

Empowering Communities through Electoral Law Reform: The Challenge of Single-Candidate Elections in Indonesia

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Abstract

This study examines the increasing prevalence of single-candidate elections in Indonesia's regional (Pilkada) contests and their implications for community empowerment and local democracy. These elections undermine democratic principles by restricting voter choice, weakening political competition, fostering voter apathy, and disempowering communities. The study employs a community-based qualitative approach, focusing on the analysis of relevant laws, Constitutional Court decisions, reports from the General Election Commission (KPU), and scholarly literature. Findings indicate that the dominance of major party coalitions and entrenched incumbents marginalizes communities, limits alternative leadership, and weakens accountability. This study highlights that electoral reform is not merely technical but also a crucial instrument for empowering communities by restoring their sovereignty and agency in governance. To address these challenges, the study recommends comprehensive reforms, including strengthened political education for first-time voters, improved transparency, stricter controls on money politics, and greater opportunities for independent and minority candidates. Such measures are essential to revitalizing local democracy, promoting political diversity, and ensuring inclusive and competitive regional elections that reflect the aspirations and sovereignty of the people.

KEYWORDS *Electoral reform, Community empowerment, Local democracy, Political participation, Single-candidate elections*

Introduction

Following the reform era, Indonesia reaffirmed its commitment to democracy through direct local elections, designed to empower communities by enabling them to directly choose their leaders. However, the persistence of single-candidate elections since 2015 highlights the erosion of community participation and political agency, exposing systemic weaknesses in the electoral legal framework. Therefore, reforming electoral laws is essential not only to ensure fair competition but also to strengthen community empowerment and restore meaningful public engagement in local governance¹. This study examines the legal framework that enables

¹ Muchamad Ali Safa'at, "Single Candidates: Ensuring a Path to Victory in Local Elections," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 7, no. 4 (2022): 1163–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911211062485>.

single-candidate elections and their impact on community empowerment, providing policy recommendations to enhance participation through inclusive, transparent, and accountable electoral reform.

Following Indonesia's post-reform democratization, direct local elections were instituted to empower communities.² However, since 2015, the rise of single-candidate elections has eroded participation and weakened the electorate's role, exposing flaws in the legal framework. Article 18(4) of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 10/2016 enshrine direct democratic elections for governors, regents, and mayors, yet fail to prevent uncontested races. This study examines these legal gaps, their impact on community empowerment, and proposes reforms to restore competitiveness and public engagement³. Direct elections have opened political opportunities for individuals from diverse backgrounds, including those from the business sector, and have been regarded as a milestone in Indonesia's democratization. Active community involvement remains essential to sustain and deepen local democracy⁴.

The direct election of local leaders is regarded as an effective way to apply democracy within communities while allowing citizens to choose their regional leaders. This substantiates the notion that direct elections for regional heads are integral to the democratic process following reforms, allowing different individuals, including business sector representatives, to engage in political activities⁵. This reinforces the notion that direct elections for regional heads are part of the democratization process following reforms, enabling various individuals, including those from the business

² Dwanda Julisa Sistyawan et al., "Transformation of Indonesia's Legislative Election System: New Order Vs Reform Era In Constitutional Law," *IIUM Law Journal* 33, no. 1 (2025): 325–75, <https://doi.org/10.31436/iiumlj.v33i1.1006>.

³ Mahfud, *Dasar dan Struktur Ketatanegaraan Indonesia, Dasar dan Struktur Ketatanegaraan Indonesia* (Rineka Cipta, 2001).

⁴ Ni Ketut Arniti, "Partisipasi Politik Masyarakat dalam Pemilihan Umum Legislatif di Kota Denpasar," *Jurnal Ilmiah Dinamika Sosial* 4, no. 2 (2020): 329, <https://doi.org/10.38043/jids.v4i2.2496>.

⁵ Muhammad Uhaib As'ad et al., "Oligarki dan Jaringan Patronase: Dinamika Kebijakan Pertambangan Batu Bara di Kabupaten Tanah Bumbu," *Politika: Jurnal Ilmu Politik* 14, no. 1 (2023): 1–17, <https://doi.org/10.14710/politika.14.1.2023.1-17>.

sector, to participate in political affairs⁶. Community involvement and participation are essential for the progression of local democracy. Article 18, The direct election of regional leaders is mandated by Paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. By this law, Governors, Regents, and Mayors, who administer province, regency, and municipal governments, are elected through democratic processes. The process for electing regional leaders is specified in Law No. 10 of 2016, constituting amendment Two to Statute No. 1 of 2015, about selecting mayors, regents, and governors. This legislation supersedes Law Number 1 of 2014, which addressed analogous issues, this act overrides Law 1 of 2014, which addressed similar matters⁷.

The phenomenon of single-candidate regional elections in Indonesia has persisted and expanded since its emergence in 2015, when three regions—Blitar, Tasikmalaya, and North Central Timor—held uncontested elections following Constitutional Court Decision No. 100/PUU-XIII/2015⁸. This legal precedent legitimized elections with only one candidate pair, setting the stage for its recurrence. Subsequent simultaneous elections in 2017, 2018, 2020 and the upcoming 2024 elections have seen an increasing number of single-candidate contests, with 25⁹ such cases in 2020 and 37 projected for 2024¹⁰. Notably, all these

⁶ Saverinus Rio Jama et al., “Perilaku Pemilih Warga Desa Golongan Muda dan Golongan Tua dalam Pemilihan Kepala Desa,” *Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan* 6, no. 2 (2021): 290, <https://doi.org/10.17977/um019v6i2p290-301>.

