

# Strategic Framework of Majene: Actualizing Merit System in Governance for Sustainable Development

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## Abstract

*This study aims to identify the factors inhibiting the implementation of the merit system in Majene Regency and to formulate strategies that can strengthen its execution. Utilizing exploratory qualitative research, this study employs in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to investigate the dynamics of meritocracy implementation at the local level, including its impact on the distribution of civil servants by position, gender, and rank from 2021 to 2022. The findings indicate a decrease in the number of civil servants influenced by retirement, rotation, and salary policies, along with recruitment limitations due to budget constraints. There is also a gender disparity and an imbalance in workforce distribution across sectors, highlighting issues of equality and fairness within the merit system. The main obstacles to implementing the merit system in Majene Regency are budget limitations and subjectivity in the selection of government officials. This study recommends the need for evaluation and improvement of human resource management strategies, increased budget for training and development, and the enhancement of transparency and objectivity in the selection and promotion processes, to actualize an effective merit system in governance and support sustainable development in Majene Regency.*

**Keywords:** Merit System, Workforce Distribution, Equity and Equality

## INTRODUCTION

A promotion, recognition, or policy system based on individual achievement, competence, and qualifications, rather than factors such as lineage or connections, is discussed (Heinze et al. 2009; Garcia 2016; Ogbu 2020; Cantor et al. 2021; Osher et al. 2021; Boliver 2022). In Indonesia, the concept of meritocracy has been present since the Dutch colonial administration, where employment was based on qualifications and achievements (Pattinasarany 2016; Toyibah 2020; Hartini & Sudrajat 2022). However, the implementation of meritocracy in practice in Indonesia faces many challenges (Krissetyanti et al. 2017; Ali et al. 2017; Dwiputrianti 2018; Wijaya & Sakhyya 2021; Rahmah & Hamdi 2022; Rusdiyani & Prasojo 2023). During the New Order era under President Soeharto, nepotism and corruption often dominated the appointment of government officials, preventing the full application of meritocracy. After the 1998 reform, efforts to implement meritocracy in the public sector were intensified, with laws enacted and decisions made based on qualifications. However, challenges such as corrupt practices and nepotism still persist in some cases. Meritocracy is normatively regulated in Indonesian law as follows:

Law No. 5 of 2014 on Civil State Apparatus - This law covers various aspects of the Civil State Apparatus (ASN) including recruitment, promotion, and transfer based on qualifications, competence, and performance. The principle of meritocracy is emphasized in ASN management.

Law No. 30 of 2014 on Government Administration- This law stresses the importance of applying meritocratic principles in government administration to achieve efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

Government Regulation No. 11 of 2017 on Civil Servant Management- This regulation details various aspects of civil servant management, including recruitment, promotion, and transfer based on meritocracy and principles of fairness.

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Ministerial Regulation of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform No. 19 of 2017 on Civil Servant Performance Appraisal Criteria- This regulation explains how to assess the performance and achievements of civil servants based on objective and meritocratic criteria.

Government Regulation No. 14 of 2011 on the Management of High Leadership Positions- This regulation enforces the principle of meritocracy in filling these positions, based on competence and performance.

The implementation of meritocracy in the Secretariat for Organization and Administration at the local government of Majene Regency is a crucial step towards more transparent and efficient governance. This aims to ensure that promotions and placements in positions are based on objective abilities and achievements, which in turn can enhance the quality of public service and administrative efficiency. However, its implementation faces several significant challenges.

One of the main obstacles to implementing meritocracy in Majene Regency is the limitation of local budget. To effectively implement a meritocracy system, adequate financial resources are required to develop meritocracy instruments, such as establishing a talent pool and succession planning. These activities necessitate intensive training for Civil State Apparatus (ASN), which requires a substantial budget. Budget constraints are a major impediment to the implementation of meritocracy in Majene Regency.

Another challenge is the subjectivity of local leaders in the selection and placement of ASN. This subjectivity, driven by personal, political, or nepotistic considerations, can undermine the integrity of the selection process, place incompetent individuals in key positions, and ultimately harm government governance and public interest.

