

# The Challenge of Bureaucratic Neutrality in the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Indonesia

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## Article Info

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**Abstract:** This study examines the intricate challenges of maintaining bureaucratic impartiality in the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Bima Regency, particularly emphasizing the pervasive influence of political dynasties. This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach and an in-depth literature review to elucidate the intricacies of local political dynamics. It illuminates how political pressure, interest-based interventions, and entrenched polarization erode bureaucratic integrity. The findings illustrate the considerable influence wielded by political dynasties in Bima Regency, which extends beyond the political sphere to encompass symbolic, cultural, and economic domains. This formidable sway presents a formidable challenge to the neutrality of bureaucratic institutions during the electoral process. Furthermore, this research highlights the crucial function of independent media in advancing inclusive democracy and upholding bureaucratic impartiality. By offering a nuanced analysis, the research uncovers the challenges and provides strategic recommendations to improve bureaucratic independence. Some key suggestions include improving ethics education and training for civil servants, strengthening oversight mechanisms, enforcing strict sanctions against violations, and encouraging greater public engagement and awareness. Ultimately, this study contributes valuable insights to ongoing efforts to improve the quality of democracy in Bima District and across Indonesia, paving the way for more resilient and transparent democratic processes in the future.

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## INTRODUCTION

Democracy has been a fundamental pillar in Indonesia's governance system since the late 20th-century reforms (Harijanti, 2015). As a developing democratic nation, Indonesia has undergone a series of general election processes marking significant steps in strengthening citizen political participation and ensuring government legitimacy (Linus et al., 2022). Legislative elections and presidential elections have been the focal points on the national political agenda, where public decision-making and the direction of the country's politics are determined by the people's voices (Bolton et al., 2021). However, behind the glitz of this democratic process, there are inevitable challenges, one of which is ensuring bureaucratic neutrality (Icisp, 2020).

The challenge of bureaucratic neutrality is crucial in the Indonesian democracy context during the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections (Darma et al., 2021). The role of bureaucracy in conducting elections is not merely administrative but also involves integrity, transparency, and fairness in the political process (Harits Anugrah et al., 2022).

Bureaucratic neutrality is a vital prerequisite for the success and legitimacy of elections because neutral bureaucracy ensures that every stage of the electoral process, from planning and organization to implementation, adheres to democratic and fair principles (Yesilkagit et al., 2023).

Amidst increasingly complex political dynamics, challenges to bureaucratic neutrality are evolving (de Avila Gomide, 2022). Factors such as political pressure, interest interventions, and political polarization can threaten bureaucratic independence and steer them towards non-neutral behavior (Makmur & Saksono, 2021). Therefore, it is important for us to carefully examine these challenges and seek solutions to strengthen bureaucratic independence and ensure the integrity of the democratic process (Aminah et al., 2021).

This is particularly urgent in Bima Regency. As one of the regions in Indonesia with a long history of democratic processes, Bima Regency often becomes a focal point in general elections, including Legislative Elections legislative elections and Presidential Elections presidential elections (Hartaman et al., 2020). However, behind the vibrant democracy, Bima Regency also faces several challenges affecting bureaucratic neutrality in the electoral process (Lestarini, 2023).

The main challenge Bima Regency faces in maintaining bureaucratic neutrality during elections is its complex political landscape (Peters & Pierre, 2022). As a region with intense political dynamics, Bima Regency often becomes an arena for various political interests (Yuliadi et al., 2021). This can create strong political pressure on bureaucratic officials, affecting their independence and neutrality in performing electoral duties. Moreover, unethical political practices and attempts to manipulate election results pose serious issues that must be addressed.

In addition to the complex political landscape, Bima Regency also faces challenges in infrastructure and human resources (Kashyap, 2022). As a region consisting of various islands and scattered rural areas, ensuring access to remote areas and conducting fair and transparent elections presents its own challenges (Wulandari et al., 2023). Inadequate infrastructure and limited human resources can hinder the efficiency and effectiveness of election management and increase the risk of violating bureaucratic neutrality (Mar'iyah, 2023).

Furthermore, the participation of the community in elections is also a crucial factor in ensuring bureaucratic neutrality (Yusuf et al., 2023). Bima Regency, with its rich social and cultural diversity, demands active participation from various segments of society in the electoral process (Alfian et al., 2021). However, limited access to information, high levels of illiteracy, and low political awareness among the population can be obstacles to ensuring a clean, fair, and transparent electoral process (Waris & M, 2022).

