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Examining Incumbent Performance Accountability in a Single Candidate Local Election: A Case Study of the 2024 Pangkalpinang Local Election

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Abstract

This study examines incumbent performance accountability in the 2024 single-candidate local election in Pangkalpinang City and its influence on electoral outcomes that culminated in the victory of the blank ballot option. Using a qualitative case study approach, the research draws on in-depth interviews, document analysis, media reports, LP3ES survey data (January 2025), and other secondary sources related to local governance and political dynamics. The findings show that the incumbent administration achieved several notable accomplishments, including a significant increase in regional investment realization from IDR 279.5 billion in 2020 to approximately IDR 4.9 trillion in 2024, urban infrastructure development, the construction of the Kubah Timah Grand Mosque, and improvements in employment and governance indicators. Despite these achievements, citizens continued to face persistent challenges in public services, including inadequate public transportation, waste management problems, limited access to clean water, and concerns regarding bureaucratic performance and local economic conditions. Survey results indicate that the victory of the blank ballot option (44.0%) over the sole candidate (38.6%) was driven primarily by perceptions of inadequate political representation, the absence of meaningful electoral alternatives, and negative evaluations of the candidate's track record. Furthermore, most respondents reported stagnant or worsening household economic conditions. The study concludes that accountability in single-candidate elections is determined not only by development achievements and administrative performance but also by political representation, government responsiveness, and democratic legitimacy.

Keywords*: performance accountability, incumbent, single-candidate election, blank ballot, electoral behavior, 2024 Pangkalpinang Local Election.*

Abstrak

Studi ini meneliti akuntabilitas kinerja petahana dalam pemilihan lokal kandidat tunggal tahun 2024 di Kota Pangkalpinang dan pengaruhnya terhadap hasil pemilu yang berujung pada kemenangan pilihan pada kolom kosong. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, penelitian ini mengacu pada wawancara mendalam, analisis dokumen, laporan media, data survei LP3ES (Januari 2025), dan sumber sekunder lainnya yang berkaitan dengan tata kelola lokal dan dinamika politik. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pemerintahan petahana mencapai beberapa prestasi penting, termasuk peningkatan signifikan dalam realisasi investasi regional dari Rp 279,5 miliar pada tahun 2020 menjadi sekitar Rp 4,9 triliun pada tahun 2024, pembangunan infrastruktur perkotaan, pembangunan Masjid Agung Kubah Timah, dan peningkatan indikator ketenagakerjaan dan tata kelola. Terlepas dari prestasi-prestasi ini, warga terus menghadapi tantangan yang terus-menerus dalam pelayanan publik, termasuk transportasi umum yang tidak memadai, masalah pengelolaan sampah, akses terbatas terhadap air bersih, dan kekhawatiran mengenai kinerja birokrasi dan kondisi ekonomi lokal. Hasil survei menunjukkan bahwa kemenangan pilihan surat

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suara kolom kosong (44,0%) atas kandidat tunggal (38,6%) terutama didorong oleh persepsi tentang representasi politik yang tidak memadai, tidak adanya alternatif elektoral yang berarti, dan evaluasi negatif terhadap rekam jejak kandidat. Lebih lanjut, sebagian besar responden melaporkan kondisi ekonomi rumah tangga yang stagnan atau memburuk. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa akuntabilitas dalam pemilihan kandidat tunggal ditentukan tidak hanya oleh pencapaian pembangunan dan kinerja administrasi, tetapi juga oleh representasi politik, responsivitas pemerintah, dan legitimasi demokrasi.

Kata kunci: akuntabilitas kinerja, petahana, calon tunggal, kotak kosong, perilaku elektoral, Pilkada Pangkalpinang 2024.

