

The Politicization of Bureaucracy in General Elections

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the bureaucratic politicization of the State Civil Apparatus (Aparatur Sipil Negara/ASN) in the 2024 Boyolali Regency Legislative Election. Using a qualitative case study approach, it explores the forms of politicization, the dynamics of patron-client relationships, and their effects on local democracy. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with active and retired ASN personnel, expert informants, along with document reviews and field observations. The findings show that bureaucratic politicization occurs through political directives in official ASN forums, the requirement to submit Family Cards (KK) as vote reports, the withdrawal of ASN funds for party victories, and pressure exerted through career mutation and career obstacles. The main discovery is a new pattern of clientelism, where ASN are used as political actors, often replaced by volunteers or civil brokers. Therefore, this research advances the clientelism literature (Hicken, 2011; Berenschot, 2018) by emphasizing that the bureaucracy is not only an object of politicization but also a tool for systematic political patronage.

Keywords: Boyolali Regency, Clientelism, Election, Politicization of Bureaucracy, State Civil Apparatus.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis praktik politisasi birokrasi Aparatur Sipil Negara (ASN) dalam Pemilihan Umum Legislatif Kabupaten Boyolali tahun 2024. Dengan pendekatan kualitatif studi kasus, penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bentuk-bentuk politisasi, dinamika relasi patron-klien, serta implikasinya terhadap demokrasi lokal. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dengan ASN aktif, purna ASN, dan informan ahli, serta ditunjang studi dokumen dan observasi lapangan. Hasil penelitian menemukan bahwa politisasi birokrasi terjadi melalui arahan politik dalam forum resmi ASN, kewajiban mengumpulkan Kartu Keluarga (KK) sebagai laporan suara, penarikan dana ASN untuk kemenangan partai, serta tekanan berupa mutasi dan hambatan karier. Temuan utama penelitian ini memperlihatkan pola klientelisme baru, yaitu penggunaan ASN sebagai aktor politik yang biasanya digantikan oleh relawan atau broker sipil. Dengan demikian, penelitian ini memperkaya literatur klientelisme (Hicken, 2011; Berenschot, 2018) dengan menegaskan bahwa birokrasi bukan hanya objek politisasi, melainkan juga instrumen patronase politik yang sistematis.

Kata kunci: Kabupaten Boyolali, Klientelisme, Pemilu, Politisasi Birokrasi, Aparatur Sipil Negara.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of bureaucratic politicization in general elections is a well-known problem in Indonesian democracy. Ideally, the bureaucracy acts as a neutral, rational-legal

instrument free from political interference, as described by Max Weber in his typology of modern bureaucracy. Weber highlighted that a rational bureaucracy features a clear hierarchy, a strict division of labor, and recruitment based on merit rather than political or personal interests (Beetham 1975; Thoha 2014). However, in reality, Indonesian bureaucracy often becomes a battleground for politicization, where officials are pressured to support the interests of those in power, including both the executive branch and political parties (Gunanto 2020; Rina Martini 2010).

The politicization of bureaucracy has deep historical roots. During the Parliamentary Democracy era (1950–1959), politicization was conducted openly, with cabinet ministers utilizing their bureaucracies to bolster their party's support. During the Guided Democracy era (1959–1965), politicization was semi-open, involving the division of power among the Nationalist, Religious, and Communist groups (Nasakom). During the New Order (Orde Baru) era (1966–1998), politicization occurred covertly but on a large scale, with the bureaucracy serving as Golkar's political arm, extending from the central government to villages (Martini, 2010). By the Reformation era, bureaucratic politicization continued in new ways, such as job transfers, the mobilization of civil servants (ASN), and the use of public facilities for political purposes (Firnas and Maesarini 2011; Wahyudi 2018).

In a theoretical context, the phenomenon of bureaucratic politicization in Indonesia is closely linked to the practice of clientelism. According to Hicken (2011), clientelism is a patron-client relationship based on contingent exchange, where politicians offer resources or protection in exchange for political support. Berenschot (2018) observes that in Indonesia, clientelism is facilitated through a network of local brokers, community leaders, and political volunteers who serve as intermediaries between politicians and citizens. However, the findings of this study reveal a new pattern: the use of civil servants (ASN) as the primary instrument in clientelism practices, such that the bureaucracy is no longer just an object of politicization but also an active participant in political mobilization.