⁷ Dwanda Julisa Sistyawan, *Demokrasi Pancasila dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Calon Tunggal di Indonesia* (Penerbit Adab, 2022), https://books.google.co.id/books?hl=id&lr=&id=fSeyEAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA7&ots=_LSPtXeHam&sig=EHoks1lQ2etVGmfooXuqVo9nz-4&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.

⁸ Sistyawan, *Demokrasi Pancasila dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Calon Tunggal di Indonesia*.

⁹ Ahmad Faiz, *Ini 25 Calon Tunggal Kepala Daerah di Pilkada 2020*, n.d., <https://www.tempo.co/politik/ini-25-calon-tunggal-kepala-daerah-di-pilkada-2020-582673>.

¹⁰ Narda Margaretha Sinambela, *KPU: Ada 37 Pasangan Calon Tunggal di Pilkada Serentak 2024*, n.d., <https://www.antaraneews.com/berita/4353067/kpu-ada-37-pasangan-calon-tunggal-di-pilkada-serentak-2024>.

candidates are supported by large party coalitions, with no independent candidates participating.

This trend reflects not only the dominance of political elites but also the marginalization of communities in the nomination and electoral processes. By consolidating control over candidacies, major party coalitions limit voters' choices, discourage grassroots initiatives, and weaken communities' political agency to propose alternative leadership. The lack of viable alternatives and the prevalence of uncontested races erode trust in the electoral process and foster apathy, further disempowering communities from engaging meaningfully in local governance. This legal framework has been criticized for undermining democratic principles, as it limits voter choice and can lead to apathy among the electorate¹¹.

The implications of having a single candidate extend beyond mere electoral mechanics; they significantly impact political participation and the overall quality of democracy. Research indicates that political awareness and socialization are crucial for fostering active political engagement among citizens¹². This not only fosters voter apathy but also disempowers communities, eroding their ability to hold leaders accountable and engage effectively in decision-making processes.

In her upcoming research, Nurhasanah examined the appearance of a sole candidate in the municipal elections following the Constitutional Court's ruling. Romli highlighted that the victory of a single candidate in regional elections could undermine local democracy by disrupting the system of checks and balances. Hannan delves into the consequences of the substantial presence of sole candidates in local democracy within present-

¹¹ Ricky Santoso Muharam et al., "Single Candidate: A Setback to Indonesian Democracy?," *Technium Social Sciences Journal* 51 (November 2023): 261–69, <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v49i1.9739>.

¹² Irzal Anderson and Kuswanto Kuswanto, "The Influence of Political Awareness, Political Socialization, and Mass Media on Political Participation in Jambi Province," *Jurnal Studi Sosial Dan Politik* 5, no. 2 (2021): 203–16, <https://doi.org/10.19109/jssp.v5i2.8742>.

day Indonesia¹³. In addition, Rahman and colleagues examined the impact of a sole candidate participating in local elections on creating a leadership crisis and endangering democracy. These sources collectively detail the difficulties and consequences of single-candidate elections on the local political environment in Indonesia¹⁴.

This issue has become increasingly urgent and relevant, particularly as the 2024 simultaneous regional elections are projected to feature dozens of regions with single-candidate contests again. Without immediate and appropriate legal reforms, the problems of weak representation and disempowered communities risk further eroding the quality of local democracy.¹⁵ Moreover, this research is expected to provide policymakers—especially the legislature, the General Election Commission (KPU), and regional governments—with practical insights for drafting electoral regulations that are more inclusive, transparent, and responsive to community needs.

Academically, this study also contributes to the literature on local democracy and community empowerment, particularly in the context of post-authoritarian states like Indonesia, which still face significant challenges in achieving substantive democracy. This study adopts a normative-juridical approach, combining an analysis of electoral regulations and Constitutional Court decisions with theories of political participation and community empowerment, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on the issue of single-candidate elections in Pilkada.

¹³ Lili Romli, “Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal,” *Jurnal Penelitian Politik* 15, no. 2 (2018): 143, <https://doi.org/10.14203/jpp.v15i2.757>.

¹⁴ Rofi A Rahman et al., “Calon Tunggal Pilkada: Krisis Kepemimpinan dan Ancaman Bagi Demokrasi,” *Jurnal Konstitusi* 19, no. 1 (2022): 47, <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk1913>.

¹⁵ Shintamy Nesyicha Syahril and Ahmad Redi, “The Single Candidate in the 2020 Regional Head Election is Viewed From the Perspective of Democratic Principles Adopted by the Indonesian State,” *Journal of Social Research* 2, no. 7 (2023): 2188–205, <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i7.1049>.

Methods

This study uses a community-based qualitative approach to analyze the phenomenon of single-candidate regional elections in Indonesia and their impact on community empowerment and local democracy. Data were collected through document analysis, including relevant laws (such as Law No. 10/2016), Constitutional Court Decision No. 100/PUU-XIII/2015, and reports from the General Election Commission (KPU). Through this analysis, the study aims to explore how the existing legal framework limits choices in elections and reduces public participation in politics. This approach also includes a literature review on the impact of single-candidate elections on community empowerment, identifying patterns that emerge from the collected data to provide policy recommendations that can enhance participation and competition in regional elections.

Results and Discussion

The Phenomenon of Single-Candidate Elections in Indonesia

The phenomenon of single-candidate elections in Indonesia has emerged as a significant concern for the integrity of the democratic process. This trend is primarily attributed to legal, political, and social factors that have evolved over recent years. The Constitutional Court's 2015 ruling, which allowed elections to proceed even with a single candidate, has been a pivotal decision. This decision originated from a judicial review of Law Number 8 of 2015, which intended to optimize the electoral process but unintentionally enabled the emergence of single-candidate situations in regional elections¹⁶.

