

The Influence of Social Status, Economic Status, Political Affiliation of Parents, and Organizational Experience on the Empty Box Phenomenon in the 2024 Maros Regional Head Election

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Abstract

This study analyzes the influence of Social Status, Economic Status, Political Affiliation of Parents, and Organizational Experience on the Empty Box Discourse in the 2024 Maros Regency Regent Election. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method through distributing questionnaires to the public in Maros Regency to explore the relationship between variables and the empty box phenomenon in implementing regional elections. Data processing was carried out with the help of SmartPLS software using the Structural Equation Modeling Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) technique. The results showed that the emergence of a single candidate in the 2024 Maros regional head election was caused by the community's lack of courage to run for office, which was influenced by the strong dominance of incumbent candidates. Furthermore, people's political participation in the election is analyzed through four main variables, all of which positively affect the empty box discourse. Thus, all hypotheses in this study are accepted.

Keywords: *Empty Box, Political Participation, Regional Head Election*

1. Introduction

General elections manifest the sovereignty of the people in Indonesia's democratic system, which is based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (Khaerah & Muslimin, 2019). Within this framework, regional head elections are the primary means for the public to directly elect their leaders through political parties or as independent candidates (Najib Husain et al., 2023). The changes in the regional head election mechanism from an appointment system, election by the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), to direct elections reflect the state's consistent efforts to strengthen substantive democracy and improve the accountability of regional leadership (Alda Muchtar, 2021; Aris, 2018). The simultaneous implementation of the Regional Head Election, which began in 2015 and is regulated by Law No. 8 of 2015, aims to create political efficiency and improve the quality of electoral democracy (Syarifuddin & Hasanah, 2020). However, this regulation also raises several issues, one of which is the emergence of the single-candidate phenomenon. In this situation, only one pair of regional head candidates contests the election, without competing candidates. This condition limits people's political choices, so voters who do not support a single candidate pair can only channel their disapproval through the empty box option as the only available alternative. (Yuristianti, 2018).

This phenomenon not only poses a dilemma from a procedural perspective but also from a principled one, as it can reduce the value of contestation, an essential element of electoral democracy (Prianto et al., 2025). An empty box in this context is not just a symbol of resistance to political domination, but also a formal mechanism guaranteed by regulations as an expression of public disapproval. Therefore, an empty box ensures that critical and active political participation continues even though only one candidate pair is contesting. In South Sulawesi Province, particularly in Maros Regency, the regional head election 2024 shows a concrete example of this phenomenon. The incumbent pair of Chaidir Syam and Muetazim Mansyur ran as the only candidates with the support of nine major parties. The lack of competitors was driven by the strong dominance of the incumbent's electability and the high nomination threshold for independent candidates (Engkus et al., 2019). This raises issues of representation and opens up a discussion about the quality of inclusive local democracy. In this context, empty boxes are no longer seen as a passive element in elections. Still, it has developed into an active political discourse championed by the community as an expression of resistance to the electoral process. As explained in a previous study

(Wahyuningsih, 2021), voters use empty boxes to voice dissatisfaction with a political system that is considered exclusive and elitist.

Several studies have examined the empty box phenomenon from various perspectives. For example, Research from (Khaerah & Muslimin, 2019) discusses Community Political Participation in the Empty Column Discourse in the Regent Election in Enrekang Regency. The results revealed that community participation in elections is driven by various factors, one of which is the citizens' political awareness level. In the context of empty-column elections, the Empty Column Winning Team seeks to encourage community political participation by emphasizing strategic issues, especially through campaigns that highlight the incumbent regent's performance failures as a form of criticism of previous leadership. Research conducted (Andrian, 2024) discusses Public Participation in the Simultaneous Regional Head Elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The results show that implementing regional head elections with only one candidate pair reflects the absence of real contestation in the electoral process. This phenomenon, known as the empty box, has occurred repeatedly from 2015 to 2024. The term refers to a situation where voters cannot vote for the single candidate pair available. This phenomenon has been legally accommodated through the General Election Commission Regulation (PKPU) Number 13/2018, which regulates the election mechanism in a single-candidate situation. Then, Research from (Harianto et al., 2020) discusses the Winning of the Empty Box in the 2018 Makassar Regional Head Election. The research findings show that the empty box phenomenon in the regional head elections in Makassar City has unique characteristics compared to other regions. If, in general, an empty box arises due to the absence of an opponent in the contestation, the situation is different in Makassar: one of the candidate pairs was disqualified by the KPU due to proven violations. This decision caused deep disappointment among the community, especially among the supporters and success teams of the disqualified candidate pair. This disappointment led to the emergence of the empty box volunteer movement, which aimed to garner public support and sympathy. While these studies make important contributions, there are significant limitations: the research focus is generally partial and predominantly descriptive. It has not empirically tested the individual determinants influencing public perceptions of empty boxes.