Boyolali presents an interesting case study because it has a paternalistic Javanese cultural tradition rooted in the “Ewuh Pekewuh” value and has been controlled by the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) for several periods. This situation creates a local political environment conducive to patronage practices and bureaucratic politicization. This study asks the main question: what forms of politicization of the civil servant (ASN) bureaucracy will occur in the 2024 Legislative Elections in Boyolali, and how will these practices influence local clientelism patterns that differ from existing theories.

Rozai (2019) demonstrated that a culture of "ewuh pekewuh" (rejection of authority) makes bureaucrats reluctant to correct violations for fear of offending their superiors. Consequently, the internal oversight system becomes less effective, and many reports do not reflect the true situation. Similarly, Frinaldi & Embi (2014) found that a culture of "ewuh pekewuh" (rejection of authority) also fosters a "nrimo" (rejection of authority) work attitude, which involves accepting conditions as they are without the willingness to offer suggestions or make improvements. In the long term, this culture limits the space for civil servants to act critically and fosters a work culture that simply follows the flow without innovation.

Based on this background, this study has three main objectives. First, to analyze the forms of bureaucratic politicization that took place in the 2024 Boyolali Regency Legislative Election. Second, to explain the patterns of patron-client relationships formed through these practices. Third, to highlight the theoretical contribution of this study in enriching the study of clientelism by demonstrating the role of civil servants (ASN) as strategic actors in political mobilization. Therefore, this study not only offers an empirical understanding of the dynamics of local politics in Boyolali but also expands the theoretical understanding of the relationship between bureaucracy, politics, and clientelism in Indonesia's electoral democracy.

THEORETICAL

The theoretical framework used in this research is based on two main perspectives: Weberian bureaucracy theory and clientelism theory. These perspectives are combined to analyze how the Boyolali bureaucracy practiced politicization during the 2024 Legislative Elections.

Weberian bureaucratic theory highlights the role of bureaucracy as a neutral, impersonal, and merit-based rational-legal system. Weber, through his ideal typology, argued that modern bureaucracy is based on a clear hierarchy of roles, strict formal rules, and recruitment based on competence rather than personal or political factors (Beetham 1975; Thoha 2014). In this framework, bureaucracy should be independent of political interests and not serve electoral goals. However, the Indonesian context shows a different situation. Bureaucracy develops within a patrimonial and particularistic framework, where bureaucrats' loyalty tends to lean more toward the political elite than toward public service principles (Gedeona, 2013). Thus, the politicization of bureaucracy is seen as a departure

from the Weberian model, where bureaucracy is no longer neutral but becomes an instrument of power.

According to Hicken (2011), clientelism is characterized by several key features, including dyadic relationships, contingency, hierarchy, and iteration. Initially, studies emphasized direct, face-to-face interactions between patrons and clients—an “instrumental friendship” based on personal ties. However, later research revealed a more complex network mediated by brokers who link patrons and clients across multiple levels of power, from national to local politics. While personal connections often persist at some level, collective forms of clientelism can also emerge, where benefits are distributed to groups rather than individuals, yet still depend on contingent, reciprocal exchanges rather than programmatic redistribution.

Another defining element of clientelism is contingency, the “quid pro quo” exchange where politicians grant benefits only to supporters, and voters reciprocate with electoral backing. These benefits may be material or non-material, and the exchange is typically ongoing rather than one-time, distinguishing it from bribery. Clientelistic relations are hierarchical, involving asymmetry between patrons with greater resources and clients of lower status, although clients sometimes exploit these ties for personal advantage. Finally, iteration—repeated interactions over time—strengthens mutual trust, reinforces social norms of reciprocity, and allows both sides to monitor and predict each other’s behavior, ensuring the persistence of clientelistic systems even under conditions such as secret balloting.

Hicken (2011) explains that clientelism is a contingent exchange relationship between patrons and clients, where political support is exchanged for the distribution of resources, protection, or access to a position. This relationship is unequal because the patron holds more resources, while the client is dependent on them for these resources. Berenschot (2018) adds that in the Indonesian context, clientelism is often mediated by local brokers, political volunteers, and community leaders. These actors serve as intermediaries, facilitating the continuous and effective distribution of resources from patrons to clients.

