

# MAINTAINING THE NEUTRALITY OF THE STATE CIVIL APPARATUS IN POLITICAL CONTESTATION IN INDONESIA

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## Abstract

*This study aims to explore the impact of Joint Decree (SKB) 3 Ministers 2022 on the neutrality of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) during social events, specifically weddings, amidst the political climate of the 2024 Indonesian elections. The research investigates how the decree influences ASN behavior in personal settings and the broader implications for political neutrality in social interactions. This study used a qualitative-descriptive method, analyzing real-life observations and testimonies from ASN and wedding participants. The findings reveal that SKB 3 Menteri has heightened awareness among ASN regarding the importance of maintaining a non-partisan stance, even in personal celebrations. The study identifies subtle behavioral shifts, such as avoidance of hand gestures or poses that could be perceived as political endorsements, demonstrating compliance with the directive. However, this heightened caution also created a palpable sense of restraint among wedding participants, leading to a more formal and less expressive atmosphere. The implications suggest that while SKB 3 Menteri has effectively curbed overt political signaling, it also highlights the complexities of enforcing neutrality in social contexts. Policymakers are encouraged to balance strict enforcement with clearer guidelines to avoid excessive restrictions on personal expressions while upholding the integrity of democratic processes.*

**Keywords:** ASN Neutrality, SKB 3 Minister, 2024 Election, Pose and Hand Symbol

## Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi dampak Surat Keputusan Bersama (SKB) 3 Menteri 2022 terhadap netralitas Aparatur Sipil Negara (ASN) dalam acara-acara sosial, khususnya pernikahan, di tengah iklim politik Pemilu 2024. Temuan ini mengungkapkan bahwa SKB 3 Menteri telah meningkatkan kesadaran di kalangan ASN mengenai pentingnya menjaga sikap non-partisan, bahkan dalam perayaan pribadi. Studi ini mengidentifikasi perubahan perilaku yang tidak kentara, seperti menghindari gerakan tangan atau pose yang dapat dianggap sebagai dukungan politik, yang menunjukkan kepatuhan terhadap arahan tersebut. Namun, kehati-hatian yang tinggi ini juga menciptakan rasa menahan diri yang nyata di antara para peserta pernikahan, yang mengarah ke suasana yang lebih formal dan kurang ekspresif. Implikasinya menunjukkan bahwa meskipun SKB 3 Menteri telah secara efektif mengekang sinyal-sinyal politik yang terang-terangan, SKB 3 Menteri juga menyoroiti kerumitan dalam menegakkan netralitas dalam konteks sosial. Para pembuat kebijakan didorong untuk menyeimbangkan penegakan hukum yang ketat dengan pedoman yang lebih jelas untuk menghindari pembatasan yang berlebihan terhadap ekspresi pribadi sembari menjunjung tinggi integritas proses demokrasi.

**Kata Kunci:** Netralitas ASN, SKB 3 Menteri, Pemilu 2024, Pose dan Simbol Tangan

## INTRODUCTION

The neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) has become one of the strategic issues in the context of Indonesian politics, especially ahead of the elections. The principles and ethics of ASN neutrality aim not only to maintain the conduciveness of political contestation, but also to ensure that administrative functions remain based on a healthy and fair democracy (Merkel & Lührmann, 2021). By maintaining neutrality, ASN is expected to prioritize the public interest over personal and partisan agendas, thereby supporting the integrity and fairness of the political process in a democratic country.

Under such condition, Indonesian Government issue by presenting various regulations such as Law Number 5 of 2014 concerning the State Civil Apparatus, Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning Elections, as well as various other government regulations such as Government Regulation Number 53 of 2020 concerning Civil Servant Discipline. One of the concrete steps that attracted attention was the Joint Decree (SKB) of the 3 Ministers in 2022, which was specifically designed to strengthen supervision and guidance on ASN neutrality. This SKB aims to close the loopholes that can be used by ASN to be directly or indirectly involved in political contestation.

Although there have been many academic studies on the neutrality of civil servants, research that specifically reviews the impact of appeals related to the prohibition of non-verbal expressions such as finger poses or the use of certain symbols is still very limited. In fact, the directive in the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3 regarding this matter is a form of government anticipation of potential violations of neutrality that often occur in public spaces, including in social moments such as weddings. According to Anggalana (2022), factors such as a lack of professionalism, an uncondusive work environment, and the weak application of punitive sanctions are the main causes of violations of ASN neutrality. However, non-verbal expressions as a form of involvement in electoral politics have not been touched much in previous studies, leaving an interesting gap to be studied further.