¹⁶ Ricky Santoso Muharam, "Single Candidate: A Setback to Indonesian Democracy?," *Technium Social Sciences Journal*, ahead of print, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v49i1.9739>; Muchamad Ali Safa'at, "Single Candidates: Ensuring a Path to Victory in Local Elections," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, ahead of print, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911211062485>.

The consequences of one-candidate elections are substantial, as they often undermine the democratic value of competition. Critics argue that such elections narrow the choices available to voters and potentially lead to a type of electoral authoritarianism, where competition is so limited that it becomes meaningless in terms of democracy's core principles¹⁷. Political participation and votes fall significantly in jurisdictions where one candidate comfortably leads. Presentable: They mostly feel disenfranchised, as there are no substantial alternatives¹⁸. Numerous studies support this perspective, underscoring the correlation between single-candidate elections and increased voter apathy, as individuals perceive these elections as predetermined rather than genuine contests¹⁹.

Furthermore, the emergence of single candidates may be attributed to political parties' inability to adequately cultivate new leadership and offer viable alternatives to incumbents. The absence of trust in political parties and their propensity to pick incumbents to mitigate electoral risks have contributed to this issue²⁰. Political brokers adversely influence electoral outcomes by oscillating their support among candidates, complicating the electoral landscape and casting doubt on the legitimacy of the electoral process²¹. In conclusion, single-candidate elections in Indonesia pose a

¹⁷ Wawan Sobari, *Blater, From Affinity to Tyranny? The Phenomenon of Sole Candidate in the 2015 Local Election in Blitar Regency, Indonesia*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icsp-17.2018.35>; Shintamy Nesyicha Syahril and Ahmad Redi, "The Single Candidate in the 2020 Regional Head Election Is Viewed From the Perspective of Democratic Principles Adopted by the Indonesian State," *Journal of Social Research*, ahead of print, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i7.1049>.

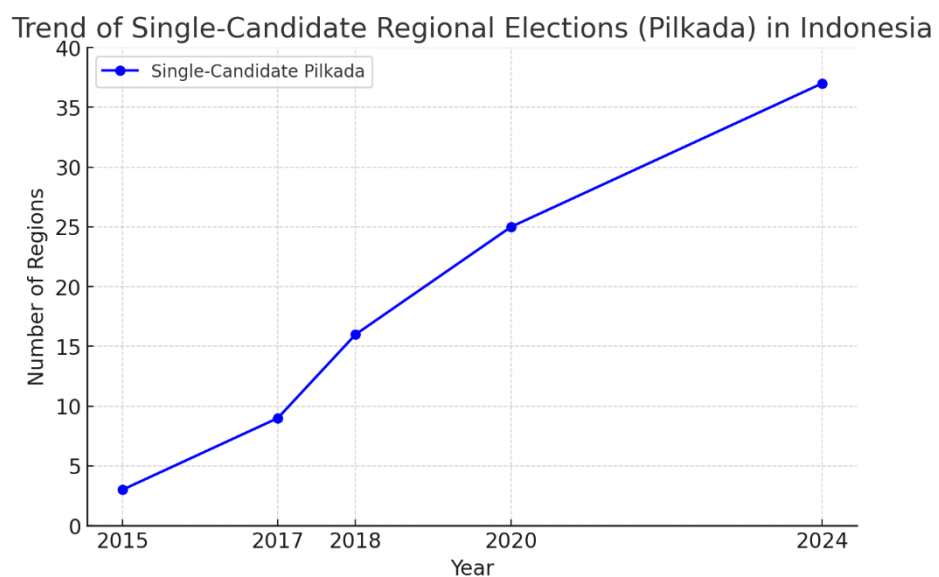
¹⁸ Suwardi Suwardi and Azis Budiyo, "Abstentions Phenomenon (Golput) Direct Local Election," *Jurnal Bina Praja*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.12.2020.203-212>; Nony Natadia Ernel and Meidi Kosandi, *Low Voter Turnout in Kepulauan Riau Province Gubernatorial Election*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icas-19.2019.87>.

¹⁹ Rofi Aulia Rahman et al., "Calon Tunggal Pilkada: Krisis Kepemimpinan dan Ancaman Bagi Demokrasi," *Jurnal Konstitusi*, ahead of print, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.31078/jk1913>.

²⁰ Gary Timothy Hasian Purba et al., "Analisis Pasangan Calon Tunggal dalam Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Kota Pematang Siantar Tahun 2020," *Perspektif*, ahead of print, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.31289/perspektif.v1i11.5636>.

²¹ Mohammad Hidayatullah et al., "Political Investors: Political Elite Oligarchy and Mastery of Regional Resources in Indonesia," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891120917213>.

significant challenge to the country's democratic framework. The interplay of legal rulings, political party dynamics, and voter perceptions creates an environment where electoral competition is increasingly compromised. Addressing these issues will require concerted efforts to reform electoral laws, enhance the accountability of political parties, and foster a more engaged electorate. This reflects broader concerns in legal discourse, where the evolution of legal positivism highlights the need for laws to adapt to societal realities to uphold justice and democratic values²².



Source: Processed by the Author

The phenomenon of single-candidate regional elections (Pilkada) in Indonesia has shown a noticeable upward trend over recent years. Starting in 2015, the number of single-candidate elections was relatively low but has steadily increased in subsequent years. By 2020, a significant rise was observed, and this trend continued into 2024. This increase suggests a growing acceptance or strategic preference for single-candidate scenarios in

²² Dwanda Julisa Sistyawan et al., "The Development Of Positivism's Legal Theory: From Bentham To Hart," *PETITA: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Hukum Dan Syariah* 9, no. 2 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.22373/petita.v9i2.402>.

regional elections, potentially reflecting changes in political dynamics, voter behavior, or regulatory environments within the country.

