

Bureaucracy Neutrality in The Post of The Simultaneous Regional Elections in Karawang Regency in 2024

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Abstract. Indonesia as a country that adheres to a democratic system, of course and will definitely hold general elections every agreed period. In every democratic party (Election or Regional Election), bureaucratic apparatus is often in a dilemma because bureaucratic apparatus are employees who are appointed and dismissed by the Civil Service Development Officer (PPK) who has the status of a political official. This dilemma is also experienced by bureaucratic apparatus in Karawang Regency which is holding a simultaneous regional election process in 2024. This study uses a qualitative method to understand a phenomenon that occurs holistically through words and language descriptively. The data obtained by this study uses several stages, such as observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain the data needed during the research process. This study produces results that bureaucratic neutrality in Karawang Regency is running optimally, which is marked by the commitment, moral integrity, and responsibility that each bureaucratic apparatus has. Other indicators include a professional attitude, no conflict of interest, and compliance with existing regulations that run optimally, which is indicated by the minimal cases of violations of neutrality committed by bureaucratic apparatus. This condition is a result of cooperation between the KPU, Bawaslu, and BKPSDM in Karawang Regency, which routinely carry out various activities and remind bureaucratic apparatus to always be neutral in the process of organizing simultaneous regional elections. This study can produce conclusions that bureaucratic apparatus have commitment, moral integrity, and responsibility, have a sense of professionalism and are impartial, have no conflict of interest, and comply with regulations regarding neutrality during and after simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency.

Keywords: Bureaucratic Apparatus; Neutrality; Public Services

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INTRODUCTION

The collapse of the New Order regime led by President Suharto due to the Reformation movement in 1998 had a significant impact on the Indonesian government system, including the transformation or shift of the political system from an authoritarian to a more democratic one. Many other changes, including the bureaucracy, have become a crucial component or instrument in any government, whose presence is unavoidable and unavoidable (Kronborg, Hedegaard, Klindt, & Vandeweerd, 2024). Every country in the world, regardless of the form or system of government adopted by the country, must have a bureaucratic institution within it that handles administrative matters and provides services to the public (Landmann & Volla, 2024).

Furthermore, Bureaucracy comes from the word 'biro' which means office and 'kratein' which means government, so that when combined, bureaucracy has the meaning of 'government desk'. In a more practical setting, bureaucracy is implemented by state actors or government employees in an organization that has a clear, formal structure and rules, and has duties and functions in the process of achieving state goals including public administration, services and development (Gearhart, Zhang, & Adegbola, 2024). In practice, it is impossible for humans or individual citizens to avoid dealing with bureaucracy (Rowe, Whitty, & Wheeldon, 2024). From birth (taking care of birth certificates) to death (taking care of death certificates), people who live in modern life will always and must deal with bureaucracy and its apparatus (bureaucrats) in government institutions (Rohmy, Hartiwiningih, & Handayani, 2024). In its history, the term bureaucracy was first introduced by Vincent de Gournay, a French-born person who translated many works of Greek thinkers into French (Ndlovu & Nzuma, 2024).

The essence of bureaucratic neutrality is not only free from or unaffected by political elements or interests, but also neutral in bureaucratic management, as well as neutral in decision-making and policy-making (Araújo, Gomes, Ferrão, & Gomes, 2024). The essence of neutrality itself means commitment, moral integrity, and responsibility in public service, carrying out duties professionally and impartially, not committing violations of conflicts of interest in their duties, not abusing their duties, status, power, and position (Deng, 2024).

The issue of neutrality initially arose from the amendment of the law on civil service, namely Law Number 8 of 1974 concerning the Principles of Civil Service which was amended to Law Number 43 of 1999 concerning Amendments to Law Number 8 of 1974 concerning the Principles of Civil Service. There is a striking difference regarding the aspect of bureaucratic neutrality itself, the difference lies in Article 3 of Law 43 of 1999 which explains the position of "ASN as an element of the state apparatus whose duty is to provide services to the public in a professional, honest, fair, and equitable manner in carrying out state, government, and development duties."

The issue of bureaucratic neutrality often arises during the approach to democratic processes (elections and regional elections), for example in 2019 (when the general election was held) and in 2020 (when the simultaneous regional elections were held). The National Civil Service Agency (KASN) and the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) recorded complaints from 528 civil servants (ASN) who were deemed to have violated the law, and KASN recommended and processed 386 of these violations. Furthermore, in 2020, KASN recorded 351 complaints, of which 243 were processed and recommended for sanctions by KASN.