In the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections, Bima Regency experienced a series of failures in efforts to create bureaucratic neutrality (Suaib et al., 2020). One of the main factors contributing to this failure is rampant politicization among government officials. Many of those involved in the election process are influenced by specific political interests, whether from political parties or other interest groups (Yuwono, 2017). This

creates an environment where bureaucratic neutrality is eroded, and political interests compete to dominate the electoral process (Firnas, 2020).

In addition to politicization, another factor contributing to the failure to create bureaucratic neutrality is the lack of strong regulations to protect the independence of bureaucratic officials (Islam & Rahman, 2020). Although there are some regulations governing bureaucratic neutrality, their implementation is often weak and not supported by adequate sanctions (Qodar et al., 2021). This provides loopholes for practices that undermine bureaucratic neutrality to develop unhindered because bureaucratic officials feel less encouraged or threatened by serious legal consequences (Zuhro, 2021).

Moreover, the lack of awareness of the importance of bureaucratic neutrality among government officials is also a determining factor in this failure (Sarnawa, 2022). Many of them do not fully understand the concept of bureaucratic neutrality and its implications for the integrity and public trust in the electoral process (Mauk, 2022). The lack of training and education on the ethics and standards of behavior required to maintain neutrality also makes bureaucratic officials vulnerable to political pressure and unethical practices (Setiawan & Hapsari, 2022).

Furthermore, the organizational culture still tied to political patronage also hampers the creation of bureaucratic neutrality in Bima Regency (Yuliadi et al., 2021). Practices of nepotism, clientelism, and collusion prevalent among bureaucratic officials can create an environment where political loyalty takes precedence over integrity and neutrality in performing election duties (Sa'ban et al., 2021). This creates a situation where abuse of power and political intervention become common and accepted as part of the existing organizational culture (Nadjib et al., 2022).

Thus, there is a pressing need to strengthen the foundation of democracy in Indonesia, especially in Bima Regency. The threatened condition of bureaucratic neutrality by practical political dynamics, especially during the legislative elections and presidential elections election seasons, raises serious concerns about the integrity and fairness of the electoral process (Patta et al., 2023). Bureaucracy, which should play a neutral role in governance, when its impartiality is compromised, can lead to the misuse of state resources for specific political interests, diminish the credibility of government institutions, and erode public trust in the democratic system. Therefore, exploring and understanding the challenges faced by bureaucratic neutrality in the context of Legislative and Presidential Elections in Bima Regency is crucial for identifying and implementing strategies to minimize bias potential and enhance transparency and fairness in the electoral process (Rajagukguk et al., 2021).

The purpose of this research is to identify the factors influencing bureaucratic neutrality in the context of elections in Bima Regency, as well as to propose recommendations that can encourage the creation of a more inclusive and democratic electoral environment. Focusing on an in-depth analysis of practices that disrupt bureaucratic neutrality, such as the influence of patron-client relationships and the use of state resources for campaigns, this research aims to provide a better understanding of how internal and external dynamics interact and affect bureaucratic neutrality. Through this research, it is hoped that effective strategies can be developed to strengthen

bureaucratic neutrality, thereby supporting fair and transparent conduct of Legislative and Presidential Elections. This initiative is not only crucial for Bima Regency but also provides valuable insights for efforts to improve the quality of democracy in Indonesia as a whole.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive approach combined with a comprehensive literature review (Ashworth et al., 2019), to explore the challenges of bureaucratic neutrality in the 2024 Legislative and Presidential Elections in Bima Regency. The choice of Bima Regency as the research location is deliberate, given its strategic importance in understanding the dynamics of bureaucratic influence and political alignment during critical electoral processes. The qualitative nature of this study allows for an in-depth examination of the subtle and overt factors that may affect the neutrality of bureaucrats, ensuring a thorough understanding of the issue at hand.

The data collection process is multifaceted, encompassing a literature review, observations, interviews, and documentation (Morris et al., 2018). The literature review provides a theoretical foundation, drawing on existing studies and frameworks that discuss bureaucratic neutrality in electoral contexts. Observations in the field offer real-time insights into the behavior and practices of bureaucrats during the election period. Interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, political candidates, and local community leaders, add a rich qualitative layer to the data, capturing the lived experiences and perceptions of those directly involved. Documentation, including official records and media reports, corroborates the findings from observations and interviews, providing a well-rounded data set for analysis.

