



Election Challenges in Border Communities After the Covid-19 Pandemic: Case Study in Riau Islands Province

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Abstract. Communities living in the border area of the country must have their characteristics in various spaces, one of which is the political space. There are still many problems faced by border communities, especially related to electoral issues, where elections are used as an arena for issues of nationalism for the border communities themselves. This is important to research considering that the Simultaneous Election will take place in 2024. Coupled with the conditions after the Covid-19 pandemic which has facilitated border access again, it becomes an important issue in facing the upcoming 2024 Simultaneous Election. So how do you prepare for the elections in 2024, especially after the Covid-19 Pandemic? Therefore, the researcher got interested in seeing how the election challenges are for the border communities after the Covid-19 pandemic in the Riau Island Province. This study uses qualitative research so that it can provide depth in terms of research, this type of descriptive research also could provide an overview of how elections are in border communities. This research uses literature study techniques to obtain supporting study materials as well as interviews with relevant informants with FGDs or Focus Group Discussions to dig deeper to provide a more objective picture. The theory used is to use the theory of community needs. Goodin said that needs are not always absolute, but some components influence them, namely priority and relativity. The results of the research obtained were that the elections held during the Covid-19 Pandemic had an increase in voters as a result of restrictions on entry to other countries, but on the other hand, there was the death of one of the candidate pairs due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Meanwhile, after this pandemic, let alone entering preparations for the 2024 simultaneous elections, there are more than 10% (percent) of the population have started working outside the border or abroad, so there are concerns about low voter turnout. Not to mention, if voters vote overseas, it will result in voters not being able to elect representatives of the people other than the president and vice president according to their area of residence.

Keywords: Border Communities, 2024 Elections, Covid-19.

1 Introduction

Indonesia is currently experiencing two contradictory periods, namely the transitional period after the Covid 19 pandemic ended, and concurrent with that is the preparation

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for the General Elections (Elections) which will be held in 2024 simultaneously throughout Indonesia. These two important agendas must be faced by the Indonesian nation simultaneously. In addition, Indonesian people tend to have many characteristics, patterns, cultures, and problems that border communities also have.

Even Maulana et al. [1] said that due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a discourse on postponing the 2024 elections, which was one of the crucial issues at the beginning of 2021. Many pros and cons occurred in society regarding this issue. Because apart from being related to the provisions of the Indonesian constitution, the process of implementing the 2024 election also takes place amid economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, in the end, President Joko Widodo, in his speech delivered on April 10, 2022, emphasized that the 2024 general election would still be held as it should be and without any delay.

2023 is a solicitous year for many countries because the situation relatively predictable and forecasts are negative. The relatively recent Covid-19 pandemic has ended, leaving many backlogs that need to be corrected, and the economic impact will still be felt in 2023. In Indonesia, 2023 will have a separate event, namely the campaign season for the 2024 elections. This election will have a higher intensity than 2019 because conducted simultaneously to elect members of the DPR, DPRD, DPD, and the President. In addition, specifically for the presidential election, there is no incumbent in the presidential candidate exchange because President Joko Widodo has served for a maximum of two periods [2].

One of the problems that need to be studied is the people living in the border area. Communities in border areas who are Indonesian citizens also participate in the political field such as participating in the regional head election process, electing people's representatives at the Regency/City, Provincial and National levels, as well as presidential and vice-presidential elections, and participating in activities commemorating Indonesia's independence day. That participating in political activities is a right that every citizen has to channel his political aspirations for the sustainability of the country. Participation in political activities will support the course of the democratic process in Indonesia [3].

Pranowo [4] said that borders have long been a part of the development of political life. Disputes between nations often occur because of border issues, which often lead to war. The border refers more to the path that stretches and separates the two regions of the country. Border areas are often seen as a zone of poverty, instability, uncertainty, marginalization, and crime. Regarding economic problems, border communities often carry out illegal economic activities to make ends meet. Border communities generally prefer to meet their health and education needs in neighboring countries rather than their own country. If conditions like this continue, it can lead to the erosion of the sense of nationalism in society which can lead to the disintegration of the nation.