The occurrence of sole candidates in concurrent regional elections in Indonesia has emerged as a notable issue since 2015. Occasionally, single-candidate pairs emerge in electoral contests, indicating a deficiency of voter options. This may obstruct the local democratic process by disrupting the checks and balances mechanism²³. Nonetheless, there are more significant ramifications associated with this phenomenon. The majority of the 25 individual candidates in the 2020 concurrent regional elections are incumbents, competing for positions as regional heads and deputy regional leaders, indicating the preeminence of the previously dominant parties²⁴.

The emergence of a sole candidate in concurrent regional elections frequently commences with political lobbying, and the public is disinclined to pursue candidature due to the incumbent's substantial influence²⁵. This prompts inquiries on the diversity of options and competitiveness that should be fundamental to the democratic process. The existence of a sole candidate may also precipitate legal issues of legality and the right to vote and be elected²⁶. While a solitary contender may introduce varying political dynamics, some fear this could diminish public engagement in the democratic process²⁷. In addition, the existence of a single candidate also raises questions about the essence of democracy, as competition and choice are crucial elements in maintaining the balance of power and community

²³ Romli, "Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal."

²⁴ Abd Hannan, "Tingginya Angka Calon Tunggal Pemilihan Kepala Daerah dan Melemahnya Demokrasi di Indonesia Kontemporer," *JPW (Jurnal Politik Walisongo)* 5, no. 1 (2023): 39–57, <https://doi.org/10.21580/jpw.v5i1.17499>.

²⁵ Maringan Panjaitan et al., "Analisis Proses dan Faktor Penyebab Lahirnya Pasangan Calon Tunggal Versus Kotak Kosong Pada Pilkada Serentak Tahun 2020," *JIIIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan* 7, no. 1 (2024): 902–7, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v7i1.3806>.

²⁶ Tony Y Rahmanto, "Calon Tunggal dalam Perspektif Hak Memilih dan Dipilih di Provinsi Banten," *Jurnal Ham* 9, no. 2 (2018): 103, <https://doi.org/10.30641/ham.2018.9.103-120>.

²⁷ Rahmanto, "Calon Tunggal dalam Perspektif Hak Memilih dan Dipilih di Provinsi Banten."

representation²⁸. Thus, the phenomenon of a single candidate in the simultaneous regional elections is not only a political issue but also raises questions about the essence of democracy, community participation, and the balance of power in the context of local government in Indonesia.

The analysis of relevant references shows several aspects that need to be considered regarding the impact of the single-candidate phenomenon on local democracy. Romli highlighted that the victory of a single candidate in the Regional Election could hinder the local democratic process because the check-and-balance mechanism is not running optimally. This can reduce the variety of choices for voters and raise questions about the essence of democracy, which should be based on healthy competition and equal representation²⁹. In addition, Marbun noted that the increase in the number of single candidates in the simultaneous regional elections from year to year could indicate the dominance of incumbents who are backward, suggesting a lack of variety and a lack of healthy leadership change. This can reduce public participation in the democratic process and raise questions about the diversity of options that should be an integral part of it³⁰.

The results of simultaneous regional elections highlight a significant tendency for single candidates to garner over 60% of the vote, notwithstanding marked fluctuations in voter turnout, which ranges from 48% to 98%. This discrepancy is primarily attributed to two prevailing patterns: voter apathy in certain areas, driven by limited candidate choices that deter participation, and robust supporter loyalty in others, where voters remain committed to a singular candidate amid a lack of competition.³¹

²⁸ Suha Qoriroh and Anna Erliyana, "Polemik Pemilihan Kepala Daerah Dengan Satu Pasangan Calon - Pasca Putusan Mahkamah Konstitusi No. 100/Puu-Xii/2015," *PLJ* 5, no. 2 (2022): 170–89, <https://doi.org/10.31869/plj.v5i2.3155>.

²⁹ Romli, "Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal."

³⁰ Kevin Nathanael Marbun et al., "Gerakan Koko (Kotak Kosong): Studi Kasus Pada Pilkada Humbang Hasundutan Tahun 2020," *Epistemik: Indonesian Journal of Social and Political Science* 3, no. 2 (2022): 16–30, <https://doi.org/10.57266/epistemik.v3i2.95>.

³¹ Roxana Gutiérrez-Romero, "The Contrasting Effects of Ethnic and Partisan Identity on Performance Evaluation," *Political Behavior* 46, no. 2 (2024): 931–59, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-022-09854-7>.

Research suggests that variations in turnout can be influenced by factors such as educational background and perceived influence on electoral outcomes³². Notably, regions experiencing strong political patronage appear to reinforce voter loyalty, leading individuals to align with candidates regardless of competitive conditions, thereby creating a cycle of support that sustains both turnout and vote shares for singular candidates³³. This phenomenon underscores a broader narrative about voter behavior that intertwines identity, loyalty, and the motivations underpinning electoral engagement³⁴.

Notably, in Makassar's 2018 election, the empty ballot option garnered 53.23% of the vote, surpassing the vote of a sole candidate, reflecting public disillusionment with the limited choices available. In the recent Makassar City regional election, the empty ballot box received 53.23% of the votes, surpassing the sole candidate backed by a large party coalition, highlighting significant voter dissatisfaction. This situation illustrates that mere party support does not guarantee electoral success unless it is accompanied by genuine public endorsement³⁵. Research indicates that such results may stem from disenchantment with the political environment, signalling that voters are increasingly prioritizing candidates who demonstrate authentic engagement with their concerns rather than those who represent established political interests³⁶. The phenomenon, where the empty ballot

³² Tatiana Kostadinova, "Voter Turnout Dynamics in post-Communist Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 6 (2003): 741–59, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00102>.

