

STRENGTHENING THE INTEGRITY OF REGIONAL HEAD CANDIDATES THROUGH THE COMPETENCE TEST MECHANISM IN REGIONAL HEAD ELECTIONS (PILKADA)

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Abstract

Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) are a crucial instrument in local democracy to produce regional leaders with integrity and capacity. However, in practice, Pilkada in Indonesia is still plagued by various problems, such as high political costs, rampant money politics, and weak recruitment mechanisms for regional head candidates, which result in low integrity and increased risks of corruption. This study aims to analyze the implementation of competency testing mechanisms as an instrument to strengthen the integrity of regional head candidates and to formulate an ideal model for strengthening integrity within the framework of the Indonesian constitutional system. The research method used is normative juridical with a statutory and conceptual approach, through an analysis of related regulations and relevant legal literature. The results show that a structured, objective, and accountable competency testing mechanism can be a strategic instrument in assessing aspects of integrity, leadership capacity, national insight, managerial ability, and commitment to eradicating corruption. The proposed ideal model is based on the principles of the rule of law, democracy, and good governance, and is supported by strong regulations, the involvement of independent institutions, transparency, and public participation. Thus, the implementation of this mechanism is expected to improve the quality of local democracy and produce regional heads who are professional, have integrity, and are oriented towards the interests of the community.

Keywords: *Strengthening Integrity, Regional Head Candidate, Competency Tes, Regional Elections.*

INTRODUCTION

Election The Regional Head who was called with Regional Election is one of the instrument democracy local functioning For choose leader area in a way directly by the people. Regional elections expected capable give birth to head areas that have integrity, capacity leadership, as well as commitment towards governance clean and accountable government. However in in practice, implementation Regional elections in Indonesia are still faced with various problem, one of them is emergence head entangled area case corruption. One of the form deviation the can in the form of giving contribution political nature illegal (*illegal political contribution*) to candidate head area, which is basically is part from practice corruption in the political process (Mulida et al., 2020). In addition, the implementation of Regional Election not directly either can separated from problem financing. Regional elections need allocation sufficient budget large, both sourced from government For support organization stages election and of the candidates who must bear various need cost political in the contestation process the phenomenon This show that the nomination and selection process candidate head area Not yet fully capable ensure presence leader an area with integrity.

The height cost political in Regional elections, practice money politics, as well as mechanism recruitment candidate head area by party politics that often do not transparent become contributing factors to weakness integrity head area elected. Joshua Dressler state that money politics includes diverse form abuse authority public, including practices purchase voice, giving promise position, and action intimidating (Indah N., 2025).

Practice money politics used as tool For get power is harmful deviations essence democracy, which should be executed in a way honest and fair. Phenomenon money politics in contestation power precisely open opportunity for the actors political For do action corruption after occupy position. Transaction politics that relies on the power of capital to push candidate selected For abuse authority to close cost politics that have issued during the campaign period. Therefore that, the more large amount of funds spent in practice money politics, increasingly high potential

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occurrence corruption to state finances after they in power . Some factor occurrence money politics include : First , the low level education part big voters cause public easy affected by the practice manipulation and mobilization politics . Second , some political elites tend prioritize interest personal and group compared to interest general , so that make money politics as the way it is considered effective For reach support sound . Third , the condition poverty public often exploited by political elites through giving money or material rewards , which ultimately grind right as well as people's sovereignty as the core of Democracy . Fourth, habit and tradition contribute to the widespread practice of money politics in society. If this practice is allowed to continue, it will develop into a recurring pattern and be considered commonplace. This condition is triggered by weak oversight and low levels of public knowledge and awareness regarding the practice of money politics in elections. This lack of awareness causes the practice to persist over time, even developing into a habit considered normal. This mindset ultimately encourages the increasing frequency of money politics, especially during general elections (Lina UF et al., 2019). Therefore, the practice of money politics not only undermines democratic values but also fosters a culture of public dependence on short-term, transactional politics that negatively impacts the sustainability of democratic development. In some cases, regional head candidates who run in regional elections are determined more by financial strength or specific political support than by personal competence and integrity. This situation has the potential to encourage abuse of power after the candidate is elected. In this context, efforts are needed to strengthen the selection mechanism for regional head candidates so that they are not solely oriented towards administrative aspects and political support, but also consider aspects of integrity, leadership capacity, and commitment to national values and good governance.