The moment of marriage is one of the interesting social contexts to study in relation to the neutrality of ASN. In wedding ceremonies, expressions of happiness are often expressed through specific poses during photo sessions, which involve finger or hand symbols. This is a challenge in itself when ASN couples who are getting married are in a political situation ahead of the presidential election. The question that arises is how can a pose or finger symbol that seems unpolitical in the context of marriage be considered a violation of ASN neutrality? And

how does the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3 affect the behavior of ASN couples in their wedding moments? The momentum of the wedding of the bride and groom cannot be separated from the ongoing socio-political context. Held on December 23, 2023, the wedding coincided with the 2024 Presidential and Vice Presidential Election campaign period, which began on November 28, 2023 and lasted until February 10, 2024. The campaign is part of a series of 2024 elections scheduled to take place on February 14, 2024 to elect Indonesia's head of state and government for the 2024–2029 period.

As a couple of civil servants who work in government agencies, this wedding event is automatically attended by the majority of invited guests from civil servants. This adds a unique dimension to the wedding atmosphere, where the demand to maintain political neutrality is becoming more and more real. In the midst of a heated political atmosphere, the civil servants who attended the event must continue to comply with the neutrality rules as stipulated in various government regulations to support the implementation of honest, fair, and transparent elections. In this case, the neutrality of ASN is crucial, especially because ASN is a representation of the state that is not allowed to be involved in practical political activities or show partiality, either directly or indirectly. At a moment like a wedding, even though it is technically a private event, there is still a moral responsibility to avoid the impression that ASN, both as organizers and guests, use their position to support a particular party, even symbolically.

This research aims to fill in the literature gap regarding the impact of the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3 on the neutrality of ASN, especially in the context of non-verbal expressions such as finger poses and hand symbols. This analysis is important to understand how these policies affect various aspects of people's lives, including social and cultural interactions in key moments such as marriage. This research is expected to contribute to academic discourse on the implementation of ASN neutrality policies, as well as provide practical recommendations to overcome potential violations in complex and symbolic social situations.

### **Neutrality of Civil Servants (ASN) in Political Contests**

Neutrality among the ASN in political contests is a critical issue in various government systems, including Indonesia. ASN neutrality requires civil servants to refrain from engaging in practical politics or showing favoritism towards political candidates during elections. This principle upholds professionalism, independence, and sustainability of the state bureaucracy. Indonesia's legal framework, such as Law Number 5 of 2014, mandates the neutrality of civil

servants. However, despite this regulation, many examples of civil servants participating in practical politics remain, either directly or indirectly (Saepudin & Pratiwi, 2022).

In Indonesia, political patronage and bureaucratic politicization often undermine the neutrality of civil servants. Muttaqin and Idris (2021) highlighted that despite the regulatory framework, the involvement of civil servants in practical politics was rampant during the 2017 Simultaneous Regional Elections (Pilkada). ASNs are found to be involved in campaign activities or take advantage of their positions to support certain candidates, influencing the outcome of the election. Furthermore, Rahman (2022) underlined the ineffectiveness of the supervision mechanism, such as that implemented by the ASN Commission, especially at the local level where political patronage remains dominant. Similarly, Setiawan (2020) notes that the bureaucratic culture and reliance on local power figures exacerbate the situation, forcing civil servants to support political campaigns to secure their positions or gain political gains.

The challenge to the neutrality of civil servants does not only occur in Indonesia. In Australia, Dunleavy and Evans (2019) documented instances where local civil servants faced subtle pressure to support political figures, especially in smaller communities where personal relationships greatly influenced professional behavior. France, on the other hand, requires civil servants to resign from their positions if they want to engage in political campaigns (Bach, Hammerschmid and Löffler, 2020). However, Rasul, Rogger and Williams (2021) noted persistent violations, especially in areas with high political protection and weak surveillance mechanisms. Similarly, in Brazil, Andretta and Kolloch (2022) revealed that civil servants often express political affiliation subtly, such as through personal relationships with politicians, which undermines the principle of neutrality. These international examples resonate with the Indonesian context, where close-knit communities and hierarchical structures often blur the lines between personal and professional roles.

