

RESEARCH ARTICLE



MANIFESTATION OF FREEDOM OF SPEECH REFORM THROUGH EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN ONLINE PETITIONS IN THE PROCESS OF FORMING AND MONITORING GOVERNMENT POLICIES

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ABSTRACT

The freedom to express opinions including through online petitions, is an obligation that must be guaranteed by the government, as mandated by regulations across various sectors. However, there are several issues in its implementation due to limited regulatory substance, weak government intervention, and the absence of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for online petitions. As a result, many online petitions go unanswered by the government. This situation demonstrates the need to re-evaluate policies on freedom of expression through online petitions. This study aims to analyze the urgency of institutionalizing online petitions as a form of freedom of expression in government administration and to provide strategies for implementing and formulating the institutionalization of online petitions to achieve freedom of expression reform in Indonesia. This writing employs a normative juridical method using legislative, conceptual, comparative, and case approaches. Based on the research findings, the author proposes a mechanism for supervising online petitions through the Ombudsman to optimize the government's role in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of online petitions. Optimization is carried out by drafting specific regulations as guidelines for the government and the public to ensure freedom of expression through online petitions. The presence of this mechanism is expected to resolve the issues in the implementation of online petitions in Indonesia, thereby achieving freedom of expression reform through the institutionalization of online petitions.

ARTICLE HISTORY:

Received : 5 Maret 2026
Revised : 10 April 2026
Accepted : 20 April 2026

KEYWORDS:

Online Petitions;
Freedom of
Expression; State
Governance System;

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1. Introduction

The Republic of Indonesia is a democratic state that places sovereignty in the hands of the people. This principle is explicitly affirmed in Article 1 paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD NRI 1945), which states that sovereignty belongs to the people and is exercised in accordance with the Constitution. As a democratic state, Indonesia guarantees the constitutional rights of every citizen, including the right to freedom of expression as part of fundamental human rights. The protection of human rights in Indonesia is constitutionally regulated under Articles 28A to 28J of the UUD NRI 1945 ([Aditya & Al-Fatih, 2021](#)). The recognition of human rights in Indonesia was further strengthened through the enactment of Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights. Article 1 paragraph (1) of the Law defines human rights as a set of rights inherent to human beings as creatures of God Almighty, which must be respected, upheld, and protected by the state, law, government, and every individual. Among these rights, freedom of expression constitutes an essential element in the implementation of democratic governance because it enables citizens to convey ideas, criticism, aspirations, and opinions regarding public affairs and state administration ([Berman, 2017](#)).

In the contemporary era, the protection of freedom of expression has become increasingly significant due to the rapid development of digital technology and social media platforms. Digital media provides broader opportunities for public participation in governmental affairs and policymaking processes. Online platforms enable citizens to voice criticism, advocate public interests, and strengthen civic engagement

beyond conventional political participation mechanisms ([Lim, 2017](#)). However, despite technological advancements, public participation in Indonesia remains largely limited to electoral activities, particularly general elections (Pemilu). After elections, citizens often have limited access to meaningful participation in the formulation and supervision of public policies. This condition reflects a narrowing interpretation of democracy that focuses primarily on electoral procedures rather than continuous public engagement. In practice, many government policies have generated public dissatisfaction due to the perceived lack of public involvement in policymaking processes, including the rejection of the Draft Criminal Code (RKUHP), the Revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission Law (RUU KPK), Law Number 6 of 2023 concerning Job Creation, the Revision of the Mineral and Coal Law (RUU Minerba), the Draft Law on Pancasila Ideology Guidelines, and the increase in BPJS Kesehatan contributions. These cases indicate that the existing mechanisms for accommodating public aspirations, including through the House of Representatives (DPR) during recess periods, are often considered ineffective ([Saud & Margono, 2021](#)).

In order to create policies that are more responsive to public interests, participatory mechanisms capable of effectively channeling citizens' aspirations are necessary. One emerging form of public participation is the use of online petitions as a medium for expressing opinions, criticism, and policy recommendations to the government. The right to convey opinions and aspirations to the government is guaranteed under Article 44 of Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights, which states that every person has the right to submit opinions, suggestions, complaints, and proposals to the government, either individually or collectively, orally or in writing, in the context of implementing transparent, effective, and efficient governance. At the international level, democratic participation and freedom of expression are also recognized as fundamental human rights. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) affirms that every person has the right to participate in the government of their country, either directly or through freely chosen representatives. Similarly, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees various civil and political rights, including freedom of opinion, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and the right to participate in public affairs ([Bua & Escobar, 2018](#)).