The gap is the reason this research was conducted. This study examines the influence of social status, economic status, parents' political affiliation, and organizational experience on public perceptions of empty boxes in the 2024 Maros regional elections. The selection of these variables

is based on a strong theoretical foundation. Political socialization theory explains the role of family, social environment, and organizations in shaping individual political orientation (van Ditmars & Bernardi, 2023). Political economy theory emphasizes the link between an individual's economic position, policy preferences, and electoral behavior (Ramadhan & Ridwan, 2024). Meanwhile, social capital theory highlights the contribution of social networks and organizational participation in shaping critical political awareness (Kim et al., 2020).

Conceptually, social status determines access to information and social legitimacy in political participation; economic status influences policy orientation and preferences for candidates; parental political affiliation reflects the long-term influence of family political socialization; and organizational experience increases political literacy and the capacity to take independent political stances. The selection of these variables considers their theoretical relevance and potential contribution in explaining voter behavior in regions with a single candidate. Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the influence of social status, economic status, parents' political affiliation, and organizational experience on public perceptions of empty boxes in the 2024 Maros regional head election.

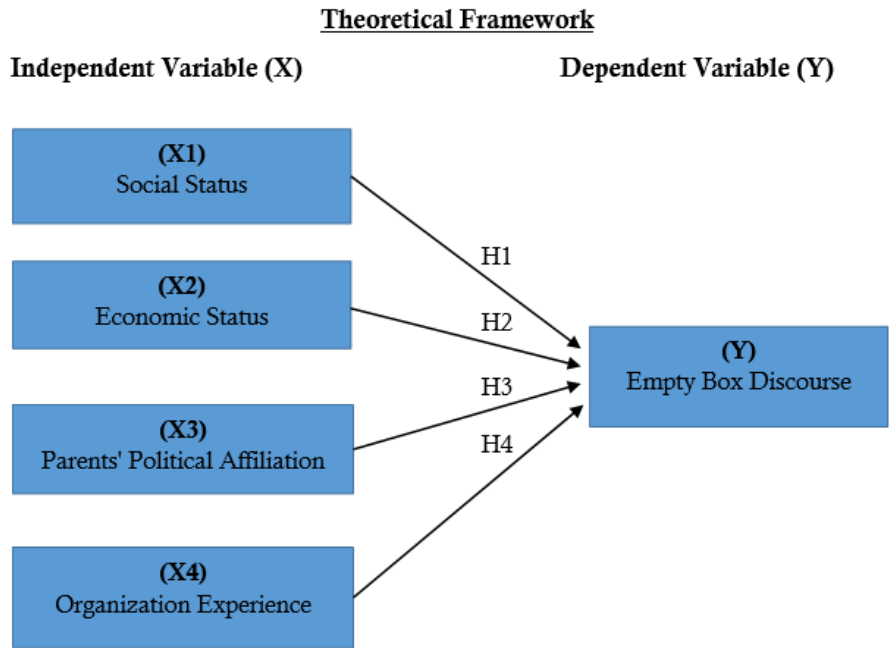


Figure 1. Theoretical framework
Source: Author's data processing, 2024

1.1 Hypothesis

- H1: Social Status positively and significantly influences Empty Box Discourse.
- H2: Economic Status positively and significantly influences Empty Box Discourse.
- H3: The political Affiliation of Parents positively and significantly influences Empty Box Discourse.
- H4: Organizational Experience positively and significantly influences the Empty Box Discourse.

