

Determination of Merit System and Self-Efficacy towards Succession Justice with Regional Political Conditions as a Moderating Variable

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the influence of the merit system and self-efficacy on fairness of job succession, and to examine the moderating role of regional political conditions on this relationship among State Civil Apparatus (ASN) of the Tasikmalaya Regency Government. Using a quantitative approach with a causal-moderating design. Data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software through a bootstrapping procedure of 5,000 subsamples. The results show that the merit system has a positive and significant effect on fairness of succession, making it the dominant predictor with a model contribution of $R^2 = 0.689$. In contrast, self-efficacy was not proven to have a significant effect on fairness of succession, indicating that structural-procedural factors are more determinant than individual psychological attributes in the context of public bureaucracy. Furthermore, regional political conditions were not proven to moderate the relationship between the merit system and self-efficacy with fairness of succession, either directly or through interaction effects. These findings imply that a strong merit system institutionalization is resilient to local political distortions, thus strengthening the implementation of the merit system is the most effective policy intervention to improve perceptions of fairness in civil servant succession. This research contributes to the development of organizational justice theory in the context of Indonesian public bureaucracy and offers novelty by integrating these three variables into a single moderation framework that has not been previously tested specifically in post-election local governments.

Keywords: Merit System, Self-Efficacy, Succession Justice, Regional Politics, civil servants

INTRODUCTION

One of the biggest challenges in accelerating bureaucratic reform today is the placement of positions or leadership succession, which must be based on objective, transparent, and competency-based principles as its main pillars. Implementing a merit system is crucial to ensure qualified individuals occupy the right positions. However, in practice, this is often problematic because the succession process is often influenced by political intervention. This condition is reflected in data presented by the Head of the State Civil Service Agency (BKN), Zudan Arif Fakrulloh, in a Hearing Meeting (RDP) with Commission II of the Indonesian House of Representatives (DPR RI), which stated that as of March 2026, there were 11.42% of personnel applications that did not comply with the merit principle. As a follow-up, BKN has sent 450 warning letters, blocked 125 ASN data, and imposed service sanctions on agencies that violated the principle, with the most violations occurring in the appointment, transfer, and promotion processes (BKN, 2026).

The issue of unfairness in job succession essentially stems from the weak implementation of the merit system as the primary instrument of personnel governance. The merit system is a civil servant management system based on qualifications, competencies, and performance fairly without distinction of political background, race, or gender (Malik & Prasajo, 2023). In this context, succession fairness can be understood as employee perceptions of the extent to which the process of filling positions or changing leadership is carried out fairly, transparently, and objectively based on measurable criteria (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt et al., 2013). Chairiah et al. (2020) emphasize that the merit system is key to realizing transparency in civil service career development because it theoretically closes the gap for subjectivity and the politicization of positions. However, the challenges of its implementation are global; Al-Saba (2023) shows that even in the senior bureaucracy in Egypt, the application of merit criteria faces significant obstacles in the selection process. In Indonesia, Damayanti et al. (2023) noted that structural and administrative barriers often make merit systems merely a formality on paper, which in turn erodes the sense of fairness among employees.

In addition to systemic factors, individual psychological dimensions such as self-efficacy also play a significant role in shaping perceptions of succession fairness. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions necessary to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson (2020) explain that in the context of succession, civil servants with high self-efficacy tend to believe that their competence will be recognized in an objective system. Furthermore, Choong & Ng (2025) found that individuals with higher self-efficacy are more responsive to perceptions of fairness in organizational decision-making. Mukherjee & Chatterjee (2023) in their study in the banking sector found a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and career satisfaction, which is consistent with the argument that self-efficacy moderates how individuals interpret fairness in the promotion process. However, this self-efficacy can be distorted if the organizational environment does not provide certainty that achievement will be directly proportional to promotion.

The effectiveness of the merit system and individual self-efficacy often clash with the realities of regional political conditions. Handayani et al. (2024) confirmed, through a VOSviewer analysis, the intense competition between political patronage and the merit system in local governments, where political interests often undermine bureaucratic objectivity. Ridwan & Sukmana (2024) highlighted the reality of social exchange in the selection of regional officials in Indonesia, where political loyalty is often exchanged for strategic positions. This phenomenon is cross-cultural; Baroun (2024) noted that in work environments steeped in political tribalism, meritocracy is often distorted. At the regional level, local political dynamics act as a crucial moderating variable that can either strengthen the system's objectivity or weaken it.

This condition is very relevant when contextualized into the reality of the Tasikmalaya Regency Regional Government. As one of the regions with dynamic local political dynamics, the succession process of positions within the Tasikmalaya Regency ASN environment is often in the public spotlight. Formally, efforts to implement the merit system in Tasikmalaya Regency show encouraging progress. Based on the Government Agency Performance Report (LKIP) of the Tasikmalaya Regency Personnel and Human Resources Development Agency (BKPSDM), the value of the merit system implementation in 2023 was recorded at 284.5, then increased significantly to 313 in 2025, with a difference of 28.5 points, so that the Tasikmalaya Regency Government succeeded in achieving the predicate of a government agency with the "Good" category in the implementation of the merit system (BKPSDM Tasikmalaya Regency, 2025). However, the increase in quantitative values does not necessarily guarantee that the perception of succession justice among ASN will also increase proportionally,

considering that the shadow of political affiliation and power relations after the regional elections are still often considered to influence the objectivity of succession.

