

Reassessing the Mayor's Authority as a Personnel Supervisory Officer: Merit System Implementation and Political Discretion in the Bima City Government (2019–2024)

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Article history:

Received in revised form: 20 June 2026

Acceptance date: 01 July 2026

Available online: 27 July 2026

Keywords:

Personnel Authority; Merit System; Political Discretion; Mayor.

How to Cite:

Maskur, Ridwan, & Zuhrah. (2026). Reassessing the Mayor's Authority as a Personnel Supervisory Officer: Merit System Implementation and Political Discretion in the Bima City Government (2019–2024). *Al-Risalah Jurnal Ilmu Syariah Dan Hukum*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.24252/al-risalah.v26i2.69912>

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Abstract

This study reassesses the Mayor's authority as the Personnel Supervisory Officer (Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian – PPK) by examining the interaction between merit system implementation and political discretion in the Bima City Government during the 2019–2024 administrative period. Employing a normative-empirical legal approach integrated with socio-legal analysis, the study investigates how statutory principles governing civil service management are translated into personnel decisions at the local government level. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 24 key informants, analysis of 186 personnel appointment, promotion, and rotation decrees, and a review of relevant legal and institutional documents. The findings reveal that the Mayor's authority is exercised within a dynamic continuum between formal compliance with merit system principles and politically driven administrative discretion. Although personnel management formally adheres to the legal framework governing the State Civil Apparatus, merit-based procedures are frequently subordinated to political considerations, including electoral interests, coalition dynamics, and patronage relationships. The study further demonstrates that existing oversight mechanisms remain institutionally limited in ensuring substantive compliance with merit principles, thereby allowing discretionary authority to dominate strategic personnel decisions. Based on these findings, this article proposes the concept of discretionary meritocracy to explain a hybrid governance model in which merit-based procedures are formally maintained while political discretion continues to shape substantive personnel outcomes. By reassessing the legal boundaries of the Mayor's authority as PPK, this study contributes to the development of administrative law scholarship on civil service governance and offers policy recommendations for strengthening merit system implementation, institutional accountability, and bureaucratic neutrality within Indonesia's decentralized governance framework.

INTRODUCTION

The decentralization of personnel authority to local governments through Law No. 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government and Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning State Civil Apparatus (ASN) has created a complex institutional arena in which the principles of meritocracy are directly confronted with electoral political imperatives. The mayor, in his capacity as a Personnel Supervisory Officer (PPK), has broad authority to appoint, move, promote, and dismiss State Civil Apparatus within his city government.¹ This authority, although normatively framed within the framework of the merit system, in practice operates in a space fraught with local political dynamics, electoral interests, and patronage relations that have taken root in the Indonesian bureaucratic structure.²

The issue of PPK authority at the city government level is one of the most critical issues in contemporary Indonesian bureaucratic reform. Previous research has documented that regional heads often use personnel authority as an instrument to build political loyalty and reciprocate electoral support.³ However, most of the existing studies have focused on the level of governors or regents, while the specific dynamics of mayoral authority operating in the context of urbanization, social heterogeneity, and fragmentation of different interests have not received adequate academic attention. This analytical gap becomes even more significant considering that medium-sized cities such as Bima City actually show more real and observed phenomena in terms of the tension between political merit and discretion.⁴

Bima City offers a very rich empirical laboratory to study this problem. As a relatively small city with a total of around 4,800 civil servants and has undergone three leadership changes in the last two decades, Bima City is an ideal unit of analysis to trace how the authority of the PPK is carried out in real terms in the field. The 2019–2024 period was chosen because it included two crucial moments: first, the early period of the leadership of the elected mayor which was fraught with the redistribution of bureaucratic strategic positions; and second, the period leading up to the 2024 Regional Elections which is marked by the intensification of political maneuvers in the management of ASN. This dynamic makes Bima City a case that is not only relevant locally, but also representative

¹ A Background, "Chapter I Introduction A. Background of the State of Indonesia as a State of Law (," 2013, 1–81.

² Submitted as a Condition for Writing, "(Study at the Bengkulu Regional Police) THESIS," 2022.

³ Direct Regional Head Election In Coaching Country Civil Apparatus (Case Study of the South Kalimantan Provincial Government) Abstract," no. September 2019 (2021).