At its core, a merit system emphasizes placing and promoting employees based on capability and performance, not on non-merit factors such as nepotism or political connections. However, in Majene Regency, as in many other regions in Indonesia, the implementation of a merit system faces challenges, including budget limitations, nepotistic practices, and a lack of transparency and objectivity in the selection and placement processes.

This research was conducted to identify factors hindering the implementation of the merit system in Majene Regency and to formulate strategies to strengthen its execution. The goal is to develop a strategic framework that not only addresses the existing challenges but also ensures that the local government can effectively implement the merit system, thereby enabling better governance and sustainable, inclusive, and equitable development for the people of Majene. Through this research, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of how the merit system can be integrated into local governance practices to promote sustainable development and improve the quality of public services will be obtained.

## **METHOD**

This research is an explanatory qualitative study aimed at gaining a deep understanding of the realities of promotion practices for high-ranking positions in Majene Regency, West Sulawesi, in 2022. The primary focus is to explore why meritocracy has not been fully implemented in this area and to identify strategic steps that the local government of Majene Regency can take in applying the merit system.

In this study, the researcher employed an explanatory qualitative method to objectively investigate the mechanisms of promotion implementation and identify factors hindering the application of the merit system in Majene. The research was conducted by collecting primary and secondary data through observations, in-depth interviews, and documentation from five key informants, including top officials in the Majene Regency government and community representatives. These informants include the Regional Secretary of Majene Regency, the Head of BKPSDM (Human Resources Development Agency) of Majene Regency, and other officials related to education, training, and the promotion process.

Utilizing the data analysis framework proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification, the researcher aimed to comprehensively understand how the merit system can be actualized in the civil service management to support fair and transparent job promotions in Majene Regency. This is expected to provide insights into how the merit system can be effectively implemented to promote sustainable development and good governance in Majene Regency.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data on the number of civil servants (PNS) in Majene Regency by position and gender from December 2021 to December 2022 shows changes that can be linked to challenges in implementing meritocracy. In 2021, the total number of PNS was 4,509, while in 2022, it decreased to 4,345. This change, particularly in the categories of high-level primary leadership, administrator, and supervisor positions, and the decrease at the echelon V level, as well as in medical, technical, and general functional positions, may reflect the impact of budget constraints and subjectivity in the promotion and placement processes.

**Table 1: Number of Civil Servants by Position and Gender in Majene Regency as of December 2021**

No	Position Title	Male	Female	Total
1	Pratama High-Level Primary Leadership (Pratama)	0	0	0
2	High-Level Middle Leadership (Madya)	0	0	0
3	High-Level Primary Leadership (Pratama)	26	7	33
4	Administrator	77	48	125
5	Supervisor	318	178	496
6	Echelon V	2	3	5
7	Functional Position Teacher	622	1.115	1.737
8	Functional Position Medical	73	366	439
9	Functional Position Technical	75	42	117
10	Functional Position General/Executor	852	705	1.557
	<b>Total</b>	<b>2.045</b>	<b>2.464</b>	<b>4.509</b>

Source: Majene Regency Central Bureau of Statistics

While there is a difference in the number of civil servants in 2022, as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Number of Civil Servants by Position and Gender in Majene Regency as of December 2022**

No	Position Title	Male	Female	Total
1	Pratama High-Level Primary Leadership (Pratama)	0	0	0
2	High-Level Middle Leadership (Madya)	0	0	0
3	High-Level Primary Leadership (Pratama)	24	10	34
4	Administrator	77	42	119
5	Supervisor	325	186	511
6	Echelon V	2	2	4
7	Functional Position Teacher	603	1.134	1.737
8	Functional Position Medical	71	358	429
9	Functional Position Technical	71	40	111
10	Functional Position General/Executor	789	611	1.400
	<b>Jumlah Total</b>	<b>1.962</b>	<b>2.383</b>	<b>4.345</b>

Source: Majene Regency Central Bureau of Statistics

Budget limitations can affect the local government's ability to conduct the necessary training to prepare civil servants (PNS) for higher positions, which could explain the lack of increase in the number of PNS in high-level primary leadership positions. Additionally, the subjectivity in the selection of government officials (ASN) by local leaders impacts job distribution, where factors other than performance and competence play a role in promotions and placements.

