

The implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang religious court from the perspective of Soerjono Soekanto's legal effectiveness theory (Based on supreme court decision no. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of single-judge hearings at the Religious Court of Lumajang based on Chief Justice's Decree Number 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024. This policy was introduced as a strategic response to the increasing number of cases that exceeded the available number of judges. Through this mechanism, the judicial process is expected to operate more efficiently while upholding the principles of fast, simple, and low-cost justice. This study employs an empirical legal method using a qualitative approach. Data were collected through direct observations, interviews with judges and court officers, and the analysis of official documents. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how the policy is implemented in practice and provides an objective assessment of its effectiveness. The findings demonstrate that the single-judge system has been implemented effectively, according to Soerjono Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness. The policy fulfills five determining factors: clear legal substance, competent law enforcers, adequate facilities, community acceptance, and an adaptive legal culture. These components collectively support the smooth execution of this system. Overall, the single-judge mechanism contributes significantly to improving judicial performance at the Lumajang Religious Court. This accelerates case resolution and strengthens public trust in the judiciary. Thus, this system represents an important step in the broader reform of Indonesia's religious-court system.

Keywords: Single Judge; Legal Effectiveness; Lumajang Religious Court.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the caseload handled by religious courts in Indonesia has demonstrated a fluctuating yet consistently high trend (Afdhali & Syahuri, 2023). National judicial statistics show that the number of cases rose from more than six hundred thousand in 2020 to over six hundred fifty thousand in 2022, declined in 2023, and increased again in 2024. Divorce cases remain the most dominant contributor to this volume, reflecting persistent social dynamics within Indonesian families. Among all provinces, East Java consistently ranks as one of the regions with the highest number of divorce cases, thereby making a significant contribution to the accumulation of cases at the national level. This has placed enormous pressure on the judiciary's capacity to ensure timely, efficient, and high-quality dispute resolution.

A similar trend is visible at the Supreme Court level. In 2023, the court handled more than twenty-seven thousand cases with a resolution rate exceeding ninety-nine percent. In 2024, the number of cases increased by more than 13 percent, whereas the completion rate experienced a slight decline. These figures indicate that, although institutional performance remains relatively strong, the overall burden on the judicial system continues to intensify. This escalating caseload presents a fundamental structural challenge to the principle of effective justice, particularly when it is not accompanied by proportional increases in judicial personnel. One of the core structural problems faced by religious courts in Indonesia is the limited number of judges compared to the growing volume of cases. Since 2015, many religious courts have operated with only three to four judges, including the chief and deputy chief judges. This imbalance has direct implications for the formation of judicial panels, as mandated by Law Number 48 of 2009 on Judicial Power, which requires that court decisions be examined and adjudicated by a panel of at least three judges, unless otherwise stipulated by law. The philosophical foundation of this provision lies in the need to maintain judicial objectivity, enhance the richness of legal reasoning, strengthen the argumentative basis of decisions, and ensure internal checks and balances within the adjudicative process.

However, in practice, the persistent shortage of judges has made it increasingly difficult to fulfil this ideal model of collective adjudication (Nabila et al., 2025). The consequence is not merely administrative delay but also the potential degradation of decision quality and public trust in the judiciary. In response to these structural limitations, the Supreme Court introduced strategic policy measures in the form of judicial dispensations that allow certain types of cases to be heard by a single judge. Initially, such dispensations applied only to simple lawsuits under Supreme Court Regulation Number 2 of 2015 and marriage dispensation cases under Supreme Court Regulation Number 5 of 2019. These policies were designed to accelerate case settlement while preserving the legal certainty and procedural fairness. This policy approach was later extended at the local level through the issuance of a special dispensation granted to Pengadilan Agama Lumajang based on the Decree of the Chief Justice of Mahkamah Agung Number 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024. This decree was issued in response to the extremely disproportionate ratio between the number of judges and the expanding volume of cases at the Lumajang Religious Court in Indonesia. In 2024, the court had only six judges, including its leadership, and two were transferred in October 2024. At the same time, by late October 2024, the number of incoming cases had already reached several thousand. This severe imbalance created practical obstacles in forming judicial panels, necessitating exceptional regulatory intervention through the allowance of single-judge proceedings.

Normatively, the use of a single-judge system is intended to realize the principle of fast, simple, and low-cost justice (Ahadi, 2022). However, its practical implementation raises serious theoretical and empirical concerns. In modern judicial theory, the quality of judicial decisions is ideally achieved through collective deliberation within a panel of judges, rather than through the reasoning of a single individual. The deliberative process enables mutual control, critical exchange of legal arguments, and minimization of subjective bias. When adjudication is conducted by a single judge, the internal mechanism of checks and balances inherent in panel deliberations is inevitably reduced. Consequently, concerns arise regarding the potential decline in objectivity, analytical depth, and substantive justice within judicial decisions. The effectiveness of single-judge decisions cannot be measured solely by their conformity to formal legal norms. It must also be evaluated through broader indicators, such as public acceptance, the frequency of appeals or cassation, and the degree to which the decisions successfully reflect a sense of fairness for the

litigating parties. The enforcement of the single-judge model thus reveals a fundamental tension between *das sollen*, the ideal legal norm requiring collective adjudication, and *das sein*, the empirical reality shaped by institutional limitations and emergency policy responses.

