



POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT BUREAUCRACY

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Abstract

Although politics must exist in government bureaucracy, they are two different things. On the other hand, political institutions and bureaucrats do not only dominate government bureaucracy. Max Weber argued that independent political forces form bureaucracy. It sits above or below competing political actors. The bureaucracy is positioned as a neutral force, meaning that the bureaucracy is not more inclined to carry out the policies or orders of the governing power, while other political powers are unwilling. However, the bureaucracy prioritizes the interests of the state and the people as a whole so that whoever the political power that governs the bureaucrats and bureaucracy provides the best service to them.

Keywords: Politics, Bureaucracy, Government.

Abstrak

Meskipun politik harus ada dalam birokrasi pemerintahan, keduanya merupakan dua hal yang berbeda. Di sisi lain, lembaga politik dan birokrat tidak hanya mendominasi birokrasi pemerintahan. Max Weber berpendapat bahwa kekuatan politik yang independen membentuk birokrasi. Birokrasi berada di atas atau di bawah aktor politik yang bersaing. Birokrasi diposisikan sebagai kekuatan netral, artinya birokrasi tidak lebih cenderung menjalankan kebijakan atau perintah penguasa, sementara kekuatan politik lain enggan. Namun, birokrasi mengutamakan kepentingan negara dan rakyat secara keseluruhan sehingga siapa pun kekuatan politik yang memerintah, para birokrat dan birokrasi memberikan pelayanan terbaik kepada mereka.

Kata kunci: Politik, Birokrasi, Pemerintahan.

Introduction

Bureaucracy is a state organization system with very complex tasks and this clearly requires good government management operational control. It is very unfortunate, if the routine work of bureaucratic apparatus often causes new problems that make the bureaucracy static and less sensitive to environmental changes and even tends to be resistant to renewal. Conditions like this often give rise to the potential for maladministration practices that lead to corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Starting from these conditions, the central and regional governments need to immediately carry out bureaucratic reforms that are not only at the level of commitment but also compared to the level of real life.

Etymologically, the word bureaucracy is bureaucracy (English bureau + cracy). In state organizations, bureaucracy is considered a machine in the administration of the state, meaning that the understanding of bureaucracy is equated with the government which is the personification of the state. In everyday life, the term bureaucracy can be interpreted as a rational organization, this is based on the idea that bureaucracy is an organization that can be organized rationally, then bureaucracy can be understood as something normative that is run by state actors or the government in organizing public services. At a more practical level, bureaucracy is implemented by state actors or government employees in an organization that has a clear, formal structure and rules and has duties and functions in the process of achieving state goals, including public administration, service and development.

Politics comes from the Greek "country" or "city", and "politics" means a relationship between people who live together. This relationship creates rules, authority, official behavior, legality of power,



and ultimately power. However, politics can also be defined as the wisdom, power and authority of government, conflict management that reaches a national agreement, and ultimately the power of the masses. However, the meaning of the word politics is not only that. Politics itself basically does not have one meaning, but rather has many meanings. However, on the other hand, there is a presumption of utility principles among bureaucrats and entrepreneurs who have connections and relations with political parties in power and certain bureaucracies. This situation, *ceteris paribus*, aligns with political patrons and patron-client relationships that exploit the turbulence of economic development to create political cartels. This article will review the relationship between Politics And Government Bureaucracy

Method

The researcher employed a literature study or literature review as the method for collecting and analyzing data from scholarly journals discussing the research topic. This process enabled the researcher to understand concepts, theories, and previous research findings related to the subject of the study. By conducting a search for relevant literature, the researcher was able to find articles that aligned with the topic and select the most relevant ones for analysis.

In conducting the literature study, the researcher performed an in-depth analysis of the data presented in the selected articles. The researcher examined and analyzed prior research findings, concepts, and theories related to the research topic. In doing so, the researcher could comprehend the development of previous studies and identify existing research gaps. A literature study also allows the researcher to identify the most relevant themes related to the topic and understand how previous studies have addressed it. This provides a strong foundation for conducting the research and helps in developing more precise research hypotheses.

According to Creswell (2014), a literature study is an important method in both qualitative and quantitative research. It can assist researchers in understanding concepts, theories, and prior findings related to the topic of the study.

Discussion

According to Thoha (2014:27), government bureaucracy cannot be separated from political processes. Governance is inherently linked to political aspects. As we know, politics involves individuals who behave and act politically and are organized politically by interest groups that seek to influence the government to adopt and implement policies or actions that benefit them while disregarding the interests of other groups. These societal groups support the government. Interest groups in society will always be involved in government bureaucracy, either directly or indirectly.

From Weber's perspective (as cited in Thoha, 2014:19–20), there are three important components in his concept of bureaucracy. First, bureaucracy is seen as a technical instrument. Second, bureaucracy is considered an independent power within society, yet it functions solely as a technical tool. Third, this perspective arises because bureaucrats are often unable to separate their actions from the interests of certain social groups. Weber's view on political implications is reflected in the second and third points. The ideal bureaucratic process can be influenced by political elements. It seems that the characteristics of social life have already been accounted for and cannot be separated from politics.