The difference in the number of male and female PNS across various positions may also indicate issues of equality and fairness in the implementation of meritocracy. For example, even though there was an increase in the number of women in high-level primary leadership positions from 7 to 10, it still shows an imbalance compared to men.

Therefore, this data highlights the need for evaluation and improvement in the meritocracy system in Majene Regency, focusing on increasing the budget for training and human resource development, as well as reducing the influence of subjectivity in the promotion and placement processes, to ensure that decisions are based on competence and performance.

**Table 3: Number of Civil Servants by Rank and Gender in Majene Regency as of December 2021**

No	Rank/Grade/Level	Male	Female	Total
<b>Group I</b>				
1	1/A (Entry-level position for junior clerks)	2	0	2
2	1/B (First-level progression for junior clerks)	12	0	12
3	1/C (Intermediate level for clerks)	6	1	7
4	1/D (Advanced level for clerks)	11	2	13
<b>Group II</b>				
5	II/A (Entry-level position for administrators)	51	43	94
6	II/B (First-level progression for administrators)	106	45	151
7	II/C (Intermediate level for administrators)	106	78	184
8	III/D (Advanced level for administrators)	131	128	256
<b>Group III</b>				
9	III/A (Entry-level position for senior administrators)	230	308	538
10	III/B (First-level progression for senior administrators)	279	459	738
11	III/C (Intermediate level for senior administrators)	323	411	734
12	III/D (Advanced level for senior administrators)	359	420	779
<b>Group IV</b>				
13	IVA (Entry-level position for executive managers)	429	569	998
14	IV/B (First-level progression for executive managers)	222	294	516
15	IV/C (Intermediate level for senior executive managers)	183	270	453
16	IV/D (Advanced level for senior executive managers)	24	5	29
17	IV/E (Top level for senior executive managers)	0	0	0

Source: Majene Regency Central Bureau of Statistics

While the number of civil servants in 2022, when viewed from the aspect of rank, can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4: Number of Civil Servants by Rank and Gender in Majene Regency as of December 2022**

No	Rank/Grade/Level	Male	Female	Total
<b>Group I</b>				
1	1/A (Entry-level position for junior clerks)	31	1	31
2	1/B (First-level progression for junior clerks)	2	0	2
3	1/C (Intermediate level for clerks)	5	0	5
4	1/D (Advanced level for clerks)	11	0	11
<b>Group II</b>				
5	II/A (Entry-level position for administrators)	12	1	13
6	II/B (First-level progression for administrators)	358	259	617
7	II/C (Intermediate level for administrators)	33	30	63
8	III/D (Advanced level for administrators)	91	42	133
9	III/A (Entry-level position for senior administrators)	90	69	159
10	III/B (First-level progression for senior administrators)	144	118	262
<b>Group III</b>				
11	III/C (Intermediate level for senior administrators)	1.145	1.561	2.706
12	III/D (Advanced level for senior administrators)	189	219	408
13	III/A (Entry-level position for senior administrators)	291	469	760
14	III/B (First-level progression for senior administrators)	275	396	671
15	III/C (Intermediate level for senior administrators)	390	477	867
<b>Group IV</b>				
16	IV/D (Advanced level for senior executive managers)	429	562	991
17	IV/E (Top level for senior executive managers)	220	286	506
18	IV/B (First-level progression for executive managers)	185	269	454
19	IV/C (Intermediate level for senior executive managers)	24	7	31
20	IV/D (Advanced level for senior executive managers)	0	0	0
21	IV/E (Top level for senior executive managers)	0	0	0

Source: Majene Regency Central Bureau of Statistics

Data on the number of civil servants (PNS) by rank and gender in Majene Regency from December 2021 to December 2022 indicates a decrease in the number of PNS across all ranks. This change reflects various dynamics in public administration, including the impact of meritocracy implementation, salary policies, and other dynamics in human resource management.

