

The Neutrality of State Civil Apparatus in Regional Head Elections in Central Lombok Regency from the Perspective of the Democratic Rule of Law Principle

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Abstract:

This study examines the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) in regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency from the perspective of the democratic rule of law principle. The research is based on the argument that ASN neutrality is not merely an administrative obligation, but a constitutional requirement for ensuring fair electoral competition, bureaucratic professionalism, and public trust in local democracy. This study employs empirical legal research with a socio-juridical approach. Data are obtained through field observation, document study, and legal material analysis, focusing on the implementation of ASN neutrality, the supervision of alleged violations, and the institutional response to bureaucratic politicization during regional elections. The findings show that ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency has been formally regulated and supervised through preventive and enforcement mechanisms. However, its implementation still faces obstacles, including political pressure, bureaucratic hierarchy, incumbent influence, career dependency, weak ethical internalization, and the growing challenge of digital political expression. The novelty of this study lies in its constitutional framing of ASN neutrality as part of the democratic rule of law principle, rather than merely as an issue of civil service discipline or electoral administration. This study concludes that strengthening ASN neutrality requires continuous legal education, clearer digital conduct guidelines, stronger coordination between election supervisory bodies and personnel authorities, transparent follow-up mechanisms, and institutional protection for ASN from political pressure.

Keywords: ASN neutrality; regional head election; Central Lombok Regency; democratic rule of law; local democracy.

1. Introduction

Regional head elections in Indonesia are a constitutional instrument for realizing local democracy within a decentralized system of government. Through regional elections, citizens exercise political sovereignty to determine local leadership, while local government is expected to operate under democratic legitimacy and legal accountability. In this context, the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) becomes an essential requirement for ensuring that regional elections are conducted fairly, honestly, and free from bureaucratic intervention. From the perspective of a democratic rule of law state, ASN neutrality is not merely an administrative obligation, but a constitutional principle that protects equality among candidates, prevents abuse of public authority, and maintains public trust in local electoral governance (Febriyanto & Firman, 2023; Ulum, 2021).

The issue of ASN neutrality remains highly relevant in regional head elections because ASN occupies a strategic position within the local bureaucratic structure. ASN has access to public resources, administrative networks, public service authority, and direct interaction with citizens. These characteristics create a risk that bureaucracy may be used as a political instrument, especially in regions where patronage relations between incumbents, local elites, and bureaucratic officials remain strong. In Central Lombok Regency, the issue becomes more significant because local political competition in regional elections may intersect with bureaucratic loyalty, career considerations, and institutional pressure. Rahman et al. (2025) found that ASN neutrality in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Central Lombok Regency reflected strong political dynamics associated with the incumbent candidate pair.

The urgency of this study lies in the need to examine ASN neutrality as part of the integrity of local democracy, not merely as a matter of administrative discipline. In a democratic rule of law state, elections must be governed by legal certainty, fairness, accountability, and equal political opportunity. ASN involvement in practical politics may distort those principles because it can produce unequal access to state resources, weaken public confidence in the bureaucracy, and reduce the credibility of regional election results. When ASN is perceived as politically aligned with certain candidates, the bureaucracy no longer functions as a neutral public service institution, but risks becoming part of electoral mobilization. For this reason, the neutrality of ASN in Central Lombok Regency must be analyzed as a constitutional issue related to democratic governance, legal accountability, and the protection of citizens' political rights (Riyanto et al., 2023; Sari, 2021).

Previous studies have examined ASN neutrality from several relevant perspectives. Sari (2021) analyzed the regulation of ASN neutrality in the 2020 regional head elections and showed that violations of ASN neutrality remained a recurring problem despite the existence of legal instruments and supervisory mechanisms. Permana et al. (2022) discussed the repositioning of ASN neutrality regulations in regional elections and emphasized the need for clearer and more effective legal arrangements. Riyanto et al. (2023) connected ASN neutrality with good governance and argued that ASN must remain professional, impartial, and oriented toward public service during regional elections. Larasati and Musfirah (2021) examined ASN neutrality from the perspective of administrative ethics and highlighted the importance of ethical compliance in preventing bureaucratic politicization. Mustika et al. (2021) studied ASN neutrality in the regional election of Bener Meriah Regency and found that neutrality violations were influenced by political pressure, career motivation, and weak enforcement.