In practice, the issue of the neutrality of bureaucratic apparatus in Indonesia is prone to occur during the implementation of the democratic party (General Elections and Regional Head Elections) which were successfully held in 2024 to elect the President and Vice President as well as the House of Representatives and Regional Representatives Council or regional heads (Lu, Yang, Liu, & Ayub, 2024). The State Civil Service Commission (KASN) stated that there were 417 reports of alleged violations of ASN neutrality throughout the 2024 Election. According to Arie Budiman, as the KASN personnel commissioner, "The number of violations of ASN neutrality is likely much higher, but is not monitored by supervisory institutions or the ASN Neutrality Task Force." The type of neutrality violation that is often committed is taking sides by ASN on social media.

The issue of neutrality also resurfaced during the simultaneous General Election and Regional Head Elections (Pilkada) in 2024. The Indonesian Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) recorded 902 violations of the law, broken down into 485 legal violations, 153 administrative violations, 136 criminal violations, and 128 code of ethics violations. Bawaslu also noted that these violations were dominated by code of ethics violations committed by civil servants (ASN), as is known, as the ASN code of ethics itself is regulated in Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 94 of 2021 concerning Civil Servant Discipline.

Reflecting on the issue of the rampant violations of the code of ethics committed by bureaucratic officials (ASN) in the election and regional election contestation processes that have been carried out, concerns have arisen about the main task of bureaucratic officials, which should be to provide excellent service to the community in order to meet their needs. This condition is exacerbated by the dissolution of the State Civil Service Commission (KASN) and the paradigm of bureaucrats who tend to consider themselves as servants of the state, not servants of the people. The main tasks of government bureaucracy include, 1) providing public services (public service), 2) carry out empowerment (empowerment), and 3) organizing development (development).

The issue of neutrality of bureaucratic apparatus (ASN) in every process of organizing democratic parties remains a hot topic that is interesting to study, because the position of the bureaucracy as the organizer of the state (policies made by the government) as well as a liaison between the community and the government itself (through public services) (Borrás et al., 2024). In order to assess the process of organizing public services organized by bureaucratic organizations, there are several indicators that can be used to assess the extent to which the service process to the community is carried out, the quality of excellent public services can be

reflected by several indicators such as Transparent, Accountable, Conditional, Participatory, Equal rights and Balance of rights and obligations (Jochemsen, Mees, & Akerboom, 2024).

Efforts to manipulate support through government agendas, the appointment of officials, and village heads who support one of the candidate pairs could raise concerns about the unfair implementation of simultaneous regional elections and could disrupt the essence of civil servant neutrality, where the two election contestants are an incumbent and a former regional secretary (Sekda) in Karawang Regency. Such conditions increase the occurrence of conflicts of interest and abuse of power and authority held by bureaucratic officials, such conditions can also disrupt and damage the essence of bureaucratic neutrality in Karawang Regency.

On the other hand, the Karawang Regency government is striving to realize a neutral Pilkada through several means, such as signing an integrity pact and holding a number of coordination meetings with related agencies (Bawaslu) to minimize and prevent violations of neutrality in the implementation of the simultaneous Pilkada. This is done by the Karawang Regency Government to create a commitment, moral integrity, and responsibility from within each bureaucratic apparatus. These activities are also intended to create a professional, neutral bureaucratic apparatus, not abusing its duties, authority, and position (especially for political interests), and creating a bureaucratic apparatus oriented towards providing excellent public services to the people of Karawang Regency.

In this study, the researcher will examine and discuss the issue of Bureaucratic neutrality in Karawang Regency in the process and post-simultaneous regional elections in 2024 using the theory of the essence of neutrality with several indicators, such as 1) Commitment, integrity, and responsibility in public services, 2) Carrying out duties professionally and impartially, 3) Not committing conflict of interest violations in their duties, and 4) Not abusing their duties, status, power, and position.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This enabled researchers to explore information in depth through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, thereby gaining a richer understanding of how collaborations are formed, implemented, and how their outcomes are perceived by stakeholders (Westbrook, Muñoz, & Auerbach, 2024). Furthermore, the focus of this research is to understand, describe, and analyze the Analysis of Bureaucratic Politicization Following the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections in Karawang Regency. This research was conducted in a relevant location and in accordance with the study and the main focus of the subject matter. This research was conducted in one of the

areas in West Java Province, specifically Karawang Regency which is generally known as the Industrial City and the Rice Barn City. This research was specifically conducted at the Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) of Karawang Regency located at Jalan Ciremai No. 5, Karang Indah, Karangpawitan Village, West Karawang District, Karawang Regency, West Java Province (41314) and the Election Supervisory Agency (BAWASLU) of Karawang Regency

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Steps to Demonstrate Commitment, Moral Integrity, and Responsibility from Each Bureaucratic Apparatus

As a democratic country, Indonesia will certainly hold general elections at agreed intervals. Furthermore, elections are used to elect members of the House of Representatives (DPR), Regional Representative Council (DPD), the President and Vice President, and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), as stipulated in Article 22E paragraph 2 of the 1945 Constitution.

