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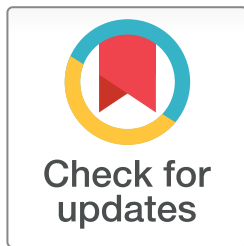
Understanding *Sowan* as a New Paternalistic Bureaucracy Pattern of Local Officials in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study aimed to examine the visit of bureaucratic officials to local head candidates who have been confirmed to win local elections, commonly known as *sowan*. The officials ignore the neutrality aspect of bureaucracy that should be strictly upheld. This phenomenon is explained by the concept of a new paternalistic bureaucracy. This study used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation was utilized as data collection methods for this study. This study's interview and FGD participants include local officials with knowledge of the *sowan* phenomenon and general civil servants in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen. This study discovered that *sowan* in the perspective of bureaucracy signifies friendship, loyalty, approach, and negotiation. This research highlights the strength of paternalistic bureaucracy, which generally begins in the final phase of the democratic process of local elections. Conceptually, this study is useful to explain the *sowan* phenomenon concerning bureaucratic neutrality and democracy and provide practical insights on the importance of law enforcement to violators of bureaucratic neutrality. This study explains the new paternalistic bureaucracy in the era of democracy in local governments in Indonesia. This study recommends the importance of law enforcement for violators of bureaucratic neutrality without discrimination, the improvement of the relationship between political and bureaucratic officials that reflect better partnerships in the recruitment of career officials, and the importance of bureaucrats who are committed to maintaining the principle of merit in the selection of local officials.

Keywords: bureaucracy; impartiality; paternalistic; political officials; position; *sowan*

1. Introduction

A government official is a professional figure who serves the general public. Bureaucracy is expected to function as a party that protects minority interests. It must, therefore, be an impartial party that must not side with either party in public services or public policies.

In public policy, bureaucracy must display an attitude above all parties in identifying public problems and analyzing and implementing public policies. Bureaucracy must be able to carefully examine public problems, and better recognize public problems. When analyzing public policies, bureaucracy must position itself as the best partner in providing solutions to the public problems faced by the government (Buhaerah et al., 2017). In the policy implementation, bureaucrats must be able to identify the target group of programs or policies objectively and avoid the interests to benefit themselves or certain groups as far as possible (Carey et al., 2020; Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2020; Petrović et al., 2020). On public service, the government cannot side with certain groups and discriminate against other groups (Evans et al., 2020; Ragavan et al., 2020; Wright-Costello & Phillippo, 2020). Public services must be carried out without discrimination, without offering certain privileges to certain groups of citizens. Public services are a strategic area to increase impartial and non-discriminatory government authority (Mik-Meyer & Haugaard, 2020).

Public policies and services can be maintained when the bureaucracy can objectively implement bureaucratic impartiality. One manifestation of bureaucratic objectivity in the Reformation Era in Indonesia is the demand that bureaucracy abandons practical politics in the bureaucratic field. In the direct local elections in 2017, the rules on bureaucratic neutrality had become extremely strict. For example, government officials are prohibited from giving likes, comments, and photos of local head candidates on social media. This is enforced to maintain bureaucratic impartiality.

Bureaucratic impartiality during the local elections is an interesting phenomenon since, in many cases, bureaucracy is under the control of the local head as a political actor. The selection of high structural positions (Echelon II) in local governments has become a semi-political arena. The semi-merit-based selection is capably illustrated with candidates entering the local head stable and passing the competency test; however, the final decision of the appointed candidate rests with the local head regardless of the test results. Rakhmawanto (2016) stated that the placement of civil servants in government agencies often causes serious problems. This type of placement does not only occur in high structural positions (Echelon II) but also in lower structural positions (Echelon III and IV) in local government bureaucracy. Therefore, the local head is dominant in determining an official's career path. This encourages the need and relevance to examine paternalistic bureaucracy. The neutrality of the bureaucracy during direct local head elections is difficult to enforce (Simamora, 2018; Sutrisno, 2019). Irregularities in the appointment of structural position scan occur due to the loss of merit system mechanism in the recruitment of bureaucratic officials (Afriani, 2006; Awaluddin, 2010; Azhari, 2011; Muhajir, 2009; Wahiyuddin, 2014). The placement of civil servants is also not entirely based on competence (Edison, 2011; Ferreira & Serpa, 2019; Rosliana & Amarullah, 2018), and cannot be trusted to properly consider and evaluate dedication, commitment, and passion (Arquisola et al., 2019), hence the local government official recruitment process must be encouraged through serious and professional competency mapping (Budiyanto, 2005; Keban, 2004; Rosliana et al., 2019).

