

## Politicization of Teachers in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Posiga District and South Bolaang Mongondow Regency

Arsit Atuna,<sup>1\*</sup> Sastro M. Wantu,<sup>2</sup> Ramli Mahmud,<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup>. PPKn Study Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, Gorontalo State University, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: [arsitatunatriplexxx@gmail.com](mailto:arsitatunatriplexxx@gmail.com),<sup>1</sup>

### Article Info

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**Abstract** : *This study aims to analyze the forms, driving factors, and impacts of teacher politicization in the 2024 Regional Head Election (Pilkada) in Posigadan District, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency. The main focus is on how local power relations influence teachers' neutrality as civil servants (ASN), particularly in practices related to promotion and transfer within the regional education bureaucracy. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation studies involving teachers, education bureaucracy officials, and other relevant stakeholders. The collected data were analyzed through stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teacher politicization practices in the context of the Pilkada. The findings indicate that teacher politicization is a real phenomenon that occurs in a structured manner. Teachers are often positioned as part of local political strategies, either through direct or indirect pressure. Promotion and transfer decisions are not fully based on performance and competence, but are influenced by political affiliation, personal closeness, and loyalty to local elites. This politicization intensifies before and after the Pilkada, placing teachers in a dilemma between the obligation to maintain neutrality and the need to secure their positions. Its impacts include the weakening of the merit system, a decline in teacher professionalism, and reduced trust in the education bureaucracy. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening oversight of ASN neutrality, improving transparency in teacher promotion and transfer policies, and reinforcing the commitment of local governments to separate political interests from education governance in order to safeguard teacher professionalism and educational quality.*

**Keywords** : *Politicization; Teachers; 2024 Local Election.*

### INTRODUCTION

Politics is basically not only concerned with elections or party activities, but concerns how power is exercised and used to manage resources and determine public decisions. Power works through rules, policies, and

administrative practices that directly affect the lives of citizens, including through government bureaucracy (Leftwich, 2014). In this framework, the bureaucracy cannot be understood as a completely neutral institution,

since it is in a circle of power that is constantly interacting with political interests.

The relationship between politics and the bureaucracy becomes even stronger when the position, promotion, and mutation of the apparatus are no longer determined solely by work performance, but also by considerations of loyalty and closeness to the rulers. This condition is in line with the view of power theory which sees bureaucracy as an important instrument in maintaining political dominance, especially at the local level (Peters, 2018). When the logic of power enters into administrative affairs, then politicization becomes part of the daily practice of government.

In the education sector, politicization has a wider impact because education touches on values, morals, and the future of society. Teachers are positioned as a profession that carries social responsibility, not just policy implementers (Dotutinggi et al, 2023). However, institutional theory suggests that actors in public organizations often adapt their behavior to the pressures of the power environment in order to remain safe in existing structures (March & Olsen, 2011). This explains why teachers, despite understanding the principles of professionalism, remain vulnerable to political intervention.

The politicization of the teaching profession can be understood through the theory of patronage, which explains that the relationship between the ruler and the apparatus is often built on the basis of an exchange of interests. Loyalty is rewarded with

career protection, while non-compliance risks leading to administrative sanctions (Kopecký et al., 2016). In the situation of regional head elections, this pattern tends to strengthen because regional heads have great authority in managing human resources in the bureaucratic environment.

In addition to patronage, the practice is also in line with the theory of clientelism which places state apparatus as part of a network of political support that works informally. Teachers, with their social position close to society, are often seen as strategic political assets, not because of their formal involvement, but because of the social influence inherent in their profession (Hicken, 2011). In this condition, teachers can become a symbol of political support without having to appear publicly.

This problem is even more complicated when it is linked to the principle of bureaucratic neutrality. Public administration theory emphasizes that the neutrality of state apparatus is a prerequisite for fair and non-discriminatory public services (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). However, in local political practice, neutrality is often confronted with the reality of power that is personal and not always written. Political pressure does not have to be present in the form of direct orders, but rather through gestures, expectations, and personal relationships.

From the point of view of organizational behavior theory, this kind of pressure affects the way the apparatus makes decisions.

Teachers tend to choose the attitude that is considered the safest for their career continuity, even if it has to sacrifice professional principles and job ethics (Robbins & Judge, 2017). The choice is not solely a question of individual attitudes, but a response to the power structure they face.