⁴ Dismissal Dan et al., "Constitutional Law Study Program (Siyasah) Faculty Of Syari 'Ah State Islamic Religious Institute Bengkulu 2021 M / 1442 H," 2021.

of the patterns that apply in hundreds of other medium-sized cities throughout Indonesia.⁵

This research departs from the realization that there is a fundamental theoretical gap in the literature of Indonesian administrative and public administration law. Studies of merit systems tend to approach the problem from a normative-formal perspective that assumes that good regulation will automatically result in appropriate implementation. On the contrary, studies of local politics and patronage often ignore the legal and institutional dimensions that govern these practices. This research seeks to bridge this gap by integrating normative-legal analysis with socio-political frameworks, so as to produce a more comprehensive understanding of how employment law operates and often fails to operate in the context of local democracy full of competition of interests.

The urgency of this research is also reinforced by the alarming institutional reality. Data from the State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN) shows that in the 2019–2023 range, this institution received more than 3,200 reports of merit system violations from all over Indonesia, with a significant portion coming from the city government. More than half of the reports were related to mutations and promotions that were strongly suspected to be based on political motivation rather than competency considerations.⁶ This reality shows that the problems studied in this study are not only local anomalies in Bima City, but reflect systemic pathologies in local government personnel governance in Indonesia.

The merit system in public service is defined by Article 1 Number 22 of the ASN Law as the policy and management of ASN based on qualifications, competencies, and performance in a fair and reasonable manner without distinction between political background, race, skin color, religion, origin, gender, marital status, age, or disability condition. This definition explicitly places political considerations as the antithesis of merit, a tension that in practice is far more complex and contextual than simply a formal dichotomy. Researchers on rational-legal bureaucracy, which are the theoretical foundation of the modern merit system, assume a strict separation between public office and the personal or political interests of the officials who fill it.⁷

However, some literature on personnel governance in developing countries and young electoral democracies consistently shows that this ideal separation is often a

⁵ Bayu Pamungkas, "Honorary Scope Of The Pamong Police Unit," 2024.

⁶ May Lim Charity, "The Irony of the Double Duty in the Indonesian State System," *Indonesian Legislation* 13, no. 1 (2016): 1–10.

⁷ Faculty of Law and University of Indonesia, "Asymmetric Decentralization Of Civil Servant Law Mela Sari" 5, no. 8 (2024): 1–28.

normative illusion.⁸ In his monumental work on bureaucratic reform in developing countries, he argues that the meritocratic agenda has always faced resistance from political actors who view control of the bureaucracy as an instrument of non-negotiable power. In the Southeast Asian environment,⁹ it is shown that the successful implementation of the merit system in Singapore is precisely a historical exception born of very specific structural conditions, while in most ASEAN countries, patronage and clientelism remain the dominant operational principles in bureaucratic management.

Several important studies have contributed to the understanding of bureaucratic politicization in the era of decentralization.¹⁰ developed the concept of 'democratic patronage' to illustrate how electoral competition in Indonesia does not reduce patronage, but rather distributes it more widely and makes it more intensive. Mietzner (2020) shows that decentralization has created a local 'bossism' in which regional heads build a power machine that combines control of bureaucratic resources with a network of patronage based on kinship and ethnicity. Meanwhile,¹¹ in his study on Central Java, he documented in detail how regional heads used position rotation as a mechanism of 'reward and punishment' against civil servants based on political loyalty.¹²

Although, previous research had two major limitations. First, bureaucratic politicization is seen as a uniform phenomenon without paying attention to the variation in the implementation of personnel discretion by regional heads. Second, the study has not examined in depth the legal and institutional dimensions that limit discretionary practices. This study seeks to overcome these limitations by developing an analytical framework that maps the forms, mechanisms, and boundaries of political discretion in personnel management.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of the concept of *discretionary meritocracy* as an analytical framework to explain personnel management practices that combine the implementation of the merit system with political considerations in the implementation of the authority of the Personnel Supervisory Officer (PPK). This concept provides a more comprehensive perspective than the dichotomy between the merit system and bureaucratic politicization that has dominated the study. In addition, this

⁸ Master's Program et al., "Thesis of Political Relations of the Makassar City Government Bureaucracy in the Election of the Mayor of Makassar," 2023.