Therefore, an instrument is needed to ensure that each regional head candidate is not only administratively qualified but also meets adequate competency standards substantively through a structured, objective, and accountable competency testing mechanism. This competency testing mechanism is essentially part of efforts to reform the state system at the local level, oriented towards strengthening the quality of public leadership. This testing is not merely a procedural formality, but rather an initial selection instrument capable of identifying the capacity, character, and commitment of regional head candidates in carrying out their duties. In this context, integrity testing is a fundamental aspect that must be prioritized, given that integrity is the moral foundation in the exercise of power. Integrity assessments can be conducted through tracking track records, verifying wealth reports, and clarifying potential conflicts of interest that candidates may have. Thus, this process is expected to screen individuals with a strong commitment to the values of honesty, transparency, and accountability. Furthermore, national insight testing is a crucial element in ensuring that regional head candidates have a comprehensive understanding of the nation's fundamental values, the Pancasila ideology, and the constitutional principles that underpin national life. National insight is not only related to normative knowledge but also reflects attitudes and commitment to maintaining the unity, diversity, and integrity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. In this regard, testing can be conducted through written assessments, in-depth discussions, and interviews that can explore candidates' perspectives and policy orientations in addressing strategic national issues. Furthermore, an understanding of *good governance* is also a crucial indicator in assessing the competence of regional head candidates. These include improving efficiency, transparency, and accountability in governance (Agus et al., 2024) .

A regional leader is required to have the ability to design, implement, and evaluate public policies effectively, efficiently, and responsively to community needs (Tri R. et al., 2025). Therefore, the competency testing mechanism should include policy simulations, case studies, and tests of managerial and leadership skills. This aspect is crucial to ensure that prospective regional heads not only possess a sound vision but also are able to translate it into realistic and impactful work programs. Furthermore, commitment to eradicating corruption is an integral part of the overall competency testing mechanism. Given the high level of vulnerability to corruption in the regional government sector, prospective regional heads must have a strong understanding of anti-corruption regulations and demonstrate a firm stance against all forms of irregularities. Testing in this aspect can be carried out through an assessment of legal understanding, the signing of an integrity pact, and an evaluation of behavioral track records related to transparency and accountability. Thus, it is hoped that the elected regional head candidates are truly committed to realizing a clean government free from corruption. Overall, the competency testing mechanism for prospective regional heads is a strategic step in strengthening the quality of democracy and governance at the local level. The implementation of this mechanism must be transparent and accountable, and involve independent institutions to ensure the objectivity and credibility of the assessment results. Furthermore, the competency test is expected to serve not only as a selection tool but also as a means of political education for the public, helping them understand the importance of electing qualified leaders. Thus, this effort is expected to contribute significantly to realizing a professional, integrity-based regional government that aligns with constitutional values and the principles of just democracy.

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One idea that is gaining ground is the implementation of a competency testing mechanism for regional head candidates, which could include testing their integrity, national insight, understanding of governance, and commitment to eradicating corruption. This competency testing mechanism can be an instrument to ensure that regional head candidates possess adequate basic skills and moral integrity before participating in regional elections. Furthermore, this system can also improve the quality of local democracy by producing more competent and public-interest-oriented candidates. Therefore, strengthening the integrity of regional head candidates through a competency testing mechanism is an important issue that requires academic study from the perspective of election law and regional governance.

Formulation of the Problem

Based on background behind problem the so can formulated problem as following :

1. How competency test mechanism can implemented as instrument For measure and strengthen integrity candidate head area ?
2. How ideal reinforcement model integrity candidate head area through competency test mechanism in framework system Indonesian state administration ?