In every democratic process (both general elections and regional elections), civil servants (ASN) often find themselves in a dilemma because they are appointed and dismissed by the Civil Service Development Officer (PPK), who holds political office. Furthermore, ASN are required to maintain neutrality to uphold the principle of professionalism in governance and in providing public services to the community.

This condition results in the position of ASN or bureaucratic apparatus becoming vulnerable to being used as a 'tool' to gain or accumulate support/votes by political officials as an effort to obtain or maintain a legacy of power. The issue of civil servant (ASN) or bureaucratic apparatus neutrality often comes under scrutiny during, during, and after the democratic process. This focus arises when numerous violations are committed by civil servants, particularly regarding their neutrality and their position, which requires them to be neutral and free from political influence or intervention. This focus or issue regarding neutrality can be likened to "water on a hill," meaning it's difficult to avoid, especially given the current development of information technology, which has contributed to the increasing number of neutrality violations due to the unwise use of social media during elections or regional elections.

Furthermore, in line with what is stated in Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning State Civil Apparatus (ASN) Article 10 states that ASN functions as 1) implementers of public policy, 2) public services, and 3) unifiers and unifiers of the nation. This gives a meaning, that the provision of public services to the community will run effectively and efficiently if ASN or bureaucratic apparatus is free from political intervention. This is also in line with the opinion expressed by Eko

Prasojo who explained that the essence of ASN neutrality can be assessed if there is a commitment attitude in the form of upholding neutrality and not interfering with the implementation of the bureaucracy with political affairs. Furthermore, the bureaucracy can also be said to be neutral if there is an attitude of moral integrity in the practice after the implementation of the simultaneous regional elections. The bureaucratic apparatus can also be said to be neutral if there is an attitude of responsibility presented by each bureaucratic apparatus during the process and after the implementation of the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency. Based on the description, it can be seen that civil servants (ASN), or bureaucratic apparatus, are not only providers of services to the public, but also serve a more extensive role as unifiers and glue for the nation. To foster the principle of neutrality (through commitment, moral integrity, and responsibility) within each ASN in facing the simultaneous regional elections, it is interesting to examine the steps taken by election stakeholders (the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and the Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM) in Karawang Regency.

The issue of neutrality is also vulnerable to occur when Karawang Regency holds simultaneous regional elections to elect the Regent and Deputy Regent pairs for the 2025-2030 term. The ASN neutrality pledge above emphasizes the importance of maintaining the principle of neutrality in providing public services to the community both before, during, and after the 2024 general elections or regional elections. The neutrality pledge also invites ASN to be wiser in using social media, because nowadays social media is closely related to daily life and can increase the impact of a violation of neutrality due to a lack of wisdom in using social media.

Not content with a neutral pledge for all ASN in Karawang Regency, BKPSDM also issued an integrity pact that applies to all ASN in Karawang Regency. The content of the pledge or integrity pact remains the same, but there are minor differences, such as the nature and wording. The pledge is more focused on leaders (heads of departments), while the integrity pact is more general in nature, requiring all civil servants to sign it. Furthermore, if a civil servant violates the terms of the integrity pact, they are subject to sanctions. Based on what was expressed by the organizers (KPU) and supervisors (Bawaslu), and BKPSDM in the simultaneous regional elections, it can be seen that in order to minimize the occurrence of violations committed by bureaucratic officials/ASN and to realize peaceful regional elections in Karawang Regency, these two agencies often convey appeals or often remind ASN to always remain neutral in the process of organizing the simultaneous regional elections.

Steps to Create a Professional and Impartial Attitude in Performing Tasks

Peaceful regional elections, is the slogan issued by the Karawang Regency KPU as the organizer of the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency in 2024. Activities to realize peaceful regional elections and minimal violations of neutrality are also being attempted to be realized by the Karawang Regency Bawaslu as the supervisor in the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency in 2024, Ahmad Syafeii (Head of Kordip (Coordinator of the Handling and Violation Division) of the Karawang Regency Bawaslu) explained the various efforts made by Bawaslu to create professional ASN, who do not violate regulations regarding neutrality.

