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### BUREAUCRACY AMID POLITICAL POWER STRUGGLE: A CRITICAL PARADIGMATIC REVIEW

<sup>1</sup>Arif Budiman, <sup>2</sup>Yuwanto, <sup>3</sup>Nurhidayat, <sup>4</sup>Laila Kholid Alfirdaus

Department of Politics and Government, Diponegoro University, Semarang, Indonesia.

Correspondent email: [budimankafka22@gmail.com](mailto:budimankafka22@gmail.com)

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#### **Abstract**

*The study of bureaucracy politicization in Indonesia has been mainly putting bureaucracy on its passive-position scenes. It viewed civil servants as politically subordinated by political officials. Bureaucracy in this classic paradigm had no other role but to execute what political officials decided. The barrier was clear, politicians made policy; civil servants administered the policy. Politicians made decision; bureaucrats merely implemented them. In this kind of relationship, bureaucracy had no other option but to obey the political leader's decisions submissively. This article came up with different perspectives. It criticized the classic paradigm and challenged the notion of civil servant's subordination before politics. Applying literature review, this study found out that bureaucracy had not merely administered the policy but also engaged in the making of it. Bureaucrats had more than enough of authorities to may choose independently to either take passive-position as an object of politicization or becoming active political actor on the stage of political power competition. Considering more bureaucracy leaders transforming into political officials, this may lead to the re-establishment of bureaucratic polity in Indonesia in the near future.*

**Keywords:** *bureaucracy; politicization; critical review.*

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## **A. INTRODUCTION**

The discussion regarding the involvement of bureaucracy in practical politics in Indonesia has often revolved around themes such as the utilization of state resources to strengthen the political interests of certain groups and the manipulation of bureaucrats to support certain political powers. The modus varies, including through regulatory politics (M A Firnas 2016; Mahdiana 2018), expansion of economic policies ahead of elections (Farhan 2013), utilization of bureaucratic resources for political party's interests, mobilization of the state apparatus to enliven political campaign activities, promotion, mutation, and demotion of bureaucratic positions based on political contributions (M Adian Firnas and Maesarini 2011; Ratna 2012; Wahiyuddin 2014; Budi 2014; Hamid 2006; Katharina 2018; Gunanto 2020; Chairullah, Nurdin, and Anggraeni 2022), the placement of civil servants in the organizational unit responsible for conducting elections (Yamin and Agustino 2014), the placement of relatives in bureaucratic positions (Hamid 2006), and so forth. Those studies viewed bureaucracy as a passive object of structured and massive politicized actions.

Conversely, several findings later show that bureaucracy is engaged in politics voluntarily. They may purposively form an alliance with politician to strengthen a candidate so it can get a win in an election. They move and take side deliberately in a way that enable them to take advantages out of the political power competition. These happenings bring about some critical questions on the prior studies, such as how could bureaucracy come to be an active actor engaged in political struggle? Does it morally acceptable to have a political bureaucracy? Would the alliance of bureaucrat-politician make a way for the re-establishment of bureaucratic polity in Indonesia in the future? This study aims to critically review the classic paradigm that argues politics and administration exist in two separate realms. It challenges the notion of subordinated-bureaucracy before politics. Instead, bureaucracy has been inherently political since the beginning. The government administration is not merely a machine that operates only upon receiving orders from politics. It is deliberately engaging in politics as an active entity, either on decision making process or on political power struggle.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study utilizes a qualitative-descriptive approach with a literature review method. Data is acquired through the exploration of literature materials, encompassing relevant research findings on the themes of bureaucracy and political power struggles. These findings include both unpublished materials such as theses and

dissertations and published works available through various media such as books, journals, seminar proceedings, and scientific conference papers. The data and information obtained are then processed by reduction, selection, compilation, and analyzed with interpretation techniques. All relevant data is then compiled systematically for further analysis interpretively to arrive at the conclusion of the study.

### **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The gesture of bureaucracy was motivated by two interests: maximizing public welfare and optimizing personal interests. Instead of advocating for the maximization of public welfare, bureaucrats tend to prioritize their personal interests as self-interest seekers. While not completely neglecting their institutional goals, bureaucrats tend to place their individual objectives above their institutional interests. While this personal interest motivated most bureaucrat to engage in political struggle, it was morally unacceptable to have political bureaucracy, let alone the risk of the re-establishment of bureaucratic polity in the future.

