

TERAJU

Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum

Teraju: Jurnal Syariah dan Hukum
Volume 08 Nomor 01, Maret 2026
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35961/teraju.v8i01.2716>

Legal Review of Empty Column Volunteer Activities in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City

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Abstrak

Pasangan calon tunggal dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Serentak 2024 di Kota Pangkalpinang menghadirkan dinamika baru dalam praktik demokrasi elektoral di Indonesia. Didukung oleh 16 partai politik, pasangan calon tunggal Maulana Aklil dan Masagus Hakim berhadapan dengan Kolom Kosong sebagai pilihan alternatif bagi pemilih di Kota Pangkalpinang. Kemunculan relawan Kolom Kosong menunjukkan bentuk perlawanan masyarakat terhadap dominasi partai politik yang menutup ruang bagi kompetisi politik yang sehat. Namun, hingga saat ini, belum ada peraturan yang secara eksplisit mengatur kegiatan kampanye atau sosialisasi yang dilakukan oleh relawan kolom kosong. Kondisi ini menciptakan kekosongan hukum yang menimbulkan hambatan bagi Komisi Pemilihan Umum (KPU) dan Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum (Bawaslu) sebagai penyelenggara pemilu untuk memfasilitasi dan mengawasi secara ketat kegiatan relawan kolom kosong. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis status hukum dan kegiatan relawan kolom kosong dalam konteks hukum pemilu di Indonesia. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian hukum normatif dengan pendekatan yuridis dan konseptual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara hukum, relawan kolom kosong tidak dapat dikategorikan sebagai peserta pemilu sebagaimana dimaksud dalam Undang-Undang Nomor 10 Tahun 2016, namun aktivitas mereka tidak dapat diabaikan karena memiliki pengaruh terhadap partisipasi politik masyarakat. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan kejelasan regulasi agar aktivitas relawan kolom kosong dapat ditempatkan secara proporsional dalam sistem hukum pemilu Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Relawan Kolom Kosong; Pemilihan Kepala Daerah; Calon Tunggal; Partai Politik; Kekosongan Hukum*

Abstract

The single candidate pair in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City presents a new dynamic in the practice

of electoral democracy in Indonesia. Backed by 16 political parties, the single candidate pair, Maulana Aklil and Masagus Hakim, face the Empty Column as an alternative choice for voters in Pangkalpinang City. The emergence of 'Empty Column' volunteers demonstrates a form of community resistance against the dominance of political parties that stifles healthy political competition. However, to date, there has been no regulation explicitly governing the campaign activities or outreach carried out by 'Empty Column' volunteers. This situation creates a legal vacuum that poses obstacles for the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), as election organisers, in facilitating and closely supervising the activities of the Empty Column volunteers. This study aims to analyse the legal status and activities of the Empty Column volunteers within the context of Indonesian election law. The research method employed is normative legal research, utilising a statutory and conceptual approach. The findings indicate that, legally, the Empty Column volunteers cannot be classified as election participants as defined in Law No. 10 of 2016; however, their activities cannot be disregarded as they influence public political participation. Consequently, regulatory clarity is required to ensure the activities of the Empty Column volunteers are appropriately situated within Indonesia's electoral legal framework.

Keywords: *Empty Column Volunteers, Regional Head Elections, Single Candidate, Political Parties, Legal Vacancy*



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Introduction

Political parties are often perceived by the public as the primary actors possessing significant authority in every democratic process, both at the national and regional levels. The dominance of political parties in controlling the nomination process and the selection of leadership figures makes the position of the people as the holders of sovereignty appear merely symbolic. This runs counter to the concept of a democratic state, namely a state governed by a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The democracy practised today is direct democracy, a form of government in which the right to make political decisions is exercised directly by the entire

populace (citizens) acting in accordance with majority procedures.¹

In many cases, public participation is not substantial because it is restricted by internal party mechanisms that tend to be elitist and closed. Normatively, a situation where only one candidate competes in an election was never envisaged within the framework of Indonesia's original democracy, which upholds the principles of healthy and open political competition. Issues regarding internal democracy within political parties in Indonesia can be observed in the candidate recruitment and selection processes, which are often closed and dominated by a small group of party elites. For instance, many parties still rely