³³ Kate Baldwin, "Why Vote with the Chief? Political Connections and Public Goods Provision in Zambia," *American Journal of Political Science* 57, no. 4 (2013): 794–809, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12023>.

³⁴ Enrico Cantoni and Vincent Pons, "Do Interactions with Candidates Increase Voter Support and Participation? Experimental Evidence from Italy," *Economics & Politics* 33, no. 2 (2021): 379–402, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ecpo.12167>.

³⁵ Febrian et al., "An Analysis of Defeated Single Candidate of Indonesia's Simultaneous Regional Elections 2018," paper presented at Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Indonesian Legal Studies (ICILS 2019), Semarang, Indonesia, *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Indonesian Legal Studies (ICILS 2019)*, Atlantis Press, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icils-19.2019.18>.

³⁶ Abd. Kahar Muzakkir and Umami Suci Fathia Bailusy, "The Split-Ticket Voting Phenomenon: Analyzing Internal Voter Factors in the Central–Provincial House of

garnered more votes than the sole candidate, reflects deep-seated issues such as political disillusionment and a desire for better representation in governance³⁷. This scenario suggests that future electoral strategies should focus on substantive public engagement rather than relying solely on coalition power³⁸.

Community Empowerment in the Context of Electoral Reform

Electoral reform transcends mere technical legal adjustments, serving fundamentally as a mechanism to restore the sovereignty of the populace. By instituting fair competition, fostering inclusive processes, and encouraging meaningful public participation, electoral reforms enable communities to reclaim their agency in selecting local leaders. This perspective emphasizes that electoral systems are not merely administrative frameworks but are central to the empowerment of communities and the promotion of democratic values³⁹.

To effect genuine empowerment, it is imperative that electoral reforms be built upon principles that guarantee transparency and inclusivity. These principles arise from the acknowledgment that effective community participation in governance is necessary for fostering a sense of ownership and agency among constituents⁴⁰. Programs aimed at enhancing political education and engagement are instrumental in equipping citizens with the skills needed to participate actively in the electoral process. Evidence has shown that skills gained through participatory initiatives can bolster

Representatives Election,” *SIGn Journal of Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2023): 69–86, <https://doi.org/10.37276/sjss.v4i1.333>.

³⁷ Febrian Febrian et al., *An Analysis of Defeated Single Candidate of Indonesia’s Simultaneous Regional Elections 2018*, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.2991/icils-19.2019.18>.

³⁸ Muzakkir and Bailusy, “The Split-Ticket Voting Phenomenon.”

³⁹ Philip Mendes, “Top-Down Paternalism Versus Bottom-Up Community Development: A Case Study of Compulsory Income Management Programmes in Australia,” *The International Journal of Community and Social Development*, ahead of print, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2516602618816485>.

⁴⁰ Esther de Weger et al., “Achieving Successful Community Engagement: A Rapid Realist Review,” *BMC Health Services Research*, ahead of print, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-018-3090-1>.

individual confidence and facilitate collective action, thereby strengthening the community as a whole⁴¹.

Moreover, the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots movements is crucial in reinforcing community empowerment. These entities act as advocates and watchdogs, ensuring that electoral reforms adhere not only to legislative standards but also resonate with the community's aspirations⁴². The involvement of CSOs in advocacy and education serves to elevate the voices of marginalized groups, thereby fostering an inclusive electoral landscape. Ongoing dialogues between these community actors and governmental bodies are essential for addressing power imbalances and ensuring that reforms reflect the priorities of the populace⁴³.

Engagement strategies that emphasize collaboration between different community stakeholders can lead to more representative and accountable governance structures. For example, participatory budgeting initiatives highlight how involving citizens in financial decision-making can enhance transparency and public trust, ultimately reinforcing the principles of democracy⁴⁴. Additionally, developing inclusive policies that address the barriers faced by vulnerable groups is critical; research indicates that such initiatives not only promote equity in political participation but also contribute to the overall efficacy of the electoral system⁴⁵.

⁴¹ Astraea Augsberger et al., “‘We Make a Direct Impact on People’s Lives’: Youth Empowerment in the Context of a Youth-led Participatory Budgeting Project,” *Journal of Community Psychology*, ahead of print, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22131>.

⁴² Cynthia Akwei, “Mitigating Election Violence and Intimidation: A Political Stakeholder Engagement Approach,” *Politics & Policy*, ahead of print, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1111/polp.12256>.

⁴³ Bangun Kuncoro Haryo Aryanto and Fitriyah Fitriyah, “The Importance of Assistant in Economic Empowerment Based on Business Assistance: Case Study on Wahana Visi Indonesia Adp Economic Program, Jatinegara,” *Indonesian Journal of Social Work*, ahead of print, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.31595/ijsw.v3i1.194>.

⁴⁴ Pim Kuipers, “Empowerment in Community-Based Rehabilitation and Disability-Inclusive Development,” *Disability CBR & Inclusive Development*, ahead of print, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.5463/dcid.v24i4.274>.

⁴⁵ M. Syaeful Anam et al., “Social Inclusion and Empowerment: Developing Local Potential in Bahu Palawa Village of Pulang Pisau Regency of Central Kalimantan Province,” *Jurnal Bina Praja*, ahead of print, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.21787/jbp.16.2024.55-68>.

