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# Dynamics of a Single Candidate for Regional Head Election in the Democratic System in Indonesia

# Muawafah<sup>1</sup>, Lita Tyesta Addy Listya Wardhani<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Master of Law, Faculty of Law, Diponegoro University, Indonesia <sup>2</sup> Lecturer of the Faculty of Law, Diponegoro University, Indonesia

**ABSTRACT:** As the 2024 regional head elections approach, strategies are needed to maintain the democratic system in Indonesia to anticipate the occurrence of single candidates. The trend of single candidates in regional head elections is a concern for the nation, as the world's third-largest democracy should be able to conduct competitive elections with at least two pairs of regional head candidates. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate the causes of single candidates in regional head elections in Indonesia and to develop strategies to anticipate single candidates in the 2024 regional head elections. This research uses doctrinal/normative legal research methods. The results of this study indicate the factors causing single candidates in regional head elections are: the high cost of political campaigns, high thresholds for candidacy, and the significant power of incumbents. Strategies to anticipate single candidates in regional head elections through independent candidates.

KEYWORDS- Single Candidate, Regional Head Elections, Democracy, Politics.

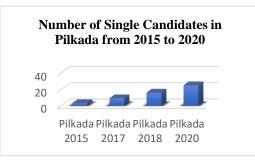
# I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that adheres to a democratic system, where the people are placed as the highest authority, especially in determining their government leaders. This provision is enshrined in Article 1, paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which states that sovereignty is in the hands of the people and is exercised according to the Constitution. Democracy is a form of political governance in which the government's power derives from the people, by the people, and for the people.

Indonesia is the third-largest democracy in the world. Its democratic practices have become more mature and advanced, consistently prioritizing the people as the highest authority. Public participation in politics demonstrates the growing presence of democracy in Indonesia. This political participation is one form of the actualization of the democratic process. It can be expressed directly through the people's celebration, officially called General Elections, including both legislative elections and regional head elections.<sup>1</sup>

One of the discourses in regional head elections (Pilkada) that has garnered attention and discussion is the emergence of single candidate practices in Pilkada, both at the regency, city, and provincial levels.<sup>2</sup> The trend of single candidates in Pilkada has been increasing dramatically over time. In the 2015 Pilkada, there were only 3 (three) single candidates; this increased to 9 (nine) in the 2017 Pilkada, 16 (sixteen) in the 2018 Pilkada, and 25 (twenty-five) in the 2020 Pilkada.<sup>3</sup>

#### Table 1. The trend of increasing single candidates in local elections from 2015 to 2020



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Maringan Panjaitan and Simson B.L, 'Analisis Proses Dan Faktor Penyebab Lahirnya Pasangan Calon Tunggal Versus Kotak Kosong Pada Pilkada Serentak Tahun 2020', *Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Dan Politik*, 1.02 (2021).



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Hannan Abd, 'Tingginya Angka Calon Tunggal Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Dan Melemahnya Demokrasi Di Indonesia Kontemporer', *Jurnal Politik Walisongo*, 5.1 (2023).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Robi Ardianto, 'Fenomena Calon Tunggal Dalam Pilkada Meningkat, Abhan: Menarik Dijadikan Penelitian', *Bawaslu*, 2021 <a href="https://www.bawaslu.go.id/id/berita/fenomena-calon-tunggal-dalam-pilkada-meningkat-abhan-menarik-dijadikan-penelitian">https://www.bawaslu.go.id/id/berita/fenomena-calon-tunggal-dalam-pilkada-meningkat-abhan-menarik-dijadikan-penelitian</a>> [accessed 4 June 2024].

The rising trend of single candidates in Pilkada has become an anomaly given that Indonesia adopts a multiparty democratic system, has a large electorate, and is supported by the participation of many political parties. With these characteristics, the dynamics of leadership contests between parties should be competitive and diverse, rather than normative and uniform.<sup>4</sup>

The emergence of single candidates in simultaneous Pilkada began in 2015 when political parties were reluctant to nominate their cadres to compete. In response to the increasingly heated issue of single candidates and the lack of a solution, the Constitutional Court issued a decision on the judicial review of Law Number 8 of 2015 through Decision Number 100/PUU-XIII/2015. This decision allowed regions with only one pair of regional head candidates to still hold Pilkada in 2015 without having to postpone it to the next period. Interestingly, the Constitutional Court rejected the petitioner's request to interpret single candidates as acceptable through a blank box mechanism. Instead, the Constitutional Court interpreted single candidate pairs to be elected through "agree" and "disagree" columns, aiming to uphold the voting rights of the people as the highest sovereign in democracy.<sup>5</sup>