Once data collection is complete, the study employs an interactive data analysis model outlined (Sagena et al., 2023). This method involves three critical stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion or verification drawing. Data reduction involves carefully selecting, focusing, and simplifying the collected data to highlight the most relevant aspects of bureaucratic neutrality in the election context. Data presentation then organizes the reduced data into coherent narratives, charts, or tables, facilitating the identification of patterns and themes. Finally, the conclusion or verification stage synthesizes the findings, offering insights into the challenges of maintaining bureaucratic neutrality in Bima Regency's electoral process and suggesting potential strategies for addressing these challenges in future elections.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Below is the appropriate research indicators designed to measure various aspects related to bureaucratic neutrality and the challenges it faces in the context of the 2024 Legislative elections and Presidential elections in Bima Regency, including factors related to local and cultural factors in Bima Regency, the participation of bureaucratic officials in political campaign activities, the existence and accessibility of complaint mechanisms, media, and information dissemination.

These indicators are designed to comprehensively measure various factors influencing bureaucratic neutrality in the context of Legislative elections and Presidential elections, as well as to evaluate efforts and strategies implemented to address existing challenges. Through data collection and analysis based on these indicators, the research is expected to provide concrete and evidence-based recommendations to support a more inclusive democracy in di Bima Regency (Muh. Najib Husain et al., 2021).

### ***The local and cultural factors in Bima Regency***

Bima Regency, located in the West Nusa Tenggara Province, Indonesia, is an area rich in tradition and culture. Its diverse population holds deep social and cultural values, which also influence their perspectives and attitudes towards various aspects of life, including political neutrality (Seran et al., 2022). Local and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the political attitudes and behaviors of the people in Bima Regency, including in maintaining political neutrality amidst increasingly complex political dynamics (Rusliandy, 2021).

One profound cultural aspect in Bima Regency is the concept of equality, which serves as a fundamental principle in social interaction (Deni et al., 2020). This concept encourages Bima's community to respect each other's opinions, regardless of socio-economic background, education, or political affiliation. In the political context, this principle of equality has the potential to support political neutrality, as people tend to avoid excessive partisanship and prioritize constructive dialogue and discussion (Indiahono, 2022).

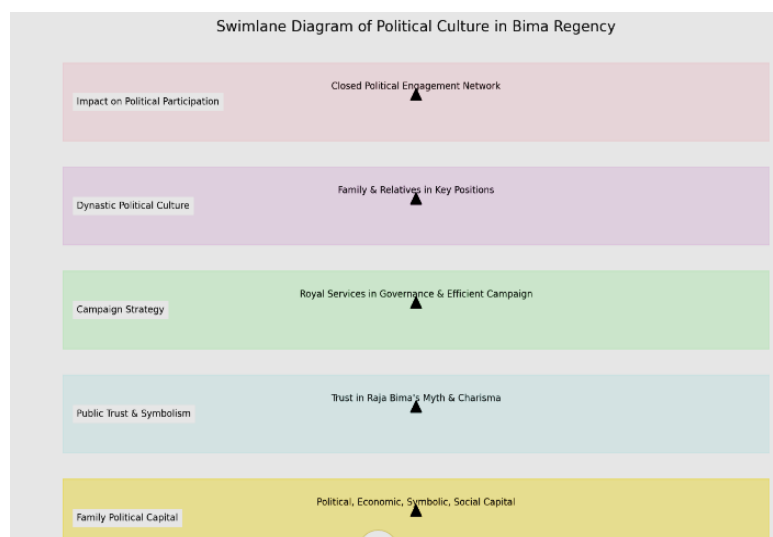
However, local and cultural factors can also pose challenges in maintaining political neutrality. Strong kinship systems and family loyalties often influence individual and group political choices. In some cases, this can lead to family or clan-based political polarization, where political decisions are based more on family loyalty than objective considerations of candidate quality or programs.

Insufficient political education also presents a challenge in promoting political neutrality in Bima Regency. Although formal education has reached much of the population, understanding the importance of political neutrality, voter rights and responsibilities, and how to critically and objectively evaluate candidates and political programs still needs improvement. This lack of awareness can facilitate political manipulation and the influence of money in politics, threatening the principle of political neutrality.

Furthermore, entrenched political dynasties in Bima Regency have created a unique political culture where symbolic capital plays a major role in determining power dynamics. The leadership of Indah Dhamayanti Putri, closely tied to the Bima kingdom, symbolizes political power derived not only from administrative capacity or managerial ability but also from the depth of history, myths, and societal beliefs. This creates a political environment where symbols of royal power and the charisma of the Bima King are used to solidify and expand political influence. In this context, symbolic capital not only influences public perception but also becomes a crucial asset in political strategies and campaigns.