¹ Nadlirun, *Getting to Know Democracy in Indonesia*, Balai Pustaka, 2012. p. 6.

on a single strong figure who holds significant control over strategic decision-making. This indicates oligarchic practices, where power is concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals, whilst other party members play no significant role in the decision-making process.²

This suggests that Indonesian democracy is undergoing a dynamic evolution, but is also vulnerable to distortion due to undemocratic internal practices within political parties. Democracy in Indonesia appears to have developed not only as a formal system relying on general elections as its indicator, but also as an empirical practice influenced by local power structures, elite interests, and political recruitment mechanisms within parties. It is therefore not surprising that, in a local context, democracy often operates without a spirit of deliberation, resembling more of an administrative procedure. Furthermore, various factors also have the potential to influence the political system in Indonesia, some of which include environmental factors, socio-cultural aspects, and the country's economic conditions. These influences combine to shape political and social dynamics, as well as state governance, for both those in power and those subject to the influence of existing power structures.³

Political parties are organisations that aim to gain political power and secure political positions, usually through constitutional means, in order to implement their policies. However, in practice, this power is often centralised within the party, leaving little room for

active public involvement in fundamental political decision-making. As is known, in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City, there was only one candidate pair competing against the Blank Column, namely Maulana Aklil and Masagus Hakim. This was because the sole candidate pair was backed by 16 political parties supporting them collectively: the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), Nasdem, Gerindra, Golkar, Demokrat, PKS, PPP, PAN, PKB, and the non-parliamentary political parties Garuda, PKN, Partai Ummat, Partai Buruh, PSI, Perindo, and Hanura. Nevertheless, the power of the people continues to play a significant role in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections, particularly in the city of Pangkalpinang. The 'Blank Column' volunteers have emerged as a form of resistance following the absence of political parties fielding candidate pairs in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in the city of Pangkalpinang.

The 'Blank Ballot' phenomenon will foster voter apathy, as voters feel their votes are wasted, leading them to be reluctant to participate in future elections, which will gradually erode democratic values. This dissatisfaction will erode trust in political institutions and the democratic system as a whole. In response to this issue, the Government has provided a solution through Constitutional Court Decision No. 100/PUU-XIII/2015, which was followed up by the provisions of Article 14(1) of General Election Commission Regulation No. 13 of 2018 on Amendments to General Election Commission Regulation No. 14 of 2015 concerning the Election of Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Deputy Regents, and/or Mayors and Deputy Mayors with a Single Candidate Pair, which states that the means used to cast votes in an election with a single candidate pair shall be a ballot paper containing two columns: one column containing the

² Hermawan Prasojo et al., *Evaluation of Internal Democracy within Political Parties in Indonesia: Optimising Transparency and Participation to Prevent Oligarchy*, Journal of the National Seminar on Rural Resource Development and Sustainable Local Wisdom, 2024, p. 1.

³ Zamrisman, *The Indonesian Political System*, Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2024, p. 5.

photograph of the candidate pair and one blank column without an image. This means that if there is only one candidate pair, the ballot paper will feature two columns: one for the candidate and one blank column without an image, which serves as the option for voters, whereby regions with only one candidate pair for regional head may participate in the simultaneous regional head elections.⁴

The existence of this regulation also hinders healthy competition between a single candidate and the blank ballot. This creates a dilemma in electoral political governance, which subsequently gives rise to a contest over the concept of elections. This dilemma then creates uncertainty in electoral practice, as the regulations require competition in elections, reinforced by the presence of the blank ballot faced by a single candidate. However, empirically, the existing political infrastructure actually results in elections without contestants. For instance, the 'Blank Ballot' option has no budget, and the campaign structure and dispute resolution mechanisms are unclear.⁵

