Regency demonstrate that post-Pilkada reflection possesses significant importance in strengthening the quality of electoral institutions. The evaluation was directed not only toward identifying technical weaknesses, but also toward fostering a more professional, transparent, and adaptive organizational culture in response to political and technological change. The evaluation forum became an important space for developing collective awareness that the quality of democracy is strongly influenced by the institutional quality of election management bodies. Furthermore, the evaluation may also serve as a foundation for formulating strategies aimed at strengthening human resource capacity and reforming the institutional governance of elections and Pilkada in the future.

Accordingly, strengthening the institutional capacity of ad hoc bodies and enhancing the professionalism of election organizers constitute essential prerequisites for maintaining Pilkada that is democratic and integrity-based. Challenges related to limited human resource capacity, independence, integrity, institutional coordination, and organizational efficiency demonstrate that electoral governance requires continuous strengthening. Election organizers cannot merely operate on the basis of administrative compliance, but must also cultivate a professional institutional culture oriented toward public service. Therefore, institutional reform, human resource capacity building, and continuous evaluation should become strategic agendas in strengthening local democracy in Indonesia.

Conclusion

The evaluation activities concerning campaign stages, the establishment of ad hoc bodies, and institutional arrangements conducted together with the KPU of Brebes Regency demonstrate that the quality of Pilkada is determined not only by the successful administrative implementation of electoral stages, but also by the substantive quality of local democratic governance. The evaluation of campaign stages revealed the persistence of various challenges, including the phenomenon of single candidates, weak political competition, and the tendency for campaigns to be more administrative than educational in nature. In addition, the development of digital campaigning has introduced new challenges in the form of

disinformation and political polarization, both of which require more adaptive oversight mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening the substantive quality of campaigns constitutes an important component in reinforcing electoral democracy at the local level.

From the institutional perspective, the evaluation findings indicate that ad hoc bodies occupy a strategic position in maintaining the quality of Pilkada administration, yet continue to face various challenges, including limited human resource capacity, issues of independence and integrity, and the effectiveness of institutional coordination. Strengthening the professionalism of election organizers must be pursued continuously through enhanced technical capacity building, institutional ethics development, and the reinforcement of a public service-oriented culture. Furthermore, post-Pilkada institutional evaluation is also essential as a foundation for improving electoral governance that is more effective, efficient, and adaptive to the dynamics of local democracy. Accordingly, strengthening the institutional capacity of election management bodies constitutes an essential prerequisite for safeguarding Pilkada integrity and enhancing public trust in democratic processes.

Based on the results of the activities and discussions, strategic measures are required in the form of strengthening recruitment and training systems for ad hoc bodies in order to enhance professionalism and integrity. Election organizers also need to improve oversight of digital campaigns while promoting more substantive and participatory political education for society. In addition, political parties need to strengthen cadre development and create broader opportunities for healthy political competition in order to reduce the phenomenon of single candidates in Pilkada. Through the strengthening of regulations, institutional capacity, and public participation, the quality of local democracy is expected to develop in a more democratic, inclusive, and sustainable manner.

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