



Analysis of Civil Servant Neutrality in Palembang Through Discourse Network Analysis and Social Network Visualization (GEPHI)

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Abstract

Background: Civil servant (ASN) neutrality is often viewed merely as a matter of administrative and legal compliance; however, in practice, it involves complex narrative dynamics among various policy actors in the public sphere.

Objective: This study aims to map the policy discourse structure of ASN neutrality in the 2024 Palembang local election and identify key actors and their underlying patterns of interest.

Methods: Using a mixed-methods approach through *Discourse Network Analysis (DNA)* and social network visualization via *Gephi* software, this study analyzed 56 statements from 40 relevant policy actors.

Results: The results reveal a fragmented discourse network (96 nodes; density = 0.05; modularity \approx 0.87), with consensus concentrated around law enforcement and disciplinary sanctions. *Bawaslu RI* emerged as the actor with the highest degree centrality (degree \approx 15 connections), dominating the oversight narrative alongside regulatory agencies, whereas civil society groups and ASNs exhibited lower centrality scores and remained peripheral in the policy debate.

Conclusion: The study concludes that strengthening bureaucratic ethical education and fostering more inclusive cross-sectoral collaboration are essential to safeguarding bureaucratic integrity from practical political intervention.

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INTRODUCTION

The neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) is a basic principle in the implementation of a professional bureaucracy. Within the framework of Indonesian law, civil servants are required to be free from political influence and partiality and not to be members or administrators of political parties. This principle is important to ensure that the bureaucracy continues to work in the public interest rather than for electoral interests or certain political affiliations. The non-neutrality of ASN has the potential to reduce bureaucratic professionalism, damage public trust, and create opportunities for the abuse of office for practical political interests. In the context of the 2024 Simultaneous Elections and Regional Elections, the commitment to maintaining ASN neutrality was reaffirmed through the Joint Decree of the Five Ministers and the Chairman of Bawaslu on Guidelines for the Development and Supervision of ASN Neutrality, which demonstrates that this issue is regarded as a serious problem in governance and electoral

democracy. In addition, the regulation of ASN neutrality is further strengthened through Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus and Government Regulation Number 94 of 2021 concerning Civil Servant Discipline as a normative basis for the guidance, supervision, and enforcement of violations of ASN neutrality.

The issue of ASN neutrality in the context of the 2024 Palembang Regional Election presented a particularly salient context for studying ASN neutrality. As the capital of South Sumatra Province, Palembang has a large bureaucratic apparatus, a history of competitive local elections in which incumbency advantages have been associated with bureaucratic mobilization, and documented pre-election complaints against local officials. The Acting Mayor publicly threatened dismissal sanctions for non-neutral ASN, and Bawaslu Palembang launched a volunteer oversight program specifically targeting civil servant neutrality. This combination of institutional density, documented violations, and active supervisory responses makes Palembang analytically rich for Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) research. The Palembang Regional Election also reflects multi-stakeholder interactions within a complex policy subsystem.

Several local media reports and official statements indicate that ASN neutrality is not merely an administrative issue, but also a political and public ethics issue debated in the public sphere. For example, the Acting Mayor of Palembang's statement regarding dismissal sanctions for non-neutral ASN and the initiatives of Bawaslu Palembang involving participatory supervision demonstrate that ASN neutrality has become the focus of attention for various actors, ranging from local governments and election supervisors to the media and civil society. This condition shows that discussions of ASN neutrality in Palembang are not only related to compliance with regulations, but also concern how narratives about bureaucratic professionalism, election integrity, and sanctions enforcement are produced and exchanged among various policy actors.

Academically, the issue of ASN neutrality in Indonesia has been studied extensively from various perspectives. Based on the synthesis of a systematic literature review of 56 peer-reviewed journal articles (Google Scholar, Sinta, GARUDA; 2015–2025), previous research has generally been concentrated into four main categories: normative-juridical studies on rules and sanctions; institutional supervision and coordination studies; case studies on ASN neutrality in elections and regional elections; and studies on the politicization of bureaucracy and ASN management. In the normative-juridical cluster, primary attention has been directed toward ASN compliance with legal norms, the effectiveness of sanctions, and problems of law enforcement (Dika, 2022; Perdana, 2012; Rahmansyah & Irwandi, 2021; Rusdiana & Maharani, 2022). In the supervisory and institutional cluster, research has largely focused on the roles of Bawaslu, KASN, BKN, and government agencies in preventing and handling violations of ASN neutrality (Ajiprasetyo & Sarnawa, 2020; Kurniawan, 2024; Mokhsen, 2019; Murti & Rizkika, 2023; uswatun Hasanah, 2024).