The mastery and control of political and economic resources by political dynasties in Bima Regency enable them to mobilize support widely and effectively. Broad access to these resources allows the Indah Dhamayanti Putri family to conduct strong political campaigns and maintain their influence within the community. Moreover, the ability to provide direct assistance and services to the people helps strengthen positive perceptions and garner sustainable political support. This demonstrates how political dynasties use the resources they control not only for political gain but also to build and maintain beneficial social relationships with the community.

The following is the flow of political culture in Bima Regency that influences the neutrality of bureaucracy and democracy, which can be explained through a swimlane flowchart.



**Figure 1.** Political Culture in Bima Regency

The longstanding legacy of mass networks and bureaucracy has become one of the greatest assets for the Indah Dhamayanti Putri family. This extensive political experience and network enable the political dynasty to strengthen their position in political contests while ensuring that government policies and programs can be effectively implemented. This network, consisting of loyalists and supporters, plays a key role in disseminating information, mobilizing support, and maintaining political stability. Thus, the mass network and bureaucracy not only support campaign efforts but also facilitate the implementation of policies that reinforce the political dynasty's position in Bima Regency.

The development of political identity (Abbas et al., 2023), and kinship-based social relations is another characteristic of local political dynasties in Indonesia (Purdey, 2016). In Bima Regency, this strategy has succeeded in creating the perception that political power is a legacy that must be guarded and maintained within the family. This creates a situation where family members and close relatives are given priority in political and administrative placements, strengthening ties between political dynasties and local power structures. While this strengthens social cohesion and political support in the short term, it also raises questions about meritocracy and equal access to power.

As a result, the dominance of political dynasties in Bima Regency has had significant impacts on public political participation. This tendency toward a closed political system limits the possibility for new actors to emerge and actively participate in the political



process. Although the resulting political stability may be considered an advantage, limitations in political participation hinder the dynamics of democracy and reduce the community's ability to influence policies and decisions affecting their lives. Thus, while political dynasties in Bima Regency have succeeded in maintaining their influence and power, challenges to democratic principles and political inclusivity remain critical issues to be addressed.

Therefore, to enhance political neutrality in Bima Regency, attention must be paid to these local and cultural factors. One strategy that can be pursued is through more intensive political education and socialization tailored to the local social and cultural context. Political education programs can be designed to teach the values of democracy, openness, and political neutrality, integrating examples and cases relevant to the daily lives of the Bima community.

Additionally, the role of community leaders and traditional leaders is crucial in promoting political neutrality. These figures have influence and credibility in the eyes of the community, making them effective agents of change in disseminating the values of political neutrality. They can convey messages about the importance of voting based on considerations of candidate programs and qualities rather than pressure or rewards.

Local media also play a crucial role in building awareness of political neutrality. Objective and unbiased reporting can help the community obtain accurate information about candidates and political programs. Media can serve as a platform for discussion and dialogue among citizens, allowing for healthy and constructive exchange of opinions and information.

Ultimately, efforts to maintain political neutrality in Bima Regency require cooperation from all elements of society, from individuals, families, community groups, traditional leaders, educators, to the media. Through a holistic and integrated approach that considers the uniqueness of local social and cultural contexts, Bima Regency can develop a healthier, more dynamic, and neutral political ecosystem. Thus, political neutrality becomes not just idealism but a practical practice that can enhance the quality of democracy and political participation in Bima Regency.

### ***Participation of Bureaucratic Officials in Political Campaign Activities***

This phenomenon not only illustrates the close connection between the bureaucracy structure and local politics but also highlights the challenges in maintaining the neutrality of the civil service apparatus in political contests (Indiahono, 2022). In Bima Regency, as in many other areas in Indonesia, bureaucratic officials are often found to be involved directly or indirectly in campaign activities, indicating the significant influence of political dynasties and local political forces within the government structure.

This involvement typically begins with the utilization of networks and resources owned by bureaucratic officials to support specific political campaigns. In many cases, this is done subtly and indirectly, such as through the use of government facilities or personal influence to support campaign activities (Siregar et al., 2023). Bureaucratic officials, with their access and control over government resources, become a crucial asset in political campaign strategies, especially in organizing activities and mobilizing support

at the grassroots level. This often raises questions about the boundaries between state duties and personal or group political interests.

