



Legal Implications of Regional Head Elections with a Sole Candidate: A Perspective of State Administrative Law

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Abstract

The phenomenon of sole-candidate regional head elections in Indonesia has posed several challenges to democratic principles, particularly with regard to legitimacy, accountability, and public participation. This research aims to analyze the legal implications of regional head elections with sole candidates from the perspective of Administrative Law and evaluate their impact on democracy. The method used in this study is normative legal research, employing a legal and conceptual approach that includes a detailed analysis of election regulations, legal doctrines, and relevant literature studies. This method provides a robust framework for understanding the interplay between regulatory frameworks and democratic principles. The research findings indicate that elections with a sole candidate have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of the elected leader, reduce political accountability, and decrease voter participation rates. As a result, there is an urgent need to reform the electoral regulatory framework in Indonesia. Key recommendations include lowering the nomination threshold to foster competition, increasing transparency in the nomination process to ensure fairness, and strengthening political education to encourage public participation. These steps aim to enhance the quality of democracy and prevent the recurrence of sole-candidate elections in the future.

Keywords: Accountability, democracy, legitimacy, sole-candidate elections, state administrative law, voter participation

A. Introduction

The phenomenon of regional head elections with sole candidates has become increasingly common in Indonesia's democratic process. In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of regions with only one candidate pair running in local elections, raising concerns about the quality of democracy and the legitimacy of the electoral process.¹

The country's electoral system, which is supposed to offer voters various choices to determine their leaders, seems to face challenges in realizing fair and healthy competition when there is only one candidate in the race.² In addition, the selection of a single candidate has sparked a debate about the role of law in upholding the fundamental principles of democracy,

¹ Kodyat, B. A., Siagian, A. H., & Andryan, A. "The Effect of Centralistic Political Party Policies in Selection of Regional Heads in Medan City." *Indonesian Journal of Education, Social Sciences and Research (IJESSR)* 1, No.1 (2020): 59-70. <https://doi.org/10.30596/ijessr.v1i1.4899>

² Haryanti, D., & Budiman, H. "Mewujudkan Nilai Demokrasi Rasional dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Langsung dan Serentak di Indonesia." *Logika: Jurnal Penelitian Universitas Kuningan* 13, No.1, (2022): 94-113. <https://doi.org/10.25134/logika.v13i01.6652>

particularly with regard to the rights to vote and to be elected, as well as how Administrative Law regulates such situations. Normatively, Administrative Law aims to regulate the mechanisms of government management and elections, but the phenomenon of sole candidates indicates a potential discrepancy or ambiguity in the existing regulations.³

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of regions experiencing sole-candidate elections, highlighting the challenges of conducting healthy and competitive elections. According to data from the General Election Commission (KPU), the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections will include 41 regions having sole-candidate elections, comprising of one province, 35 regencies, and five cities. Examples include Serdang Bedagai Regency (North Sumatra), Brebes Regency (Central Java), and Surabaya City (East Java). In these areas, the election involves a single candidate running against a "blank box," with the potential for re-election if the blank box receives more than 50% of the votes.⁴

The phenomenon of sole-candidate regional head elections has been of growing concern in Indonesia's democratic process. Sole candidacy in regional elections refers to a situation where only one candidate pair is eligible to run in a local election, leaving voters with the option of either approving the this candidate or rejecting him or her through a "blank ballot." This phenomenon raises significant concerns regarding the quality of democracy, particularly in terms of political competition, voter participation, and the legitimacy of the electoral process.

From the perspective of Administrative Law, sole-candidate elections highlight regulatory ambiguities and potential deficiencies in the legal framework that governs regional elections. Normatively, Administrative Law is intended to regulate the mechanisms of government management and elections to uphold democratic principles, such as fairness, transparency, and public participation. However, the recurrence of sole-candidate elections signals a need for a thorough evaluation of existing laws to address potential shortcomings in ensuring political competition and voter engagement.