The digital age has introduced additional complexity to the neutrality discourse (Cole, 2020). In Brazil, the proliferation of social media platforms has facilitated subtle expressions of political affiliation by civil servants through likes, shares, or comments on politically charged content. Similarly, Indonesia faces challenges as social media strengthens the visibility of ASN activities, resulting in increased public scrutiny. For example, sharing wedding photos or videos on platforms like Instagram or Facebook can inadvertently signify political affiliation, especially if the gesture or symbol is misinterpreted. Recent research highlights the role of digital literacy in addressing these challenges. Wilantika and Wibisono (2021) found that targeted training programs on the ethical use of social media significantly reduced perceived

bias among civil servants in Southeast Asia. By implementing these insights, Indonesia can improve the implementation of the 3 Ministerial Decree by introducing social media guidelines tailored to private events. This approach will address the growing interplay between digital expression and political neutrality, ensuring regulations adapt to technological advancements.

An important factor that is less discussed but affects the neutrality of civil servants is the intersection of social events and political dynamics, such as marriage. In Indonesia, marriage often influences the political behavior of civil servants, especially when their spouses or close family members are actively involved in politics. Murphy (2023) identified examples where marriage between civil servants and politicians creates a conflict of interest, with civil servants feeling pressured to support political candidates due to family ties or marriage. This dynamic adds a layer of complexity to maintaining neutrality, as civil servants navigate loyalty to family and adherence to professional ethics. In addition, marriage can serve as a political tool in the patronage network. In this context, marital relations are used to strengthen political alliances or secure support. Lu et al. (2022) notes that family and marriage ties often act as bridges that connect civil servants with political actors, creating ethical dilemmas that challenge their ability to remain neutral and independent. This complexity underscores the need for an enhanced regulatory framework that addresses nuanced socio-political factors that affect ASN neutrality in both the professional and personal domains.

This study seeks to fill this research gap by analyzing how SKB 3 Menteri attempts to regulate ASN neutrality in such complex socio-political contexts. The data collected will focus on behavioral adaptations of ASN in wedding settings, identifying shifts in their interactions, gestures, and overall participation in events that could be perceived as politically charged. By examining real-life observations and testimonies from ASN and wedding participants, the study aims to highlight how regulatory measures shape social behaviors and whether they effectively maintain political impartiality or create unintended constraints. This study used a qualitative-descriptive method, analyzing patterns of compliance and the perceived consequences of the decree. The findings reveal that SKB 3 Menteri has heightened awareness among ASN regarding the importance of maintaining a non-partisan stance, even in personal celebrations. The study identifies subtle behavioral shifts, such as avoidance of hand gestures or poses that could be perceived as political endorsements, demonstrating compliance with the directive. However, this heightened caution also created a palpable sense of restraint among wedding participants, leading to a more formal and less expressive atmosphere. The implications suggest that while SKB 3 Menteri has effectively curbed overt political signaling, it also highlights the

complexities of enforcing neutrality in social contexts. Policymakers are encouraged to balance strict enforcement with clearer guidelines to avoid excessive restrictions on personal expressions while upholding the integrity of democratic processes. Additionally, the study contributes to broader discussions on how social relationships and regulatory frameworks intersect in shaping the political behavior of civil servants.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive approach by integrating in-depth interviews and literature reviews as the main method of data collection (Schuessler et al., (2018). The qualitative-descriptive approach was chosen because of its ability to understand social phenomena in their natural context in depth and detail. This method is very relevant to explore efforts to maintain the neutrality of civil servants, especially in unique contexts such as the moment of marriage that can be influenced by electoral political dynamics. The informants in this study were carefully selected to ensure the reliability and depth of the interview data. They consist of individuals who have direct experience and knowledge related to the research topic, allowing them to provide valuable insights. The selection process was based on purposive sampling, ensuring that each informant had a relevant role, expertise, or lived experience. For instance, policymakers, civil servants, community leaders, or professionals involved in the subject matter were prioritized. The logical rationale for choosing these informants lies in their ability to provide firsthand information, offer diverse perspectives, and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Their inclusion helps strengthen the validity of the findings and ensures that the research captures multiple dimensions of the phenomenon under study.

In particular, this study adopts the case study method, which according to Gerring and Cojocar (2016) is an intensive study of a single case to draw generalizations to a broader phenomenon. The case study method allows for in-depth exploration of the unique aspects of a particular case, thus providing richer and more focused insights. In this context, the case of ASN neutrality at the moment of marriage was chosen as a "typical case" that describes a phenomenon that is relevant to the ASN population in general (Gerring, 2017). The focus of this research is to uncover how ASN neutrality policies, especially those regulated in the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3, are applied in complex social situations, such as marriage involving non-verbal expressions through finger and hand symbols.

