

Party Elites and Centralized Selection of Regional Head Candidates

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Keywords: Candidacy, Regional Head, Political Elite, Political Parties, Mayor Election.

Abstract: This paper is derived from an ongoing dissertation research, this research wants to capture the process of selecting candidates/candidacy for regional heads in the 2020 Medan city mayor elections. There are strong indications that in the process of candidacy of regional head candidates by political parties, the process was undemocratic and full of elite interests, rather than the volition of grassroots party cadres and constituent communities. The dynamics of discord within the party structure and the dismissal of cadres are signs of a mismatch between the voices of the bottom line and the elite of political parties in deciding which candidates will be nominated. UU no. 2 of 2011 concerning Political Parties, has mandated political parties that the recruitment of candidates for regional heads and their representatives must be carried out in a democratic and open manner. In this article, the author wants to elaborate on the phenomenon of the centrality of the candidacy of regional head candidates in Indonesia, which is associated with the intervention of political elites and oligarchs in political parties and their impact on the development of local democracy.

1 BACKGROUND

Ideally, political parties are to mobilize the people, represent certain interests, and provide a way of compromise for conflicting opinions. The role of political parties as a means of recruitment is to select prepared cadres, and to strive for the placement of qualified, possess, and experienced cadres and to get support from the community in strategic political positions (Farisi and Haryadi 2017).

Political parties that are centralized and unresponsive to aspirations from below, and oligarchs that control or dominate political parties and the practice of clientelism in getting votes in elections, have saturated Indonesia's electoral democracy (Aspinall, Edward & Berenschot 2019).

In many parties, the process of determining candidates who will take part in the elections is carried out in a very closed manner, not only to the wider community but also to party administrators at the regional level. The Central Executive Board of political parties (DPP) in Indonesia has full authority to determine who is approved to be carried by his party in each pilkada. This determination may involve or be known to the regional administrators, but also

without involving or even notifying the regional administrators if there is a tendency for differences in interests between the central and regional administrators to appear (Purwaningsih, Eka, and Widodo n.d.).

If we examine the regulations governing political parties, namely Law no. 2 of 2011 concerning Amendments to Law Number 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties, there is an article that mentions political recruitment, namely Article 29 paragraph (1) which reads:

"Partai Politik melakukan rekrutmen terhadap warga negara Indonesia menjadi: c. bakal calon kepala daerah dan wakil kepala daerah".

("Political parties recruit Indonesian citizens to become: c. candidates for regional head and deputy regional head")

Then paragraph (2) of article 29 reads:

"rekrutmen sebagaimana yang dimaksud pada ayat (1) huruf c dilakukan secara demokratis dan terbuka sesuai dengan AD dan ART serta peraturan perundang-undangan."

("Recruitment as referred to in paragraph (1) letter c is carried out in a democratic and open manner in

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accordance with the AD and ART and the laws and regulations.")

In the 2020 Medan mayor election some time ago, there were dynamics in a number of political parties in terms of determining who their party would carry as a candidate for mayor of Medan. PDIP and Gerindra are two political parties that have 10 seats in the city parliament, which were thus able to nominate their own regional head candidate, but both ended up in a coalition.

PDIP and Gerindra seem to prioritize the order from the central elite over the aspirations of grassroots party administrators, this can be seen at least from the incumbent mayoral candidate Akhyar Nasution who is a cadre and administrator of the North Sumatra PDIP who did not receive a recommendation and was not promoted by his own party. PDIP then issued a new membership card for Bobby Nasution (president Jokowi's son in law) and accepted Bobby's registration as a candidate for mayor of Medan, even though the PDIP's originally scheduled registration time had closed.

This phenomenon caused turmoil in the management of the North Sumatra and Medan PDIP, especially at the sub-district level. Akhyar Nasution, who was a PDIP cadre from the start, has loyalists at the grassroots level who have been PDIP administrators for a long time. These lower-level administrators reject the policy of the PDIP DPP which prefers Bobby, who is not a cadre, to Akhyar Nasution, who is incumbent and has a clear career and regeneration in PDIP (Arfah 2020).

Not only at the management level, PDIP cadres and longtime loyalists also issued a firm statement rejecting the DPP's decision to choose Bobby and are ready to accept sanctions. The firm stance of the PDIP cadres is a manifestation of their disappointment with the unilateral decision of the DPP, which does not carry cadres from internal parties whose loyalty and militancy have been tested (Ilham 2020).

This elitist DPP decision was followed by the DPD (provincial) and DPC (City) administrators. The elite's interests were clearly more accommodated than the voices of grassroots administrators and cadres, this indication can be seen from the removal of sub-district administrators who did not support the DPP's decision to nominate Bobby Nasution in Medan election. Apart from being removed, the four PAC (sub-district) heads were also recommended to be fired from membership in PDIP. The four PAC leaders came from PAC PDIP in the Medan Area, Medan Perjuangan, Medan Johor, and Medan Selayang (Molana 2020).

Akhyar Nasution himself after not getting the ticket from the PDIP then approached the Democratic Party and the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS). As a result, the two parties officially endorsed Akhyar after he decided to leave the PDI-P and join the Democrats.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method used in this study is a qualitative research method, which is a method that describes a problem with an emphasis on depth of data or analysis. Qualitative research is an investigative process in which researchers gradually try to understand social phenomena by differentiating, imitating, comparing, cataloging and classifying objects of study (Creswell, 2009).

The data obtained were then analyzed using descriptive-analytical method. With the descriptive method, attention is focused on phenomena that are actual at the time the research is being conducted, which shows the facts about the problem being studied, as well as accurate and rational interpretation of data or information.