There are also efforts made by the BKPSDM of Karawang Regency which were carried out long before the simultaneous regional elections were held in the form of "At the beginning of the year there was a circular related to neutrality where there was a reading of the oath that must be carried out by each SKPD and SKPD head in their respective environments in accordance with instructions from the Ministry of Home Affairs". Various efforts and activities carried out by the KPU, BKPSDM, and Bawaslu in an effort to realize a professional bureaucratic apparatus in carrying out its duties. Various activities or efforts made to foster a professional attitude in the bureaucratic apparatus by stakeholders in the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency can be said to be successful and have a positive impact, because agencies that are in direct contact with the community in the process of providing public services continue to carry out their obligations professionally without discrimination and are not affected by the moment of the simultaneous regional election process. As a result, the community also feels satisfied with the services provided according to several results of the community satisfaction index (IKM) survey.

Steps to Minimize Conflicts of Interest in the Execution of Duties

Every individual has ambitions or interests they wish to achieve or fulfill. These interests will change or evolve according to the needs and circumstances they face. Efforts or ambitions to fulfill these interests sometimes encounter obstacles, whether due to health, circumstances, or current positions. This example is similar to that experienced by the West Karawang District Head (Mrs. Lasminingrum), who is the wife of the candidate for regent number 01 (Acep Jamhuri). This situation certainly increases the potential for a conflict of interest. The sub-district head's position as a public servant could be used for her husband's political gain (by soliciting support from civil servants in the West Karawang District), but this did not occur. Although the West Karawang sub-district head was questioned by the Karawang Regency Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) regarding a report of campaign activities carried out by supporters of the 01 Party at an event attended by the sub-district head, Ms. Lasminingrum was ultimately found not to have violated the ASN neutrality regulations because she did not meet the cumulative requirements for campaign

activities. This is in line with what was expressed by Ahmad Syaifei, who explained, "There is a report of a conflict of interest, but there is no violation because it does not meet the elements of a campaign, so it cannot be followed up. Reports such as (the West Karawang Sub-district case or billboards)."

This opinion aligns with that expressed by Mari Fitriani (Chair of the Karawang Regency General Elections Commission), who explained, "A conflict of interest definitely exists, but whether it's reported to the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) or not is up to Bawaslu to follow up and receive feedback from the relevant institutions. However, if no regulations have been violated, Bawaslu cannot follow up on the matter." Furthermore, Marsidik (representing the BKPSDM) also explained the conflict of interest. He stated that there are steps to be taken if the risk increases. "The conflict of interest has not occurred, but there is a circular from the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform explaining that if the running mate nominates, there are two alternatives that can be taken: leave without state responsibility (for fear of being neutral) or remaining in office or working but must remain neutral."

Torich (acting head of civil registration) expressed a similar opinion, stating that "a conflict of interest could arise, especially if there's an invitation from another party. To minimize the conflict of interest, I would refuse, saying, 'I'm a civil servant, I can't do anything.'" They would understand this refusal. Hermawan (as the Head of the West Karawang District Program Sub-District) has his own tips or ways to minimize violations due to conflicts of interest, he said that "The steps that can be taken are having a firm stance that adheres to existing regulations, if you insist on continuing to participate in practical politics, the sanctions are borne by each individual. If I am reluctant to participate in practical politics, because politics is only temporary (5-10 years) while I have been a civil servant for 20 years and consistently receive payment from the government every month." He emphasized that his stance is a key factor in preventing violations of neutrality that could arise from a conflict of interest. He also fully understands the sanctions associated with engaging in practical politics. He also recognizes that politics is temporary, and therefore believes in upholding his stance as a civil servant, which requires constant neutrality.

This condition ultimately has a positive impact on the community as the main object in the process of providing public services, a calmer service climate and running effectively and efficiently without any discrimination in the process of providing public services. This is also supported by the experience of Marliana (as a Karawang Regency resident who is currently receiving treatment at the Karangpawitan Community Health Center) who stated "There is no discriminatory service, for example, people who come in shabby clothes, but are still treated well.

Political discrimination has also never been experienced, because of the tolerant nature of each employee and the community itself, never discriminating (especially regarding political differences)".

Conflicts of interest can occur, especially when holding a power/position at a crucial moment such as the 2024 simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency, a strong personality and a firm stance are required to avoid being caught up in conflicts of interest that can increase the chances of a violation occurring. Based on the description above, it can be seen that the majority of ASN in Karawang Regency did not commit violations in the form of conflicts of interest, reports did exist (related to conflicts of interest), but were not proven as violations. This provides a brief overview that the majority of ASN in Karawang Regency already have the principles of professionalism (prioritizing public interests over personal) and neutrality (because the majority of ASN did not show partisanship towards one of the candidates in the simultaneous regional elections).