More recent studies have also discussed the institutional handling of ASN neutrality violations. Firnanda et al. (2024) examined the handling of ASN neutrality violations by Bawaslu in the 2020 Kediri Regent and Deputy Regent Election and found that Bawaslu's authority was limited to supervision, examination, assessment, and recommendation. Arhdan et al. (2024) analyzed law enforcement against ASN neutrality violations in the 2020 simultaneous regional elections in West Sumatra and emphasized that the effectiveness of enforcement depends on coordination between Bawaslu, KASN, and personnel supervisory officials. Rizal et al. (2025) studied the handling of ASN neutrality violations in the 2024 Mojokerto regional election and found that institutional coordination, human resources, and reporting systems affect the effectiveness of supervision. Awaluddin et al. (2023) examined Bawaslu's role in handling ASN neutrality violations in Pontianak and showed that electoral supervision requires stronger prevention and enforcement strategies. Rahman et al. (2025) provided the most specific contribution to the Central Lombok context by identifying the political dynamics affecting ASN neutrality during the 2024 regional head election.

Although these studies have contributed significantly to the discussion of ASN neutrality, most of them focus on regulatory design, institutional enforcement, administrative ethics, or case studies in regions outside Central Lombok. The existing study on Central Lombok has examined ASN neutrality in the 2024 regional election, yet the issue still requires deeper constitutional analysis through the principle of a democratic rule of law state. This study is positioned to fill that gap by examining ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency not only as a violation of electoral or civil service rules, but as a constitutional problem that affects the quality of local democracy. The novelty of this research lies in its effort to connect empirical issues of ASN neutrality with democratic rule of law principles, particularly legal certainty, impartiality, equality, accountability, and the prevention of bureaucratic politicization. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the neutrality of ASN in regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency, identify the factors affecting ASN neutrality, and examine how the principle of a democratic rule of law state can strengthen the integrity of local democratic governance.

2. Research Method

This study employs an **empirical legal research method** with a **socio-juridical approach**. The empirical legal method is used because this research examines how legal norms concerning the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) are implemented in the practice of regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency. The study does not apply a quantitative method, mixed method, or

statistical model. Instead, it focuses on observing, describing, and analyzing the relationship between legal regulation, bureaucratic practice, and the implementation of democratic principles in local electoral governance.

The socio-juridical approach is applied to connect the normative framework of ASN neutrality with the empirical reality of regional election administration. Normatively, ASN neutrality is regulated to ensure that civil servants remain impartial, professional, and free from practical political interests. Empirically, this study examines whether such neutrality is maintained during regional head elections and how the principle of a democratic rule of law state operates in preventing bureaucratic politicization. This approach allows the study to assess ASN neutrality not only as an administrative obligation, but also as a constitutional requirement for protecting fairness, equality, accountability, and public trust in local democracy.

The case study of this research is the implementation of ASN neutrality in the regional head election in **Central Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia**. Central Lombok Regency is selected as the research locus because the issue of ASN neutrality is closely related to local political competition, bureaucratic professionalism, and the integrity of regional election administration. The study focuses on how ASN neutrality is maintained, supervised, and enforced in the context of local electoral contestation, particularly when bureaucratic structures may intersect with political interests, incumbent influence, and public service authority.

The data used in this study consist of **primary legal-empirical data** and **secondary legal data**. Primary legal-empirical data are obtained from field-based observation of the implementation of ASN neutrality in the regional election process in Central Lombok Regency. These data include observable practices related to bureaucratic impartiality, supervision of ASN conduct, handling of alleged neutrality violations, institutional responses, and the relationship between electoral supervision and personnel administration. Secondary legal data are collected from statutory regulations, election supervision documents, official institutional records, regional election documents, previous studies, journal articles, and other academic literature relevant to ASN neutrality, regional elections, democratic governance, and constitutional law.

Data collection is conducted through **field observation, document study, and legal material analysis**. Field observation is used to examine the practical implementation of ASN neutrality within the local electoral context. Document study is used to collect legal documents, election-related records, supervisory documents, and academic sources concerning ASN neutrality and regional head elections. Legal material analysis is used to identify the normative foundation of ASN neutrality, including the principles of impartiality, professionalism, legal certainty, equality before the law, and democratic accountability.

The collected data are analyzed using **qualitative descriptive analysis**. The analysis is conducted by classifying the data into several main themes, including the legal basis of ASN neutrality, forms of neutrality implementation, potential violations, institutional supervision, enforcement mechanisms, and the relevance of ASN neutrality to the democratic rule of law principle. The data are then interpreted using constitutional law concepts, particularly the rule of law, democratic governance, electoral fairness, bureaucratic neutrality, and accountability. Through this analysis, the study evaluates whether ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency functions effectively as a safeguard for local democratic integrity.

