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From Bureaucracy into Political Office: How Regional Secretary Staging Up to Political Post in North Lombok

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Abstract

Bureaucrats are active political actors. Along with their administrative role, they have their own political interests. Through a qualitative-phenomenological approach, this research aims to discover the strategies of regional secretary in staging up its role from high administrative official to political post at the regional level. Primary data were collected through interviews with key participants, while secondary data was obtained through searching libraries, archives, and documents relevant to the research subject. The data obtained is then organized, sorted, selected, and analyzed both textural description and structural description through source triangulation methodology and member check validation. The research findings indicate that the regional secretary has political advantage due to its extensive authority that covers nearly all aspects of administrative governance. This authority serves as a fundamental foundation for shaping self-image and performance, particularly in the endeavor of transforming the position from high administrative officials to political roles. However, this position does not significantly impact the success of the transformation unless supported by key political actors.

Keywords: Bureaucracy, Regional Secretary, Key Political Actors

1. Introduction

This research aims to examine the politicization of bureaucracy by the Regional Secretary. Since the discussions of bureaucracy politicization emerged in Indonesia, it has been revolved around how local leaders politicized bureaucrats to lead them to specific political locus, especially during the stages of elections. Generally, these studies have delved into the phenomena of conditioning, recruiting, directing, and mobilizing of the bureaucratic group to support specific election participants. Various forms can be observed, ranging from placing relatives in bureaucratic positions before and after elections (Effendi, 2018); assigning civil servants to the election organizing secretariat (Yamin & Agustino, 2014); regulatory politics (Firnans, 2016; Mahdiana & Wisnu, 2018); economic policy expansion before elections (Farhan, 2013); and utilizing bureaucratic resources for political party activities and/or election participants. This includes mobilizing state apparatus to enliven political campaign activities, promotions, mutations, and demotions of bureaucratic

positions based on political contributions (Firnas & Maesarini, 2011; Ratna, 2012; Wahiyuddin, 2014; Kusuma Budi, 2014; Hamid, 2011; Katharina, 2018; Gunanto, 2020; Chairullah, et al. 2022), and others.

The bureaucracy in those studies is assumed to be a passive object that either voluntarily or coercively carry out actions which are against the provisions of laws and regulations, such as attending covert socialization activities for the candidacy of incumbent regional heads, raising campaign logistics, mobilizing voter support, and the like. In fact, in the study of bureaucratic politicization, there is another study theme that is no less important, namely the utilization of bureaucratic politics by administrative officials for the benefit of power politics.

Among the various studies of bureaucratic politicization above, not many discuss in detail how the process occurs. Researchers tend to look at macro phenomena that occur, but do not explain in detail important bureaucratic actors, strategies built, bridging the interests of politicians with bureaucrats, and so on. In this context, the placement of regional secretary as research objects is important, considering that if you look at the regulations regarding the authority and duties of regional secretaries as stipulated in Government Regulation Number 72 of 2019 concerning Regional Apparatus which clearly states that district/city regional secretaries are tasked with assisting regents/mayors in formulating policies and administrative coordination of the implementation of regional apparatus duties and services Administrative, then the role of the regional secretary is obviously very vital. The authority of the Regional Secretary covers almost all aspects of government administration ranging from operating core elements to supporting staff. With this great authority, the regional secretary cannot be underestimated.

Because this study focuses on an object that has not received much attention, namely the bureaucratic politicization by the highest-level administrative officials which is carried out consciously, voluntarily, and deliberately for the electoral interests of themselves and/or other parties, the focus of this study is directed at the highest position of bureaucracy at the regional level, namely the regional secretary.

By capturing the regional secretary as the research focus, this study aims to convey that in the swift currents of bureaucratic politicization, bureaucrats remain a crucial political entity worthy of attention. The research is anticipated to enhance understanding of bureaucracy, portraying it not only as an administrative government manager but also as a political agent with vested interests, strategies, and an intriguing playing field to observe. This research was conducted in North Lombok Regency. The selection of this location was based on; first, it demonstrated the durability of the position of the regional secretary, extending beyond the normal term of office. This fact becomes even more intriguing when the social and political contexts in each area indicate competitive and dynamic scenes.