This article identifies several critical issues arising from sole candidacy in regional elections. One of the foremost concerns is the legitimacy of the electoral process, as voters are constrained to choosing either the sole candidate or a blank ballot, which may lead to questions about the democratic validity of such elections. This situation diminishes the substance of political competition which is a fundamental element of democracy, by eliminating the opportunity for voters to evaluate and choose among diverse candidates with differing visions and policies. Furthermore, the absence of electoral competition has significant implications for public accountability. In the absence of alternative candidates, elected leaders may face reduced pressure to be responsive and accountable to their constituents, thereby potentially weakening the democratic governance process.

Specifically, this research focuses on examining how the presence of sole candidates affects the legitimacy and accountability of the electoral process at the provincial and district/city levels. One of its main objectives is to provide a deeper understanding of the gaps in the existing regulatory framework, as well as to offer legal solutions that can strengthen the mechanisms of democracy in Indonesia. Through the Administrative Law approach, this research hopes to answer several important questions, such as the extent to which the law balances the right to be elected and maintains healthy political competition in elections. This research will also assess the long-term impact of the sole candidate phenomenon on citizen political participation and trust in local government institutions. Thus, this investigation is

³ Aprilianti, D. D., Mashuri, M., & Humiati, H. "Analisa Yuridis Terhadap Aturan Hukum Calon Tunggal Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Dalam Perspektif Kepastian Hukum." *Yurijaya: Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum* 6, No.1 (2024): 21-33. <https://doi.org/10.51213/yurijaya.v6i1.127>

⁴ Aryo Wasisto, "Tantangan Demokrasi Dalam Pemilihan Calon Tunggal Pada Pilkada 2024", *Info Singkat* 16, No. 14 (2024):7-11 researchgate.net

expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of more inclusive and accountable public policies, as well as enrich the legal literature on elections and democracy.

Although various studies have examined regional head elections in Indonesia, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the Administrative Law studies related to elections with single candidates. Most previous researches have focused on the political, sociological, or economic aspects, while in-depth analyses from the perspective of administrative law have rarely been conducted. Existing studies typically highlight the political impact and voter participation, but they remain limited in their examination of the legal implications for the accountability and legitimacy of local governments elected through sole-candidate elections. Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap by contributing to the understanding of laws relevant to the context of state administration. By identifying the shortcomings in existing regulations and examining their impact on the quality of democracy, this study will clarify the need for reforms in electoral policy in Indonesia. The analysis of this gap also shows that there is yet to be a comprehensive legal solution to ensure that the election process with a sole candidate still meets fair and transparent democratic standards. Therefore, this article expects to address this void in the existing literature.

This research uses a novel approach by focusing on the legal implications of sole-candidate regional head elections, which have not been studied extensively from the perspective of Administrative Law. Previous research discussed this phenomenon from political and sociological perspectives, but there is as yet no comprehensive study that specifically examines the legal aspects in the context of governance and regional head elections. The novelty of this research lies in the analysis that focuses on the gaps in existing regulations and how these legal voids can disrupt fundamental democratic principles, such as legitimacy and accountability. In addition, it provides an important justification by emphasizing that better legal regulations are needed to ensure that elections with a single candidate align with healthy and fair democratic standards. The results of the study are expected not only to enrich the academic discourse in the field of Administrative Law but also to provide concrete and applicable policy recommendations for lawmakers and election organizers to improve the quality of democratic governance in Indonesia.

This study uses normative legal research with a legal and conceptual approach. The statute approach is used to examine regulations governing regional head elections with sole candidates, including laws and regulations from the KPU; whereas the conceptual approach is employed to understand legal concepts such as democracy, legitimacy, and accountability in the context of general elections. Data collection was carried out through library research, where secondary data, and secondary and tertiary legal materials served as the main sources. The collected data was analyzed through qualitative legal analysis methods, with systematic and historical interpretation techniques being used to assess the development of regulations, as well as comparative analysis to compare similar rules in other countries in order to find more applicable solutions.

