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The Dynamics of Filling Vacancies in the Village Head Position: Between Budget Pragmatism and Postponement of Interim Elections (PAW) in Menganti District

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the dynamics of filling a vacant village-head position through the postponement of an interim village-head election and the successive appointment of acting village heads in Putat Lor Village, Menganti District, Gresik Regency. A qualitative single-case study design was employed. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with subdistrict officials, the acting village head, and a representative of the Village Consultative Body, supported by a review of appointment decrees, administrative documents, and relevant regulations. Data were analyzed using an interactive model involving data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, while source and document triangulation was applied to strengthen credibility. The findings show that the postponement was shaped by three interrelated considerations: administrative adaptation during regulatory transition, the absence of a specific budget allocation for the interim election, and the synchronization of the election schedule with the local political agenda. Extending the tenure of acting village heads maintained public-service continuity and reduced procedural and political costs. Nevertheless, administrative efficiency and political stability cannot automatically justify postponing the community's right to elect a definitive leader. Administrative discretion must therefore be supported by a clear legal basis, measurable time limits, periodic evaluation, transparent budgeting, and public accountability.

Introduction

Village government is an important part of the implementation of national government because it is directly related to public services, development, financial management, and community participation at the local level. Village heads hold strategic positions in directing the implementation of government and ensuring the sustainability of services to the community. Therefore, vacancies in the position of village head can cause administrative, political, and public service problems if they are not immediately resolved through mechanisms in accordance with laws and regulations. Law Number 6 of 2014 concerning Villages has regulated the filling of vacancies in the position of village head through the appointment of the Acting Village Head and, under certain conditions, the Election of the Interim Village Head (PAW) through village deliberations (Perdana et al., 2022).

These regulations have developed after the enactment of Law Number 3 of 2024 which amends a number of provisions in the Village Law, including the term of office of the village head and the transitional arrangement of village government (Sakdi, 2024). The change in the regulation has implications for villages that experience vacancies during the transition period. In such conditions, local governments must ensure that the appointment of the Acting Village Head does not turn into a prolonged filling of positions and ignores the community's right to have a definitive leader. The

appointment of the Acting Head is essentially a temporary mechanism to maintain the continuity of government, not a permanent replacement for the village democratic process (Fasholakhudin & Shokhikhah, 2024; Hasanah et al., 2024).

Technically, the implementation of PAW is regulated through the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 112 of 2014 concerning the Election of Village Heads as amended through the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 65 of 2017 and the Regulation of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 72 of 2020 (Ministry of Home Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2017, 2020). The arrangement places the Village Consultative Body (BPD), village governments, sub-district governments, and district governments as actors who have different functions in the process of filling vacancies. The BPD plays a role in forming committees and facilitating village deliberations, while the local government is responsible for ensuring that the process of determining and appointing interim village heads takes place according to the provisions. Divisions of authority that are not carried out consistently can cause legal uncertainty and extend the term of office of the Acting Village Head.

The implementation of PAW in practice does not always run as well as its normative design. A number of studies show that the election of interim village heads can face administrative problems, limited institutional readiness, conflicts of interest, and disputes over election results (Adnan, 2021; Dianto & Gunawan, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024). These disputes can become more complex because the election of village heads takes place in relatively close social spaces, so that family relationships, support groups, political interests, and the struggle for village resources intersect (Huda, 2022; Sakdi, 2024). This condition causes local governments not only to consider compliance with procedures, but also social stability and the sustainability of public services.

Village leadership transitions also have the potential to give rise to horizontal conflicts when the community is polarized by support for certain candidates. The study by Dewi et al. (2024) shows that conflicts in village communities cannot be separated from cultural values, social relations, and the struggle for access to resources. Meanwhile, Indah et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of clarity on the duties and authority of village governments in maintaining accountability in government administration. The findings show that the settlement of vacancies is not enough to be understood as a process of filling administrative positions, but also as part of managing the legitimacy, political interests, and social cohesion of the village community.