In this study, both theories are employed in conjunction to complement each other. Weberian theory explains how bureaucracy, which is supposed to be neutral, instead deviates from its intended purpose through systematic politicization. Meanwhile, clientelism theory examines how patron-client relationships are established in Boyolali, with the bureaucracy playing a key role. The main contribution of this study is the finding

that civil servants (ASN) are not only targets of politicization but also tools of a new form of clientelism used by political patrons. This adds to the existing clientelism literature, which previously focused on the roles of political volunteers or civil brokers (Allen Hicken, 2011; Berenschot, 2018). Therefore, this study demonstrates that in the Boyolali context, the bureaucracy can serve as a strategic agent of political patronage, challenging existing assumptions about the primary actors in clientelism practices.

The study of bureaucracy, politicization, and clientelism has deep roots in the theories of political science and public administration. Weber is the most influential figure, known for his ideal typology of rational-legal bureaucracy. According to Weber, bureaucracy is the most efficient form of organization because it operates through a clear hierarchy of positions, binding formal rules, and a merit-based system for hiring and promotions. Within the Weberian framework, bureaucrats are seen as public servants who work impersonally, ensuring that the policies and services they provide are not affected by personal relationships or partisan political interests (Beetham, 1975; Thoha, 2014)

However, Weber's ideas are often not realized in practice in developing countries, including Indonesia. Gedeona (2013) stated that Indonesian bureaucracy is more particularistic and patrimonial. In this context, bureaucracy is not a neutral instrument serving the public interest, but rather a tool of power used to maintain political loyalty and support. This phenomenon shows that the Weberian concept of bureaucracy faces significant challenges when applied in a socio-political environment shaped by patron-client relationships. Therefore, studies of bureaucracy in Indonesia must consider the deviation from the ideal Weberian typology toward practices of patrimonialism and politicization.

The history of the Indonesian bureaucracy's development shows that politicization is not a new phenomenon; it has been ongoing since the country's independence. Martini (2010) divides the history of bureaucratic politicization into three major periods. First, the Parliamentary Democracy era (1950–1959), during which the bureaucracy became a tool open to the influence of political parties. Ministers utilized their bureaucracies to strengthen their parties' electoral bases, resulting in bureaucrats becoming more loyal to parties than to the state. Second, the Guided Democracy era (1959–1965), when politicization occurred semi-openly through the division of power among nationalist, religious, and communist groups (Nasakom). Third, the New Order (Orde Baru) era (1966–1998), during which politicization occurred behind closed doors but was more systematic and widespread. During this period, the bureaucracy was forced to serve as the political machine of Golkar,

directing civil servants from the central government down to the village level to support the ruling party.

The Reformation era promised a more neutral bureaucracy, as political decentralization and direct elections were believed to encourage healthier competition. However, reality shows that the bureaucracy remains a tool for politics. Firnas and Maesarini (2011) noted that in direct regional elections, regional leaders often utilize civil servants (ASN) as a political machine to maintain power. Wahyudi (2018) even claimed that local bureaucracies are never fully neutral but are always part of patronage networks. Meanwhile, Rakhmawanto (2020) highlighted the weak oversight of civil servant neutrality and the lack of strict sanctions, which allow the politicization of the bureaucracy to continue. This issue is exacerbated by a paternalistic bureaucratic culture, where loyalty to superiors is prioritized over adherence to rules.

This phenomenon of bureaucratic politicization can be better understood through the theoretical framework of clientelism. Hicken (2011) defines clientelism as a contingent, non-programmatic political relationship in which politicians provide direct benefits such as material assistance, money, or access to office in exchange for political support from the public. This relationship is asymmetrical, hierarchical, and repetitive, resulting in a long-term dependency between the patron and client. Berenschot (2018) expands on this understanding by highlighting the role of local brokers in connecting patron-client relationships in Indonesia. He argues that political volunteers, community leaders, and village officials act as intermediaries, ensuring that patrons' promises and resources are properly distributed, while also maintaining client loyalty during elections.