This tension becomes more analytically significant when examined through the Legal Effectiveness Theory proposed by Soerjono Soekanto. According to this theory, the effectiveness of law does not depend solely on the existence of written regulations but is determined by the degree to which legal norms function in real social life. Soerjono Soekanto conceptualizes five interrelated factors that influence legal effectiveness: the legal substance itself, law enforcement officials, supporting facilities and infrastructure, the legal awareness of the community, and cultural values embedded in society. These factors operate simultaneously and collectively determine whether law achieves its intended objectives. Within the context of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court, all five factors are directly implicated. From the perspective of legal substance, the Supreme Court's decree provides a formal legal foundation for the application of a single-judge system. However, the mere existence of such regulations does not guarantee their effectiveness. From the perspective of law enforcement officials, judges at the Lumajang Religious Court are required to maintain professional integrity, objectivity, and analytical rigor despite the absence of collective judicial deliberations. The factor of facilities and infrastructure is reflected in the limited number of judges as a structural constraint that directly affects adjudicative capacity (Badri, 2021). Meanwhile, societal factors manifest in the extent to which litigants accept or resist decisions rendered by a single judge. Finally, the cultural factor is evident in the societal expectation that justice should be delivered collectively through a judicial panel rather than individually by a single judicial actor.

Empirically, Indonesian society has long been accustomed to the concept of judicial panels as symbols of fairness, neutrality, and procedural legitimacy. The transition toward single-judge proceedings, although legally permitted, may generate varying perceptions of justice and legitimacy. This sociocultural dimension is crucial in assessing whether the implementation of the single-judge system merely accelerates procedural efficiency or genuinely enhances the overall effectiveness of the judicial process. Several previous studies have explored issues related to judicial effectiveness, mediation in divorce cases, off-court hearings, and simple lawsuits in both religious and general courts. However, most of these studies either emphasize administrative efficiency, mediation outcomes, or procedural legality without systematically integrating the framework of legal effectiveness theory to analyze single-judge adjudication in religious courts. Some studies examine the legality of single-judge authorizations, while others focus on judges' considerations in marriage dispensation cases. However, comprehensive empirical analyses that position single-judge trials within the multidimensional structure of legal effectiveness remain limited, particularly in the context of special dispensations issued by the Supreme Court in response to acute judicial shortages (Asdiqi, 2024).

Against this background, the present study is academically and practically significant. It does not merely examine the formal legality of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court but critically evaluates their effectiveness through the lens of Soerjono Soekanto's legal effectiveness theory. This study seeks to assess whether the implementation of single-judge proceedings truly achieves the core objectives of law, namely, justice, legal certainty, and social benefit under conditions of structural constraint. Furthermore, it analyzes how institutional limitations, judicial professionalism, social acceptance, and legal culture interact to shape the real impact of this policy. By situating the single-judge system within a broader socio-legal framework, this study contributes to the development of judicial policy analysis and the refinement of legal effectiveness theory in the context of contemporary Indonesian judicial reform. It provides an empirical foundation for evaluating whether emergency judicial policies grounded in efficiency can sustain the substantive quality of justice in the long term. Consequently, this study is relevant to both academic discourse and future policymaking in the field of judicial administration and procedural law.

2. METHOD

This study is an empirical legal research aimed at examining how single-judge trials are implemented in judicial practice and assessing the extent to which this policy operates effectively within

the social reality and the existing legal system. The main focus of this research is the practice of single-judge hearings at Pengadilan Agama Lumajang, which was granted special authority to conduct single-judge proceedings based on the Decree of the Chief Justice of the Mahkamah Agung Number 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024. This research adopts a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical character, as the data collected consist of narratives, experiences, perspectives, and real practices of legal actors directly involved in the implementation of the single-judge trials. Empirical legal research was selected because this study does not merely examine legal norms as written rules (law in the books) but also explores how those norms operate in real practice (law in action). Law is understood as a living social phenomenon whose effectiveness is not determined solely by the existence of regulations but also by the behavior of law enforcement officials, the availability of supporting facilities, public acceptance, and the prevailing legal culture. This study employs Soerjono Soekanto's Legal Effectiveness Theory as the main analytical framework for evaluating the implementation of single-judge trials.