In addition, several studies place the neutrality of civil servants within the context of local politics and the relationship between bureaucracy and electoral power. These studies show that the problem of ASN neutrality does not stand alone as an issue of administrative ethics, but is closely related to patronage structures, promotion practices, bureaucratic loyalty, local political pressure, and the weak bargaining position of civil servants in the face of intervention by political elites (Diana & Sigiro, 2025; Fajrianto & Andriyansyah, 2024; Sapni et al., 2023; Sihaloho, 2020). In various regions, case studies on ASN neutrality have generally focused on forms of violations, causal factors, supervisory obstacles, or evaluations of policy implementation (Bahrul, 2015; Sarnawa, 2018; Sumarlin et al., 2024; Syadik, 2021). Thus, although the literature on ASN neutrality in Indonesia has developed extensively, most of the research is still dominated by descriptive, normative-legalistic, and institutional evaluation approaches that position ASN neutrality primarily as a matter of rules, violations, and supervisory effectiveness.

This trend reveals an important research gap. To date, there remains very limited research that views ASN neutrality as a discursive-relational phenomenon—namely, as an arena in which various actors construct, disseminate, and contest claims regarding bureaucratic professionalism, election integrity, law enforcement, and public service ethics. In practice, the issue of ASN neutrality exists not only within regulatory texts, but also in officials' statements, the positions of supervisory institutions, media reports, and the responses of other actors that interact in shaping

policy meaning. In other words, previous literature has been relatively strong in explaining the forms of ASN neutrality violations and identifying the institutions responsible for supervision, but it has not sufficiently explained how ASN neutrality discourse is produced, interconnected, and shaped through relationships among actors within the policy subsystem.

In contrast to previous studies, this research positions ASN neutrality not only as a matter of legal compliance, administrative violations, or the effectiveness of institutional supervision, but also as a discursive phenomenon involving interactions among various policy actors. This study employs Discourse Network Analysis (DNA)—rather than conventional content analysis—because DNA simultaneously maps actor-level relationships and thematic structures within a single integrated framework. Whereas conventional content analysis measures theme frequency or framing, DNA treats statements as relational data connecting actors to positions, thereby revealing the structural topology of policy discourse.

This approach is particularly appropriate for ASN neutrality research because understanding which actors share or contest narrative frames is analytically more meaningful than merely counting theme occurrences (Leifeld & Haunss, 2012). This study applies the Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) approach to map relationships among actors, policy statements, and narrative themes that emerge in the discourse surrounding ASN neutrality during the 2024 Palembang Regional Election. Thus, the primary distinction of this study lies in its unit of analysis and methodological approach: whereas previous studies predominantly focused on rules, violations, sanctions, or implementation evaluations, this study seeks to uncover the structure of discourse, patterns of inter-stakeholder interconnectedness, and the potential for discursive coalitions that shape debates concerning civil servant neutrality.

To clarify the position of this research within the broader literature, Table 1 presents a concise mapping of previous research trends on ASN neutrality in Indonesia based on a systematic literature review of 56 peer-reviewed articles (Google Scholar, Sinta, GARUDA; 2015–2025).

Table 1. Brief Mapping of Previous Research on ASN Neutrality in Indonesia

Research cluster	Main focus	Findings bias	Example references
Normative juridical and sanctions	Rules, prohibitions, obligations, and effectiveness of sanctions	Dominant position ASN neutrality as a matter of legal compliance	(Dika, 2022; Perdana, 2012; Rahmansyah & Irwandi, 2021; Rusdiana & Maharani, 2022)
Supervision and institutions	The Role of Bawaslu, KASN, BKN, and Government Agencies	Emphasizing prevention, enforcement, coordination, and implementation of supervision	(Ajiprasetyo & Sarnawa, 2020; Kurniawan, 2024; Mokhsen, 2019; Murti & Rizkika, 2023; uswatun Hasanah, 2024)
Local politics and elections	ASN neutrality in regional political contestation	Demonstrate the influence of patronage, loyalty, and pressure of local elites	(Bahrul, 2015; Fajrianto & Andriyansyah, 2024; Sarnawa, 2018; Syadik, 2021)
Politicization of the bureaucracy and management of ASN	Position relations, promotions, mutations, and merit systems	Explains that neutrality is influenced by the power structure of the bureaucracy	(Diana & Sigiro, 2025; Fajrianto & Andriyansyah, 2024; Sapni et al., 2023; Sihalo, 2020)
Research gaps	Discourse structure, inter-actorial relations,	It is still very limited in the literature on ASN neutrality in Indonesia	Filled by this research through DNA and Gephi

Research cluster	Main focus	Findings bias	Example references
	and narrative coalitions		

The mapping in Table 1 reveals a critical methodological gap: no existing study has applied Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) to visually map ASN neutrality discourse at the local level in Indonesia, leaving the network of actor connections, the centrality of voices, and narrative coalitions empirically unexplored at the subnational level. The present study fills this gap by providing the first relational mapping of ASN neutrality discourse at the local level. Based on this background, this study aims to map the structure of policy discourse related to ASN neutrality in Palembang using the Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) method and Gephi social network visualization.