The Constitutional Court's decision was followed up by the General Elections Commission (KPU) by issuing Circular Letter Number 462/KPU/X/2015, allowing regions with a single candidate pair to still hold elections on December 9, 2015. Although the Constitutional Court and the KPU have strived to protect and respect the people's right to choose their regional heads, the Constitutional Court's decision and the steps taken by the KPU have still drawn significant criticism. The main criticism revolves around the concept of democracy with only one election candidate.<sup>6</sup>

Based on the background above, the formulated research questions are: Why are there single candidates in the regional head elections in Indonesia, and what are the strategies to anticipate single candidates in the democratic contest of the 2024 regional head elections ?.

#### II. RESEARCH METHODS

A method is a framework for performing an action or a structured way of organizing ideas that are orderly, directed, and contextually appropriate to the intended purpose.<sup>7</sup> Research, on the other hand, is a fundamental means for the development of science and technology to systematically, methodologically, and consistently uncover the truth through the analysis and construction of collected and obtained data.<sup>8</sup>

This study employs doctrinal/normative legal research methods, which involve examining the law as a set of norms/rules applicable in society.<sup>9</sup> The approaches used include the statutory approach, the conceptual approach, and the case statutory approach.<sup>10</sup> The statutory approach involves reviewing legislation that regulates single candidates in Pilkada. The conceptual approach explores the concept of democracy. The case statutory approach is applied to observe the dynamics of single candidates in regional head elections within the democratic system in Indonesia.

#### **III.RESEARCH RESULTS**

#### A. Factors Contributing to the Emergence of Single Candidates in Regional Head Elections in Indonesia

Democracy is a form or mechanism of government in which the sovereignty of the people (the power of citizens) over the state is implemented by the government of that state. Democracy and regional head elections (Pilkada) are like interlinked chains. Pilkada is a manifestation of democracy, while democracy is built upon the involvement of the people in choosing their own leaders.<sup>11</sup>

The primary goals of direct Pilkada are:

- 1. To create effective local governance, institutionalize, and deepen local democracy.
- 2. To produce high-quality regional leaders. Local elections aim to sharpen empathy towards the people's desires and concerns, in order to formulate policies that favor public interests.
- 3. To actualize the representation of local interests so that regional policies more explicitly favor the people.
- 4. To enhance the competitiveness and independence of regions in accordance with local strengths and wisdom.

Following the Constitutional Court Decision Number 100/PUU-XIII/2015 and the enactment of Law Number 10 of 2016, the practice of single candidate pairs in Pilkada was finally given the green light for implementation in regional head elections in Indonesia. However, the phenomenon of single candidates poses a fundamental threat to the essence of democracy in fostering healthy and fair competition to find competent, integrity-driven, and capable leaders for the regions.

The presence of only a single candidate proves the failure of political education in upholding democratic principles. As a contest of ideas in the democratic festival of Pilkada, it allows the public to discern and choose candidates with quality ideas and proposals.

According to Deputy Chairman of Commission II of the House of Representatives Arif Wibowo, there are many factors that lead to the emergence of single candidates in Pilkada, including:<sup>12</sup>

1. The high cost of political campaigns deters many political parties and candidates from participating in Pilkada contests.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Hannan Abd.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Suhartoyo, 'Calon Tunggal Dalam Pemilihan Umum Kepala Daerah Dan Konsep Demokrasi (Analisis Terhadap Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Kabupaten Blitar Tahun 2015)', *Jurnal Cita Hukum*, 4.1 (2016).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Suhartoyo.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Komarudin, *Metode Penulisan Skripsi Dan Tesis* (Angkasa, 1974).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Soerjono Soekanto, *Penelitian Hukum Normatif Suatu Tinjauan Singkat* (Rajawali Press, 1985).