Political education, transparency, and the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups are foundational elements in fostering community empowerment within the electoral process. These components enhance citizens' engagement by ensuring they are informed and equipped to participate meaningfully in democratic practices. Research indicates that education can empower individuals, especially women and marginalized groups, by increasing their awareness of political rights and processes, thereby encouraging active participation in elections⁴⁶. Furthermore, transparency in electoral procedures and the active inclusion of vulnerable populations not only strengthen the democratic process but also affirm citizens' confidence in governance⁴⁷.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots movements play a crucial role in amplifying community voices and advocating for electoral reforms that reflect the public's needs. These organizations operate as watchdogs, educators, and advocates, ensuring that electoral systems remain accountable to the electorate⁴⁸. Studies show that the active involvement of CSOs improves voter turnout and promotes political awareness, which is essential for fostering a responsive electoral framework⁴⁹. By championing civic engagement and protecting the rights of marginalized populations, these entities help create an electoral landscape that genuinely embodies the community's aspirations⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ Prerna Bharti and Debjani Sarkar Ghose, "Achieving Gender Equality Through Electoral Participation of Women: A Case Study of 2005, 2010 and 2015 Assembly Elections in Patna (India)," *Geography Environment Sustainability*, ahead of print, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.24057/2071-9388-2020-168>.

⁴⁷ Bhavisha Virendrakumar et al., "Disability Inclusive Elections in Africa: A Systematic Review of Published and Unpublished Literature," *Disability & Society*, ahead of print, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2018.1431108>.

⁴⁸ Olivia Gumbo, "A Critical Analysis of the Role of Civil Society in Zimbabwe's 2018 Harmonized Elections," *Open Journal of Political Science*, ahead of print, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojps.2020.102020>.

⁴⁹ Gumbo, "A Critical Analysis of the Role of Civil Society in Zimbabwe's 2018 Harmonized Elections."

⁵⁰ Patrick Nkemdilim Ijeh et al., "Beyond the Ballot: Understanding Voters' Perception on Electoral Reforms and Mass Media Influence in Nigeria," *Environment and Social Psychology*, ahead of print, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.54517/esp.v9i6.2283>.

Strengthening Democracy in Indonesia: Enhancing Political Participation and Transparency in Regional Elections

Several proposals based on relevant references can be considered to enhance the Regional Election system, making it more democratic and participatory. First, strengthening the political participation of novice voters in general elections is essential because political participation is a crucial indicator of the implementation of people's sovereignty in a democratic system. In addition, political education strategies and awareness need to be improved, especially for first-time voters, to increase their participation in the electoral process⁵¹.

Furthermore, public information disclosure in regional Elections needs to be considered since it constitutes a fundamental legal principle that underpins democracy and law as an essential basis of someone's right to get information⁵². Not to be left behind, mounting a communication media boat optimally also belongs to the General Elections Commission (K.P.U.), especially when faced with an emergency as it would happen regarding general elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The K.P.U. has showcased its flexibility by leveraging digital channels to distribute information and interact with voters, leading to notable improvements in participation levels among new voters⁵³. For example, research has emphasized the efficacy of social media in mobilizing youth voters, given that these platforms enable direct communication and interaction with political materials⁵⁴.

⁵¹ Muhamad Iqbal Muttaqin and Ridho Al-Hamdi, "Pendidikan Politik: Upaya Komisi Pemilihan Umum Sleman dalam Mewujudkan Kesadaran Politik Waria," *PERSPEKTIF* 12, no. 4 (2023): 1389–99, <https://doi.org/10.31289/perspektif.v12i4.9947>.

⁵² Muttaqin and Al-Hamdi, "Pendidikan Politik: Upaya Komisi Pemilihan Umum Sleman dalam Mewujudkan Kesadaran Politik Waria."

⁵³ Nanang Subekti et al., "The Dynamic Capability of the Indonesian General Election Commission (KPU) in the 2020 Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Proceedings of the 6th International Conference on Social and Political Sciences (ICOSAPS 2020)* (Paris, France), Atlantis Press, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.201219.052>.

⁵⁴ Jakob Ohme, "When Digital Natives Enter the Electorate: Political Social Media Use among First-Time Voters and Its Effects on Campaign Participation," *Journal of*

The role of social media in promoting political literacy among novice voters warrants consideration. Its study reveals that digital platforms serve as significant sources of political information for first-time voters, facilitating their engagement through mobilizing calls to action⁵⁵. Additionally, public information disclosure in the implementation of the Regional Elections also needs to be considered, as information disclosure is an essential legal basis for every individual's right to obtain information, which in turn can strengthen democracy. In addition, electoral system reform is also needed to overcome money politics, strengthen democratic integrity, and increase public trust.

Enhancing voter participation, particularly among novice voters, is critical for the sustainability of democracy, especially in the context of regional elections (Pilkada). The KPU (Komisi Pemilihan Umum) Can leverage various communication media to effectively engage voters, particularly in challenging circumstances like the COVID-19 pandemic. Research indicates that educational initiatives, especially those utilizing print media, can significantly raise political awareness and participation among young voters⁵⁶. This is particularly relevant as novice voters represent the future of democratic engagement, necessitating targeted political education programs that can foster their understanding of electoral processes and civic responsibilities⁵⁷.

Moreover, electoral transparency is paramount in building public trust. The KPU must ensure that information regarding elections is readily accessible and understandable to the public. This can be achieved by

Information Technology & Politics 16, no. 2 (2019): 119–36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2019.1613279>.

⁵⁵ Ohme, “When Digital Natives Enter the Electorate: Political Social Media Use among First-Time Voters and Its Effects on Campaign Participation.”

⁵⁶ Indriyati Kamil and Diani Indah, “Political Communication Education for Beginner Voters in Convenient Regional Head Elections in 2024,” *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, dan Agama* 14, no. 2 (2022): 855–68, <https://doi.org/10.37680/qalamuna.v14i2.3767>.

⁵⁷ Nurul Fitriana Harsyaf and Nur Khaerah, “Understanding the Electoral Preferences of Beginner Voters in the 2020 Bulukumba Local Elections,” *Journal of Contemporary Local Politics* 2, no. 2 (2023): 82–93, <https://doi.org/10.46507/jclp.v2i2.473>.

adopting modern information technologies to disseminate election-related data, from voter registration lists to real-time vote-counting results. Transparency enhances accountability and mitigates the risks of electoral fraud, a significant concern in many democratic systems⁵⁸.

