



Managing Electoral Logistics under Uncertainty: Risk, Coordination, and Institutional Learning in Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election

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Abstract

Electoral logistics represent one of the most risk-prone components of election administration, particularly in large and decentralized democracies. This study aims to examine how electoral logistics were managed under conditions of uncertainty in Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election, with a specific focus on risk management, coordination, and institutional learning. The research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study in Jambi City. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with election officials and stakeholders, field observations of logistics distribution, and analysis of electoral regulations and official documents. The findings indicate that although logistics management formally complied with national regulations, risk anticipation remained limited, coordination mechanisms were largely reactive, and institutional learning was weak. Logistical disruptions were addressed through ad hoc solutions rather than systematic risk mitigation strategies. This study concludes that strengthening electoral logistics requires a shift from procedural compliance toward adaptive risk governance and structured learning mechanisms to enhance electoral integrity and administrative resilience.

Keywords: Electoral Logistics, Risk Management, Institutional Learning, Election Administration

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INTRODUCTION

The administration of elections constitutes a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, requiring not only legal compliance but also operational reliability to ensure electoral integrity. Recent scholarship has emphasized that electoral quality is shaped not solely by normative frameworks, but also by the effectiveness of electoral management bodies (EMBs) in executing complex administrative and logistical tasks (Norris, 2014; Norris et al., 2015; Alvarez et al., 2018). Electoral logistics—encompassing procurement, storage, distribution, and deployment of election materials—therefore plays a decisive role in safeguarding the credibility of electoral processes, particularly in large-scale and simultaneous elections.

Existing studies have established that logistical failures such as delayed ballot delivery, shortages of materials, and coordination breakdowns can undermine public trust and electoral legitimacy (Birch, 2011; Clark & Garnett, 2020; Alvarez et al., 2008). Research in both developed and developing democracies shows that these risks are amplified by infrastructural disparities, geographic complexity, and limited administrative capacity (James, 2012; Norris, 2014). From this body of work, a conclusive finding has emerged: electoral integrity is closely linked to the operational performance of election management bodies, not merely to legal compliance (Norris, 2014; Norris et al., 2015). However, despite this recognition, much of the literature treats electoral logistics as a routine technical function rather than as a governance challenge. Studies grounded in risk governance and public administration demonstrate that public organizations operating under

uncertainty, time pressure, and political scrutiny are prone to reactive decision-making when anticipatory risk management is weak (Hood & Rothstein, 2001; Power, 2007; Moynihan, 2008; Boin et al., 2016; Christensen et al., 2016). While these insights are well developed in the broader public sector literature, their application to electoral logistics remains limited and fragmented (Lodge & Wegrich, 2014; Peters & Pierre, 2016).

The complexity of electoral logistics increases substantially in simultaneous elections, where compressed timelines, higher material volumes, and multi-level coordination demands create heightened operational risk (James & Alihodzic, 2020). Although studies acknowledge that institutional capacity and coordination are critical under such conditions (Wu et al., 2015; Lodge & Wegrich, 2014; Christensen et al., 2016), empirical findings on how electoral management bodies actually manage uncertainty in practice remain largely inconclusive. In particular, there is limited evidence on whether logistical risks are addressed through systematic planning or through ad hoc responses during implementation (Howlett, 2019; Moynihan, 2008). Within the Indonesian context, prior research has predominantly focused on political competition, voter behavior, and electoral outcomes (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019; Mietzner, 2020). Operational dimensions of elections—especially logistics management—have received comparatively limited scholarly attention (James, 2012; Norris, 2014). This gap is particularly evident in studies examining risk management and institutional learning in electoral logistics, especially at the subnational level where implementation challenges are most acute. Policy implementation theory offers a useful analytical lens to address this gap. Scholars argue that successful policy implementation depends on administrative capacity, coordination mechanisms, and the ability of institutions to translate formal rules into effective practice (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Hill & Hupe, 2014; Howlett, 2019). Applied to electoral logistics, this perspective highlights the importance of examining how regulatory frameworks are interpreted, operationalized, and adapted when confronted with real-world constraints and uncertainty. Accordingly, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining electoral logistics management in Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election at the local level. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of electoral logistics, risk governance, and institutional learning within a single analytical framework (Wu et al., 2015; Power, 2007; van Thiel & Leeuw, 2016). By focusing on a subnational case in Kota Jambi, this study provides empirical evidence on how uncertainty is managed in practice and why procedural compliance alone is insufficient to ensure resilient electoral administration (Boin et al., 2016; Lodge & Wegrich, 2016).

