KPU as an "ad hoc agency": Budget-saving or inefficiency?



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While its proposals demand careful observation, study and trial, the discourse surrounding revision of the Election Law is moving forward positively. In addition to widely-discussed issues, such as funding transparency of political parties and recruitment, another proposal recommends transforming the General Election Commission (KPU) into an "ad hoc agency" limited to a two-year work cycle. This raises many questions and concerns regarding KPU continuity and effectiveness in carrying out its duties. As an election organizer responsible for honesty, integrity and the smooth running of the democratic process in Indonesia, this change may exert several negative impacts in terms of operations, independence and the image of the KPU itself.

This proposal deserves highlighting, because transforming the KPU into an ad hoc agency whose members are replaced every two years can affect the stability and continuity of its work. It is worth noting that frequent member changes require iterative adaptation, where each change is time and resource-consuming. New members also need to adjust to internal regulations and mechanisms and establish synergy with various related parties. For a complex election involving various elements, the continuation and implementation of long-term planning is crucial, to avoid absence of policy or a delayed program. Budget-wise, frequent member changes will also affect expenditures. In fact, the budget should be prioritized and allocated to other programs that directly impact the quality of the election in general.

This notion also poses a risk of unintentionally augmenting the authority of the House of Representatives (DPR) in determining who can serve as a KPU Commissioner. We should not forget that the DPR, and Committee II in particular, plays a role in the KPU commissioner selection process. This means that a transformation into an ad hoc structure would permit more frequent changes of commissioners, a temptation for various political interests to interfere in the periodic selection of KPU members. The two-year cycle can be misused by political parties in the DPR to capitalize on the selection process, by placing figures they believe are more accommodating to their own party's interests. This may jeopardize the independence and credibility of the KPU, as an institution that should be non-partisan, accountable and demonstrate integrity.

Therefore, in terms of budget effectiveness and efficiency, a better approach would be to strengthen the KPU as an agency, without damaging its continuity and independence. The KPU needs to improve efficiency by reconsidering activities that consume immense budget without significantly support their core duties. For example, the KPU can minimize ceremonial activities and focus on productive and substantive agendas instead. The agency should stop using excessive decorations for meetings or spending money on uniforms or orientation activities. Instead, the focus should be on the substance. These measures will save the budget without sacrificing quality.

Another aspect that the KPU needs to consider is to conduct internal bureaucratic reform by simplifying structure and trimming down divisions that are less productive in performance. Divisions that do not significantly contribute to election implementation should be merged or eliminated, so that resources can be diverted to more essential divisions, such as those related to data and information, public relations, or community participation, to ensure that the KPU is more inclusive, transparent and accountable.

In addition, human resources capacity must be improved through relevant periodic training, to improve the professionalism of KPU members and employees. With human resources improvement, the KPU no longer needs to rely on changing members to ensure innovation and work effectiveness. Improvement on open data must also be carried out to increase transparency and public participation in the democratic process. Thus, the public can monitor and evaluate the KPU's performance directly.

Again, transforming the KPU into an ad hoc agency may seem attractive in terms of budget savings, but the long-term impact must also be considered meticulously. The KPU as the election organizer must maintain its independence, which requires continuity in the aspects of planning and implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation, through good governance.