 <sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Hari Sutra Semadi, 'Lensa Penelitian Hukum: Esai Deskriptif Tentang Metodologi Penelitian Hukum', *Journal of Judicial Riview*, 24.2 (2022).
 <sup>10</sup> Peter Mahmud Marzuki, *Penelitian Hukum* (Prenada Media, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Lala Miami Prameswari, 'Pilkada Dalam Mewujudkan Demokrasi', *Bawaslu Provinsi Bangka Belitung*, 2017 <a href="https://babel.bawaslu.go.id/pilkada-dalam-mewujudkan-demokrasi/>[accessed 4 June 2024].">https://babel.bawaslu.go.id/pilkada-dalam-mewujudkan-demokrasi/>[accessed 4 June 2024].</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> 'Faktor Penyebab Meningkatnya Calon Tunggal Pilkada', *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat RI*, 2020 <a href="https://www.dpr.go.id/berita/detail/id/29649/t/Faktor+Penyebab+Meningkatnya+Calon+Tunggal+Pilkada>[accessed 4 June 2024].</a>

2. The absence of candidates with well-known personal and political reputations in certain regions undergoing regional head elections.

Fadhil Ramadhani, a researcher from the Association for Elections and Democracy (Perludem), identifies several reasons for the proliferation of single candidates in Pilkada:<sup>13</sup>

- a. Firstly, political parties lack a stable and democratic recruitment system. As a result, nominations in political candidacies, such as Pilkada, are pragmatic and short-term.
- b. Secondly, the nomination threshold provisions in Pilkada contribute significantly. The requirement of 20% of seats and 25% of votes "imprisons" political parties and stifles initiatives to bring forward new figures.
- c. Thirdly, the high support requirements for independent candidates make alternative nomination routes unproductive. Many individuals fail or are burdened by these stringent requirements.

Another factor contributing to the prevalence of single candidate Pilkada (blank box) is the significant power of the candidate pair, especially if the candidate is an incumbent. Political interests also play a role, leading political parties to rally behind one candidate, thereby limiting opportunities for other candidates except for those running independently.

Single candidate Pilkada will proceed with a mechanism similar to Pilkada with two or more candidates. In practice, the single candidate pair will compete against or face a blank box on the ballot paper. Opponents of the single candidate will campaign for the blank box, using various tactics to challenge the single candidate.

Historically, single candidates in simultaneous Pilkada have often won by a significant margin, as evidenced by the following data:<sup>14</sup>

No.	Year	Number of Single Candidates	Results
1.	2015	3	absolute victory
2.	2017	9	absolute victory
3.	2018	16	15 victories
4.	2020	25	absolute victory

Table 2. Data on Single Candidate Pairs in the Simultaneous Regional Elections

From the data presented above, it is noteworthy that in 2018, there was one single candidate pair who lost to a blank box in Makassar City, namely Munafri Arifuddin-Andi Rachmatika Dewi. The Makassar Mayoral Election initially had two candidate pairs: Mohammad Ramdhan Pomanto, also known as Danny Pomanto, with Indira Mulyasari, and Munafri Arifuddin with Andi Rachmatika. Subsequently, the Makassar Election Commission disqualified Danny Pomanto and his running mate due to legal issues. Prior to their disqualification, the Danny-Indira pair was set to run independently. Meanwhile, the Munafri-Andi pair was supported by a coalition of 10 major political parties: NasDem, Golkar, PAN, Hanura, PPP, PDI-P, Gerindra, PKS, PKPI, and PBB.<sup>15</sup>

Danny Pomanto, the incumbent, and his running mate, Indira Mulyasari Paramastuti Ilham, were members of the Makassar City Regional House of Representatives (DPRD Kota Makassar). Danny-Indira nominated themselves for the Makassar mayoral election as independent candidates, garnering support from Makassar residents by using photocopies of their Identity Cards.