DNA allows for a quantitative analysis of the relationships between actors and elements of policy narratives Leifeld (2012), enabling this study to identify the key actors in the ASN neutrality discourse, determine which themes are most prominently exchanged, and examine how patterns of relationships among actors are formed in policy debates. In this regard, this study proposes three main objectives: (1) mapping key actors and their relationships with the themes of ASN neutrality narratives; (2) identifying dominant patterns in the discourse, e.g., emphasis on law enforcement, prevention, or education; and (3) offering policy recommendations to strengthen ASN neutrality based on empirical findings. Thus, this research is expected not only to enrich the body of studies on the neutrality of civil servants in Indonesia but also to make a methodological contribution through the use of Discourse Network Analysis to examine the dynamics of public policy at the local level.

To date, studies of ASN neutrality in Indonesia have been largely descriptive or legalistic and have rarely employed network methods or narrative frameworks. Most previous research has focused on normative-judicial analysis, evaluations of policy implementation, strengthening supervisory institutions, and case studies of violations of ASN neutrality in various regions. These studies have made important contributions to explaining the legal basis, forms of violations, supervisory mechanisms, and the effectiveness of sanctions enforcement; however, the majority still position ASN neutrality primarily as a legalistic and administrative issue.

In practice, however, the issue of ASN neutrality is shaped not only by regulations but also by official statements, responses from supervisory institutions, media reports, and public interpretations that influence one another. Therefore, research that views ASN neutrality as a discursive-relational phenomenon remains limited, particularly research that conceptualizes it as an arena in which various actors construct, disseminate, and contest claims regarding bureaucratic professionalism, electoral integrity, law enforcement, and public service ethics.

On this basis, this research offers a novel contribution by integrating the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), and Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) in a comprehensive manner. NPF is used to examine the structure of policy narratives, ACF is employed to explain the potential formation of coalitions based on policy beliefs, while DNA is utilized to empirically map the relationships between actors and claims within the discourse of ASN neutrality. Through this approach, the study not only contributes a new case study on ASN neutrality in the 2024 Palembang Regional Election but also presents a more analytical framework for understanding the structure of ASN neutrality policy discourse in Indonesia.

METHOD

The research design adopted a sequential mixed-methods approach consisting of four structured stages. Stage 1—Data Collection: News articles and public statements related to ASN neutrality in Palembang were collected from three primary online media outlets (Detik Sumbagsel, Radar Palembang, and Sumsel Update) as well as official institutional websites, including Bawaslu Kota Palembang and Antara Sumsel. The data collection period spanned from August 1 to November 30, 2024. The sources included statements from central government officials, regional officials, Bawaslu representatives, community organizations, and formal legal instruments. Relevant data were identified through structured online searches and official news

archives. All collected statements were assessed using the following inclusion criteria: (a) originating from identifiable actors; (b) containing substantive claims regarding ASN neutrality, supervision, sanctions, or bureaucratic ethics; (c) publicly accessible through verifiable sources during the collection period; and (d) directly related to the 2024 Palembang Regional Election. Anonymous and purely procedural statements were excluded. The final corpus consisted of 56 statements from 40 unique actors.

Stage 2—Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) Coding: Each statement was independently coded by two researchers using Discourse Network Analyzer (DNA) v.3.0 based on a predefined actor–attribute codebook. The coding scheme categorized each statement according to its actor and narrative attribute. Actors included individuals, institutions, and legal entities, while attributes represented the substantive themes of the statements, such as appeals for neutrality or sanctions enforcement. To ensure inter-coder reliability, a random 20% sample ($n = 11$ statements) was double-coded, resulting in Cohen's kappa of $\kappa = 0.82$, indicating substantial agreement. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion prior to full-dataset coding.

Stage 3—Gephi Visualization: The coded data were exported in GraphML format and analyzed using Gephi v.0.10.1. Network visualization employed the ForceAtlas2 layout algorithm. Actor and attribute nodes were visually differentiated, and node size represented degree centrality. The analysis calculated several network metrics, including degree centrality, betweenness centrality, network density, modularity using the Louvain method, and connected components. The frequency distribution of statements by actor was also examined to identify the most prominent actors in the discourse.