To strengthen the validity of the research, this study applies **source triangulation** by comparing field observation, official documents, legal materials, election supervision records, and relevant academic literature. This technique is used to ensure that the analysis is not based on a single source of data, but on a comprehensive reading of both legal norms and empirical institutional practice. Through this method, the study aims to provide an accountable explanation of how ASN neutrality is implemented in regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency and how it can be strengthened based on the principle of a democratic rule of law state.

3. Results and Discussions

1) The Implementation of ASN Neutrality in the Regional Head Election in Central Lombok Regency

The results of this study show that the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in the regional head election in Central Lombok Regency is formally recognized as an essential legal and institutional

requirement. ASN neutrality is understood as the obligation of civil servants to remain impartial, professional, and free from practical political activities during the electoral process. In the context of regional head elections, this principle is closely related to the protection of fair competition among candidates and the prevention of bureaucratic intervention in local democracy. From the perspective of a democratic rule of law state, ASN neutrality is not only an administrative norm, but also a constitutional safeguard for electoral fairness, public trust, and equality before the law.

Empirically, ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency is implemented through preventive and supervisory mechanisms. Preventive efforts include socialization of neutrality rules, internal warnings within the bureaucracy, coordination between election supervisory bodies and local government institutions, and the dissemination of legal prohibitions concerning ASN involvement in political campaigns. Supervisory mechanisms are carried out through monitoring of ASN conduct, examination of alleged violations, documentation of reports or findings, and institutional coordination with relevant authorities responsible for personnel discipline and administrative sanctions. These mechanisms indicate that ASN neutrality is not treated as an abstract legal principle, but as a practical requirement that must be monitored throughout the electoral stages.

The findings also indicate that the implementation of ASN neutrality faces practical challenges because ASN operates within a local bureaucratic environment that is closely connected to regional political power. ASN may be vulnerable to political influence due to hierarchical relations, career dependency, loyalty to superiors, and the presence of incumbent political networks. In regional elections, these factors may create indirect pressure on ASN to show support, participate in political mobilization, or become involved in actions that can be interpreted as partiality. Rahman et al. (2025) found that ASN neutrality in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Central Lombok Regency was influenced by local political dynamics, especially the presence of incumbent-related political competition.

The implementation of ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency also shows that neutrality violations do not always appear in direct campaign participation. They may occur through more subtle forms, such as attending politically symbolic events, giving signals of support through social media, using bureaucratic networks to influence voters, or allowing public service authority to be associated with particular candidates. This finding is consistent with Sari (2021), who argued that ASN neutrality violations in regional elections often persist because legal prohibitions are not always followed by strong preventive culture and effective enforcement. Riyanto et al. (2023) also emphasized that ASN neutrality must be understood as part of good governance because the bureaucracy is expected to serve the public interest rather than electoral interests.

Based on the empirical findings, the main issue in Central Lombok Regency is not the absence of legal norms, but the gap between formal regulation and practical compliance. ASN neutrality has been regulated and supervised, yet its effectiveness depends on institutional consistency, bureaucratic ethics, and the ability of supervisory bodies to respond to alleged violations objectively. In this sense, the neutrality of ASN must be evaluated not only by whether rules exist, but by whether those rules are internalized and enforced in the actual electoral process.

2) Legal and Institutional Obstacles to ASN Neutrality

The results of this study reveal several obstacles that affect the neutrality of ASN in regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency. The first obstacle is the structural position of ASN within the local bureaucracy. ASN is required to be loyal to the state and the law, but in practice, bureaucratic careers are often connected to decisions made by political office holders. This creates a tension between professional neutrality and institutional dependency. In a regional election involving incumbent power or local elite competition, ASN may experience pressure to maintain political loyalty for career security, promotion, or bureaucratic access.

The second obstacle concerns the culture of local political patronage. Local elections often involve personal networks, kinship ties, organizational affiliations, and informal political relationships. These factors may influence ASN behavior even when direct political orders are not explicitly given. ASN may feel compelled to support certain candidates because of social pressure, bureaucratic expectations, or proximity to political actors. Mustika et al. (2021) found a similar pattern in the regional election of Bener Meriah

Regency, where neutrality problems were influenced by political pressure, career interests, and weak enforcement. This comparison shows that ASN neutrality violations are not merely individual acts, but may emerge from the interaction between bureaucracy and local political structures.