Cho (2012) emphasized that during the New Order era, clientelism was centralized, with the state serving as the main source of resource distribution and Golkar acting as the dominant instrument. However, following the Reformasi, clientelism became more decentralized, with various patterns emerging at the local level. Ramadhan and Berlianto (2019) found that clientelism practices often appeared in the form of vote buying, selective distribution of social assistance, and patronage of regional positions. Other studies also confirm the different forms of clientelism in Indonesia. Putra et al. (2022), for example, highlight the role of political volunteers in mobilizing electoral support, while (Fathudin et al. (2020) show how social identities, such as religion, ethnicity, and customs, serve as the basis for building patronage networks. Yanto (2022) classifies clientelism practices into three models: culturalist, marketist, and institutionalist, illustrating the strategies used by

political actors. Anggoro (2019) even examines how networks of retired TNI officers in villages function as channels for political patronage.

These various studies demonstrate that research on bureaucratic politicization and clientelism in Indonesia has made significant progress, but important gaps remain. Most research highlights the role of political volunteers, community leaders, or civil service brokers as key figures in clientelism. However, the role of civil servants (ASN) is seldom examined in detail. Martini (2010), Gunanto (2020), and Wahyudi (2018) do mention bureaucratic involvement, but they mainly view the bureaucracy as an object of politicization rather than as an active player in patron-client networks. As a result, there is still limited research that considers ASN as a strategic actor in clientelism, despite the bureaucracy's unique position due to its control over state resources, strong hierarchical structure, and direct involvement in public service delivery.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by emphasizing that civil servants (ASN) are not merely objects of politicization but also active participants in political mobilization in Boyolali. This study found that during the 2024 Legislative Election, civil servants were used to convey political directives in official forums, collect Family Cards (KK) as voter registration forms, gather party contributions, and directly mobilize the public. Thus, the bureaucracy in Boyolali not only carries out orders from superiors but also acts as an agent of clientelism, ensuring that the distribution of patronage aligns with political goals.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deep understanding of bureaucratic politicization during the 2024 Legislative Election in Boyolali Regency. A qualitative method was chosen because the phenomenon of bureaucratic politicization is complex, nuanced, and involves social relationships that cannot be fully understood through numbers or quantitative data alone. According to Creswell (2013), qualitative research is suitable when researchers want to explore meaning, understanding, and social interactions among actors with diverse backgrounds.

Boyolali Regency was selected as the research site due to its distinctive political characteristics. Boyolali is recognized as a stronghold for the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) in Central Java, consistently securing seats in the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) and holding regional leadership positions. This dominance not only shows the party's electoral stability but also creates opportunities for patronage networks and bureaucratic politicization. Additionally, Boyolali has a paternalistic

Javanese political culture, where the value of *Ewuh Pekewuh* (*Ewuh Pekewuh*) often makes it difficult for civil servants (ASN) to refuse political directives from their superiors. The mix of party dominance and paternalistic bureaucratic culture makes Boyolali an excellent place for studying the connection between bureaucracy and politics.

The research informants fall into three main categories. First, active civil servants (ASN) who have firsthand experience with the political pressures and directives of the 2024 elections. They offer insights into the forms of bureaucratic politicization, from following party directives to participating in voter data collection. Second, a retired ASN with extensive experience in the Boyolali bureaucracy can provide valuable insights into how bureaucratic practices have changed over time. Third, expert informants, such as local political observers and academics, offer broader analysis of the connections between bureaucracy, politics, and clientelism.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, choosing individuals who were believed to have the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Snowball sampling was also employed, where initial informants recommended other relevant participants. This approach allowed researchers to gather a diverse range of perspectives, including those of active and retired civil servants, as well as local political analysts.

Ethical considerations are central to this research due to the sensitive nature of bureaucratic politicization and the potential risks to informants. To protect their identities, anonymity codes such as "Informant 1" or "Informant 2" were used. The researchers also guaranteed that participation was voluntary, without coercion, and that informants could withdraw at any time. Additionally, the data collected was solely for academic use, not for any practical political purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research in Boyolali Regency indicates that the politicization of bureaucracy during the 2024 Legislative Elections was not merely occasional but rather structured and a key component of local political dynamics. Boyolali's unique social and political environment, characterized by the dominance of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP) and a paternalistic bureaucratic culture, plays a crucial role in facilitating the involvement of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) in electoral politics. PDIP's dominance in Boyolali has been steady since the Reformation, with the party consistently winning legislative elections and holding regional leadership positions. This situation has created a "political monoculture" at the local level, turning the bureaucracy into a mere extension of the

dominant party. In such an environment, ASN neutrality is nearly impossible due to strong political pressure from regional government elites.