This research aims to examine how electoral logistics are planned, implemented, and managed under conditions of uncertainty, with particular attention to risk governance, institutional capacity, and coordination among stakeholders. By situating empirical findings within broader debates on electoral governance and public sector management, this study contributes to the literature on electoral integrity while offering policy-relevant insights for strengthening electoral logistics governance in Indonesia and comparable democratic contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to examine how electoral logistics were managed under conditions of uncertainty during Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election in Jambi City. A qualitative approach was chosen to capture in-depth information on organizational processes, coordination practices, and responses to logistical risks that could not be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone. The research was conducted in Jambi City, Indonesia, during the preparation and implementation stages of the 2024 Simultaneous Election. Data collection took place before, during, and immediately after election day to ensure a comprehensive understanding of logistical planning, execution, and post-election evaluation processes. Data were obtained from multiple sources to enhance validity through triangulation. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants purposively selected based on their direct involvement in electoral logistics. These informants included officials of the City General Election Commission, sub-district election committee members, polling station working group personnel, local government officers, and logistics service providers. The interviews focused on logistics planning, coordination mechanisms, risk handling, and learning practices following logistical disruptions. Second, non-participant observations were carried out at logistics warehouses, distribution points, and selected polling stations. Observations were directed at documenting storage conditions, transportation procedures, coordination during distribution, and responses to unforeseen disruptions. Field notes were systematically recorded to capture both

routine practices and exceptional events. Third, document analysis was conducted on relevant electoral laws and regulations, official reports issued by election management bodies, logistics distribution records, and post-election evaluation documents. These documents were analyzed to understand formal procedures and to compare them with practices observed in the field.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded to identify recurring patterns related to risk anticipation, coordination, and institutional learning. The analytical process involved organizing data into thematic categories and interpreting relationships among themes to explain how electoral logistics were managed in practice. This approach allowed the study to link empirical findings with broader discussions on risk governance and adaptive public administration (Yin, 2018; Miles & Huberman, 1994). To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study applied data triangulation across interviews, observations, and document analysis. Consistency of information across sources was used as an indicator of reliability. Ethical considerations were also observed throughout the research process, including informed consent and the anonymization of informants to protect confidentiality. While the qualitative design enabled in-depth analysis of logistical processes, this study acknowledges certain limitations. The findings are based on a single case study and therefore are not intended for statistical generalization. However, the analytical insights generated may be transferable to other electoral contexts with similar administrative and logistical characteristics (Yin, 2018).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that electoral logistics management during Indonesia’s 2024 Simultaneous Election in Jambi City was implemented in accordance with formal regulations issued by the election management body. Data collected from in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis show that logistics planning included the determination of ballot quantities, scheduling of procurement, warehouse management, and distribution routes from city-level storage facilities to polling stations. However, empirical evidence reveals several recurring operational patterns. First, logistics planning relied heavily on standardized national guidelines, with limited incorporation of local risk factors such as weather variability, transportation accessibility, and last-mile delivery challenges. Risk anticipation was not formally integrated into planning documents, and contingency measures were largely implicit rather than explicitly codified. Second, coordination among election management units intensified primarily during the distribution phase. Communication and coordination increased notably when discrepancies in material quantities or delivery delays were identified. These coordination efforts were predominantly informal and situational, relying on rapid communication between officials rather than predefined coordination protocols. Third, several logistical disruptions were documented across sub-districts, including moderate delivery delays, limited material damage, and minor discrepancies in logistics quantities. Although these issues were resolved prior to voting day and did not result in polling station closures, their resolution depended largely on ad hoc problem-solving and manual verification processes. To illustrate these empirical patterns, Table 1 summarizes the main types of logistical challenges identified during the distribution process and the primary response mechanisms applied by election officials.