Furthermore, the participation of bureaucratic officials in political campaigns also reflects the dynamics of power and political patronage in Bima Regency. Bureaucratic officials involved in campaign activities often do so as part of a patronage network, where their political support is expected to be rewarded with protection, promotion, or other benefits within the bureaucratic structure. This phenomenon reinforces the cycle of dependency between politicians and bureaucratic officials, where both parties benefit from the exchange of political support and administrative advantages.

However, the involvement of bureaucratic officials in practical politics also presents risks to the integrity and neutrality of public service. Ideally, civil servants are tasked with serving the public professionally and not engaging in political activities that could affect their independence and objectivity. When bureaucratic officials are involved in political campaigns, it can blur the lines between government duties and political activities, potentially undermining public trust in government institutions.

Efforts to address and minimize the involvement of bureaucratic officials in practical politics have become an important topic of discussion in Bima Regency. Measures such as increased supervision, strengthening regulations, and political education for civil servants are proposed as solutions to maintain bureaucratic neutrality. The importance of maintaining this neutrality is not only related to the effectiveness of public service but also to fairness and equality in the democratic process, where each candidate has the same right to support without disproportionate influence from the government structure.

In the context of local democracy in Bima Regency, the involvement of bureaucratic officials in political campaigns reflects the challenges faced in separating government interests from practical politics. Although improvement efforts continue, the unique local political dynamics and the strong influence of political dynasties and patronage make this separation process difficult. Going forward, it is important for Bima Regency and other areas in Indonesia to continue pushing for reforms and awareness of the importance of bureaucratic neutrality in supporting a healthy and inclusive democratic system.

### ***The existence and accessibility of proper complaint mechanisms***

The accessibility of election complaint mechanisms in Bima Regency for the 2024 election is a critical aspect in ensuring integrity and fairness throughout the electoral process. These mechanisms are designed to provide a platform for the public, candidates, and political parties to voice complaints or reports related to alleged election violations, whether technical issues, manipulation, voter intimidation, or the illicit use of state resources (Bolton et al., 2021). This function is crucial in Bima Regency, where local political dynamics and the influence of political families could potentially affect the fairness and transparency of elections (Darma et al., 2021).

To enhance the existence and accessibility of complaint mechanisms, the Bima Regency Election Supervisory Agency has taken proactive steps by establishing complaint offices at various strategic locations, as well as utilizing digital platforms to facilitate the submission of complaints (Makmur & Saksono, 2021). This allows citizens



to report alleged violations more easily, not limited by geographical or time constraints. Moreover, the use of social media and instant messaging apps for complaints makes the process quicker and more responsive, reaching a broader segment of the population, especially the younger generation.

The response to incoming complaints is an important indicator of the effectiveness of these mechanisms. In Bima Regency, Election Supervisory Agency and the General Elections Commission have committed to taking each complaint seriously, ensuring that every case is thoroughly and transparently investigated. To achieve this, they conduct regular training for their officers on how to handle complaints, from the reception process to investigation and resolution. Success in this response not only depends on the speed of reaction but also on the ability to address issues fairly and objectively, ensuring all parties feel heard and respected.

Furthermore, educating the public about their rights and the complaint mechanisms is a priority. Through collaborations with NGOs, local media, and educational institutions, Election Supervisory Agency Bima Regency strives to increase public awareness about the importance of active participation in election supervision. Information campaigns and workshops are held to teach citizens how to identify and report election violations, and the importance of this process in maintaining a healthy democracy.

However, challenges remain, particularly in overcoming the stigma or fear of retribution when reporting violations. To address this, Election Supervisory Agency Bima Regency guarantees confidentiality and protection for reporters, emphasizing that the complaint system is designed to protect every individual's right to participate in a free and fair electoral process. Measures such as anonymous hotlines and web-based complaint systems with options to keep the reporter's identity confidential have been introduced.

Ultimately, the success of the complaint mechanisms is measured not only by the number of reports successfully resolved but also by the increase in public trust towards the electoral process. In the context of Bima Regency, where political dynamics can be highly complex, the existence and responsiveness of effective complaint mechanisms are key to ensuring that the 2024 Election takes place in an atmosphere that is transparent, fair, and democratic. Continuous efforts to improve accessibility and response to complaint mechanisms are crucial steps in strengthening democracy in Bima Regency.