However, government bureaucracy is a system that organizes governance, consisting of various interrelated subsystems, including authority, core functions, human resources, work procedures, and so on. Government bureaucracy serves as the front line in delivering services to the public. Therefore, bureaucracy must remain neutral, both politically and administratively; if bureaucracy becomes a political force, it will lose its neutrality and side with certain political powers. This means that the services required by the public will not meet their expectations.

In essence, bureaucracy is a means to achieve predetermined goals; however, the process of setting those goals is a political task and falls under the control of political officials. Therefore, each staff member and government bureaucratic official functions as the driving force of a machine that has no



personal interest. Thus, government bureaucracy should operate as a neutral force, free from the influence of specific groups or factions.

However, government bureaucracy has yet to fully implement a neutral policy in many developing countries, including Indonesia. Thoha (2014:7) argues that familial culture influences the power hierarchy in Indonesia, reinforcing authoritarian practices. If lower-ranking officials do not receive approval from higher authorities, they will not act. This inevitably leads to inefficiency and hinders development and public service delivery.

Ideally, every country should have a bureaucracy, as it is a logical consequence of the primary role of government and the state in ensuring the welfare of its people. Furthermore, bureaucracy should not be perceived as something complicated or burdensome by certain individuals.

There are several real-life cases that illustrate how civil servants or the bureaucracy are often found to be politically non-neutral in practice. For example, the replacement of echelon I and II officials often involves those who have political affiliations or seek affiliation with the Minister. In the budgeting process, certain programs are inserted that carry the mission of the political party to which the Minister belongs. This practice is even more apparent at the regional level, where long-serving employees align themselves—albeit not openly—with incumbent officials in hopes of securing positions.

Etzioni (1985; Peters, 1992; Riggs, 1991) argue that bureaucracy cannot be separated from politics, as it is impossible to distinguish administrative matters from political ones. Riggs emphasizes that those who believe bureaucracy is politically neutral are essentially assuming that bureaucrats are powerless agents without self-interest or authority. Guy Peters and Jon Pierre (2004) further developed this idea through their theory of the politicization of public service, which aligns with Riggs' theory. They define the politicization of public service as the substitution of political criteria for merit-based criteria in the selection, retention, promotion, rewarding, and disciplining of public service members. Peters and Pierre use this concept to explain the phenomena of governmental bureaucracy, acknowledging that it is inseparable from the bureaucratic structure established for public service. In this context, bureaucracy plays a crucial role in determining “who gets what” from the public sector, as it holds the authority over resources—both public goods and services—that are allocated and distributed to society.

The practice of government bureaucracy is a crucial aspect in running the machinery of governance and development. According to Miftah Toha (2003), nearly all nations in the world view government action—executed through its bureaucratic machinery—as the best way to establish authority and enforce regulations that bind all parties. Government bureaucracy plays a highly strategic role in executing governance and development because it serves as an institution capable of offering political functions in resolving political conflicts that arise between individuals and groups.

In this context, government bureaucracy can play an important role in resolving political conflicts that emerge among political parties or other interest groups. For instance, if there is a split within a political party supported by the ruling regime, the bureaucracy may act as a key player in resolving the conflict. This could weaken and divide the conflicting party, allowing government policies to proceed more smoothly.

However, it must be noted that the practice of government bureaucracy can also have negative consequences if not managed properly. If the bureaucracy becomes too powerful and lacks accountability, it may lead to abuses of power and serve personal interests. Therefore, it is essential to ensure that the government bureaucracy operates professionally, effectively, and accountably, so it can deliver quality public services and support the functioning of a democratic government.

In this context, government bureaucracy must be operated based on the principles of good governance, such as transparency, accountability, and public participation. By doing so, the bureaucracy can become an effective and professional institution in implementing governance and development, as well as providing quality public services. Therefore, it is essential to continually pursue bureaucratic reform and to enhance the capacity and integrity of the government bureaucracy in order to implement better and more democratic governance, as both a state administrator and public servant.



In its development, bureaucracy faces various challenges, which are increasingly influenced by rapid changes in the strategic environment and driven by the rapid advancement of science, technology, communication, and information. These developments impact the orientation and performance of the bureaucracy, which is expected to carry out its duties and functions more professionally. The management of public services and improvement of development quality for society are the main objectives of establishing an effective government bureaucracy. Thus, in this context, bureaucracy becomes a tool to achieve these goals.

The challenges faced by government bureaucracy influenced by the strategic environment internally due to global factors include: feudal economic globalization, the paradigm of governance and decentralization, advancement in science, technology, communication, and information, human rights, democratization, and environmental changes, among others. Meanwhile, internal challenges caused by national and local environments that synergize in addressing global dynamics include: corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN), feudal bureaucratic culture, authoritarian leadership style, dysfunctional bureaucratic systems, structures and behaviors, as well as the low quality of bureaucratic knowledge and skills (professionalism and performance).

These challenges have led to the widespread emergence of "bureaucratic pathology," which necessitates the strengthening and development of government bureaucracy capacity — a "capacity government bureaucracy" that functions based on values and ethics, with a structure and culture oriented towards performance, competence, professionalism, and proportionality.