METHOD

Methods used in study This is study law juridical normative . Research law juridical normative that is research conducted with method review and analyze all regulation legislation (Peter, 2005). Research This also commonly called as study law doctrinal . In research this , often law conceived as what is written in regulation legislation (*law in book*) or conceptualized law as rules or norms which are benchmark behave public to what is considered appropriate (Jonaedi et al., 2016). Approach study This use approach statute *approach* and legal approach conceptual *approach* (Maftukhin , 2025) . Approach statute *approach* is used For know How review law to strengthening integrity candidate head area through competency test mechanism in election head area . Meanwhile approach concept (*conceptual approach*) is used as supporters For explore related concepts base such as competency tests election head area . Source material primary law used that is Constitution Number 10 of 2016 concerning change second on Constitution Number 1 of 2015 concerning determination regulation government replacement Constitution Number 1 of 2014 concerning election governors , regents and mayors become laws and regulations General Election Commission Number 10 of 2024 concerning change on regulation commission election general number 8 of 2024 concerning nomination governor and deputy governor , regent and deputy regent , and mayor and deputy mayor . Source material law secondary includes , journals scientific laws and books reference .

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Competency Test Mechanism for Regional Head Candidates

Election Governor , Regent and Mayor held in a way democratic as arranged in Article 18 paragraph (4) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia . Therefore that , the principle people's sovereignty and democracy based on of the people, by the people, and for the people must held in high esteem tall as condition main in implementation election head area said . In a way normative , competency test mechanism for candidate head area should set on several level regulations in a way layered , with point main is at the level of law . First , the regulation basic (basic norms) should be loaded in Constitution Number 10 of 2016 as part from regime law Election District head . This matter because of the competency test related direct with condition nomination , selection process candidates , and rights constitutional citizens to chosen so that must own legitimacy strong in Constitution . In law mentioned , especially Article 7, the candidate governors , regents and mayors city must fulfil condition among others: 1) Be pious to God Almighty ; 2) Loyal to Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, ideals Proclamation , and the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia; 3) Lowest education school advanced level on or equivalent ; 4) Minimum age 30 years For candidate governor and 25 years For candidate regent / mayor city ; 5) Capable of physical and spiritual; 6) Never as convict based on decision the court that has powerful law remain (with exception certain); 7) Not currently revoked right choose ; 8) Never do actions despicable ; 9) Submit a list of assets personal ; 10) Not currently own debt burden that is detrimental to the country; 11) Not currently stated bankrupt ; 12) Have Number Taxpayer Identification Number (NPWP) and reports tax ; 12) Never take office as head area for two terms in same position ; 13) No status as official head area ; 14) Resign self from position certain (TNI, Polri , ASN, DPR, etc.) since set as candidate . In the context of this , the law need arrange principles , goals , space scope , as well as authority institutions that organize competency tests . Second , the regulation more technical and operational can lowered in regulation implementers , such as Regulation Government (PP) or Regulation General Election

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Commission (PKPU). In general General Article 14 of PKPU No. 8 of 2024 load provision that : 1) Candidate for head area must convey document condition as proof fulfillment condition as arranged in Constitution . Document the covering among others: a) Identity self (KTP); b) Obtained diploma legalized ; c) Certificate Healthy physical and spiritual; d) Certificate free narcotics ; e) Certificate No Once convicted (or announcement open for ex- convict); f) Report State Officials' Wealth Report (LHKPN); g) NPWP and proof reporting tax ; h) Letter of resignation self from position certain (if relevant). 2) All document the will become object study administration by the KPU for determine the status of compliance terms (MS) or No fulfil conditions (TMS).

As an institution that is independent , the KPU has task main points and functions For planning , organizing , and supervise the entire process stages election general (Muhammad MN et al., 2024). Commission General elections own authority For set procedures implementation , method assessment , competency test stages , and instrument evaluation used . With Thus , the aspect technical like form test , indicator assessment and procedures verification can arranged in a way more flexible . Third , to ensure objectivity and accountability , can also involve other institutions through regulations additional , for example Work The same with institution independent like Commission Eradication Corruption in aspect testing integrity and record footsteps anti-corruption . This is can strengthened through regulation joint regulation or memorandum of understanding that has base clear law . With Thus , ideally , the arrangement competency test mechanism in Regional Election must placed at the legal level as a basic norm , Then lowered in regulation technical by the KPU , as well as supported by involvement institution independent to ensure transparent , accountable and free implementation from intervention political approach layered This it is important that the competency test mechanism No only legitimate in a way law , but also effective in strengthen integrity candidate head area .