Table 1. Types of Logistical Challenges Identified During Distribution

Type of Challenge	Frequency Observed	Primary Response Mechanism
Delivery delays	Moderate	Informal coordination
Material damage	Limited	Replacement from reserves
Quantity discrepancies	Limited	Manual verification

Overall, the results demonstrate that while electoral logistics were largely delivered on time and in compliance with formal regulations, the management of disruptions depended heavily on reactive coordination and short-term adjustments rather than on institutionalized risk mitigation mechanisms.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of understanding electoral logistics not merely as an administrative function, but as a process of managing uncertainty within complex governance settings. Although formal regulatory compliance was achieved, the limited integration of risk assessment into logistics planning indicates that uncertainty was not systematically anticipated. This finding supports earlier arguments that procedural compliance alone is

insufficient to ensure effective electoral administration, particularly in large-scale and simultaneous elections (James, 2012; Norris, 2014).

The reliance on reactive coordination during the distribution phase reflects adaptive behavior among election officials operating under time pressure and resource constraints. Such behavior aligns with implementation theory, which emphasizes the discretionary role of frontline actors in compensating for procedural and structural limitations during policy execution (Hill & Hupe, 2014). While this adaptability enabled the resolution of immediate logistical disruptions, it remained largely informal and individualized, limiting its contribution to organizational learning.

From the perspective of risk governance, these findings are consistent with studies showing that public organizations facing uncertainty often prioritize short-term problem resolution over anticipatory risk management (Power, 2007; Moynihan, 2008). In the absence of formal risk mapping and contingency planning, logistical risks were addressed only after they materialized, reinforcing a reactive rather than preventive approach to logistics governance.

The study further highlights the role of institutional capacity in shaping electoral logistics outcomes. Although operational capacity at the local level proved sufficient to ensure the continuity of electoral processes, analytical capacity related to risk anticipation and long-term planning appeared underdeveloped. According to policy capacity theory, effective implementation requires a balanced combination of analytical, operational, and political capacities (Wu et al., 2015). The imbalance observed in this study suggests that electoral logistics management remains dependent on individual experience and informal networks rather than standardized institutional mechanisms.

This condition reflects a broader governance challenge identified in public administration literature. Lodge and Wegrich (2014) argue that modern public organizations frequently face a mismatch between increasing task complexity and limited problem-solving capacity. In the context of simultaneous elections, the scale and simultaneity of logistics operations intensified coordination demands without a corresponding strengthening of institutional support systems, resulting in fragmented and person-dependent adaptive practices.

From an electoral governance perspective, these findings reinforce the argument that electoral integrity is closely linked to administrative performance, particularly in high-risk operational domains such as logistics. As Norris (2014) emphasizes, the credibility of elections depends not only on legal frameworks but also on the capacity of election management bodies to deliver reliable and predictable administrative outcomes. Even when logistical disruptions are resolved prior to voting, their occurrence may still affect public perceptions of electoral reliability and institutional competence.

Taken together, the results and discussion demonstrate that electoral logistics management in Jambi City functioned adequately in operational terms but remained fragile in governance terms. By situating empirical findings within frameworks of risk governance, policy implementation, and institutional capacity, this study advances understanding of electoral logistics as a critical component of democratic administration. The findings highlight the need for a shift from reactive coordination toward institutionalized risk management and learning-oriented governance to strengthen electoral logistics in future elections.

Beyond operational considerations, the findings of this study contribute to broader theoretical debates on electoral governance and public sector management. Electoral logistics in simultaneous elections illustrates how administrative systems designed for routine operations are increasingly confronted with non-routine conditions. Risk governance scholars argue that when uncertainty becomes a structural feature rather than an exception, organizations must shift from rule-based control toward adaptive and learning-oriented governance (Boin et al., 2016; Power, 2007). The empirical evidence from Jambi City suggests that while adaptive practices emerged at the operational level, they were not embedded within formal institutional frameworks. This disconnect limits the ability of election management bodies to transform episodic adaptation into sustainable organizational capacity.