As the stages of the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections progressed, the Blank Column volunteer movement caused a degree of unease amongst the public at large as well as the sole candidate pair themselves. This unease stems from the proliferation of billboards and banners promoting the

Blank Column as the best choice for the people of Pangkalpinang City. Bolstered by this phenomenon, the Blank Column volunteers have launched a resistance movement. Eka Mulia, as Chair of the Blank Column volunteers in Pangkalpinang City, is endeavouring to forge a new path by positioning the Blank Column as an instrument of resistance or an alternative choice against the injustice of an election that presents only a single candidate pair. This study will examine the nature of the political movement carried out by Blank Column volunteers so that it may be accommodated by the electoral authorities, namely the KPU and Bawaslu.

Article 63(1) and (2) of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 10 of 2016 on the Second Amendment to Law No. 1 of 2015 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 of 2014 on the Election of Governors, Regents and Mayors into Law, it is explained that campaigns are conducted as a form of public political education carried out responsibly, and the campaigns referred to in paragraph (1) are conducted by political parties and/or candidate pairs and may be facilitated by the Provincial KPU for the election of Governors and Deputy Governors and by the Regency/Municipal KPU for the election of Regents and Deputy Regents, as well as the election of Mayors and Deputy Mayors.⁶

However, this initiative has actually created new problems in the process of Indonesia's democratic governance. The KPU, as the technical organiser of the elections, has not regulated in detail how the 'blank column' group—which openly refers to its members as 'blank column volunteers'—carries out outreach efforts that appear to be campaigning for a

⁴ Article 14(1) of General Election Commission Regulation No. 13 of 2018 on Amendments to General Election Commission Regulation No. 14 of 2015 Concerning the Election of Governors and Deputy Governors, Regents and Deputy Regents, and/or Mayors and Deputy Mayors with a Single Candidate Pair

⁵ Mahpudin, *Protest Voting and Abstention in Single-Candidate Local Elections: The Case of the 2018 Simultaneous Local Elections*, Journal of Public Administration, Vol. 05, 2021: 8, <https://ojs.umrah.ac.id/index.php/kemudi/article/view/2643/1204>

⁶ Article 63(1) and (2) of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 10 of 2016 on the Second Amendment to Law No. 1 of 2015 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 of 2014 on the Election of Governors, Regents and Mayors into Law

particular candidate pair regarding the importance of voting for the blank column, even though there is not a single regulation stating that the blank column is a participant in the election, let alone regulating the mechanisms for outreach or campaigning carried out by 'blank column' volunteers. The blank column is interpreted as if it were an electoral participant with the same rights and obligations as other candidates. Naturally, this impacts the duties and functions of the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) as the electoral management body, which is required to monitor the conduct of such outreach activities—or what appear to be campaigns—by Blank Column volunteers. However, once again, Bawaslu, as the electoral oversight body, cannot operate effectively without clear regulations to monitor the dynamics and various activities, such as the campaigns, carried out by Blank Column volunteers.

The author endeavours to examine the 'Blank Column' phenomenon affecting the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City. According to the author, the primary factor influencing the existence of these 'Blank Column' volunteers is the factor of interest. As emphasised by Etzioni's quote, interest groups play several roles. Firstly, they focus on specific issues and benefit their own members. Secondly, they seek to raise the level or standard they wish to achieve. Thirdly, they utilise the power or authority they possess. Interest groups employ various strategies in their efforts to achieve their objectives. Firstly, interest groups may employ lobbying strategies. Lobbying itself is tailored to the specific context of each group's interests.

The second strategy of interest groups is to gain access to policymakers and mobilise the resources they possess. The third strategy is for interest groups to mobilise voters in order to influence election results. Interest groups may even

target individuals. The fourth strategy is to control the information provided to the electorate in general. This strategy is employed because interest groups have limited resources. In other words, this strategy involves shaping public opinion by establishing a 'frame', as interest groups face resource constraints. The fifth strategy is to engage in advocacy. The advocacy referred to here involves expanding and broadening coalitions or the number of supporters.⁷

To date, there is not a single regulation stating that the Blank Column is included as a participant in the election, let alone a regulation governing the campaign activities of Blank Column volunteers, thereby impacting the regulations that the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), as the electoral oversight body, must adhere to when carrying out its duties and functions of supervising campaigns or other forms of activity undertaken by Blank Column volunteers to campaign in the public sphere regarding the positive aspects of the Blank Column's vision, mission and objectives. This creates a legal vacuum for electoral management bodies, particularly the KPU and Bawaslu, in facilitating or supervising activities such as campaigns and socialisation, or similar activities, by Blank Column volunteers in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City.