The phenomenon of teacher politicization can also be read through the theory of local democracy, which emphasizes that the quality of democracy is largely determined by bureaucratic neutrality. When bureaucracy is used as a political tool, political competition becomes unequal and public trust in the government weakens (Diamond, 2019). In the long term, this condition has the potential to damage local governance and reduce the quality of public services, including education.

At the local level, power relations are often more personal than at the national level. Local political theory explains that the social closeness between the ruler and the apparatus makes the boundaries between professional affairs and political interests blur (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Teachers as part of the educational bureaucracy are not outside this dynamic, but rather part of an interconnected network of power

This condition is also related to the theory of bureaucratic control, which states that political actors tend to use administrative authority to ensure support and reduce the potential for opposition in the bureaucratic body (Moe, 2012). In the context of regional head elections, this kind of control is becoming

increasingly visible because the position of regional head has a direct influence on the distribution of bureaucratic positions and facilities.

In Posigadan District, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, this dynamic can be seen in the relationship between regional political power and the education bureaucracy. Teachers not only carry out teaching duties, but also face political situations that affect their position and sense of security as State Civil Apparatus. This condition raises serious problems related to teacher neutrality and its impact on governance and education services. Therefore, this study is directed to examine the politicization of teachers in the 2024 regional head election in Posigadan District, by placing teachers as part of a bureaucracy that is between professional demands and local political pressures.

## **METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical method, which aims to understand and interpret in depth the socio-political phenomena that occur in the context of the politicization of teachers in their relationship with the regional bureaucracy in Posigadan District. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore meanings, processes, power relations, and social dynamics that cannot be explained through quantitative measurement alone, but through the interpretation of the experiences, views, and practices of actors directly involved in the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The source of research data consists of primary data and secondary data, where primary data is obtained from informants who are purposively selected based on their involvement and knowledge of the issue being researched, including government officials, community leaders, political figures, as well as teachers and citizens relevant to the research context, while secondary data is obtained from official documents, regulations, and institutional archives (Ristanti, Asmawi, 2026). policy reports, as well as scientific articles and journals related to the politicization of the bureaucracy and the world of education. Data collection techniques are carried out through in-depth interviews, non-participatory observations, and documentation studies, which are used in an integrated manner to obtain comprehensive data and enable a cross-source confirmation process (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Interviews are used to explore the perceptions, experiences, and strategies of relevant actors, observations are conducted to understand the empirical situations and social interactions taking place in the field, while documentation serves as supporting data to reinforce empirical findings. Data analysis is carried out interactively and continuously through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification, where the data obtained are selected and focused in accordance with the research objectives, presented in the form of thematic narratives, and interpreted to find patterns, cause-effect relationships, and substantive meanings of the phenomenon of

teacher politicization in the context of regional bureaucracy (Miles et al., 2014)..

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Politicization of Teachers in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Posigadan District, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency.**

#### **1. Promotion of Positions**

The findings of the study show that the process of promoting teacher positions in the educational bureaucracy of Posigadan District has not been fully implemented objectively and performance-based. Promotion of positions tends to be influenced by personal closeness and political affiliation with parties that have power at the regional level. In practice, teachers who are considered to have political affiliation or show support for certain parties are more likely to obtain strategic positions, even though their competence and track record of performance are not always superior to other teachers.

In contrast, teachers who do not have political access or choose to be neutral are at risk of being overlooked in the promotion process, even if they have a long period of service and experience in remote areas. This condition causes a perception of injustice among teachers and weakens trust in the human resource management system in the education sector. The practice of promotion based on political interests also has an impact on the decline of teachers' work motivation and professionalism because performance is no

longer seen as the main factor in career development.

The process of promoting teacher positions in the educational bureaucracy of Posigadan District has not been fully implemented objectively and performance-based, but is more influenced by personal closeness and political affiliation with actors who have power at the regional level, so that the practice of promotion deviates from the principles of rational-legal bureaucracy that emphasizes formal legality, competence, and professional assessment as the main basis for the development of the career of the apparatus (Weber, 2020).

In the education bureaucracy, promotion should function as a reward mechanism for teachers' performance, dedication, and professional capacity, but research findings show that political relations are the dominant determinant variable, indicating the weak implementation of a merit system that is supposed to ensure fairness and objectivity in human resource management (Sofyan et al., 2025).