In the face of such situations, government officials can use administrative discretion to maintain the continuity of government. However, discretion must remain based on legitimate authority, objective reasons, public interest, and the principle of accountability. Considerations of procedural efficiency or conflict prevention cannot be used automatically to override provisions regarding PAW. The appointment and extension of the term of office of the Acting Deputy Attorney General that lasts indefinitely has the potential to reduce legal certainty, weaken the oversight of the BPD, and delay the political right of the people to elect the definitive leader. Thus, discretion needs to be assessed based on the balance between the effectiveness of the government and compliance with regulations.

In addition to administrative issues, the implementation of PAW has a budget dimension

because its implementation requires the formation of committees, candidate verification, socialization, village deliberations, inaugurations, and various supporting activities. The management of the APBDes should be carried out in a transparent, accountable, and traceable manner by the community. However, previous research shows that the governance of the APBDes still faces problems of information disclosure, apparatus capacity, documentation, and accountability for budget use (Kanter et al., 2021; Kawatu et al., 2024). These limitations can affect the ability of village governments to provide budgets for political and administrative activities that are not planned from the beginning.

Budget limitations can also encourage village governments to choose alternatives that are considered cheaper and easier to implement. Ndonggi (2024) shows that the effectiveness of the use of Village Funds and Village Fund Allocation is greatly influenced by the ability of the village government to set priorities and connect the budget with development needs. In the context of filling vacancies, the choice to extend the term of office of the Acting Deputy Chief can be influenced by consideration of costs, administrative readiness, and the proximity of the schedule to the regular village head election. However, these efficiency considerations still need to be tested based on the principles of budget transparency and compliance with the PAW mechanism so that they do not develop into a justification for the postponement of village democracy.

Studies on village head vacancies so far have mostly discussed the juridical aspects of PAW, the dismissal of village heads, disputes over election results, and local government authority (Adnan, 2021; Perdana et al., 2022; Fasholakhudin & Shokhikhah, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024). Studies that simultaneously link administrative discretion, budgeting choices, and election schedule synchronization are still limited. In fact, these three aspects are important to explain why the PAW mechanism was not implemented immediately even though vacancies have been running for a relatively long time.

This research fills this gap through a case study of the vacancy of the position of the Head of Putat Lor Village, Menganti District, Gresik Regency. The novelty of the research lies in the analysis of the relationship between administrative discretion, budget considerations, and election schedule synchronization in the decision to extend the term of office of the Acting Village Head. This study does not place the postponement of PAW as an action that can be justified or blamed from the beginning, but assesses the rationality of the policy based on empirical evidence, legal provisions, budget transparency, and its implications for the democratic rights of the community. Thus, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of filling vacancies in the position of the Head of Putat Lor Village and explain the administrative, budgetary, and political factors that affect the delay in the implementation of PAW.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design to analyze the postponement of the Intertemporal Village Head Election (PAW) in Putat Lor Village, Menganti District, Gresik Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on decision-making processes, administrative considerations, budget management, and political dynamics that cannot be explained through quantitative data alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The case study design is used to examine the phenomenon in depth in the context of the institutions and regulations that surround it (Yin, 2018).

The research location was chosen purposively because Putat Lor Village has experienced a vacancy in the position of village head since 2023 and the filling of positions is carried out through several periods of Acting Village Head without the implementation of PAW. Field data collection was carried out on May 4-12, 2026. Informants were selected through purposive sampling techniques based on their knowledge and involvement in filling vacancies, namely the staff of the Menganti District government, the Acting Head of Putat Lor Village, and representatives of the Putat Lor Village Consultative Body (BPD). The personal identities of the informants are disguised to maintain confidentiality and avoid institutional consequences.

Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews using semi-structured interview guidelines. Interviews were directed to the chronology of vacancies, the process of appointment and extension of the Acting Village Head, consideration of PAW postponement, budget provision, relationship between the village government, BPD and sub-district, and the plan to hold regular village head elections. Because the informant did not give consent to the use of recording equipment, interview data was collected through field notes written during the interview and completed immediately after the interview process was completed. This condition was noted as one of the limitations of the study.

Secondary data was obtained through the review of the Decree on the appointment of the Acting Village Head, the BPD proposal letter, and other administrative documents that can be accessed on May 6, 2026. The study also examined Law Number 6 of 2014, Law Number 3 of 2024, Government Regulation on the implementation of the Village Law, and Permendagri Number 112 of 2014 as amended through Permendagri Number 65 of 2017 and Permendagri Number 72 of 2020. APBDes documents were not obtained directly, so information about PAW budget allocation and the inauguration of the Acting Regent was based on informant information, not an examination of written budget documents.

The validity of the data was checked through triangulation of sources and triangulation of documents. Information on the chronology of filling positions, the validity period of the decree, the consideration of PAW postponement, and the provision of the budget were compared between informants from the sub-district, village government, and BPD. The information from the interview results was also compared with the document of the appointment of the Acting District and the provisions of laws and regulations. Statements that cannot be supported by written documents are treated as informants' statements and presented carefully so as not to be considered as fully verified administrative facts.

Data analysis used an interactive model of Miles et al. (2014), which included data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. At the condensation stage, data was grouped into the themes of chronology of filling positions, administrative discretion, budget considerations, APBDes transparency, and election schedule synchronization. Furthermore, data was presented in the form of chronological narratives and interthematic relationships. Conclusions were drawn by comparing empirical findings with legal provisions as well as the concepts of

discretion, budget accountability, and local democracy. The analysis process was carried out repeatedly to ensure that the interpretation of the research remained in accordance with the data obtained.

Results and Discussion

Chronology of Vacancies and Extension of Acting Village Heads

The vacancy for the position of Putat Lor Village Head begins in 2023 after the definitive village head dies before the end of his term of office. This condition is followed up through the appointment of the Acting Village Head from the State Civil Apparatus to ensure that the implementation of government and public services continues. The appointment of the Acting Head is a temporary administrative mechanism until the implementation of the Interim Village Head Election (PAW) or regular village head election in accordance with applicable provisions (Republic of Indonesia, 2014; Perdana et al., 2022).

The findings of the study show that the filling of vacancies in Putat Lor Village was not immediately continued with the implementation of PAW. The Acting Head's leadership period lasted through several appointment periods, including the replacement of officials who carried out village government duties. Based on the informant's information, the policy was chosen to maintain the continuity of public services while adjusting the transition process to changes in regulations after the enactment of Law Number 3 of 2024. The change in the term of office of the village head through the regulation raises the need for administrative adjustments to villages that have experienced vacancies before the law changes are enacted (Republic of Indonesia, 2024; Sakdi, 2024).

The extension of the term of office of the Acting Head is seen by the apparatus as a more practical step than the issuance of a decision in a shorter period. However, the consideration of administrative efficiency needs to be distinguished from the legal authority in determining the Acting Village Head. The sub-district government basically plays a role in coordinating, facilitating, and submitting proposals, while the determination of the Acting Head is within the authority of the regional head in accordance with applicable regulations. Therefore, the practice of extending the term of office of the Acting Head is inappropriate if it is solely referred to as the discretion of the sub-district without explaining the decision of the regional head on which the legal basis is.

The findings show that there is a tension between the need to maintain the continuity of government and the obligation to provide definitive leadership. Acting officials are indeed necessary so that public services do not stop, but prolonged tenure can reduce the temporary nature of these positions. Fasholakhudin and Shokhikhah (2024) point out that the dismissal and appointment of village officials must remain based on legal certainty. Meanwhile, Hasanah et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of legal protection and procedural compliance in changing the structure of village government.