### ***Media and Information Dissemination***

In the context of the 2024 elections in Bima Regency, the role of media and the neutrality of the bureaucracy emerge as two pivotal factors that not only determine the course of the democratic process but also the quality of democracy itself (Yesilkagit et al., 2023). The media wields the power to create an inclusive democracy, where every voice has an equal opportunity to be heard and valued. Meanwhile, bureaucratic neutrality ensures that the elections are conducted fairly and free from the influence of political, symbolic, cultural, and economic powers of political dynasties that may dominate the political landscape in Bima Regency (de Avila Gomide, 2022).

The media serves as a bridge between the public and those in power. In Bima Regency, where political dynasties hold significant sway, the media can act as a tool to ensure that a variety of perspectives and voices from across the societal spectrum are given space (Yuliadi et al., 2021). Independent and pluralistic media can reduce the risk of narrative dominance by any single group or political dynasty, allowing voters to make decisions based on diverse and unbiased information. Thus, the media not only provides information but also educates the public on the importance of diversity of opinion in democracy.

However, challenges arise when the media itself is under the influence of certain political or economic powers. In Bima Regency, where political dynasties may have the resources to influence media outlets, the importance of investigative and independent journalism becomes crucial. Media that can maintain their independence from political and economic interests can help ensure that the 2024 elections are conducted in a more neutral and fairer environment. This requires support from media watchdog agencies and civil society to monitor and challenge any practices that threaten democratic principles.

On the other hand, the neutrality of the bureaucracy is another foundation of fair elections. A neutral bureaucracy ensures that state resources and administrative decisions are not used to support the interests of specific groups or individuals. In the case of Bima Regency, where political dynasties wield strong influence, it is essential for civil servants to maintain a distance from practical politics and focus on delivering public services that are fair and impartial.

Implementing bureaucratic neutrality in the 2024 elections in Bima Regency requires a strong commitment from all levels of government. Measures such as education and training on ethics and neutrality for civil servants, strict supervision, and sanctions for violators can help ensure that the bureaucracy functions as a pillar of neutrality, not as a tool for specific political interests.

The interaction between media and bureaucracy is also crucial. Independent and strong media can play a role in overseeing the bureaucracy, ensuring that practices such as the use of state resources for political campaigns or pressure on civil servants to support specific candidates are detected and condemned. Thus, the media not only helps to create an inclusive public space but also contributes to the enforcement of neutrality in public administration.

The creation of an inclusive democracy and the maintenance of bureaucratic neutrality in the 2024 elections in Bima Regency are interrelated processes that require collective efforts from the media, bureaucracy, civil society, and watchdog agencies. Through this synergy, Bima Regency can move towards elections that are not only fair and free but also reflective of the will and aspirations of its entire population, free from the dominance of political, symbolic, cultural, and economic powers of political dynasties.

## **CONCLUSION**

Democracy in Indonesia, especially in Bima Regency, has undergone significant evolution since the reform era in the late 20th century, reflecting a strong commitment

to citizen political participation and government legitimacy through general elections. However, challenges in ensuring bureaucratic neutrality during the electoral process highlight the complexities inherent in maintaining democratic principles in practice. In Bima Regency, these challenges are further complicated by the entrenched power of political dynasties, which have the potential to significantly influence local political and economic dynamics. The Legislative and Presidential Elections become the primary battleground where the symbolic, political, cultural, and economic power of these political dynasties is tested, necessitating further efforts to ensure that the electoral process reflects the true will of the people. Efforts to maintain bureaucratic neutrality in the face of political and economic pressures are critical, not only for the fairness of the elections but also for the integrity and public trust in the democratic system itself.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes strengthening democratic institutions, increasing public awareness and participation, and developing independent and critical media. Media, in this context, play a crucial role in creating an inclusive democracy, providing a platform for various voices in society to be heard and influence the political agenda. Meanwhile, bureaucratic neutrality must be strengthened through internal reforms, education and training on ethics and public responsibility, and effective oversight mechanisms to prevent and address violations. In Bima Regency, where the influence of political dynasties poses specific challenges to bureaucratic neutrality, these efforts become increasingly important. Thus, the collective effort of all societal elements, including government institutions, media, civil society, and individuals, is key to ensuring that the 2024 elections and other democratic processes in Bima Regency are conducted in a fair, transparent manner that represents all segments of society. Through a comprehensive and collaborative approach, Bima Regency can overcome these challenges and strengthen its democratic foundations, ensuring that all its citizens have an equal voice in determining their future.

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