The provisions of Article 117 of the Civil Servants Law regulate that High Leadership Positions can only be held for a maximum of five years and may be extended based on performance achievements, competency alignment, and organizational needs after obtaining approval from the personnel management official and coordinating with the National Civil Service Agency (Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara or KASN).

The Civil Service Development Officer (Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian or PPK) is an official with the authority to determine the appointment, transfer, and termination of civil service employees, as well as the development and guidance of civil servants in government agencies in accordance with the provisions of laws and regulations. At the provincial level, the Civil Service Development Officer is the governor, while at the district level, it is the regent. Referring to these provisions, the regent's approval in the process of extending the term of high-ranking officials, especially the position of the regional secretary, becomes an indispensable prerequisite that cannot be rejected. In other words, to continue serving as a regional secretary after completing the five-year term, an individual must convince the regent that they have no performance issues and can collaborate effectively with the regional head of the area where they work. Therefore, the ability of the North Lombok Regional Secretary to sustain his position for more than five years is an interesting phenomenon to be studied.

The North Lombok Regional Secretary, SU, managed to sustain the position for 10 years (2010-2020) until retirement as the North Lombok Regional Secretary despite two changes in political leadership within the North Lombok Regency Government. These changes involved two different coalition parties, as illustrated in the following table:

Table 1: The Dynamics of the Regent and Vice Regent Positions in North Lombok

No	Era	Candidates	Supporting Party
1.	2010-2015	DS – NA	Demokrat, PNI Marhaenisme, Hanura, PKS, PKB, PPPI, PDP
2.	2015-2020	NA – SAR	PDIP, Gerindra, PAN, PKB, PBB

Sources: data processed from various sources

Secondly, SU ran as candidate for vice-regent in the 2020 Regional Elections alongside the incumbent regent NA. After being officially declared as participants in the Regional Elections, SU resigned from the position of the Secretary of North Lombok Regency in July 2020, approximately six months before reaching retirement age.

Bureaucratic politicization is different from bureaucratic politics. Bureaucratic politicization is the replacement of ethical-objective qualifications such as public interest, personal capacity, personal competence, and individual and organizational performance with other preferences that are subjective and political. Meanwhile, bureaucratic politics entrusts bureaucratic involvement in the political process of decision-making and public policy within an ethical, normative, procedural, and objective framework. That is, bureaucratic involvement is motivated by public interest, based on clear legal provisions, moving in agreed mechanisms, and in line with the qualifications and competencies possessed.

Bureaucratic politics is carried out in two models, namely cooperative-collaborative and coercive-confrontational. The cooperative-collaborative strategy occurs when government administrative officials provide full support in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes of policies decided by political officials, including when political officials strive to win power struggles. On the other hand, the coercive-confrontational strategy takes place when bureaucratic leaders acting as administrative government managers ignore, oppose, or even sabotage policies decided by political officials who are both partners and superiors.

Modus operandi used in each strategy has various forms. Some modus used in the cooperative-collaborative strategy include idea politics, distribution politics of public services, budget allocation politics, and personnel policy politics. Idea politics, according to Mallarangeng (2000), is carried out by contributing ideas and thoughts for the initiation and innovation of policies aimed at improving organizational performance and enhancing the quality of public services. This can also be referred to as substantive politics. Distribution politics of public services, as described by Golden & Min (2013), is one of the bureaucratic political models performed by making political decisions to allocate specific goods, services, and public services to certain desired groups, while budget allocation politics involve making political decisions to allocate specific budgets for programs, activities, or support to specific parties or certain groups of the community. Fregetto (1997) refers to this modus as distributive politics. Meanwhile, personnel policy politics relate to the option of applying the principle of meritocracy in personnel management, whether it is applied purely based on free competition and competence or whether opportunities are given for affirmative policies that consider not only competence but also aspects of representing groups of society that are underrepresented and marginalized in government bureaucratic organizations (Kuipers, 2022).

Politics and bureaucracy are not two separate entities that are polarized firmly and tangibly, but are on a continuum that allows the administration/bureaucracy to also play a reciprocal political role, including by being involved in the process of policy formulation and implementation or even exercising discretion over existing and enacted policies. In this context, bureaucrats become actors as well as initiators in utilizing the administrative role of government by transforming their administrative roles for the benefit of power politics. High bureaucratic

officials exploit social, political, and economic resources under their control to then be used as basic capital to strengthen positioning and increase political support in regional elections, both for themselves and for others outside the bureaucratic structure.