Based on the Supreme Court Decision Number 250 K/TUN/Pilkada/2018 concerning the dispute over the Makassar City Election Commission Decision Number 35/P.KWK/HK.03.1-Kpt/7371/KPU-Kot/II/2018 regarding the Determination of the Mayoral and Vice Mayoral Candidate Pairs in the 2018 Makassar Mayoral and Vice Mayoral Election. Through the Makassar City Election Commission Decision Number: 64/P.KWK/HK.03.1-Kpt/7371/KPU-Kot/IV/2018, the Danny-Indira candidate pair was disqualified from the nomination because they were convincingly found to have violated Law Number 10 of 2016 Article 71 Paragraph 3 in conjunction with General Election Commission Regulation Number 3 of 2017 Article 89 Paragraph (2). This was due to allegations that Mohammad Ramdhan Pomanto, in his capacity as the Mayor of Makassar, had engaged in the following actions:

- 1. Distributing smartphones to the Chairs of Neighborhood Associations and Community Leaders throughout Makassar;
- 2. Appointing 2,376 temporary contract workers at the Makassar City Education Agency;
- 3. Using the tagline "Makassar Dua Kali Tambah Baik / 2X+√," which was the tagline of the Makassar City Government as written in the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD) for Makassar from 2014 to 2019.

The disqualification of the incumbent led to the emergence of a blank box and its supporters, known as Blank Box Volunteers. The voting power of the incumbent's supporters was evident in the victory of the blank box over Munafri-Andi.

When linked to the Elite Theory developed from the thoughts of Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca,<sup>16</sup> political parties, as part of the ruling elite, naturally have a greater chance of occupying regional leadership positions, especially when supported by coalitions of various major parties. However, the local election arena is not solely determined by the number of supporting coalition

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Rofiq Hidayat, 'Ini Penyebabnya Tingginya Calon Tunggal Dalam Pilkada', *Hukumonline*, 2020 <a href="https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/ini-penyebab-tingginya-calon-tunggal-dalam-pilkada-lt5f326f8d56dc9/>">https://www.hukumonline.com/berita/a/ini-penyebab-tingginya-calon-tunggal-dalam-pilkada-lt5f326f8d56dc9/></a> [accessed 4 June 2024].

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Hannan Abd.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> 'Kotak Kosong Menangi Pilkada Makassar, Perludem: Tamparan Keras Bagi Partai Politik', *Perludem*, 2018 <a href="https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/>">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/">https://perludem.org/2018/07/03/kotak-kosong-menangi-pilkada-makassar-perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/">https://perludem-tamparan-keras-bagi-partai-politik/</a>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> 'Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto', *Anarsist Haberler*, 2022 <a href="https://www.anarsisthaberler.net/gaetano-mosca-and-vilfredo-pareto/">https://www.anarsisthaberler.net/gaetano-mosca-and-vilfredo-pareto/</a> [accessed 4 June 2024].

parties; the key determinant is how many people exercise their right to vote for the candidate pairs in the local election. Ultimately, based on the theory of popular sovereignty, the people are the holders of state sovereignty, thus making them the ultimate holders of state power, as stated in Article 1 Paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which reads: Sovereignty is vested in the hands of the people and is implemented according to the Constitution.

#### B. Strategies to Anticipate Single Candidates in Democracy Contests in the 2024 Regional Elections

The Republic of Indonesia is a unitary state that adopts the principle of decentralization in governance by providing opportunities and autonomy to regions. Decentralization is always associated with autonomous status, so any discussion of decentralization inherently involves autonomy. The essence of decentralization is the process of autonomy, namely the transfer process to lower-level governments to manage and administer certain governance affairs as their domestic affairs. In other words, decentralization and autonomy are two sides of the same coin.<sup>17</sup>

To manage and administer regional governance affairs, a leader is needed to coordinate the region, namely the regional head. Regional heads are elected through Regional Elections (Pilkada), and the importance of conducting Regional Elections is to find the best potential sons and daughters of the nation who will advance the region.

The 2024 Regional Elections, as announced in a press conference by the Chairman of the General Elections Commission of the Republic of Indonesia, Hasyim Asy'ari, are scheduled to be held on Wednesday, November 27, 2024.

To ensure future vision and mission debates, it is only appropriate to have at least 2 (two) pairs of Regional Head Candidates in the 2024 Regional Elections. A single candidate will lead to a massive election, diminishing the euphoria of the democratic festivities.

Strategies to Anticipate Single Candidates in the 2024 Regional Elections are as follows:

- 1. Political parties should prioritize political cadreship or regeneration, even though the right to be elected is a right that can be exercised or not. As political parties, they should consider the living democratic system in Indonesia. Political parties play a crucial role in a modern democratic system and are the main pillars in the political system institution. Political parties translate the values and interests of a society in the bottom-to-top process. Because political parties are essential for the growth of democracy,<sup>18</sup> they should have a moral responsibility for the sustainability of the democratic system in Indonesia by presenting the best sons and daughters of the nation as candidates in the electoral contest.
- 2. Attracting public participation through independent candidates.

