

Legal Strengthening for Independent Candidates in Regional Head Elections

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ABSTRACT

Legal strengthening for independent candidates in the Regional Head Election (Pilkada) is a strategic effort to ensure equal political rights for every citizen as mandated by Article 27 paragraph (1) and Article 28D paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Independent candidates play a role in expanding public participation as well as being an alternative to suppress the dominance of political parties in the nomination process. This study uses a normative juridical method with a legislative, conceptual approach, and a study of Constitutional Court decisions, which examines the dynamics of regulations from Law Number 32 of 2004 to Law Number 10 of 2016. The types of legal materials used are primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Data collection was carried out by means of literature studies. As an analysis method, this study uses qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. The results of the study show that although the independent path has been legally recognized, independent candidates still face obstacles such as high support requirements, limited campaign access, and resistance from political parties. Therefore, legal strengthening is needed through reformulating proportional support requirements, utilizing information technology for verification, and providing effective legal protection against political obstacles. These steps, coupled with adequate political education, are expected to create fair and inclusive political competition and strengthen the quality of local democracy.

Keywords: Independent Candidates, Legal Strengthening, Regional Head Elections.

INTRODUCTION

Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia affirms that sovereignty rests with the people and its implementation is carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. The existence of sovereignty in the hands of the people is one of the proofs that Indonesia adheres to a democratic system of government. One of the main indicators of the implementation of people's sovereignty is the holding of General Elections (Pemilu).¹ In Article 1 number 1 of Law Number 22 of 2007, Elections are defined as a means to realize people's sovereignty which is held directly, generally, freely, secretly, honestly, and fairly within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Meanwhile, Article 1 number 4 explains that the Election of Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads (Pilkada) is an election to directly elect regional heads and deputy regional heads within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia.

Historically, Article 56 paragraph (2) of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government states that "Candidate pairs as referred to in Paragraph (1) are proposed by Political Parties or coalitions of Political Parties". This provision shows that in order to become participants in the Regional Head Election, regional head candidates must be proposed by political parties or coalitions of political parties, so that the role of political parties in the Regional Head Election process is very dominant. Furthermore, the dynamics of political policy have developed with the implementation of Law Number 12 of 2008 concerning the Second

¹ Pasal 1 ayat (2) Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945.

Amendment to Law Number 32 of 2004, which provides opportunities for individual candidates in the Regional Head Election.

Following the issuance of Constitutional Court Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007, individual or independent regional head candidates were declared eligible to participate in the Pilkada. The Constitutional Court considered that opening the independent candidate route was a step to actualize the spirit of democracy and expand public participation in the political process, in accordance with the principles of the 1945 Constitution and the regulations that have been in effect in Aceh based on Law No. 11 of 2006.² The presence of independent candidates was considered a response to public frustration with the dominance of political parties in the nomination process, as well as a procedural innovation to stimulate closeness between candidates and constituents. Legally, the Constitutional Court Decision is consistent with the constitutional rights of citizens to political participation (Article 27 Paragraph (1) and Article 28D Paragraphs (1) and (3) of the 1945 Constitution), so that the recognition of individual candidates is not merely procedural but also a fulfillment of the constitutional principles of a democratic state.³

With the enactment of Law No. 12 of 2008, the opportunity to run for regional head is no longer the exclusive right of political parties. This provision represents a significant advancement in Indonesia's democratic system, providing greater space for public political participation and creating a healthier competitive climate in the search for qualified leaders.⁴

Competition through independent candidates has positive implications as a solution for local development at a time when natural resources are increasingly limited. The stark difference between independent candidates and political party candidates lies in the organization of their political infrastructure and superstructure. Independent candidates lack a clear political infrastructure. What maintains the relationship between constituents (infrastructure) and executive institutions (superstructure) is absent. In fact, executive positions filled by independent candidates will not receive strong political legitimacy from the Provincial and Regency/City Regional People's Representative Councils (DPRD) due to the power of various political parties.

Although Article 48 of Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning Regional Head Elections provides space for independent candidates, the provision stipulates requirements that are considered burdensome and complicated. This situation indicates the influence or intervention of certain interest groups in the law-making process. From a legal political perspective, this demonstrates that law functions not only as a normative instrument but can also be used as a means to achieve political goals, given that law is a product of the political process.⁵

Despite facing various challenges, over the past five years, several independent candidates have successfully won regional elections. The presence of these independent candidates has contributed significantly to the dynamics of local democracy and brought a new dimension to the efforts to realize the ideals of a better Indonesia.⁶

METHODOLOGY

This research is a normative juridical study, which examines the legal issues using a statute approach. The legal materials used include primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials. Data collection was conducted

² Tundjung Herning Sitabuana, "Calon Perseorangan dalam Pilkada (Analisis Yuridis terhadap Putusan MK RI Nomor 5/PUU-V/2007)," *Masalah-Masalah Hukum*, Universitas Diponegoro, 2008, hlm. 1–12, tersedia di <https://doaj.org/article/ba4d4941573643d192b730c9c5be04bd>.