There is a significant research gap in the existing literature. Previous studies generally examined the influence of merit systems (Chairiah et al., 2020; Damayanti et al., 2023) or self-efficacy (Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson, 2020; Md. Sahedur Rahman et al., 2023) separately on various organizational outcomes. Meanwhile, studies on regional political conditions have been more often positioned as independent variables or descriptive contexts, rather than as moderating variables that empirically test their interaction with merit systems and self-efficacy in an integrated model. No research has specifically examined how regional political conditions moderate the relationship between merit systems and self-efficacy and succession justice, particularly among civil servants in post-election Indonesian local governments. The novelty of this research lies in integrating these three variables into a single moderation framework using a concrete and empirically relevant locus: Tasikmalaya Regency.

Based on the above background, this research is crucial to be conducted in order to analyze the extent to which the merit system and self-efficacy determine succession justice, as well as how regional political conditions moderate this relationship among ASN in the Tasikmalaya Regency Regional Government.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Succession Justice

Succession justice refers to employee perceptions of the extent to which the process of filling positions or changing leadership within an organization is conducted fairly, transparently, and objectively based on measurable criteria. This concept is rooted in organizational justice theory, which asserts that perceptions of fairness within an organization significantly influence employee attitudes, motivation, and performance (Greenberg, 1990). In the context of public bureaucracy, succession justice holds a highly strategic position, as the promotion process not only impacts the individual concerned but also influences all employees' trust in the integrity of the organization's overall career management system.

From an organizational justice perspective, there are three main dimensions commonly used to assess fairness in human resource management processes (Colquitt et al., 2013). First, distributive justice, which refers to employee perceptions of the fairness of the results or outcomes received, including promotions. Employees will assess whether the position obtained is commensurate with the individual's contributions, competencies, and performance. Second, procedural justice, which relates to the fairness of the organization's decision-making process. In the context of succession, this dimension reflects the extent to which the selection process is conducted transparently, consistently, and based on clear criteria. Third, interactional justice, which relates to the quality of interpersonal treatment employees receive during the decision-making process, encompasses aspects of rewards, information transparency, and fair communication between leaders and employees.

These three dimensions are interrelated and collectively shape a comprehensive perception of justice among employees. Adamovic (2023), in a semi-systematic literature review of organizational justice research, confirmed that procedural and distributive justice are consistently strong predictors of employee commitment, satisfaction, and organizational citizenship behavior across various sectors, including the public sector. Empirically, Moon et al. (2024) found that all three dimensions of organizational justice significantly influence public employee turnover intentions, indicating that

perceptions of unfairness in the promotion system have a broad impact on the stability of bureaucratic human resources. Thus, succession justice is a central dependent variable reflecting the extent to which the civil service management system is able to implement the principles of justice in practice.

Merit System and Succession Justice

The merit system is a human resource management principle that emphasizes that all processes of civil servant management must be based on individual competence, qualifications, and performance objectively, without discrimination based on political affiliation, race, or gender (Malik & Prasajo, 2023). In the public sector, the merit system aims to ensure that positions are filled by individuals with the best abilities and to protect civil servant careers from interference by those in power. The implementation of the merit system in Indonesia is normatively regulated in Law Number 5 of 2014 concerning Civil Servants, which emphasizes professionalism and freedom from political interference, and is reinforced in Law Number 20 of 2023 as an update to national civil service regulations.

Indicators for implementing a merit system include several key dimensions, namely: (1) objectivity in job selection and appointment; (2) transparency in the promotion and transfer process; (3) competency- and performance-based assessment; (4) availability of a clear and planned career path; and (5) protection of ASN careers from politicization (KASN, 2020; OECD, 2017). When these indicators are implemented consistently, a merit system creates an environment where employees can trust that promotion decisions are based on merit, not political affiliation.

Research by Chairiah et al. (2020) shows that the implementation of a good merit system contributes to the formation of perceptions of organizational justice because it provides procedural certainty for civil servants that the selection process is not arbitrary. Malik & Prasajo (2023) further emphasizes that a merit system can increase the professionalism of civil servants while preventing the practice of political patronage. Logically, the mechanism of the merit system influences succession justice through two channels: first, by reducing subjectivity in promotion decisions, so that competent employees feel treated fairly; and second, by creating consistent and transparent standards, which increases the perception of procedural justice among all civil servants. Based on the theoretical and empirical framework, the first hypothesis of this study is formulated as follows:

H1: Sistem merit berpengaruh positif terhadap keadilan suksesi.

Self-Efficacy and Succession Justice

Self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute a series of actions necessary to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1997). As a core psychological construct in Social Cognitive Theory, self-efficacy has four primary sources: previous successful experiences (mastery experience), observations of others' success (vicarious experience), verbal persuasion from others (verbal persuasion), and interpretations of the individual's physiological state (Bandura, 1997). In an organizational context, self-efficacy influences how individuals evaluate opportunities for career success and interpret experiences in the job selection process.

Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to have more positive perceptions of organizational systems because they believe their competencies are capable of competing objectively. Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson (2020) stated that individuals with high levels of self-efficacy are more able to accept the selection process as fair, as long as the procedures used are objective and transparent. In other words, self-efficacy forms a kind of cognitive appraisal that the ongoing promotion process reflects actual capacity, not external intervention. Similarly, Choong & Ng (2025) found that individuals

with higher self-efficacy are more responsive to perceptions of fairness in organizational decision-making because they feel they have sufficient personal resources to face the process. Empirically, Adamovic (2023) also found a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and career satisfaction in employees, indicating that confidence in one's abilities strengthens individuals' positive evaluations of the applicable promotion system. Based on these theoretical and empirical arguments, the second hypothesis of this study is:

H2: Self-efficacy has a positive effect on succession justice.