In addition , strengthening competency test mechanism candidate head the area also needs directed at development substance assessment that is not only nature administrative , but also includes aspect capacity leadership , integrity , and ability managerial and technocratic . Besides That in election head area need existence system meritocracy Can realized if regulations electoral capable ensure that candidate head developed areas to elections is those who have competence , achievement and integrity high . Implementation meritocracy in election head area demand existence balance between democratic political processes and principles professionalism bureaucracy , so that capable produce leader competent area as well as own integrity tall (Michael Young, 1958) . During this time , the selection process candidate head area tend focused on fulfillment formal administrative requirements , so that Not yet fully capable describe quality and capability candidate in operate government area . Therefore that , is necessary expansion competency test indicators that include ability in formulate policy public , understanding governance good governance , as well as commitment to principles democracy and eradication corruption . In the context mentioned , the competency test mechanism can designed in a number of form , such as test written , interview deep , until presentation vision and mission tested by an independent panel . This panel ideally consists of from academics , practitioners government , as well as element public civilians who have credibility and integrity . Involvement various party This aim For minimize subjectivity as well as avoid domination interest political certain in the assessment process . Thus, the competency test results can reflect the candidate's quality more objectively and comprehensively.

Furthermore, transparency in the implementation of competency tests is also crucial. Every stage, from the selection process and assessment methods to the evaluation results, must be publicly accessible as a form of accountability to the community. Publication of competency test results not only increases public trust in the regional election process but also provides voters with sufficient information to make rational choices. With this transparency, voters are expected to consider not only popularity or emotional closeness to candidates but also their capacity and integrity. Furthermore, oversight mechanisms for the implementation of competency tests also need to be strengthened. Supervisory bodies such as the General Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) can be given a role to ensure that all stages are carried out in accordance with applicable regulations and are free from fraudulent practices and political interference. Effective oversight will prevent manipulation of competency test results, which could harm the quality of local democracy. Equally important, a mechanism for continuous evaluation and improvement of the competency test system is needed. This evaluation can be conducted after each regional election to assess its effectiveness, weaknesses, and challenges encountered in its implementation. The results of this evaluation will then serve as the basis for improving regulations and technical implementation in the future. Thus, strengthening the competency testing mechanism for regional head candidates serves not only as a selection tool but also as a strategic effort to improve the quality of local democracy. Through a structured, transparent, and accountable system, it is hoped that regional heads will be elected who not only meet administrative requirements

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but also possess the capacity, integrity, and commitment to realizing effective, clean, and community-oriented regional governance.