Researchers in collecting data use several data collection techniques, one of which is; Library research, namely by studying and collecting data through relevant literature and reading sources that support research. This study uses internet journals and books that are in accordance with the studies in this study.

This study takes the research locus on the 2020 mayor elections in Medan, the main focus is on the process of selecting regional heads of regional heads in political parties. The researcher will take 2 (two) parties that carry Bobby Nasution's regional heads, namely PDIP and Gerindra Party as objects of research to determine the mechanism and dynamics of the regional regional head selection process in these political parties.

3 RESULT & DISCUSSION

3.1 Party Elitism & Inequality Politic

Political parties often choose to nominate candidates from outside their own cadre, they tend to look for candidates who have the resources to fund campaigns – often also who can afford to pay the party for candidacy and who have strong enough local recognition and popularity to have a chance of

winning. The ideological differentiation between political parties is also unclear, this causes prospective voters to be unable to distinguish the 'gender' of political parties based on their policy positions or platforms, voter preferences tend to be more prominent figures (Aspinall and Mas'Udi 2017; Muhtadi 2019).

Candidate selection is one of the paths for implementing the party's internal democracy (Susan Scarrow in Hanafi 2021). Internal party democracy according to William P. Cross focuses on the internal distribution of power within a political party. Hanafi stated that one of the challenges of recruitment is the institutionalization of personal and oligarchic leadership of some political parties in Indonesia. The consequence is the weak commitment of the elite or party leaders to build and institutionalize the party's internal democracy.

Elites are actors who control resources, occupy key positions and relate through power networks (Yamokoski and Dubrow, 2008). Thus, the concept of state-of-the-art elite is more closely related to the Weberian notion of power, understood as the ability to carry out one's will, even against the will of others (Weber, 2005). Power can be achieved through material and/or symbolic resources. Consequently, elites can be defined as those who possess these resources (Reis and Moore, 2005) (López 2013).

Meanwhile, local political elites are those who occupy political positions in the local sphere. The existence and role of local political elites cannot be separated from the influence of changes that occur in the political system that surrounds them. Changes that occur in the political system have an influence on the relationship between the elite and the masses, but also on the relationship between the elite and the state.

Many studies of elites assume that privileged positions in key sectors of society – political, economic, military, religious, cultural, and civil – give one a louder and clearer political voice and, in some cases, the power to step in to the mass base when needed. Mills and other elite theorists argue that the state has been hijacked by elite cabals or, at a minimum, that policy preferences belong to elites. Elites play a large role in the political process as both prime movers and beneficiaries of unequal democratic political systems. Kahn (2012) concludes in an article in the *Annual Review of Sociology* on elite sociology that, "Elites are often engines of inequality, be it in terms of economic distribution, political power, or access and control over institutions (Dubrow 2014).

There is also a dynamic within the internal elite, where each elite individual competes with each other

to maintain his position and role. Therefore, with changes in the political system, local political elites must be able to formulate strategies to be able to achieve and maintain their positions and roles (Haryanto 2009).

What happened in the Bobby Nasution case in the 2020 Medan election was a political recruitment process that ignored the development of the party's internal democratic institutions. The distribution of internal power of political parties is unequally distributed when deciding which candidate to carry in the pilkada. The PDIP elite who are in the central management (DPP) clearly have the full right to decide their attitude regardless of the aspirations of local cadres who have their own choice, namely the old PDIP cadre Akhyar Nasution.

In a case study in Latin America, Waisman said the Latin American political system is run with privilege, where well-organized elites use their position to benefit themselves at the expense of those who are marginalized. Political elites in Latin America, according to Waisman, are determined to make their political careers as long and 'wet' as possible. This desire to gain power and stay on top can be shaped and strengthened during their ascent. Joignant et al. found that ascension to the top of the political elite was more likely if they first gained experience in lower-level political organizations. This suggests a closed elite system that operates on pre-existing privileges and that leads to selective political boundaries where only a few resource-rich and organizationally skilled people can enter.

Cases that occurred in the 2020 Medan city mayor elections, we can clearly enter according to the Waisman category that occurred in South America above. Bobby Nasution, who is part of the central political elite because he is the son-in-law of president Jokowi, was chosen as a candidate for mayor of Medan by the same party that brought his father-in-law as president of Indonesia. Making Bobby Nasution the mayor of Medan when his father-in-law was President demonstrates how a closed elite system operates based on privilege and leads to selective political boundaries where only a handful of resource-rich people can enter.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Although there are many descriptive case studies on the process of candidate recruitment within certain parties, and the existence of formal party regulatory documents, relatively little is known about the structure and dynamics of the process in practice. In

the internal research of political parties as organizations, the nomination process is the dependent variable that serves to understand the distribution of power within the party among different organs and factions.

In most countries, parties have their own internal processes and regulations in the candidate recruitment process. But who decides? The following are the key dimensions of party internal democracy:

- I. Degree of Centralization, i.e. the degree to which nominations are determined primarily by national party leaders or delegated downwards to regional, district or local bodies;
- II. Breadth of participation, a related but distinct issue of whether only a few selectors select candidates or whether many people are involved in the process, and
- III. Scope of decision making, regarding whether there is a choice of one, few, or many competitors who want to be nominated.

This research will then be carried out within the framework of the key dimensions above, with the help of discussions and debates about party elites and political inequality, the researcher hopes to capture the role of elites at each level and how elites work to preserve power in their hands through a candidate selection mechanism that seems democratic.

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