The research location was purposively determined at the Lumajang Religious Court due to the significant imbalance between the number of judges and the volume of cases. As of October 2024, the court had only six judges, while the number of incoming cases exceeded 3,800. This makes the Lumajang Religious Court a highly relevant and representative locus for examining the effectiveness of the single-judge policy in the context of limited judicial resources. The research subjects are parties directly involved in the implementation of single-judge trials, including judicial officers and justice seekers. Participants were selected based on their competence, experience, and relevance to the research focus. Specifically, the subjects include judges who adjudicate cases individually, court clerks and administrative staff who manage case administration, and litigants or legal counsel who directly experience the single-judge trial process. The subjects involved in this study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Subjects and Objects

No	Name	Position
1	Achmad Chozin, S.H.	Junior Clerk for Civil Cases
2	a. Dra. Siti Muarofah Sa'adah, S.H. b. Dra. Nur Sholehah, M.H. c. Hirmawan Susilo, S.H., M.H.	Judges
3	a. Muhammad Irfan Tantowi, S.H. b. Achmad Prayoga, S.H.	Advocates

The main objective of this research is the implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court. Substantively, this object includes two essential aspects: the procedural mechanism of single-judge trials in accordance with prevailing legal provisions and the level of effectiveness of their application based on Soerjono Soekanto's Legal Effectiveness Theory. This effectiveness is analyzed through five determining factors: legal substance, law enforcement apparatus, supporting facilities and infrastructure, society, and legal culture. The sources of data in this study consist of primary and secondary data that complement one another. Primary data were obtained directly through in-depth interviews with judges who conduct single-judge trials, court clerks or administrative officers, and litigants or legal counsel involved in such proceedings. Secondary data were obtained through library research on statutory regulations and institutional documents, including Law Number 48 of 2009 on Judicial Power, Supreme Court Regulation Number 5 of 2019 on Guidelines for Adjudicating Marriage Dispensation Petitions, the Decree of the Chief Justice Number 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024 on the Appointment of Single Judges, and supporting documents such as case reports and the official research permit issued by the Lumajang Religious Court.

Data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted directly in the courtroom during the implementation of single-judge hearings to examine the interaction between judges and litigants, the dynamics of the proceedings, and the accompanying administrative mechanisms. Unstructured observation was employed to allow the researcher to capture the full, contextual reality of courtroom practice. Semi-structured interviews were

the primary method for collecting in-depth primary data. The interviews were guided by a prepared list of questions but remained flexible to allow for further exploration in accordance with the informants' answers. Interviews were conducted with judges, court clerks, litigants, and their legal counsel. To broaden the range of informants, this study also applied the snowball sampling technique, whereby initial informants recommended other relevant informants. The interview guideline used in this research is presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines

No	Questions for Judges/Staff of the Lumajang Religious Court	Questions for Litigants
1	What was the background for submitting the request for single-judge trial dispensation?	How was your experience during the single-judge trial?
2	Are there specific criteria for determining which cases are tried by a single judge?	Were you satisfied with the process and the final decision?
3	What has been the impact of single-judge trials on procedural efficiency?	What differences did you feel compared to panel trials (if any)?
4	Are there any challenges or obstacles in the implementation of single-judge trials?	In your opinion, is the single-judge system fair?
5	How is the internal evaluation of the quality of single-judge decisions conducted?	Would you recommend this system to others?

In addition to interviews and observation, documentation was used to collect data from official documents relevant to the research topic, particularly the Decree of the Chief Justice Number 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024, case administration documents, and photographs of court activities where institutionally permitted. Data processing was conducted through several systematic stages, namely editing, classification, verification, analysis, and conclusion drawing. Editing was carried out by reviewing all collected data to ensure completeness, clarity, and relevance to the research focus. Classification was then conducted by grouping data according to source (primary and secondary), category of informants (judges, clerks, and litigants), and key themes such as legal basis, effectiveness, obstacles, and public acceptance. Verification was performed to ensure the validity of the data through triangulation among observation, interview, and documentation results. If doubtful or inconsistent data were found, clarification was conducted with the relevant informants. The data were then analyzed using a descriptive-qualitative method by systematically presenting the findings in narrative form. This analysis aimed to explain the practice of single-judge trials and to evaluate their effectiveness based on the five factors of Soerjono Soekanto's Legal Effectiveness Theory. The final stage of the research was conclusion drawing based on the overall analytical results. The conclusions were formulated to answer the research problems, to assess the effectiveness of single-judge trial implementation, and to provide an evaluative overview of the application of the single-judge policy at the Lumajang Religious Court from both normative and empirical perspectives.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The empirical findings of this study show that the implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court is primarily a structural response to the imbalance between the growing number of cases and the limited number of judges. The policy is grounded in extraordinary authorization from the Supreme Court and framed as an operationalization of the principle of simple, speedy, and low-cost justice, particularly for non-contentious and relatively simple matters. Field data indicate that the main legal basis for the implementation of single-judge trials is the Decree of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court No. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024 dated 18 November 2024. This decree was issued following a formal request from the Lumajang Religious Court through letter No. 2584/KPA.W13.A8/HK2.6/X/2024. At the time of the request, the court was handling approximately 3,838 cases with only six active judges, including the