Regional Political Conditions as a Moderating Variable

The regional political situation in this study is defined as the perception of civil servants (ASN) regarding the extent to which the dynamics of power and the political interests of local elites influence the decision-making process in personnel management, particularly in promotions and job placements. This concept aligns with the construct of perceived organizational politics (POP) developed by Ferris & Kacmar (1992), which is an individual's cognitive assessment of the political climate in their work environment. In the context of Indonesian local governments, the dimensions of the regional political situation include: (1) perceptions of general political behavior in the form of favoritism and informal alliances in decision-making; (2) perceptions that promotion and transfer policies are influenced by political interests rather than merit; and (3) perceptions that loyalty to political leaders is an unwritten requirement for career advancement (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Ferris et al., 2002).

In Indonesia's decentralized system, local political factors significantly influence the decision-making process within the bureaucracy, particularly after regional head elections. Ridwan & Sukmana (2024) highlight the reality of social exchange in the selection of regional officials, where political loyalty is exchanged for strategic positions. Handayani et al. (2024) confirm through a VOSviewer analysis that political patronage competes directly with the merit system in local government and has the potential to reduce bureaucratic objectivity. At the international level, Baroun (2024) shows that in work environments steeped in tribalism and group politics, meritocracy tends to be distorted, while Panizza et al. (2023) in a cross-country comparative study confirms that political patronage consistently undermines merit-based professionalization within the bureaucracy.

In conditions of intense regional political tensions, the implementation of the merit system can be distorted because promotion decisions are influenced more by political considerations than by competence. This situation will reduce perceptions of procedural and distributive justice among civil servants, who feel their achievements are not being recognized proportionally. Conversely, in conditions of conducive and neutral regional politics, the merit system has the potential to be implemented more purely, thus strengthening its influence on succession justice. Thus:

H3: The high level of regional political conditions weakens the positive influence of the merit system on succession justice.

In addition to moderating the merit system, regional political conditions also influence how self-efficacy plays a role in shaping perceptions of succession fairness. When the organizational environment is rife with political intervention, an individual's belief in their abilities becomes irrelevant in determining promotion outcomes, as job decisions are driven more by political factors. This condition causes even civil servants with high self-efficacy to experience dissonance between their self-beliefs and the reality of the non-objective promotion process, thus weakening the influence of self-efficacy on perceptions of succession fairness. Conversely, in stable and non-interventionist

political conditions, high self-efficacy will further strengthen the perception that the succession process is fair because individual competence is truly the primary determinant. Based on this argument:

H4: High regional political conditions weaken the positive influence of self-efficacy on succession justice.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-moderating design, where data was collected through an online survey of targeted respondents. The quantitative approach was chosen because the research objective was to empirically examine the relationships between variables through structured hypothesis testing (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The method used was a cross-sectional survey, where data was collected at a specific point in time from respondents who met purposive sampling criteria.

This research design was specifically designed to test two main influence paths—namely the influence of the Merit System (X1) and Self-Efficacy (X2) on Succession Justice (Y) and the role of Regional Political Conditions (Z) as a moderating variable that strengthens or weakens both relationships. This research model was analyzed using Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software, which is considered appropriate for predictive and exploratory models with a relatively small sample size (Hair et al., 2022).

This study operationalizes four main variables as latent constructs with reflective indicators, including Succession Justice (Y) as the dependent variable with 9 indicator items (Colquitt, 2001; Greenberg, 1990), as well as Merit System (X1) with 10 indicator items (KASN, 2020; Malik & Prasoj, 2023) and Self-Efficacy (X2) with 8 indicator items (Bandura, 1997; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) as independent variables. In addition, Regional Political Conditions (Z) are positioned as a moderating variable measured through the construct of Perceived Organizational Politics (Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Ferris et al., 2002) to capture the influence of political interests and loyalties on job promotions. All of these variables are measured through specific dimensions that include aspects of justice, transparency, self-efficacy, and organizational political dynamics.

Population and Sample

The population in this study was all civil servant within the Tasikmalaya Regency Government who had been involved, either directly or indirectly, in the promotion or transfer process of structural or functional positions. This involvement criterion was important to ensure that respondents had real-world experience relevant to the construct being measured, namely perceptions of succession fairness.

The sampling technique used was purposive sampling, which is the selection of samples based on certain considerations and criteria tailored to the research objectives (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019). The inclusion criteria set include: (1) having the status of an active ASN within the Tasikmalaya Regency Regional Government; (2) having a minimum work period of two years so that they have sufficient time to observe the dynamics of job succession; and (3) having participated in or directly knowing the job selection, promotion, or transfer process in their agency.

The number of respondents successfully collected in this study was 32 people. Although relatively small, this sample size is considered adequate for PLS-SEM analysis, considering that this method does not require a normal multivariate data distribution and is capable of producing stable parameter estimates with a minimum sample of 30 to 100 respondents (Hair et al., 2019; Kock, 2018).

Furthermore, the number of indicators per construct in this model does not exceed 7 items, so the sample-to-parameter ratio remains within acceptable limits.

Respondent Demographic Profile

Based on the results of filling out the questionnaire, a demographic description of the respondents was obtained as presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. Respondent Demographic Profile (n = 32)

Category	Information	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Woman	17	53,1
	Man	15	46,9
Age	< 30 years old	8	25,0
	30–39 years old	14	43,8
	40–49 years old	7	21,9
	≥ 50 years old	3	9,4
Education	High School	2	6,3
	Associate's Degree (D3/D4)	3	9,4
	Bachelor's Degree (S1)	20	62,5
	Postgraduate (S2/S3)	7	21,9
	Echelon II	1	3,1
Position	Echelon III	2	6,3
	Echelon IV	1	3,1
	Functional Position	7	21,9
	Staff	21	65,6

Source: Primary data, processed (2026)

Based on Table 1, several significant demographic patterns can be identified. In terms of gender composition, there is a fairly proportional balance between female employees (53.1%) and male employees (46.9%), indicating that gender representation in this work unit is relatively even. In terms of age, the majority of respondents are in the productive age range, namely 30–39 years (43.8%) and under 30 years (25.0%), so that in aggregate 68.8% of respondents are under 40 years old. This condition reflects an organizational structure dominated by young to middle-aged workers with the potential for long tenure.