This study combines primary and secondary data to build a more comprehensive understanding. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with a number of invited guests who are civil servants in various city, provincial, and state universities in Palembang

City. Palembang City was chosen as the case study area for this research based on several rational considerations. Although Palembang is not categorized as a region with high violations of civil servant neutrality, its selection allows for an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of neutrality enforcement in a relatively stable environment. This provides a comparative perspective to regions with more frequent violations. Additionally, ensuring that the invited participants were indeed civil servants required a careful verification process. Since they attended the interviews without wearing uniforms, identification was conducted through institutional records, official employment status confirmation, and prior coordination with relevant government agencies. The selected informants included civil servants from various campuses in Palembang City, such as [insert specific campuses], who were chosen based on their knowledge, experience, and willingness to provide insights into the research topic. Their perspectives contribute valuable information on how civil servant neutrality is maintained in an academic setting within the city. The interview process is designed to explore their experiences, perceptions, and challenges in maintaining neutrality during the moment of marriage. Meanwhile, secondary data was collected from literature studies published in academic journals, news articles, and online media sources related to the ASN neutrality policy and its implementation in the context of elections in Indonesia.

To analyze the data, this study follows several stages; 1) data reduction, which is done by simplifying and selecting data relevant to the focus of the research, including findings from interviews and literature; 2) explanation of findings, which is carried out by grouping and compiling data to build a structured narrative about ASN neutrality in social moments; 3) data verification, which is carried out by validating data that has been collected through triangulation of sources, both from direct interviews and relevant literature; and 4) drawing conclusions, which is carried out by compiling theoretical and empirical conclusions based on the results of data analysis, with a focus on the contribution of research to the study of ASN neutrality in a socio-political context (Villamin et al., (2024). With this method, the research is expected to provide new insights regarding the implications of the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3 on the social life of civil servants, as well as enrich the literature on the dynamics of civil servant neutrality in political contestation in Indonesia

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Dynamics of ASN in Political Contestation in Indonesia**

The neutrality of civil servants in political contests is still a fundamental problem in Indonesia. Although ASN is expected to carry out their duties professionally without being

influenced by political interests, the reality on the ground shows a different fact. Based on a report by the State Civil Apparatus Commission (KASN), in February 2024 there were 417 reports of violations of ASN neutrality, with 40% of them occurring through social media (Rusdiyani, N. (2020, July 02). Historical data also reveals a similar trend. In 2018, there were 951 complaints of violations of ASN neutrality in 28 provinces, with South Sulawesi as the province with the highest number of violations (294 cases), followed by Southeast Sulawesi (221 cases) and West Java (54 cases) (Mokhsen et al., 2018). In the 2019 election, there were 991 cases of ASN involvement in practical politics (Tirto, 2019). In 2020, 413 violation reports were recorded until the middle of the year, with 18.7% of them occurring through social media (Sarnawa and Khaer, 2024).

The motivation for violating ASN neutrality is generally based on the organizational hierarchy that demands loyalty to superiors structurally. Bawaslu's findings in July 2020 showed that as many as 6,492 ASNs provided support to Pilkada participants in 79 districts/cities. This violation not only undermines the neutrality of ASN, but also creates an ethical dilemma, especially for officials with high positions who have authority in the appointment and dismissal of ASN. Data shows that most violations are committed by high-ranking regional officials, accounting for 33% of total violations (Ramadhan, 2020). In the context of the Regional Elections, incumbent candidates often use their authority to mobilize ASN to support their candidacy. The bureaucratic system led by political actors from certain parties further strengthens the pattern of political intervention in the bureaucratic structure (Martini, 2010).

One of the sources that makes ASN neutrality occur is due to the politicization of bureaucracy when ASN is forced to be involved in practical politics in order to maintain a position or get a promotion. This phenomenon is driven by the power relationship between regional heads as political actors and ASN as agents. For example, research by Bakhri (2023) shows that ASN often provides support to candidates for regents/deputy regents, either directly or through a network of successful teams at the sub-district and village levels. This support is based on various motives, including social, cultural, intimidation, career, and reciprocity.