The method used in this study is a sociological approach through interviews with Bawaslu, the KPU, and blank column volunteers to understand the reality on the ground. The research findings regarding the first research question indicate that the activities of blank-column volunteers are extensive, yet can only be monitored

⁷ Ikhsan Darmawan, 'The Role and Strategy of the Blank Column Group in the 2017 Single-Candidate Regional Head Election in Pati Regency: A Preliminary Study', *Journal of Political Discourse*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2017: pp. 45–51.

through persuasive measures. This situation presents technical challenges, including the potential for campaign activities to be disguised, difficulties in providing evidence, and inconsistencies in monitoring. The findings regarding the second research question concern the impact of blank-column volunteers' activities on the effectiveness of local election administration, the principle of fairness, the legitimacy of local elections, and public trust. Therefore, comprehensive regulatory reform is necessary to ensure that local election oversight is effective, fair, democratic, and proportionate.

Discussion

Activities of Blank Column Volunteers.

The phenomenon of single candidates, which gives rise to the 'blank column' phenomenon as a counterpoint, essentially undermines the substance of political contestation by eliminating healthy competition between candidates. The increasing prevalence of single candidates in every regional head election constitutes an anomaly within the multi-party system. Ideally, every political party or coalition of political parties should be able to field its best candidates to stand in democratic elections or any contest for public office, from the local level up to the national level.⁸

Consequently, the emergence of 'Blank Column' volunteers has emerged as a manifestation of the desire to provide an alternative choice for the public in expressing their dissatisfaction with the single candidate pair in Pangkalpinang City. Based on the author's observations and interviews with a number of 'Blank Column' volunteers, as well as reports in various media outlets in Pangkalpinang, these volunteers have emerged because there are no other candidates besides the

existing single candidate pair. The emergence of the single-candidate phenomenon has led some members of the public to disagree and take the initiative by forming the Blank Column volunteers. However, as the author has already stated in the introduction above, the main factor influencing the existence of these Blank Column volunteers is the factor of self-interest. As emphasised by Etzioni's quote, interest groups play several roles. Firstly, they focus on specific issues and benefit their own members. Secondly, they aim to raise the level or standard they wish to achieve. Thirdly, they utilise the power or authority they possess.

Interest groups employ various strategies in their efforts to achieve their objectives. Firstly, interest groups may utilise lobbying strategies. Lobbying itself is tailored to the specific context of each group's interests. The second strategy employed by interest groups is to gain access to policymakers and mobilise the resources at their disposal. The third strategy involves mobilising voters to influence election outcomes. Interest groups may even target individuals directly. The fourth strategy is to control the information provided to the electorate in general. This strategy is employed because interest groups have limited resources. In other words, this strategy involves shaping public opinion by establishing a 'frame', as interest groups face resource constraints. The fifth strategy is to engage in advocacy. The advocacy referred to here involves expanding and broadening coalitions or the number of supporters.⁹

As a step to introduce and enhance public understanding of the blank ballot

⁸ Andi Luhur Prianto et al., *Local Democracy and Single-Candidate Regional Head Elections*, Subaltern Inti Media, 2021, p. 7.