In terms of education level, the majority of respondents were Bachelor's (S1) graduates (62.5%), followed by Postgraduate (S2/S3) graduates (21.9%). This composition indicates that the quality of human resources in this organization is quite high academically. In line with this, there is an identified correlation between educational level and structural position, where all Echelon position

holders who were respondents had a Postgraduate educational background and were in the mature age group (over 40 years old).

In terms of job structure, the majority of respondents held executive/staff positions (65.6%) and functional positions (21.9%), resulting in a non-structural proportion of 87.5% of the total sample. This structure reflects a centralized organizational structure with limited managerial positions. Consequently, the majority of respondents are relatively vulnerable to job succession uncertainty, making their perceptions of the fairness of the promotion process highly relevant to study.

Measurement Scales and Instruments

The research instrument used was a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, in which respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each statement. Scoring was carried out using the following scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neutral/Undecided; 4 = Agree; and 5 = Strongly Agree. The use of this five-point Likert scale is commonly used in social science and public management research because it is able to gradually capture the nuances of respondents' perceptions (Sekaran & Bougie, 2019).

The questionnaire was developed through the stages of adapting instruments from relevant literature, then content validity testing was carried out through expert reviews before being distributed to respondents within the Tasikmalaya Regency Government.

Data Analysis Techniques: PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4

The collected data were analyzed using the Partial Least Square – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) method with SmartPLS software version 4. The choice of PLS-SEM was based on several methodological considerations: (1) the research model is predictive with moderating variables, which are more suitable for analysis with PLS than CB-SEM; (2) the relatively small sample size ($n=32$) does not meet the minimum assumptions of CB-SEM which requires a larger sample; (3) the data distribution does not have to be multivariate normal; and (4) PLS-SEM is able to simultaneously estimate the outer model (measurement model) and inner model (structural model) (Hair et al., 2022; Ringle et al., 2020).

a. Evaluation of Measurement Model (Outer Model)

Outer model evaluation was conducted to verify that each indicator accurately measures the intended construct. Testing included: (1) convergent validity, assessed through outer loading values (≥ 0.70), Average Variance Extracted ($AVE \geq 0.50$), and Composite Reliability ($CR \geq 0.70$); (2) discriminant validity, assessed through the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio ($HTMT < 0.85$) and the Fornell-Larcker Criterion, where the square root of the AVE of each construct must be greater than its correlation with other constructs; and (3) internal consistency reliability, assessed through Cronbach's Alpha value ($\alpha \geq 0.70$) (Hair et al., 2022; Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

b. Structural Model Evaluation (Inner Model) and Hypothesis Testing

The inner model evaluation included an assessment of: (1) the coefficient of determination (R^2), which indicates the proportion of variance in the dependent variable explained by the independent variables; (2) the effect size (f^2), which measures the relative contribution of each predictor; (3) predictive relevance (Q^2) through a blindfolding procedure, where a Q^2 value > 0 indicates the model has predictive relevance; and (4) the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) to detect multicollinearity between constructs (a VIF value < 3.3 is accepted in PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2019).

Hypothesis testing was conducted through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resampling subsamples without replacement (no sign change option), which produced t-statistics and p-values for each relationship path. The hypothesis was accepted if the t-statistic > 1.96 (at $\alpha = 0.05$) or p-value < 0.05 (two-tailed). All hypothesis testing refers to the path coefficient (β) which reflects the strength and direction of influence between constructs.

c. Moderation Effect Testing (Moderated PLS-SEM)

Testing the moderating effect of Regional Political Conditions (Z) was conducted using a product indicator approach with the two-stage method recommended for moderation models in PLS-SEM (Henseler & Chin, 2010; Becker et al., 2018). In the first stage, an outer model was estimated to obtain the latent construct scores. In the second stage, the interaction score between the independent variable (X_1 or X_2) and the moderating variable (Z) was formed as the product of the standardized latent scores, then entered into the structural model as interaction terms ($X_1 \times Z$ and $X_2 \times Z$).

The moderation hypotheses (H3 and H4) were accepted if the path coefficient of the interaction term ($\beta_{\text{interaction}}$) was statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). The negative direction of the interaction coefficient indicates that high regional political conditions weaken the positive effect of the independent variable on succession justice, as hypothesized in this study.

Research Model Framework

Overall, the structural model in this study can be represented in the following equation:

$$Y = \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 (X_1 \times Z) + \beta_4 (X_2 \times Z) + \epsilon$$

Keterangan:

- Y : Succession Justice (dependent variable)
- X_1 : Merit System (independent variable)
- X_2 : Self-Efficacy (independent variable)
- Z : Regional Political Conditions (moderating variable)
- $X_1 \times Z$: Interaction between Merit System and Regional Political Conditions
- $X_2 \times Z$: Interaction between Self-Efficacy and Regional Political Condition
- $\beta_1 - \beta_4$: Structural path coefficient
- ϵ : Residual/error

