STRATEGY SYSTEM FOR THE DESIGN OF DIRECT REGIONAL HEAD ELECTIONS BY THE GENERAL ELECTION COMMISSION IN THE MIDDLE OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract-- *This research aims to find out the strategic system for the design of direct Local Leaders Election (Pilkada) by the General Election Commission (KPU) during the Covid-19 pandemic. Pilkada, which is routinely held every five years, has been hampered due to the Covid-19 pandemic problem, where the government requires social distancing and physical distancing. This is a challenge for Pilkada organizers to be innovative in carrying out the implementation stages. The General Election Commission (KPU) must be able to design and implement elections that continue to use health protocols. The research method used is empirical juridical research, which examines the applicable legal provisions, as well as what happens in society. The results of the research obtained are that the KPU designed several things so that the implementation of Pilkada is safe, efficient, and smooth, namely by designing communication and designing education. The KPU in completing the socialization of direct elections during the Covid-19 pandemic was carried out thoroughly, including all components of the Pilkada coordinator. The KPU also builds support for election members by leading socialization on Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and pamphlet leaflets while adhering to health protocols.*

Keywords— Covid-19 Pandemic, Direct Pilkada System, General Election Commission

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country based on a democratic system, which is exemplified by the recognition of the democratization process through general elections. These elections directly involve the people in choosing their representatives. The realization of the people's power aims to create representatives who are prepared to fulfill the people's mandate in building a superior, capable, and high-quality region. One significant step in the decentralization strategy is the implementation of decisions in regional head elections (*Pilkada*) (Fitriyah, 2020). Regional head elections, often referred to as *Pilkada*, are an integral part of the democratic process. This approach is crucial and has gained momentum, especially since 1996 (kemenkumham, 2009).

Democracy is not merely a formality; it requires society to have a means to express their aspirations and opinions directly. Leaders who actively engage with the people and make changes represent a significant shift towards demystifying power. This breaks the long-standing tradition of placing rulers on a pedestal that is difficult for ordinary people to reach. When *Simakrama* becomes the platform for people to convey their aspirations, opinions, interests, and needs, it serves as a means of government oversight and facilitates independent discourse, free from manipulation and pressure. However, there are many challenges that require attention, including the varying degrees of aspirations influenced by the diversity of values, differences in lifestyles, and the urgency of interests. These challenges align with the increasing complexity of problems faced by society.

Local governments provide substantial authority to the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), and this extends to Regional Head Elections (*Pilkada*). While decentralization has been substantial, it has primarily reached the lowest levels of government rather than empowering the

people themselves. This stands in contrast to democratic governance, which assigns a significant role to the people. Decentralization in the absence of a democratic system tends to concentrate power within the government and fails to secure autonomy for the people in the regions (Noviati, 2013). Democracy is instituted to ensure the fulfillment of public needs (Harding & Stasavage, 2014). In a democracy, policy-making relies on the wishes and aspirations of the general population.

The process of political democratization in Indonesia has progressed well and holds promise, yet it also presents challenges that demand serious attention. In the broader community's perspective, it's not only democracy and pluralism that are important, but also economic development and the provision of fair and equitable public services. Society expects effective and efficient governance in both economic development and public services, alongside the advancement of democracy. In essence, the development of democracy and the enhancement of government effectiveness and efficiency should occur simultaneously.

Decentralization and regional autonomy policies were implemented to bring the government closer to the community, or at the very least, to bring services and community empowerment into closer proximity. It is expected that government administration will operate more effectively, with the government being in close proximity to the community and capable of providing services that align with the needs and demands of community development. The positive impact of applying the principle of decentralization in the implementation of regional autonomy is to create opportunities for regions to develop innovative solutions. Practicing innovation in public services opens doors for each region to be recognized as a best practice example of regional autonomy. Positive innovations are already emerging in various areas, including Bali. Such developments were less common under a centralized government system in Indonesia.

Public service, as a process of organizational performance (bureaucracy), carried out by public service personnel, must adhere to the normative rules established by public organizations as part of the public organizational culture. The main reasons for failures in the implementation of public service tasks within decentralized structures (Rondinelli, 1981) include: a) A strong commitment to a narrow political culture; b) A lack of trained and skilled personnel at the local level; c) Insufficient funding sources to fulfill duties and responsibilities; d) A reluctance to delegate authority; and e) An absence of technological and physical infrastructure to support the execution of public service tasks.