There has been debate on politics-administration relation. One suggested they were unseperable realm while the other viewed conversely. The first paradigm put politics over administration so that bureaucracy is merely like a robotic-machine to implement policy made by politicians, while the second emphasize the two of living co-existence. The study of bureaucracy politicization initially viewed the bureaucracy through the first paradigm. It laid bureaucracy in a passive and submissive position. Their involvement in political activities was not seen as motivated by interests but rather as a consequence of the doctrine that states bureaucracy merely executes decisions and policies made by politicians. Some studies using this perspective include Firnas & Maesarini (2011), Ratna (2012), Wahiyuddin (2014), Kusuma Budi (2014), Hamid (2016), Katharina (2018), Gunanto (2020), Chairullah et al. (2022), and Yamin & Agustino (2012).

These researchers identified several modes of bureaucracy politicization in Indonesia, namely through regulatory politics; expansion of economic policies approaching elections; utilization of bureaucratic resources for political party activities and/or election participants; mobilization of state apparatus to enliven political campaign activities; promotions, mutations, and demotions in bureaucracy based on political contributions; placement of civil servants in election organizing units; and placement of relatives in strategic bureaucratic positions.

The modus of regulatory politics is carried out through the initiation of regulations aimed at co-opting individuals or professional organizations of civil servant, so that their political aspirations can be directed to support a specific political group. The most benefited parties from this policy are typically political groups or coalitions that are currently in power. Such conditions have occurred in the Orde Baru era, specifically when Government Regulation Number 6 of 1970 on Civil Servant Single-Loyalty was enacted (Mahdiana 2018).

The expansion of economic policies is practiced by providing additional incentives such as salary increases and honorariums to bureaucratic officials leading up to the general election. This strategy is also known as the ‘political budget cycle,’ a model that assumes a favorable macroeconomic condition before the election will facilitate and increase the chances of the incumbent being re-elected.

The utilization of bureaucratic resources or public facilities for specific political interests is the most visible in various places. Citing a report from the National Civil Service Agency (BKN) regarding the neutrality violations of civil servants in the 2004 general elections, Gunanto exposed the violation committed by civil servants in regional elections comprising organizing activities such as meetings, community discussions, and the like that lead to garnering support for specific candidates, participating in political party’s campaigns, making decisions that benefit specific candidates and harm unwanted candidates (Gunanto 2020).

Exposing politicization practices in the Banten Regional Elections in 2006, Hamid found that politicization occurred both before and after the regional election (Hamid 2006). Rather than put meritocracy and professionalism on top, several bureaucratic officials were transferred based on patrimonial relationships instead. Budi found a similar reality in the Pilkada of Lampung Province in 2014. Despite the extensive socialization regarding the obligation of civil servant to remain neutral throughout the elections, candidates who were still holding positions as regional heads at the provincial or district/city levels were alleged to persistently mobilize civil servants’ support in their respective regions for their own electoral victory (Budi 2014).

Supporting the notion of bureaucracy’s subordination to politicians, Katharina and Rakhmawanto explained that the submission was inevitable due to the weak position of the bureaucracy in the face of political officials. The status of regional heads as the Personnel Development Officer (Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian or PPK) in the region, with the authority to carry out promotions, transfers, and demotions of

officials within the bureaucratic structure, has placed bureaucrats in a position where they have no option but to follow the directives of political officials (Katharina 2018; Rakhmawanto 2019). Similar to the previous research, Chairullah et al. also found the same modus of bureaucracy's politicization during the 2017 Regional Elections in West Aceh. Promotions, transfers, and demotions of employees and bureaucratic officials in the health sector were carried out without considering procedural aspects and competence (Chairullah, Nurdin, and Anggraeni 2022).

The various modus operandi of bureaucratic politicization, as outlined above, collectively put bureaucracy as the object. The bureaucracy was unable to avoid political order and pressure initiated by political officials. Those perspectives were inseparable from the influence of the Wilsonian paradigm, which was popularized by Woodrow Wilson and still holds sway today. The dichotomy of politics and administration, advocated by Woodrow Wilson, contributes to a perspective that sees bureaucracy as a passive entity. Wilson argued that politics and administration are two distinct, separate, and dominant entities. Politics deals with policy formulation, while administration deals with the effective and efficient implementation of policies formulated by politicians (Wilson 1887).

This view was supported by Frank J. Goodnow, Leonard White, and Dwight Waldo (Anwaruddin 2004). Bureaucracy is seen as a neutral, value-free entity, or in Weberian terms referred to as 'rational'. As a consequence of this 'subordination' of administration to politics, the bureaucracy cannot escape the influence of the political elite, not only in the policy process but also in every momentum of the political power struggle. The bureaucracy has always been the target of politicization carried out by political officials without having the opportunity to freely deviate from the political officials will.