2. Method

This research uses a quantitative approach with a partial least squares-based structural equation modeling (SEM-PLS) analysis technique, suitable for testing the relationship between latent variables in relatively small sample sizes and abnormal data distribution conditions. This approach was chosen to examine the influence of social status, economic status, parents' political affiliation, and organizational experience on the empty box discourse in the 2024 Maros Regency Regional Head Election. All variables in this study were measured using a five-point Likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree, 2. Disagree, 3. Neutral, 4. Agree, and 5. Strongly Agree) arranged in construct indicators that have been validated content-wise by experts and tested in advance to ensure the clarity and reliability of the instrument. The stages of the research can be seen in Figure 2 below:

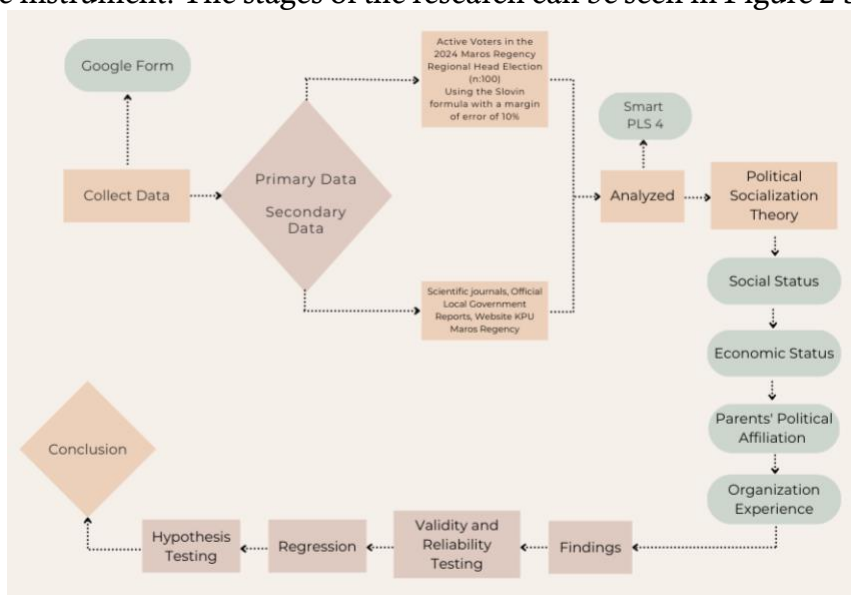


Figure 2. Research Process
Source: Author's data processing, 2024

Figure 2 shows the research stages, which begin with primary and secondary data collection. Primary data was collected through questionnaires distributed to Maros Regency residents registered in the 2024 Regional Election Permanent Voter List (DPT), while secondary data was obtained through literature studies from scientific journals, official government reports, and the Maros Regency KPU website. The data collection period lasted two months, from November to December 2024, i.e., after the voting process was completed. This time was chosen so that the voter perceptions collected reflect direct post-election reflections and experiences, not just expectations. The research population is all active voters registered in the 2024 Regional Head Election Permanent Voter List (DPT) in Maros Regency, comprising 265,432 people. The sample size was determined using the Slovin formula with a margin of error of 10%, which resulted in a minimum of 73 respondents. However, to improve the accuracy of the analysis, the number of respondents was increased to 100 people. The sampling technique was carried out by purposive sampling, with the criteria that respondents were Maros Regency residents registered as legal voters in the 2024 Regional Head Election. The selection of respondents also considers the geographical distribution between sub-districts so that the research results represent proportional regional representation. Data analysis was carried out using SmartPLS software, through a series of stages such as construct validity test, reliability test, hypothesis testing with bootstrapping (referring to the t-statistic value and p-value), and R-square test to see the contribution of independent variables to the dependent variable.

3. Results

3.1. Respondents' Demographic Profile ($n = 100$)

The demographic profile of respondents in this study consists of Maros Regency residents registered in the Permanent Voter List (DPT) for the 2024 regional head election. Respondents include male and female voters aged between 17 and 65 years old. They represent diverse educational backgrounds, ranging from high school graduates to bachelor's degree holders.

Tabel 1. Profil demografis responden

Characteristic		Frequency (F=100)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	61	61%
	Female	39	39%

Characteristic		Frequency (F=100)	Percentage (%)
Age	Female	39	39%
	17-25	25	25%
	26-35	51	51%
	36-45	17	17%
	46-55	5	5%
	56-65	2	2%
Education	SMP	4	4%
	SMA	28	28%
	S1/D4	61	61%
	S2-S3	7	7%

Table 1 displays the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in this study. Regarding gender, male respondents dominate at 61%, while women account for 39% of the total 100 respondents. The dominance of male respondents indicates that male participation in responding to political issues and the Regional Head Election in Maros Regency is quite high. However, the proportion of women reaching almost 40% reflects an involvement that cannot be ignored, indicating that local political issues have become a cross-gender concern.

