

## The Deputy Dilemma: Redesigning Roles and Authority in Regional Government

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**ABSTRACT:** The position of the deputy regional head within Indonesia's regional governance system continues to present a range of challenges, particularly concerning the scope of authority. These ambiguities often result in disharmonious relationships between regional heads and their deputies. This study aims to critically analyze the legal framework governing the role of deputy regional heads in Indonesia's regional government system. Employing a doctrinal legal research method, this study adopts a statutory and conceptual approach. The findings reveal that the regulatory framework concerning deputy regional heads has experienced fluctuations in tandem with broader changes in regional governance legislation. In practice, conflicts frequently arise between regional heads and their deputies due to the lack of clarity regarding the latter's legal authority. This study proposes several conceptual reforms for the regulation of deputy regional heads. These include the potential abolition of the position altogether or a restructuring of the role based on the specific needs of each region. Furthermore, strengthening the legal authority of deputy regional heads is recommended as a means to ensure a more balanced and cooperative partnership with regional heads.

**KEYWORDS:** Deputy; Roles; Authority; Regional; Government.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's regional governance has undergone significant transformation following the amendments to the 1945 Constitution and the implementation of regional autonomy in 2001. Regional autonomy, as a foundational principle of local governance, has offered renewed hope for regions to develop independently and to enhance the welfare of their local populations. Introduced as part of the broader reform movement, regional autonomy represents a logical consequence of Indonesia's democratization process in the aftermath of the New Order regime.<sup>1</sup> Regional autonomy, embedded within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework, has created space for greater public participation in governmental processes. It provides regional governments with a critical opportunity to optimize local development in accordance with the specific needs and potentials of their respective regions.

To realize these objectives, it is imperative for regional administrations to prioritize institutional reforms, improve public financial management systems, and implement comprehensive public management reforms.<sup>2</sup> Institutional restructuring must begin with the reorganization of the regional executive office, which plays a pivotal role in local governance. Following Indonesia's constitutional reform, the 1945 Constitution mandates that regional heads be selected through democratic means. Although the Constitution does not explicitly outline the procedures for such democratic processes, the legislature, exercising its open legal policy, has chosen to adopt direct elections by the people as the mechanism for selecting regional heads. This approach reflects the will of local communities and reinforces the commitment to democratic governance at the regional level.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the legislation stipulates that regional heads are to be directly elected by the people as a single ticket together with their deputy regional heads.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ni'matul Huda and Despan Heryansyah, 'Kompleksitas Otonomi Daerah Dan Gagasan Negara Federal Dalam Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia', *Jurnal Hukum Ius Quia Iustum* 26, no. 2 (22 August 2019): 238–58, <https://doi.org/10.20885/iustum.vol26.iss2.art2>.

<sup>2</sup> Mardiasmo, *Otonomi dan manajemen keuangan daerah*, Serial otonomi daerah (Yogyakarta: Andi, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Donal Fariz, 'Pembatasan Hak Bagi Mantan Terpidana Korupsi Menjadi Calon Kepala Daerah', *Jurnal Konstitusi* 17, no. 2 (19 August 2020): 309–29, <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk1724>.

<sup>4</sup> Sulardi Sulardi and Tri Sulistyanyingsih, 'Konstruksi Regulasi Sistem Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Menuju Sistem Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Yang Demokratis Dan Aspiratif', *Jurnal Media Hukum* 24, no. 1 (2017): 24–34, <https://doi.org/10.18196/jmh.2017.0086.24-34>.