Introduction

Local elections constitute one of the principal instruments of local democracy, functioning not only as a mechanism for the circulation of political power but also as a means of ensuring political accountability between government and citizens. Within electoral democracies, voters are provided with an opportunity to evaluate governmental performance throughout an incumbent's term of office and to reward or punish political leaders through their voting decisions in subsequent elections. This perspective is commonly referred to as retrospective voting theory, which posits that electoral behavior is shaped by voters' evaluations of incumbent performance (Fiorina, 1981). Through this mechanism, elections serve not merely as arenas of political competition but also as instruments of public control over government performance and democratic governance.

In the context of local government, performance accountability constitutes a critical dimension of the relationship between public institutions and citizens. Performance accountability refers to the ability of governments to justify and report the implementation of public programs, the use of public resources, and the achievement of development objectives to citizens as the ultimate holders of sovereignty (Peters, 2007). From the perspective of agency theory, local governments act as agents entrusted with authority by citizens as principals and are therefore expected to govern effectively, responsively, and accountably (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Consequently, the success or failure of local governments in delivering public services and development outcomes may significantly influence citizens' political evaluations and voting behavior.

A substantial body of literature suggests that voters often consider government performance when making electoral choices. Boyne et al. (2009), for example, found that public service performance significantly affects political support for local governments in the United

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Kingdom. In the Indonesian context, Dharma and Martani (2016) as well as Yuliati et al. (2016) demonstrated that indicators of local government performance are positively associated with the re-election prospects of incumbent leaders. Nevertheless, numerous studies have also shown that administrative achievements and formal awards do not necessarily translate into higher levels of public satisfaction or electoral support. Purwidayani and Slamet (2022), for instance, found that several formal accountability indicators had no significant effect on incumbent electability, suggesting that voters' political evaluations are shaped by factors extending beyond administrative performance alone.

These dynamics become particularly intriguing when examined within the context of single-candidate local elections. Since being formally accommodated within Indonesia's local electoral system, the number of regions holding single-candidate elections has increased steadily from 3 contests in 2015 to 37 in 2024 (LP3ES, 2025). This phenomenon has generated considerable debate regarding the quality of local democracy, the representative function of political parties, and the substantive nature of electoral competition (Prianto et al., 2024). By limiting electoral choices to either supporting the sole candidate or voting for the blank box option, single-candidate elections fundamentally alter the nature of democratic competition. Under such circumstances, the victory or defeat of a sole candidate may reflect not only support for or opposition to the candidate but also broader public evaluations of the political system and incumbent governance.

The 2024 Pangkalpinang mayoral election presents a particularly compelling case for examining these issues. Unlike most single-candidate elections in Indonesia, the election resulted in the victory of the blank box option, receiving 44.0% of votes against 38.6% for the sole candidate, who was supported by all political parties represented in the local legislature (LP3ES, 2025). This outcome highlights political dynamics that cannot be adequately explained through conventional electoral logic. The victory of the blank box demonstrates that elite political support does not necessarily correspond to public preferences. More importantly, it may be interpreted as a form of public resistance to a political configuration perceived as failing to provide meaningful electoral alternatives (Halil, 2025). Table 1 below presents key electoral statistics from the 2024 Pangkalpinang local election.

Table 1: Key Electoral Statistics, 2024 Pangkalpinang Local Election

Aspek / Aspect		
Indicator	**Figures**	**Source**

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Registered voters	141.447 jiwa	KPU Pangkalpinang, 2024
Polling stations	464	KPU Pangkalpinang, 2024
Blank box votes	44,0%	KPU / LP3ES, 2024
Solo-candidate votes	38,6%	KPU / LP3ES, 2024
Non-voters	9,0%	LP3ES, 2025
Undecided	7,4%	LP3ES, 2025
Re-election scheduled	27 Agustus 2025	PKPU No. 19/2024

Source: KPU Pangkalpinang (2024); LP3ES (2025); PKPU No. 19 Tahun 2024.