One of the most numerous examples of border communities in Indonesia is the Riau Island Province (Kepri). On Panama [5] explained that Riau Island Province is one of the provinces that borders several neighboring countries. The boundaries of the province that was born two decades ago are known as the northern face of Indonesia. Vietnam, Malaysia, Cambodia, and Singapore are countries bordering the Riau Island Province. Therefore, researchers are interested in seeing how the election challenges

are in border communities after the Covid-19 pandemic with case studies on elections in the Riau Island Province. The researcher limited this study of border communities in one city, namely Dumai, and two regencies, namely Bengkalis and Meranti, which are in the Riau Island Province.

2 Goals

The general objective of this research is to explain the challenges of elections in border communities after the Covid-19 pandemic with election case studies in the Riau Island Province. The specific purpose of this research is

- To be able to find out and describe the condition and character of the border community during the Covid-19 pandemic in the Riau Island Province
- To be able to find out and describe the challenges after the Covid-19 pandemic faced by border communities in the Riau Island Province

3 Conceptual Framework

3.1 Border Communities

The term community comes from the word *musyarak* which comes from Arabic and means to participate or participate. So that it can be said that society is a group of people who interact in a social relationship. They have the same culture, region, and identity. As for the border referred to by Novionita et al. [6] namely the border is an area that is a separator between two regions or countries. Soegijoko and Bulkin [7] gives meaning of the boundaries of the border area as a special area because it borders the territory of a neighboring country so the handling of its development requires specialism.

3.2 Community Needs

In looking at people who need specificity, it is important to look at the needs of the community. Goodin [8] sees that needs are not always absolute. He views the needs as something that have two components that must be taken to attention because these two components influence defining needs, namely priority and relativity. Related to priorities, the party with authority often has to direct when there is a conflict between satisfying people's wants and meeting people's needs. When this happens, people must try to meet the needs of the community as much as possible and not the desires of the community. As for the relative, Goodin [8] explained that the need is very dependent on the elements of time, place, and social environment [9].

3.3 Elections

A general election is an indicator of the stability and dynamic democratization of a country. In Indonesia, periodic general elections have been held since 1955, but the

process of democratization through previous elections has not been able to produce mature democratic values due to an authoritarian political system. The hope to find an ideal form of democracy began to emerge after the fall of the New Order regime in 1998, which led to changes in the democratic and governmental order in Indonesia [10].

According to Alvons [11] the sovereignty possessed by the people is reflected, among other things, by holding general elections at certain times. Elections are one of the most basic human rights of citizens. Therefore, in the context of implementing human rights, the government must carry out general elections. In our constitution, the 1945 Constitution regulates elections, namely in chapter VIIB Article 22E, namely about general elections. Under the principle that it is the people who are sovereign, then everything must be returned to the people to determine it. It is a violation of human rights if the government does not hold general elections or delays general elections without the consent of the people's representatives.

4 Methodology

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods are often called naturalistic research methods because the research is carried out in natural conditions. This qualitative descriptive approach aims to examine and clarify the existence of a phenomenon that occurs in society [12].

The problem being researched is based on the reality that appears in today's society. Meanwhile, the techniques used in this study were in the form of literature studies and FGDs or Focus Group Discussions. FGDs were said to be [13] a process of collecting qualitative data and information in a systematic way regarding an issue which was carried out through group discussions. The FGDs conducted in this study was with several KPU members, both Provinces and Cities or Regencies studied, namely:

- Head of the HR Division (Human Resources) KPU (Komisi Pemilihan Umum/ General Election Commissions) Riau Island Province, Nugroho Noto Susanto.
- Member of KPU Meranti Archipelago, Hanafi.
- Chairperson of the Bengkalis District KPU, Elmiawati Safarina
- Member of KPU of Bengkalis District, Feri Herlinda and Safroni
- Member of KPU of Dumai City, Siti Khadijah and Parno.