Stage 4—Theoretical Interpretation: The network findings were interpreted using the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) and the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) to explain the structure of policy narratives and potential coalition formation within the ASN neutrality discourse.

To ensure validity, robustness checks were conducted by assessing the stability of the network under alternative coding conditions and variations in node composition. Although follow-up studies may further strengthen reliability through expanded double-coding procedures, these checks did not substantially alter the main findings, as most statements were derived from official and verifiable sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The ASN neutrality discourse network in Palembang consists of 96 nodes (40 actors and 56 attributes) with 56 actor–attribute relationships. Initial visualizations show the network to be fragmented into many small components; that is, each actor focuses on its own internal narrative without sharing many of the same attributes. There is practically no single coalition network that unites all actors. These results are consistent with a two-mode analysis design that, without special pruning, tends to display many isolated components when unique statements dominate each actor's discourse.

Table 1 summarizes the main categories of actors identified, along with their examples, scope, and roles in the discourse. These categories are divided into: (a) Election Supervisors (e.g., Bawaslu RI, Bawaslu Kota Palembang) with national and local scopes that focus on the supervision and enforcement of violations; (b) the Central Government (MenPANRB, Minister of Home Affairs, BKN, KASN) as national actors responsible for ASN development and regulation; (c) the Regional Government (*Penjabat* (Pj.) Wali Kota, Regional Secretary, Inspectorate, Camat) at the provincial, municipal, and sub-district levels, which is responsible for internal supervision and discipline; (d) Regulations (*Undang-Undang No. 20/2023*, Joint Decree of Five Ministers of 2022, *Peraturan Pemerintah* (PP) No. 94/2021) as abstract “actors” at the national level that serve as the legal basis for neutrality; (e) ASN groups (ASN at the national, provincial, and municipal levels) as the objects of multilevel policies; and (f) Communities/LSM (e.g., researchers, participatory supervisors) with local and national scopes that provide independent and participatory perspectives.

Table 2. of the main categories of identified actors

Categories Actors	Example Actor (n)	Scope	Role in Discourse
Election Supervisor	Bawaslu RI; Palembang City Bawaslu (2)	National/City	Monitoring and enforcement of violations
Central Government	Minister of PANRB; Minister of Home Affairs; BKN; KASN (4)	National	ASN Development; Regulation & Sanctions
Local Government	Acting Mayor; South Sumatra Regional Secretary; Inspectorate; Sub-district Head	Province/ City/ District	Internal supervision & discipline
Regulation*	Law 20/2023; Decree of 5 Ministers 2022; PP 94/2021 (3)	National	Neutrality & Discipline Foundation
ASN (Group)	National/Provincial/City ASN (3)	Multi-level	Policy objects
Community/NGO	Participatory supervisors; Researcher	Local/National	Participation & independent perspective

Source: Processed results of researchers

*Note: Regulations are treated as abstract "actors" in the DNA schema.

In this network, Supervisory and Regulatory Actors emerge as the dominant nodes with the highest degree. This is reflected in the high frequency of their associated attributes. For example, the node “Bawaslu RI” (actor) is connected to several main attributes, such as “enforcement of strict disciplinary sanctions” and “monitoring of the Regional Elections.” Similarly, the nodes “Law 20/2023” and “SKB 2022” are connected to many neutrality-themed statements. This combination indicates that the primary message in the discourse is the enforcement of the rule of law as a solution. On the other hand, the ASN nodes, as a group or community, have a low degree, meaning that their voices are less prominent in the discourse presented.

A two-mode network visualization is shown in Figure 1. This network displays separate components representing the narrative of each actor. For example, the Bawaslu node forms a centralized component (strict supervision narrative cluster), while the MenPANRB, Minister of Home Affairs, and KASN nodes are incorporated into other components (coaching narrative and regulatory narrative). Each statement attribute is connected to only one actor or a small group of actors. This signifies that there is no direct conflict among actors in the statement dataset, but rather a partial consensus that neutrality is important. Most cross-actor interactions occurred on cross-sectoral themes, such as structural collaboration in supervising civil servants, violation-reporting mechanisms, neutrality education, and public participation. Figure 1 confirms this finding by showing clusters that are not perfectly integrated.

Figure 1. A two-mode network of ASN neutrality discourse in Palembang. Each blue node represents an actor (official, institutional, or regulatory), and each red node represents a statement attribute. The visualization features separate components, indicating a strong internal narrative for each actor with little direct interaction.