Regarding age, most respondents are in the productive age group, which indicates the active involvement of young people and early adults in local political discourse. The 26-35 age group is the most dominant with 51%, followed by the 17-25 age group with 25%, and the 36-45 age group with 17%. Meanwhile, those aged 46-55 and 56-65 years old accounted for 5% and 2% respectively. This data shows that younger age groups tend to be more engaged in contemporary political issues such as the empty box phenomenon, which is most likely influenced by the level of access to social media, political education, and the dynamics of digital participation.

In terms of education, most respondents have a higher education background. Respondents with S1/D4 degrees accounted for 61%, high school graduates for 28%, S2-S3 graduates for 7%, and junior high school graduates for only 4%. The dominance of highly educated respondents is an important indicator that most participants have sufficient cognitive capability and political literacy to understand the dynamics of the Regional Head Election, including the empty box phenomenon. This strengthens the

validity of the perceptions obtained in the study, considering that reflective and analytical capacity towards political issues increases with a high level of education. The combination of productive age and higher education creates a potential respondent base in providing rational and informative responses to the local political process, especially the 2024 Maros regional elections.

3.2. Reliability Test

A variable is considered reliable if the composite reliability or Cronbach's Alpha value reaches above 0.500 (Latan & Ghazali, 2018). Table 3 shows that all variables studied are reliable.

Table 2. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha examination results

<i>Construction</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	<i>Rho_A</i>	<i>Composite Reliability</i>	<i>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</i>	
Political Affiliation of Parents	0.914	0.937	0.946	0.854	Reliable
Empty Box Discourse Organization	0.937	0.942	0.955	0.843	Reliable
Experience	0.789	0.797	0.876	0.703	Reliable
Economic Status	0.819	0.819	0.893	0.735	Reliable
Social Status	0.799	0.939	0.872	0.696	Reliable

Source: Processed by primary data, 2024

Table 2 explains that the Composite Reliability and Cronbach's Alpha values are above 0.70, meeting the recommended minimum limit, (Inrinofita Sari, 2024), indicating good internal consistency between indicators. The AVE values, which all exceed 0.50, also confirm that each construct has strong convergent validity, that is, the construct's indicators can explain a variance greater than the measurement error. The Empty Box Discourse construct shows the highest reliability performance (CR = 0.955, $\alpha = 0.937$), indicating that the construct's indicators are highly homogeneous and statistically robust. In contrast, Organization Experience has the lowest Cronbach's Alpha value (0.789). However, it is still in the acceptable category, indicating that although there is little variation between indicators, the construct remains consistent.

This difference between reliability values also has theoretical implications. The high consistency in the Empty Box Discourse construct

reflects that this discourse has been a relatively uniform concern among respondents. In contrast, the variability in organizational experience suggests that diverse contexts or personal experiences influence this aspect more.

3.3. Regression Analysis

Table 3. Regression Test Results

	<i>R-Square</i>	<i>R-Square Adjusted</i>
<i>Satisfaction of Service Users</i>	0.922	0.919

Source: Processed by primary data, 2024

Based on the regression test results shown in Table 3, it is known that the R-square value of 0.922 and adjusted R-square of 0.919 indicate that the structural model used in this study has a very high explanatory power, where 92.2% of the variance of the dependent variable Empty Box Discourse (DKK) can be explained by four independent constructs, namely Social Status, Economic Status, Political Affiliation of Parents, and Organizational Experience. Referring to the guidelines of (Sari et al., 2025), an R-square value above 0.75 reflects substantial predictive power, so the model is considered to have excellent structural fit. Furthermore, all independent constructs proved statistically significant in influencing DKK, as indicated by the considerable path coefficient value ($t > 1.96$, $p < 0.05$) and bootstrapping results. These results reinforce that the formation of empty box discourse in the Regional Head Election cannot be separated from structural and socio-political factors inherent in individuals, such as economic and social backgrounds, collective experience in organizations, and political affiliations that are culturally inherited from parents.