This condition is in line with the theory of bureaucratic politicization which explains that bureaucracy at the local level is often an arena for contesting political interests, where structural positions are used as an instrument to secure political loyalty and support, especially in the context of regional power dynamics (Pratama et al., 2023). The finding that teachers who are politically neutral or do not have access to power networks tend to be overlooked in the promotion process, despite

having long tenures and teaching experience in remote areas, point to the operation of patronage patterns and patron–client relations in the education bureaucracy, where personal and political loyalty are traded for access to strategic positions (Abidin et al., 2020).

This kind of practice not only creates inequality of career opportunities among teachers, but also gives birth to a strong perception of injustice in the work environment, which in turn has an impact on declining work motivation, weakening professional commitment, and reduced trust in the human resource management system in the education sector (Firman, 2025).

Furthermore, when promotion is no longer perceived as a result of performance and competence, teachers tend to shift their professional orientation from improving the quality of learning to adaptive strategies that are political and pragmatic, so that professionalism as a basic value of the educator profession is structurally degraded. In the long term, this condition has the potential to reduce the quality of educational leadership at the school level, because strategic positions are filled by individuals who are not fully selected based on managerial and pedagogical capacity, but on the basis of political proximity, which ultimately has an impact on the decline in the effectiveness of education governance and the overall quality of education services in Posigadan District.

## 2. Position Mutation

The results of the study found that teacher position mutation is often used as an instrument of control and political pressure, especially before and after the implementation of the Regional Elections. Mutations are not always carried out on the basis of school needs or equal distribution of educators, but are influenced by teachers' attitudes and political positions. Teachers who are considered not in line with the political interests of regional rulers tend to be moved to schools that are far away, less strategic, or have limited facilities.

Meanwhile, teachers who show political loyalty get more favorable placements. This kind of mutation pattern creates an inequality in the distribution of teachers, reduces the effectiveness of learning, and strengthens the notion that the education bureaucracy does not run fairly and transparently. Mutations with political nuances also have a psychological impact, because teachers feel insecure in their careers and tend to be pragmatic in dealing with local political dynamics.

The mutation of teacher positions in Posigadan District is not solely carried out as a managerial instrument for the equitable distribution of educators or the fulfillment of school needs, but is used as a mechanism of control and political pressure, especially before and after the implementation of the Regional Elections, which shows the operation of bureaucratic power in the form of disciplinary; in the perspective of power theory and *governmentality*, the mutation of positions

functions as a tool to discipline the apparatus to be obedient and in harmony with the interests of the rulers, not as a neutral administrative policy (Foucault, 2020). The finding that teachers who are considered not in line with local political interests tend to be transferred to schools that are distant, less strategic, or have limited facilities, reflecting the use of mutation as a non-formal sanction that is coercive in nature, where career space and work locations are used as instruments of control for ASN's political behavior (Christensen et al., 2020).

Conversely, teachers who show political loyalty obtain more favorable placements, so that mutation loses its main function as a mechanism for distributing educational human resources and turns into a tool of covert political selection, which has an impact on the inequality of teacher distribution between schools and a decrease in learning effectiveness, especially in schools that are the location of "bureaucratic punishment" (Perry & Vandenabeele, 2021).

In the perspective of *job insecurity* theory, mutations with political nuances create career insecurity among teachers, because job positions and locations are no longer determined by performance or institutional needs, but by local political dynamics, so teachers tend to develop pragmatic and defensive attitudes in the face of an unstable work environment (De Witte et al., 2020).

This condition encourages a shift in teachers' professional orientation from improving the quality of learning to bureaucratic survival strategies, including

political compromise and avoidance of critical attitudes, which ultimately weakens the integrity of the educator profession. Furthermore, the use of mutation as a political instrument shows that decision-making in the education bureaucracy is not completely rational and data-based on school needs, but is influenced by limited rationality and short-term interests of regional rulers, so that mutation policies lose administrative legitimacy and reinforce the perception that the education bureaucracy does not run fairly and transparently. In the long term, this practice of political mutation has the potential to damage the order of educational organizations, because the instability of teacher placement has a direct impact on the continuity of learning, the school work climate, and the quality of educational services received by students in Posigadan District.