From the perspective of governmental performance, the incumbent administration in Pangkalpinang recorded several notable achievements during its tenure. These included substantial growth in regional investment, accelerated urban infrastructure development, the construction of the Kubah Timah Grand Mosque as a new city landmark, and improvements in employment and governance indicators. Despite these accomplishments, citizens continued to experience a range of persistent public service challenges, including inadequate public transportation, waste management problems, limited access to clean water, rapid proliferation of franchise retail, and concerns regarding the quality of bureaucratic services. This situation suggests the existence of a gap between officially communicated governmental achievements and citizens' lived experiences of public service delivery and development outcomes.

Within the broader literature on democratic accountability, such conditions may be understood through the concept of a performance gap the discrepancy between administratively measured governmental performance and citizens' perceptions of the benefits they actually experience (Mansbridge, 2003). Political leaders may accumulate formal achievements, awards, and favorable performance indicators while simultaneously experiencing declining political legitimacy if citizens do not perceive development benefits as equitable and meaningful. Thus, performance accountability extends beyond statistical achievements and administrative indicators to encompass the government's ability to foster trust, responsiveness, and political representation.

Post-election survey findings conducted by LP3ES (January 2025) indicate that the primary reasons voters chose the blank box option were: (1) perceptions that the sole candidate failed to represent public aspirations, (2) dissatisfaction with the absence of alternative candidates, and (3) negative assessments of the candidate's track record. Furthermore, 57.6% of respondents reported that their household economic conditions had not improved significantly, and 27.4% stated conditions had worsened (LP3ES, 2025). These findings suggest that

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electoral behavior was influenced not only by evaluations of physical development but also by perceptions of political representation and the socioeconomic consequences of public policies (Halil, 2025).

Although the literature on retrospective voting and governmental accountability has expanded considerably, studies examining the relationship between incumbent performance accountability and electoral behavior within single-candidate elections remain limited. Most existing research focuses on competitive electoral environments involving multiple candidates. Consequently, there remains a significant research gap concerning how citizens evaluate incumbent performance when electoral choices are severely constrained and how such evaluations influence decisions to support the blank box option.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to address the following research question: How do citizens evaluate incumbent performance accountability in the context of the 2024 single-candidate local election in Pangkalpinang, and to what extent did these evaluations contribute to the victory of the blank box option? Accordingly, the study aims to analyze incumbent performance accountability in the 2024 Pangkalpinang single-candidate election and to explain its impact on voter responses that ultimately resulted in the blank box victory. Academically, this research contributes to the growing literature on public accountability, electoral behavior, and local democracy. Practically, it offers insights into strengthening political representation and improving the quality of democratic governance at the local level in Indonesia.

Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design using a case study approach to examine incumbent performance accountability and its relationship with electoral outcomes in the 2024 Pangkalpinang local election. The case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth understanding of a contemporary political phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly the unique situation in which a single-candidate election resulted in the victory of the blank box option (Yin, 2018).

The unit of analysis in this study was the public evaluation of incumbent performance and its influence on voter behavior during the 2024 Pangkalpinang mayoral election. Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure comprehensive analysis and enhance the credibility of findings. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, including political observers, local

community leaders, journalists, election stakeholders, political party actors, and members of civil society organizations involved in the electoral process. Secondary data consisted of government reports, official election documents, media coverage, policy documents, statistical publications, and survey results conducted by LP3ES (the Institute for Research, Education, and Social and Economic Information) in January 2025.

Data collection was conducted between January and June 2025. In-depth interviews were carried out using semi-structured interview guidelines focusing on three major themes: (1) public perceptions of incumbent performance, (2) public evaluations of local government accountability, and (3) factors influencing voter support for the blank box option. Documentary analysis examined government performance indicators, investment realization data, public service conditions, and electoral statistics. In addition, media reports and LP3ES survey findings were analyzed to capture broader public discourse surrounding the election and the incumbent administration. Analysis of media coverage showed that while pemberitaan about the Pangkalpinang election was predominantly carried by local outlets, three national media, Kompas, Media Indonesia, and Antara were among the top ten publishers, reflecting the national salience of the blank box victory phenomenon (LP3ES, 2025).