The Wilsonian bureaucratic paradigm that multiplies the view of passive bureaucracy no longer has relevance. This view has received critical challenges from several scientists who often study bureaucratic political themes, including Temple, Clerk, Hughes, Huque & Rahman, Alamsyah, Yuwono, Alfirdaus & Manalu, and Saglam. Lafayette Parker Temple III in his dissertation explicitly stated that bureaucracies have their own power and they are not simply vacuous receptacles of democratic power responding to any direction political principals want them to go (Temple 1999). In line with Temple's opinion, Nicholas Timothy Clerk stated that the concept of the administrator as merely a passive instrumentality available to those who make public policy is not highly simplistic but also unrealistic (Clerk 1972).

Owen E. Hughes argued that public administration does not occur in a vacuum, but is inherent in the political process (Hughes 2003). On that basis, it can simply be said that the administrative process is fundamentally a political process. In line with Clark and Hughes, Huque & Rahman in their research on bureaucracy in Bangladesh even found that bureaucracy in the country actually plays a dominant political role compared to other political forces. This dominance is made possible by several conditions, including the stability of the organizational structure, administrative experience, and expertise in managing the bureaucracy on the one hand faced with the weak capacity of available political institutions, the lack of experience of existing political leaders, and the vulnerability of political stability on the other (Huque and Rahman 2003). With the quality of the bureaucracy, politicians in Bangladesh even become dependent on the bureaucracy so that government administration can run as desired.

The substance of Huque & Rahman's research that underscores the expertise of bureaucrats in terms of government affairs as a surplus value in front of politicians is also echoed by Van Gunten. In his research on economic policy in Mexico and Argentina, Van Gunten found that excellence in economic expertise placed bureaucrats in an important position in the policy-making process (Van Gunten 2012).

Furthermore, if Huque & Rahman examine the dominant power of bureaucracy in government, Saglam in his research on the political activities of some bureaucrats in Istanbul at the end of 2010 found that some of these bureaucrats actually 'resisted' the discourse carried by the government. Instead of engaging in actions to support the ruler and compete for government political power, bureaucrats who come into direct contact with people at the bottom level actually rally solidarity to 'challenge' the narratives and regulations echoed by the government office where they are assigned to and work in it (Saglam 2022). In short, it can be said that the bureaucracy in Istanbul at the time of the research was also actively involved in political activity, only in a different way from the form of bureaucratic political activity in general.

The active movement of bureaucracy in power politics battles was also found by Yuwono in his research in Boyolali and Pemalang. In addition to being the object of politicization carried out by the incumbent regent and his winning team, there are also bureaucrats who consciously and deliberately establish political 'coalitions' with candidates for regional heads and candidates for deputy regional heads (Yuwono 2017). This coalition building is driven by mutualistic motives that each party hopes to take advantage of. Candidates for regional heads and candidates for deputy regional

heads hope to get support from bureaucrats on the one hand while on the other hand hope to get concessions for their contributions in winning candidates, either in the form of promotion or other socio-political-material benefits.

Criticizing the assumption of the neutral Wilsonian bureaucratic concept, Alamsyah emphasized that in practice the bureaucracy cannot extricate itself from being involved in the political process (Alamsyah 2017). Bureaucracy is not just a collection of robots, systems, and procedures. More than that, bureaucracy is people who have different values, views, and abilities. In addition, the bureaucracy also has power obtained as a consequence of the control of various resources within government organizations, ranging from information, expertise, authority in policy making, political legitimacy, coercive instruments, permanent and stable organizations, discretion, and its role as the personification of the state. Such is the case with political interests attached to bureaucracy, such as the interest to increase the budget, maintain career stability, and maintain standard operating procedures that can be used to practice rent-seeking in the process of delivering public services. In short bureaucratic neutrality, according to Alamsyah, is something utopian.

Alfirdaus & Manalu strengthened the view that bureaucracy is not a passive entity. In their research of bureaucratic politics in environmental program evaluation in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java, and Bangka Belitung, they found that the bureaucracy is actively involved not only in the momentum of regional elections, but also during the implementation of public services (Alfirdaus and Rouli Manalu 2020). Bureaucratic politics is carried out by setting low performance standards in order to secure appraisals of achievements and performance. The purpose is none other than to secure the career and position of the official in charge of it. The officials also prefer to hand over the implementation of programs and activities to Third Parties in order to avoid the potential risks regarding the execution.