The phenomenon of bureaucratic politicization appears in various forms. First, civil servants are instructed to attend official meetings that are intended to convey political instructions. Bureaucratic forums, which are supposed to focus on technical government coordination, are instead filled with directives supporting specific legislative candidates. In an interview, a civil servant stated that official meetings often resemble political rallies, with a clear or implied message that political partisanship is a moral obligation for civil servants. This shows how a supposedly neutral bureaucratic space is being used for electoral purposes.

Second, the practice of collecting Family Cards (*Kartu Keluarga/KK*) by civil servants (*ASN*) is a key finding of this study. Civil servants are required to collect copies of Family Cards (*Kartu Keluarga/KK*) from their families and communities as a form of voter support report for a particular party. This practice clearly violates ASN neutrality regulations but is widespread under the guise of "participation" in political development. This KK collection is essentially a political control mechanism to ensure electoral support is targeted. Civil servants are not merely objects of direction, but active agents who mobilize their social resources for political gain.

Third, civil servants participate in political fundraising. Several informants mentioned an informal obligation for civil servants to contribute funds, which are then directed toward party campaigns. While the amounts vary, this process reveals that the bureaucracy has evolved into a source of political patronage, rather than merely an administrative system. Civil servants are perceived as clients who are expected to be loyal to their political sponsors by making financial contributions, while also seeking benefits such as job security or future promotions.

Fourth, civil servants also participate in direct community mobilization. They are not only instructed to vote for certain candidates but also responsible for delivering political messages to residents in their communities. In this context, civil servants act as "political brokers" with greater social legitimacy than ordinary volunteers because they carry symbols of state power. This phenomenon illustrates a shift in the role of civil servants from public servants to political agents who are actively involved in patronage networks.

Fifth, In the context of Boyolali's bureaucratic politicization, career mutation has been strategically employed as a political instrument rather than an administrative mechanism for professional development. Transfers and rotations were used to reward

loyal civil servants with rapid promotions while punishing those who refused to align with the ruling party by relocating them to remote areas or marginal positions. This practice reflects the contingent and hierarchical nature of clientelism, wherein political elites (patrons) control the career trajectories of bureaucrats (clients) through rewards and sanctions based on political loyalty. Consequently, bureaucratic decisions such as transfers and promotions became tools of political coercion that undermined meritocracy and professionalism. The result is a bureaucratic structure that operates within a clientelistic logic—where personal allegiance to political power outweighs competence, eroding Weberian principles of neutrality and transforming the bureaucracy into an extension of the ruling party's political machinery.

These findings can be interpreted through the theoretical framework of Weberianism and clientelism. From Weber's perspective, the politicization of bureaucracy in Boyolali clearly deviates from the rational-legal bureaucratic model. Civil servants no longer operate impersonally and neutrally, but are instead tied to the interests of political parties. The bureaucratic hierarchy, intended to enhance administrative effectiveness, has instead become a conduit for political influence. Civil servants' loyalty is no longer to formal regulations but to powerful political patrons. This aligns with Gedeona (2013) finding that the Indonesian bureaucracy is characterized by particularism and patrimonialism.

Meanwhile, clientelism theory offers an alternative perspective that better explains the dynamics of political exchange in this situation. Hicken (2011) defines clientelism as a dependent exchange relationship between patrons and clients, where political support is exchanged for material or non-material benefits. This relationship is hierarchical and repeated, creating long-term dependency. Using Hicken's framework, civil servant involvement in the Boyolali election can be seen as a form of exchange: civil servants provide political support, whether through votes, funds, or social mobilization, and in return, they receive protection, promotions, or simply the security of bureaucratic positions.