chief and deputy chief judge. According to the Junior Clerk for Civil Cases, Achmad Chozin, the request for dispensation was not driven solely by efficiency considerations but by the necessity to adapt to severe human-resource constraints. He emphasized that a case that would normally be handled by a panel now had to be decided by a single judge, and that such a shift could only be implemented legitimately after securing formal authorization from the Supreme Court. Judges confirmed that, in principle, Indonesian procedural law still favors panel adjudication. Judge Hirmawan Susilo explained that single-judge adjudication is not permitted under ordinary circumstances, but becomes legally acceptable when supported by a specific authorization from the Supreme Court. He noted that this special dispensation is accompanied by supervision from the higher judiciary to mitigate the risks associated with concentrating adjudicative authority in a single judge. These statements suggest that the single-judge system at the Lumajang Religious Court operates within a clearly defined legal corridor and is treated as an exceptional, rather than a routine, arrangement.

Beyond the special decree, judges also referred to the normative foundation found in Article 2(4) of Law No. 48 of 2009 on Judicial Power, which mandates that courts administer justice based on the principles of simplicity, speed, and low cost. In practice, this principle is used to justify the use of single-judge trials for suitable case types. Judge Nur Sholehah highlighted that in cases such as marriage dispensation and *isbat nikah* (confirmation of marriage), the time needed for case completion becomes significantly shorter, with scheduling more flexible and litigation costs indirectly reduced. Judge Siti Muarofah Sa'adah added that the system not only speeds up proceedings by eliminating the need for coordination among panel members, but also allows judges to focus more directly on the case at hand, while still maintaining cautious and thorough legal reasoning. The findings further show that the implementation of single-judge trials is not applied indiscriminately to all case types. The Lumajang Religious Court applies clear selectivity and prudence in determining which cases are eligible for single-judge adjudication. Only cases deemed simple, non-contentious, and unlikely to produce broad or complex legal consequences are assigned to a single judge. These typically include petitions for marriage dispensation, *isbat nikah*, the appointment of a guardian in cases of *wali adhal*, minor changes in identity particulars on marriage or divorce certificates, and other administrative religious matters of a non-contentious nature. The categorization is aligned with Supreme Court Regulation No. 5 of 2019 on Marriage Dispensation and expanded under Decree No. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024. Judge Hirmawan stressed that, while the general rule prohibits single-judge trials, the existence of a specific, higher-level regulation in a particular context renders them lawful. This cautious approach is echoed by practitioners. Advocate Muhammad Irfan Tantowi, who frequently appears before the Lumajang Religious Court, reported that many non-complex cases can indeed be resolved faster under the single-judge system, but he emphasized the importance of continued oversight to prevent potential abuses or procedural shortcuts. Overall, the findings indicate that the court strives to balance the aims of efficiency and the need to preserve substantive justice by limiting single-judge trials to strictly defined categories of cases.

With regard to procedure, the research shows that the administrative flow of single-judge cases largely follows that of ordinary panel cases. Proceedings begin with case registration at the clerk's office, either through direct filing or via the e-Court system. Once the case file is complete, the Chief Judge issues an assignment decree designating a specific judge as the single adjudicator for that case. This judge assumes full responsibility from the examination stage and evidence-taking through to the reading of the decision. According to Achmad Chozin, the conduct of the trial itself remains firmly grounded in the applicable procedural law; the difference lies primarily in the number of adjudicators and the resulting efficiencies in scheduling and internal coordination. In practice, limited judicial personnel necessitate rotational scheduling and shared use of courtroom facilities. Judge Siti Muarofah reported that, while initial adjustments were needed to streamline administrative routines, the implementation has generally run smoothly. Single judges are clearly mandated to handle specific categories of cases, while other judges continue to sit in panels for more complex or contentious matters. The findings also demonstrate that decisions resulting from single-judge trials are subject to administrative review and reporting to the Directorate General of Religious Courts (Badilag). Judge Hirmawan explained that the Supreme Court conducts periodic national examinations of decisions quarterly through a random sampling system,

ensuring that the quality and consistency of judicial decisions, including those issued by single judges, remain under systematic supervision. The internal dynamics of the court further illustrate how the institution attempts to manage the added burden of individual judges. Task allocation among judges is regulated by the court's leadership, typically through rotation, while routine coordination meetings weekly or monthly are used to harmonize legal interpretations and maintain consistency in applying legal principles. Judge Siti Muarofah emphasized that, despite deciding individually, judges still consult informally on principled matters to ensure uniformity in the application of law. Chozin described the system as “forcing” judges to handle more cases individually than under the panel model, but underscored that this is done with prior authorization and internal preparedness. Judge Nur Sholehah also highlighted the critical supportive role of clerks and bailiffs in ensuring that administrative processes, such as summons and case management, are handled efficiently, so that judges can concentrate on judicial functions.