Malik et al. (2020) highlighted that the promotion and career of ASN positions are often determined by political interests, not based on competence and performance. As a result, ASN neutrality becomes difficult to enforce. In Takalar Regency, Muhammad Halwan Yamin (2013) found that the weak supervision by the Panwaslu over the involvement of civil servants in political campaigns worsened the situation. ASN not only supports certain candidates, but is



also involved in mass mobilization and the provision of campaign fund support. This condition creates a serious challenge for efforts to maintain bureaucratic neutrality in Indonesia. In a bureaucratic structure led by political officials, the relationship between political actors and civil servants forms a relational pattern that has an impact on the inability of civil servants to carry out their professional functions (Ryu and Virindra, 2023). This kind of relationship also produces policies that are more beneficial to certain political positions than the general public interest.

Seeing from that, the violation of ASN neutrality becomes complex. The phenomenon of violating ASN neutrality does not only occur at the individual level, but also involves the bureaucratic system as a whole. Incumbent regional heads, for example, have a tendency to use their authority in personnel development in order to win political contests. With an electoral system that relies on the most votes, incumbent candidates often mobilize ASN to gain political support. This creates a cycle of ethical violations that is difficult to stop. One of the relevant studies is the research by Turner, Prasajo and Sumarwono (2022), which shows that the politicization of the bureaucracy in Indonesia often occurs due to the implementation of the "marriage system" instead of the "merit system". The placement of positions is no longer based on competence, but on political loyalty. As a result, the bureaucracy loses its independence as an institution that is supposed to serve the public interest.

### **Finger Pose and Hand Symbol at ASN Wedding Party Ahead of the 2024 Election**

The neutrality of ASN in elections and regional elections has become an important issue in Indonesia, especially with regulations that prohibit ASN from engaging in practical political activities, both openly and covertly. One of the new prohibitions issued in the Joint Decree of the 3 Ministers is a ban for ASN to pose with symbols that have the potential to show support for certain candidates during the 2024 elections, including certain finger poses. Related to this, the wedding moment becomes a dilemma because ASN, even in a personal context, must maintain political neutrality, while on the other hand, hand gestures and finger symbols are an important part of expression at weddings.

Along with the stricter regulations regarding ASN neutrality, every symbol or finger pose used in a wedding party can have many interpretations. According to Kompas.com news (5/11/2023), there are several poses that are considered to show indirect political support, such as the pose of metal fingers, the pose with a thumb, or the number five symbol related to the serial number of the candidate pair (paslon). While these poses may initially be seen as an expression of happiness or familiarity at a wedding, during political campaigns such as the

2024 elections, the meaning of the poses can be seen as a symbol of political support or affiliation. This makes the finger pose and hand symbol in the ASN wedding party a dilemma. For example, the South Korean-style "saranghaeyo" symbol, although not directly related to politics, can be easily associated with certain groups or individuals who are popular with voters, especially among the younger generation. The finger pose that forms the number five or two, while it looks unpolitical, can be considered a code that directs support to a particular candidate. In this context, marriage, which is a personal moment, becomes at risk of giving rise to a political impression, even if there is no explicit intention to show support for a particular candidate. As stated by a civil servant at the Ministry of Religious Affairs in Palembang:

“As we approach the elections, we as civil servants must remain neutral, one way being through hand gestures.”

According to Hadiyantina (2021), the neutrality of civil servants in Indonesia is often threatened by the involvement of individuals in practical politics, even in situations that can indirectly create a political impression. This is exacerbated by ASN's reliance on local power or personal relationships with politicians, which can influence their decision to vote for or side with certain candidates. Therefore, at the moment of marriage, ASN must be more careful in choosing poses that not only reflect their personal happiness, but also keep their distance from potential political affiliations.

Figure 1: Examples of Poses Allowed by the Decree of 3 Ministers



Source: Kompas.com, 2023

## **Marriage and the Symbolism of ASN Social Life in the Midst of Political Dynamics**

Marriage, an institution that has bound and shaped relationships between individuals throughout the history of mankind, has profound meaning. Religiously, marriage is considered a sacred bond that is recognized and blessed by a divine entity. In fact, marriage is often thought of as a bond between two individuals who vow to love, respect, and support each other for life. In another important thing, wedding celebrations involve ritual ceremonies that are rich in symbolism and spiritual meaning. The exchange of vows, prayers, scripture readings, and symbolic signs such as rings or robes are often integral to wedding ceremonies, affirming the spiritual unity and commitment between the couple before God and their community. Thus, marriage in a religious perspective is not simply a bond between two individuals, but is also part of a larger divine plan or will.

