

The Dynamics of the Four Lawang Regional Elections: Winning Against Empty Boxes and the Implications of PSU (Analysis of Victory and Challenges of Democracy in the Election Era)

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Abstract

The Regional Head Election (Pilkada) in Empat Lawang Regency, South Sumatra, in 2025 faces significant challenges with the emergence of the phenomenon of single candidate pairs fighting against empty boxes. This study aims to analyze the factors that affect the victory of a single candidate, the implications of re-voting (PSU) on the legitimacy of the election results, and the challenges in maintaining the integrity of democracy. The research method used is qualitative descriptive, with direct observation and analysis of previous research. The results showed that the victory of a single candidate was influenced by unbalanced campaigns, political party support, and a lack of public understanding of empty boxes. The legitimacy of the election results is highly dependent on public trust in the organizers of the Regional Elections, which is reflected in the high voter participation. Challenges in maintaining democracy in Empat Lawang Regency include fierce political competition, potential clashes between supporters, and a lack of political education. This research contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of local democracy in Indonesia, especially in the context of the Regional Elections.

Keywords: dynamics, Pilkada, Empty Box, PSU

INTRODUCTION

The election of Regional Heads or often known as Regional Elections is one of the important pillars in the democratic system in Indonesia.¹ All provinces and districts, cities held regional elections, including Empat Lawang district, which is located in South Sumatra. The Regional Elections in Empat Lawang district are in the spotlight in the implementation of this latest Regional Election in 2025.

It is found that in the Regional Elections it directly causes the phenomenon of a single candidate pair. This condition is ensured that in the implementation of the election will fight against empty boxes. The single candidate against the box is deeply

¹ Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, "Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia," 2016.

enshrined in Law Number 14 of 2015, concerning the Election of Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Deputy Regents, Mayors and Deputy Mayors. Legal products containing a single candidate against an empty city have been amended several times, KPU RI Regulation No. 20 of 2020 is an amendment to KPU Regulation No. 14 of 2015 concerning the Election of Governor and Deputy Governor, Regent and Deputy Regent, Mayor and Deputy Mayor regarding one pair of candidates.

In this election, the phenomenon of empty boxes² emerged as a significant challenge for candidates. Single candidates and empty boxes in the regional elections indicate a political system that tends to be pragmatic and undemocratic. There is a phenomenon of empty boxes that there is an analogy that describes a single candidate pair, the election of the regional head followed by 1 pair of candidates and the voter seems to have to agree on the single candidate pair to be chosen.

The meaning of an empty box is a single candidate pair against an empty box without another candidate pair. In addition, because the participation of political parties is not enough to propose the best cadres from their respective parties, so that political liberalization emerges to make one pair of candidates the winner. A single candidate in the regional elections is the same as a false contestation because the election without contestation essentially does not have a spirit or soul that is in harmony with the principles of *luber and jurdil*. Voter rights and the right to be elected are reduced because they are faced with choices that do not describe a competition. The public cannot compare candidate pairs, although it is certain that there are still other better candidates that can be chosen by the public.³

Re-voting, which was later known by the abbreviation PSU, could not avoid its occurrence in the implementation of regional elections in Indonesia. As a consequence, a re-vote requires more time and budget. Although sometimes it can change the process and the results. The legal basis for the implementation of Re-Voting or PSU is regulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections in Article 372. In paragraph (1), it is stipulated that voting at polling stations can be repeated in the event of a natural disaster and/or riot that results in the results of the vote not being used or the counting of votes cannot be carried out.

In addition, the re-voting that took place after the election added to the complexity of the situation, raising questions about fairness and transparency in the democratic process. This study aims to analyze victory in this context as well as the challenges faced in maintaining the integrity of democracy in Empat Lawang Regency. This research also offers a new perspective on the phenomenon of empty boxes in the Regional Elections, as well as the impact of PSUs that are often overlooked in previous studies. With a focus on Empat Lawang Regency, which contributes to the literature on local democracy in Indonesia.

² Wahyuning Chumaeson, "Single Candidate in the 2020 Regional Head Election in Indonesia: A Case Study of the Regional Head General Election in Sragen Regency," *JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS, SOCIAL & HUMANITIES* 2, no. 06 (2021): 182–196.