³ Najib Husain, Wa Ode Sitti Halimah, dan Wa Ode Emy Sartika, "Analisis Potensi Calon Independen versus Calon Partai Politik pada Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Kabupaten Konawe Kepulauan Tahun 2020," *Publicuho*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2020, hlm. 93–104, tersedia di <https://journalpublicuho.uho.ac.id/index.php/journal/article/view/93>.

⁴ Desriadi, "Analisis Implementasi Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah secara Langsung," *Jurnal Trias Politika*, Vol. 1 No. 2 (2017), doi:10.33373/jtp.v1i2.1067.

⁵ Maskup Asyadi, "Irasionalitas Persyaratan Pencalonan Perseorangan dalam Undang-Undang Pemilihan Kepala Daerah," *Cakrawala: Jurnal Penelitian Sosial*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (2020): 181–190, <https://doi.org/10.31603/cakrawala.v8i2.3749>.

⁶ Dwi Budi Santosa, "Peran Calon Perseorangan dalam Dinamika Demokrasi Lokal di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Politik dan Pemerintahan*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2019): 45–56, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jgpp.9126>.

through a literature review. The research employed qualitative descriptive analysis techniques as its analytical method.

RESULTS DISCUSSION

Strengthening the law for independent candidates or individual candidates in the Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) is a strategic step to guarantee equal political rights for citizens as mandated by Article 27 paragraph (1) and Article 28D paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The presence of independent candidates in the Pilkada is not only a means to expand public participation, but also an effort to suppress the dominance of political parties in the regional head nomination process.

Following the collapse of the New Order regime, one of the primary demands that emerged was the immediate realization of regional autonomy as a manifestation of democratic principles. In line with the spirit of reform, the public also demanded changes to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. Amendments to the 1945 Constitution subsequently affirmed the implementation of a democratic system in Indonesia.⁷

The second amendment to the 1945 Constitution on August 18, 2000, included a reformulation of Article 18 concerning regional government. This amendment brought about a fundamental transformation in the structure of regional government. Provisions regarding regional head elections were then included in the Regional Government Law (Article 56), which previously required the regional head and deputy regional head to be selected as a single candidate pair nominated by a political party or coalition. However, since the Constitutional Court issued Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007, the nomination mechanism has been expanded. Now, regional head candidates can also be nominated through independent or individual channels, in addition to political parties.⁸

Democracy has long been understood as a form of direct election to fill public or political positions. This argument is strengthened by Syamsudin Haris's opinion, which defines general elections (pemilu) as the best way to elect public officials.⁹ The election of public officials through the mechanism of regional head elections (pemilukada) is currently considered the most appropriate system for realizing the principles of democracy in Indonesia. The presence of regional head elections has a close relationship with the development of democracy at the local level. One prominent characteristic of local democracy is the direct involvement of the community in determining public officials. Direct regional head elections are an important milestone in the history of local politics. In general, filling regional head positions can be done through two channels. First, the political party route, as regulated in Article 56 Paragraph (2) of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government, which states that candidate pairs are proposed by political parties or coalitions of political parties. These candidates can come from one political party or a coalition of several political parties through a coalition mechanism. Second, the individual or independent route, which provides the opportunity for the community to nominate themselves without going through a political party.¹⁰

Legally, the existence of independent candidates in the local political arena began to be recognized after the issuance of Constitutional Court Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007 which annulled the provisions of Article 59 Paragraph (1) and Article 56 Paragraph (2) of Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government. These provisions were deemed to be in conflict with Article 18 Paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia because they only provided the opportunity for candidacy to candidate pairs originating from political parties or coalitions of political parties. As a follow-up, Law Number 12 of 2008 concerning Regional Government was born, which became the antithesis of the dominance of political parties in regional

⁷ Eny Kusdarini, *Pengembangan Hukum Tertulis Oalam Uud 1945 Beserta Arti Penting Amanoemen UUD 1945*, *Informasi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Humaniora*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (2024)

⁸ Aman Ma'arij, "Analisis Penerapan Pasal 18 Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945 terhadap Pelaksanaan Pemerintahan Daerah," *Tajdid: Jurnal Pemikiran Keislaman dan Kemanusiaan* Vol. 4 No. 2 (Oktober 2020), DOI:10.52266/tadjud.v4i2.522