In terms of efficiency, the data revealed a clear reduction in the time required to resolve simple cases. Prior to the introduction of the single-judge system, even simple matters could take several weeks due to the need for panel deliberations and coordination among three judges. Following the implementation of Decree No. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024, the average time for settling uncomplicated cases such as marriage dispensation or isbat nikah has reportedly decreased from around three to four weeks to approximately one to two weeks. Judges Siti Muarofah and Nur remarked that the elimination of panel deliberation significantly contributed to this acceleration. From the administrative side, Chozin noted that the speed of case resolution still depends on the inherent complexity of each case but acknowledged that a single judge can handle a greater number of cases within the same timeframe. Lawyers reported similar experiences. Advocate Muhammad Irfan Tantowi observed that under the panel system, scheduling could be prolonged because it had to accommodate the availability of three judges. The single-judge system makes scheduling more flexible and reduces the waiting time for hearings. He and fellow advocate Achmad Prayoga reported that the new system substantially assists both parties and their legal representatives by simplifying the process and avoiding unnecessary delays, particularly in non-complex matters. The findings also shed light on public and professional perceptions of the reforms. At the initial stage of implementation, some members of the public expressed doubts about the fairness and legitimacy of decisions issued by a single judge, given the longstanding cultural perception of court hearings as solemn and best conducted by a panel. Judges reported that these doubts were gradually resolved through explanations and legal education provided by court officers. Judge Siti Muarofah observed that most users of the court's services eventually welcomed the system because of the shorter duration of the proceedings and lower associated costs. Judge Nur likewise noted that initial confusion was mitigated once litigants understood that the system was formally authorized and applied only to certain types of cases. From the perspective of legal practitioners, the single-judge system is generally perceived as a progressive measure aligned with practical needs. Both Irfan and Prayoga described the implementation as appropriate and responsive to local conditions, provided that internal monitoring and consistency in jurisprudence are maintained. Their views indicate that the factor of community and professional acceptance one of the key dimensions of legal effectiveness tends to support the continued application of single-judge trials in Lumajang, at least for simple, non-contentious cases.

Despite these positive indications, the research also identifies several constraints that limit the optimal functioning of the system. The most fundamental of these is the ongoing shortage of judges. With only six judges handling more than 3,800 cases, the workload per judge remains high, even after implementing the single-judge model. Chozin acknowledged that the policy effectively “forces” individual judges to carry heavier caseloads that were previously distributed among a panel. Judges pointed out that the single-judge system is essentially an adaptive stopgap measure necessitated by structural limitations in judicial staffing, rather than a permanent ideal model of adjudication. Other constraints relate to infrastructure and administrative support. Judges and clerks reported that courtroom availability, information systems, and supporting facilities occasionally lag behind the demands of the new system, especially when courtroom schedules for panel and single-judge sessions overlap. While these challenges are generally managed through internal coordination, they nonetheless illustrate that adequate facilities are a crucial factor in ensuring the effectiveness of legal implementation. Moreover, the high administrative

workload persists, as all procedures must still adhere to formal procedural law despite the reduction in the number of judges on the bench. Finally, the findings show that evaluation and internal oversight mechanisms play a central role in safeguarding the quality of single-judge decisions. At the national level, the Supreme Court, especially through the religious court directorate, conducts regular examinations of decisions on a quarterly basis. At the court level, the leadership monitors performance and outcomes through routine meetings and case reviews. Judges emphasized that professionalism, prudence, and adherence to procedural law are constantly reinforced as guiding principles. Advocates interviewed in this study confirmed that, in their experience, the quality of decisions issued by single judges at the Lumajang Religious Court remains high and substantively well-reasoned, sometimes even perceived as more focused because they reflect the concentrated attention of one experienced judge. Overall, the empirical findings suggest that the implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court has been effective in improving temporal and procedural efficiency for simple, non-contentious cases, while basic safeguards of legal certainty and fairness are maintained through selectivity in case assignment, structural supervision, and ongoing internal coordination. At the same time, persisting constraints in judicial staffing, infrastructure, and the need for sustained public education indicate that the system remains a pragmatic institutional response rather than a complete structural solution to the broader challenges facing the religious court system.