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Regional heads and their deputies play a critical role in executing governmental functions and advancing development at the regional level. However, in practice, there have been instances of disharmony in the relationship between regional heads and their deputies, which has adversely affected the performance and stability of regional governance.<sup>5</sup> In some cases, such tensions have escalated to the point where deputy regional heads have chosen to resign from office before completing their term. Disharmony between regional heads and their deputies can manifest in various forms, including differences in policy priorities, leadership styles, and political views. Such discord can significantly hinder the implementation of regional government programs and undermine the objectives of regional autonomy.<sup>6</sup> While multiple factors contribute to this disharmony, the primary causes frequently identified are disputes over the scope of authority and financial management.<sup>7</sup>

Politically, conflicts between regional heads and their deputies often reflect the failure of political parties to effectively consolidate candidate pairs. Electoral threshold regulations require political parties in some regions to form coalitions to meet a minimum of 20% of legislative seats or 25% of the valid votes. Consequently, regional heads and their deputies frequently come from different parties with divergent interests. Such conflicts tend to intensify toward the end of their term, especially if they have served only one period in office. This dynamic can provoke unhealthy competition and conflicts of interest, as each party seeks to secure public support and consolidate their political standing.<sup>8</sup>

Several conflicts between regional heads and their deputies have attracted public attention. One notable example is the resignation of Lucky Hakim from his position as Deputy Regent of Indramayu. In his statement, Lucky Hakim cited the lack of delegated authority to assist and represent the Regent in managing regional government affairs as the primary reason for his resignation.<sup>9</sup> Previously, conflicts between regional heads and their deputies have also been documented in other regions. In Bojonegoro, the Deputy Regent reported the Regent to the police following disputes over the management of COVID-19 patients.<sup>10</sup> In Aceh, the conflict escalated to a grave level, culminating in death threats. Firdaus, the Deputy Regent of Central Aceh, expressed that he was consistently excluded from involvement in various regional government policy decisions by the Regent, Shabela Abubakar.<sup>11</sup>

The phenomenon of conflict between regional heads and their deputies is not new in Indonesia's regional governance, particularly in the post-reform era. Data from the Directorate General of Regional Autonomy at the Ministry of Home Affairs indicates that between the 2005 and 2013 regional elections, 93% of regional heads experienced conflicts with their deputies.<sup>12</sup> A primary factor contributing to this discord is the unclear legal status and authority of deputy regional heads. Deputies are often perceived merely as assistants to the regional head, despite the fact that, under the direct election system where both are elected as a single ticket, deputy regional heads can wield considerable influence in garnering votes during the electoral process.

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that significant issues remain regarding the status and authority of deputy regional heads, warranting further scholarly examination. Accordingly, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of regional governance in Indonesia, focusing primarily on two key areas: first, the regulation of the status and authority of deputy regional heads; and second, the restructuring of the legal framework governing deputy regional heads within Indonesia's regional government system.

While the role of deputy regional heads has been addressed in several previous studies, including Suharizal's article, which argues that abolishing the deputy regional head position is both a strategic and constitutional measure to improve regional governance, this research offers novel contributions. Suharizal highlights that the presence of deputy regional heads has often

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<sup>5</sup> Risal Risal and La Ode Munawir, 'Pembagian Kewenangan Kepala Daerah Dan Wakil Kepala Daerah Dalam Penyelenggaraan Pemerintahan', *Legal Standing : Jurnal Ilmu Hukum* 5, no. 2 (25 May 2021): 71, <https://doi.org/10.24269/ls.v5i2.3818>.

<sup>6</sup> Aylar Beniah Ndraha, 'Optimizing Public Services: Reconstructing the Discordant Relationship between Local Leaders to Foster Harmony (A Case Study of Indonesia)', *Journal of Digitainability, Realism & Mastery (DREAM)* 2, no. 07 (27 July 2023): 18–34, <https://doi.org/10.56982/dream.v2i07.143>.

<sup>7</sup> 'Mendagri Tito Soroti Konflik KDH Dan Minta Kepala Daerah Untuk Luruskan Niat Mengabdikan Rakyat', *BPSDM Kemendagri*, 13 September 2021, <https://bpsdm.kemendagri.go.id/berita/page/446>.

<sup>8</sup> Enny Agustina, 'Juridical Analysis of Disharmonization between Local Leaders and Deputy Local Leaders in Local Government Systems', *Jurnal Bina Praja* 12, no. 2 (16 December 2020): 181–92, <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.12.2020.181-192>.

<sup>9</sup> Agus Yulianto, "'Perang Terbuka' Bupati Indramayu Vs Wakil Bupati'", *Republika*, Oktober 2022, <https://news.republika.co.id/berita/rj3411318/>.