However, Berenschot (2018) presents a different approach by highlighting the role of political brokers in Indonesia. He explains that clientelism does not function directly between patrons and clients but rather through brokers such as volunteers, community leaders, or village officials. These brokers facilitate the effective distribution of patronage. In contrast to Berenschot's framework, the findings in Boyolali show a unique pattern. Civil servants serve as both brokers and clients. On the one hand, they are influenced by local political patrons, such as regional heads or party elites; on the other hand, they act as intermediaries, linking these patrons to the community. As state officials with formal

legitimacy, civil servants are more effective than civilian volunteers in conveying political instructions.

This is the key contribution of this research: it enhances clientelism theory by illustrating the new role of civil servants (ASN) as political actors. Previous research has mainly focused on political volunteers, traditional leaders, or civil brokers as drivers of clientelism. Putra et al. (2022) emphasized the role of volunteers in the 2024 Lampung elections, while Fathudin et al.(2020) highlighted social identity as the basis of patronage, and Yanto (2022) demonstrated variations in clientelism approaches in local elections. However, very few studies explicitly position civil servants as agents of clientelism. In this study, civil servants are not only objects of politicization but also strategic actors ensuring the sustainability of patronage. Table 1. illustrates how Allen Hicken’s (2011) characteristics of clientelism are manifested in political practices in Boyolali.

Table 1. Allen Hicken's (2011) Characteristics of Clientelism in Boyolali

Characteristics of Clientelism	Practices in Boyolali
Dyadic Relationships	Direct relationships between civil servants (ASN) and party elites and bureaucratic apparatus (regional government agencies (OPD), school principals, and others).
Contingency	Security from transfers ora career mutation and promotions is only granted if civil servants are loyal.
Hierarchical	Civil servants are in a subordinate position, similar to political volunteers.
Iterative	Politicization occurs every five years, during the Boyolali Legislative Election and the Regional Election.

Furthermore, the involvement of civil servants reveals a new form of bureaucratic-inspired clientelism. While Hickens argues that clientelism generally involves direct exchanges with individual clients, and Berenschot claims that volunteers usually mediate it, this research shows that civil servants can play a dual role: as clients of political patrons and as brokers connecting patrons with the public. In other words, the bureaucracy becomes a formal part of clientelism networks. This pattern reinforces party dominance at the local level because support is no longer just informal but is validated through state institutions.

The political implications of this phenomenon are quite serious. First, electoral democracy loses its substantive quality because contestation no longer occurs in a fair arena. When the bureaucracy is mobilized to support a particular party, political competition becomes uneven. Second, the professionalism of civil servants (ASN) is compromised. Civil servants, who should focus on public service, are instead preoccupied with political interests. Third, a culture of fear has developed among civil servants. They feel compelled to follow political directives for fear of losing their jobs or career opportunities. This creates a serious moral dilemma for civil servants who try to maintain neutrality.

In the Boyolali context, the *Ewuh Pekewuh* culture reinforces this practice. Civil servants (ASN) often hesitate to reject political directives from their superiors because Javanese social norms emphasize obedience and respect. This culture contributes to the politicization of the bureaucracy not only due to structural pressures but also because of the internalization of cultural values that make it difficult for ASN to act independently. Therefore, the politicization of the bureaucracy in Boyolali is not only a result of elite political strategies but also a part of local bureaucratic culture.

This research has the potential to expand the discussion on bureaucracy and clientelism in Indonesia. From a Weberian viewpoint, the findings show a growing departure from the rational-legal bureaucratic model. Meanwhile, from a clientelism perspective, this study introduces a new pattern: bureaucratic clientelism, where civil servants (ASN) play a key role. Therefore, this research can serve as a basis for further studies to see the bureaucracy not just as a victim of politicization, but as an active participant in electoral political practices.

CONCLUSION

Research on the politicization of bureaucracy in the 2024 Legislative Elections in Boyolali Regency reveals a clear picture: local bureaucracy is closely tied to electoral politics. With the longstanding dominance of the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDIP), the bureaucracy in Boyolali has become a crucial component of the party's political apparatus. This indicates that, despite Indonesia's electoral democracy system being in place for over twenty years, local political practices continue to be characterized by patrimonial, clientelistic, and highly politicized tendencies.