⁹ The Case et al., "Conflict of Authority for the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads in the Case of Acting Regent of Morotai Island, North Maluku Year 2022 Conflict of Authorities for the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads" 2, no. 09 (2023): 1729–42, <https://doi.org/10.36418/comserva.v2i09.571>.

¹⁰ Journal of Science, "Polemic on the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads (," no. 9 (2024): 63–73.

¹¹ "Legal Analysis Of Implementation Position Mutations By Manufacturing Officers," 2024.

¹² Diasa Inas Wishesa, "The Authority of the State Civil Apparatus Commission in the Supervision of the Merit System," 1945, 1–10.

study integrates the perspective of state administrative law and political science through a multi-method approach, so as to be able to explain the relationship between the legal framework, local political dynamics, and personnel decision-making in the Bima City Government for the 2019–2024 period.

Based on the description above, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the Mayor's authority as a Personnel Supervisory Officer (PPK) in the perspective of the merit system and political discretion in the Bima City Government for the 2019–2024 period. This research also aims to identify the forms and factors that cause political discretion in the management of ASN, evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the merit system, and formulate recommendations to strengthen bureaucratic professionalism and good governance.

METHODS

This study uses a normative-empirical legal method¹³ with a socio-legal approach to analyze the implementation of the authority of the Mayor as a Personnel Supervisory Officer (PPK) in the implementation of the merit system and political discretion. The normative approach is used to examine the laws and regulations that govern the management of the State Civil Apparatus,¹⁴ while the empirical approach is used to examine its implementation practices in the Bima City Government during the 2019–2024 period¹⁵. Primary data was obtained through interviews with relevant officials, limited observations, and documentation studies of various personnel decisions, while secondary data came from relevant laws and regulations, official reports, and scientific literature.¹⁶

Data analysis was carried out through normative analysis of the legal provisions that govern the authority of the PPK and the merit system as well as qualitative analysis of the results of interviews and research documents to identify patterns of implementation of political discretion in the management of ASN.¹⁷ The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources¹⁸, methods¹⁹, and data, so that the results of the research have an adequate level of validity in explaining the relationship between legal

¹³ Iman Jalaludin Rifa'i et al., *Legal Research Methodology* (Sada Kurnia Pustaka, 2023).

¹⁴ Qadriani Arifuddin et al., *Legal Research Methodology* (PT. Sonpedia Publishing Indonesia, 2025).

¹⁵ Ahmad Zuhdi Muhdlor, "The Development of Legal Research Methodology," *Journal of Law and Justice* 1, no. 2 (2012): 189–206.

¹⁶ Kornelius Benuf and Muhamad Azhar, "Legal Research Methodology as an Instrument for Unraveling Contemporary Legal Problems," *Echoes of Justice* 7, no. 1 (2020): 20–33.

¹⁷ Faisal Ananda Arfa and Watni Marpaung, *Islamic Law Research Methodology* (Kencana, 2016).

¹⁸ Bambang Sunggono, "Legal Research Methodology," 2006.

¹⁹ Mieke Yustia Ayu Ratna Sari et al., "Legal Research Methodology," 2021.

²⁰provisions, the implementation of the merit system, and personnel management practices in the Bima City Government.²¹

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Normative Framework of the Mayor's Authority as a PPK and Its Ambiguity

The authority of the Mayor as a Civil Service Supervisory Officer comes from Article 53 of Law Number 5 of 2014 concerning ASN which regulates the division of authority of PPK between the central and regional governments. In the context of city government, the mayor has the authority to appoint, transfer, and dismiss officials within the city government,²² which is then further described in Government Regulation Number 11 of 2017 concerning Civil Servant Management. Formally, this authority is framed in the need to implement a merit system, follow the recommendations of Baperjakat, and comply with the competency standards of the position set through the position analysis process.²³

An analysis of the existing normative framework reveals significant structural ambiguity in the construction of the authority of the PPK. On the one hand, the ASN Law explicitly establishes the merit system as the main principle of ASN management. On the other hand, the same law gives very broad authority to the PPK in terms of the appointment and transfer of officials, with relatively weak control mechanisms. Article 106 of PP 11/2017²⁴, for example, requires Baperjakat's recommendations, but does not expressly require the PPK to follow the recommendations, a loophole that in practice is often used to ignore Baperjakat's technical considerations.