Hand poses and finger symbols at weddings are more than just physical expressions. In many cultures, hand or finger poses are used to convey a message or reinforce a social identity. In Indonesia, for example, certain symbols often have political connotations, especially when used in sensitive contexts such as ahead of elections or regional elections. At the same time, the wedding moment is an opportunity to show the closeness between family and friends, as well as to celebrate the bond formed between two individuals. Therefore, the choice of pose can have a greater social and emotional impact than it may seem at first glance. However, with the political context increasingly blending in social life, especially ahead of the elections, it is important for every civil servant to be aware of how their actions, including at weddings, can potentially have a political impression. Research by Setiawan (2020) highlights that bureaucratic culture in Indonesia is often influenced by political relations, where everyday actions, such as photo poses, can be considered to reflect individual political attitudes, even though the intention is not political at first.

ASN marriage ahead of the 2024 election, with the potential use of hand symbols or finger poses that have political connotations, needs to be seen as part of a larger problem in maintaining ASN neutrality. Therefore, while a pose at a wedding party can be seen as an expression of happiness, it is important to choose a more neutral pose and avoid symbols that could be interpreted as support for a particular candidate. Therefore, maintaining ASN neutrality ahead of the 2024 election does not only apply in the context of work, but also in personal activities, such as marriage. Although finger poses and hand symbols at weddings are often not meant to show political support, in the context of a campaign, they can be easily interpreted as a form of support for a particular candidate. Therefore, ASN must be more careful

in choosing poses that not only reflect personal happiness, but also maintain an image of their neutrality and professionalism. ASN neutrality is not only about avoiding direct political involvement, but also avoiding symbols or expressions that can give a political impression, especially at important moments such as marriage. As stated by a civil servant in one of the government offices in Palembang City, being a civil servant requires neutrality, especially as the elections approach.”

Seeing the importance of the essence of a marriage, every moment experienced by the couple must be appreciated and remembered as part of their journey together. In this digital era, these happy moments are often captured through various photos that become eternal memories for them. One of the most meaningful moments in a wedding is when taking pictures together, which is a way to express their happiness. Various models and poses are used to add beauty and impression to each photo. However, often commonly used poses involve the symbolism of the fingers and hands, adding meaning and distinctiveness to each image. However, imagine if this moment of wedding immortalization involves ASN couples, especially ahead of the 2024 Presidential Election. How has the process of their marriage, which should have been a personal and intimate moment, been affected by the ongoing political dynamics? In a wedding, the presence of invited guests from various professions, including civil servants, is an inevitable part. However, sometimes, the atmosphere of capturing the moment becomes less enthusiastic and seems stiff when most of the invited guests are ASN. Guests who work as civil servants, representing various government institutions, often seem to be less flexible in expressing their happiness. Maybe because of a formal work environment or just a habit that is carried over, happy moments do not look as quick as expected.

Stiff facial expressions and a slightly stiff attitude are often the hallmarks of ASN invited guests at a wedding. However, it also adds its own nuances to the event. As if, the presence of these civil servants gives an impression of honor and stability, although it may seem less relaxed. This phenomenon reflects how the political dynamics and professionalism of civil servants also affect their social interactions in personal life spaces, including marriage.

Figure. 1. Photo with ASN



Source: Self-documentation, 2023

From the second image above, it appears that the finger pose done by the invited guests and the bride and groom is very monotonous, with no significant changes. However, if you look more closely, there is a striking difference between photo poses done by ASN guests and non-ASN guests. The photo pose of invited guests with ASN status looks like it tends to be formal and simple, as if avoiding expressions that are considered not in accordance with professional norms. On the other hand, non-ASN invited guests showed greater enthusiasm and expressive happiness through the ring finger pose and South Korean-style love finger style. However, the two ASN brides still insisted on maintaining consistency by not following the pose style of the non-ASN guests. This decision is a real reflection of how the status as an ASN carries a moral responsibility to maintain attitudes in social life, including in moments of personal happiness such as marriage.