³ Mutia Pebi Pandia, "Re-Voting for the 2024 Election in Tenggak Village, Sidoharjo District, Sragen Regency," *Journal of Politic and Government Studies* 14, no. 1 (2024): 740–757.

Therefore, in this article, we will describe the factors that affect the victory of candidates in the Four Lawang Regional Elections against the empty boxes, how are the implications of the re-voting (PSU) on the legitimacy of the election results and the challenges faced in maintaining democracy in the Empat Lawang Regency post-Election

METHOD

The research method used in this article is a qualitative descriptive method based on the results of previous observations and research, previous research is important in a study to provide a common thread for the research that the researcher is researching. There have been many researches related to the regional elections, including research conducted by Abdullah, in 2024⁴ it is stated that the single candidate and the empty box are a political system that is practical and undemocratic, juridically and normatively, because the single candidate against the empty box according to the Constitutional Court decision Number 100/PUU-XII/2015 hints at the public to make a decision to agree or disagree. If the majority of the public disagrees, So the election was postponed until the next period. Only a single candidate exists because of the expensive political dowry, the Regional Elections are held in order to support oligarchs who cause others to have no political boats.

Research conducted in Seragen by Mutia Pebi Pandia⁵ explained that the regulations for the implementation of Re-Voting (PSU) are unclear because there are no challenges in realizing a fair election process, there are inconsistencies and legal uncertainty if the PSU has more than two candidate pairs. Harmonization between regulations is very minimal, causing difficulties both in organizing PSUs and for organizers. The lack of technical guidance and direction is hampered, and has the potential to jeopardize the integrity of elections.⁶

The researcher conducted direct observations on the implementation of the regional elections in Empat Lawang district both when fighting against empty boxes and re-voting. The researcher recorded all the results of observations in the field, small interviews, analyzing the results based on existing theories.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Factors that affect the candidate's victory against the empty box in the Four Lawang Regional Elections.

1. The campaign is for only one pair of candidates, there is no campaign for empty boxes.
2. Only one pair of salons on banners and the like
3. In campaign props, there is only one pair of candidates, as well as campaign attributes and other media can be done massively.

⁴ Nur Rohim Yunus, "Single Candidate as a Form of Political Party Dysfunction," *BE* 1, no. 4 (2017).

⁵ Pandia, "Re-Voting for the 2024 Election in Tenggak Village, Sidoharjo District, Sragen Regency."

⁶ M Rizqi and Didan Neofal Arysandi, "The Problem of Re-Voting Rules in the Dispute of the Results of the Presidential and Vice Presidential Elections," *Journal of Legal Interpretation* 5, no. 3 (2024): 1225–1234.

4. The empty box vote promo is only carried out by democracy activists, NGOs, or election monitors.
5. The timing of the candidate mobilizers is more and more maximal in carrying out the mission of winning candidates.
6. Witnesses at polling stations are only for one candidate pair, because based on Law 10/2016 witnesses are candidates if they are officially written from the candidate pair. Witnesses from the empty box were confirmed to be absent.
7. Not many voters understand that blank boxes on the ballot are an option as well.
8. It is supported by many parties (National Mandate Party, Golkar Party, PDI Perjuangan, Democratic Party, Gerindra Party, PKS and Nasdem Party).⁷

Legitimacy of the Results of the Re-Voting Election (PSU)

In the era of direct elections, especially the election of regional heads, legitimacy and public trust are very important and because it can affect the results of the elections, good or bad in the election process, the problem is that the more the community is legitimate and has a high level of trust in the organizers of the elections, the results of the elections will be better and vice versa if the legitimacy of the people is low and there is no trust in the organizers of the elections, then it will be producing bad elections or the results of the elections are flawed and have a low participation rate.

The people in Empat Lawang Regency are very enthusiastic in participating in the election process, both when fighting against an empty city with 260 thousand ballots prepared, including additional backups. The number of DPTs in the Empat Lawang area is 257,020 people with 125,024 voters, including women and 131,996 male voters. 176,250 valid votes, the candidate received 140,302 votes or 79.6%. Meanwhile, voters who chose the empty box received 35,958 votes. Thus, the candidate pair won 140,302 votes, while the blank column received 35,948 votes. There were 176,250 valid votes, and 3,687 invalid votes.⁸

At the time of the PSU, the public's enthusiasm increased to 80% so that in the recapitulation of votes, Budi Antoni-Henny got 52,021 votes, while Joncik-Arifai got 80,639 votes. So that the difference in votes between the candidates was 28,618 votes.⁹ Thus, it is clear that the legitimacy and trust of the public in the implementation of the regional elections and election organizers is very good.