The definition of an independent candidate is an individual who can compete in the nomination recruitment process for regional head and deputy regional head positions through the regional election mechanism without using a political party as a medium of struggle. Simply put, an independent candidate is someone who runs for regional head without the support of a political party, acting on their own behalf.

The lack of trust in candidates from political parties actually provides a middle ground, namely through the presence of independent candidates. Independent candidates can be seen as a symbol of the emergence of a solution or alternative to other options that are more neutral and expected to meet the expectations of the people as voters. Independent candidates are considered to have leadership qualities, high integrity, and are supported by the public, which can change the map and structure of Indonesian politics, such as religious leaders and charismatic community figures who are influential and may advance as regional head candidates. There is also a belief that independent candidates will minimize political conflicts, which is not impossible given the good political education of the people, as rational choices will emerge from a variety of alternative options in the regional elections.

The next issue is how to attract independent candidates. In reality, the General Elections Commission has conducted socialization regarding the requirements and stages to run as a single candidate in the Regional Elections, but the minimum support requirements for single candidates are considered burdensome. Based on Article 41 of Law Number 10 of 2016, the requirements for independent candidates in the Regional Elections for governor and regent positions are as follows:

- 1) Independent candidates may register as Candidates for Governor and Deputy Governor if they meet the support requirements of the population eligible to vote and listed in the permanent voter list in the most recent general election or the previous election in the respective region, with the following provisions:
  - a. Provinces with a population listed in the permanent voter list of up to 2,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 10%;
  - b. Provinces with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 2,000,000 inhabitants up to 6,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 8.5%;
  - c. Provinces with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 6,000,000 inhabitants up to 12,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 7.5%;
  - d. Provinces with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 12,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 6.5%; and
  - e. The support as referred to in points a, b, c, and d must be spread across more than 50% of the total districts/cities in the respective province.
- 2) Independent candidates may register as Candidates for Regent and Deputy Regent as well as Candidates for Mayor and Deputy Mayor if they meet the support requirements of the population eligible to vote and listed in the permanent voter list in the respective region in the most recent general election or the previous election in the respective region, with the following provisions:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> Sirajuddin and Winardi, *Dasar-Dasar Hukum Tata Negara Indonesia* (Setara Press, 2015).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Thomas Meyer, Peran Partai Politik Dalam Sebuah Sistem Demokrasi: Sembilan Tesis (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), 2012).

- Districts/cities with a population listed in the permanent voter list of up to 250,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 10%;
- b. Districts/cities with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 250,000 up to 500,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 8.5%;
- c. Districts/cities with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 500,000 up to 1,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 7.5%;
- d. Districts/cities with a population listed in the permanent voter list of more than 1,000,000 inhabitants must be supported by at least 6.5%; and
- e. The support as referred to in points a, b, c, and d must be spread across more than 50% of the total sub-districts in the respective district/city.

The support above shall be made in the form of a support letter accompanied by a photocopy of the Electronic Identity Card or a certificate issued by the Population and Civil Registry Office stating that the individual is domiciled in the administrative area conducting the Election for at least 1 (one) year and is listed in the Permanent Voter List of the previous general election in the respective province or district/city.

These requirements pose a challenge for single candidates to participate in the electoral competition. Therefore, the General Elections Commission is expected to attract community leaders to participate in the elections. Although the presence of single candidates has been declared constitutional and guaranteed in the Constitution and laws, it does not mean that it is commonplace, as it may undermine the nation's democratic spirit.

## CONCLUSIONS

The factors contributing to the existence of single candidates in local elections in Indonesia are as follows: First, the high cost of political campaigns and the lack of an established and democratic political recruitment system within political parties. Second, the candidacy threshold requirements in local elections play a significant role. The requirement of 20% of seats and 25% of votes effectively "imprisons" political parties and stifles the initiative to bring forth new candidates. Third, the high support requirements for independent candidacies. This issue renders alternative candidacy routes unproductive. Fourth, the substantial power of incumbents. To anticipate single candidates in the 2024 local elections, political parties should engage in political cadre development or regeneration, and attract independent candidates from the community.

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