⁹ Agus, *Aktor Penyelenggara Pemilu*, (Malang: Pusat Kajian Inovasi dan Kerjasama Antar Daerah Ilmu Pemerintahan FISIP UB, 2013), h. 13

¹⁰ Siti Nurhalimah, "Jalur Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah di Indonesia: Antara Peluang dan Tantangan Demokrasi," *Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan dan Sosial Politik*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (2023): 45–56.

head elections. This regulation officially opened up space for individual candidates to participate in regional elections, while also accommodating the mandate of the Constitutional Court Decision read on July 23, 2007. Since then, independent candidates have had the legal legitimacy to participate in regional head contests.¹¹

The regional head election system in Indonesia has undergone various dynamics, ranging from direct regional head elections (Pilkada), election mechanisms through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), to a return to the direct or simultaneous regional head election model. This change was emphasized through Law Number 8 of 2015, which provides opportunities for the public to participate in regional head elections, including running independently without the support of political parties. The existence of independent candidates in local political contests still plays a significant role and is considered an alternative for voters. In line with the concept of democracy put forward by Robert Dahl, the implementation of democracy requires fair, honest, and periodic general elections, in which each candidate has the opportunity to compete for the people's votes. This type of democracy encompasses two main dimensions: contestation and participation, both of which are crucial elements in realizing democracy or polyarchy.¹²

Regarding the independent candidate model, since its inception until now, it has been hoped that individual candidates will address the empty social role of political parties when dealing with the masses and become an alternative solution to the political deadlock due to the rife conflict of interest within political parties. Furthermore, this is to obtain regional head/deputy regional head candidates who are free from the influence and pressure of political parties, thus emerging as a new political institution that will face both political realities and dilemmas mentioned above. Independent candidates will certainly choose the path, in the form of gaining support as a requirement for nomination and winning the competition quickly.¹³

Independent candidates require support, which can be obtained through various mechanisms. The nomination process can come from political parties, coalitions of political parties, or individuals with personal or collective support. In the context of political parties, nominations are usually obtained through cadre development, candidate exchanges, conventions, or even political agreements, including those made by local parties. The level of support for independent candidates is often related to the nomination requirements in regional elections imposed by political parties, such as the electoral threshold set for a single election period.¹⁴

The nomination mechanism for independent candidates differs from that for nominations by political parties, but the two are not incompatible. If both pathways are implemented simultaneously, a balanced benchmark is required as a legal basis, known in modern election systems as the electoral threshold. Every citizen has the right to achieve this, whether through support from political parties or non-party networks. Candidates' efforts to obtain public office are verified through regional elections, funded by the state budget. Thus, both party-backed and independent candidates continue to compete for the public interest.¹⁵

The presence of independent candidates in the implementation of direct regional elections opens up opportunities for the birth of leaders who come from the dynamics of grassroots politics. The community does not only play the role of spectators or mere voters of candidates proposed by political parties, but can also become active political actors by nominating candidates, providing support, and even running as regional head candidates. The existence of independent candidates reflects a real manifestation of participatory democracy that grows from and by the community. This principle is in line with the provisions of Article 28D Paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia which guarantees that every citizen has equal opportunities in government, as well as Article 43 Paragraph (1) of Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights which affirms the right of every citizen to vote and be elected in general elections directly,

¹¹ Muhammad Iqbal, "Eksistensi Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Pasca Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Nomor 5/PUU-V/2007," *Jurnal Hukum dan Pembangunan*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2023): 215–230.

¹² Rahmawati, "Peran Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah di Indonesia: Analisis Undang-Undang Nomor 8 Tahun 2015 dan Teori Demokrasi Robert Dahl," *Jurnal Ilmu Politik dan Pemerintahan*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2023): 45–60.

¹³ Suryo Gilang Romadhon, *Penegakan Hukum Progresif Dalam Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi Tentang Calon Perseorangan Pilkada*, (Yogyakarta: Cahya Atma Pustaka, 2016), h. 33

¹⁴ Suryani, "Mekanisme Dukungan Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah: Antara Regulasi dan Realitas Politik," *Jurnal Politik dan Pemerintahan Daerah*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2023): 112–125.