⁹ Ikhsan Darmawan, *The Role and Strategy of the Blank Column Group in the 2017 Single-Candidate Regional Head Election in Pati Regency: A Preliminary Study*, *Journal of Political Discourse*, Vol. 2, No. 1, March 2017, pp. 45–51.

option in local elections with a single candidate, blank ballot volunteers carry out various forms of outreach to different sections of society. This outreach is conducted through direct engagement with residents, explaining that voting for the blank ballot is a constitutionally valid choice if the public has no preference for the single candidate available. The blank column is an option for voters who do not wish to select any of the candidates listed on the ballot paper. The blank column is not merely an alternative; it reflects the right to express dissent towards one or all of the candidates offered and available. The existence of the blank column allows voters to express their dissatisfaction legitimately, without having to sacrifice their right to vote by spoiling the ballot paper or choosing not to vote (abstaining). This option not only affirms freedom of expression in a democracy but also ensures that the right to vote is not limited to choosing from the available candidates. In a democratic state governed by the rule of law, the blank column can reflect political freedom and individual sovereignty, where the people can make their choice without pressure or coercion.¹⁰

In addition to direct approaches, blank-column volunteers also utilise print media as a means of political communication, such as erecting banners and billboards at a number of strategic locations in the city of Pangkalpinang. This aims to increase the visibility of the blank-column volunteer movement so that the message conveyed can reach a wider audience. From a political participation perspective, this step demonstrates an effort to mobilise public awareness to understand that participation

in elections is not only realised through support for candidates, but can also be expressed through the choice of the blank column as a form of the public's political stance.

Public participation in this context is viewed as part of the social control mechanism over the democratic process. The Blank Column Volunteers believe that active public engagement in the political process is a crucial factor in maintaining the integrity and transparency of local elections. Consequently, the volunteers are striving to raise public awareness regarding the importance of the public's role in safeguarding the democratic process at the local level, particularly in the city of Pangkalpinang. These efforts are not only aimed at increasing support for the Blank Column movement, but also at encouraging the public to be more critical of the political dynamics unfolding during the election process.

Based on field observations, the group supporting the Blank Column consists largely of community leaders who are concerned about the interests of regional development. The volunteers are working to foster a collective awareness among the public regarding the power held by voters in determining the direction of local democracy. In the various outreach activities carried out, volunteers not only urged people to vote for the blank ballot but also encouraged the public to actively engage in monitoring and critiquing the political policies adopted by leaders. This approach demonstrates that the Blank Column volunteer movement is not solely focused on electoral choices but also incorporates a dimension of political education aimed at enhancing the public's democratic literacy.

Furthermore, interviews with informants revealed that Blank Column volunteers view the choice to vote for the blank ballot as a form of public political

¹⁰ Yuda Hanafi Lubis, Fathurozi, Dede Indraswara, *Recognition of the Blank Vote as a Valid Ballot in Regional Head Elections Based on the Principles of a Democratic Rule of Law State*, Journal of Studia Legalia: Journal of Legal Science, Volume 5, Issue 1, May 2024, p. 3.

expression that can be used to convey dissatisfaction with the existing political conditions, particularly regarding the dominance of the political elite in the nomination process for local heads. In this context, the volunteer movement utilised the political momentum of an election with a single candidate as an opportunity to expand the scope of public participation and increase the visibility of the Blank Column movement. Various communication channels were utilised to convey this message, including the use of the media, public discussion forums, and direct interaction with the public. Through these strategies, the Blank Column volunteers sought to build public support whilst strengthening public awareness of the importance of active participation in the democratic process.

Based on an interview with Mr Sukma Wijaya, one of the Blank Column volunteers, a number of Blank Column volunteer activities have been systematically coordinated since the first one on 29 August 2024, around 100 volunteers from the Pangkalpinang Blank Column Volunteers carried out a symbolic action by registering a blank ballot with the Pangkalpinang City Election Commission (KPU) as a form of protest against the presence of only one candidate pair. They carried cardboard boxes labelled 'Blank Column' and delivered speeches outside the KPU office. Subsequently, in early September 2024, a group of volunteers (including the Pangkalpinang Youth Voice and the Blank Ballot Defenders Front) submitted a request for a hearing to the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) to demand recognition of the representation of the blank ballot and the technical mechanisms for conducting the local elections. The volunteers established the Empty Box Aspiration House Foundation as a formal body, which also functions as an election monitoring organisation. They submitted an