As a consequence of these efforts, strengthening the competency testing mechanism needs to be supported by a comprehensive and binding regulatory framework, so that it does not stop at the normative level but is truly operational at every stage of the regional head nomination process. In this context, regulations regarding competency testing should ideally be placed at the statutory level as a basic norm to ensure constitutional legitimacy and ensure legal certainty in its implementation. Regulations at the statutory level are also crucial to prevent fluctuating policy changes due to short-term political dynamics. Furthermore, these provisions need to be incorporated into technical regulations drafted by the General Elections Commission (KPU) for effective implementation in the nomination, verification, and determination of regional head candidate pairs. In addition to regulatory aspects, the success of a competency testing mechanism also depends heavily on the institutional design that implements it. An independent institution or panel with high integrity, professionalism, and credibility is needed to ensure that the assessment process is conducted objectively and free from political interference. element academics, practitioners government, figures society, as well as institution supervisor become important to create system of checks and balances in implementation of competency tests. With Thus, the results evaluation No only nature administrative, but truly reflect quality substantive from candidate head area. More further, strengthening mechanism this is also a must integrated with system recruitment politics carried out by parties politics. As actor main in the nomination process, the party political own not quite enough answer strategic in ensure that nominated candidate has fulfil standard adequate competence and integrity. Therefore that, internalization principle meritocracy in body party political become crucial, so the selection process candidate No Again dominated by considerations electability only, but also considering capacity, record traces, as well as commitment to interest public. Without there is reform in body party politics, competency test mechanism potential only become formalities that are not give impact significant to quality democracy local. In addition, it is also important to put public as part from ecosystem supervision in implementation of competency tests. Participation public through access to information, criticism and input to candidate head area will strengthen legitimacy competency test results. In this case this, transparency become principle the main thing that must be held in high esteem high, so that the whole process can supervised in a way open to the public. Openness This No only increase accountability, but also encourages formation culture more politics rational and quality-based candidate. Not losing important, strengthening competency test mechanism must accompanied with system ongoing evaluation. Evaluation done For identify weaknesses, obstacles, and potential improvement in every organization Regional elections. Evaluation results the Then become base in formulate policy repair, good from aspect regulations, institutions, and technical implementation. With adaptive and sustainable approach, competency testing mechanism can Keep going develop in accordance with dynamics need society and development system state administration. In the end, strengthening competency test mechanism candidate head area is part from the big agenda of democratic reform local aiming For increase quality leadership area in a way systemic. Through implementation a structured, transparent and accountable system is expected can selected leader areas that are not only fulfil condition administrative, but also has capacity intellectual, moral integrity, and ability adequate managerial. With Thus, the regional elections No Again just become an arena of contestation politics, but rather become means strategic For give birth to capable leader realizing governance effective, clean, and welfare-oriented governance community.

Ideal Model of Reinforcement Integrity of Regional Head Candidates Through Competency Test Mechanism

Strengthening integrity candidate head area through competency test mechanism in essence rooted in three main pillars in state administration that is the principles of the rule of law (*rechtstaat*), democracy, and *good governance*. Third principle the become foundation conceptual at a time normative in designing a selection model leadership areas that are not only legitimate in a way procedural, but also quality in a way substantive. In the perspective of the rule of law, as confirmed in The 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, every organization power government must based on law, not solely on power politics. Principles This contain consequence that the nomination process head area must subject to standards clear, objective and enforceable laws accountable. Therefore that, the competency test mechanism become instrument important For ensure that candidate head area fulfil qualification appropriate integrity, capacity and professionalism with principle legality and accountability in a state of law. Furthermore, in framework democracy, popular sovereignty is source legitimacy main in election head area. However thus, democracy No only interpreted as procedure electoral only, but also must ensure quality available options for the people. In the context this, the competency test mechanism functioning as *democratic filter* that ensures that proposed candidates to public is individuals who have adequate competence

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and integrity . Thus, competency tests do not conflict with democratic principles, but rather strengthen substantive democracy by improving the quality of political representation .

Furthermore, the principle of *good governance* emphasizes the importance of transparent, accountable, effective, efficient governance, and free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Consistent application of the principles of *good governance can prevent the emergence of bureaucratic pathologies and encourage the realization of a bureaucracy that is efficient, clean, and responsive to the needs of the community, thereby ultimately increasing public trust in the government* (Sri YM et al., 2025). Within this framework, the integrity of regional head candidates is a primary prerequisite for realizing good governance. A competency testing mechanism that is designed systematically, transparently, and based on measurable indicators will contribute to selecting leaders who are committed to the values of *good governance* . This is in line with efforts to prevent corruption from the early stages of candidacy, not only during the administration of government. Normatively, strengthening integrity through competency testing also gains legitimacy from various laws and regulations, including Law Number 10 of 2016 which regulates regional head elections, and Law Number 12 of 2011 which emphasizes the importance of regulating norms hierarchically and systematically. Furthermore, the principle of eradicating corruption, which is an integral part of integrity, is also strengthened through national policies involving the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), an institution that plays a role in promoting transparency and accountability of public officials. Thus, the ideal model for strengthening the integrity of regional head candidates through a competency test mechanism is a manifestation of the integration of the principles of the rule of law, democracy, and *good governance* . This model aims not only to fulfill the formal aspects of candidacy but also to ensure that each candidate competing in the regional elections possesses leadership qualities capable of responding to the demands of clean, effective, and community-oriented governance.