Research findings show that the politicization of the bureaucracy in Boyolali happens not only through symbolic political instructions but also through systematic, concrete

actions. Civil servants are asked to attend official forums with political instructions, submit Family Cards (Kartu Keluarga) as support, donate funds to party interests, and participate in direct political mobilization within the community. These forms of politicization reveal a much deeper bureaucratic involvement than simple passive loyalty. Civil servants in Boyolali play an active role as effective agents of political mobilization because of their social and institutional legitimacy.

From a theoretical perspective, this research significantly enhances our understanding of bureaucracy and clientelism. From a Weberian view, bureaucracy should serve as a neutral, professional, and impersonal tool of rational-legal authority. However, the Boyolali case shows a clear deviation from this Weberian model. Instead, bureaucracy has become an instrument of partisan politics, where job hierarchies and organizational structures are used to support the interests of the ruling party. This reveals that bureaucratic neutrality in Indonesia remains largely a formal norm, while actual practices systematically favor those with political power.

From a clientelism theory perspective, this study uncovers a new pattern that enriches academic discussion. Hicken (2011) defines clientelism as a contingent exchange relationship between patrons and clients, while Berenschot (2018) highlights the significance of local brokers in distributing patronage. This study shows that civil servants can serve as both clients and brokers within clientelism networks. As clients, they rely on local political patrons for support, which is provided through votes, funds, and bureaucratic loyalty. As brokers, civil servants link patrons with the public through political mobilization, guidance in official forums, and the use of administrative authority. Therefore, this study confirms that bureaucracy can be a strategic actor in clientelism networks, a topic that has been rarely examined in previous research.

The implications of these findings are significant. First, local democracy loses its meaningfulness. When the bureaucracy is mobilized for partisan political interests, elections are no longer fair. The ruling party gains structural advantages unavailable to its competitors, thus diminishing the opportunities for power rotation. Second, the professionalism of civil servants (ASN) is degraded. Their orientation is no longer solely focused on public service, but rather on maintaining loyalty to political patrons for job security and career continuity. Third, a culture of fear and obedience develops among civil servants, making it hard for them to take independent actions. Paternalistic Javanese culture and the values of *Ewuh Pekewuh* reinforce this, making the politicization of the bureaucracy seem normal.

The main conclusion of this study is that the politicization of bureaucracy in Boyolali should not be viewed solely as a deviation from the standard of civil servant neutrality, but rather as part of an institutionalized clientelistic political system. Civil servants are not just passive subjects of politicization; they also play a key role in supporting the political dominance of the ruling party. This shows a shift in clientelism practices, where the bureaucracy becomes a more effective tool of patronage than civilian brokers. Therefore, this study expands clientelism theory by introducing the concept of bureaucratic clientelism, a pattern of patron-client relationships that utilizes the bureaucracy as the primary intermediary in garnering political support.

This study recommends enhancing mechanisms for monitoring civil servant neutrality, both through government agencies such as the Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) and the Civil Servant Commission (Komisi ASN), as well as through the participation of civil society. Penalties for breaches of civil servant neutrality must be consistently applied to serve as a warning. Additionally, bureaucratic reform should focus not only on technical and administrative improvements but also on building an organizational culture that is less influenced by political pressure. Political education for civil servants also needs to be strengthened so that they understand their primary loyalty is to the state and society, not to any particular political party.

ACADEMIC CONTRIBUTION

Academically, this research's contribution lies in expanding the concept of clientelism as described by Hicken (2011) and Berenschot (2018). While previous theories emphasized that political volunteers and civil service brokers are the primary actors in patron-client networks, this research reveals a new pattern: the involvement of civil servants (ASN) as clientelistic actors. This suggests that the bureaucracy is no longer merely an externally politicized administrative institution, but has become an instrument of patronage integrated into political victory strategies. Therefore, this research contributes to the literature on bureaucratic politicization and clientelism, providing new insights into how electoral democracy operates at the local level.

This research fills a gap in the literature by confirming that civil servants (ASN) can play a strategic role in clientelism within local politics. This contribution aims to serve as a foundation for further research on the role of bureaucracy in Indonesian electoral democracy. It offers policymakers a reflection on how to improve the quality of democracy through a more neutral, professional, and service-oriented bureaucracy.

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