The comparison between the data for 2021 and 2022 shows a decrease in the total number of PNS across all ranks, which could be due to various factors such as retirement, rotation, or local government policies limiting new recruitment to control the budget. For instance, Group I decreased from 34 to 31 individuals, Group II from 688 to 617, Group III from 2,789 to 2,706, and Group IV from 998 to 991. This reduction is also related to challenges in implementing meritocracy, such as budget limitations for employee development and training previously discussed.

Linking this with the data on the number of PNS according to department/agency in 2022, where the Majene Regional General Hospital has the highest PNS staffing needs, followed by the agency with the second-highest needs. This indicates that certain sectors, such as healthcare, have a greater need for PNS personnel, highlighting the importance of prioritizing human resource allocation according to community needs and public services.

The decrease in PNS numbers across various groups and the uneven distribution of PNS among departments/agencies underscore the need for more focused strategies in human resource management, including recruitment, retention, and development policies aligned with meritocracy principles. This is crucial to ensure that competent and effective human resources are placed in the most needed positions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public services in Majene Regency.

**Table 6: Number of Civil Servants by Department/Agency and Gender in Majene Regency, 2022**

No	Department/Agency	Male	Female	Total
1	Secretariat of the Region	95	41	136
2	Secretariat of the Regional People's Representative Council	34	14	48
3	Inspectorate	28	18	46
4	Regional Planning Agency	25	13	38
5	Finance and Asset Management Agency	39	26	65
6	Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency	25	13	38
7	Regional Revenue Agency	40	22	62
8	Research and Development Agency	5	9	14
9	Agency for National Unity and Politics	8	11	19
10	Disaster Management Agency	36	5	41
11	Regional General Hospital	54	136	190
12	Education, Youth, and Sports Office	81	48	129
13	Health Office	24	28	52
14	Public Works and Spatial Planning Office	44	18	62
15	Culture and Tourism Office	29	19	48
16	Marine and Fisheries Office	21	11	32
17	Housing, Settlement, and Land Office	26	5	31
18	Library and Archives Office	5	17	22
19	Investment and One Stop Service Office	12	12	24
20	Cooperatives, SMEs, Industry, and Trade Office	14	8	22
21	Civil Registration and Population Office	14	14	28
22	Social Office	8	9	17
23	Population Control and Family Planning Office	20	23	43
24	Environmental and Hygiene Office	48	14	62
25	Community Empowerment and Village Office	21	5	26
26	Civil Service Police Unit	42	4	46
27	Manpower and Transmigration Office	24	9	33
28	Food Security Office	7	10	17
29	Women Empowerment and Child Protection Office	6	12	18
30	Transportation Office	33	4	37
31	Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption Office	8	12	20
32	Agriculture, Livestock, and Plantation Office	97	51	148
33	Banggae Sub-district	35	30	65
34	East Banggae Sub-district	41	34	75
35	Pamboang Sub-district	21	11	32
36	Sendana Sub-district	26	13	39
37	Tammerodo Sub-district	10	3	13
38	Tubo Sendana Sub-district	16	4	20
39	Malunda Sub-district	27	7	34
40	Ulumanda Sub-district	12	2	14
41	Mosso Dhua Village	0	0	0
42	Banggae Village	0	0	0
43	Baru Village	0	0	0
44	Baruga Village	0	0	0
45	Baruga Dhua Village	0	0	0
46	Baurung Village	0	0	0
47	Galung Village	0	0	0
48	Labuang Village	0	0	0
49	North Labuang Village	0	0	0
50	Lalampaña Village	0	0	0

Source: West Sulawesi Provincial Sectoral Statistics Data Book

The data on the number of civil servants (PNS) according to government departments/agencies and gender in Majene Regency in 2022 shows significant variation in workforce distribution across different government sectors. It is evident that certain sectors, such as the Regional General Hospital (RSUD) and the Department of Agriculture, Livestock, and Plantation, have relatively high numbers of PNS, with the RSUD having the highest at 190 employees and the Agriculture, Livestock, and Plantation Department having 148.