Furthermore, the implementation of this model is expected to strengthen the quality of local democracy by presenting candidates who possess not only electoral legitimacy but also adequate technocratic and moral capacity. In the long term, the existence of a credible and accountable competency testing mechanism will also encourage the transformation of political culture from one based on popularity and capital power to one that emphasizes quality, integrity, and professionalism. This will ultimately create a positive cycle in the local government system, where qualified leaders are able to produce effective public policies, improve public welfare, and strengthen public trust in government institutions. Therefore, strengthening integrity through a competency testing mechanism is not only a normative necessity but also a fundamental strategy in realizing sustainable and equitable local governance.

Assessment Dimensions and Indicators

In formulating an ideal model for strengthening the integrity of regional head candidates through a competency test mechanism, it is necessary to construct assessment dimensions and indicators that are not only comprehensive, but also systematic, measurable, and capable of reflecting the quality of leadership as a whole. The first dimension, which serves as the main foundation, is moral integrity, which includes tracing track records, compliance with the law, and a history of behavior free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Assessment of this aspect is not only based on administrative documents, but also through factual verification, public clarification, and the involvement of authorized institutions to ensure that candidates have honest, trustworthy, and reliable characters in exercising power. Furthermore, the dimension of national insight is an important indicator that must be measured in depth, considering that regional heads are part of the state administrators who have the responsibility to maintain the integrity of the nation. National insight can be understood as a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the state, nation, and national identity possessed by individuals and society (Aziz WN et al., 2026). National insight includes an understanding of the basic values of the state, the Pancasila ideology, and the constitution as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. In addition, this aspect also assesses the candidate's commitment to maintaining pluralism, tolerance, and unity within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia, especially in facing increasingly complex social dynamics.

The next dimension is leadership capacity, which focuses on the candidate's ability to make strategic decisions, lead government organizations, and effectively manage conflict and change. Leadership is not only assessed through rhetorical skills, but also through experience, decisive action, and the ability to develop a realistic and implementable vision. Today's leaders emphasize capability, creativity, and human resource development, prioritizing efficient communication and the ability to adapt to the dynamics of change (Susan F. et al., 2025). In this context, competency tests can explore how candidates respond to crises, prioritize policies, and demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. Furthermore, managerial and technocratic skills are crucial assessment dimensions, given that regional heads serve as government managers responsible for planning, implementing, and

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evaluating public policy. Indicators in this dimension include an understanding of *good governance*, the ability to develop regional development plans, accountable budget management, and the capacity to formulate policies based on data and community needs. Thus, prospective regional heads must possess not only a normative vision but also the technical capabilities to concretely realize it. Furthermore, the commitment to eradicating corruption and public service must be an integral indicator of the overall assessment. This commitment is reflected in attitudes, understanding of anti-corruption regulations, and a willingness to implement the principles of transparency and accountability in government. Furthermore, an orientation toward public service is also an important benchmark for assessing the extent to which candidates are sensitive to community needs and committed to continuously improving the quality of public services. By integrating all these dimensions, the competency testing mechanism is expected to produce an objective, comprehensive, and leadership-oriented assessment. This approach not only assesses formal and administrative aspects but also explores the substantive capacity of regional head candidates to carry out government functions. Therefore, the existence of clear and measurable indicators is key to ensuring that the candidate selection process is not merely procedural but truly capable of selecting regional leaders with integrity, competence, and a strong commitment to the interests of the community and the sustainability of regional development.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of regional elections in Indonesia still faces various fundamental problems, particularly the high cost of politics, the rampant practice of money politics, and weak recruitment and selection mechanisms for regional head candidates, which have implications for low integrity and increased potential for corruption after election. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the selection system through a structured, objective, and accountable competency testing mechanism as a strategic instrument to ensure that regional head candidates not only meet administrative requirements, but also possess moral integrity, leadership capacity, national insight, and a commitment to good governance and the eradication of corruption. The implementation of a competency testing model based on the principles of the rule of law, democracy, and good governance, and supported by strong regulations, independent institutions, transparency, and public participation, is expected to improve the quality of local democracy and produce regional leaders who are professional, clean, and oriented towards the interests of the community in a sustainable manner.

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