<sup>10</sup> Farid Assifa, 'Ketika Bupati Bojonegoro Dipolisikan Wakilnya, Konflik Bermula Dari Soal Data Covid-19', *Kompas.Com*, 25 September 2021, <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/09/25/063000465/ketika-bupati-bojonegoro-dipolisikan-wakilnya-konflik-bermula-dari-soal>.

<sup>11</sup> Iwan Bahagia, "'Curhat' Wabup Firdaus Merasa Tak Dihargai Hingga Ancam Bunuh Bupati Aceh Tengah', *Kompas.Com*, Mei 2020, <https://regional.kompas.com/read/2020/05/15/16530861/curhat-wabup-firdaus-merasa-tak-dihargai-hingga-ancam-bunuh-bupati-aceh?page=all#page2>.

<sup>12</sup> Irianto, *Konflik Dalam Otonomi Daerah Dan Dampaknya Terhadap Penyelenggaraan Pemerintahan* (Jakarta: Penerbit BRIN, 2021), <https://penerbit.brin.go.id/press/catalog/download/485/380/5490?inline=1>.

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exacerbated conflicts within regional administrations, adversely affecting local democracy.<sup>13</sup> The innovation of this study lies in its comprehensive legal basis, grounded in Regional Government Law and its amendments, alongside Law on the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors and its amendments. This research also traces the regulatory developments concerning deputy regional heads following the reform era and proposes an ideal framework for restructuring their status within regional governance.

### II. METHOD

This study employs a doctrinal research method with a statutory approach to examine the regulation of the roles and authority of regional heads and their deputies. A conceptual approach is also utilized to redesign the appropriate roles and powers of regional heads and their deputies within the context of a democratic unitary state. The issue of unclear authority allocation has resulted in coordination problems between these offices, as reflected in various laws related to regional governance and constitutional provisions. Conclusions are drawn after thorough analysis, involving the examination of relevant legislation alongside conceptual studies.

### III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### A. Regulation of Deputy Regional Heads: Roles and Authority

The amendments to the 1945 Constitution, undertaken between 1999 and 2001, marked a pivotal turning point that fundamentally transformed the relationship between the central and regional governments. The constitutional provisions concerning regional governance became significantly more comprehensive compared to the prior framework, which had been articulated merely in the explanatory section. According to Bagir Manan, the newly introduced Articles 18, 18A, and 18B establish a novel paradigm and direction for regional governance in Indonesia.<sup>14</sup> A key element of this new paradigm is the principle that regional governments have the authority to regulate and administer their own governmental affairs based on the principles of autonomy and co-administration. These provisions affirm that regional governments function as autonomous entities within the unitary state of the Republic of Indonesia.<sup>15</sup>

Specifically, regarding the election of regional heads, Article 18(4) stipulates that such elections must be conducted democratically. The phrase “democratically” implicitly indicates that the drafters of the constitutional amendment granted the legislature an open legal policy to further regulate regional head elections in accordance with regional developments and conditions. Furthermore, the drafters recognized the profound diversity of Indonesia’s regions. This diversity is reflected in the variations of local governance systems, including the procedures for electing regional heads. For instance, the appointment of the Governor and Vice Governor in the Special Region of Yogyakarta continues to be based on traditional customs, specifically through hereditary succession within the royal court.<sup>16</sup> This stands in contrast to the constitutional regulation concerning presidential elections, where Article 6A explicitly states that the president shall be elected directly by the people.

Moreover, Article 18(4) does not mention the position of the deputy regional head. This again differs from the presidential election, in which the president is elected together with the vice president as a pair. This provision implicitly suggests that the existence of a deputy regional head is not a necessary element of the regional governance structure. Should a deputy regional head be deemed necessary, the selection process is not required to follow a direct electoral model akin to that of the vice president. In other words, the appointment of a deputy regional head may be conducted through non-electoral means, such as designation or administrative appointment. This interpretation aligns with Law on the Basic Principles of Regional Administration, which characterizes the deputy regional head as a supplementary figure to the regional head. The law stipulates that the position of deputy regional head may be established in accordance with regional needs. Furthermore, it specifies that the deputy regional head is a career official appointed from among the civil service.