Tabel 2. Ringkasan Hipotesis Penelitian

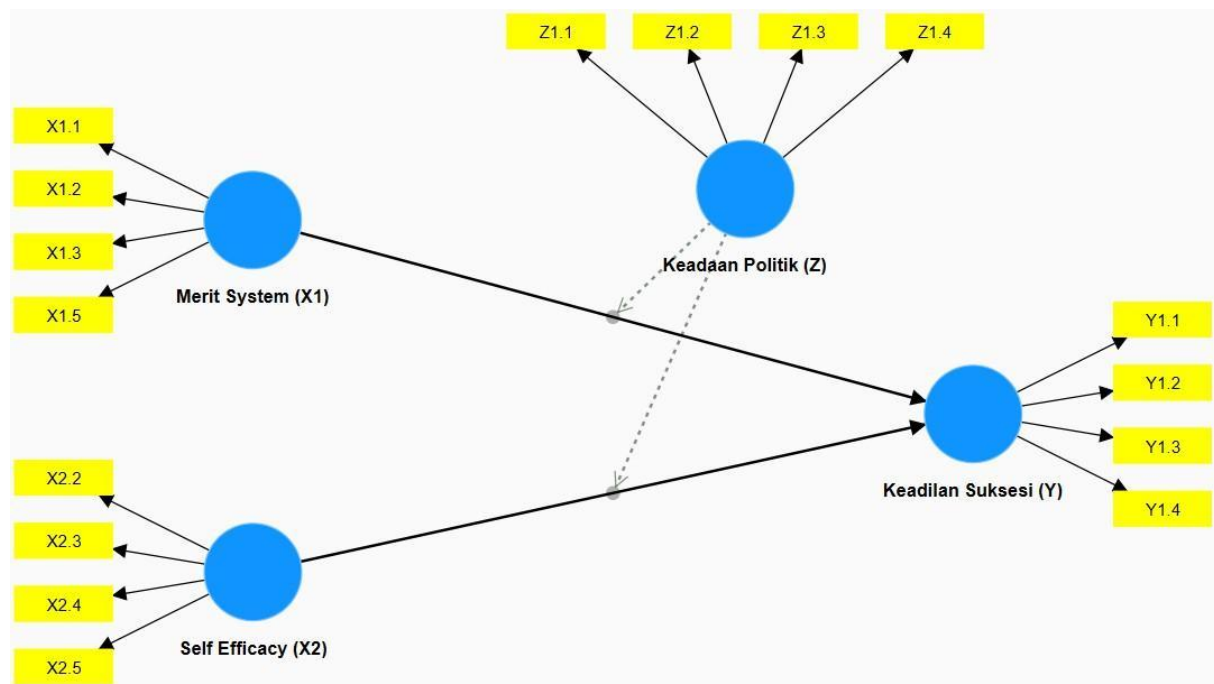
Hypothesis	Statement	Expected Direction
H1	Merit System → Succession Justice	Positif (+)
H2	Self-Efficacy → Succession Justice	Positif (+)
H3	Regional Political Conditions moderate (weaken) the relationship between the Merit System → Succession Justice	Negatif (–)
H4	Regional Political Conditions Moderate (Weaken) the Self- Efficacy → Succession Justice Relationship	Negatif (–)

Source: Elaborated from the research conceptual framework

The decision criteria for each hypothesis are determined based on the statistical significance of the SmartPLS 4 bootstrapping results, with a threshold of t-statistic > 1.96 and p-value < 0.05 in a two-tailed test. The final interpretation will consider the magnitude of the path coefficient (β), the direction of the relationship, and the R^2 value as an indicator of the overall strength of the model..

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Variable Model



Source: Processed Secondary Data, 2026

Figure 1 presents the research variable model estimated using the Partial Least Squares – Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) approach using SmartPLS 4 software. This model fully visualizes the architecture of the relationships between the constructs being tested, encompassing two direct effect paths and two moderating effect paths.

The model consists of three exogenous constructs: Merit System (X1), Self-Efficacy (X2), and Regional Political Conditions (Z) as moderating variables, and one endogenous construct: Succession Justice (Y). The black solid line represents the direct influence between the constructs, while the gray dashed line represents the moderation path—the influence of Regional Political Conditions (Z) in intervening in the relationship between each independent variable and the dependent variable.

Structurally, this model is built on four relationship propositions: (1) Merit System (X1) has a direct effect on Succession Justice (Y); (2) Self-Efficacy (X2) has a direct effect on Succession Justice (Y); (3) Regional Political Conditions (Z) moderate the relationship between Merit System (X1) and Succession Justice (Y); and (4) Regional Political Conditions (Z) moderate the relationship between Self-Efficacy (X2) and Succession Justice (Y). These four propositions are then tested statistically through a bootstrapping procedure to determine the significance of each path, as described in the hypothesis testing section.

Measurement Model Test Results (Outer Model)

Before testing the hypotheses, a measurement model evaluation was conducted to verify that each indicator consistently and accurately represents its latent construct. This evaluation aligns with the

PLS-SEM analysis procedures outlined in the research methods section, which require testing convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability before interpreting the structural model (Hair et al., 2022).

a. Convergent Validity and Construct Reliability

Convergent validity testing was conducted by examining the outer loading values of each indicator and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. The test results are presented in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3. Outer Loading Values of Research Indicators

Indikator	Outer Loading	Criteria
X1.1 ← Merit System (X1)	0,795	Valid
X1.2 ← Merit System (X1)	0,796	Valid
X1.3 ← Merit System (X1)	0,814	Valid
X1.5 ← Merit System (X1)	0,812	Valid
X2.2 ← Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,934	Valid
X2.3 ← Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,934	Valid
X2.4 ← Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,855	Valid
X2.5 ← Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,925	Valid
Y1.1 ← Succession Justice (Y)	0,850	Valid
Y1.2 ← Succession Justice (Y)	0,921	Valid
Y1.4 ← Succession Justice (Y)	0,932	Valid
Z1.1 ← Regional Political Situation (Z)	0,951	Valid
Z1.2 ← Regional Political Situation (Z)	0,909	Valid
Z1.3 ← Regional Political Situation (Z)	0,534	Valid
Z1.4 ← Regional Political Situation (Z)	0,636	Valid