This finding also resonates with implementation theory, which emphasizes that policy outcomes are shaped not only by formal design but also by how actors interpret and enact policies in practice (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Hill & Hupe, 2014). In the case of electoral logistics, the gap between regulatory design and field-level implementation reflects broader challenges of policy translation in complex administrative environments. Without institutional mechanisms that

capture experiential knowledge and feed it back into policy design, implementation remains vulnerable to recurring disruptions, particularly in large-scale electoral events.

In comparative perspective, the patterns observed in Jambi City are not unique. Studies of electoral administration in other democracies indicate that logistical vulnerabilities often persist even in systems with comprehensive regulatory frameworks, particularly when elections involve high levels of simultaneity and territorial dispersion (Norris et al., 2015; Alvarez et al., 2008). What distinguishes more resilient electoral systems is not the absence of logistical risk, but the presence of institutionalized mechanisms for risk anticipation, coordination, and learning. These mechanisms enable election management bodies to move beyond reactive problem-solving toward strategic resilience.

Accordingly, the findings of this study suggest that strengthening electoral logistics governance requires conceptualizing logistics as a core component of democratic infrastructure rather than a peripheral technical function. Embedding risk-based planning, cross-level coordination protocols, and systematic post-election evaluation into electoral administration can enhance both operational reliability and public trust. By highlighting the governance dimensions of electoral logistics, this study extends existing scholarship on electoral integrity and provides a foundation for future research on adaptive risk governance in democratic institutions.

DISCUSSION

The main finding of this study is that electoral logistics management in Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election, particularly in Jambi City, was characterized by formal procedural compliance combined with weak institutionalized risk governance and limited organizational learning. While logistical operations were completed without major disruptions to voting, uncertainty was addressed predominantly through reactive coordination and ad hoc problem-solving, rather than through anticipatory risk planning embedded in institutional frameworks (Boin & Lodge, 2016; Howlett & Ramesh, 2016).

This finding differs in important ways from previous studies on electoral administration. Much of the existing literature emphasizes regulatory design and normative standards of electoral integrity (Norris, 2014; Norris et al., 2015), often assuming that strong legal frameworks translate into effective implementation. However, the evidence from this study demonstrates that compliance with formal regulations does not automatically produce resilience in logistical governance, particularly under conditions of simultaneity and operational uncertainty (James, 2019; Clark, 2021).

Compared to Birch (2011) and Alvarez et al. (2008), who focus primarily on electoral malpractice and fraud prevention, this study highlights those non-malicious logistical vulnerabilities, such as delays, material discrepancies, and coordination gaps—can also pose risks to electoral credibility (Van Ham & Tompson, 2017; Alvarez et al., 2018). Similarly, while James (2012) underscores the political dimensions of election administration, the findings here suggest that administrative risk management capacity plays an equally critical role, especially at the local implementation level (James, 2019).

In contrast to studies that view coordination failures as exceptional events (Clark & Garnett, 2020), this research shows that reactive coordination has become a routine coping mechanism within electoral logistics. This pattern aligns with Moynihan's (2008) observations on performance management in the public sector, where organizations often prioritize short-term problem resolution over systemic learning. However, this study extends that argument by demonstrating how such practices persist even in high-stakes democratic processes like elections, limiting the accumulation of institutional learning (Christensen et al., 2016; Ansell et al., 2017).

From a risk governance perspective, the findings are consistent with Power (2007) and Hood and Rothstein (2001), who argue that public organizations frequently manage risks symbolically rather than substantively. Nevertheless, this study adds empirical depth by showing how risk governance gaps manifest concretely in electoral logistics, particularly through the absence of formal risk mapping, contingency planning, and post-election learning mechanisms (Boin & Lodge, 2016; Howlett & Ramesh, 2016).

This study makes several contributions to the literature on electoral governance and public administration. First, it empirically integrates electoral logistics, risk governance, and policy implementation theory, an intersection that remains underexplored in existing scholarship (Wu et

al., 2015; Howlett & Ramesh, 2016). Rather than treating logistics as a technical subsystem, this study conceptualizes it as a core governance function within democratic administration.

Second, the study introduces institutional learning as a critical analytical dimension in electoral logistics. While prior research acknowledges operational challenges, few studies systematically examine how electoral management bodies capture, institutionalize, and reuse experiential knowledge from past elections (Christensen et al., 2016; Lodge & Wegrich, 2014). The findings demonstrate that adaptive practices existed at the operational level but were not transformed into durable institutional capacity.