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Analysis of the Implementation of Single-Judge Trials through the Lens of Soerjono Soekanto's Legal Effectiveness Theory

3.2.1.1 Legal Substance: Strength and Limits of the Normative Framework

From the perspective of legal substance, the implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court rests on a formally strong and exceptional normative basis. The Decree of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court No. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024 functions as a special policy instrument that derogates, in a controlled manner, from the general rule in Article 11(1) of Law No. 48 of 2009, which prescribes that cases should be adjudicated by a panel of at least three judges unless otherwise stipulated by law. In Soerjono Soekanto's framework, this demonstrates an attempt to align legal norms with empirical institutional conditions, namely the acute mismatch between the number of judges and the volume of cases. Normatively, the decree operates as a form of legal dispensation in response to an emergency situation: with only six active judges and thousands of cases per year, strict adherence to the panel model would risk serious delays, case backlogs, and potential denial of justice. Judge Hirmawan explicitly acknowledged that, in ordinary circumstances, single-judge adjudication would not be permissible, but becomes lawful and legitimate when supported by a specific authorization from the Supreme Court. This confirms that the decree is not merely administrative, but carries substantive legal force as a judicial policy instrument.

In terms of procedural law, the findings indicate that the single-judge system does not alter the core structure of religious court procedure. Hearings are still conducted in accordance with civil procedure rules, and judges remain bound by the principles of fairness, legal certainty, and utility. The remarks of Junior Clerk Achmad Chozin show that even under the single-judge model, procedural safeguards such as the separate examination of witnesses are maintained to prevent both formal and material defects. For Judge Hirmawan, correct and consistent application of procedural law is itself the starting point of legal certainty and a necessary precondition for achieving justice. The decree also contains a reasonably clear delineation of the types of cases that may be heard by a single judge: simple, non-complex, non-contentious matters such as marriage dispensation, *isbat nikah*, guardian appointment in *wali adhal* cases, minor civil-status corrections, and other administrative religious petitions (Yolanda, et.al., 2023). This selectivity protects the system from overreach and helps prevent single-judge trials from being used for contentious cases with far-reaching legal consequences. Nevertheless, both judges and advocates

emphasized the need for further technical guidelines and systematic socialization to avoid divergent interpretations among different courts.

Viewed through Soerjono Soekanto's "legal substance" factor, the single-judge policy in Lumajang can be categorized as normatively effective: it is grounded in a valid legal instrument, consistent with the principle of simple, speedy, and low-cost justice, and accompanied by explicit substantive limits. However, its long-term effectiveness still depends on continuous refinement of technical guidance and harmonization of interpretation across institutions so that the exceptional nature of the dispensation is not blurred or misapplied.

3.2.1.2 Law Enforcement Actors: Professionalism, Support Apparatus, and Internal Coordination

The second factor in Soerjono Soekanto's theory concerns law enforcement actors, which in this context includes judges, clerks, bailiffs, and administrative staff. The empirical data show that the effectiveness of the single-judge system is heavily mediated by the professionalism, integrity, and coordination of these actors. At the level of the judiciary, single-judge adjudication inherently increases the personal responsibility of the judge. Without the collective deliberation typical of a panel, a single judge must carry the full burden of legal reasoning, assessment of evidence, and final decision-making. This elevates the importance of individual competence and ethical commitment. Judge Hirmawan underlined that hearings must still be conducted strictly in accordance with procedural law and that legal certainty begins with correct procedural application. In his view, the process is not merely a formality but the primary route through which justice is realized.

Similarly, Judge Nur argued that the quality of decisions is not determined by the number of judges but by their professionalism and prudence (Handoko, et al., 2021). Her statement reflects a shift from a purely structural understanding of quality (linked to panel composition) to a more substantive understanding (linked to the personal capabilities and integrity of the judge). In terms of legal effectiveness, this corresponds directly to Soekanto's emphasis on the central role of law enforcement officials in transforming written norms into living law. The findings also reveal that non-judicial officers play a crucial supporting role. Clerks manage case registration, scheduling, and documentation; bailiffs ensure timely and lawful summons of parties; administrative staff handle the logistics that underpin the smooth running of hearings. Chozin's explanation shows that although the legal procedure remains the same, the success of single-judge trials depends on clear division of tasks, prior authorization, and readiness across the entire court apparatus. Nur further stressed that without proper coordination, single judges could easily become overwhelmed by the cumulative workload. To compensate for the absence of formal panel deliberations, the Lumajang Religious Court maintains internal coordination through routine meetings and informal consultations among judges. Judge Siti Muarofah described how judges continue to discuss principle issues collectively to ensure consistent legal application. At the higher level, Judge Hirmawan pointed to the Supreme Court's quarterly national examination (eksaminasi) of decisions as an institutional mechanism of oversight and peer review. Together, these mechanisms function as a substitute for the internal check-and-balance provided by panel deliberations, supplying horizontal (among judges) and vertical (from higher courts) supervision.

In sum, the law enforcement factor in Lumajang appears to be relatively strong: professional judges, supportive staff, and embedded coordination mechanisms collectively enhance the effectiveness of the single-judge system. The potential risk of increased subjectivity inherent in single-judge adjudication is mitigated by individual integrity, institutional evaluation, and ongoing collegial dialogue.