Source: Output SmartPLS 4)

Tabel 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	CR (rho_a)	CR (rho_c)	AVE
Regional Political Situation (Z)	0,817	1,009	0,853	0,605
Succession Justice (Y)	0,885	0,906	0,929	0,813
Merit System (X1)	0,820	0,834	0,880	0,647
Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,933	0,956	0,952	0,833

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, processed (2026)

Based on Table 3, in general, all indicators used in this study met the minimum outer loading standard of 0.70 as required (Hair et al., 2022), except for indicators Z1.3 (0.534) and Z1.4 (0.636) in the Regional Political Conditions variable. However, these two indicators were retained in the model because they still exceeded the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.50, and their removal did not significantly increase the AVE value (Chin & Dibbern, 2010). The AVE value for the Regional Political

Conditions variable reached 0.605, which is above the minimum threshold of 0.50 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), thus meeting the convergent validity of all constructs.

In terms of construct reliability (Table 4), all variables demonstrated Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (rho_c) values above the minimum standard of 0.70. Succession Justice (Y) had a CR value of 0.929 with an AVE of 0.813; Self-Efficacy (X2) had a CR of 0.952 with an AVE of 0.833; Merit System (X1) had a CR of 0.880 with an AVE of 0.647; and Regional Political Conditions (Z) had a CR of 0.853 with an AVE of 0.605. These values indicate that all constructs in this study have good internal consistency and are capable of reliably representing the measured latent variables.

During the model refinement process, two indicators, X1.4 and X2.1, were eliminated from the final model because their Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values exceeded the threshold of 5.0. This elimination was done to address multicollinearity issues without compromising construct reliability and validity (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014).

b. Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity testing was conducted by examining the correlation matrix between constructs using the Fornell-Larcker criteria. The test results are presented in Table 5.

Tabel 5. Correlation Matrix Between Constructs (Discriminant Validity – Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Konstruk	Z	Y	X1	X2	Z×X1	Z×X2
Regional Political — Situation (Z)						
Succession Justice 0,334 (Y)	0,334	—				
Merit System (X1)	0,388	0,905	—			
Self-Efficacy (X2)	0,193	0,441	0,478	—		
Z × X1	0,372	0,310	0,159	0,380	—	
Z × X2	0,496	0,495	0,425	0,271	0,691	—

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, processed (2026)

Based on Table 5, it was identified that the correlation between the Merit System (X1) and Succession Justice (Y) reached 0.905. This value is close to the 0.95 threshold required by Henseler et al. (2015). This condition is understandable considering that conceptually the merit system is closely related to perceptions of justice, because the merit system is the main instrument designed to realize the principles of justice in personnel management (Malik & Prasajo, 2023). In research where two constructs are conceptually closely related, a high correlation value does not necessarily indicate a discriminant validity problem, but rather reflects a strong theoretical relationship between the two constructs (Henseler et al., 2015). Correlations between other constructs are within an acceptable range.

c. Collinearity Test (Variance Inflation Factor)

As the final stage of the outer model evaluation, a collinearity test was conducted between indicators using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) value. According to the criteria established in the research methodology, a VIF value <5.00 indicates the absence of multicollinearity (Hair, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2014; Garson, 2016). The test results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) Value

Indicator	Value VIF
X1.1	1,902
X1.2	1,643
X1.3	1,670
X1.5	2,119
X2.2	4,231
X2.3	4,773
X2.4	2,498
X2.5	4,756
Y1.1	2,107
Y1.2	2,855
Y1.4	3,293
Z1.1	3,155
Z1.2	2,957
Z1.3	2,267
Z1.4	2,444
Political Condition (Z) × Self-Efficacy (X2)	1,000
Political Circumstances (Z) × Merit System (X1)	1,000

Sumber: Output SmartPLS 4, diolah (2026)

Table 6 shows that all indicators in the final model have VIF values below 5.00. The highest VIF values are found in the Self-Efficacy indicator, with X2.3 at 4.773 and X2.5 at 4.756, both within the established tolerance limits. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are no significant multicollinearity issues in the indicators used in this study, and the measurement model is deemed suitable for further structural model evaluation.

2. Structural Model Test Results (Inner Model)

a. Koefisien Determinasi (R-Square)

The evaluation of the structural model begins with an examination of the coefficient of determination (R^2) to measure the model's overall predictive power. The test results are presented in Table 7.

Tabel 7. Coefficient of Determination (R-Square)

Variabel	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Succession Justice (Y)	0,689	0,626

Source: Output SmartPLS 4, processed (2026)

Based on Table 7, the R-square value of the Succession Justice variable (Y) is 0.689 (adjusted R-square = 0.626). Referring to the interpretation guide by Hair et al. (2022) in the context of social sciences and management, the R^2 value of 0.689 is categorized as substantial (strong), indicating that this research model has a high level of predictive accuracy. Substantively, this value indicates that the combined contribution of the Merit System (X1), Self-Efficacy (X2), Regional Political Conditions (Z),

and their moderating interactions are able to explain 68.9% of the variation that occurs in the perception of Succession Justice among ASN in Tasikmalaya Regency. The remaining 31.1% is influenced by other factors outside the scope of this research model, such as organizational culture, transformational leadership, or bureaucratic structural factors that were not measured in this study.

3. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 subsamples as described in the research methods. The hypothesis was accepted if the T-statistic value was > 1.96 and the P-value was < 0.05 in a two-tailed test. The complete results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 8 and summarized in Table 9.