Thus, the extension of the Acting Deputy in Putat Lor Village can be understood as a form of administrative adaptation, but its legality and accountability must still be assessed based on the basis of determination, deadlines, performance evaluation, and concrete steps towards definitive leadership. Procedural efficiency cannot stand alone as a reason for the postponement of PAW because the implementation of village government must also maintain legal certainty and the

democratic rights of the community.

Budget Pragmatism and Limitations of APBDes Transparency

In addition to administrative factors, the findings of the study show that the delay of PAW is influenced by financing considerations. The implementation of PAW requires budget support for the formation of committees, candidate verification, socialization, implementation of village deliberations, documentation, and inauguration. These needs must be planned through the APBDes because PAW financing through village deliberations is part of the responsibility of the village government in accordance with applicable regulations.

Based on the information of the informant, the Putat Lor APBDes does not provide a special nomenclature for the implementation of PAW. The village government is said to only allocate the inauguration budget that can be used when the appointment or replacement of the Acting Village Head is carried out. Because the APBDes document cannot be obtained directly, the findings cannot be stated as a budget fact that has been verified documentally. The statement regarding the unavailability of the PAW budget must therefore be understood as the information of the informant that has been compared with other interview sources.

Limited access to the APBDes is an important finding in this study. The village budget document is basically public information that the community needs to assess the suitability between village planning, implementation, and financial accountability. The closed attitude and transfer of responsibility when the document is requested shows that the disclosure of budget information has not been implemented optimally. These findings are in line with Kanter et al. (2021) and Kawatu et al. (2024), who show that the management of the APBDes still faces issues of transparency, apparatus capacity, and accountability to the community.

Budget considerations in this case can be understood as a form of budget pragmatism, namely the tendency to choose alternatives that are considered easier and cheaper to maintain the sustainability of village government. Maintaining the Acting Deputy Governor is considered to require lower costs than organizing the PAW which requires its own administrative and political stages. However, budget pragmatism cannot be used as a single reason not to implement the mechanism that has been determined by the regulations. The village government should adjust budget planning after a vacancy occurs, including through changes to the APBDes if the requirements and schedule for the implementation of PAW have been met.

The absence of a special allocation for PAW also shows a reciprocal relationship between political decisions and budget planning. PAW is not implemented because the budget is not available, while the budget is not provided because PAW is not placed as a priority. This condition forms a policy circle that extends the leadership period of Pj. Ndonggi (2024) emphasizes that the effectiveness of the use of the village budget is not only determined by the size of the budget, but also by the accuracy of priority setting and the ability of the village government to connect the budget with the needs of the community.

Therefore, budget pragmatism needs to be placed critically. Efficiency is a legitimate consideration in village financial management, but it must be accompanied by information disclosure, a clear legal basis, and an evaluation of its democratic consequences. Without the

disclosure of the APBDes document, it is difficult to ascertain whether the postponement of PAW is really caused by financial limitations or is a political decision that is then justified through budget reasons.

Election Schedule Synchronization and Local Political Stability

The next finding shows that the postponement of PAW is related to the plan to synchronize the filling of the position of Putat Lor Village Head with the election of a regular village head. Based on information from informants from the sub-district and village government, the implementation of PAW is considered less efficient if the elected village head will only serve the remaining term of office for a relatively short time before entering the regular election schedule. These considerations encourage the local government to retain the Acting Head as a transitional leader.

A similar pattern is said to occur in Beton Village, which also experienced a vacancy in the position of village head. The similarity in handling in the two villages shows that the postponement is not entirely an internal decision of Putat Lor Village, but is related to the local government's policy in regulating the election schedule. The strategy is directed to prevent overlapping election stages, reduce costs, and reduce community political fatigue due to the implementation of two election processes in close proximity.