5 Discussion

5.1 Political Characteristics of Border Communities

Dumai City is a plural city, Member of Dumai City KPU, Parno explained that there are 16 (sixteen) tribes in Dumai City. In addition, there are 130 companies located on the beach so the average population works as farmers and only a small proportion are farmers and fishermen. Due to the existences of population that works, the KPU needs extra staff to increase people's participation in elections.

Almost the same as Dumai City, Bengkalis Regency, there are lots of people that is also work and there are more of those that are abroad. According to the Chairperson of the Bengkalis Regency Election Commission, Elmiawati Safarina, many tribes live on the coast, so the livelihoods of the Bengkalis people are also carried out in a bordering country, namely Malaysia. Not to mention, the Malay ethnicity is higher than other ethnic groups in Bengkalis Regency so the Bengkalis people feel closer to Malaysia.

Whereas in Meranti Regency which is an archipelago area, member of Meranti KPU, Hanafi said that almost along the shoreline there are coffee shops so the people (Meranti) discuss political issues in coffee shops, many candidates and even regional heads will discuss political issues in coffee shops, it is indeed a bit different compared to other border communities.

5.2 Elections During the Pandemic

Before discussing post-pandemic elections, researcher will first discuss important events that occurred during elections in border communities. During the pandemic, Meranti Regency and Dumai City held Regional Head General Elections (Pilkada) which took place simultaneously on December 9, 2020.

There were two important events in the election during the pandemic that occurred in Meranti Regency and Dumai City. For Meranti Regency, there was an increase in voter turnout during the voting. As for the City of Dumai, the decline in participation was caused more by the death of a candidate pair due to Covid-19.

Hanafi explained that this condition was also unique during the controversy over holding regional elections during a pandemic, where workers who were in Meranti during Covid-19 were not allowed to go to Malaysia because they were not allowed to enter so it benefited from an increase in the number of voters. Also conveyed by Hanafi quoted by Imron [14] that the number of people using their right to vote in the Meranti Archipelago District Election increased from 65.40 percent to 70.84 percent, which means an increase of 5.44 percent.

Meanwhile, another incident occurred in Dumai City, the candidate for deputy mayor of Dumai City, Eko Suharjo died due to Covid during the Pilkada in Dumai City. It was explained in Indriani [15] that previously Eko was the Deputy Mayor of Dumai City who was on leave because he ran for the Pilkada and then experienced illness and received intensive care at the hospital for one month. Initially, Eko tested positive for Covid-19. During treatment, his condition improved. However, he suddenly returned to treatment and died.

What happened in Dumai City made the opposite of Meranti Regency, in fact, participation in Dumai City relatively decreased. This happened because according to member of Dumai City KPU, Siti Khadijah, the people of Dumai City would be more obedient to the figures in the community. So this is also what causes the community to not be so enthusiastic because the candidate for deputy mayor is a figure for the people of Dumai City.

5.3 Challenges After the Pandemic

Currently, Indonesia is experiencing a "post-pandemic" period, and there are several challenges that must be faced in preparing for the 2024 elections which will be held simultaneously. The three regions agree that they have almost the same challenges, namely voters who work abroad causing fears of reduced voter turnout in the 2024 elections. In addition, for the City of Dumai there is a significant rate of population increase that must be anticipated in the Final Voter List (DPT) and the distribution of ballots. Finally, there is a regulatory issue that is felt urgent to be made considering the characteristics of border communities who prefer to work rather than having to vote.

5.4 Voters Work Abroad

The three regions, namely Meranti Regency, Bengkalis, and City of Dumai, both have problems facing the 2024 Election, namely related to voters working abroad. Even though there is an Overseas KPU, this does not guarantee the voting rights used by people who work abroad because the average passport used for work is a travel passport or as a tourist. Even if possible, Overseas Elected Regions (Dapils) in Malaysia use the Jakarta Dapil so that when voting, the people of the Riau Island Province cannot vote for the people's representatives such as the MPR, DPR, and DPD levels according to their region.