Tabel 8. Hypothesis Testing Results through Bootstrapping

Hypothesis Path	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	STDEV	T-Statistik	P-Value
H1: Merit System (X1) $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice (Y)	0,757	0,689	0,182	4,149	0,000
H2: Self-Efficacy (X2) $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice (Y)	0,007	0,084	0,201	0,037	0,970
H3: Z $\times$ Merit System (X1) $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice (Y)	-0,084	-0,097	0,331	0,255	0,799
H4: Z $\times$ Self-Efficacy (X2) $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice (Y)	-0,113	-0,015	0,404	0,280	0,780

Source: SmartPLS 4 output, processed (2026)

Tabel 9. Summary of Research Hypothesis Decisions

H	Statement	β	P-Value	Keputusan
H1	Merit System $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice	0,757	0,000	Diterima
H2	Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice	0,007	0,970	Ditolak
H3	Z $\times$ Merit System $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice	-0,084	0,799	Ditolak
H4	Z $\times$ Self-Efficacy $\rightarrow$ Succession Justice	-0,113	0,780	Ditolak

Source: SmartPLS 4 output, processed (2026)

Discussion

4.1 Merit System Has a Positive and Significant Influence on Succession Justice

The results of the first hypothesis test indicate that the Merit System has a positive and significant effect on Succession Justice. Thus, H1 is accepted. This finding confirms that the better the merit system implementation in the Tasikmalaya Regency Government, the more significant and significant the Civil Servant's perception of justice in the succession process will be.

This finding directly addresses the first research question and aligns with the theoretical framework developed in the literature review. As explained by Chairiah et al. (2020), a well-implemented merit system contributes to the formation of perceptions of organizational justice because it provides civil servants with procedural assurance that the selection process is not arbitrary. A merit system that accommodates the dimensions of selection objectivity, promotion transparency,

competency-based assessment, and career protection from politicization (KASN, 2020) simultaneously enhances perceptions of procedural, distributive, and interactional justice, consistent with the concept of organizational justice proposed by Greenberg (1990) and Colquitt et al. (2013).

The Merit System, in this finding, is proven to be the dominant predictor and primary determinant of Succession Justice in this research model. This further strengthens Malik & Prasajo's (2023) argument that a merit system can enhance civil servant professionalism. This finding is also relevant to the empirical context in the field: although the implementation of the merit system in Tasikmalaya Regency continues to increase year after year (BKPSDM Tasikmalaya Regency, 2025), this quantitative increase is only meaningful if it is simultaneously accompanied by an increase in perceptions of fairness among civil servants, as confirmed by the findings of this study.

Furthermore, these findings contribute to the development of organizational justice theory in the context of Indonesian public bureaucracy. Specifically, these results confirm that the merit system mechanism operates through two main pathways in shaping perceptions of fairness: first, by reducing subjectivity in promotion decisions; and second, by creating consistent and transparent standards. Thus, the merit system proves to be the most effective policy instrument in achieving succession justice compared to other factors in this model.

4.2. Self-Efficacy Does Not Have a Significant Effect on Succession Justice

Testing the second hypothesis yielded findings that differed from those hypothesized. Self-efficacy was shown to have no significant effect on Succession Justice, thus rejecting H2.

Theoretically, the relationship between self-efficacy and perceptions of organizational justice has received strong support in the organizational behavior literature. Bandura (1997), using Social Cognitive Theory, asserted that individuals with high self-efficacy tend to have more positive expectations for the outcomes they achieve, including assessing the fairness of organizational systems. Vaughan-Johnston & Jacobson (2020) and Choong & Ng (2025) empirically found that self-efficacy plays a significant role in shaping individual perceptions of distributive and procedural justice, particularly in the context of career development. However, these theories are based on the assumption that the subjects studied are employees in organizations with relatively open individual space, where an individual's initiative, ambition, and self-confidence can significantly influence their position and career trajectory.

The critical point that distinguishes this research context lies in the fundamental nature of ASN as civil servants. Unlike private sector employees, whose careers are largely determined by individual capacity, personal initiative, and competitiveness in a competitive environment, civil servants (ASN) are bound by a regulative, hierarchical, and highly structured civil service system. A private sector employee with high ambition and self-efficacy can directly translate these psychological attributes into strategic actions that impact their careers, such as applying for new positions, negotiating for positions, or moving to other organizations that better appreciate their abilities. This kind of direct conversion is not available to civil servants.

In the ASN civil service system, particularly within the Tasikmalaya Regency Government, job succession is determined by mechanisms that go far beyond individual psychological attributes. Civil service regulations, seniority norms, considerations from the Regional Personnel Agency (Baperjakat), and decisions by civil servant development officials are the dominant variables that determine the course of job succession. In this ecosystem, even an ASN with high ambition or very high self-efficacy lacks a direct mechanism to translate their self-confidence into tangible influence on the succession process. A person may be fully confident that they are competent and worthy of a position, but that belief does not automatically change their perception of the fairness of the system. Quite the contrary:

Highly ambitious civil servants who are not selected in a succession process determined by mechanisms beyond their control may experience a deeper dissonance between their self-belief and the systemic reality they face.

Thus, the lack of influence of self-efficacy on succession fairness in this study accurately reflects the structural reality of civil servants in Tasikmalaya Regency. The regulative and hierarchical nature of civil servant employment contexts proved to be dominant moderators, overriding the theoretically established relationship. This finding modifies theoretical assumptions derived from Bandura's (1997) Social Cognitive Theory in the specific context of Indonesian public bureaucracy, where structural and systemic factors were shown to be more dominant than individual psychological attributes in shaping perceptions of succession fairness.