3.4. Hypothesis Testing

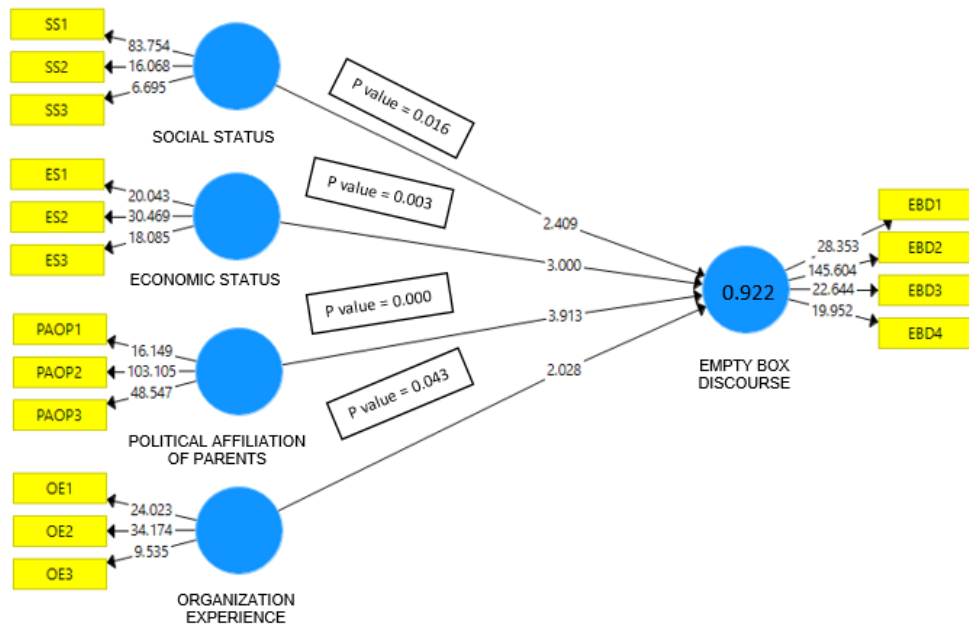


Figure 3. Bootstrapping Output
Source: Processed by primary data, 2024

Figure 3 illustrates the results of hypothesis testing between the independent and dependent variables, conducted using the bootstrapping technique within the analytical framework of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). This method is employed to assess the validity and reliability of the data by analyzing the T-statistic and P-value. According to conventional significance thresholds, a relationship is considered statistically significant if the T-statistic exceeds 1.96 and the P-value is below 0.05 (Sari et al., n.d.). Based on these criteria, the following table presents the findings of hypothesis testing on the influence of Social Status, Economic Status, Parental Political Affiliation, and Organizational Experience on the Empty Box Discourse.

Table 4. Hypothesis Testing

Variabel	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistics (O/STDEV)	P value	Hipotesis
Political Affiliation of Parents-The Empty Box Discourse	0.376	0.363	0.096	3.913	0.000	Accepted
Organizational Experience- Empty Box Discourse	0.167	0.180	0.082	2.028	0.043	Accepted
Economic Status-Empty Box Discourse	0.292	0.292	0.097	3.000	0.003	Accepted
Social Status- Empty Box Discourse	0.191	0.191	0.079	2.409	0.016	Accepted

Source: Processed by primary data, 2024

The results of hypothesis testing show that all independent variables in this research model, namely Social Status, Economic Status, Political Affiliation of Parents, and Organizational Experience, have a positive and significant influence on Empty Box Discourse in the context of Regent Election in Maros Regency. This finding is based on the t-statistic value exceeding the threshold of 1.96 and the p-value smaller than 0.05, as required in hypothesis testing in the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) model. First, the effect of Social Status on Empty Box Discourse is significant with a coefficient value of 0.191 ($t = 2.409$; $p = 0.016$). This shows that the higher the individual's social status, the greater the tendency to support the empty box discourse. Individuals with higher social status generally have access to wider political information, sharper critical thinking skills, and active involvement in political discussions. This finding is in line with the results of previous studies (Dewi, 2020; Laia et al., 2021), which emphasize that social status is an important determinant in citizens' political engagement, including in taking a position towards the empty box option as an expression of disappointment or dissatisfaction with the available candidates.

Second, the Economic Status variable also shows a significant positive effect on the Empty Box Discourse with a coefficient of 0.292 ($t = 3.000$; $p = 0.003$). This indicates that individuals with better economic backgrounds

are more critical in using their voting rights. They tend to have higher political awareness and evaluative ability towards the quality of regional head candidates. This is reinforced by the findings of (Pratiwi et al., 2023), which explain that economic stability is positively correlated with the intensity of citizen involvement in political decision-making. In the context of Maros Regency, the middle and upper economic groups appear to be more vocal and courageous in expressing their dissatisfaction through support for the empty box option.