Data analysis followed the interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. All interview transcripts, documents, and secondary materials were organized and coded according to themes relevant to performance accountability, political representation, and electoral behavior. Thematic patterns were then identified by comparing information across different data sources. Finally, findings were interpreted using the theoretical perspectives of retrospective voting and political representation to explain the relationship between government performance, public perceptions, and electoral outcomes.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this study employed data triangulation and source triangulation. Information obtained from interviews was cross-checked with survey data, media reports, official government records, and election documents. Member checking was conducted with selected informants to verify the accuracy of interpretations and reduce potential researcher bias. The use of multiple data sources and analytical procedures strengthened the credibility, dependability,

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and confirmability of the research findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The study does not seek statistical generalization but rather analytical generalization. Therefore, the findings are intended to contribute to broader theoretical discussions on performance accountability, single-candidate elections, and electoral behavior in local democracies, particularly within emerging democratic contexts such as Indonesia.

Result and Discussion

Incumbent Performance Accountability: Between Formal Achievements and Public Perceptions

The findings indicate that the incumbent administration in Pangkalpinang demonstrated several measurable achievements during its tenure. Government reports and media analyses show significant growth in regional investment realization, increasing from IDR 279.5 billion in 2020 to approximately IDR 4.9 trillion in 2024an increase of more than 1,600%. The administration also implemented several visible urban development projects, including the construction of the Kubah Timah Grand Mosque (total budget IDR 64 billion, across four construction packages, designed by architect Ridwan Kamil and inaugurated 10 November 2023), the revitalization of sidewalks and public parks, and improvements in employment indicators (Megawandi, 2025). These achievements were consistently promoted as evidence of successful local governance and development-oriented leadership.

Table 2: Incumbent Performance Achievements, Pangkalpinang 2020–2024

Incumbent Performance Achievements			
Sector	**Indicator**	**Achievement**	**Source**
Investment	Regional investment realization	IDR 279,5 M (2020) → IDR 4,9 T (2024)	Pemkot Pangkalpinang, 2024
Infrastructure	Grand Mosque construction	Rp 64 miliar, diresmikan 10 Nov 2023	Megawandi, 2025
Infrastructure	Sidewalk and park revitalization	Completed	Pemkot Pangkalpinang, 2024
Employment	Employment indicators improved	Positive (BPS Pangkalpinang 2023)	BPS Pangkalpinang, 2024
Governance	Governance awards	Achieved	Pemkot Pangkalpinang, 2024

Source: Pemerintah Kota Pangkalpinang (2024); Megawandi (2025); BPS Pangkalpinang (2024).

From a conventional accountability perspective, these accomplishments suggest that the incumbent fulfilled a substantial portion of the government's developmental responsibilities. According to Peters (2007), performance accountability is reflected in the government's ability to achieve policy objectives and demonstrate measurable outcomes. Similarly, Boyne et al. (2009) argue that voters often reward governments that successfully deliver public services and economic improvements. Based on these assumptions, the incumbent administration in Pangkalpinang should have enjoyed a favorable electoral position.

However, the empirical findings reveal a different reality. Interviews and survey data

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indicate that many citizens continued to perceive persistent deficiencies in public service delivery. Key concerns included inadequate public transportation, recurring waste management problems, limited access to clean water, bureaucratic inefficiency, the rapid proliferation of franchise retail outlets crowding out traditional markets, and uneven development outcomes across social groups. These concerns suggest that citizens evaluated governmental performance not solely through aggregate development indicators but through their everyday experiences of public services and quality of life. Table 3 presents a systematic overview of these public service challenges, as documented through field interviews and Megawandi's (2025) presentations.