B. Discussion

1. Legal Implications of Regional Head Elections with a Sole Candidate from the Perspective of Administrative Law

The election of a sole candidate as the head of district in Indonesia is an important highlight in the context of State Administration Law, as it creates a series of complex jurisprudential

issues.⁵ Administrative Law serves as a framework that regulates state governance and elections, with the aim of ensuring that democratic principles such as legitimacy, accountability, and public participation are upheld.⁶ In the context of elections with a single candidate, challenges arise as the democratic process, which should involve competition among candidates, is reduced to a limited choice. This raises fundamental questions about the extent to which an election can be considered legitimate and representative, especially when the public is not provided with adequate choices.

Recent research shows that the presence of sole candidates in regional head elections can lead to a significant decrease in voter participation rates. Data shows that in some single-candidate elections, voter turnout can drop by up to 30% as compared to those involving multiple candidates. This decline in participation is often caused by a sense of apathy among the public, who feel that their voices will not make a difference because of a lack of alternatives.⁷ This phenomenon is very disconcerting, especially in the context of the legitimacy of elected regional leaders which should stem from broad support from the community. Without adequate participation, it is difficult to claim that the elected leaders truly represent the will of the people.

Low voter participation in sole-candidate elections could weaken the legitimacy of the elected regional leaders, which in turn could affect government performance. When the community feels disengaged in the election process, there can be a lack of support for the policies implemented by the local leaders. Therefore, it is very important to re-evaluate the mechanisms of regional head elections in order to encourage higher participation and enhance the legitimacy of the government.⁸ Thus, in order to ensure that the principles of democracy are upheld, there needs to be a reform in the electoral system that allows for more than one candidate to emerge so that the public has real choices and can actively participate in the democratic process.

Within the framework of Administrative Law, legitimacy is one of the fundamental principles that must be upheld in every electoral process. This can come not only from the validity of the legal process but also from the level of community involvement in the choosing of leaders. Elections with single candidates can reduce the options available to the public, leading to a decrease in voter participation. According to Hans Kelsen's legal theory, law and political legitimacy are closely related to people's participation in competitive and open elections.⁹ If there is only one candidate, the aspect of competition as a part of the democratic system weakens, which ultimately undermines the elected leader's political legitimacy. Another study by Munir Fuady also states that a democratic electoral mechanism must provide ample space for competition in order to avoid political oligarchy and the monopoly of political power within the democratic system.¹⁰

In terms of accountability, this research shows that sole-candidate elections raise doubts about the selected candidate's ability to be responsible to the public. The accountability of local governments is closely related to the involvement of the community in selecting and granting mandates to prospective regional leaders. When the public lacks adequate choices, the level of

⁵ Febrian, Iza Rumesten RS, Apriyani L. "An Analysis Of Defeated Solo Candidate Of Indonesia's Simultaneous Regional Elections 2018." *2nd International Conference on Indonesian Legal Studies (ICILS 2019), Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 363. (2019): 100–106. 10.2991/icils-19.2019.18

⁶ Safa'at, M. A. "Solo Candidates: Ensuring A Path To Victory In Local Elections." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 7, No. 4 (2022): 1163-1176. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911211062485>

⁷ Aprilianti, D. D., Mashuri, M., & Humiati, H. "Analisa Yuridis Terhadap Aturan Hukum Calon Tunggal ...*Op.cit.*

⁸ S. N. Wijayanti. "Pilkada Serentak 2020: Evaluasi Partisipasi Pemilih Di Masa Pandemi Covid-19." *Jurnal Hukum Progresif* 12, No. 2 (2024): 78-93 <https://doi.org/10.14710/jhp.12.2.78-93>

⁹ Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

¹⁰ Munir Fuady, *Teori Negara Demokratis* (Jakarta: Citra Aditya Bakti, 2014).

accountability of elected officials tends to decrease due to the lack of competition that drives public responsibility. This aligns with the findings of Irman Putra Sidin, which indicate that political competition in elections is an important element in maintaining the transparency and accountability of public officials, especially at the local government level.¹¹