Freedom of expression is therefore inseparable from democratic principles and constitutes a fundamental civil and political right. That democracy requires active citizen participation in determining the conditions of their social and political environment, and therefore the freedom to express opinions and thoughts must be protected to ensure democratic governance. In line with this perspective, several previous studies have highlighted the importance of online petitions as instruments of democratic participation. Their research demonstrates that online petitions strengthen communication between citizens and representative institutions, particularly within parliamentary systems. Similarly, Ross D. Cotton explains that countries adopting formal e-petition mechanisms tend to provide broader opportunities for citizens to participate in policymaking processes and encourage governmental responsiveness toward public concerns ([Masferrer, 2023](#)).

Several countries, such as the United Kingdom, Estonia, and the United States, have successfully implemented online petition systems as part of democratic governance. In the United Kingdom, online petitions are formally integrated into parliamentary mechanisms, enabling citizens' concerns to be discussed by legislative institutions and followed up by the executive branch. Meanwhile, the United States provides official petition services through the "We the People" platform as a form of direct digital participation between citizens and the government. Compared to these countries, Indonesia has not yet established a comprehensive legal and institutional framework governing online petitions. Consequently, online petitions in Indonesia often lack legal certainty, institutional recognition, and effective follow-up mechanisms ([Bochel, 2017](#)).

Although previous studies have examined online petitions as instruments of democratic participation, several research gaps remain. Existing studies predominantly focus on the implementation

of online petitions in countries with established parliamentary traditions, while limited attention has been given to the Indonesian constitutional and administrative context. Moreover, prior studies generally discuss online petitions from political participation and digital democracy perspectives without comprehensively analyzing the legal protection and institutional mechanisms required to guarantee the effectiveness of online petitions in Indonesia. There is also still limited research examining the role of independent state institutions, particularly the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, in strengthening online petition mechanisms as instruments of public participation and governmental oversight. Therefore, this research offers novelty by emphasizing the optimization of the Ombudsman's role in strengthening online petitions through regulatory reform and institutional mechanisms aimed at guaranteeing legal protection, procedural standards, and governmental accountability in responding to public aspirations.

The urgency of this research arises from the increasing public demand for broader and more effective participation in governance, particularly in the digital era. Despite constitutional guarantees of freedom of expression, Indonesia still lacks a comprehensive legal framework regulating online petitions as official channels for public aspirations. The absence of clear regulations and institutional mechanisms often results in online petitions being treated merely as symbolic expressions without legal consequences or adequate governmental responses. This condition potentially decreases public trust in democratic institutions and weakens the implementation of participatory democracy. In line with Aristotle's theory of the ideal state, the state bears responsibility for ensuring public welfare and fulfilling the rights and needs of its citizens [\(Namang, 2020\)](#). Therefore, strengthening online petitions becomes essential to ensure that freedom of expression can be exercised effectively, responsibly, and constitutionally within democratic governance.

Based on these issues, this research aims to analyze the constitutional and legal protection of freedom of expression through online petitions in Indonesia, examine the weaknesses of existing public participation mechanisms in policymaking and governmental supervision, analyze the potential role of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia in strengthening online petition mechanisms, and formulate a regulatory and institutional model for strengthening online petitions as instruments of democratic participation and governmental accountability in Indonesia. Accordingly, this study is presented under the title *"Manifestation of Freedom of Speech Reform Through Efforts to Strengthen Online Petitions in the Process of Forming and Supervising Government Policies."*

2. Methodology

This research employs a normative juridical legal research method that examines legal norms and principles contained within applicable positive law. Normative legal research focuses on analyzing statutory regulations, legal doctrines, legal principles, and legal concepts relevant to the issues discussed in the study [\(Efendi & Ibrahim, 2016\)](#). This research examines the legal framework concerning freedom of expression and online petitions within the Indonesian constitutional and administrative system. To support the analysis, this study applies several approaches commonly used in normative legal research, namely the statute approach, conceptual approach, comparative approach, and case approach. The statute approach is used to analyze laws and regulations related to human rights and public participation, while the conceptual approach examines legal doctrines and theories concerning democracy and freedom of expression. Furthermore, the comparative approach compares the implementation of online petition mechanisms in several countries, and the case approach analyzes public policy controversies and governmental responses in Indonesia.