From the perspective of social stability, this consideration can be understood because the election of village heads has the potential to give rise to more direct competition than elections at a higher level of government. The social closeness between voters and candidates causes differences in choices to easily develop into tensions between families or community groups. Huda (2022) and Khotimah et al. (2024) show that disputes in the election of village heads can continue to become administrative disputes and political conflicts. Dianto and Gunawan (2024) also found that the replacement of village heads over time can be influenced by conflicts of interest between parties involved.

The appointment of the Acting Deputy Acting Officers from the ASN element is seen as reducing tensions because the officials are not expected to be directly tied to the village political group. In the case of Putat Lor, the existence of the Acting Deputy is considered to be able to maintain public services and prevent political competition during the transition period. However, the assumption regarding this success has not been supported by data from the community or candidate groups that have the potential to participate in PAW. This study only obtained information from elements of the government and the BPD, so the assessment of political stability must be understood as an institutional perspective, not a comprehensive picture of the attitude of the community.

The synchronization of election schedules also poses a democratic dilemma. On the one hand, such policies can save the budget and reduce the risk of conflict. On the other hand, the community will have to wait longer to obtain a definitive village head who has an electoral mandate. The indefinite extension of the Acting Party's term of office and a clear transition plan have the potential to turn the temporary policy into a normal practice. Therefore, the decision to postpone the PAW must be accompanied by a legal basis, a time frame, documentation of considerations, and a supervisory mechanism that is accessible to the public.

Administrative Discretion between Efficiency and Legal Certainty

The findings of the study show that the postponement of PAW in Putat Lor Village was formed by a combination of regulatory adjustments, administrative efficiency, limited budget planning, and considerations of political stability. These factors do not work in isolation. The extension of the term of office of the Acting Governor becomes easier because the PAW is not budgeted, while the absence of a budget is reinforced by the plan to align the election with the regular schedule.

This practice can be categorized as administrative discretion if decisions are taken to solve concrete problems that have not yet obtained clear technical arrangements. However, discretion must still meet the principles of legality, public interest, objectivity, transparency, and accountability. Discretion cannot be used to delay legal obligations indefinitely or eliminate the community's right to determine the definitive village head.

The findings of this study differ from previous studies that placed PAW delays more as a procedural issue, result dispute, or conflict of interest (Adnan, 2021; Dianto & Gunawan, 2024; Khotimah et al., 2024). The case of Putat Lor shows that delays can also be born from the relationship between bureaucratic decisions and budget planning. The contribution of this research lies in the explanation that budget pragmatism can be an instrument that extends interim leadership when it is not accompanied by PAW planning and adequate supervision.

Thus, the postponement of PAW in Putat Lor Village is not properly understood solely as administrative negligence or directly justified as an efficiency strategy. This practice is a policy choice that has administrative benefits as well as legal and democratic consequences. The local government needs to ensure that every extension of the Acting Governor's Office is equipped with a legal basis, periodic evaluations, budget openness, and a definite schedule to obtain a definitive village head.

Conclusion

The postponement of the Inter-Time Election (PAW) of the Village Head in Putat Lor Village is not solely caused by administrative negligence, but is formed through the interaction between bureaucratic discretion, budget planning limitations, and efforts to align the election schedule with the local political agenda. The extension of the term of office of the Acting Village Head was chosen to maintain the continuity of public services, reduce administrative complexity, and prevent potential horizontal conflicts. However, considerations of budget efficiency and political stability cannot automatically justify the postponement of PAW. Each discretion must have a clear legal basis, measurable deadlines, periodic evaluations, and transparent accountability mechanisms. Information on the use of the inauguration budget post is also still based on the results of interviews because APBDes documents cannot be accessed directly, so the findings need to be understood as research limitations.

Local governments need to clarify procedures for filling vacancies, ensure the availability of the PAW budget, increase the openness of the APBDes, and establish a transition schedule that provides legal certainty. These steps are necessary so that the efficiency of government and local stability do not reduce the right of village communities to obtain definitive leaders through a democratic, transparent, and accountable process.

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