From a regulatory perspective, this study also shows that the existing laws and regulations of the KPU have not fully anticipated the increase in the number of sole candidates in regional head elections. Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Second Amendment to Law Number 1 of 2015 regarding the Establishment of Government Regulations in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2014 on the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors as Regional Law, stipulates that in the event there is only one pair of candidates, the election may still be held with the option of a "blank box." However, this provision is considered insufficient to ensure fair and representative competition, and it does not address the underlying issues related to legitimacy and accountability. Michael Coppedge, in his study on elections and democracy in various countries, also emphasizes the importance of strict limitations on sole candidate elections to maintain the quality of democracy and enhance public trust in the electoral process.¹²

Practically, the implication of this research finding is the need for reform in the legal framework of elections in Indonesia to mitigate the negative impact of the sole candidate phenomenon. One recommendation is to review the regulations governing the minimum number of candidates required to run in elections, as well as to provide incentives for independent candidates to participate in elections in order to encourage healthier competition. In this context, a study by Norris discussing electoral reforms in various countries suggests that increasing the number of candidates and lowering the nomination threshold could help address the issue of the lack of political competition in local elections.¹³

From the perspective of Administrative Law, the legal implications of regional head elections with sole candidates are very significant, especially concerning legitimacy, accountability, and political competition. Although the existing regulations provide a way out through the "blank box" option, this is not enough to address the fundamental issues in the electoral system. Therefore, further reforms in electoral laws are needed to strengthen the democratic system in Indonesia.

2. The Impact of the Sole-Candidate Regional Head Election Phenomenon on Democratic Principles

The phenomenon of sole-candidate regional head elections in Indonesia directly affects the three main principles of democracy, i.e, legitimacy, accountability, and public participation. These three principles are interconnected in maintaining the quality of democracy at the local level, where elections are not only about selecting leaders but also about providing space for the the community to actively participate in the democratic process.

a. Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a fundamental aspect of democracy, and refers to the acceptance and trust of the public in the election results and the government that is subsequently formed. In the context of sole-candidate elections, the legitimacy of the elected leader tends to decline because of the lack of healthy political competition. Hans Kelsen emphasizes that legitimacy in the electoral process is closely related to free and open political participation, where the people's choices

¹¹ Irman Putra Sidin, *Konstitusi dan Demokrasi: Menuju Pemilu yang Demokratis* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2016).

¹² Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (California: Stanford University Press, 1994).

¹³ Pippa Norris, *Electoral Integrity and Political Regimes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

must be based on diverse alternatives.¹⁴ When there is only one candidate, the public's choice is limited to selecting that person or "an empty box," which indirectly diminishes the quality of participation and active engagement in the electoral process. Michels also argues that limitations in political choices can lead to political oligarchy and reduce public trust in the ongoing democratic process.¹⁵

From a legal perspective, Administrative Law must ensure transparency and fairness in all electoral processes. However, the presence of a sole candidate has the potential to create gaps in the existing regulations, which in turn affects the legitimacy of elected regional leaders.¹⁶ The inability of regulations to provide adequate alternative candidates undermines the principle of legitimacy, which can lead to a crisis of trust in both provincial and district/city governments.

b. Accountability

Accountability relates to the extent to which elected leaders are responsible to the public. In a healthy democracy, political competition plays a crucial role in ensuring that elected candidates are accountable for their performance to the constituents who voted for them. Irman Putra Sidin's research indicates that political accountability is often closely related to the existence of political competition which encourages candidates to propose programs and policies that can be justified to voters.¹⁷ In sole-candidate elections, there is practically no political competition; therefore, voters have no alternatives to evaluate the programs or policies of other candidates. This has the potential to lower the quality of accountability because a single candidate does not face challenges or questions from other candidates during the campaign process.

In addition, Michael Saward explains that political accountability is one of the main mechanisms for maintaining the quality of democracy, where elected leaders must always be prepared to have their performance assessed and compared with other candidates.¹⁸ Without strong competition, accountability is difficult to achieve and elected regional leaders can operate with minimal public oversight.

c. Public Participation

Public participation lies at the heart of democracy, where society actively engages in the process of electing leaders. However, elections with sole candidates tend to lower voter participation, as the public may feel that the exercise is meaningless, given that there is an option only for one candidate. Robert Dahl revealed that in a healthy democracy, public participation must be encouraged through diverse political choices and open competition.¹⁹ When participation declines, it directly impacts the legitimacy of the elected leaders as voters who feel that they have no choice may be reluctant to engage in the electoral process.