In line with the reform process, legislation concerning regional governance in Indonesia also underwent significant changes. The role and status of the deputy regional head were clarified in Law on Regional Government 1999, as evidenced by the provision that deputy regional heads were to be elected alongside regional heads by the Regional People’s Representative Council. Although Local Government Law was enacted shortly thereafter, it did not significantly alter the position of the deputy regional head. The primary difference lay in the method of election: the regional head and deputy were no longer elected by the national People’s Representative Council but instead through direct public elections. This shift was clearly influenced by the broader democratization movement following the reform era.

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<sup>13</sup> Suhariza Suhariza, ‘Penguatan Demokrasi Lokal Melalui Penghapusan Jabatan Wakil Kepala Daerah’, *Jurnal Konstitusi* 7, no. 5 (20 May 2016): 93–112, <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk755>.

<sup>14</sup> Bagir Manan, *Menyongsong Fajar Otonomi Daerah*, Cet. 1 (Yogyakarta: Pusat Studi Hukum, Fakultas Hukum, Universitas Islam Indonesia, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Ni’matul Huda, *Hukum Pemerintahan Daerah*, Cet. 1 (Bandung: Nusamedia, 2009).

<sup>16</sup> Fajar Laksono et al., ‘Status Keistimewaan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta Dalam Bingkai Demokrasi Berdasarkan Undang-Undang Dasar 1945 (Studi Kasus Pengisian Jabatan Kepala Daerah Dan Wakil Kepala Daerah)’, *Jurnal Konstitusi* 8, no. 6 (20 May 2016): 1059–86, <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk868>.

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However, a closer examination reveals that, in terms of regulating the deputy regional head, both laws diverge from the provisions of the amended 1945 Constitution. As previously discussed, Article 18(4) makes no reference to the office of the deputy regional head within the regional government structure. This omission suggests that the position is not of constitutional necessity or central importance. Furthermore, in practice, the presence of deputy regional heads has often given rise to new issues at the regional government level. One notable issue is the imbalance of authority between regional heads and their deputies. Deputy regional heads frequently appear to serve merely as subordinates or assistants to the regional head. In practice, their roles and responsibilities often depend on the discretion—or “generosity”—of the regional head. Consequently, this has led to frequent conflicts between the two offices, which in turn disrupts the effectiveness and productivity of regional governance.

Additionally, problems arise when the office of the deputy regional head becomes vacant. In many cases, such vacancies remain unaddressed for extended periods without any clear resolution.<sup>17</sup> This is primarily due to the absence of regulations specifying a deadline for filling the position. Furthermore, there are no sanctions imposed on regional governments that fail to promptly appoint a new deputy. From a constitutional law perspective, this situation reinforces the notion that the position of deputy regional head is not essential within the regional governance framework.

In its legislative development, the Indonesian legislature subsequently enacted Regional Head Election Law. Under this law, the term “regional head election” refers exclusively to the election of the regional head, excluding the deputy, through the regional representative council. Concurrently, the legislature also enacted Regional Government Law. With regard to the deputy regional head, the law provides that a regional head may be assisted by a deputy. The use of the word may indicate that the existence of a deputy regional head is facultative rather than mandatory within the regional governance system. This legislative approach suggests that the role of the deputy regional head, as envisioned by the Constitution, is that of an auxiliary to the regional head, subject to the specific needs of each region. Accordingly, it is arguably inappropriate to require the direct election of a deputy regional head as part of a joint ticket with the regional head.

Although the Regional Head Election Law was subsequently repealed by Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 1 of 2014, the changes introduced were limited solely to the electoral mechanism—shifting from election by representative councils to direct election by the people. This amendment was a response to widespread public opposition to the legislative-based election mechanism.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, the Perpu did not address the existence of the deputy regional head within the context of regional head elections.