The challenges faced in maintaining democracy in Empat Lawang Regency.

In carrying out the democratic party, including and like the regional elections in Empat Lawang, because considering that Empat Lawang Regency is sociology and

⁷ Farid Assifa Aji YK Putra, "7 Parties Support Incumbent Elections, Four Lawang Regional Elections Will Fight Empty Boxes This article has been published on Kompas.Com with the title '7 Parties Support Incumbent Candidates, Four Lawang Regional Elections Will Fight Empty Boxes', Click to read: <https://Regional.Kompas.Com/Read/2024/0>," *Kompas.Com*, 2024.

⁸ Agus Dwi, "The recapitulation of the PSU of the Four Lawang Regional Elections is completed, the KPU Plenary is held today," *Republic of Merdeka*, 2025.

⁹ Dani Aswara, "Quick Count Results of PSU Four Lawang Regional Elections: Joncik-Arifai Ahead 59 Percent," *Time*, 2025.

anthropology, the people are hard, but religious and religious. However, in terms of maintaining democracy, there will be challenges, the challenges in maintaining democracy in the Four Lanes are

1. Very tight political competition,; The competition is stated to be tight because the two pairs of candidates in the PSU both have solid timem and supporters and ..
2. The potential for clashes between supporters is high, because they both want the candidate to win, and do not prepare mentally what if they lose.
3. Political education for the community is very lacking. The community is not given ample time and is also appropriate in getting an explanation of the process, implementation, discipline, PSU
4. Competition is very fierce and intense, every election in any form must be fierce and this is a risk. This risk is well understood by the public.
5. High tension potential,
6. Potential for physical clashes when the Regional Elections are strong
7. There are still people who do not understand and appreciate differences of opinion, especially in politics
8. Vulnerable to acts of violence.

DISCUSSION

The Victory of the Regent Candidate in Empat Lawang Regency When Fighting an Empty Box But Ended in PSU

One pair of candidates for regional leaders or candidates for Regent in Empat Lawang district must fight against empty boxes because the situation and conditions demand to fight against empty boxes, such as the HBA-Heny candidate declared dead, because it is understood that he has served 2 terms as Regent in Empat Lawang Regency¹⁰. Empat Lawang Regency in the 2024 simultaneous election, followed by a pair of candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent against an empty box.

In addition, there was public dissatisfaction with the candidates being carried, empty boxes were provided as a form of protest. There is only one pair of candidates, encouraging the public to vote for an empty box. Unhealthy competition is due to the indication of the practice of fat coalition. As a form of imposing the will to win a single candidate. Debate and debate do not exist, even though in a democracy debate and debate and debate are important.¹¹

The victory against the empty kotan that ended up PSU in Empat Lawang district was due to the Constitutional Court's decision to annul the victory of a single candidate,¹² so that voters had the opportunity to vote again, to ensure the legitimacy of the election. Second, there is a dispute over election results (PHP). So as a follow-up to PSU, to realize a safe, orderly, peaceful, and dignified Regional Elections.

¹⁰ Muhammad Riyadi et al., "Analysis of General Election Commission Regulation Number 18 of 2024 Jean Jacques Rousseau's Perspective on the Legitimacy of Power," *JOURNAL USM LAW REVIEW* 8, no. 1 (2025): 179–195.

¹¹ Satriyani Dewi Astuti, "UNAIR Political Communication Expert Responds to Bacapres' Debate Event," *Unair News*, 2023.

¹² "Ikhtisar_4246_2454_Ikhtisar 24- BUP," n.d.

Then the Bawaslu of Empat Lawang Regency held a peaceful PSU declaration to ensure that all parties are committed to a conducive process, including the community, as a benchmark for the success of the election. As the head of the region, namely the Governor of South Sumatra, he hopes that the community can channel political rights properly, and transparently so that there are no lawsuits so that the funds can be used for more useful things for regional developers.