The direct election of regional heads (*Pilkada*) is not merely a political process to fill democratic positions through elections; it also signifies the implementation of true regional autonomy and political decentralization. Regional head elections, hereinafter referred to as Regional Elections, serve as a necessity for local regions to select leaders at the regional level. The legal requirement and experience of appointing Provincial Regional Heads are outlined in Article 24, paragraph (5) of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning the Government of the Region, which states, "The Regional Head and Deputy Regional Head, as mentioned in paragraphs (2) and (3), are directly elected by the people in their own area." Therefore, the conclusion is that regional heads are elected directly by the people in their respective areas.

Regional head elections (*Pilkada*) represent the practical implementation of the democratic system at the local level for selecting regional leaders or representatives chosen by the local community itself. The essence of the democratic system lies in the power vested in the people. Direct elections are recognized as a method within a democracy-based system for choosing regional heads, granting people the opportunity to decide on their leaders (Nugraha & Mulyandari, 2016). Through direct elections, individuals can directly determine who will serve as their regional head. These regional elections materialize the principles of responsiveness and accountability, as regional heads are directly accountable to their constituents (Hutapea, 2015).

Regional head elections, also known as simultaneous regional elections held across Indonesia, were

scheduled for the end of 2020, specifically on December 9, 2020. This five-year political event is a routine activity. However, the 2020 elections faced significant challenges due to the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic, during which the government enforced social distancing and physical distancing measures. The process of conducting regional elections involves mass social activities, beginning with voter list compilation, citizen information verification, candidate selection, campaign stages, and finally, voting. These activities require the mobilization of the masses and political candidates' efforts to garner citizen support for the most votes (Hergianasari, 2016). Government Regulation Number 2 of 2020 confirmed December 9, 2020, as the date for the regional elections. The certainty of this date became problematic because, in August 2020, Indonesia did not witness a decrease in the number of positive Covid-19 cases.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact, creating tensions in various regions of Indonesia. The decision regarding whether to proceed with the regional elections at the local level became controversial. Two dilemmatic options emerged, emphasizing either the fulfillment of a joint agreement between the government and the regions or concerns about the potential increase in Covid-19 cases due to large gatherings during the elections (Spinelli, 2020). Simultaneously, the regional elections presented their own set of challenges, including the potential for the virus to spread and the creation of Covid-19 clusters due to gatherings involving multiple people. This also necessitated a larger budget for the election process.

Citizens often exhibit limited and inconsistent decision-making patterns (Yates & de Oliveira, 2016), which poses a challenge in a democratic system. The difficulties of implementing democratic processes amid the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly the enforcement of health protocols like social distancing and physical distancing, further complicate matters. The participation of the people, especially those involved in political parties, remains the primary factor determining the success of the 2020 regional elections. In light of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, this research endeavors to uncover a strategic framework for the design of direct Local Leaders Election (*Pilkada*) by the General Election Commission (KPU), aiming to ensure the safety and efficacy of the electoral process while safeguarding public health.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopts an empirical juridical approach, often referred to as field research. This approach seeks to explore the real-world application of legal provisions within society (Arikunto, 2017). It focuses on understanding the actual occurrences related to regional head elections (*Pilkada*) amidst the pandemic. Empirical juridical research is legal research on the enactment or implementation of normative legal provisions in action on every specific legal event that occurs in society (Muhammad, 2004) or in other words, research conducted on the actual situation or the real situation that occurs in society with the intention of knowing and finding the facts and data needed, after the required data is collected then go to problem identification which ultimately leads to problem solving (Waluyo, 2002).

The primary data collection methods employed in this research include:

a. Document Analysis: Analysis of legal documents, government regulations, KPU regulations, circulars, and any relevant publications that guide the conduct of regional elections during the pandemic.

b. Surveys: Surveys were conducted to gather information from key stakeholders involved in regional elections. This includes election organizers, candidates, and voters. The surveys were administered online and in-person, adhering to health protocols.

c. Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with election organizers, government officials, and experts in electoral processes. These interviews provided qualitative insights into the challenges and strategies associated with conducting elections during the pandemic.

d. Observations: Researchers attended various election-related events, adhering to health protocols, to observe the implementation of strategies and health protocols in real-time.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. General Election Commission (KPU) in Designing Regional Elections during the Covid-19

Popular sovereignty serves as the cornerstone of state authority over individual freedoms, as enshrined in the state constitution and enforced by laws. Consequently, it hinges on the nature of a democracy-based state, which originates from the people and endows them with significant control within the power structure by means of their votes (Alfons, 2010). In Indonesia, the practice of democracy is marked by various barriers and obstacles, resulting in challenges that necessitate creative solutions. As a result, the prevalent mode of democracy in Indonesia often emerges in response to these obstacles and issues (Kruk et al., 2018).