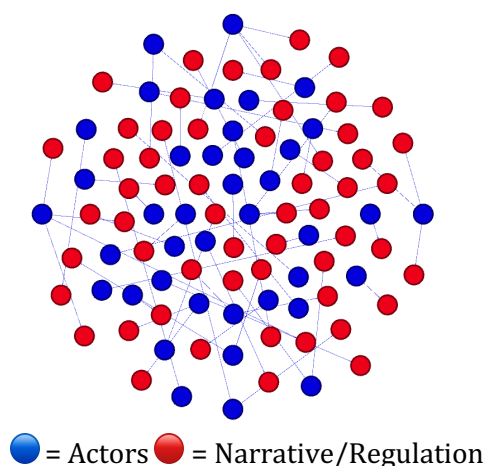


Figure 1. Two-mode network of ASN neutrality discourse in Palembang
Source: Visualization Results The researcher used Gephi (DNA coding data, 2025).

Network metrics confirm the following: modularity ≈ 0.87 ; Bawaslu RI degree centrality ≈ 15 ; local nodes (e.g., Camat) degree centrality = 1; and network density < 0.05 . From an ACF perspective Sabatier (1993), the regulatory-enforcement cluster constitutes a dominant advocacy coalition—civil society lacks the institutional resources to constitute a rival coalition, indicating an asymmetrical subsystem. From an NPF perspective Shanahan (2018), the enforcement-dominated narrative reflects a villain-victim-hero structure: non-neutral ASN as villains, electoral integrity as the victim, and Bawaslu and regulatory institutions as heroes. ASN’s low degree centrality indicates that they are represented as passive policy objects—a “discursive marginalization” that tends to generate surface-level compliance rather than deep normative internalization (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

To clarify the narrative structure, we include alternative visualizations. Figure 2 shows a flow graph illustrating the centralized focus of the narrative based on actor groups. Although this visualization is not generated from a single analysis in Gephi, it helps interpret the visible clusters. Figure 2 shows, for example, that two-thirds of the narrative surrounding “strict sanctions” originates from Bawaslu, whereas the theme of “neutrality education” is distributed between KASN and civil society components. Thus, interinstitutional collaboration appears to be more systematically structured around the protection of legal compliance (sanctions) than around public education.

Figure 2. Example visualization of cross-actor thematic composition (placeholder). Different-colored nodes symbolize manually identified thematic clusters, such as sanctions (red), education (green), and participation (blue).

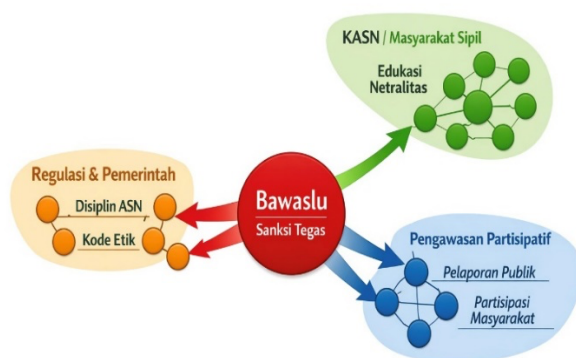


Figure 2. The results of visualizing the cross-actor theme in the ASN neutrality discourse
Source: Results processed by researchers based on DNA analysis and interpretation of cross-actor discourse using Gephi, 2025.

Two analytically distinct clusters emerge: Cluster 1 (Regulatory-Enforcement): dominated by Bawaslu RI, Bawaslu Palembang, Law 20/2023, and the Joint Ministerial Decree—actors sharing a state-centric orientation focused on institutional compliance and punitive deterrence. Bawaslu RI’s high degree centrality (≈ 15) anchors the enforcement narrative. Within the ACF Sabatier (1993), these actors constitute a dominant advocacy coalition. Cluster 2 (Civil Society-Participatory): smaller and peripheral—community organizations and participatory supervisors focused on bottom-up oversight and public education. This cluster lacks the institutional resources necessary to constitute a rival coalition, indicating an asymmetrical discourse structure.

The high modularity (≈ 0.87) signals a structural disconnect between top-down enforcement and bottom-up participation. Locally in Palembang: (1) the Acting Mayor’s public dismissal-sanction statements positioned the executive as an unusual enforcement voice; (2) Bawaslu Palembang’s Zilenial volunteer program is the most visible civil society engagement node; and (3) a Camat node appeared as a reported violator—a role inversion exposing local political pressure on lower-level ASN. These specificities distinguish Palembang’s discourse from national-level patterns.

Advanced Analytics (One-Mode Projection and Community Detection)

Since the two-mode network demonstrates the potential for separate narrative coalitions among actors, additional analytical steps were undertaken to examine direct relationships between actors. Single-mode network projections were created by connecting two actors if they shared at least one statement attribute. The result is a graph of connected actors based on narrative similarity. In this one-mode network, informal coalition clusters become visible: for example, Bawaslu RI may be connected to Bawaslu Palembang (through a shared statement on supervision), as well as to KASN and MenPANRB (through shared statements on ASN discipline). Meanwhile, ASN groups may be connected with the local government if they discuss reporting mechanisms together. This projection network can generate larger components than the original two-mode network because a single shared attribute is sufficient to create links between actors.