The third obstacle is related to the supervision and enforcement mechanism. Election supervisory institutions may identify and examine alleged ASN neutrality violations, but the imposition of administrative sanctions often depends on coordination with personnel supervisory officials and other competent authorities. This institutional separation may weaken enforcement when recommendations are not followed by firm sanctions. Firnanda et al. (2024) found that Bawaslu's role in handling ASN neutrality violations is often limited to supervision, examination, assessment, and recommendation. Arhdan et al. (2024) also argued that the effectiveness of law enforcement against ASN neutrality violations depends on coordination between electoral supervisory bodies, civil service authorities, and officials responsible for administrative discipline.

The fourth obstacle is the development of digital political expression. ASN neutrality is now challenged not only by physical attendance at campaign activities, but also by online behavior. Social media activities such as liking, sharing, commenting, posting photos, or showing symbolic support may create legal and ethical questions. These forms of digital expression are sometimes viewed as minor actions, but they may influence public perception of bureaucratic impartiality. Rizal et al. (2025) found that reporting systems and institutional capacity are important in handling ASN neutrality violations in the 2024 regional election context. This is relevant to Central Lombok Regency because digital political behavior can expand the scope of neutrality supervision beyond conventional campaign activities.

The fifth obstacle concerns legal awareness and ethical internalization among ASN. Formal prohibitions may not be effective if ASN understands neutrality only as a fear of sanctions rather than as a professional and constitutional obligation. Larasati and Musfirah (2021) emphasized that ASN neutrality must be connected with administrative ethics because neutrality is not only about legal compliance, but also about the moral responsibility of public officials to protect bureaucratic professionalism. In the context of a democratic rule of law state, ASN should not merely avoid visible violations; ASN must also maintain public confidence that government institutions are not being used to support particular electoral interests.

These obstacles show that ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency is a multidimensional issue. It involves legal norms, bureaucratic hierarchy, political culture, institutional coordination, digital communication, and ethical commitment. For this reason, the strengthening of ASN neutrality cannot rely only on sanction-based enforcement. It must also include preventive education, transparent supervision, bureaucratic reform, protection from political pressure, and consistent implementation of disciplinary mechanisms.

3) ASN Neutrality as a Requirement of the Democratic Rule of Law State

From the perspective of the democratic rule of law principle, ASN neutrality is a fundamental requirement for maintaining the integrity of local democracy. A democratic rule of law state requires that elections are conducted under legal certainty, equal opportunity, accountable institutions, and impartial public administration. ASN neutrality supports these requirements by ensuring that the bureaucracy does not become an electoral instrument for particular candidates. When ASN is politically neutral, public administration remains oriented toward citizens rather than political interests. When ASN is politicized, the fairness of the electoral process and the credibility of public institutions are weakened.

The findings of this study indicate that ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency must be placed within the broader relationship between democracy and bureaucracy. Regional elections require political competition, but the bureaucracy must remain outside partisan contestation. This separation is important because ASN exercises public authority, manages administrative services, and represents the continuity of the state. If ASN becomes involved in candidate support, the state's administrative apparatus may lose its impartial character. Febriyanto and Firman (2023) argued that ASN neutrality is closely related to the quality of democratic governance because bureaucratic impartiality helps prevent the misuse of state authority in elections. Ulum (2021) also emphasized that neutrality is an important condition for maintaining professional bureaucracy in democratic governance.

The principle of a democratic rule of law state also requires that neutrality violations be handled through clear, fair, and accountable legal procedures. Enforcement must avoid selective treatment because selective enforcement can create public distrust and weaken the authority of electoral supervision. In Central Lombok Regency, the strengthening of ASN neutrality therefore requires consistency between legal norms, supervisory action, and disciplinary follow-up. Awaluddin et al. (2023) found that Bawaslu's role in handling ASN neutrality violations requires stronger preventive and enforcement strategies. This supports the argument that supervision should not stop at identifying violations, but must ensure that every finding is processed through accountable institutional mechanisms.