Over time, both the Regional Head Election Law and the Regional Government Law underwent multiple revisions. These amendments eventually reinstated the formal recognition of the deputy regional head within the regional governance system. Specifically, the revised Regional Head Election Law mandates that regional heads must be elected as a pair with their deputies. In parallel, the revised Regional Government Law reaffirms the permanent role of deputy regional heads as part of the regional governance structure. With regard to authority, the revised Regional Government Law does not significantly alter the functions and powers of deputy regional heads as compared to those outlined in Regional Government Law 1999 and 2014. The duties of the deputy regional head remain limited to consultative, supervisory, coordinative, and advisory functions, as well as other responsibilities that, in principle, could be carried out by regional government officials serving as assistants to the regional head.

The newly introduced Article 66(3) of the Regional Government Law merely stipulates that the deputy regional head must sign an integrity pact in the performance of their duties. This integrity pact serves as a joint commitment between the regional head and the deputy to carry out their responsibilities and exercise their authority in full until the end of their term of office.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Article 66(4) of the Regional Government Law stipulates that the deputy regional head is obligated to carry out duties in conjunction with the regional head until the end of their term of office. However, these new provisions fail to resolve the long-standing issue of unclear authority and role allocation for deputy regional heads—a key factor contributing to frequent disharmony in regional governance. To this day, conflicts between regional heads and their deputies remain common. Moreover, the requirement for deputy regional heads to serve alongside their respective regional heads until the completion of their term appears somewhat coercive. The law does not clarify the legal consequences for a deputy regional head who fails to fulfill this obligation. This regulatory ambiguity further exacerbates the structural weaknesses inherent in the current framework governing the office of the deputy regional head.

### **B. The Redesign of the Regulation of Deputy Regional Heads in Indonesia’s Local Governance**

The concept of decentralization has evolved in tandem with the growing need for democratization within a state. Decentralization is widely regarded as an approach aimed at fostering a more democratic system, as it entails the delegation of certain powers to local

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<sup>17</sup> Rahma Aulia and Fifiana Wisnaeni, ‘Pengisian Jabatan Kepala Daerah dan Wakil Kepala Daerah yang Berhalangan Tetap dalam Sistem Ketatanegaraan Indonesia (Studi Kasus Pengisian Jabatan Wakil Bupati Kabupaten Grobogan)’, *Masalah-Masalah Hukum* 47, no. 3 (30 July 2018): 298, <https://doi.org/10.14710/mmh.47.3.2018.298-316>.

<sup>18</sup> Diana Yusyanti, ‘Dinamika Hukum Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Menuju Proses Demokrasi dalam Otonomi Daerah’, *Jurnal Rechts Vinding: Media Pembinaan Hukum Nasional* 4, no. 1 (30 April 2015): 85, <https://doi.org/10.33331/rechtsvinding.v4i1.49>.

<sup>19</sup> Christie Stefani, ‘Kepala Daerah Dan Wakilnya Wajib Patuhi Pakta Integritas’, *Cnnindonesia*, 17 February 2015, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20150217002511-32-32614/kepala-daerah-dan-wakilnya-wajib-patuhi-pakta-integritas>.

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governments. This enables them to play an active role in addressing issues that are closely linked to the everyday lives of communities within their respective regions.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, the level of democratization within a country serves as a driving factor for the process of decentralization.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it can be argued that decentralization and democracy are two interrelated and mutually reinforcing concepts. In practice, decentralization has often served as a mechanism to mitigate regional disintegration and unrest in various countries. This is exemplified by the case of South Sudan, where decentralization has played a significant role in alleviating ethnic conflicts.<sup>22</sup>

In general terms, decentralization refers to the act or process of dispersing power or authority (spreading *van machten*) from a central organization, office, or individual to lower levels.<sup>23</sup> Both decentralization and deconcentration fundamentally involve the dispersion of authority. However, decentralization primarily pertains to constitutional or state governance matters, whereas deconcentration is more administrative in nature, relating chiefly to the delegation of governmental administrative functions within the civil service.<sup>24</sup> Decentralization can take the form of autonomy and co-administration (*tugas pembantuan*). In the context of Indonesia, decentralization serves as the foundational principle for regional governance, particularly following the constitutional amendments. The 1945 Constitution affirms that regional governments have the authority to regulate and manage their own governmental affairs based on the principles of autonomy and co-administration. Regions are granted the power to administer and organize their territories with the objective of achieving autonomy goals, namely to provide public services, enhance community welfare, and improve regional competitiveness.<sup>25</sup>