This disparity reflects the focus and priorities in local government policies, where sectors like health and agriculture are major focal points. It may also indicate a greater need for human resources in these sectors to meet community needs. However, some agencies have very low numbers of PNS, such as the Research and Development Agency and the Ulumanda Sub-district, each with only 14 PNS, highlighting resource limitations or a lack of focus on certain areas in the regional development strategy.

The variation in PNS numbers between departments and agencies also underscores the challenges in implementing a meritocratic system. With diverse needs and priorities across sectors, it is crucial for local governments to manage human resources strategically and fairly, ensuring that recruitment and promotion processes are based on meritocratic principles to optimize talent and competence across all government sectors. This data emphasizes the importance of careful analysis and strategic planning in human resource management, considering the need for efficient and effective resource allocation to support various government functions and meet public service needs.

### **Strategic Steps and Local Government Policies of Majene Regency for the Implementation of the Merit System**

The importance of devising strategic steps and local government policies to achieve a governance system known as meritocracy lies in the strategic objective to create efficient, transparent, and quality- and capability-oriented government governance. This merit system ensures that the appointment, promotion, and performance appraisal of government employees are based on their competencies, qualifications, and performance, rather than on political considerations or nepotism. Within the local government context, there are several strategic steps and policies that the Majene Regency local government needs to undertake to fully achieve a merit system, including:

#### **Preparing the Local Government Budget**

Preparing the local government budget for implementing a talent pool or succession planning is crucial for maintaining continuity and effectiveness in public service delivery. Adequate funding allows the local government to identify, develop, and retain talented individuals within the organization. A talent pool or succession plan ensures that competent and quality leaders are available to fill strategic positions in the future. Adequate budgeting can support training, skill development, and recognition programs that encourage professional growth within the local government environment. Furthermore, sufficient budget allocation can support the implementation of efficient human resource management systems and technologies, facilitating talent identification and monitoring individual progress within the talent pool. This not only enhances efficiency but also addresses challenges during the succession process. The importance of adequate funding is also reflected in the local government's ability to compete in attracting and retaining top talent. By offering appropriate incentives and facilities, the local government can become an attractive destination for potential individuals, creating a dynamic and innovative work environment.

#### **Collecting Data on Echelon III Civil Servants (ASN)**

In realizing meritocracy in Majene Regency's local government, the personnel authority body is strategizing and formulating policies, including collecting employment history data of Echelon III civil servants (ASN). This aims to prepare for a talent pool or succession planning. By gathering data on Echelon III ASN, the Majene Regency government can achieve a more effective merit system, ultimately improving the quality of public service and administrative efficiency.

Creating a Merit System Implementation Roadmap

To realize meritocracy in the local government of Majene Regency, a strategic step and policy must be established by creating a bureaucratic reform roadmap. This roadmap is significant as it helps to direct the long-term vision of the local government, ensuring that implemented policies and programs align with strategic goals. Moreover, the roadmap can guide efficient resource allocation, ensuring that the budget is wisely allocated according to regional development priorities. It also provides a framework for performance evaluation, allowing the local government to track goal achievements and make necessary adjustments. The roadmap can enhance community engagement by providing visibility into development plans, thus enabling public participation in the decision-making process and offering valuable feedback.

**Implementation of Open Selection for Promoting High-Level Primary Leadership Positions in Majene Regency**

Based on the interview results concerning the implementation of open selection for high-level primary leadership positions in Majene Regency in 2022, which was based on the merit system analysis in the assessment by the selection panel and the decision of the Regent as the Personnel Development Official (Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian) in placing one selected candidate for the vacant position, the following matrix is presented to understand the dimensions of the merit system:

**Table 7: Matrix of Open Selection Implementation for High-Level Primary Leadership Positions in 2022 Based on the Assessment of the Selection Committee and the Decision of the Regent as the Personnel Development Official (PPK) According to Merit System Dimensions**