4.3. Regional Political Conditions Do Not Moderate the Effect of the Merit System on Succession Justice (H3 Rejected)

The results of the third hypothesis test indicate that regional political conditions did not significantly moderate the influence of the merit system on succession justice, thus rejecting H3. This finding is inconsistent with the hypotheses formulated based on studies by Panizza et al. (2023) and Baroun (2024), which stated that the intensity of political patronage weakens the relationship between the merit system and organizational outcomes.

To understand this finding more deeply, it is necessary to examine the unique political characteristics of Tasikmalaya Regency, which cannot be easily compared to other regencies or cities in Indonesia. Tasikmalaya Regency is one of the regions experiencing intense political dynamics, where even the regional head election process has had to undergo a revote due to disputes and the complexity of the democratic process in the region. This situation reflects the dynamic nature of the local political landscape and the significant potential for the involvement of political interests in various areas of government, including personnel matters.

The high intensity of local politics in Tasikmalaya Regency, including the tendency for political considerations to be involved in personnel matters, creates a paradox that results in statistically insignificant moderation. In conditions where political pressure on the bureaucracy is so high and widespread, the influence of regional political conditions no longer acts as a variable that selectively moderates the relationship between the merit system and succession justice. Instead, it has become part of the background noise that pervades all civil servant perceptions. Civil servants in Tasikmalaya Regency perceive regional political conditions as a given and constant condition, so this variable no longer has sufficient variation to dynamically moderate the relationships between other variables in the model.

On the other hand, the increasingly strengthened institutionalization of the merit system actually acts as a buffer, maintaining the merit system's positive influence on succession justice relatively stable despite high local political pressure. As argued by Damayanti et al. (2023), strong institutionalization of the merit system can serve as a buffer against political distortion. In the context of Tasikmalaya Regency, this phenomenon is clearly visible: it is precisely in the midst of high political pressure that the merit system is perceived by ASN as an anchor of justice that is still upheld, so that the relationship between the merit system and succession justice is not distorted by local political dynamics.

4.4. Regional Political Conditions Do Not Moderate the Effect of Self-Efficacy on Succession Justice

The results of the fourth hypothesis test are consistent with previous findings: Regional political conditions were not shown to significantly moderate the effect of self-efficacy on succession justice, thus rejecting H4. Although Choong & Ng (2025) argued that an unfavorable political

environment can distort the relationship between individual self-efficacy and perceptions of justice, the bureaucratic context of Tasikmalaya Regency's civil servants (ASN) exhibits a different dynamic.

The primary factor explaining this insignificant moderation stems from a very specific phenomenon within the context of ASN employment in Tasikmalaya Regency: the involvement of ASN themselves in regional political dynamics. In an environment with high local political intensity, as previously described, many ASN in Tasikmalaya Regency consciously position themselves within political affiliation networks, both actively and passively. This political involvement creates conditions in which ASN orientations regarding careers and job succession are no longer solely based on self-confidence in their own competencies, but are also shaped by more complex political calculations.

This situation creates a unique dynamic: the self-efficacy of civil servants (ASN) who have been integrated into a political affiliation network no longer functions as a pure predictor of perceptions of justice, because their perceptions of justice are shaped by a political logic that differs from the logic of meritocracy. Civil servants who engage in politics have a different reference to justice: they tend to judge succession as fair or unfair not solely based on their confidence in their competence, but rather on the extent to which the outcome aligns with or conflicts with the interests of their political affiliation. Under these conditions, both the regional political situation and individual self-efficacy operate within a logic distorted by bureaucratic politicization, resulting in a moderating interaction between the two that does not produce a statistically significant effect.

Thus, the phenomenon of civil servants in Tasikmalaya Regency engaging in politics is the primary explanation for why the moderation of regional political conditions on the relationship between self-efficacy and succession justice could not be confirmed in this study. This finding also provides an important empirical signal for bureaucratic reform efforts in Tasikmalaya Regency, demonstrating that civil servant neutrality is not merely a normative requirement, but rather a structural prerequisite for individual psychological mechanisms such as self-efficacy to function purely and undistorted in shaping perceptions of justice.

CONCLUSION

Taken together, these four research findings form a coherent narrative regarding the determinants of fairness in succession within the Tasikmalaya Regency Regional Government Civil Servants (ASN). This narrative can be summarized in three main points.

The first point is the supremacy of systemic factors over psychological factors. In the context of the Tasikmalaya Regency public bureaucracy, perceptions of fairness in succession are shaped more by the prevailing system mechanisms, particularly the merit system, than by individual psychological attributes such as self-efficacy. This finding is not merely a statistical anomaly, but rather reflects the fundamental difference between ASN and employees in other sectors: ASN operate within a highly structured, hierarchical, and regulative civil service system, severely limiting the scope for individual psychological attributes to influence perceptions of fairness.

The second point is the resilience of the merit system amidst political pressure. Although Tasikmalaya Regency is known for its intense local political dynamics, including various complexities in its regional democratic process, the positive influence of the merit system on fairness in succession remains persistent and undistorted by these political pressures. This demonstrates that the increasingly strengthened institutionalization of the merit system can serve as a buffer against political distortion, while also offering hope that consistent bureaucratic reform can have a real impact even in a stressful political environment.

The third key issue is the politicization of civil servants (ASN) as a structural disruption. The involvement of Tasikmalaya Regency civil servants (ASN) in the dynamics of local political affiliation has proven to be a disruptive factor that weakens the relevance of individual psychological attributes, including self-efficacy, in shaping perceptions of fairness. As long as the politicization of the bureaucracy persists, the logic of meritocracy and the logic of politics will continue to compete in shaping ASN perceptions of job succession. Therefore, ASN neutrality and the simultaneous strengthening of the merit system are two inseparable reform agendas if true fairness in succession is to be achieved in Tasikmalaya Regency.

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