## **Factors of Politicization of Teachers in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Posigadan District, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency**

### **1. Obedience Factor**

Field findings show that teachers' obedience to political directives is more pseudo-obedience than obedience born from legal awareness and professional ethics. Teachers generally understand the obligation of neutrality as state apparatus, but structural pressures and power relations in the bureaucracy make obedience turn into a survival strategy. Teachers tend to follow political directions or cues to avoid the risk of

mutation, career inhibition, or exclusion in the work environment.

This kind of obedience is not based on ideological beliefs, but on fear and caution in maintaining relations with superiors and local elites. As a result, the principle of neutrality becomes difficult to manifest in real terms, and obedience is directed more to the interests of power than to the rules and values of professionalism. Teachers' obedience to political directives in the educational bureaucracy of Posigadan District represents pseudo-obedience rather than obedience born from legal awareness and internalization of professional ethical values, which in the theoretical perspective of obedience to authority is understood as obedience that arises due to the pressure of power, not because of the moral or normative legitimacy of the order itself (Milgram, 2020).

Although normatively teachers understand the obligation of neutrality as state apparatus and the educator profession, the hierarchical bureaucratic structure and asymmetrical power relations cause obedience to shift into an institutional survival strategy, where compliance is interpreted as a way to avoid disguised sanctions such as unfavorable mutations, career inhibition, or social exclusion in the work environment (Scott, 2021).

In the framework of structural power theory, this condition shows that power does not always work through written rules or formal sanctions, but through symbolic and implicit control that influences the behavior of

the apparatus, so that teachers are encouraged to adjust their political attitudes in order to maintain position security and career stability (Lukes, 2021).

The obedience that is formed in this kind of situation is instrumental, that is, obedience is carried out not because of a belief in certain values or ideologies, but as a rational response to the risks inherent in a politicized bureaucratic system, as described in the theory of instrumental obedience that places fear and profit-loss calculation as the main basis of obedient behavior (Tyler, 2021).

As a result, the ethics of the teaching profession that demands independence, integrity, and orientation to the interests of education are reduced, because teachers' decisions and attitudes are more directed to conform to the interests of power rather than the principles of professionalism and the applicable legal rules (Banks, 2022). Furthermore, this pseudo-obedience shows how the principle of ASN neutrality is difficult to realize substantively when the bureaucracy does not provide structural protection for the apparatus that is independent, so that neutrality only stops at the normative and administrative levels without the support of consistent institutional practices (OECD, 2021). In the long run, these conditions have the potential to perpetuate a bureaucratic culture that is permissive to political intervention, weaken the integrity of the teaching profession, and blur the line between obedience to rules and obedience to power.

## **2. Loyalty Factor**

The results of the study revealed that teachers' loyalty in the context of the Regional Elections does not always arise from the suitability of political visions, but is more influenced by personal relationships, sense of indebtedness, and emotional ties with certain figures. This loyalty develops through past experiences such as appointment assistance, promotion, or bureaucratic protection, thus forming a moral obligation to return support.

Loyalty also serves as a self-protection mechanism. Teachers who show political loyalty feel safer from the risk of mutation or marginalization, while teachers who do not show support have the potential to face indirect pressure. In this context, loyalty has become an informal means of exchange between teachers and political elites, thus shifting the meaning of professionalism and neutrality of civil servants.

Teachers in the Regional Elections in Posigadan District are not entirely rooted in the suitability of political ideological visions or beliefs, but rather are formed through personal relationships, sense of indebtedness, and emotional ties with certain political figures or elites, which in the perspective of social exchange theory is understood as a mutual relationship based on profit and moral obligation between individuals and powerful actors (Blau, 2020). Past experiences such as assistance in the appointment process, promotion, or bureaucratic protection form the perception that there is a "social debt" that must be repaid, so that loyalty develops not as an

expression of rational political choices, but as a moral obligation that is internalized in power relations (Molm, 2021). This pattern is in line with the theory of debt which explains that individuals in organizations tend to show continued loyalty to parties who have provided significant benefits, even though such loyalty has the potential to conflict with professional norms and formal rules (Greenberg, 2020).