Vacant Position	Merit System Dimension				Decision by the Regent as Personnel Development Official (PPK)
	Jobs at every level	The best candidate	Open to all	Systematic, transparent, challengeable	
<b>Department of Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption</b>	"Implies 'Jobs at every level' because the promotion of positions is conducted competitively"	The three selected candidates appear not to fully meet the requirements in terms of experience and job qualifications.	The three selected candidates are all internal elements, specifically civil servants from the Majene Regency local government.	In the dimensions of being systematic, transparent, and challengeable, there is a lack of transparency in the announcement of assessments for the top three candidates. However, the process prioritizes competition and competence.	The selected candidate for the position shows less alignment between job experience and qualifications, focusing more on managerial competencies. The successful candidate, originating from the internal civil service, previously held the position of Head of Governance Affairs at the Regional Secretariat of Majene Regency and possesses a Master of Science (M.Si) degree.
<b>Food Security Agency</b>	Implies 'Jobs at Every Level' due to competitive promotion processes	The three selected candidates demonstrate a match between their competencies and job qualifications.	The three selected candidates all come from internal sources, namely the civil servants of Majene Regency's local government.	In terms of being systematic, transparent, and challengeable, there is a deficiency in transparency regarding the assessment announcement of the top three candidates. Nevertheless, the approach emphasizes competition and competence.	The candidate selected for the position shows less alignment between job experience and the position's qualifications, meeting the requirements for a Bachelor's degree (S1) but not fully aligning with the Master's degree (S2) qualifications. Instead, the focus is primarily on managerial competencies. The successful candidate, coming from the internal civil service, previously served as the Head of the Economic Affairs Section at the Regional Secretariat of Majene Regency and holds a Master of Science (M.Si) degree.

Source: Processed by the researcher

The matrix for the open selection of High-Level Primary Leadership positions in Majene Regency in 2022 demonstrates how the selection process is framed within the context of the merit system, especially in aspects

of jobs at every level, selecting the best candidates, openness, and the principles of being systematic, transparent, and challengeable.

In the case of the Department of Communication, Informatics, Statistics, and Encryption, the selection process implied the principle of jobs at every level with competitively conducted promotions. However, even though the three selected candidates were from the internal civil servants of Majene Regency government, they did not show optimal alignment based on experience and job qualifications. This indicates a lack of transparency and objective assessment, despite the process favoring competition and competence.

For the Food Security Agency, the selection also followed the principle of jobs at every level with competitive promotions. The selected candidate showed alignment between competencies and job qualifications, but there was still a shortfall in demonstrating transparent assessment. Although the selected candidate had appropriate qualifications, such as Bachelor's and Master's degrees, the selection process seemed to prioritize managerial competencies over the suitability of job experience.

These cases highlight the importance of transparency and objectivity in the selection process to ensure that the best candidates, who match the required qualifications and experience, are chosen. Shortcomings in transparency and objectivity can diminish the effectiveness of the merit system, making it crucial to evaluate and enhance the selection process to better align with the principles of meritocracy. This includes ensuring that candidate assessments are conducted in a clear and accountable manner to support fair and competence-based decisions.

## **CONCLUSION**

The decrease in the number of civil servants (PNS) in Majene Regency from 2021 to 2022 illustrates the dynamics and challenges in public administration, including factors such as retirement, rotation, salary policies, and recruitment limitations due to budget constraints. These obstacles also affect the implementation of meritocracy, with limited budgets and the subjectivity of ASN selection by regional leaders impacting job distribution and promotion processes. The gender disparity in the number of PNS reflects issues of equality and fairness that need to be addressed in the implementation of meritocracy. Sectors like health and agriculture show a greater need for human resources, underscoring the importance of appropriate human resource allocation. Moreover, the open selection process for high-level primary leadership positions highlights the need to enhance transparency and objectivity for fair and competence-based assessment. Therefore, Majene Regency must strengthen its human resource management strategies, including increasing the budget for training and development of human resources, and ensuring transparency and fairness in selection and promotion, to realize an effective merit system in governance and support sustainable development.

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