Research that places bureaucrats as active political actors in the politicization of bureaucracy has been carried out, among others by Clerk (1972), Temple (1999), Hughes (1994), Huque & Rahman (2003), van Gunten (2012), Alamsyah (2003), Alfirdaus & Manalu (2020), and Saglam (2022).

Clerk (1972) says that the concept that administrators are only passive instruments in the process of public policy formulation not only oversimplifies the problem but is also unrealistic. Bureaucracy according to Temple (1999) is not a vacuum that only carries out the orders and directions of politicians but has its own will and power to determine attitudes and take action. In addition to not being in a vacuum, bureaucracy according to Hughes (1994) is also *inherent* in the political process, so fundamentally it can be said that the administrative process is at the same time also a political process.

Huque & Rahman (2003) in their research in Bangladesh found several preconditions that gave way to bureaucratic dominance in the political process, including the establishment of organizational structure, administrative experience, expertise in managing bureaucracy on the one hand, while at the same time the capacity of available political institutions is not strong enough, the experience of existing political leaders is still inadequate, and political stability has not been fully maintained. In this context, van Gunten (2012) specifically mentions expertise in the economic sector that places bureaucrats in an important position in the policy formulation process.

If Clerk says the idea of passive bureaucracy is unrealistic, then Alamsyah (2003) explicitly states it as utopian. Since individual bureaucrats have different values, views, abilities, powers, and interests, the idea that bureaucracy is only a passive instrument in the decision-making process can thus be dismissed as impossible. This thinking is reinforced by research conducted by Alfirdaus & Manalu (2020) which found that bureaucracy has proven to be actively involved not only in the momentum of power politics competition in the regions, but also during the implementation of public services. In other words, the politicization of the bureaucracy is not only aimed at winning over others but also protecting the interests of the bureaucracy itself.

The widespread politicization of bureaucracy in Indonesia is supported by many factors. Some believe in the influence of socio-cultural factors playing a role, while others emphasize the contribution of the government system that significantly contributes to the perpetuation of the practice of politicizing bureaucracy in Indonesia. Socio-cultural factors identified by researchers include spoil system (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019), patronage-clientelism (Wahyudi, 2014; Yamin & Agustino, 2014; and Pratama, 2017), and patrimonialism (Jati, 2012).

Aspinall and Berenschot state that the existence of the spoil system in Indonesian society has provided opportunities and sociological legitimacy for the winners of national elections (Pemilu) or regional elections (Pilkada) to reward electoral support within the government bureaucracy. This reward takes the form of job promotions within the organizational structure, granted to bureaucrats who provided electoral support during local leadership elections. Simultaneously, the system allows for the demotion of officials known to be political opponents at the same time.

Meanwhile, Wahyudi (2018), Yamin & Agustino (2014), and Pratama (2017) found that filling positions and appointing bureaucratic officials in the regions are still dominated by the spirit of transactional-material patronage and clientelism with nuances of social kinship. The same thing was found by Jati (2012) in his research related to the strategy of bureaucratic co-optation by Sultan Hamengkubuwono X who utilized the culture of patrimonialism in society to support the Sultan to become the Governor of the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY) in the discussion of the Draft Special Autonomy Law (RUUK) for the Special Region of Yogyakarta (DIY).

If the above-mentioned researchers identify socio-cultural factors, other researchers have found legal and governance factors contributing significantly to the proliferation of bureaucratic politicization. Firnas (2016)

asserts that the politicization of bureaucracy is triggered and sustained by the implementation of regional autonomy and direct regional elections, a conclusion in line with the research findings of Humau (2022) regarding bureaucratic polarization in North Central Timor Regency.

Building on Firms's study, alongside Humau, Wahiyuddin (2014), Rakhmawanto (2017), Katharina (2018), and Hidayat (2021) found that bureaucratic politicization is difficult to avoid because the authority and responsibility for personnel development in the regions, such as transfer, promotion, and demotion of structural officials, are still held by political officials or, in this case, regional heads.