Addressing the issue of money politics is another crucial aspect of electoral integrity. Reforming the electoral system to impose stricter regulations and penalties for corrupt practices is essential. Integrating blockchain technology into the electoral process has been proposed as a viable solution to enhance transparency and security in voting⁵⁹. Blockchain can provide a tamper-proof record of votes, thereby reducing opportunities for manipulation and ensuring that electoral outcomes reflect the will of the voters⁶⁰.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the KPU's use of digital communication platforms and social media has proven effective in maintaining voter engagement while adhering to health guidelines. Virtual campaigns can facilitate participation without compromising public safety, although ensuring that the information shared through these channels is accurate and not misleading is crucial⁶¹. Combining digital and traditional media strategies can maximize outreach, particularly in regions with limited internet access, fostering a more inclusive electoral environment ⁶².

⁵⁸ Adwin Adofo, "Empowering Youth Who Care About Democracy: Introducing General Elections to First-Time Voters," *Journal of Universal Community Empowerment Provision* 2, no. 3 (2022): 74–78, <https://doi.org/10.55885/jucep.v2i3.255>.

⁵⁹ Robin Singh Bhadoria et al., "Implementing Blockchain-Based Traceable Certificates as Sustainable Technology in Democratic Elections," *Electronics* 11, no. 20 (2022): 3359, <https://doi.org/10.3390/electronics11203359>.

⁶⁰ Uzma Jafar et al., "Blockchain for Electronic Voting System—Review and Open Research Challenges," *Sensors* 21, no. 17 (2021): 5874, <https://doi.org/10.3390/s21175874>.

⁶¹ Lea Simms et al., "Psychosocial Peer Support to Address Mental Health and Burnout of Health Care Workers Affected by COVID-19: A Qualitative Evaluation," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20, no. 5 (2023): 4536, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20054536>.

⁶² Adofo, "Empowering Youth Who Care About Democracy: Introducing General Elections to First-Time Voters."

Promoting Fair Competition and Democracy in Indonesia's Regional Elections

Reforms are crucial to promoting vigorous competition in regional elections. The prevailing election dynamics in Indonesia often result in the dominance of major political parties, marginalizing minor parties and independent candidates. The manipulation of political elites significantly influences this occurrence since they often consolidate support for a singular candidate, undermining democratic procedures and eroding democratic norms⁶³.

A multifaceted strategy is crucial to surmount the diverse challenges that result in a singular candidate in local elections. Initially, more stringent regulatory reforms are necessary to ensure equitable competition by limiting the influence of major political parties and providing greater opportunities for minor parties and independent candidates to participate. This legislation should seek to avert the occurrence of a sole candidate in the regional elections⁶⁴. Secondly, initiatives to enhance political engagement among the populace, mainly through extensive political education directed at voters and prospective candidates, are crucial. Political education must emphasize the importance of active participation in the democratic process and provide a comprehensive understanding of people's rights and responsibilities in elections⁶⁵.

Efforts to prevent the emergence of a singular candidate in the regional elections must also consider voter rights and strategies to avert such occurrences, particularly in regions like Banten⁶⁶. Moreover, communication methods, mainly social media, influence the candidate's image and electability throughout the election. Resolving the single-

⁶³ Shintamy Nesyicha Syahril and Ahmad Redi, "The Single Candidate in the 2020 Regional Head Election Is Viewed From the Perspective of Democratic Principles Adopted by the Indonesian State," *Journal of Social Research* 2, no. 7 (2023): 2188–205, <https://doi.org/10.55324/josr.v2i7.1049>.

⁶⁴ Romli, "Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal."

⁶⁵ Romli, "Pilkada Langsung, Calon Tunggal, dan Masa Depan Demokrasi Lokal."

⁶⁶ Rahmanto, "Calon Tunggal dalam Perspektif Hak Memilih dan Dipilih di Provinsi Banten."

candidate issue in municipal elections necessitates a comprehensive strategy encompassing regulatory reform, political education, legal issues, and initiatives to enhance democratic participation and equity in the electoral process.

Improving the supervisory functions of electoral bodies and promoting active engagement from the public and media are essential for bolstering openness and accountability in the nomination process. Studies demonstrate that enhanced openness can enhance electoral accountability by influencing the conduct of incumbents and prospective challengers, affecting candidate selections and electoral results. The media's role is especially crucial during elections, as it educates individuals about the governing capacities of ruling parties and the political process⁶⁷. Moreover, cultivating a culture of transparency can augment public confidence in election processes, which is vital for a robust democratic process.

Another critical aspect is regulating the electoral system to mitigate the negative influence of money politics. Excessive campaign spending can deter new candidates from entering the race, as they may need more financial backing than established parties possess⁶⁸. Implementing stricter regulations on campaign financing and ensuring equitable access to resources can create a more level playing field for both political parties and independent candidates⁶⁹. Additionally, providing financial support and reducing campaign costs can incentivize a broader range of candidates to participate in elections, thus promoting a more inclusive political landscape⁷⁰.

⁶⁷ Beatriz Cuadrado-Ballesteros et al., "The Role of Media Pressure in Promoting Transparency of Local Governments," *Transylvanian Review of Administrative Sciences* 2017, no. 51E (2017): 20–37, <https://doi.org/10.24193/tras.51E.2>.

⁶⁸ Babayo Sule, "How Accountable and Transparent Is the African Democracy? Reviewing Political Party Financing and Regulations," *African Social Science and Humanities Journal* 2, no. 3 (2021): 168–84, <https://doi.org/10.57040/asshj.v2i3.47>.