The type of data used in this research is secondary data, namely data obtained indirectly through legal documents and library materials. Secondary data consists of primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, and tertiary legal materials. Primary legal materials include statutory regulations, official records, and constitutional provisions related to freedom of expression and public participation,

such as the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia and Law Number 39 of 1999 concerning Human Rights. Secondary legal materials include books, scientific journals, scholarly opinions, legal articles, court decisions, and previous studies relevant to democracy, online petitions, and human rights. In addition, tertiary legal materials such as legal dictionaries and internet-based references are also utilized to support the research analysis ([Eleftheriadis, 2023](#)).

The data collection method applied in this study is library research, which is conducted by collecting, examining, and classifying various legal materials and literature relevant to the research topic. The library research is not merely limited to reading books, but also involves systematic activities of recording, organizing, and analyzing research materials obtained from various sources. Therefore, this study relies on books, scientific journals, laws and regulations, official documents, legal news, and internet-based publications related to online petitions and freedom of expression. After the legal materials and relevant data are collected, this research employs a qualitative juridical analysis method. The analysis is conducted by systematically describing and interpreting legal materials in the form of coherent and structured narratives to facilitate the formulation of conclusions ([Gerry, 2017](#)). Through this method, the researcher identifies legal problems, examines institutional weaknesses, and formulates recommendations regarding the strengthening of online petitions as instruments of democratic participation and governmental accountability in Indonesia.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Online Petitions as a Form of Freedom of Expression in Government Administration

Public participation constitutes one of the fundamental characteristics of a democratic state. In a democratic system, the government is required to pay close attention to public opinion as a manifestation of people's sovereignty. Therefore, democracy requires equal opportunities for every citizen to participate in the process of formulating and supervising public policies. The effectiveness of democracy can thus be assessed through the extent to which the state accommodates public participation in governance processes. However, in practice, various government policies in Indonesia are often perceived as inconsistent with public aspirations. For instance, the Draft Bill on the Elimination of Sexual Violence was removed from the Priority National Legislation Program despite strong public demand, while the Draft Bill on Pancasila Ideology Guidelines, which received substantial public opposition, remained included in the legislative agenda. These conditions indicate that public participation in policymaking has not been optimally implemented, resulting in policies that are frequently viewed as lacking responsiveness to societal needs ([Parvin, 2018](#)).

The issue of freedom of expression in Indonesia has also become increasingly complex due to the implementation of Law Number 19 of 2016 concerning Amendments to Law Number 11 of 2008 on Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE Law). Several cases demonstrate that the ITE Law has often been interpreted broadly and used against individuals expressing criticism toward the government. One example occurred in 2020 when a student from Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta was named a suspect after criticizing government policies through social media, allegedly violating Article 28 paragraph (2) of the ITE Law regarding hate speech. In addition, various forms of intimidation against government critics have also been reported, including threats, criminalization attempts, hacking of personal accounts, and intimidation against academics and activists, such as the case involving activist Rasio Patra and the hacking incident experienced by the discussion committee of the Faculty of Law at Gadjah Mada University. Such as conditions raise concerns regarding the actual position of citizens within the democratic system and indicate that public participation is often limited to electoral participation alone. Consequently, citizens require alternative participatory mechanisms that allow them to effectively express aspirations, criticism, and supervision over government administration

One form of digital participation that has increasingly developed in Indonesia is the use of online petitions. Online petitions emerged as an alternative platform due to the perceived ineffectiveness of

conventional demonstrations in influencing public policy. Historically, petitions have long been recognized as instruments of political participation, particularly in England since the issuance of the Magna Carta in 1215, where petitions became a communication channel between citizens, parliament, and the monarchy (Huzzey & Miller, 2021). Over time, petitions evolved into digital forms through online platforms that facilitate broader and more efficient public participation. In Indonesia, online petition platforms such as Change.org have become increasingly popular since their introduction in 2012. Reports indicate that by 2021, nearly 19 million Indonesians had used the platform, with approximately one million users actively supporting various online petitions. This development demonstrates that online petitions have become an important instrument for expressing public aspirations and influencing government policies.