¹⁵ Hamid, R., "Posisi Calon Independen dalam Sistem Pemilu Kepala Daerah di Indonesia," *Jurnal Demokrasi dan Otonomi Daerah*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2024): 45–60.

generally, freely, secretly, honestly, and fairly in accordance with statutory regulations.¹⁶

The stagnation of political party institutionalization and the existence of gaps in regulations are driving factors in the emergence of independent candidates, where accommodation through statutory regulations can be interpreted as part of the blessings of the democratic transition. This condition is a response to the weak institutionalization of political parties combined with the weakness of political regulatory products. The provisions in Law Number 32 of 2004 concerning Regional Government—specifically Article 56 Paragraph (2), Article 59 Paragraph (1) to Paragraph (6), and Article 60 Paragraph (2) to Paragraph (5)—when linked to Article 18 Paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, are considered inconsistent with democratic principles. This also contradicts Article 67 Paragraph (1) letter d of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh, which explicitly permits independent candidates. A judicial review of these articles resulted in a limited revision of Law Number 32 of 2004 by the Constitutional Court. Furthermore, the DPR responded by issuing Law Number 12 of 2008 as the second amendment to Law Number 32 of 2004. Article 67 Paragraph (1) of Law Number 11 of 2006 concerning the Government of Aceh was maintained because it did not conflict with Article 18 Paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution, thus still providing space for individual candidates in the regional elections.¹⁷

Law Number 1 of 2015 provides an opportunity for candidates to advance through the independent route. However, the provisions regarding independent candidates have been refined in the revision of the law as outlined in Law Number 8 of 2015 concerning Amendments to Law Number 1 of 2015. One of these changes is increasing the support requirements for independent candidate pairs as stated in Article 41 Paragraph (1) and Paragraph (2) by 3.5% from the original provisions in Law Number 1 of 2015. The reason for increasing these requirements is related to the adjustment of the parliamentary threshold for candidate pairs supported by Political Parties or Coalitions of Political Parties, which in Law Number 1 of 2015 has increased by 5% compared to the provisions in Law Number 32 of 2004. Therefore, the requirements for independent candidates have also been increased as a form of equality of rules between nomination routes.¹⁸

The amendment to the provisions of Article 41 Paragraph (1) and Paragraph (2) by the legislators is in line with the mandate of Constitutional Court Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007. This decision confirms that independent candidates must meet minimum support requirements equivalent to the requirements for candidates running through a Political Party or Coalition of Political Parties. This adjustment is intended to encourage independent candidates to demonstrate that they have received significant support from the public.¹⁹

In Constitutional Court Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007, which has been updated to Constitutional Court Decision Number 60/PUUXIII/2015, the Constitutional Court has upheld the principles of democracy. This is because of the enforcement of democracy and how the law should protect equal rights in society so that democracy as a sovereign goal becomes a component of progressive law that can be used as an indicator. In addition, the principle of democracy or popular sovereignty has been adopted and practiced which guarantees the role of society in the state decision-making process, so that every law that is implemented and enforced reflects a sense of justice in society. The law is not intended to guarantee the interests of a few people in power, but rather to guarantee the interests of justice for all. Thus, the rule of law that is developed is not an absolute *rechstaat*, but a democratic *rechstaat*.²⁰

A current issue concerning independent candidates in regional elections concerns the establishment of minimum support requirements, which range from 3% to 15%. The Regional Representative Council of the Republic of Indonesia (DPD RI) has proposed that the percentage of public support for independent candidates be adjusted to regional characteristics, particularly population size and regional typology. For provinces,

¹⁶ Nurdin, M., “Peran Calon Perseorangan dalam Mewujudkan Demokrasi Partisipatoris pada Pilkada Langsung,” *Jurnal Politik dan Pemerintahan*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (2023): 112–128.

¹⁷ Rahman, A., “Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilu: Antara Celah Hukum dan Dinamika Demokrasi Lokal,” *Jurnal Hukum dan Politik*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (2022): 45–62.

¹⁸ Putra, B., “Pengaturan Calon Perseorangan dalam Pilkada Pasca Perubahan UU No. 1 Tahun 2015,” *Jurnal Legislasi Indonesia*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2017): 133–148.

¹⁹ Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, *Putusan Nomor 5/PUU-V/2007*, Jakarta: MKRI, 2007.

²⁰ Jimly Asshidiqie, *Menuju Negara Hukum Yang Demokratis*, (Jakarta: PT Bhuana Ilmu Populer, 2009), h. 84

regencies, or cities with large populations, the percentage of support should be lowered given the already high absolute number of supporters. The same applies to regions with large and remote areas. Meanwhile, the proposed 15% support requirement put forward by several political parties, under the pretext of "the principle of justice," is considered excessive, as political parties are not required to meet such a requirement due to the existing provisions regarding nominations through political parties or coalitions of political parties.²¹