Hanafi said, for the people of Meranti Regency, after being allowed to go abroad, 25,000 people were in the process of obtaining passports to go to Malaysia. Adding up those who have had passports for a long time, it means that 35,000 people will work in Malaysia. While the population in Meranti Regency is 219,000 people, which means that more than 10% (percent) of the Meranti population will work abroad.

Similar to Meranti, Bengkalis also have the same problem because voters in Bengkalis mostly work in Malaysia. For example, when updating voter data, the KPU discover many voters who could not be found because they were working abroad. So there is a concern at the time of the election event because on the day of the voting, there will be many who work in other countries and the character of the Bengkalis people is that they will prioritize earning a living rather than voting.

5.5 Population Increasing

Specifically for the City of Dumai there is an increase in the number of residents as voters in the upcoming 2024 Election which must be anticipated by the Dumai City KPU. According to Safroni, this can be seen in the Dumai Pilkada which took place on December 9, 2020, where as many as 181,000 residents were designated as DPT, whereas now on the List of Potential Election Voters (DP4), there are more than 231,000 people from Dumai City who are registered. This means that there is a significant increase in the number of residents as voters.

This is possible because industrial growth in Dumai City is increasingly widespread, where more than 130 companies are established on the beach. Then the ease of access to and from Dumai City is marked by the existence of the Dumai-Malakka international

port which was reopened after the Pandemic. And there is also toll access such as the Pekanbaru-Dumai toll road which makes travel easier.

5.6 Regulation

One of the ways to be taken to deal with the declining participation of voters in voting is through regulation. Because according to Hanafi, if the KPU of Bengkalis took precautions to go abroad it would be impossible. If for example, the legislative candidates give money (even though it is considered money politics) but the amount is still far less rather than they have to lose their workers in foreign countries. Not to mention the distance that the workers have to cover if they have to return to Meranti will be more time-consuming.

One of the methods taken by the Dumai KPU is by making election information pamphlets for TKI (Indonesian Workers) who are going abroad. This socialization is in the form of recommendations not to justify leaving the country when holding elections so that these workers can understand the schedule for holding elections so that during elections they can vote.

It's different from Meranti, in Meranti, there are 6 (six) islands spread across 6 sub-districts, different from other regions, if people went from one sub-district to another it takes around 1 (one) to 4 (four) hours, not to mention the one with the border has a fairly long distance. This condition also causes the Meranti community need lots of effort to return to their hometown to simply vote on election day.

Therefore, there is a need for regulations that must be carried out by the Central KPU in facing the 2024 Election for border communities. Because Hanafi added that it is impossible to prevent people from going to work. According to him, an effective solution would be for the Indonesian KPU to issue a special regulation or memo to the government or consulates in Malaysia to prohibit them from entering at least one week or three days before the voting.

This is felt to be effective because workers who work in Malaysia do not use work visas, they only use travel passports but are used to work. This is not a problem at all in the Malaysian government because the workers are willing to extend their visas and return to Malaysia as workers. Moreover, the immigration section of Malaysia already understands the condition of the people who work as workers looking for food needs.

Unlike the Pilkada/ Regional Head Election, according to the Riau KPU, Nugroho Noto Santoso during the Pandemic, the regional KPU can carry out regulations in the form of using social media so that people and the candidates can carry out outreach on Social Media and it is quite effective, especially in a pandemic. However, because the 2024 Election is national in nature, the regulations that are made are regulations originating from the Central KPU.

6 Conclusion

Whereas several challenges must be faced by election organizers in carrying out the upcoming 2024 elections. The condition of border communities who work abroad

causes obstacles that must be faced to be able to vote in their home region. While it is not possible to vote overseas due to limited votes and also different electoral districts. Apart from that, the addition of the number of residents designated as DP4 made the regional KPU have to work extra to ensure the number of registered voters.

One of the opportunities to be able to deal with the above problems is with regulations, both regulations made by the center or the Indonesian KPU to make rules for the conditions of border communities. Or cooperate with consulates of border countries to prohibit voters from entering 1 week or at least 3 days before the voting period. Apart from that, they can also appoint regional KPUs to make special regulations that can be made to deal with problems in border communities during elections.

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