Complying with Rules in Carrying Out Duties, Statuses, Powers, and Departments

As explained above, humans naturally possess interests that can change and evolve depending on the situation or circumstances faced by the individual. This can lead to conflict, as humans often resort to methods detrimental to others to achieve their own interests. Therefore, regulations, rules, or norms, known as laws, are necessary. Laws can serve as guidelines, benchmarks, or standards for behaviour and attitudes in communal life, defining what should and should not be done. Laws can be written or oral, and are customs passed down from generation to generation.

In the context of civil servant (ASN) or bureaucratic apparatus neutrality, laws already exist governing it. This is necessary to prevent bureaucratic affairs from being equated with political affairs and to create balance. To comply with laws and regulations related to neutrality, stakeholders in the implementation of the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency are working together to minimize violations committed by civil servants due to disobedience to the principle and requirement to always be neutral. Ahmad Syafeii provided a statement that there are "Regulations regarding neutrality in Karawang Regency, in the form of circulars that are hierarchical (from the Ministry of Home Affairs to the district government)."

In line with what was stated by Mari Fitriana (as the head of the Karawang Regency KPU) who explained "The regulations regarding neutrality are in the ASN Law, but from the perspective of the regional regulation (Karawang Regency) to my knowledge there are none, there are only integrity facts". Ade Gunawan (as the Secretary of Karangpawitan Village) also said that "There

are (regulations), in addition to regulations from the center through Bawaslu regarding ASN neutrality. In the regions it is the same, the Regent reminded ASN by issuing a circular regarding ASN neutrality which contains prohibitions or sanctions when we violate the appeals made by the central or regional government". This situation has had a positive impact, where civil servants or bureaucratic apparatus have a comprehensive understanding regarding the importance of maintaining neutrality in political moments. The massive education carried out by stakeholders in the implementation of regional elections has also impacted knowledge of the sanctions attached if they continue to insist on following the flow of practical politics, as stated by Torich (as Acting Head of Civil Registration) who said "The sanctions given to civil servants are definitely a warning from the leadership and usually a summons by the BPKSDM if proven to be participating in practical politics."

Another opinion was also expressed by Hermawan (Head of the West Karawang District Program Sub-District), who stated, "The sanctions that ASN receive (if they participate in practical politics) are dismissal, while other sanctions include warnings, or various administrative sanctions such as demotion, salary cuts, or even suspension. This depends on the scale of the violation committed by the ASN." A deep understanding of the necessity to be neutral along with the sanctions attached if one continues to be determined to follow the flow of practical politics has an impact on the provision of public services in accordance with the basic standards of public services, this opinion is supported by the experience told by Marlina (as a member of the public who often receives services at the Karangpawitan Community Health Center) who said "I have never received treatment that is not in accordance with the SOP, but there are several employees who are known to be unfriendly and unfriendly towards the public."

CONCLUSION

The neutrality of the bureaucracy after the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency in 2024 is running optimally, based on research using the theory of the essence of neutrality which has 4 (four) indicators such as: (1) Integrity pact, neutral pledge format, and various socializations carried out by stakeholders in the regional elections to create a peaceful regional election and minimal violations of neutrality committed by bureaucratic officials. However, the commitment aspect did not run optimally because there were 2 (two) versions of data regarding violations which caused the data to be unaccountable. However, in terms of moral integrity and responsibility, it ran optimally as evidenced by the neutral attitude of the bureaucratic officials after the simultaneous regional elections in Karawang Regency. (2) The provision of services carried out by the bureaucratic officials in Karawang Regency during the post-

simultaneous regional elections ran optimally, as evidenced by the high public satisfaction index (IKM) in several agencies in Karawang Regency. Carrying out duties professionally and impartially also runs optimally because there are no reports or complaints coming from the public regarding the attitude of the bureaucratic apparatus in Karawang Regency. (3) Reports regarding conflicts of interest do exist, but the attitude of not violating conflicts of interest in their duties carried out by the bureaucratic apparatus runs optimally after the simultaneous regional elections. This conclusion is based on or proven by the absence of reports regarding violations based on conflicts of interest, this also indicates that the bureaucratic apparatus in Karawang Regency has the principle of professionalism. (4) Rules are needed to create order, this is also done by the Karawang Regency government to minimize violations of neutrality through circulars, so as not to violate their duties, status, power and position, and to comply with all regulations regarding neutrality that apply to run optimally..

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