Several online petition cases in Indonesia illustrate the significant influence of digital participation on policymaking processes. One prominent example concerns the relocation of the National Capital City (IKN) under Law Number 3 of 2022 concerning the National Capital City. Public opposition emerged due to concerns regarding the lack of transparency, the substantial budget allocation, and the accelerated policymaking process. Through Change.org, an online petition rejecting the relocation of the IKN succeeded in collecting millions of signatures, reflecting strong public resistance toward the policy. Nevertheless, the government continued the project without substantial consideration of the public's objections. This condition indicates that public participation rights, as guaranteed under Article 96 paragraph (1) of Law Number 12 of 2011 concerning the Formation of Legislation, have not been effectively implemented. Another example involved the proposal of the Minister of Law and Human Rights, Yasonna Laoly, to release corruption convicts during the COVID-19 pandemic due to prison overcrowding. The proposal received widespread criticism because corruption was considered an extraordinary crime detrimental to democracy and public welfare. Public rejection through online petitions eventually influenced President Joko Widodo to reject the proposal. These cases demonstrate that online petitions possess significant potential to influence public policy and function as instruments of public control over government administration.

Normatively, the right to freedom of expression and the utilization of digital technology are protected under various Indonesian legal instruments. Article 28E paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution guarantees the freedom of association, assembly, and expression. Similar protections are also contained in Law Number 9 of 1998 concerning Freedom of Expression in Public, Law Number 40 of 1999 concerning the Press, and Law Number 13 of 2022 concerning the Formation of Legislation, which emphasizes meaningful public participation through the rights to be heard, considered, and explained. However, despite these regulations, Indonesia still lacks specific legal provisions governing online petitions as official mechanisms for public participation. Existing regulations only implicitly regulate freedom of expression in digital spaces without establishing legal certainty regarding the status, procedures, and governmental obligations in responding to online petitions. Consequently, online petitions often function merely as symbolic instruments without binding legal force. Therefore, specific regulations concerning online petitions are urgently needed to provide legal protection, prevent misuse, and ensure governmental accountability in responding to public aspirations conveyed through digital platforms. As emphasized by Muhammad Hatta, freedom can only be properly exercised through a clear and enforceable legal framework, because legal uncertainty will ultimately weaken democracy and threaten the protection of citizens' rights.

3.2 Implementation Strategy and Formulation for Strengthening Online Petitions in Realizing Freedom of Expression Reform in Indonesia

The implementation of online petitions in a democratic state is closely related to political dynamics and governmental willingness to accommodate public participation. Brodtkin (2019), through the *multiple streams analysis* theory, explain that the success of public policies, including online petitions, is

influenced by policy factors and political factors. Policy factors concern the substance and solutions proposed through online petitions, while political factors relate to the government's willingness to respond and incorporate public aspirations into policymaking processes. In Indonesia, the absence of specific regulations governing online petitions causes their implementation to depend heavily on political will rather than legal obligations. Consequently, online petitions often lack binding force and are vulnerable to political interests and elite domination. In addition, online petitions also face risks of misuse, such as infiltration by interest groups, misinformation, and identity manipulation. Therefore, a comprehensive regulatory and institutional framework is required, including clear mechanisms regarding petition submission procedures, verification systems, minimum signature thresholds, institutional responsibilities, and governmental obligations in responding to public petitions

Several countries have successfully implemented online petitions as instruments of democratic participation. The United Kingdom, for example, has developed an integrated parliamentary e-petition system that allows citizens to directly submit aspirations to parliament through an official digital platform. Under the UK system, online petitions supported by at least 10,000 signatures must receive an official government response, while petitions reaching 100,000 signatures may be debated in parliament. The UK Parliament also establishes strict standards for petitions, including requirements that petitions must address matters within governmental authority, avoid defamatory content, remain politically neutral, and not violate existing laws.