To ensure the successful realization of regional autonomy objectives, it is essential to strengthen regional institutions. One key aspect of this institutional strengthening is the empowerment of regional heads. Within the framework of regional autonomy, the regional head serves as the spearhead of development and the enhancement of community welfare. The regional head is a crucial factor influencing the quality of public service delivery at the local level.<sup>26</sup> However, in practice, a myriad of issues surrounds the position of the regional head, one of which concerns the relationship between the regional head and the deputy regional head. While the deputy was initially expected to assist the regional head and support the agenda of regional autonomy, their presence has instead generated contentious disputes over authority between the two offices. Consequently, a reorganization—or redesign—of the status and authority of the deputy regional head is necessary. This reorganization presents at least two options: first, the abolition of the deputy regional head position within regional government; second, the clarification and strengthening of the deputy regional head's authority in the Regional Government Law.

First—the abolition of the deputy regional head position—is not novel. This idea has gained traction in tandem with the increasing frequency of conflicts between regional heads and their deputies. In academic discourse, the debate over abolishing the deputy position is generally grounded in constitutional arguments as well as considerations of institutional effectiveness.

Constitutionally, the Constitution does not explicitly mention the position of the deputy regional head. In the context of regional head elections, the Constitution only stipulates that governors, regents, and mayors are to be elected democratically. Accordingly, the office of the deputy regional head is fundamentally facultative; it may be established or abolished. Furthermore, the position is tentative, as it largely depends on the open legal policy discretion of the legislative body. Considering the often contentious dynamics between regional heads and their deputies, the existence and role of the deputy regional head should ideally be left to regional discretion. Ideally, the appointment of deputy regional heads should be conducted through political appointments based on the specific needs of each region, as previously regulated under the Regional Government Law prior to its amendment and the Regional Head Election Law prior to its amendment.

From the perspective of institutional effectiveness, the duties of the deputy regional head as an assistant to the regional head can, in principle, be fulfilled by the Regional Secretary (*Sekretaris Daerah, Sekda*). The Regional Government Law stipulates that the Sekda's role is to assist the regional head in formulating policies and coordinating the administration and implementation of regional

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<sup>20</sup> Ni'matul Huda, *Desentralisasi Asimetris Dalam Negara Kesatuan Republik Indonesia: Kajian Terhadap Daerah Istimewa, Daerah Khusus, Dan Otonomi Khusus*, Cetakan 1 (Ujungberung, Bandung: Nusa Media, 2014).

<sup>21</sup> Mohammad Arzaghi and J. Vernon Henderson, 'Why Countries Are Fiscally Decentralizing', *Journal of Public Economics* 89, no. 7 (July 2005): 1157–89, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeo.2003.10.009>.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Wulla Kwori, 'Effects of Decentralization on Ethnic Conflict Resolution in South Sudan: A Case Study of Juba County', *Social Sciences & Humanities Open* 6, no. 1 (2022): 100369, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2022.100369>.

<sup>23</sup> Manan, *Menyongsong Fajar Otonomi Daerah*.

<sup>24</sup> Mei Susanto, 'Perjalanan Historis Pasal 18 UUD 1945 (Perumusan Dan Undang-Undang Pelaksanaannya)', *Padjajaran Jurnal Ilmu Hukum (Journal of Law)* 2, no. 3 (2015): 620–25, <https://doi.org/10.22304/pjih.v2n3.a11>.

<sup>25</sup> Jamiat Akadol, 'Budaya Hukum Sebagai Faktor Pendorong Terwujudnya Reformasi Birokrasi Daerah Di Indonesia', *Jurnal Magister Hukum Udayana (Udayana Master Law Journal)* 7, no. 1 (28 May 2018): 12–23, <https://doi.org/10.24843/JMHU.2018.v07.i01.p02>.