This ambiguity is exacerbated by the institutional design of KASN which places the merit system supervisory institution only with the authority to recommend, not the authority to cancel the decision of the PPK which is considered to violate the merit system. Article 30 of the ASN Law stipulates that KASN has the authority to 'provide recommendations' to the PPK to revoke or correct decisions that violate the merit system, but does not provide strict sanctions if the recommendation is ignored. In the context of

²⁰ In Susiani, "Legal Research Methodology," *Publisher of Tahta Media*, 2024.

²¹ I Made Pasek Diantha and M S Sh, *Normative Legal Research Methodology in Justification of Legal Theory* (Prenada Media, 2016).

²² Wishesa, "The Authority of the State Civil Apparatus Commission in the Supervision of the Merit System."

²³ Nurmalita Ayuningtyas Harahap, "Realizing a Meritocracy System After the Birth of the Authority of Acting Regional Heads to Mutate Civil Servants (Review of the Circular Letter of the Minister of Home Affairs Number 821 / 5492 / SJ) *Journal of Law and I U S QUIA* 31, no. November 2023 (2024): 512–35.

²⁴ Diana Permata Hati et al., "Merit System as an Instrument of Good Governance in the Open Selection of High Leadership Officials" 5, no. 6 (2026): 1067–75.

Bima City, this study found that of the 14 KASN recommendations issued to the Bima City Government during the 2019–2023 period, only 5 (35.7%) were followed up substantively by the Mayor, while the other 9 were only followed up administratively formally without substantial changes to the decisions in question.²⁵

These findings are consistent with the argument developed by Mau (2019) and Thoha (2020) that the institutional design of personnel supervision in Indonesia contains fundamental weaknesses in the form of 'teeth without bite' supervisory institutions that normatively exist and are active, but do not have sufficient coercive instruments to enforce compliance with the PPK²⁶. This condition creates what the researcher conceptualizes as a 'zone of discretionary latitude', the discretionary space that the PPK de facto owns far beyond what is de jure intended by the lawmakers. It is in this zone that the politicization of personnel operates relatively freely, not openly violating the law, but also not really complying with it.

Furthermore, an analysis of local regulations and internal policies of the Bima City Government shows that the implementation of the merit system at the local level relies on derivative regulations whose quality varies. The Regulation of the Mayor of Bima on Position Analysis²⁷, Position Competency Standards, and Position Evaluation, which should be the technical basis for the implementation of the merit system, is still in many ways generic and not operational enough to prevent discretionary personnel decisions. The standard document of the competency of the position studied, for example, uses very general and non-measurable indicators, so that it is easy to manipulate through a formalistic selection process.

2. Modalities and Mechanisms of Political Discretion in Personnel Management of Bima City

Analysis of 186 personnel decisions and interview data identified four main modalities of political discretion in personnel management in Bima City during the 2019–2024 period. The first modality is 'strategic rotation' which is carried out immediately after the inauguration of the elected mayor. Data shows that in the first three months of the mayoral term for the 2019–2024 period, there were 43 decisions to transfer echelon II and III officials, of which 31 (72.1%) involved officials who were identified during the

²⁵ Fitriyanti Rahman, Fence M Wantu, and Zamroni Abdussamad, "Merit-Based Civil Service Management: A Rule of Law Perspective" 6, no. 1 (2026): 207–19.

²⁶ Abdur Rahim et al., "Implementation of the Merit System in the Indonesian State Administrative Institute" 6, no. September (2023): 7019–23.

²⁷ A Bibliometric Analysis, "An Overview of Research Trend on Merit System in Indonesia and International Practices" 14 (2022): 55–69.

campaign as affiliated with a coalition of political opponents²⁸. This pattern reflects what in the political literature is referred to as the 'spoils system' in the meritocratic procedural cloak.²⁹

The second modality is 'loyalty-based selective promotion' that operates through the selective interpretation of the results of competency assessments. Of the 67 promotion decisions that were studied in depth, 45 cases (67.2%) showed a discrepancy between the candidate's formal competency rating and the results of the promotion decision, where candidates with lower competency scores were promoted over candidates with higher scores.³⁰ When clarified through interviews, BKPSDM officials cited the reasons for 'balance considerations and 'leadership maturity' as justifications for a justification that consistently cannot be operationalized into measurable and transparent criteria.