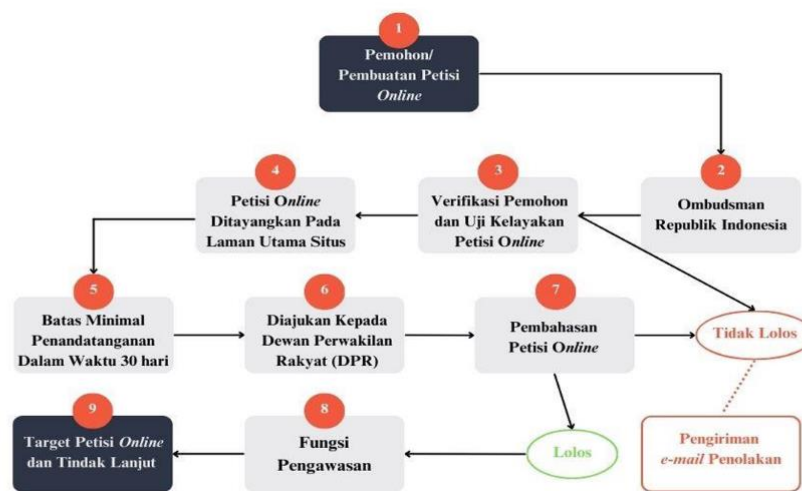
Through regulations such as the Communications Act 2003 and the Data Protection Act 2018, the United Kingdom has successfully institutionalized online petitions as a formal mechanism for public participation and governmental accountability. Similarly, Estonia has become one of the leading countries in implementing e-government and digital democracy. Through the *Rahvaalgatus.ee* platform managed by the Estonian Cooperation Assembly, citizens can submit online petitions integrated with national digital identity systems and blockchain-based security mechanisms. Estonia requires online petition creators to follow several procedural stages, including public discussion, proposal refinement, and the collection of at least 1,000 verified digital signatures. The use of electronic identity verification and distributed ledger technology (DLT) ensures data security, prevents manipulation, and strengthens public trust in the online petition system ([Almi'ani et al., 2026](#)).

The practices implemented in the United Kingdom and Estonia can serve as important references for Indonesia in formulating regulations and implementation strategies for online petitions. However, their implementation must be adapted to Indonesia's constitutional, political, and technological conditions. The first step that should be undertaken by the Indonesian government is strengthening the national e-government system to support secure, integrated, and accountable digital participation mechanisms. This effort requires the support of comprehensive legal instruments, including regulations concerning cyber resilience, personal data protection, and integrated national data governance. The establishment of a national data center is also essential to support integrated public services, including online petition systems. In addition, several technical challenges must be addressed, such as unequal internet access, the risk of false identities, weak inter-agency coordination, limited technological infrastructure, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities ([Bertot et al., 2016](#)). Therefore, the implementation of technologies such as blockchain, cloud computing, and credential authentication systems becomes highly relevant. Blockchain technology can strengthen data security and prevent data manipulation, cloud computing can ensure system stability and accessibility, while credential schemes such as Coconut Credential can verify the authenticity and integrity of digital signatures. Collaboration between the government and state-owned enterprises, particularly in the telecommunications and digital sectors such as Telkom Indonesia, is also necessary to support technological integration and infrastructure development.

In terms of institutional design, this study argues that the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia is the most appropriate institution to supervise and manage online petition mechanisms in Indonesia. The Ombudsman possesses constitutional legitimacy and institutional authority to oversee public services

and investigate maladministration in governmental administration. Furthermore, the Ombudsman is recognized as an independent institution with a relatively high level of public trust. Data from 2022 shows that the Ombudsman handled 22,197 public reports and identified 8,292 allegations of maladministration through Final Examination Reports. This demonstrates the institution’s capacity and credibility in handling public complaints and supervising government accountability. Therefore, strengthening online petitions through the Ombudsman can provide legal certainty, institutional legitimacy, and greater public trust in digital participation mechanisms. In this context, the Ombudsman could function not only as a supervisory institution but also as a mediator between citizens and the government by ensuring that online petitions are processed transparently, objectively, and accountably as part of democratic governance reform in Indonesia.

Figure 1 Concept of procedures and flow for submitting online petitions.



Source: processed by the researcher (2026)

Based on the proposed scheme above, the implementation of online petitions managed by the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia would be carried out through several procedural stages before a petition can be formally submitted to the House of Representatives (DPR). The first stage involves the collection of online petitions through a special digital platform directly managed and supervised by the Ombudsman. In this stage, the Ombudsman acts as the primary institution responsible for receiving public aspirations submitted through online petitions. Subsequently, the Ombudsman conducts an eligibility assessment and identity verification process to ensure the validity and accountability of each petition submitted. Petition applicants must be Indonesian citizens at least 17 years of age, proven by a valid National Identity Card (KTP), and/or Indonesian legal entities fully owned by Indonesian citizens. Furthermore, the substance of the petition must not concern personal disputes, confidential matters, defamatory content, or issues that potentially violate laws and regulations. This verification process is essential to prevent misuse of online petitions and to ensure that petitions genuinely reflect public interests.