In response to the non-disaster events of Coronavirus-19, President Jokowi promptly issued Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 2 of 2020, postponing the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors until December 2020. This decision prompted the issuance of General Election Commission Regulation Number 5 of 2020, which represents the Third Amendment to General Election Commission Regulation Number 15 of 2019, outlining the Program Stages and Schedules for the Implementation of the Governor and Deputy Governor Elections, Regents and Deputy Regents, and/or Mayors and Deputy Mayors. Additionally, Circular Number 20 of 2020 was released, addressing the Implementation of the Governor and Deputy Governor Elections, Regents and Deputy Regents, and/or Mayors and Deputy Mayors Simultaneously in 2020 under the circumstances of the non-natural disaster, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19). These guidelines prioritize health and safety standards by adhering to health protocols, implementing measures to prevent the spread of Coronavirus, and establishing methodologies for conducting elections during the pandemic.

The Regional Head Election (*Pilkada*) symbolizes the people's sovereignty system adopted by the Indonesian government, exemplifying a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The rationale behind conducting regional head elections (*Pilkada*) is to choose leaders capable of safeguarding, nurturing, and managing the populace to realize a just and prosperous Indonesian society (Nuna & Moonti, 2019). Elections in Indonesia are a constitutional mandate, allowing the Indonesian people to exercise their electoral rights every five years. These elections encompass not only the selection of the president and vice president but also extend to regional leaders at the provincial and district/city levels.

Article 5 of General Election Commission (KPU) Regulation Number 6 of 2020 stipulates that simultaneous elections during the Covid-19 pandemic must prioritize the safety and health of organizers, participants, and voters. This entails conducting rapid tests for all members of the KPU RI, regional KPU, PPK, PPS, and PPDP, along with the mandatory use of personal protective equipment such as masks. Furthermore, hygiene measures, including hand sanitizer availability, regular cleaning and sanitization, monitoring internal body temperatures, and maintaining a one-meter physical distance, are also enforced. These standards are adjusted according to the number of participants, with stricter measures implemented as the number increases.

General elections (Elections) serve as a manifestation of the democratic framework of government in Indonesia, rooted in the fourth principle of Pancasila. Regional Elections are a specific type of election in Indonesia, grounded in a democracy-based political framework determined through the people's votes. Ensuring the fair allocation of voting rights is essential, and these elections are expected to be free, fair, honest, and conducted consistently every five years. As Robert Dahl contends, elections that occur without hindrance, uphold fairness, and adhere to a regular schedule are indicative of the implementation of a democratic system (Dahl, 2020).

Elections held with freedom, fairness, and regularity can be interpreted as follows (Benuf, 2019): (1) Freedom means that any voter (resident) can choose to visit the polling station (TPS) in their respective regions without fear, apprehension, or reprisal. (2) Fairness ensures that every voter (resident) holds an equal standing in making their choice. (3) Regularity signifies that direct elections occur at fixed intervals, enabling the public or residents to evaluate and choose the best leader to govern their respective regions.

During the coronavirus pandemic, Regional Head Elections (*Pilkada*) must strictly adhere to and implement health protocols (*prokes*). These health protocols must be observed at every stage of the regional elections, including during campaigning, voting, and vote counting. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive plan or framework to ensure that Regional Head Elections (*Pilkada*) are conducted safely, efficiently, and smoothly. The plans put forth by the General Election Commission (KPU) include:

a. Communication Design

Planning elections during the coronavirus pandemic has been addressed in General Election Commission (P-KPU) Regulation Number 5 of 2020, which involves adjustments to General Election Commission Regulation (P-KPU) Number 6 of 2020. While these regulations provide a framework, there are still assessments that must be completed to ensure smooth implementation. The planning for simultaneous elections in 2020 necessitates the coordination and processing of voter information, candidate registration, determination of candidate pairs, as well as drawing and assigning campaign sequence numbers.