Third, the Political Affiliation of Parents is also proven to positively and significantly affect Empty Box Discourse (coefficient 0.376; $t = 3.913$; $p = 0.000$). This confirms that political preferences in the family have become an important channel in inheriting political values and affiliations. Individuals from families with certain political orientations tend to be more exposed to political discourses early on and have strong internalized political awareness. In line with research by (Halim, 2016; Rifki & Mujaeni, 2021), parents' political affiliation plays a significant role in shaping children's political attitudes, including the tendency to be critical and reject the choice of candidates who are considered not credible through the empty box option.

Finally, Organizational Experience also positively and significantly influences Empty Box Discourse with a coefficient value of 0.167 ($t = 2.028$; $p = 0.043$). Participation in organizations allows individuals to develop analytical thinking capacity, understand political dynamics more broadly, and train sensitivity to representation and political leadership issues. This finding supports Halim's (Halim, 2016) research, which emphasizes the importance of organizational experience in shaping political awareness and active citizen engagement. In Maros Regency, individuals with a track record in student, social, or political organizations tend to assess the integrity and capacity of candidates better, and choose the empty box as a symbol of resistance to the status quo that is considered unrepresentative.

4. Discussion

This study analyzes the influence of four factors, namely Social Status, Economic Status, Political Affiliation of Parents, and Organizational Experience, on Empty Box Discourse. The findings of this study show that these four factors positively influence the Empty Box Discourse in the 2024 Regent Election in Maros Regency. Through the adoption of this research model, this study found that the Social Status Hypothesis has a positive and significant effect on Empty Box Discourse. This finding is accepted with a T-statistic value of 2.409 and a P-value of 0.016. These results

indicate that individuals with higher social status tend to have better political knowledge and greater interest and attention to political issues (Kundori et al., 2023). Social status, which includes heredity, level of education, and type of employment, shapes the framework of an individual's capacity to access information, participate in political conversations, and make rational decisions in the context of elections. For example, higher education provides analytical skills on public issues. At the same time, professions such as academics, journalists, and bureaucrats facilitate more active political engagement through exposure to public policies and wider social networks (Wahyuni & Adnan, 2024). However, the influence of social status on political discourse is not always linear. While descent can reflect social position, in areas such as Maros Regency, its impact can be overshadowed by patronage practices and local power relations, where social affiliations and power networks also determine access to information and political participation. In addition, higher education does not always guarantee critical engagement in politics, especially in political apathy or limited, credible information media. This means that the empty box discourse as a representation of political criticism is not only born from actors with high social status, but also from broader social dynamics, including dissatisfaction with existing political choices.

The hypothesis that Economic Status has a positive and significant effect on Empty Box Discourse in this study is accepted with a T-statistic value of 3,000 and a P-value of 0.003. This result shows that. This result reinforces the finding that individuals with higher economic status tend to have greater access to education, political information, and public discourse media, contributing to increased political participation and awareness (Ginting & Ivanna, 2024). A person's economic status is usually measured through wealth ownership, income levels, consumption patterns, and valuable assets (Purnama & Dewi, 2020), which ultimately form a critical capacity in assessing the quality of political candidates. In the context of regional head elections, groups with high economic status tend to be more active in expressing political dissatisfaction, one of which is through support for the empty box option as a form of resistance to the dominance of candidates who are considered not to represent their aspirations (Septiani et al., 2025). However, economic status can also produce contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, regional head candidates with an established economy are perceived as more capable and less at risk of corruption, thus encouraging public trust (Syamsuadi & Yahya, 2018). On the other hand, the dominance of economic elites in political contestation creates resistance, especially from community groups

who feel marginalized. This resistance can be manifested in the form of active abstention through support for empty boxes. This is in line with the Political Economy approach, which emphasizes that economic inequality can shape patterns of political participation and perceptions of the political system itself (Wisnu, 2016). Therefore, the influence of economic status on the empty box discourse not only reflects the ability of individuals to access political information but also reflects the tension between elite domination and the community's desire for more egalitarian political representation.