Government bureaucracy has relevance to the governance environment based on the system, structure, and culture in carrying out its functions, processes, and behaviors in policy-making and public service. The existence of bureaucracy in administering governance faces both internal and external challenges, often referred to as "bureaucratic pathologies," thus requiring government bureaucratic reform.

Government bureaucratic reform is necessary to respond to changes in the strategic environment of governance. This reform can be carried out through reorientation, revitalization, reconstruction, and refunctionalization based on a new paradigm of government bureaucracy that focuses on changes in bureaucracy, mindset, and transforming behaviour, aligned with the values, systems, structures, and culture of state governance.

Given that government bureaucracy represents the transformation of both national and public interests, it holds a strategic and dominant position in the state administrative system as a vehicle for achieving the goals of government.

The most blatant process of bureaucratic politicization could be seen during the New Order regime. At that time, the bureaucracy was positioned as one of the instruments for mass mobilization through the enforcement of mono-loyalty among civil servants (bureaucrats). In fact, during the New Order, the bureaucracy was regarded as one of the pillars of Suharto's regime, alongside the military (ABRI) and Golkar party.

In every election, civil servants and their families were not only required to vote for Golkar but were also expected to act as political machinery to gather support from their respective communities. The bureaucracy was used as a tool to serve the interests of Suharto's regime in maintaining power, which led to a blockage in the circulation of competitive elites.

Logically and in practice, absolute power that is not contested regularly, fairly, and competitively tends to decay within the government bureaucracy. This decay was indicated by discrimination, collusion, nepotism in recruitment, career barriers for non-partisans, political party intervention in determining who received privileges, positions, and public service benefits, as well as the misuse of public facilities and program funds for Golkar's benefit, and even widespread corruption.

The bureaucracy became a "cash cow" or a political party tool to achieve its goals. The New Order bureaucracy underwent "Parkinsonization" — a process of turning bureaucratic functions into a means of accommodating the ruling regime's political cadres.



The strong political party intervention in the bureaucracy has caused significant negative impacts on the professionalism and performance of the bureaucracy. As a result, the bureaucracy cannot function optimally and tends to demonstrate poor performance. This is due to the misuse of power and resources for personal and group interests, where funds that should have been allocated for the public good are instead used to enrich individuals and ruling elites. The bureaucracy has become a field for rent-seeking by irresponsible bureaucrats.

The impact of this phenomenon is the erosion of public trust in the bureaucracy, a deeply concerning situation with potentially widespread negative consequences. The public has lost confidence in the ability and integrity of the bureaucracy to carry out its duties and functions, leading to skepticism and doubt about its capacity to provide effective and professional public services. This is highly detrimental to the stability and progress of a country, as an effective and professional bureaucracy is a key pillar in operating government and development.

Public trust in the bureaucracy is critically important, as it directly affects the legitimacy and effectiveness of government in fulfilling its responsibilities. If the public no longer trusts the bureaucracy, it becomes difficult for the government to achieve its goals and objectives. Therefore, serious efforts are needed to address this issue and to build a professional, effective, and accountable bureaucracy.

Building a professional, effective, and accountable bureaucracy requires strong commitment and effort from all parties, including the government, the bureaucracy, and the public. The government needs to implement comprehensive bureaucratic reforms, including enhancing transparency and accountability, as well as improving existing systems and procedures. The bureaucracy must improve its capabilities and integrity in carrying out its duties and functions, as well as enhance public service delivery. Meanwhile, the public needs to increase its participation and oversight of the bureaucracy to ensure that it operates in accordance with the established goals and objectives.

Thus, public trust in the bureaucracy can be restored and national development can proceed smoothly. A professional, effective, and accountable bureaucracy can serve as a crucial pillar in running the machinery of government and development, so that the goals and objectives set can be achieved more effectively and efficiently. Therefore, the effort to build a professional, effective, and accountable bureaucracy is of utmost importance and must be undertaken seriously and comprehensively.

With the current condition of the bureaucracy being strongly influenced and intervened by political parties—or in other words, the loss of neutrality within the government bureaucracy—there has been a growing movement to restore bureaucratic neutrality, as advocated by Max Weber and other theorists of the state. This movement began to gain momentum in the period leading up to the fall of the New Order regime and the emergence of the Reform Era. Unfortunately, even in the Reform Era, the expected neutrality of the bureaucracy has in practice become increasingly elusive. Bureaucratic bias has even developed rapidly, especially when political parties that win presidential, gubernatorial, mayoral, or regency elections form coalitions.

Conclusion

Bureaucracy and politics have a very close relationship within a system of government. Bureaucracy, as a state or government instrument, plays an important role in running the administration and achieving national goals. Meanwhile, politics, as a process of decision-making and policy formulation, significantly impacts the direction and objectives of the bureaucracy. In practice, bureaucracy and politics are interrelated and inseparable. Bureaucracy requires political input to determine the direction and priority of policies, while politics relies on bureaucracy as an instrument to implement policies and achieve goals. Therefore, the existence of bureaucracy and politics in government is inevitable.



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