3.2.1.3 Facilities and Infrastructure: Supporting and Limiting the Reform

The third factor in Soerjono Soekanto's model concerns facilities and infrastructure as conditions that enable or constrain legal implementation. The empirical findings indicate that while the Lumajang Religious Court has made use of modern tools such as SIPP and e-Court, the available infrastructure is still in a transitional stage and not yet fully optimal. Relying on only a limited number of courtrooms, the

institution must alternate between panel and single-judge hearings in the same physical spaces. Judges reported that this sometimes requires rescheduling or careful allocation of courtroom use to avoid clashes. Judge Siti Muarofah acknowledged minor difficulties related to information systems and room availability, but stressed that these pragmatic challenges can generally be handled through internal coordination.

In the digital domain, case tracking and registration systems have improved administrative efficiency, but lawyers such as Muhammad Irfan noted that further enhancements are needed, especially in managing digital queues and electronic scheduling. From the perspective of legal effectiveness, this suggests that the infrastructure factor is supportive but still evolving. The underlying technological foundation exists, yet it has not reached a level that fully maximizes the potential efficiency gains of the single-judge model. Administrative efficiency emerges as another key dimension. The testimony of Chozin shows that while the formal procedure is identical to panel hearings, single-judge trials reduce coordination delays and allow judges more flexibility in arranging hearing dates and drafting decisions. Judge Siti Muarofah confirmed that the absence of multi-judge deliberation shortens the overall process, particularly for simple cases. However, this efficiency is contingent on the capacity of clerks and bailiffs to manage summons, document handling, and scheduling in a timely manner. Without well-functioning administrative support, the efficiencies of the single-judge system would be quickly eroded by logistical bottlenecks. The high caseload over 3,800 cases in 2024 highlights the need not only for increased human resources but also for expanded physical and digital infrastructure. Judges and practitioners alike emphasized that additional courtrooms and more robust information systems would significantly enhance the effectiveness of single-judge trials. In Soerjono Soekanto's terms, the facility factor in Lumajang is in a "developing effective" state: it already contributes positively to the implementation of the law but still requires reinforcement to sustain higher volumes of cases without compromising service quality.

3.2.1.4 Community Factor: Understanding, Acceptance, and Trust

The fourth factor in Soerjono Soekanto's theory relates to society here understood as litigants and legal practitioners, especially advocates. The research findings show that the initial reception of the single-judge system among court users was mixed: while many appreciated the speed and lower practical costs, there were early concerns about fairness and legitimacy. According to Judge Siti Muarofah, some litigants initially feared that a case decided by one judge might be less fair than one decided by a panel (Baidi, 2024). However, after court officers and advocates explained the legal basis in the Supreme Court decree and the restricted scope of the policy, most parties came to accept the system and even valued its practicality. This pattern reflects a common dynamic in legal reform: new procedures often face initial resistance rooted in habit and perception, which can gradually be overcome through explanation, transparency, and positive experience. Advocates play a bridging role between the court and the community. Lawyers such as Muhammad Irfan and Achmad Prayoga reported that they frequently had to clarify to their clients that the single-judge system is officially authorized and limited to specific types of cases. At the same time, they observed that once clients experienced faster proceedings and more predictable schedules, their concerns diminished. Prayoga also emphasized that advocates contribute to procedural efficiency by preparing documents properly and cooperating with the court, thereby helping to prevent unnecessary adjournments or delays.

From a socio-legal perspective, the increase in public trust is a particularly important indicator of effectiveness. The testimonies of advocates suggest that, over time, the visible benefits of speed and simplicity contributed to rising confidence in the court. For many litigants, justice is not measured solely by the number of judges but by the transparency of the process, reasonable duration, and the perceived fairness of the outcome. This corresponds closely with Soerjono Soekanto's view that legal effectiveness is closely linked to societal acceptance and compliance: law becomes effective when it is understood, accepted, and internalized by the community. In the context of Lumajang, the community factor thus appears to support the continuation of the single-judge system, at least for simple, non-contentious cases. Initial doubts have largely been replaced by pragmatic appreciation, provided that the court remains transparent and responsive to public concerns.