The hypothesis that the Political Affiliation of Parents has a positive and significant effect on Empty Box Discourse in this study is accepted with a T-statistic value of 3.913 and a P-value of 0.000. This result confirms that family political affiliation, especially parents', plays an important role in shaping their children's political orientation and behavior. This finding is consistent with Political Socialization theory, which states that the family is the earliest and most influential agent of political socialization in shaping individual political attitudes and awareness (Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). In this context, parents not only transmit political values but also influence how children interpret the political process, including the choice of candidates or the empty box option as an expression of dissatisfaction with the available options. Previous research shows that families with a strong political orientation tend to produce individuals with more active political involvement and high political awareness (Mardhatillah, 2024). Parents' political affiliations influence children's preferences through political discussions at home, exposure to certain media, and involvement in political activities. Children who grow up in such an environment tend to adopt similar political values and participate more actively in political discourse, including consciously supporting empty boxes as a form of social control over candidate quality.

Furthermore, Bourdieu's concept of political habitus (Rafsanjani & Hidayat-Sardini, 2023) provides a theoretical explanation that strengthens this relationship. The political habitus formed early on through interactions within the family creates a framework of thought and action that guides individuals in understanding and responding to political dynamics. Individuals raised in families with strong political habitus tend to have a firm attitude and sensitivity to the issue of non-ideal political representation so that they can express disagreement through support for empty boxes, not as a form of apathy, but as an active and conscious political expression.

The hypothesis that Organizational Experience has a positive and significant effect on Empty Box Discourse in this study is accepted with a T-statistic value of 2.028 and a P-value of 0.043. This finding shows that

individual experience in organizations, both social and political, plays an important role in shaping a more reflective and participatory mindset and political attitude. Individuals with organizational expertise tend to be more trained in critical thinking, discussion, and objectively assessing socio-political dynamics, including choosing an empty box as a form of conscious and rational political expression. This aligns with Social Capital theory, which explains that organizational participation strengthens social networks, expands access to political information, and increases confidence and political competence (Apriyani et al., 2024). Various forms of organizations, such as Community Organizations (Ormas), Student Associations, Youth Organizations, and other youth organizations, are significant informal political learning platforms. Involvement in organizations expands social networks that can be mobilized in the context of elections and enriches individual experiences in understanding collective decision-making mechanisms, negotiations, and leadership dynamics (Berutu & Ivanna, 2024). People who are active in organizations have greater opportunities to obtain diverse and in-depth political information, ultimately improving the quality of their considerations in the regional head election process. When faced with candidates considered not to represent public aspirations, individuals with organizational experience tend to be more courageous in taking alternative stances, such as voting for empty boxes, not as a form of apathy, but as a manifestation of active and critical political awareness.

Furthermore, organizational experience trains individuals to get used to interacting with various characters, expressing opinions openly, and managing differences constructively. This process contributes to the formation of a mature and responsible political attitude. In organizations, individuals are also tested in the context of leadership and cooperation, two very important competencies in democratic life. People who have been or are currently involved in organizations generally have a greater concern for the quality of public leadership, as they have become accustomed to judging leaders through the parameters of competence, ethics, and alignment with the public. Therefore, the decision to vote for an empty box can be seen as a thought process influenced by empirical experience in organizations, rather than mere distrust or dislike of a particular candidate.

5. Conclusion

Maros Regency is one of twenty-one regencies in South Sulawesi Province that participated in simultaneous regional elections. The political dynamics in the Maros Regency elections are quite complex, one of which is marked by the participation of incumbent candidates against empty

boxes. This condition reflects the character of local democracy, which still leaves problems of limited political participation and choice. This study aims to analyze the influence of social status, economic status, parents' political affiliation, and organizational experience on the empty box phenomenon in the 2024 Maros Regional Head Election. Using a quantitative approach, the regression results show that the four independent variables positively and significantly influence people's tendency to respond to the empty box phenomenon, with an R-square value of 0.922. This finding shows that social factors and political experience play an important role in shaping people's political attitudes, especially in regional head elections with minimal candidate choice.

The main contribution of this study lies in its initial attempt to understand voter behavior in the context of single-candidate local elections and the presence of empty boxes, issues that have rarely been the focus of Indonesian local politics literature. The study enriches the understanding of the dynamics of local democracy by highlighting the influence of social factors and individual political experiences on responses to political choice limitations. Limitations of this study include the small sample size, narrow area coverage, and short implementation duration, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future research is recommended to explore new constructs such as expectations, risk perceptions, and facilitating conditions, as well as involving a wider area and a larger number of respondents to test the consistency of citizens' perceptions of the empty box phenomenon.

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