application to the KPU to be verified as an official monitoring body. However, as of that time, the application had not yet been approved. They also formed structures such as the Anti-Money Politics Task Force, and even organised a competition offering a prize of 50 million rupiah for anyone who successfully apprehended perpetrators of money politics. Finally, on 21 December 2024, the Chair of the Rumah Aspirasi Kotak Kosong Volunteers, Eka Mulya Putra, officially announced the dissolution of the volunteer network during a gathering and celebration. This marked the end of the volunteers' campaign after securing victory for the 'blank ballot' in the local elections.¹¹

Within Indonesia's political and democratic system, every member of society has the right to elect their representatives who will subsequently hold key state positions, whether in the executive or legislative branches. Public engagement in politics serves as a crucial barometer for gauging the maturity of democracy, particularly in the city of Pangkalpinang. Therefore, public participation is essential as part of political engagement, and naturally, each individual has their own reasons for participating, depending on their level of political awareness.¹²

The Impact of the 'Blank Ballot' Campaign

The phenomenon of the blank column in these local elections can be viewed from two perspectives. Firstly, the trend of the blank column has a detrimental impact on the future of

¹¹ Online interview with Mr Sukma Wijaya, a blank vote campaigner, 12 August 2025 at 11.00 WIB.

¹² Andi Luhur Prianto, Ihyani Malik, Zaldi Rusnaedy, Nur Khaerah, Abdillah, Dian Lestari, Ria Anggaraini, *Local Democracy and Regional Head Elections with a Single Candidate Pair*, Subaltem Inti Media, 2021: p. 25.

democracy in Indonesia, as the existence of the blank column highlights a lack of competition and transparency in the conduct of local elections; this situation leaves the public without an ideal choice when selecting local leaders. This phenomenon also reflects the failure of the democratic system, which is fundamentally intended to provide the public with a diverse range of choices in general elections. Democracy should be understood not merely as a procedural matter, but as a system that guarantees healthy and fair competition. Direct local elections in Indonesia are one of the outcomes of the long struggle for reform. The democratic process, which has been fought for at great cost and amidst numerous challenges, is now threatened with being ‘manipulated’ by the political elite through the buying of support from political parties in the name of coalitions. We must recognise that democracy is reflected in the aspects of competition, participation, and the public’s freedom to make choices in political contests, including the opportunity to accept or reject those who will become leaders in a particular region. Thus, there are indications that politicians are solely focused on pragmatic interests aimed at securing the most votes in local elections, rather than fostering political education to build democracy itself.

If we refer to democratic practices in the UK and the US, there is a concept known as ‘the right not to vote’, meaning the right not to vote as a form of individual freedom. This right emphasises that casting a vote is a freedom, not an obligation that can be enforced. In line with this, the renowned Indonesian professor Jimly Asshiddiqie has also stated that democracy guarantees individual freedom, including the freedom to vote or not to vote. Consequently, the blank ballot as a competitor to the sole candidate pair in the 2024 Simultaneous

Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang City is a forced solution.

Human rights, whether in international or national legal instruments, grant the right to vote and to stand for election only to individuals as legal subjects, not to a blank ballot. The government should prevent the emergence of single candidate pairs by restructuring the nomination requirements so that more candidates can participate. Simplifying these requirements is in line with the multi-party system regulated in Law No. 2 of 2011 concerning Amendments to Law No. 2 of 2008 concerning Political Parties.¹³

Secondly, the ‘Blank Column’ reflects complex political dynamics, in which major parties unite in a single coalition, leaving little room for other candidates to stand; these major political parties, through their coalitions, dominate local politics. The question that then arises is whether the validity of the ‘Blank Column’ implies that it holds the same status and is on an equal footing with the sole candidate pair as an alternative choice for the people. If there is equality between the single candidate pair and the blank column, does this also entail equality in the regulations? This is important given that the existence of the blank column is a relatively recent development, having only been in place since 2015 as the first phase of the implementation of the national simultaneous regional elections. The substantive purpose of the blank column within the dynamics of democracy is, in addition to serving as a form of guarantee for citizens’ fundamental rights, also as an effort to encourage citizens’ political participation. This is because an election with just one candidate pair does not represent the full expression of the