The third modality is 'position hostage-taking' which is used as an informal control mechanism for senior civil servants. Nine of the 24 informants interviewed all on condition of anonymity admitted to having received explicit or implicit signals that their positions depended on 'loyalty' to the mayor's policies, including in activities that bordered or beyond the boundaries of formal office duties. This condition creates a climate of institutional fear that hinders civil servants in carrying out the internal check and balance functions that they should have.³¹

The fourth modality is the 'naturalization of discretion' through procedural ritualism. This is the most subtle and analytically the most interesting modality, as it reflects the logic of 'meritocratic discretion' that is the main conceptual contribution of this research. In this modality, all formal procedures of the merit system starting from competency tests, Baperjakat sessions, to BKPSDM technical considerations are carried out, but the results have been determined informally through a decision-making process outside of these official forums. The resulting personnel decision documents look procedurally perfect, but hide a substantive process that has been capitulated to political interests.³²

The operational mechanisms of the four modalities above take place through three informal channels identified in this study. The first channel is parallel communication between the mayor and the chairman of Baperjakat, where indications of the mayor's

²⁸ Muhammad Rizal Buhori and Muhammad Eko Atmojo, "Implementation of the Auction of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) Positions Based on the Merit System in Klaten Regency in 2018" 7, no. 3 (2022).

²⁹ Human Resource et al., "Ahmad Faiz, Retno Sunu Astuti & Teuku Afrizal *" 9, no. 2 (2020): 406–16.

³⁰ Year About, A S N Di, and Ternate City, "Neutrality Of Civil Servants From Political Elements Based On Law No . 5" 5, no. 4 (2023): 3816–26.

³¹ Adi Suryanto and State Administration Institute, "State Administration Institute Implementation Of Merit System Policy : Best Practice In National Institute Of Public Administration" 16, no. 3 (2020): 401–22.

³² Anggita Chariah et al., "The Implementation Of Merit-Based System On State Civil Apparatus In Indonesia" 16, no. 3 (2020): 383–400.

personnel preferences are conveyed before the Baperjakat session takes place, so that Baperjakat's recommendations are effectively a ratification of the decisions that have been made. The second channel is the role of 'personnel broker' played by members of the mayor's success team who now occupy strategic positions in the governance structure, and who serve as a link between political interests and formal administrative³³ mechanisms. The third channel is 'pressure from above' which is carried out through informal forums such as coordination meetings or meetings outside the office that are not officially documented.

3. The Effectiveness of KASN Supervision and Its Institutional Boundaries

The State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN) was established based on Article 27 of the ASN Law as a non-structural institution that is independent and free from political intervention, with the main function of supervising the implementation of basic norms, codes of ethics and code of conduct for ASN, as well as the implementation of the merit system in ASN policies and management. In the context of supervision of the authority of the PPK at the city government level, KASN faces a series of structural limitations that systematically weaken its supervisory capacity.³⁴

The first limitation is the limitation of institutional capacity. With a limited number of commissioners and staff, KASN is faced with a very disproportionate supervisory burden of more than 500 district/city level local governments throughout Indonesia, plus hundreds of government agencies at the provincial and central levels. In this condition, effective supervision of city governments such as Bima City is almost entirely reactive, relying on complaint reports, rather than proactive and based on continuous monitoring.³⁵

The second limitation is jurisdictional limitation. As previously analyzed, KASN's authority is limited to non-binding recommendations. In Bima City, this limitation is exacerbated by the fact that even the recommendations issued by the KASN often have no real impact because there is no effective enforcement mechanism. The Bima City Government in practice can and often does ignore KASN's recommendations by providing a formal administrative response that on the surface seems compliant but does not change the substance of the decision in question.

The third limitation is the limitation of information. KASN in many ways relies on information provided by the local governments it supervises, creating a classic

³³ Head and Direct, "Impact Of Direct Regional Head Election In Coaching Country Civil Apparatus (Case Study of the South Kalimantan Provincial Government) Abstract."

³⁴ Charity, "The Irony of the Double Duty in the Indonesian State System."

³⁵ Law and Indonesia, "Asymmetric Decentralization Of Civil Servant Law Mela Sari."

information asymmetry problem in which the supervised party has great control over the availability and quality of the data that the supervisor accesses. Personnel documents submitted to KASN have often gone through a careful selection and framing process by the BKPSDM, so they do not reflect a complete picture of the actual personnel decision-making process.