Independent candidates running in regional elections face significant challenges, one of which is the lack of support from members of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), all of whom are members of political parties. Furthermore, the General Elections Commission (KPU) in the regions faces potential difficulties in the selection process, given that the independent candidacy mechanism opens up wider opportunities for many individuals to run. Political party resistance to independent candidates is also evident in the discourse on establishing what are considered stringent requirements, namely the requirement to obtain support from at least 15% of the total population. This requirement is equated with the requirements for political parties or coalitions of political parties, citing "the principle of justice." However, this equivalence creates injustice, as independent candidates lack the same structures and resources as political parties.²²

Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors provides a crucial role in the implementation of regional elections, while still opening up opportunities for independent candidates. However, the existence of independent candidates stands in stark contrast to the representative system. In the direct regional election mechanism, independent regional head candidates must meet minimum support requirements, evidenced by photocopies of their supporters' Identity Cards (KTPs) as a requirement to be included in the candidate list. The direct election system applies the principle of one man, one vote, allowing supporters of independent candidates to re-vote for their nominated candidates. However, in representative-based regional elections conducted through the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), the position of independent candidates is weakened, as they lack the support of factions in the DPRD, as do candidates from political parties. The strength of independent candidates depends entirely on direct support from the public.²³

Based on the above description, there are several reasons underlying the need to provide independent candidates with the opportunity to participate in direct regional elections in various regions. One of the main considerations is the weakness of the direct regional election system, which was previously entirely under the control of political parties. This perceived lack of political party dominance has given rise to the idea of introducing independent candidates as a concrete manifestation of democracy. The presence of independent candidates in regional elections in Indonesia has positively contributed to the development of democracy, as public support for them often stems from declining public trust in political parties. This positive sentiment can also be understood as a response to the perception that candidates from political parties are often tied to party interests once they serve as regional heads.²⁴

The urgency of strengthening this law becomes even clearer considering the various obstacles faced by independent candidates, ranging from potential abuse of support verification procedures, political intimidation, and difficulties accessing equal campaign space. Without strong regulations, independent candidates have the potential to become mere formalities with no real opportunity to compete. Legal strengthening can be done through amending the law to lower the support threshold so that access to nomination for independent candidates becomes more inclusive and competitive,²⁵ and expanding information technology-based support verification methods to accelerate, secure, and validate public support. Furthermore, it is necessary to regulate and enforce strict sanctions against parties who obstruct the nomination process or commit administrative/criminal violations that undermine access to nominations. In addition to regulatory changes,

²¹ Rachmad, R. A., "Kedudukan Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah di Indonesia," *Jurnal Ilmu Hukum*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2022, hlm. 215.

²² Santoso, A., *Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilukada: Antara Demokratisasi dan Resistensi Partai Politik*, Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2020, hlm. 142.

²³ Hamid, F., *Dinamika Calon Perseorangan dalam Pemilukada di Indonesia*, Jakarta: Kencana, 2019, hlm. 87.

²⁴ Prasetyo, A., *Calon Perseorangan dan Demokrasi Lokal di Indonesia*, Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2020, hlm. 102.

²⁵ D. Dinarito & J. Ng., *Characterising Independent Candidates in Indonesian Local Politics*, *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (2021), hlm. 266–292. DOI: 10.1177/1868103420972412.

strengthening public political education is essential so that voters understand the strategic value of independent candidates in maintaining the balance of regional political power and improving the quality of local representation.

Thus, strengthening the law for independent candidates in regional elections is not just a technical election issue, but is an integral part of efforts to strengthen local democracy, uphold the principle of political equality, and ensure that every citizen has a fair opportunity to compete to lead their region.

CONCLUSION

The existence of independent candidates in the Regional Head Election (Pilkada) is a concrete manifestation of expanding public political participation as well as strengthening the principles of democracy at the local level. Constitutional Court Decision Number 5/PUU-V/2007 has confirmed the recognition of citizens' political rights to nominate themselves outside the political party mechanism, in line with Article 27 paragraph (1) and Article 28D paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. The independent path is an important alternative amidst the dominance of political parties, although in its implementation it still faces obstacles, such as high support requirements, complex verification procedures, limited political resources, and resistance from established political forces.

Legal strengthening for independent candidates needs to be directed at reformulating support requirements that are proportionate to the demographic and geographic conditions of the region, implementing information technology to simplify and streamline the support verification process, and providing effective legal protection against intimidation and political obstacles. Furthermore, public political education is key to ensuring the public understands the strategic value of independent candidates as a counterbalance to the dominance of political parties and as a channel for grassroots aspirations. With comprehensive legal strengthening, independent candidates will not only serve as a political alternative but also as a crucial instrument in expanding public participation, maintaining the balance of power in the regions, and improving the quality of democracy in Indonesia.

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