Figure 3. Research methodology flow (placeholder). This diagram illustrates the main stages: narrative data collection, DNA coding, visualization in Gephi, and further analysis through network projections and community detection.

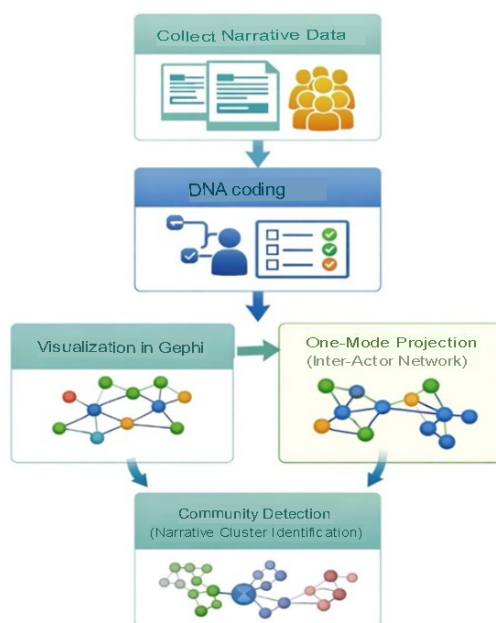


Figure 3. Advanced analysis pipeline through single-mode network projection and community detection

Source: Researcher's processed results based on DNA analysis and Gephi visualization, 2025.

After the one-mode projection, we applied a community detection algorithm (the Louvain method) to identify whether there were significant thematic sub-coalitions. Initial experiments showed the existence of several typical communities, such as the “enforcement” community, which includes Bawaslu, KASN, and legal institutions, as well as the “education support” community, which groups KASN, BKN, and several educational institutions. However, the detected communities did not show a dominant single-narrative coalition structure; rather, each community was relatively homogeneous, as expected. This confirms the initial interpretation that there is no direct opposition in the discourse, but rather a series of minor similarities among actors.

The one-mode projection and community detection analysis provide a way to refine the two-mode network outcomes. For example, by visualizing a single-mode network (Figure 4), we can highlight the core actors more clearly. In Figure 4 (placeholder), the larger nodes represent actors with many narrative similarities. It appears that the Bawaslu RI node is centrally positioned and connected to the KASN and ASN group nodes because they share themes related to sanctions and supervision. This clarifies the central position of supervisory actors within the network.

Figure 4. A one-mode projection network of actors (placeholder). The blue nodes represent government/supervisory actors, whereas the red nodes represent the civil community/ASN. Node size is based on the number of shared narrative links. This projection shows several small clusters based on common themes, such as enforcement clusters and education clusters.

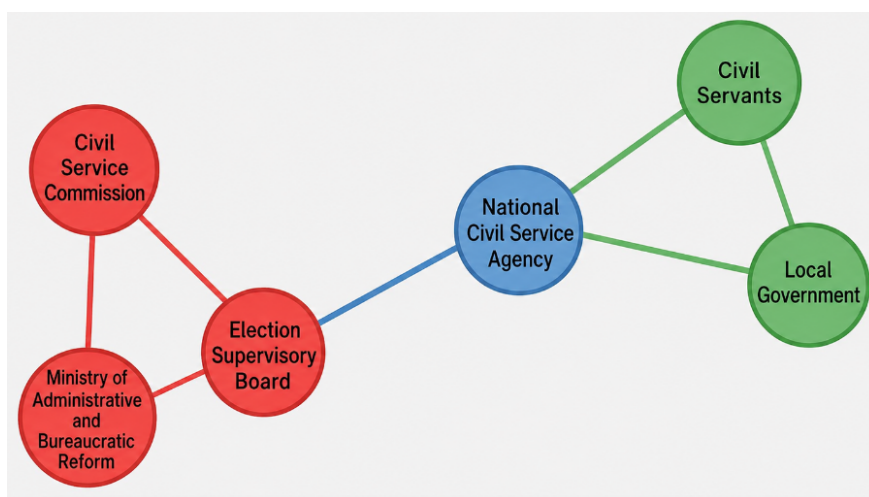


Figure 4. Placeholder single-mode projection network

Source: Visualization Results The researcher used Gephi (DNA coding data, 2025).

As a methodological note, reliance on single-mode projection can increase density and cohesiveness in the network, thereby reducing fragmentation. However, this can also increase noise if the shared attributes are not highly relevant. Therefore, the results of community detection should be interpreted carefully as indicating potential narrative coalitions rather than formal interest groups.