This kind of loyalty also serves as a self-protection mechanism, where teachers who show political loyalty feel safer from the risk of mutation, marginalization, or career pressure, while teachers who do not show support have the potential to face indirect consequences, a condition that mirrors the practice of political clientelism in public bureaucracy (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2021). Loyalty then turns into a tool of informal exchange between teachers and political elites, where support and obedience are exchanged for a sense of security, stability of position, or access to bureaucratic resources, so that professional relationships shift into personal-political relationships full of interests (Hicken, 2020). From the perspective of instrumental loyalty theory, the loyalty that arises in this situation is pragmatic and situational, not normative loyalty based on organizational values or professional ethics, so that ASN neutrality becomes difficult to realize substantively (Meyer & Allen, 2020). As a result, the professionalism of teachers has undergone a shift in meaning, from an orientation to educational services and professional integrity to an orientation to the maintenance of power

relations, which in the long run has the potential to perpetuate an educational bureaucratic culture that is permissive to political intervention and weaken the principles of justice and transparency in education governance.

### **3. Potential Role Factors**

Research has found that teachers have a great potential role in local political dynamics due to their proximity to the community, moral legitimacy, and position as role models. This potential is harnessed by political actors to influence voters' preferences through a subtle and personalized social approach. Teachers are not always formally involved in political activities, but their existence is used as a symbol of support and a means of mobilizing public opinion.

In addition, teachers' dependence on regional bureaucracy in terms of promotions, mutations, and educational facilities makes their positions vulnerable to political intervention. The role of teachers has also shifted, from neutral educators to actors who are indirectly involved in the local political process. This shift shows that the politicization of teachers is not just an individual action, but part of a power structure that utilizes the social potential of teachers as a political resource.

The moral legitimacy inherent in the educator profession, as well as its position as a role model in the social space, which in the perspective of social capital theory is understood as an accumulation of beliefs, networks, and symbolic influences that can be

mobilized for collective and political interests (Putnam, 2020). This social potential makes teachers a strategic actor that can indirectly influence voters' preferences through daily interactions that are personal and persuasive, so that political actors take advantage of the existence of teachers not through formal involvement in political activities, but as a symbol of legitimacy and a medium for disseminating public opinion that is subtle and difficult to detect (Bourdieu, 2021).

Within the framework of symbolic power theory, the teaching profession has moral authority that allows its views and attitudes to be accepted without coercion, so that the teacher's implicit support can serve as a source of social legitimacy for local political actors (Bourdieu, 2021). Furthermore, the use of teachers' potential as a liaison between political elites and society reflects the practice of *political brokerage*, where individuals with social influence are used as intermediaries to reach the voter base without having to build direct political communication (Stokes et al., 2020).

This condition is strengthened by the structural dependence of teachers on the regional bureaucracy in terms of promotion, mutation, and fulfillment of educational facilities, which makes the position of teachers vulnerable to political intervention and opens up space for the use of their social potential as a political resource (Pfeffer & Salancik, 2021). In the perspective of political resource theory, the social influence of teachers is treated as a

strategic asset that can be converted into electoral support, so that the role of teachers has shifted from neutral educators to actors who are indirectly involved in the local political process (McCarthy & Zald, 2020).

This shift in roles is in line with social role theory which explains that individuals can experience role conflicts when structural demands force them to carry out functions outside of their professional mandate, so that the identity of teachers as educators intersects with political roles that are not always fully realized (Biddle, 2021). Thus, the politicization of teachers in this context cannot be understood solely as an individual choice, but as part of a power structure that systematically utilizes the social potential of teachers as a political resource, which ultimately blurs the boundaries between the educational space and the political arena and weakens the principle of structural neutrality of ASN.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of research on the politicization of teachers in the 2024 Regional Head Election in Posigadan District, South Bolaang Mongondow Regency, it can be concluded that the politicization of teachers is a real phenomenon and takes place in a structured manner in the regional education bureaucracy. This practice did not arise by chance, but grew out of local power relations that placed teachers as a strategic element in the political interests of the Regional Elections. Teachers not only play the role of educators, but

are also positioned as part of a bureaucracy that is vulnerable to power intervention.

Research shows that the promotion and mutation of teacher positions are often influenced by political affiliation, personal closeness, and loyalty to regional elites, so that the principle of the merit system has not run optimally. This condition is increasingly strengthened before and after the 2024 Regional Elections, when teachers are in a dilemma between the obligation of neutrality as civil servants and bureaucratic pressure. The obedience and loyalty of teachers are more pragmatic to maintain the security of the position. As a result, the professionalism of teachers has weakened and trust in the education bureaucracy has decreased, so supervision and transparency of personnel policies are needed.

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