¹³ Hertina, Hernandi Affandi, ‘A Choice Without a Choice: The Blank Ballot and Human Rights Protection in Single-Candidate Regional Head Elections’, *Journal of Legal Issues*, Vol. 53, No. 1, March 2024: 70–71.

people's voice. Consequently, at the outset of its implementation, it took the form of a simple question to citizens: agree or disagree. Thus, the presence of the blank column as an alternative option will encourage political participation.

Article 89(4) of PKPU No. 12 of 2015 stipulates that in regional head elections, a minimum of two candidates must be eligible to stand in the election. This aims to ensure healthy and constructive competition in the democratic process, by guaranteeing that voters have viable choices in determining their regional leaders. With at least two eligible candidates, it is hoped that this will increase public political participation and provide strong legitimacy. If, upon the expiry of the extension period, the number of candidate pairs does not meet the minimum requirement, the election shall be postponed until the next simultaneous election. The consequence is a potential legal vacuum because regional head elections cannot be held as scheduled, which in turn may result in a vacancy in the position of regional head that must be filled through a mechanism in accordance with applicable legal provisions.¹⁴

Although considered a legal vacuum, discussions regarding the activities of 'blank column' volunteers are often interpreted as a form of campaigning; consequently, there is no regulation that specifically governs campaigning or other terms relating to 'blank column' activities, as whilst the blank column appears on the ballot paper, it is not classified as a candidate in the election. Activities by 'blank column' volunteers, whether in the form of

campaigning or similar forms of outreach, should be carried out as a form of responsible political education for the public and as campaigning as referred to in Article 63(1) of the Republic of Indonesia Number 10 of 2016, are carried out by political parties and/or candidate pairs and may be facilitated by the Provincial Election Commission for the election of Governors and Deputy Governors and by the Regency/Municipal Election Commission for the election of Regents and Deputy Regents, as well as the election of Mayors and Deputy Mayors.¹⁵

This means that there is not yet a single regulation providing scope for 'blank column' volunteers to carry out campaign-like activities in public spaces based on sound reasoning regarding the vision, mission and objectives of the 'blank column' in the public sphere; consequently, this creates a legal vacuum for electoral management bodies—both the KPU and the Bawaslu—to facilitate or supervise the activities of 'blank column' volunteers. The KPU Regulation does not provide any further detailed provisions regarding how the Blank Column should be granted facilities equivalent to those of a single candidate pair. Whilst it is true that the Blank Column has no owner, as a legal construct it should receive special treatment so that the Blank Column can stand on equal footing as a choice for the people. The special treatment referred to is a form of government protection to ensure that the Blank Column can serve as a choice for the people, representing a statement of stance regarding the existence of sovereignty in the hands of the people, in accordance with the theory of popular sovereignty—a doctrine

¹⁴ Diana Dwi Aprilianti, Muhammad Mashuri, Humiati, *Legal Analysis of the Legal Framework for Single-Candidate Regional Head Elections from the Perspective of Legal Certainty*, Scientific Journal of Law: Study of Legal Issues and Development, Vol. 6, April 2024, p. 6.

¹⁵ Article 63 of Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 10 of 2016 on the Second Amendment to Law No. 1 of 2015 on the Enactment of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 of 2014 on the Election of Governors, Regents and Mayors into Law

holding that the highest source of power in the state lies with the people.¹⁶

A legal vacuum, or *rechts vacuum*, is a situation where there is no written legislation (*lex scripta*) that explicitly regulates a particular event, act, or legal relationship arising in society and requiring legal certainty. This condition does not mean that the law does not exist at all, but rather that the written law, which serves as the primary reference, has not yet anticipated the issue in question. A legal vacuum generally arises as a result of unforeseen developments, such as technological innovation, the emergence of new business models, or social changes that outpace the drafting of legislation.¹⁷