Table 3: Public Service Challenges in Pangkalpinang

Public Service Challenges		
Sector	**Main Issues**	**Impact**
Public Transportation	Inadequate routes and fleet capacity; lack of integration among transport modes; poorly maintained vehicles.	Limited mobility and accessibility for residents, particularly those living in suburban and peripheral areas.
Waste Management	Waste generation reaches 150–200 tons per day; the 2.5-hectare landfill is overloaded for a population exceeding 250,000; low public awareness of waste management practices.	Environmental pollution, public health risks, and increasing waste accumulation.
Clean Water Supply	Insufficient infrastructure; limited access during the dry season; poor water quality in some areas; although 93.95% of households have access to improved drinking water sources.	Disruptions in clean water supply and increased vulnerability of residents, especially during prolonged dry periods.
Bureaucratic Services	Persistence of a "being served" rather than a "serving" mindset; limited innovation and digitalization; lack of transparency and responsiveness.	Low public trust in government institutions and reduced citizen satisfaction with public services.
Retail Sector	Rapid expansion of franchise retail outlets, increasing from 21 stores in May 2021 to 171 stores in March 2024.	Intensified pressure on traditional markets and growing local economic inequality.

Source: Megawandi (2025); Field Interviews (2025).

This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that objective performance indicators and subjective citizen evaluations often diverge (Van Ryzin, 2007; James, 2011). In local democracies, citizens frequently rely on direct experiences rather than administrative reports when assessing government effectiveness. Consequently,

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formal achievements alone are insufficient to secure political legitimacy if citizens perceive that development benefits are distributed unequally or fail to address their immediate concerns.

The Performance Gap and the Crisis of Substantive Accountability

One of the most significant findings of this study is the existence of a performance gap between officially reported achievements and citizens' lived experiences. The incumbent administration successfully communicated various accomplishments through official channels, yet many voters remained dissatisfied with local governance outcomes.

This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of the performance gap, which refers to discrepancies between institutional measures of success and public perceptions of governmental effectiveness (Mansbridge, 2003). While administrative accountability focuses on measurable outputs, democratic accountability requires citizens to recognize and experience the benefits of public policies.

The Pangkalpinang case demonstrates that investment growth and infrastructure expansion did not automatically translate into broader public satisfaction. LP3ES survey findings (January 2025) indicate that approximately 57.6% of respondents reported no significant improvement in their household economic conditions over the preceding year, while 27.4% stated that their economic situation had actually worsened (LP3ES, 2025). Economic concerns, like economic empowerment, social assistance programs, and minimum wage improvements, emerged as the primary policy priorities for voters, followed by education and environmental issues (LP3ES, 2025). These findings align with retrospective voting literature, which suggests that voters evaluate incumbents based on perceived socioeconomic outcomes rather than formal performance indicators alone (Fiorina, 1981; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2007).

Furthermore, the rapid proliferation of franchise retail outlets, growing from 21 units in May 2021 to 171 units in March 2024 (with only 3 closures by January 2025) appears to have contributed to the displacement of traditional markets and local traders. Megawandi (2025) highlighted this dynamic as a structural economic challenge, suggesting that a portion of the community perceived this trend as evidence that growth primarily benefited investors rather than ordinary residents. Such perceptions weakened the incumbent's ability to transform administrative achievements into electoral support.

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Similar findings have been reported in studies of local governance, where public satisfaction is strongly influenced by distributive perceptions and everyday service experiences rather than macro-level performance statistics (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). Citizens appeared to interpret some development initiatives as benefiting investors and political elites more than ordinary residents, generating a crisis of substantive accountability even in the presence of formal performance achievements.

Political Representation and the Failure of Electoral Legitimacy

Beyond performance evaluation, the findings suggest that the 2024 Pangkalpinang election was strongly influenced by perceptions of political representation. LP3ES survey results (January 2025) revealed that the three primary reasons for supporting the blank box option were: (1) the perception that the sole candidate did not adequately represent public aspirations, (2) dissatisfaction with the absence of electoral alternatives, and (3) negative assessments of the candidate's political track record (LP3ES, 2025). Table 4 below summarizes these findings alongside their theoretical relevance.