In line with that, Brierly (2017) in his research in Ghana on bureaucratic relations with politicians also found a condition where the bureaucracy cannot reject the wishes and aspirations of politicians even though it clearly violates rules and regulations due to the great influence of politicians in determining the careers of bureaucratic officials.

In addition, the existence of conflicting regulations between the obligation to maintain neutrality on the one hand and the obligation to obey the orders of superiors on the other often puts bureaucrats in a dilemmatic position (Hartini, et.al., 2014; Pananrangi & Nippi, 2021). While being discreetly neutral does not guarantee the security and sustainability of office positions, being one-sided becomes a rational choice for most bureaucrats (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019), especially at the same time supervision and enforcement of neutrality violations are still not optimally carried out (Firms, 2011; Sutrisno, 2019; Sari, 2021). In such situations and conditions, bureaucracy becomes vulnerable to politicization.

The fact that regional secretary ran as vice-regent candidates in the 2020 Regional Elections indicates that the transformation of administrative officials into political figures is an inevitability. However, not all administrative officials can successfully make this transformation. This study assumes that the positions of SU as high-ranking bureaucratic officials also contributed to the decision-making of political party coalitions to support them as vice-regent candidates in their respective regencies. Nevertheless, the study also assumes that the status of the regional secretary position is not the sole factor that ultimately convinces political parties to lend their support. Other factors, such as the effective utilization of the administrative role of the regional secretary, also contribute to electoral strengthening.

Based on this, the research aims to answer several questions: What is the added-value of regional secretary position in post-reform Indonesia? Does the position contribute to the political role played by the regional secretary? How does the bureaucratic politics played by regional secretary synergize with the political power of regional head? How does regional secretary manage its own interests as administrative government manager while simultaneously playing a role as political actor striving for political position when interacting or dealing with currently influential political figures? How does the politicization of bureaucracy pave the way for regional secretary as administrative government manager to transform into government political official? What factors influence the success and failure of this role transformation?

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative-phenomenological approach. The analytical units are individual, namely the Regional Secretary of North Lombok Regency for the 2010-2020 term. The research subjects are related to the strategic role of regional secretary in bureaucratic politics at the local level. The politics and politicization of bureaucracy that are of interest in this study involve the interactions between the regional secretaries, the regional heads, and the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) in the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies in the region, which have implications for the local election process.

Data mining is carried out through interviews and documentary studies. Interviews are conducted with the regional secretary as the main participant and government officials directly involved in the regional head election processes, policy formulation, budgeting, and human resource placement within the local government organization.

Additionally, interviews are conducted with social and political activists at the level of North Lombok Regency as significant others.

Documentary studies are conducted through tracing local government archives/documentation related to the process of changing regional heads, policy formulation, budgeting, and the placement of bureaucratic human resources within the local government organization.

The data and information obtained are then processed by reduction, selection, compilation, and analyzed with interpretation techniques. The data that has been collected is sorted based on the degree of relevance, so that the data that is really appropriate and needed can be separated from the data that is not needed. All relevant data is then compiled systematically for further analysis interpretively to arrive at the conclusion of the study.

3. Results

The regional secretary serves as the head of the regional secretariat. The regional secretariat of a regency is one of the components of the regency's local government apparatus, along with other components such as the secretariat of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), inspectorate, agencies, boards, and districts. The supervision and control of the organization of regency local government components, including the regional secretary, are carried out by the governor, who serves as the representative of the central government in the region.

The position of regional secretary is classified as a high-ranking official position. In accordance with the provisions of Article 155 of Law Number 5 of 2014, the filling of high-ranking official positions conducted by PPK by first forming a selection committee. The committee selects three names of candidates for each high-ranking official position vacancy. Three names of the candidates for the selected pre-primary leadership office were presented to the PPK through the Authorized Office; The three selected candidates are submitted to PPK through the Authorized Official. The PPK selects one out of the three to be appointed and inaugurated as a high-ranking official. Specifically for high-ranking officials leading the regency secretariat, coordination is done with the governor.