Discussions

Robustness Check

The robustness findings carry theoretical implications beyond methodological validation. The core network structure—high modularity, regulatory dominance, and civil society peripherality—persists even when the highest-degree nodes are removed, indicating a systemic feature of the policy subsystem consistent with neo-institutionalist arguments about institutional path dependence. The persistent cluster separation—two distinct belief systems coexisting without meaningful dialogue—reflects an imbalance of institutional capital that privileges legalistic over civic framings, echoing Wilson's (1887) and Svava's (2001) observations that the politics-administration dichotomy often insulates bureaucratic decision-making from democratic

accountability.

To ensure that the results of the network analysis are not overly influenced by the choice of coding scheme or the quantity of data, we review several robustness approaches. First, we test the stability of the structure by temporarily removing nodes with very high degrees (for example, excluding the nodes representing Law 20/2023 or Bawaslu) and observing changes in network patterns. As a result, although modularity changes slightly, the pattern of component separation remains the same, which suggests that the main findings are not dependent on one dominant node.

Second, we consider threshold variables in Discourse Network Analysis (DNA): currently, all attributes are considered equal without a specific value threshold. In follow-up studies, thresholds can be applied, for example, by requiring two actors to share at least two attributes to be linked, to test whether a tighter network results in more significant clusters. This is related to Newman's (2006) research demonstrating the resilience of community structures to minor disturbances.

Third, the validity of the coding was tested informally. Although most statements are direct quotations (reducing ambiguity), we note the need for independent double-coding in future research. This would allow the calculation of Cohen's kappa for inter-coder reliability. If follow-up studies find a low kappa value (<0.6), this would indicate that some conclusions need to be reexamined. However, for this study, the cross-checking procedure without a formal double-coding design was considered adequate, given that news sources relatively clearly associated statements with the relevant actors.

Overall, the initial examination indicated that the main structure of the narrative network did not change substantively under various minor modifications, and that the dominant actor nodes remained consistent. However, we recommend that future studies use larger volumes of data (e.g., longer time periods or broader sources) to ensure the generalizability of findings, as well as incorporate temporal network analysis to examine the evolution of discourse.

Policy Implications

This study confirms and extends four key prior findings: (1) ASN's peripheral network position confirms Sihaloho (2020)—ASNs are discursively constructed as objects of compliance. (2) The dominance of post-violation deterrence over preventive education corroborates Fajrianto (2024)—enforcement mechanisms remain reactive. (3) Contrary to Murti (2023), national coordination frameworks do not produce coherent local discourse alignment in Palembang. (4) Contrary to Hasanah (2024), education-themed narratives occupy peripheral positions, revealing a gap between policy prescription and discursive salience. Theoretically, the regulatory-enforcement coalition has crowded out alternative frames centered on participation, education, or bureaucratic culture change (Sabatier & Weible, 2014).

The results of the discourse analysis above have operational implications for strengthening ASN neutrality in Palembang and Indonesia more generally. First, the finding that surveillance and sanctions dominate the discourse underscores the need for consistent and transparent enforcement of sanctions. This means that Bawaslu and related institutions must ensure that procedures for reporting and addressing violations are carried out without delay or discrimination. For example, reports of violations should be followed up publicly through easily accessible mechanisms (online or face-to-face), and the results should be published to create a deterrent effect. Local governments also need to strengthen the authority of regional inspectorates or internal supervisory bodies to take action against ASN personnel proven to have committed violations.

Second, the relatively limited narrative focus on education and the internalization of ethics demonstrates an opportunity to strengthen socialization programs. The government and relevant stakeholders should improve neutrality code-of-ethics training materials in the orientation programs for new civil servants, as well as provide simulations and ethics workshops for existing officials. This educational program can involve cooperation among BKN, KASN, and public universities. For example, an online learning module on neutrality could be developed and required for all civil servants as part of performance requirements.

Third, the results of the analysis highlight multi-agency coordination as a key issue. With discourse distributed across Bawaslu, the central government, and regional institutions, local government agencies must establish regular coordination with central and supervisory commissions. For example, the Palembang BKPSDM office could hold quarterly meetings with the City Bawaslu to share reports of violations and discuss response measures. The 2022 Joint Decree of Five Ministers suggests the formation of a cross-sectoral team, allowing these collaborative activities to serve as an operational forum for harmonizing the interpretation and implementation of neutrality policies.