This communication process places significant demands on the source component, which acts as the driving force behind message control, particularly messages delivered by KPU officials. The objective is to make the message component the subject of analysis. This communication briefing is carried out through various media channels. The receiving component typically encompasses the general population, while the impact component often pertains to the local area, which serves as the target for socialization efforts. As per Laswell's communication model, communication involves both the communicator and the communicant (Mulyana, 2010). These two components are essential elements in enhancing communication conducted by the General Election Commission (KPU).

This model illustrates how the source generates a message, encodes it, and transmits it through a channel to the message recipient or communicant. In this context, the data source creates messages on behalf of the General Election Commission (KPU) during the process of organizing elections amidst the pandemic. Both internal and external communication systems are employed to increase citizen cooperation and assure voters that the election stages are conducted in compliance with health protocols.

b. Designing Education

Voter education serves as a crucial part of the process to provide citizens with information aimed at enhancing their insights, understanding, and engagement in elections, contributing to the development of their civic capabilities.

The coordinators of the 2020 regional elections faced their own set of challenges. Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and with both hopeful anticipation and critical concerns about the pandemic's eventual containment, the political landscape compelled us to unite and earnestly combat the virus by breaking the chain of its transmission. This political arrangement also conveys the message that we must collectively hope for Indonesia's capacity to swiftly resolve the pandemic. It's a hopeful political choice deserving of recognition.

There are four key areas we need to focus on: energizing citizen participation, maintaining strict

welfare protocols, enhancing the voting system, and providing comprehensive assistance for voters. Strict implementation of welfare protocols is vital to ensure that the execution of electoral processes does not compromise the security and health of voters exercising their right to vote.

Both the KPU and Bawaslu have devised programs that involve various partners in the 2020 Regional Elections. These partners include universities, media outlets, government bodies, private organizations, CSOs (Civil Society Organizations), NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), individuals with disabilities, religious leaders, community leaders, and women leaders. Within this network, virtual communication has proven effective in disseminating information and educating voters. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, family and community forums have emerged as crucial networks for voter education and socialization.

3.2. The General Election Commission (KPU) in Carrying out Election Socialization during the Covid-19 Pandemic

In the 2020 Regional Elections, which were held amidst the Covid-19 pandemic, there are five critical aspects that require attention to ensure safe, peaceful, healthy, legally certain, and beneficial direct elections. These aspects involve the legitimacy of decisions, the presence of voters (citizens/communities), election participants (political parties/individuals), election organizers (KPU and Bawaslu), and budget readiness (Marisa et al., 2020).

1) Legitimacy of the Rules: The guidelines that legitimize the postponement of simultaneous elections, which can be used as valid reasons for the postponement, under the Draft Government Regulation on The Replacement of the Law (PERPPU), must be promptly implemented. The KPU must make necessary adjustments, particularly regarding issues related to the timing of the functioning of the District Election Committee (PPK) and the Voting Committee (PPS), spouse candidate registration, settlement of PTUN/MA decisions, and campaigning. All these aspects need to be aligned, especially in terms of schedules, stages, programs, and budgets.

2) Election Participants: The Democratic Party, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, has committed to adhering to health protocols for both general elections and regional elections. However, the involvement of various parties in democratic parties has been limited, considering the willingness of candidates' spouses to comply with and implement health protocols in their activities (Hilman et al., 2020).

3) Election/Regional Election Organizers: For election coordinators/*pilkada* organizers conducting direct elections, the primary challenge lies in ensuring the consistent compliance of election personnel with health protocols throughout the election process. Effective coordination and communication among election coordinators can be hindered by poor web quality, violations related to the procurement of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), public concerns about the spread of Covid-19 leading to decreased voter presence at Polling Stations (TPS), and disruptions to the election process due to facility and infrastructure delays. Additionally, voters (*paslon*) often disregard health protocols during the campaign (Hamdani & Fauzia, 2021).

4) Voters: Article 71, paragraph (1) of General Election Commission (P-KPU) Regulation Number 6 of 2020 directs that the number of voters at polling stations adhere to the TPS limit while maintaining a one-meter separation and complying with health protocols as a precautionary measure to control the spread of the Covid-19 virus. Before entering the polling station (TPS), KPPS members are expected to measure the voters' internal body temperature using a device to minimize direct contact.