The Regency PPK is the regent. The PPK is prohibited from replacing High-Ranking Officials for two years from the appointment of the High-Ranking Official, unless the High-Ranking Official violates the provisions of laws and regulations and no longer meets the specified job requirements. The replacement of high-ranking officials, both principal and intermediate, before two years can be carried out after obtaining the approval of the President. The process of filling the position of regency regional secretary begins with the regent acting as the PPK. The regent consults in writing at least three candidates for the position of regency secretary to the governor after considering the selection committee's recommendations. This consultation is conducted before seeking written approval from the chairman of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) of the regency. The results of the consultation are then conveyed in writing by the governor to the regent in the form of an official document. If within thirty days after receiving the written consultation request, there is no written response from the governor, the regent's proposal is considered to have been consulted.

The regency regional secretary can be dismissed from the position without prior consultation with the governor if the individual resigns, submits a request to resign as a civil servant, reaches the retirement age, is physically or mentally unfit as declared by a doctor, undergoes organizational streamlining, takes leave outside the state's responsibility, or is appointed to a state official position.

The regency regional secretary can be dismissed outside the aforementioned provisions by first consulting in writing with the governor, stating the reasons for the dismissal beyond the aforementioned provisions. Upon such proposal, the governor conveys their written recommendation to the regent.

Based on the above description, it can be concluded that when candidates for the position of regency regional secretary go through the process of occupying and maintaining the position, they need to communicate with the regent, the head of the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), and the governor. The ability to establish communication with these parties determines the likelihood of both candidates to occupy and maintain the position of regency regional secretary.

The regional secretary has significant access to the available resources in the region. Referring to the provisions of Article 29 of Presidential Regulation Number 18 of 2016, as amended by Presidential Regulation Number 72 of 2019 concerning Regional Apparatus, it is stated that the regency regional secretary is tasked with assisting the regent in formulating policies and administratively coordinating the implementation of duties of regional apparatus as well as administrative services. In carrying out these duties, the regional secretary is authorized to perform functions such as coordinating the formulation of regional policies, coordinating the implementation of tasks of Regional Apparatus Work Units (SKPD), monitoring and evaluating the implementation of regional policies, providing administrative services, and fostering civil servants in regional agencies, as well as implementing other functions assigned by the regent related to their duties and functions.

In the management of regional finances, the regional secretary performs the task of formulating planning, budgeting, implementation, bookkeeping, reporting, and accountability, as well as financial oversight on behalf of the head of the region. In this regard, the regional secretary serves as the Head of the Regional Government Budget Team (TAPD).

Apart from orchestrating SKPD, the regional secretary also acts as a 'bridge' connecting, communicating, and synergizing the vision and mission of the head of the region with the aspirations of the community through the legislative members. Therefore, every regional secretary is required to communicate effectively with the head of the region as the authority in managing regional finances and with the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) as a partner in the discussion of regional government programs, activities, and budgets.

The position of the regency regional secretary as a high-ranking official at the highest structural level in the regional bureaucracy, with all the inherent authority, entails two conflicting consequences, especially when they have the intention to run for the position of a regional head or deputy regional head. The position can be a blessing and a curse. It becomes a blessing when all the attributes associated with it can positively serve as a foundation to achieve a more esteemed position, such as holding a political position in the executive domain. Conversely, the position can invite misfortune when the prestige of the held office generates prejudice and discomfort from superiors with similar aspirations to run for the position of a regional head or deputy regional head.

Legal provisions state that the regional head is the PPK in the region. The PPK is an official who has the authority to determine the appointment, transfer, and termination of civil servants and the development of civil service management in government agencies in accordance with the provisions of laws and regulations. At the provincial level, the PPK is the governor, while at the district level, it is the regent.

The provision in Article 117 of Law Number 5 of 2014 concerning State Civil Apparatus (Civil Servants Law) stipulates that the position of regency secretary as a High Leadership Position can only be held for a maximum of five years and may be extended based on performance achievements, competency suitability, and organizational needs after obtaining approval from The Civil Service Development Officer (regent) and coordinating with KASN.

Referring to the provisions, the regent's approval in the process of extending the tenure of high-ranking officials, especially the position of the regency secretary, becomes a prerequisite that cannot be rejected. In other words, to continue serving as the regency secretary after the five-year term, someone must convince the regent that they have no performance issues and can collaborate effectively with the head of the region where they work.