Referring to some of the results of the research above, it can be drawn from the essence that bureaucracy will naturally always be involved in the political process. In fact, Peters said that the apolitical state civil apparatus, dichotomous political and administrative relations, and neutral public officials are outdated views (Peters 2018). Why is bureaucracy politically active? According to Macalou, it can be explained in at least two perspectives: bureaucrats as social *welfare maximizers* and bureaucrats as *self-interest seekers* (Macalou 2010). The first perspective is promoted by scientists such as Bentham, Von Mises, Weber, Bardhan, and Das who believe that every bureaucrat pursues the realization of the common good. Weber's principle of

impersonality in the ideal type of bureaucracy, for example, clearly asserts that aspects of a personal nature (including vested interests) are usually not involved in the organizational movements of the bureaucracy. Likewise with the spirit of advancing the general welfare of the bureaucracy in newly independent countries. Bardhan found that bureaucrats in these countries generally prioritized the ideals of the common good over the pursuit of personal gain. In several studies they conducted showed that this public interest motive became a guide and compass for direction in every movement, attitude, and action of policies taken and decisions made.

Unlike Weber, Bardhan, and the other figures mentioned above, other scientists such as Tullocks, Downs, Niskanen, and Bates as quoted by Macalao believe that instead of fighting for the public interest, every bureaucrat essentially puts his personal interest first in the priority list of motives and main reasons for every attitude chosen and action taken. Bates, in his study of sub-Saharan Africa, found that bureaucrats massively took advantage of the region's industrialization process by charging more like bribes for every service provided to citizens. While Tullock, Niskanen, and Krueger found that every bureaucrat is a rational individual who always seeks to maximize personal interests, including in the form of salary, power, reputation, patronage, and ease of work (Macalou 2010).

This second perspective is the substance echoed by *public choice theory*. Blending the logic of economics with political science, this theory assumes that every human being, including bureaucracies and political agents, is rational. That is, every stance and move taken is usually aimed at maximizing personal gain, with little cost possible in lieu of it.

Referring to the two perspectives above, it can be understood that in each bureaucrat there are two interests, namely carrying out administrative duties of government and at the same time also fighting for the interests of power politics. The personal profit motive, as believed by public choice theory, is more dominant, triggering the bureaucracy to become actively involved in the process of power politics.

The assumption was supported by data listed in *the 2018 Policy Brief of the Civil Servants Commission* concerning the Urgency of Enforcing the Neutrality of the State Civil Apparatus. There was stated that violations of neutrality of civil servants are caused by the internal motives such as obtaining/maintaining position and preserving social harmony along with external factors such as pressure from other parties, and the absence of sanctions that can deter the perpetrators.



Considering the rising number of bureaucrats pursuing political posts nowadays, like happened in 2020 local election in Bandung, Cirebon, Cianjur, Sukabumi, South Tangerang, Semarang, South Solok, South Sulawesi, Mamuju, Sampang, Lamongan, Sukoharjo, Asahan, South Lombok, North Lombok, Central Hulu Sungai, Batanghari, East Kotawaringin, Natuna, Kaimana, the question of whether they could bring about a reestablishment of bureaucratic polity in Indonesia come into surface. Since the bureaucratic polity thriving in the struggling democratic state, it has been some concerning analysis on the possibility of bureaucratic polity resurgence in Indonesia (Setiyono 2024). Since there were findings of Indonesia's democracy declining (Mujani and Liddle 2021; Warburton 2020), their concerns are reasonable.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

Based on the literature review outlined above, several conclusions can be drawn. *First*, bureaucracy is not a passive entity merely subject to decisions made by political officials; rather, it is an active political actor that plays role in almost every formulation and implementation of political decisions and public policies. *Second*, politics and administration are not two separate entities with clear and distinct polarities; rather, they exist on a continuum that allows administration/bureaucracy to play a reciprocal political role. This includes involvement in the formulation and implementation of policies or even discretion over existing policies. *Third*, bureaucratic politicization was motivated by two interests: maximizing public welfare and optimizing personal interests. However, in practice, instead of advocating for the maximization of public welfare, bureaucrats tend to prioritize their personal interests as self-interest seekers in every process of decision making. While not completely neglecting their institutional goals, bureaucrats tend to place their individual goals above their institutional interests. Finally, it has been concerned of bureaucratic polity re-establishment in Indonesia since the number of bureaucrats pursuing political posts was continuously increasing.

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