Fourth, public involvement, which emerges as a cross-actor theme, needs to be strengthened. The Palembang Bawaslu has involved volunteers (Zilenial) in monitoring neutrality, and this approach could be expanded through community reporting campaigns. Local governments and legislatures can organize open dialogues (e.g., focus group discussions) involving civil society groups to evaluate the implementation of neutrality policies, gather complaints, and educate the public about the importance of bureaucratic neutrality. Thus, society becomes not only the object of supervision but also an active subject in oversight.

Fifth, these results suggest the development of indicators for a culture of neutrality within the bureaucracy. In the future, local governments could incorporate neutrality compliance as one of the ASN performance indicators (Key Performance Indicators [KPIs]) assessed within the performance evaluation system (beyond attendance or technical performance). For example, each year ASN personnel could complete an assessment instrument on political ethics, with the results influencing certain promotions or awards. Such policies would operationally internalize the theme of neutrality within bureaucratic routines.

Overall, the combination of law enforcement and education constitutes the two primary objectives. The implementation of these policy recommendations should be outlined in specific action plans, as suggested by the Joint Decree of Five Ministers (e.g., annual socialization calendars and joint training programs). Cross-institutional involvement, such as that of KASN, BKN, and public universities, will enhance both legitimacy and effectiveness.

Limitations and Advanced Research Agenda

This research has several limitations. First, the data are limited to public statements accessible through mass media and official websites. This means that dispersed discourse aspects or informal conversations outside these sources are not captured. In addition, coding was conducted only by a single coder, although cross-checking procedures were applied. Ideally, the use of double-coding would allow the reliability of narrative attribution to be tested. Second, the analysis is cross-sectional; the study did not explicitly consider the temporal dimension. Discourse on ASN neutrality may change as election day or specific political events approach, and temporal (dynamic) analysis could provide additional insights.

Third, the focus on only one city (Palembang) limits the generalizability of the findings. Although many findings may be nationally relevant, local political constellations vary. Future research could compare neutrality discourse across multiple regions or at the national level to identify broader patterns. Fourth, the DNA method captures only narrative relationships and therefore does not account for non-narrative variables that may also be influential (e.g., actors' political backgrounds). Mixed-methods research involving in-depth interviews or surveys could complement the network findings presented here.

As a future research agenda, it is recommended: (1) to apply longitudinal network analysis by dividing data into periods before and after regional elections in order to examine how discourse evolves; (2) to perform sensitivity tests, for example, based on secondary coding or variations in attribute definitions, to ensure that the main structure remains valid; (3) to explore an Advocacy Coalition Framework–Discourse Network Analysis (ACF-DNA) merger, in which advocacy coalition variables are combined with network data to determine whether interest coalitions coincide with narrative communities; and (4) to enrich the model with qualitative data, such as explanatory interviews with key figures, to assess the motivations underlying the narratives. These efforts would deepen understanding of communication channels among actors and how ASN neutrality can be improved in practice.

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the structural essence of the discourse network, this research demonstrates that ASN neutrality in the 2024 Palembang Regional Election constitutes not merely a matter of regulatory compliance but a contested discursive arena in which institutional actors, narrative frames, and power asymmetries interact to shape the meaning of bureaucratic integrity in local democracy. By moving beyond descriptive reporting of individual violations toward relational mapping of the discourse network, this study reveals patterns of discursive dominance, peripheral silencing, and intercluster fragmentation that surface-level analyses cannot detect (Putra & Putra, 2025).

Quantitatively, the discourse network comprised 96 nodes (40 actors and 56 attributes; density = 0.05; modularity \approx 0.87), with Bawaslu RI holding the highest degree centrality (\approx 15), while civil society and ASN nodes averaged a degree of \approx 1. Two-thirds of the “strict sanctions” narrative attributes originated from Bawaslu-connected nodes, confirming the asymmetry of discursive power in the local policy subsystem. Based on these findings, two principal policy implications emerge: (1) the dominance of enforcement-centered discourse should be complemented by discursive rebalancing through ASN-led ethics forums, peer-learning programs, and public testimony platforms; and (2) the structural disconnect between regulatory and civil society clusters calls for formal dialogue mechanisms among BKPSDM, City Bawaslu, and civil society organizations. This study acknowledges three limitations: data restricted to publicly accessible media from a single six-month period, a single-city focus limiting generalizability, and intercoder reliability tested on only 20% of the corpus (κ = 0.82). Future research should compare discourse across multiple cities, apply temporal network analysis to track discourse evolution, and explore Advocacy Coalition Framework–Discourse Network Analysis (ACF-DNA) integration to test whether narrative communities coincide with formal advocacy coalitions.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Author 1 (Corresponding Author): Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, DNA coding, formal analysis, writing – original draft. Author 2: Literature review, theoretical framework development, validation, writing – review and editing. Both authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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