<sup>26</sup> Y. Anni Aryani et al., 'Determinants of Local Government Public Service Quality: Evidence from the Developing Economy', *Journal of Governance and Regulation* 12, no. 1, special issue (2023): 218–29, <https://doi.org/10.22495/jgrv12i1siart2>.

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government tasks.<sup>27</sup> In carrying out their duties, the Regional Secretary (Sekda) is accountable to the regional head. Thus, the Sekda is responsible for managing the bureaucratic machinery of regional government. The presence of a deputy regional head often leads to overlapping authority between the deputy and the Sekda. Therefore, the abolition of the deputy regional head position could optimize regional bureaucracy under the leadership of the Sekda. Additionally, eliminating this position would result in significant fiscal savings for the state, as the budget allocated to deputy regional heads amounts to trillions of rupiah.

Second, the strengthening of the deputy regional head's status by clarifying and reinforcing their authority within the statutory framework. This idea aligns with the context in which the regional head and deputy regional head are elected directly by the people. Both candidates for regional head and deputy regional head hold equally significant roles in electoral contests. In some cases, deputy candidates even wield greater influence due to their status as prominent public figures within their communities. Moreover, within the framework of direct local elections, the deputy regional head can function as a means of broadening voter support. In regions where social tensions make voter conflicts more likely, the deputy regional head may serve as a symbolic representative, fostering social cohesion.<sup>28</sup>

Based on this context, the position of the deputy regional head should be maintained. Both the regional head and their deputy hold important and distinct roles. Therefore, the relationship between the two should be characterized by partnership rather than hierarchy. The authority of the deputy regional head must be clearly differentiated and reinforced through legislation. This is essential to ensure a collaborative partnership between them. Furthermore, fostering such a partnership is expected to strengthen the institutional framework of regional governance. A strong institutional foundation at the regional level can significantly contribute to sustainable local economic development.<sup>29</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

The regulatory framework governing the status and authority of deputy regional heads has experienced considerable fluctuations alongside evolving regional governance laws. Initially, the presence of deputy regional heads was intended to assist regional heads in fulfilling the objectives of regional autonomy. However, in practice, their role has often led to conflict and deadlock within local administrations. Since the reform era, several regulatory models have been introduced through regional governance laws. First, Local Government Law 2004 mandated the direct election of regional heads and their deputies, establishing a hierarchical relationship whereby the deputy regional head serves to assist and is accountable to the regional head. Second, Local Government Law 2014 introduced a facultative position for deputy regional heads, allowing regions the discretion to determine whether to have a deputy based on local needs. If the regional head deemed a deputy necessary, the appointment would be made from civil servants. Over time, however, amendments to the Law reverted the provisions concerning deputy regional heads to the earlier model set out in that Law. Given the ongoing challenges discussed, a restructuring of the legal provisions governing deputy regional heads warrants careful consideration. Several reform concepts have been proposed. The first is the abolition of the deputy regional head position, grounded in constitutional and effectiveness arguments. Nevertheless, it remains possible that certain regions may require the presence of a deputy, in which case the decision should be left to regional discretion based on specific needs. The second concept advocates for strengthening the authority and status of deputy regional heads within the regional governance laws, emphasizing the need to clarify their powers. This is particularly important given that deputy regional heads are elected directly alongside regional heads, necessitating a clearly defined partnership to ensure effective governance.

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<sup>27</sup> Suhariza, 'Penguatan Demokrasi Lokal Melalui Penghapusan Jabatan Wakil Kepala Daerah'.

<sup>28</sup> Indra Pahlevi, 'Posisi Wakil Kepala Daerah Dalam Sistem Pemerintahan Daerah Di Indonesia', *Kajian* 17, no. 1 (16 March 2012): 77–102, <https://doi.org/10.22212/kajian.v17i1.358>.

<sup>29</sup> Bangkit A. Wiryawan and Christian Otchia, 'The Legacy of the Reformasi: The Role of Local Government Spending on Industrial Development in a Decentralized Indonesia', *Journal of Economic Structures* 11, no. 1 (December 2022): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40008-022-00262-y>.

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