⁶⁹ Riska Sarofah et al., "Analysis of Local Electoral Governance under Electoral Integrity Perspective in Yogyakarta City 2017," *Journal of Government and Civil Society* 2, no. 2 (2018): 107, <https://doi.org/10.31000/jgcs.v2i2.1027>.

⁷⁰ Andrew Beath et al., *Electoral Rules and the Quality of Politicians: Theory and Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan* (Cambridge, MA, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.3386/w20082>.

Moreover, ongoing evaluation of electoral policies is necessary to adapt to the changing political environment. Involving various stakeholders, including academics, political practitioners, and the public, in this evaluation process can ensure that the electoral system remains responsive to the needs of a diverse electorate⁷¹. Political education initiatives targeting voters and potential candidates can enhance understanding of electoral rights and responsibilities, increasing political participation⁷². This educational approach is vital for fostering a politically informed citizenry that can engage meaningfully in the democratic process.

Addressing the dominance of major political parties and creating space for smaller parties and independent candidates is essential for fostering healthy competition in elections. Stricter regulatory reforms can help achieve this by limiting the influence of entrenched political dynasties and promoting meritocratic candidate selection within parties⁷³. Additionally, community involvement in the nomination process can be enhanced by engaging civil society organizations and public forums, allowing citizens to voice their aspirations and concerns⁷⁴.

One notable obstacle to candidate emergence arises from strategic decision-making affected by electoral dynamics, including redistricting. Studies suggest that for a political party to secure more seats, it is essential to nominate several strong challengers. Nevertheless, redistricting has the potential to disrupt the connections between voters and current officeholders, leading to higher rates of nonparticipation and reduced

⁷¹ Miguel Pérez-Moneo, "Regulating Nominations in Political Parties: Candidates, Open Primaries and Law," *Ballot* 2, no. 1 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.12957/ballot.2016.25568>.

⁷² Uzamere Rasak Okunzuwa, "Students' Knowledge of Political Education Concepts in Social Studies Curriculum as a Determinant of Their Attitude Towards Political Participation in Edo State," *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research* 6, no. 2 (2023): 178–89, <https://doi.org/10.52589/AJSSHR-YU9ZFCGO>.

⁷³ Caitlin E Jewitt and Gregory Shufeldt, "A Rigged Game? How Candidate, Partisan, and Electoral Factors Shape Elite Support for the Party Nomination Process," *American Politics Research* 49, no. 6 (2021): 681–94, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X211022317>.

⁷⁴ Sarofah et al., "Analysis of Local Electoral Governance under Electoral Integrity Perspective in Yogyakarta City 2017."

competition among candidates⁷⁵. This suggests that strategic redistricting can create environments where only a single candidate emerges, as potential challengers may perceive the electoral landscape as unfavorable. To counteract this, parties can implement proactive candidate recruitment strategies emphasizing the importance of diverse representation and encouraging potential candidates to enter races even in challenging districts⁷⁶.

Moreover, the psychological and social factors influencing candidate ambition are crucial in candidate emergence. Studies have shown that women often face additional barriers due to societal expectations and gender stereotypes, which can deter them from running for office⁷⁷. To combat this, initiatives aimed at increasing women's political ambition and providing support networks can be effective. Programs that offer mentorship, training, and resources specifically designed for women can help mitigate the impact of these barriers and encourage a broader range of candidates to emerge⁷⁸.

In conclusion, achieving a fair and inclusive electoral process in Indonesia requires comprehensive reforms, political education, and proactive measures to foster diverse representation. By addressing the challenges of significant party dominance and ensuring transparency, Indonesia can strengthen its democratic integrity and promote meaningful participation across all levels of society⁷⁹.

⁷⁵ Danny Hayes and Seth C. McKee, "The Participatory Effects of Redistricting," *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 4 (2009): 1006–23, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2009.00413.x>.

⁷⁶ Jamie L. Carson, "Strategy, Selection, and Candidate Competition in U.S. House and Senate Elections," *The Journal of Politics* 67, no. 1 (2005): 1–28, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2005.00305.x>.

⁷⁷ Michael G Miller, "Going All-in: Gender and Campaign Commitment," *Research & Politics* 2, no. 3 (2015): 205316801560510, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168015605105>.

⁷⁸ Sarah A. Fulton et al., "The Sense of a Woman: Gender, Ambition, and the Decision to Run for Congress," *Political Research Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2006): 235–48, <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290605900206>.

⁷⁹ Dwanda Julisa Sistyawan et al., "A Comparative Analysis of Mechanisms for Settlement of Election Disputes: Case Studies of Indonesia and South Africa," *Al-Risalah: Forum*

Conclusion

The phenomenon of single-candidate elections in Indonesia's regional politics reflects deep-rooted challenges to the principles of democratic competition and meaningful public participation. This trend, driven by the dominance of major political party coalitions and the entrenched power of incumbents, has limited electoral choices, weakened accountability mechanisms, and fostered political apathy among citizens. The Constitutional Court's decision allowing uncontested elections, while addressing procedural concerns, has inadvertently undermined the spirit of democracy by enabling less competitive contests.

Therefore, comprehensive regulatory reforms are crucial not only to restore the integrity of regional elections but also to empower communities and strengthen their sovereignty. Electoral law reform must explicitly aim to enhance political education, ensure transparency, protect the rights of vulnerable groups, promote independent and minority candidates, and foster active civil society engagement. These measures reinforce democratic integrity and serve as legal interventions designed to empower marginalized communities, restore their agency, and amplify their voices in governance. By integrating community empowerment into the framework of electoral reform, Indonesia can foster a more inclusive, competitive, and participatory electoral process that better reflects the aspirations and sovereignty of its people.

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