Figure. Photo with ASN 2



Source: Self-documentation, 2023

Analyzing the differences in expressions and body movements (symbols) between civil servant guests and non-civil servant guests provides valuable insight into how neutrality and political positioning manifest in nonverbal communication. Civil servants, bound by strict neutrality regulations, may exhibit more controlled and reserved expressions. Their facial expressions are likely neutral or composed, avoiding overt emotional displays that could be interpreted as political bias. Their body language might also reflect formality, with minimal gesturing, restrained postures, and an overall demeanor of professionalism. A key symbolic aspect is the avoidance of hand gestures associated with political parties, such as finger signs representing candidate numbers. In contrast, non-civil servant guests—who are not subject to the same restrictions—may display more open and expressive body language. They could be more relaxed in their postures, use more animated hand gestures, and show visible enthusiasm or preference for certain political affiliations through subtle or overt signals. Their expressions may include smiles, nods, or other forms of engagement that reflect personal opinions more freely. By analyzing these differences, researchers can identify patterns in how civil servants consciously manage their neutrality through nonverbal communication, reinforcing their obligation to remain impartial in public settings. This analysis also highlights how political symbolism can be subtly communicated or suppressed, depending on professional and ethical constraints.

As state servants, ASN has received various facilities from the government to carry out their duties to serve the community, so their existence must be neutral, not partisan to certain groups, and still prioritize the public interest. This is in line with the view of Mokhsen (2022) who emphasized that compliance with the code of ethics and code of conduct is very important in realizing ASN professionalism. Professionalism not only includes technical competence, but also attitudes and behaviors in carrying out tasks. The code of ethics provides moral guidance that is considered in decision-making, while the code of conduct regulates what ASN can and cannot do in various situations. The reflection of this marriage shows how the personal life of civil servants can intersect directly with the demands of professionalism and neutrality. In situations like this, civil servants are required to maintain integrity and ethics, even in the midst of their personal happiness. This not only strengthens public trust in ASN as state servants, but also becomes an important part of creating a healthy and fair democratic atmosphere.

## CONCLUSION

The 2022 Joint Decree (SKB) of the Minister of Home Affairs, the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PAN-RB), and the Head of the State Civil Service Agency (BKN) has significant implications for the neutrality of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in various public and social settings, including weddings. The decree, which reinforces the obligation of ASNs to remain politically neutral, affects their behaviour and interactions in events where political figures or symbols may be present. First, strengthening ASN Neutrality – The SKB provides clearer guidelines, ensuring that ASNs uphold their neutrality in all public and social interactions, preventing indirect political endorsements. Second, preventing Political Polarization in Social Spaces – By regulating ASN behaviour, the SKB minimizes potential conflicts or misinterpretations in social events, preventing tensions related to perceived political affiliations. Third, enhancing Public Trust in Government Institutions – A strict neutrality stance reassures the public that ASNs serve professionally without political bias, strengthening democratic governance.

As an ASN, the Decree of the 3 Ministers, is not much different from the regulations on the appeal of ASN to remain neutral, independent and professional towards any political contestation candidate. This study makes several major contributions to the discourse of ASN neutrality. First, highlighting the nuanced impact of the 2022 Ministerial Decree 3 on the personal and social behavior of civil servants, especially in the context of marriage. Second, it draws attention to broader socio-cultural and digital challenges that make it difficult to enforce neutrality. Third, it provides a framework for understanding how non-verbal expressions, such as gestures or symbols, can be politicized in sensitive contexts such as election periods. For policymakers, these findings underscore the need for clearer and context-sensitive guidelines that address the symbolic and digital dimensions of ASN behavior. To mitigate similar challenges in the upcoming elections, the following actionable recommendations are proposed:

1. Improving Digital Literacy Programs: Develop training modules for civil servants on the ethical use of social media, focusing on how personal posts can be perceived in a politically charged climate.
2. Context-Specific Guidance: Provide detailed examples of acceptable and unacceptable behavior during private events, helping ASNs navigate complex social dynamics.
3. Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms: Equip supervisory bodies such as KASN and Bawaslu with resources to identify and address violations of subtle neutrality in both offline and online environments.

4. Promoting a Merit-Based System: Strengthening policies that reduce political patronage in the bureaucracy, ensuring career advancement is based on competence rather than political affiliation.
5. Public Awareness Campaign: Educate the public on the importance of ASN neutrality to foster collective accountability and reduce undue pressure on civil servants.

These measures aim to balance professional expectations with personal freedom, ensuring that civil servants can maintain their integrity without sacrificing the quality of their social lives. By overcoming traditional and digital challenges, Indonesia can strengthen its democratic process and uphold the credibility of its civil service.

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