Norris' research also emphasizes that the level of public participation is greatly influenced by the extent to which voters feel that their voices can make a difference.²⁰ In the context of a single candidate, this limited choice can lead to political apathy where voters feel that the

¹⁴ Hans Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

¹⁵ Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* (New York: Hearst's International Library, 1911).

¹⁶ Elly Nurlia, Utang Suwaryo, R. Widya Setabudi Sumadinata, Netty Prasetyani. "Woman Leader Victory as the Solo Candidate in the Elections in District of Lebak Banten Indonesia in 2018." *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies* 13, No. 4, (2019): 489–498. <https://doi.org/10.51870/CEJISS.XKV3716>

¹⁷ Irman Putra Sidin, *Konstitusi dan Demokrasi: Menuju Pemilu yang Demokratis* (Jakarta: Kencana, 2016).

¹⁸ Gadafi, K. & Nelwati, S. "Dampak Dinasti Politik Terhadap Culture Demokrasi Pancasila di Indonesia." *Journal Innovation In Education* 2, No.3 (2024): 133-148 <https://doi.org/10.59841/inoved.v2i3.1384>.

¹⁹ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²⁰ Pippa Norris, *Electoral Integrity and Political Regimes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

election outcome is predictable and their votes do not matter. Another impact of this decline in participation is a decrease in public trust in democracy itself.

A concrete example of the discussion regarding the impact of the sole-candidate phenomenon in regional head elections on democratic principles is the case of the regional head election in Surabaya in 2020. In that exercise, Surabaya only had one pair of candidates, namely the pair Eri Cahyadi and Armudji, who faced a "blank box." In this context, the legitimacy of the elected leader is the primary question. Although the Eri-Armudji couple won with a significant percentage of the votes, there were concerns about their legitimacy considering that voters did not have a diverse range of alternative candidates, making their choices very limited. This had the potential for delegitimization in the perception of some voters who felt that the election did not offer healthy competition.

From the perspective of accountability, in the absence of any opposing candidates, the sole pair of candidates does not have to undergo a competitive campaign process or strong public debates. Michael Saward argues that without competition, a sole candidate is not critically tested by the public or political opponents, which in turn can reduce the pressure for accountability after being elected.²¹ This also happened in Surabaya, where debates over policies or alternative ideas were not really brought up because of the lack of significant challengers.

Additionally, the voter turnout in the Surabaya regional head elections has also decreased compared to the previous exercises. This shows that when society is faced with a single-candidate option, the interest in participating in elections decreases, as voters may feel that their vote will not change the electoral outcomes. Robert Dahl also mentioned that limited choices can make voters feel disengaged from the political process, which reduces their active participation along with the quality of democracy.²²

The election of regional heads with sole candidates has had a negative impact on the fundamental principles of democracy, namely legitimacy, accountability, and public participation. Without healthy political competition, the legitimacy of elected leaders diminishes, political accountability weakens, and public participation decreases.²³ Therefore, improvements in election regulations that focus on maintaining candidate diversity and ensuring active community involvement in the electoral process are essential for upholding the quality of democracy at the local level.

3. Recommendations for Strengthening the Regulatory Framework and Governance of Elections in Indonesia.

A more comprehensive reform of the electoral system is necessary in order to strengthen the regulatory framework and governance of elections in Indonesia, particularly in the context of regional head elections with sole candidates. The phenomenon of sole candidates elections occurring more frequently in various regions indicates a weakness in the current regulations. This deficiency is evident from the lack of incentives for other candidates to participate in the elections, which ultimately has a negative impact on healthy political competition.²⁴ This threatens the fundamental principles of democracy such as legitimacy, accountability, and

²¹ Adhianugrah, M. A. "Dinamika Oligarki dalam Pilkada Kota Medan 2020: Analisis Pengaruh Elit Politik." *NeoRespublica: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 5, No.1, (2023): 380-391. <https://doi.org/10.52423/neores.v5i1.178>

²² Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²³ Asmorojati, A. W., Suyadi, Zalik Nuryana, Sumaryati & Megawati. "Systematic Literature Review of Postponed Elections During COVID-19: Campaigns, Regulations, and Budgets." *Heliyon* 10, No.4 (2024): 1-13 <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2272323>

²⁴ Rahman, R. A., Satriawan, I., & Diaz, M. R. "Calon Tunggal Pilkada: Krisis Kepemimpinan dan Ancaman Bagi Demokrasi." *Jurnal Konstitusi* 19, No.1 (2022): 47-72 <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk1913>

public participation, which are the foundation of any electoral process. In other words, the presence of single candidates not only reduces options for voters but also has the potential to create an unhealthy political climate, where elected leaders do not feel compelled to be accountable for their policies to the public.

It is important to conduct a thorough evaluation of the existing regulations and identify aspects that need improvement. Based on the latest data, approximately 70% of voters in areas with only one candidate felt dissatisfaction with the available choices, and over 60% of them expressed that they did not trust the election process.²⁵ This data shows that public dissatisfaction with sole-candidate elections can lead to political apathy, as citizens feel that their voices have no impact. Thus, reform should not only focus on adding new candidates but also on improving the quality of the existing ones, including better training and development of leadership skills.

The following are some recommendations based on the results of this research and supported by existing literature reviews:

a. Reduction of the Nomination Threshold and Encouragement of Independent Candidates

One of the main weaknesses of the current election regulations is the high threshold for candidacy, which hinders the emergence of a larger number of candidates. Law Number 10 of 2016 stipulates that candidate pairs must be supported by at least 20% of the seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) or 25% of valid votes in the previous general election. This threshold often makes it difficult for smaller political parties or independent candidates to run, thereby reducing the number of competing candidates. It is recommended that the nomination threshold be lowered, especially for independent candidates, in order to encourage healthier competition. Pippa Norris suggests that electoral reforms to lower the nomination threshold could enhance candidate diversity and promote more inclusive political participation.²⁶

b. Reform of the Sole-Candidate Mechanism

Current regulations allow elections to proceed even if there is only one pair of candidates, with voters having the option to choose between the sole candidate or a "blank box." However, this system does not guarantee adequate representation and competition. Election laws should promote political diversity and public engagement. Therefore, a recommendation can be made to add stricter mechanisms for handling sole candidates, such as extending the registration period for candidates or providing incentives for smaller political parties and independent candidates to participate. This would increase the chances of additional candidates emerging and enrich political competition in the region.

c. Increased Oversight of the Nomination Process

The nomination process for candidates within political parties is often managed in a closed and non-transparent manner, which can lead to the emergence of a single candidate due to internal party arrangements. This shows the importance of increasing transparency in the nomination process within political parties.²⁷ Due to this reason, regulatory reforms should also include enhanced oversight over political parties' nomination processes, so that candidate selection is conducted more transparently and in line with the aspirations of the public. This oversight can be carried out by independent institutions such as the KPU or the Election

²⁵ Mahpudin, M. "Protest Voting dan Abstention dalam Pilkada Calon Tunggal: Kasus Pilkada Serentak 2018." *KEMUDI: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan* 5, No. 2, (2021): 149–166 <https://doi.org/10.31629/kemudi.v5i02.2643>

²⁶ Pippa Norris, *Electoral Integrity and Political Regimes* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

²⁷ Muzykant V.L., Muqsith M.A. "Social Consequences of the 2020 Regional Elections in Indonesia Under the Covid-19 Pandemic." *RUDN Journal of Sociology* 21, No.3 (2021): 536-542. 10.22363/2313-2272-2021-21-3-536-542

Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) by having greater authority to ensure that every nomination process within the party is democratic and participatory.

d. Increasing Public Participation through Political Education

The decline in voter participation in sole-candidate elections has become one of the pressing issues in democracies. Robert Dahl argues that low political participation is often caused by a lack of public understanding of the importance of elections and the choices available.²⁸ Therefore, more serious political education efforts are needed to increase voter participation, especially in areas prone to having single candidates. These political education campaigns must involve the government, political parties, and civil society to raise awareness of the importance of participation in elections and how to vote critically, even in the presence of a sole candidate.