The data obtained through searches of mass media sources indicates that, following the implementation of the Civil Servants Law, at least two regency regional secretaries were dismissed due to having held the position for more than five years, namely Jaka Sawaldi in Klaten Regency and I Gede Adnya Muliadi in Karangasem Regency.

Unlike Jaka Sawaldi and I.G.A Muliadi, who were dismissed from the position of regional secretary for valid reasons, that is reaching the normal five-year term limit, some regional secretaries had to face dismissal before completing their normal term due to political factors.

The Regional Secretary of Cirebon Regency, Yayat Ruhyat, was transferred from his position before completing his normal term due to a dispute with the regent leading up to the regional elections. Yayat Ruhyat was transferred from the regional secretary to expert staff because it was revealed that he intended to run as the Vice Regent of Cirebon in the 2018 Regional Elections.

Kasrul Selang was dismissed from his position as the Secretary of the Provincial Government of Maluku by Governor Murad Ismail after holding the position for approximately 1.5 years. Governor Murad Ismail replaced Kasrul Selang shortly after receiving a reprimand from the Minister of Home Affairs, Tito Karnavian, for the low budget absorption performance in handling Covid-19. Kasrul Selang, who was appointed as the secretary by Governor Murad Ismail in February 2020, was terminated by the same person in July 2021 and reassigned to the position of Senior Expert.

The Pariaman City Regional Secretary, Indra Sakti, was reassigned from the position of city secretary to the position of Expert Staff for Economic, Financial, and Development Affairs of Pariaman City by Mayor Genius Umar on March 2, 2020. Approximately 3.5 years earlier, precisely on August 19, 2016, Indra Sakti assumed the position of city secretary after being inaugurated by Mayor Mukhlis Rahman.

Meanwhile, Syafrudin Sapsuha was dismissed from the position of Regional Secretary of Kepulauan Sula Regency for not providing a budget for the inauguration of the new Regent and Vice Regent, Fifian Adeningsi Mus and M. Saleh Marasabessy. It was previously known that Syafrudin Sapsuha was inaugurated by Regent Hendrata Thes on December 16, 2019. However, due to the perceived inability to demonstrate professional performance in providing a budget for the inauguration of the newly elected Regent and Vice Regent in the 2020 local elections, Sapsuha was dismissed by Regent Fifian on June 8, 2021.

The events described above serve as authentic evidence that the position of a regional secretary is susceptible to politicization. Furthermore, these facts also confirm that the regional secretary not only becomes the object of politicization but also actively plays a role as a subject involved in politicization.

This study examines the bureaucratic politicization events by the regional secretary in different background. Unlike Yayat Ruhyat and Herman Subaidi, SU did not experience reassignment from the position of regional secretary. He also did not challenge the incumbent, as Yayat Ruhyat and Herman Suabidi did. On the contrary, SU ran as a vice-regent candidate alongside with the incumbent regent NA.

SU is not affected by the five years limit of term regulation. He also had no performance issues as happened with Kasrul Selang, and did not suffer defeat consequences like Indra Sakti and Syafruddin Sapsuha.

SU is a career bureaucrat who has worked their way up from the bottom of the bureaucracy. He experienced a pivotal moment that elevated his profile to the main stage. SU became part of the Committee for the Formation of North Lombok Regency (KLU) in 2005, which successfully separated North Lombok Regency (KLU) from West Lombok Regency (KLB).

Despite being controversial, SU has a greater ability to comprehend with political dynamics. When there was a rift between Regent and Vice Regent, SU took a position on the side of stronger power. Since the regulation has placed the authority of surviving regional secretary under the governor, SU moved to align with Vice

Regent whose governor mostly preferred. This indicates that SU's decision to 'side' with Vice Regent was a rational decision, not an emotional one.

SU's bias towards Vice Regent was also evident through various program initiatives and activities that 'benefited' Vice Regent. This included awarding local government project contracts to individuals known to have connections with Vice Regent and could assist in the logistics of the local elections (Pilkada). Additionally, SU aided in the formulation of conceptual platform and initiated various community meetings for Vice Regent promotional purposes.