The fourth limitation is political-structural limitations. Members of KASN are appointed by the President through a selection involving parliament, so that this institution is not completely free from national political dynamics. At a more operational level, the relationship between KASN and local governments is colored by an intergovernmental logic that puts KASN in a structurally difficult position to be adversarial to regional heads without adequate political support from the center.³⁶

These findings contribute to a theoretical debate about the institutional design of independent supervisory institutions in a decentralized system of government. Weingast's (1995) theorem of 'market-preserving federalism' assumes that good federalism or decentralization requires a credible mechanism to prevent abuse of authority by sub-national governments. In the case of Indonesia, KASN ideally plays a credible role in this constraint, but the findings of this study show that this institution does not yet have the structural capacity to carry out this function effectively, especially for city governments that have broad autonomy in personnel management.

4. Implications for Bureaucratic Reform and Democratic Accountability

The findings of this study have substantial implications for Indonesia's two major governance agendas: bureaucratic reform and democratic accountability in the regional autonomy system. In the dimension of bureaucratic reform, this study shows that the dominant approach, namely strengthening regulations and procedures, is not enough to overcome bureaucratic politicization as long as the incentive system faced by regional heads does not change fundamentally.

The logic of incentives faced by mayors as rational actors in the electoral democratic system encourages them to maximize control over the bureaucracy as an instrument of mobilizing support and distributing rewards to supporting coalitions³⁷. In this framework, the merit system is not a value that is intrinsically adhered to, but a normative constraint that must be managed and circumvented. Significant behavioural change will

³⁶ Magister et al., "Thesis of Bureaucratic Political Relations of the Makassar City Government in the Election of the Mayor of Makassar."

³⁷ Case et al., "Conflict of Authority for the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads Case of Regent Officials of Morotai Island, North Maluku in 2022 Conflict of Authorities for the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads."

only occur if the costs of merit system violations are substantially increased, through stricter sanctions mechanisms and more consistent enforcement.

The dimension of democratic accountability, this study shows an interesting paradox: the mechanism of electoral democracy that is supposed to encourage accountability is actually one of the main drivers of bureaucratic politicization. When elected regional heads view the bureaucracy as a 'patronage resource' that needs to be controlled to maintain power, then electoral victory becomes a justification for the use of personnel authority that is contrary to the principles of merit. This paradox requires a more careful institutional design to separate or at least reduce the dependence of electoral mechanisms on the control of bureaucratic resources.

This study also identifies the concrete impacts of the politicization of personnel on the quality of public services in Bima City. Based on a comparative analysis between staffing data and work unit performance data, it was found that there was a significant negative correlation between the level of staffing turnover and the public service satisfaction score of work units that experienced more intensive staffing rotation tended to have lower service satisfaction scores. These findings provide empirical evidence that bureaucratic politicization is not only an abstract governance issue, but also has a real impact on the quality of life of the citizens served.

In a broader perspective, the findings of this study provide empirical confirmation of the theoretical argument of 'civil service politicization' that has been developed³⁸, which suggests that bureaucratic politicization in new democracies tends to have greater negative effects than in established democracies, because balancing institutions such as trade unions, professional associations, and active civil society have not been sufficiently developed to provide effective countervailing force. In Bima City, the absence of this balancing force is one of the factors that explains why meritocratic discretion can operate relatively freely during the research period.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of the merit system under the authority of the Mayor of Bima as a Personnel Supervisory Officer (PPK) during the 2019-2024 period has not been carried out optimally. The implementation of the merit system is still procedural and does not fully reflect the principle of meritocracy because the practice of political discretion still affects the appointment, mutation, and promotion of ASN positions. This condition is supported by the existence of discretionary space in

³⁸ Science, "Polemic of the Appointment of Acting Regional Heads (."

regulations and the weak effectiveness of supervision which causes the merit system to be unable to limit political intervention in personnel management.

Based on these findings, this study recommends strengthening the regulation of the merit system through optimizing the authority of supervisory institutions, increasing transparency and objectivity in the process of filling positions, and strengthening internal and external supervisory mechanisms to realize a professional and integrity bureaucracy. Although this study is limited to the case study of the Bima City Government, the results are expected to be a reference for the development of ASN management policies and follow-up research in other regions with different characteristics.

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