e. Encouraging Policies to Strengthen the Regional Head Election System

Long-term policies are needed to strengthen the regional head election system by ensuring broader and more balanced political representation. Michael Coppedge emphasizes that the strengthening of the electoral system must include efforts to encourage active citizen participation through regulatory reforms that are friendlier to independent candidates and an increase in trust towards political parties.²⁹ One recommendation is to introduce an open proportional electoral system, where voters have greater control over whom they choose within political parties, thus minimizing party control that could lead to the emergence of sole candidates.

Some of these recommendations aim to address weaknesses in the regulation and governance of elections in Indonesia by focusing on promoting healthy political competition, enhancing the transparency of the nomination process, and strengthening political participation. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to reduce the frequency of emergence of sole candidates and strengthen the quality of the country's democracy.

C. Conclusion

The occurrence of sole-candidate regional head elections in Indonesia highlights critical challenges to democratic principles, particularly legitimacy, accountability, and political competition. These elections with their limited voter choices erode meaningful competition, reduce voter participation, and weaken the legitimacy of the elected leaders. The existing regulatory framework, including the "blank box" provision in Law Number 10 of 2016, inadequately addresses these issues and fails to ensure fair and representative elections. Political accountability diminishes without robust competition as leaders are less compelled to respond to public demands. To address these deficiencies, reforms must enhance electoral competition by lowering nomination thresholds, encouraging independent candidates, and ensuring broader public participation. Drawing on international experiences, such as Michael Coppedge's insights on democracy and Hans Kelsen's legitimacy theory, these changes are essential to strengthen the democratic framework and mitigate the risks of political stagnation, ultimately reinforcing public trust in Indonesia's electoral system.

The absence of political competition in sole-candidate regional head elections diminishes the legitimacy of the elected leaders as voters face limited choices which undermines their trust in the democratic process. The decline in public participation is driven by voter apathy and

²⁸ Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

²⁹ Alhadar, S., Sahi, Y., & Katili, P. P. "Penguatan Demokrasi Dan Pemilu Bagi Pemilih Pemula Menjelang Pemilihan Umum Tahun 2024:(Studi Pengabdian Pada Mahasiswa Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Gorontalo)." *Community Development Journal: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat* 5, No.1 (2024): 1115-1123. <https://doi.org/10.31004/cdj.v5i1.25097>

disillusionment with the lack of alternatives as evidenced by reduced voter turnout in such elections. Additionally, accountability is weakened because the sole candidates are not subjected to rigorous public debate or competition, which reduces the pressure to justify their policies or performance. Legal frameworks, including the "blank box" option in elections, fail to address these structural deficiencies, allowing the persistence of this democratic deficit. A notable example is Surabaya's 2020 election, which demonstrated reduced voter participation and thus prompted questions of legitimacy. To address these issues, reforms must promote candidate diversity, enhance competition, and ensure active public engagement; thus safeguarding the integrity of Indonesia's democratic processes.

D. Suggestion

It is recommended that electoral regulations in Indonesia be comprehensively reformed to enhance the quality of democracy, especially when faced with the occurrence of sole candidates in regional head elections. The nomination threshold for political parties and independent candidates should be lowered in order to encourage more candidates to participate, which will ultimately increase the choices for voters and strengthen the legitimacy of elected leaders. In addition, the handling of sole candidates must be tightened by extending the registration period for contenders and providing incentives for smaller parties and independents. Greater transparency in the political parties' nomination processes is also important in order to avoid the selection of a sole candidate through undemocratic internal political processes. Political education should also be enhanced to motivate voter participation, even in situations involving single candidates, in order to ensure public involvement in the local election process. Further evaluation of the effectiveness of the "empty box" mechanism is also necessary to ensure that elections remain representative and democratic, even when only one candidate is contesting. Implementing these recommendations will help prevent the emergence of sole candidates in future regional head elections and thus strengthen democracy in Indonesia.

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