Table 4: Three Main Reasons for Choosing the Blank Box Option (LP3ES, 2025)

Reason	Elaboration	Theoretical Relevance
The Sole Candidate Did Not Represent Voters' Aspirations	Most respondents perceived that the sole candidate failed to reflect citizens' interests, expectations, and local needs.	Substantive Representation (Pitkin, 1967)
Protest Against the Lack of Electoral Alternatives	The absence of competing candidates was viewed as a failure of political parties to provide meaningful democratic choices.	Protest Voting (Otjes et al., 2020)
Negative Evaluation of the Candidate's Track Record	Voters expressed dissatisfaction with the candidate's past performance, credibility, and political record rather than government performance alone.	Retrospective Voting (Fiorina, 1981)

Source: LP3ES (2025); Halil (2025).

These findings highlight the importance of representation in shaping electoral behavior. According to Pitkin (1967), democratic representation involves more than formal authorization through elections; it also requires substantive responsiveness to citizens' interests. Mansbridge (2003) similarly argues that political legitimacy depends upon citizens' perception that elected leaders genuinely represent their values, concerns, and aspirations.

The Pangkalpinang case demonstrates that voters were not merely evaluating governmental performance but were also assessing whether the available candidate

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represented a meaningful political choice. The absence of electoral competition reduced opportunities for citizens to express policy preferences through conventional electoral channels. The LP3ES survey further found that 82.1% of respondents had never participated in electoral socialization activities, and that most socialization was conducted by political parties and blank box volunteer teams rather than by neutral electoral institutions such as the KPU (LP3ES, 2025). As a result, the blank box option became an alternative vehicle for expressing political dissatisfaction.

These findings are consistent with theories of perceived representation, which emphasize that citizens' subjective feelings of inclusion and political responsiveness significantly influence political behavior (Dovi, 2007). Even where formal performance indicators appear favorable, perceptions of representational failure may generate substantial electoral resistance. The LP3ES survey also indicated a notable anomaly: a share of respondents who expressed general support for the concept of single-candidate elections nonetheless voted for the blank box option in practice, suggesting that dissatisfaction with the specific candidate, rather than opposition to the format itself, drove blank box support (LP3ES, 2025).

The Blank Box Victory as Protest Voting

The victory of the blank box option can be understood as a form of protest voting. Protest voting occurs when voters intentionally support alternatives that express dissatisfaction with political elites, institutions, or available candidates rather than support a competing political program (Otjes et al., 2020).

In Pangkalpinang, voters faced a unique electoral structure in which only one candidate pair competed. Under such circumstances, the blank box option became the primary institutional mechanism through which dissatisfaction could be expressed. Rather than abstaining from participation, many citizens actively used their votes to reject the available candidate. The final tally 44.0% blank box versus 38.6% for the sole candidate (LP3ES, 2025), underlines the decisive character of this protest.

This finding supports recent scholarship suggesting that blank ballot and anti-candidate voting frequently emerge in contexts where voters perceive insufficient representation and limited electoral choice (Superti, 2020; Paulis & Ognibene, 2023). The Pangkalpinang case demonstrates that protest voting can function not only as a rejection of individual candidates but also as a critique of broader political arrangements,

including party cartelization and elite domination.

The fact that the sole candidate was supported by all parliamentary parties a configuration linked nationally to the 'KIM Plus' phenomenon further strengthened perceptions that electoral competition had been effectively eliminated. Rather than enhancing legitimacy, the oversized coalition appeared to reinforce public perceptions of elite consolidation and restricted democratic choice. National social media analysis by LP3ES revealed a discernible association between the 2024 presidential election narrative and the single-candidate/blank-box discourse in the Pangkalpinang pilkada (LP3ES, 2025), suggesting that national political polarization also influenced local electoral dynamics. Similar observations have been made in studies of democratic backsliding and single-candidate elections in Indonesia, where excessive elite coordination can undermine public trust and electoral competitiveness (Prianto et al., 2024; Mietzner, 2024).