Online petitions that meet the administrative and substantive requirements will then be published on the official portal managed by the Ombudsman. Publication through the portal allows the public to

access, review, and support petitions transparently. To proceed to the next stage, an online petition must obtain a minimum number of signatures within a specified period of 30 days. The determination of a signature threshold is intended to ensure that only petitions receiving substantial public support are forwarded for further discussion (Vidgen & Yasseri, 2020). The development of a structured online petition mechanism demonstrates that digital participation can be institutionalized as an integral and strategic component of a more responsive, transparent, and accountable democratic governance system. In the contemporary digital era, where public communication increasingly occurs through online platforms, the existence of formal mechanisms for aggregating and managing public aspirations becomes essential to ensure that citizen participation is not only expressive but also meaningful within the policy cycle. By incorporating clear procedural standards, identity verification systems, defined submission flows, and measurable thresholds of public support, online petitions are able to function not merely as channels of expression, but also as structured, evidence-based inputs in the policymaking and policy evaluation processes.

Furthermore, this mechanism also serves as an important filtering instrument that helps distinguish between issues of broad public concern and those with limited or individual societal relevance. Through such filtering, governmental institutions are better positioned to prioritize policy responses based on collective urgency, public significance, and the level of societal impact. This ensures that state attention and administrative resources are directed toward substantive issues that genuinely reflect the needs and aspirations of the wider community. In this way, a structured online petition system not only strengthens the quality of public participation, but also contributes to improving the effectiveness of governance by reducing policy noise, enhancing deliberative quality, and ensuring that decision-making processes are grounded in verified and representative public input.

Through this system, online petitions are expected to move beyond symbolic democratic expressions and evolve into legitimate instruments of civic participation that are supported by verifiable public engagement and institutional follow-up. In the long term, the integration of online petitions within formal governance structures has the potential to strengthen the relationship between citizens and the state, enhance policy responsiveness, and improve public trust in governmental institutions. Accordingly, the development of such mechanisms represents a strategic step in reinforcing the principles of participatory democracy, while ensuring that freedom of expression is exercised in a more effective, meaningful, and institutionally recognized manner within Indonesia's constitutional framework.

4. Conclusion

The development of digital technology has transformed the paradigm of public participation in expressing opinions, shifting from conventional face-to-face communication toward digital platforms such as online petitions. Online petitions have increasingly become a popular medium for citizens to convey criticism, suggestions, and aspirations regarding governmental policies and public issues. Several online petition movements in Indonesia, such as public opposition to the relocation of the National Capital City (IKN) and the rejection of the proposal to release corruption convicts during the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrate that online petitions possess significant influence in shaping public discourse and affecting policymaking processes. These developments indicate that online petitions have become an important element in the growth of digital democracy in Indonesia. However, despite their increasing influence, Indonesia still lacks a specific legal framework governing online petitions, resulting in the absence of governmental obligations to formally respond to petitions submitted through digital platforms. Consequently, online petitions remain vulnerable to legal uncertainty and weak institutional protection as instruments of freedom of expression.

To strengthen online petitions as legitimate mechanisms of democratic participation, Indonesia requires a comprehensive implementation strategy supported by adequate legal and technological infrastructures. The experiences of the United Kingdom and Estonia may serve as important references

in formulating an online petition system adapted to Indonesia's constitutional and sociopolitical conditions. The government needs to accelerate the development of an integrated e-government system based on the principles of transparency, accountability, and participatory governance. This effort must also be supported by the enactment of regulations concerning cyber resilience, personal data protection, and integrated national data governance to ensure legal certainty and protection for online petitions. In addition, technological support such as blockchain technology, cloud computing, and credential authentication systems is necessary to guarantee data security, prevent identity manipulation, and strengthen public trust in digital participation mechanisms.

Furthermore, the existence of an independent supervisory institution is essential to ensure the credibility and accountability of online petition systems in Indonesia. In this regard, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia is considered the most appropriate institution to supervise and manage online petitions due to its authority in overseeing public services and handling maladministration cases. The Ombudsman's independent position and relatively high level of public trust provide a strong institutional foundation for ensuring that online petitions are managed transparently, objectively, and professionally. Therefore, the government is expected to immediately formulate comprehensive legal regulations concerning online petitions and include them within the Priority National Legislation Program (Prolegnas) as part of broader efforts to strengthen freedom of expression, public participation, and democratic governance in Indonesia.

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