This study also finds that ASN neutrality should be strengthened through a preventive model rather than relying solely on punitive enforcement. A preventive model may include continuous socialization of neutrality rules, internal bureaucratic monitoring, written integrity commitments, digital conduct guidelines, reporting channels, and cooperation between Bawaslu, local government, and personnel supervisory authorities. Such a model is important because neutrality violations often occur before formal campaign activities or through indirect forms of support. Permana et al. (2022) argued that the regulation of ASN neutrality in regional elections requires clearer legal positioning to prevent recurring violations. This view is relevant to Central Lombok Regency because effective neutrality protection must operate before violations develop into electoral disputes.

The novelty of this study lies in its constitutional framing of ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency. Previous studies have generally discussed ASN neutrality as an administrative issue, an electoral violation, or a matter of bureaucratic ethics. This study places ASN neutrality as part of the democratic rule of law principle. In this framework, ASN neutrality is not only intended to discipline civil servants, but also to protect the fairness of local elections, prevent abuse of bureaucratic power, and preserve public trust in democratic institutions. This perspective contributes to previous research by showing that ASN neutrality must be assessed as a constitutional issue in local democratic governance.

Based on the discussion, ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency can be strengthened through four main strategies. First, legal socialization must be conducted continuously and not only during election periods. Second, supervision must cover both direct and indirect forms of political involvement, including digital conduct. Third, coordination between electoral supervisory institutions and personnel authorities must be improved so that recommendations can lead to effective sanctions. Fourth, ASN must be protected from political pressure within the bureaucracy. These strategies are necessary to ensure that ASN neutrality becomes a living principle in local governance, not merely a formal rule repeated during regional election cycles.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that the neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in regional head elections in Central Lombok Regency is an essential element of local democratic governance. ASN neutrality is not merely an administrative obligation imposed on civil servants, but a constitutional requirement that protects electoral fairness, bureaucratic professionalism, and public trust in the regional election process. The findings show that ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency has been formally regulated and institutionally supervised, yet its implementation still faces practical challenges arising from political pressure, bureaucratic hierarchy, incumbent influence, career dependency, and weak ethical internalization.

The main finding of this study is that the problem of ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency lies not in the absence of legal norms, but in the gap between formal regulation and practical enforcement. Preventive measures, such as socialization, coordination, and monitoring, have been implemented, but they are not always sufficient to prevent direct or indirect forms of political involvement. Neutrality violations may appear not only through open campaign participation, but also through symbolic support, social media activity, bureaucratic mobilization, and informal loyalty to local political actors. This confirms previous studies which found that ASN neutrality violations are often influenced by political patronage, weak enforcement, and institutional dependency within the regional bureaucracy (Mustika et al., 2021; Permana et al., 2022; Sumarlin et al., 2024).

The novelty of this study lies in its constitutional framing of ASN neutrality in Central Lombok Regency. Previous studies have generally examined ASN neutrality as a matter of administrative discipline, electoral supervision, or bureaucratic ethics. This study contributes by placing ASN neutrality within the principle of a democratic rule of law state. In this framework, ASN neutrality functions as a safeguard against the misuse of bureaucratic authority in elections, protects equal competition among candidates, and strengthens the legitimacy of local democratic outcomes. This position expands earlier findings which emphasized the role of Bawaslu, KASN, and personnel supervisory officials in handling ASN neutrality violations, by showing that enforcement must also be connected with constitutional values such as legality, impartiality, accountability, and equality before the law (Arhdan et al., 2024; Firnanda et al., 2024; Mawuntu et al., 2023).

The findings also imply that strengthening ASN neutrality requires more than sanction-based enforcement. A preventive and institutional model is needed, including continuous legal education, clear digital conduct guidelines, stronger coordination between election supervisory bodies and personnel authorities, transparent follow-up of recommendations, and protection for ASN from political pressure. In Central Lombok Regency, these strategies are important because local political contestation may directly intersect with bureaucratic structures and public service authority. The effectiveness of ASN neutrality should therefore be measured not only from the number of violations handled, but also from the ability of institutions to prevent bureaucratic politicization before it affects the electoral process.

This study has certain limitations. It focuses on the neutrality of ASN in Central Lombok Regency and does not provide a comparative statistical measurement across several regencies or cities. The study also does not examine in detail the perception of voters regarding the impact of ASN neutrality violations on electoral trust. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies between Central Lombok Regency and other regions in West Nusa Tenggara, especially areas with different levels of electoral vulnerability. Further studies may also apply a mixed-method approach by combining legal analysis, institutional data, violation reports, and public perception surveys. Future research should also explore the role of social media, digital evidence, and bureaucratic protection mechanisms in strengthening ASN neutrality during regional head elections.

5. References

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