Incumbent Accountability in Single-Candidate Elections

The findings of this study suggest that incumbent accountability in single-candidate elections operates differently from accountability in competitive electoral settings. In conventional elections, voters can reward or punish incumbents by selecting among competing candidates. In single-candidate elections, however, accountability mechanisms become more complex because electoral alternatives are limited.

The Pangkalpinang case demonstrates that voters adapted by transforming the blank box option into an accountability mechanism. Rather than simply evaluating governmental performance, citizens combined assessments of performance, representation, political responsiveness, and democratic legitimacy. Consequently, electoral outcomes reflected multidimensional evaluations rather than narrow judgments of administrative effectiveness.

This finding contributes to the growing literature on electoral accountability by demonstrating that accountability mechanisms remain active even under conditions of limited electoral competition. Consistent with the arguments of Schumpeter (1942) and Norris (2011), democratic legitimacy depends not only on electoral procedures but also on meaningful political competition and citizens' perceptions of choice. When electoral competition is weakened, voters may seek alternative mechanisms through which to express political preferences and hold leaders accountable.

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Overall, the Pangkalpinang election illustrates that performance accountability alone cannot guarantee electoral success. Public evaluations of representation, responsiveness, legitimacy, and democratic choice play equally important roles in shaping electoral outcomes. The victory of the blank box, therefore, reflects not merely dissatisfaction with governmental performance but a broader demand for more substantive forms of democratic representation and accountability.

Conclusion

This study examined incumbent performance accountability in the context of the 2024 single-candidate local election in Pangkalpinang and explored its relationship with the electoral victory of the blank box option. The findings demonstrate that incumbent accountability in a single-candidate election cannot be understood solely through formal indicators of governmental performance. Although the incumbent administration recorded several notable achievements, including a more than 1,600% increase in regional investment realization (from IDR 279.5 billion in 2020 to IDR 4.9 trillion in 2024), the construction of the Kubah Timah Grand Mosque (IDR 64 billion, inaugurated in 2023), and improvements in certain governance indicators, these accomplishments were insufficient to generate broad electoral support. Public evaluations were shaped not only by administrative performance but also by citizens' perceptions of service delivery deficiencies in transportation, waste management, and clean water access, as well as economic stagnation and inadequate political representation.

The study further reveals that the victory of the blank box option (44.0% versus 38.6% for the sole candidate) was driven by a combination of performance perceptions and a broader crisis of political representation. The absence of meaningful electoral alternatives, dissatisfaction with the sole candidate's representational capacity, and perceptions of limited democratic competition contributed significantly to voter behavior. Consequently, the blank box option functioned as an alternative mechanism of democratic accountability through which citizens expressed dissatisfaction with both the candidate and the political configuration that produced a single-candidate contest.

The Pangkalpinang case contributes to the literature on electoral accountability by demonstrating that retrospective evaluations of government performance operate differently in single-candidate elections. Voters do not merely assess developmental outcomes but also evaluate the quality of

political representation and the availability of democratic choice. Therefore, electoral accountability in such contexts is multidimensional, encompassing performance, representation, responsiveness, and democratic legitimacy.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that political parties strengthen candidate recruitment and cadre development processes to ensure the availability of competitive electoral alternatives in local elections. Local governments should also improve the quality of public services, particularly in the areas of transportation, waste management, and clean water provision, and strengthen citizen engagement mechanisms to reduce the gap between administrative achievements and public perceptions. Independent electoral institutions such as the KPU and Bawaslu should assume a more proactive role in voter education and socialization, given that 82.1% of respondents had not participated in any electoral socialization prior to the 2024 election. For future research, comparative studies involving other single-candidate elections in Indonesia are recommended to further examine how variations in political competition, governance performance, and public trust influence electoral accountability and democratic legitimacy at the local level.

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