3.2.1.5 Legal Culture: Emerging Patterns and the Future of Reform

The fifth factor in Soerjono Soekanto's theory is legal culture, which encompasses the values, expectations, and habitual practices that shape how law is perceived and implemented. The shift from a panel-centric model to a system that includes single-judge trials represents not only a procedural change but also a cultural transition within the court and the wider community. Historically, the prevailing legal culture in religious courts emphasized collective decision-making through three-judge panels, reflecting ideals of collegiality, shared responsibility, and internal control (Fahira, 2025). The introduction of single-judge trials thus challenges a deeply embedded expectation that "real" judicial decisions should be the product of panel deliberations. Judge Hirmawan's explanation of legal culture as a pattern formed through repeated and consistent practice indicates that the single-judge system itself is in the process of becoming part of a new judicial tradition at the Lumajang Religious Court. Empirical data show that this cultural adaptation is occurring on two fronts. Internally, judges are learning to combine individual decision-making with institutionalized forms of coordination and evaluation, gradually normalizing the idea that justice can also be delivered effectively by a single, professionally accountable judge. Externally, litigants are redefining their expectations as they experience the benefits of faster, less burdensome proceedings while still perceiving decisions as substantively fair. The tension between traditional perceptions of solemn, panel-based proceedings and the practical advantages of single-judge trials is gradually being resolved through ongoing education and shared experience. Judges like Siti Muarofah and Nur observed that, although some community members initially regarded single-judge hearings as less "sacred," their views changed after being informed of the legal basis and seeing that the outcomes remained fair and consistent. Advocates such as Muhammad Irfan have contributed to this cultural shift by actively explaining the legitimacy and purpose of the new system.

In a broader perspective of judicial reform, the single-judge system in Lumajang embodies a cultural move towards a more efficient, service-oriented conception of justice. Judge Nur characterized the system as a concrete step towards the goals of judicial reform: fast, efficient, and accessible justice. At the same time, practitioners like Prayoga warned that sustainability depends on maintaining decision quality and managing caseloads so that judges are not overburdened. This underscores that legal culture must integrate not only new practices, but also new expectations about institutional support and quality assurance. Taken together, the cultural dimension in Lumajang indicates that the single-judge system is evolving from an emergency measure into a potentially enduring element of judicial practice, provided that it continues to deliver justice that is both efficient and substantively fair. If the five factors in Soerjono Soekanto's theory—substance, law enforcement actors, facilities, community, and legal culture—can remain aligned and mutually reinforcing, the Lumajang experience may serve as a viable model for broader judicial innovation in other religious courts in Indonesia (Aryani, 2025).

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of single-judge trials at the Lumajang Religious Court has proven to be an effective and strategic institutional response to structural constraints in the judicial system. Grounded in the Decree of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court No. 215/KMA/HK2.6/XI/2024, this policy directly addresses the chronic imbalance between the high volume of incoming cases and the limited number of judges. Functionally, it reinforces the principle of simple, speedy, and low-cost justice by enabling faster case resolution without abandoning procedural safeguards. In practice, the system maintains the quality of judicial decisions through the professionalism and prudence of judges who assume dual responsibility in the absence of panel deliberations, and it is substantially supported by digital infrastructures such as SIPP and e-Court, which streamline case management and enhance administrative efficiency. These findings indicate that institutional adaptation is essential for keeping the judiciary responsive to the demands of justice, legal certainty, and social utility.

Viewed through the lens of Soerjono Soekanto's Legal Effectiveness Theory, the implementation of single-judge trials in Lumajang reflects a synergistic alignment of the five key factors

of legal effectiveness. Legal substance enjoys strong legitimacy through a clear and specific Supreme Court decree; law enforcement actors particularly judges demonstrate professionalism and ethical responsibility in safeguarding objectivity; facilities and infrastructure, including digitalization, support more efficient proceedings; the community factor is manifested in growing public and professional acceptance as users experience tangible benefits in terms of faster and more accessible services; and the legal culture within the court and surrounding society shows adaptive openness to procedural innovation and greater transparency. Taken together, these elements confirm that the single-judge policy is not merely an administrative shortcut, but an innovative model of judicial reform that transforms law from a purely textual norm into an effective instrument of social service, capable of realizing fair, efficient, and responsive public justice.

Ethical Approval

This research was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for socio-legal and empirical legal studies. Prior to data collection, official permission was obtained from the Lumajang Religious Court as the research site. All interview participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was entirely voluntary. The identities of informants were kept confidential to protect their privacy and professional integrity. This study did not involve vulnerable groups or experimental interventions; therefore, formal approval from a medical or institutional ethics committee was not required.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. No primary data were collected from human subjects, and no interviews, surveys, or personal information were obtained in this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article. The conceptualization and formulation of the research focus were carried out collaboratively. The literature search, data selection, and analytical synthesis were jointly conducted by the authors. The drafting, revision, and finalization of the manuscript were completed through shared effort and mutual supervision. All authors have read and approved the final version of this manuscript.

Disclosure Statement

The authors declare that they have no known financial, personal, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the development of this research or the preparation of this manuscript. All stages of the study including the conceptualization, literature selection, analysis, and writing were conducted independently and guided solely by academic objectives. No external parties intervened or contributed in a way that may have impacted the neutrality, integrity, or outcomes of this article. The authors affirm that this work adheres to ethical research standards and that all referenced materials have been properly and transparently acknowledged.

Data Availability Statement

This study is based entirely on a qualitative literature review of publicly available academic sources. No primary empirical data were collected. All references used in the analysis are cited within the manuscript. Additional details regarding the literature selection process, analytical framework, or specific sources can be made available by the authors upon reasonable request for academic or research purposes.

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