The Influence of Legitimacy and Trust of the Four Lawang People in PSU

Public legitimacy plays an important role in Re-Voting (PSU) in the regional elections, because the level of public participation and trust in the election process can affect the results and acceptance of elected candidates. If the public feels involved and believes in the integrity of the election, the legitimacy of the elected regional heads will be stronger, supporting the stability of the government.¹³ The trust of the people of Empat Lawang is high because the election takes place fairly and transparently, community participation in voting is high, the statesmanship nature of the Four Lawang people or this legalization can strengthen the legitimacy of the elected leaders.

With a high level of voter participation in the Four Lawang PSUs, it shows that the community has a desire to be involved in the political process. This participation is important as the people will in the elections and the results of the elections are the will of the people.

Leaders who have strong legitimacy in the regional elections can carry out their duties effectively, and policies in development programs. The community supports the policies of their leaders, thus harmonizing the relationship between the government and the citizens. Because of the existence of high legitimacy, it reduces political polarization in society and elected leaders are responsible to the community, such as listening to aspirations and meeting the needs of the community, so that the government is of good quality. Lastly, that the strong legitimacy of the community contributes to the stability of the government, social protests can be reduced, and create a more conducive environment for regional development.¹⁴

Based on the description of the discussion of the results of the research, it is clear that the Four Lawang community contributes, plays an active role, is wise, enthusiastic in following, and maintaining democracy in the form of regional elections, this kind of attitude shows that the legitimacy and trust of the Four Lawang people is high in the process and implementation of the regional elections carried out by the election committee and the government.

The Importance of Maintaining Democracy in Facing the Challenges of the Regional Elections in Four Lawang

The fierce political competition that occurred in the PSU of the Four Lawang Regional Elections, which could trigger tensions and clashes between supporters as estimated by many observers, because it was motivated by the sociology and anthropology of the Empat Lawang people who were hard, the livelihood of farmers and the lack of education. However, the reality in the "PSU" election is that the people of Empat Lawang are able to control themselves, mature and wise in participating in

¹³ Fauzy Rosny and M Yusuf Samad, "Journal of Lemhannas RI (JLRI)," *Journal of the National Institute of the Republic of Indonesia (JLRI)* 12, no. 2 (2024).

¹⁴ Budhi Setianingsih, "The Effectiveness of the Regional Development Planning System (Simrenda) (Study on the Regional Development Planning Agency of Malang City)" (Brawijaya University, 2015).

the democratic party as a form of maintaining democracy, because in essence the people of Empat Lawang are very religious and religious.¹⁵ So it is appropriate to deal with the people of Empat Lawang through a religious approach.

The people of Empat Lawang lack political education, especially from a religious point of view, for this reason the community needs to be given broader political education with various approaches including religious approaches,¹⁶ so that they can be more critical and wise in choosing leaders, as well as understand the importance of doing politics peacefully and not using violence.

The government and security forces need to ensure security and order during the election process, including PSUs, as well as take preventive measures to prevent clashes between supporters. The media has an important role in presenting objective and educational information related to the Regional Elections, so that the public can make the right decisions based on accurate information. Freedom of opinion must still be guaranteed, but keep in mind that opinion must also be done responsibly and not harm other parties.

CONCLUSIONS

The regional elections in Empat Lawang Regency show that the phenomenon of a single candidate pair against an empty box creates a challenge for local democracy. The victory of a single candidate is influenced by a variety of factors, including injustice in the campaign and strong political support. The legitimacy of election results is very important to maintain public trust, which is reflected in the high participation in PSUs. However, challenges such as fierce political competition and potential conflicts between supporters need to be addressed to ensure a healthy democratic process. Therefore, it is important for governments and societies to improve political education and create an environment conducive to peaceful political participation. This research emphasizes the need for a more inclusive and educational approach in facing democratic challenges in Empat Lawang Regency, so that the community can play an active and wise role in the political process.

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¹⁵ Syamraeni Syamraeni and Hidayatus Sholichah, "The Transformation of Religious Values in the Digital Era: An Analysis of the Literature Based on the Goals of Hifz Al-'Aql," *Socio Religion* 5, no. 2 (2024).

¹⁶ Suparlan Suparlan, "Methods and Approaches in Islamic Studies," *Fondatia* 3, no. 1 (2019): 83–91.

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