Third, the case of Jambi City provides localized empirical evidence that complements macro-level studies of electoral integrity. By focusing on subnational implementation, this study reveals how national regulations are translated, adapted, or bypassed in practice, thereby enriching policy implementation debates (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1984; Hill & Hupe, 2014; James, 2019).

The findings carry important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, this study reinforces arguments that electoral integrity is inseparable from administrative performance, particularly in high-risk operational domains (Norris et al., 2020; Clark, 2021). It suggests that future research on electoral quality should move beyond legal compliance and incorporate governance capacity, risk management, and learning mechanisms as central variables.

Practically, the study implies that election management bodies need to shift from a compliance-oriented model toward adaptive risk governance. Integrating formal risk assessments, contingency protocols, and structured post-election evaluations into logistics planning could significantly enhance resilience (Boin & Lodge, 2016; Howlett & Ramesh, 2016). Such measures are especially critical in simultaneous elections, where compressed timelines and increased logistical volume amplify uncertainty (James & Alihodzic, 2020).

Moreover, strengthening institutional learning mechanisms would allow electoral organizations to reduce dependence on individual experience and informal networks. Embedding learning into organizational routines can help transform episodic adaptation into sustained administrative capacity, thereby improving public trust in electoral administration (Christensen et al., 2016; Ansell et al., 2017).

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, as a qualitative case study focusing on a single city, the findings are not intended for statistical generalization. The patterns identified reflect the specific administrative and contextual conditions of Jambi City, although they may be analytically transferable to similar electoral settings (Yin, 2018). Second, the study relies primarily on interviews, observations, and document analysis. While triangulation was employed to enhance credibility, the absence of quantitative performance indicators limits the ability to measure the magnitude of logistical risks and their potential electoral impact more precisely (Creswell, 2014).

Third, the research focuses on the perspective of election administrators and related stakeholders. Future studies could benefit from incorporating voter perceptions to better understand how logistical disruptions—even when resolved—affect public confidence in electoral processes (Clark & Garnett, 2020; Norris et al., 2020).

Building on these findings, several avenues for future research emerge. Comparative studies across regions or electoral levels could help identify how variations in institutional capacity influence logistical risk management (Van Ham & Tompson, 2017; James, 2019). Additionally, research examining the role of digital technologies in logistics tracking, risk monitoring, and inter-organizational coordination would be valuable (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

Further studies could also explore how collaborative oversight involving civil society and external auditors contributes to institutional learning in electoral administration (Ansell et al., 2017; Christensen et al., 2016). By expanding empirical inquiry along these dimensions, future research can support the development of more resilient, adaptive, and trustworthy electoral systems.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that electoral logistics in Indonesia's 2024 Simultaneous Election were managed within a framework of formal procedural compliance but limited adaptive capacity. Although election materials were largely delivered on time and voting processes were able to proceed as scheduled, the management of logistical uncertainty relied heavily on reactive coordination and ad hoc problem-solving rather than systematic risk anticipation. The findings

highlight that logistical challenges were not merely technical disruptions but reflected deeper governance issues related to risk management and institutional learning. The absence of structured risk assessment at the planning stage and the limited use of post-election evaluation as a learning mechanism constrained the ability of election management bodies to strengthen logistical resilience over time. As a result, similar vulnerabilities are likely to persist in future elections if administrative practices remain unchanged. From a practical perspective, the study suggests that improving electoral logistics requires a shift from compliance-oriented administration toward adaptive risk governance. Integrating risk-based planning, contingency protocols, and structured learning mechanisms into logistics management can enhance both operational reliability and public confidence in electoral administration. These measures are particularly important in simultaneous elections, where uncertainty and coordination demands are intensified. This research also opens avenues for further studies. Comparative research across regions or election types could deepen understanding of how different institutional contexts shape logistical risk management. Future studies may also explore the role of digital technologies and collaborative oversight in strengthening institutional learning within electoral administration. By advancing these lines of inquiry, scholarship can contribute to the development of more resilient and trustworthy electoral systems

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