Article 12(j) of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections states that the General Elections Commission (KPU) has the duty to publicise the conduct of elections and/or matters relating to the duties and powers of the KPU to the public. Meanwhile, Article 93(c) of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections states that the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) oversees the preparation for the conduct of elections, which includes public awareness campaigns regarding the conduct of elections.¹⁸ Based on the above regulations, blank-column campaigns—which are not regulated within the stages of the election and voting process—may fall under the category of public awareness activities accommodated by the authority of the KPU and Bawaslu as electoral management bodies. Given this legal vacuum, the scope of blank-column activities can be channelled into public

awareness initiatives carried out by various elements of society.¹⁹

Public awareness activities can be carried out by the public through voter education programmes as KPU volunteers, participatory oversight campaigns as Bawaslu participatory oversight cadres, or by joining accredited election monitoring organisations recognised by the KPU to help provide political education to the wider public. Political education not only helps the public to understand the democratic process, but also fosters individuals who think critically and take responsibility for political life at the local level. With increased political understanding, citizens can become more active in decision-making that directly impacts their lives. Furthermore, political education also plays a role in strengthening the accountability of local government, as an educated public is more critical and proactive in voicing their aspirations. With the right political education, the community can build strong social solidarity and also contribute to the creation of a healthy democracy.²⁰

Blank-column volunteers can educate the public on the meaning and implications of voting for the blank column. Blank-column volunteers provide education to the public on the meaning and implications of voting for the blank column with the aim of gaining support and solidarity from the public, so that the public is better informed about what the blank column entails. Thus, democracy is more oriented towards the realisation of

¹⁶ Prof. Dr. I Gede Pantja Astawa, S.H., M.H., *Popular Sovereignty According to the Indonesian Constitutional System*, Fokus Media, 2021, p. 63

¹⁷ Reviana Mutiara Indah, Irwan Triadi, *Legal Discovery as the Implementation of Legal Theory in Addressing Normative Gaps*, Media Hukum Indonesia, 2025, Vol. 3, p. 6.

¹⁸ Article 12 and Article 93 of Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections

¹⁹ Titi Anggraini, 'The Phenomenon of Single Candidates and Citizens' Voting Rights', *Journal of Elections and Democracy*, No. 9 (2016), p. 37.

²⁰ Suyono, Bernadetta Budi Lestari, Nehru Firdaus Ardhana, Cristo Rei Romanza Mollo, *The Role of Political Education in Addressing the Dynamics of Indonesian Democracy Post-2024 Election for the Community of Bohar Village, Sidoarjo*, *Journal of Educational Sciences*, Vol. 7, No. 12, December 2024, p. 8

substantive democracy, namely a democracy that serves as a pathway for the fulfilment of citizens' rights in accordance with the application of the theory of popular sovereignty.

Conclusion

The activities of the Blank Ballot volunteers in the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Head Elections in Pangkalpinang emerged as a response to the phenomenon of single candidates, which limits the public's electoral choices. The Blank Ballot volunteers represent a form of public political participation aimed at providing an alternative choice for voters who have no preference for the sole candidate pair. The activities carried out by the volunteers include various forms of public outreach through direct engagement, the use of print media such as banners and billboards, the formation of volunteer organisations, the expression of public aspirations through hearings with legislative bodies, and various initiatives aimed at raising public political awareness. These activities demonstrate that the 'Blank Ballot' volunteers play a role in providing political education to the public regarding the existence of the blank ballot as a valid option within a single-candidate electoral system. On the other hand, the existence and activities of the 'Blank Ballot' volunteers also highlight a gap in legal regulations concerning the scope of activities, campaigning, and facilities for the blank ballot within the local head election system. In these circumstances, the activities of the Kotak Kosong volunteers are largely interpreted as a form of political outreach carried out by the public within the framework of voter education and citizens' political participation, thereby remaining within the democratic sphere aimed at enhancing public awareness and engagement in the political process at the local level.

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