5) Preparation of a Budget Plan: The primary challenge in completing the implementation of *pemilu*/*pilkada* is the availability of funds. Insufficient funds may result in cuts to reserves, which could compromise the quality of the work. Extraordinary funds, without any budget cuts, need to be prepared by the state (Habibi et al., 2023). Inaccuracies in the spending plan can be attributed to fund diversions

to address the Covid-19 situation. The plan to utilize reserves became a significant issue in the elections/regional elections, particularly on December 9, 2020, despite coordination between the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Home Affairs regarding changes to the budget plan for regional election funds (Darmastuti, 2020). The General Election Commission (KPU) must appropriately utilize the budget and exercise prudent management in the event of budgetary leakage in the field.

The role of the Regional Election Commission (KPUD) in overseeing regional elections includes community socialization. This socialization is governed by Article 15 of Law Number 7 of 2017 and Article 18, point (j), which outlines the responsibilities of the General Election Commission (KPU) at the district/city level. Conducting socialization within the community prior to the election of regional heads and deputy regional heads is immensely beneficial for citizens, especially for those exercising their voting rights for the first time. This includes citizens who have recently turned 17 years old, ensuring that first-time voters understand how to exercise their voting rights in selecting their regional leaders.

The General Election Commission (KPU) has harnessed electronic advancements, particularly utilizing social media, to convey messages during the socialization of the 2020 Regional Elections. This socialization involves all elements of the election organizers, from PPS, PPK to KPPS. The approach includes posting pamphlets on Instagram stories, Facebook stories, and WhatsApp stories of each member. This strategy undergoes evaluation every two weeks, with rewards from the General Election Commission (KPU) granted to PPK, PPS, and KPPS units that post the most pamphlets. Additionally, all election organizers are encouraged to subscribe to the General Election Commission (KPU) YouTube channel to access the latest information.

The socialization process goes beyond encouraging the public to cast their votes and exercise their voting rights at polling stations (TPS). The General Election Commission (KPU) also emphasizes the rejection of money politics in these socialization efforts. All information disseminated by the General Election Commission (KPU) prioritizes the implementation of health protocols. Ensuring the adherence to health protocols is crucial, given that the General Election Commission (KPU) interacts with the largest number of voters nationwide. To achieve this target, convincing people to come to the Polling Station (TPS) during the Covid-19 pandemic requires continuous efforts.

The socialization process on social media, undertaken by the General Election Commission (KPU) through pamphlet postings on the official website and accounts of the General Election Commission (KPU), aims to capture public interest. The General Election Commission (KPU) can use color choices in its displays while paying attention to the content of the pamphlet, which must contain a persuasive message inviting voters to visit the Polling Station (TPS) while adhering to health protocols.

As part of its community education efforts, the General Election Commission (KPU) conducts various competitions involving all segments of society. These competitions serve as a component of socialization and include creative meme competitions, legal opinion writing, and short video production competitions. Winners receive prizes, and their work is featured on the official social media accounts of the General Election Commission (KPU) in the Lahat district.

The goal of this socialization is to create a platform for appreciating the creative ideas of voters through legal opinion writing, ultimately aiming to increase voter participation (Hutabarat et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic has necessitated that election organizers take both online and offline socialization steps, implementing clear and concrete stages to reach a wider audience and achieve broader and more extensive targets.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted, several conclusions can be drawn. It is essential that every stage of the political decision-making process strictly adheres to health protocols, including the campaign stage,

voting, and the implementation of vote counting. Consequently, there is a need for a well-defined procedure or framework to ensure that regional head elections (*Pilkada*) are conducted safely, efficiently, and smoothly. The strategies employed by the General Election Commission (KPU) to achieve this include communication design and educational efforts.

The General Election Commission (KPU) has demonstrated a comprehensive approach to the socialization of direct elections during the Covid-19 pandemic. This approach involves all components of regional election coordination, harnessing electronic media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube channels, and in-person activities that distribute pamphlets and organize educational competitions. Importantly, all socialization efforts are conducted while strictly adhering to health protocols.

Looking ahead, future research should continue to explore the evolving dynamics of regional head elections in Indonesia, considering the ongoing impact of the pandemic and any potential long-term changes in electoral processes and practices. Additionally, it is important to monitor the implementation of health protocols and their effectiveness in safeguarding public health during electoral events. Furthermore, studies on voter behavior and the impact of social media in influencing electoral outcomes could provide valuable insights for policymakers and election organizers. Overall, regional head elections in Indonesia will continue to evolve, and research plays a crucial role in informing and improving the electoral process.

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