After Vice Regent was then elected as Regent of KLU for the 2015-2020 term, SU remained supportive of the implementation of the regent's vision. Observing many neglected and poorly managed local government assets, SU proposed the establishment of an agency to manage these assets, similar to the National Asset Management Agency (LMAN). The funding for this agency would come from a combination of government and private contributions. The purpose of this asset management agency was intended to help transform these assets into productive ones, contributing to the local government's revenue.

In addition, SU was also supportive of the implementation of the One Doctor One Village and Village Ambulance programs, as well as the establishment of a Front Office in every government office to improve the quality and convenience of public services. Regarding the appointment of bureaucracy officials, SU was always well-informed by the Regent.

Despite SU's stubbornness and rigidity to the members of the DPRD, the Regent continues to defend SU. He mentions that SU's rigidity is actually an effort to ensure that everything is always within the framework of regulations and not dominated by political considerations.

4. Discussion

The research findings present several implications: *first*, it reinforces the paradigm which believes that politics and administration are inseparable units and confirms their reciprocity relationship. *Second*, it proves that policies freeing the bureaucracy to express its political views as was the case during the independence era or supporting a specific political power during the Orde Baru era, are equally less ideal compared to regulations regarding the necessity for the bureaucracy to remain neutral during the Reform era. In fact, these policies have not been able to prevent the bureaucracy from getting involved in the bureaucratic politicization, either for its own interests or for the interests of others. Therefore, other alternative policy should be considered for initiation, that is to free bureaucrats from their voting rights.

Third, this research supports the statement that ethics go beyond the law. Normative law alone is not sufficient to realize a neutral bureaucracy. Strengthening the ethical awareness of the bureaucracy in the political power arena is also crucial to consider. In many instances of neutrality violations within the bureaucracy, wrongdoers often seek refuge and manoeuvre behind normative legal texts, either to avoid punishment or to manipulate violations. Therefore, ethical awareness needs to be integrated with normative legal awareness to prevent bureaucratic politicization.

Fourth, the proliferation of regional secretaries running for office as local government leaders raises speculation about the return of a bureaucratic politicization regime in the future. The recent phenomenon of many regional secretaries pursuing political positions through regional elections has sparked speculation about the return of a bureaucratic politicization regime in the future. This speculation gains strength when, at the same time, political democratization in Indonesia is declining, as stated by political scientists such as Mujani & Liddle (2021) and Warburton (2020).

5. Conclusion

The regional secretary holds a crucial position in the local government system. Normatively, they have extensive authority that covers almost every aspect of government administration, including the executing elements (operating core) such as regional offices, the supporting elements (technostructure) encompassing regional agencies, and supporting staff. In terms of regional financial management, the regional secretary is granted attributive authority based on legal regulations to coordinate TAPD, responsible for formulating programs and the regional government budget.

Such a position of the regional secretary significantly contributes to the political role played by the bureaucracy, both in cooperative-collaborative and coercive-confrontational forms. Cooperative-collaborative bureaucratic politics is evident in the politics of ideas, distribution of public services, budget allocation politics, personnel policy politics, and politics related to the provision of other technical support. Meanwhile, bureaucratic politics that is coercive-confrontational in nature is evident in the form of policy approval without protests (bureaucratic acquiescence) toward decisions made by superiors.

In general, this study does not observe any 'open conflicts' in relation to the implementation of the regent and vice regent's vision and mission, indicating no divergence between the regional secretary and the head or deputy head of the region.

This synergy is possible because initially, the regional secretary did not have the ambition to transform the position from a high administrative official to a political government official at the regional level. It merely performed its duties as regional secretary, equipped with the authority granted by regulations to manage government administration. Its entry into the political stage is more of a consequence of tested loyalty, achievements, and the advantages of the investment capital planted throughout its institutional and individual history.

The social and political benefits later provide the regional secretary with ease in the endeavor to navigate the transformation from administrative to political positions, at least until reaching the front door of political office, such as a candidate for vice regent. Its ability to pass the loyalty test, possess performance achievements, and historical investments become strengthening factors that instill confidence in key political figures in the region to promote them to political positions.

This research finds that the position of the regional secretary, with all its authority, plays a crucial role in building an individual's self-image and performance to strive for a transformation from a high administrative position to a political one. However, this position will not have a significant impact on the success of the transformation without the support of key political actors.

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