During local elections, when the vote-counting has appeared to stabilize and been presumed not to significantly change in the Local General Elections Commission (KPUD) tabulation, many local officials carry out *sowan* activities. *Sowan* is the visit of the local officials to the residence of the local head candidate who has received the most votes in the election. Based on observations, this *sowan* phenomenon occur in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen Regencies, Central Java

Province, Indonesia. A study on the *sowan* phenomenon in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen is important due to the large number of civil servants or state civil apparatuses in the five districts, which is 39,776 individuals (see Table 1). In addition, limited studies examine *sowan* as a new bureaucratic activity in a democratic system through direct local elections. The relationship between bureaucratic and political officials has become important to ensure that the bureaucracy remains enforcing the merit system in the human resources recruitment process.

Table 1. Number of Civil Servants in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen

No.	Regency	Number of Civil Servants
1	Banyumas	12,539
2	Purbalingga	7,892
3	Banjarnegara	8,695
4	Cilacap	11,110
5	Kebumen	12,079
Total		39,776

Source: Processed from Secondary Data (BPS Kabupaten Banjarnegara, 2018; BPS Kabupaten Banyumas, 2019; BPS Kabupaten Cilacap, 2019; BPS Kabupaten Kebumen, 2018; BPS Kabupaten Purbalingga, 2018)

This study on *sowan* in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen examined the meaning of *sowan* carried out by local officials. It investigated the question, "What and how do the local officials in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen give meaning to the *sowan* phenomenon?" This research is important to uncover the *sowan* dimension from a bureaucratic perspective. It is essential since the bureaucracy is currently encouraged to practice a merit system in appointing officials. In addition, the relationship between bureaucratic and political officials in the era of direct election democracy creates a new paternalistic culture that threatens the merit system. The direct local head election was born in a new era of democracy and hence should provide and protect a more transparent and accountable system.

2. Methods

This study used a qualitative research method with a phenomenological approach. This study examined the perspective of local officials' visits to the residence of local head candidates who are certain to win based on input from individuals who have experienced or understand the phenomenon. Qualitative research is more appropriate for this study since it may reveal the uniqueness of specific individuals, groups, communities, and organizations in their daily lives as comprehensive and detailed as possible (Basrowi & Sukidin, 2002; Dawson, 2002). The study data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and documentation. This study's interview and FGD participants included local officials with knowledge of the *sowan* phenomenon, both high-ranked officials and ordinary civil servants in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen. References used in this study are data issued by official government institutions, such as Statistics Indonesia and other documents relevant to the research. The validity of the study data was conducted by triangulation between interviews and interviews with FGD results. An interactive data analysis technique was used to analyze the study data (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Sowan as Friendship

The local officials in the interviews and FGD of the study revealed that *sowan* is normatively a good thing. It is the arrival of a person to someone else's residence to

establish a good relationship. *Sowan* is a cultural mechanism for younger individuals to respect older individuals and for individuals in lower positions to respect those with higher positions. *Sowan*, in this sense, is therefore always considered good by several FGD participants. They believe that *sowan* as an initiative to respect and congratulate the local head candidate is natural, and there is nothing wrong. The limit of bureaucratic impartiality or the prohibition of sharing group photos and giving likes and comments on social media only applies during the local head election. Shortly after the election, the limitation ended since the political event was considered practically over.

Informant L1 stated that although he did not practice *sowan*, it was common in bureaucracy. Informant L2 reinforced the statement of informant L1 by stating that *sowan* is a tradition and should not be abandoned. Informant P1 stated that *sowan* is a kind of relationship that cannot be avoided; however, it must be done in an official context. In the absence of official context, *sowan* is not carried out. Hence *sowan* is not carried out on candidates who are not local officials.

Informant L3 stated that he often did *sowan* to political officials before the elections. *Sowan* activity is reduced when the incumbent nominates himself or herself. This is to maintain neutrality from other parties. Thus, the phenomenon of *sowan* does belong to not only the bureaucracy but also to the society in general.

Hospitality is good for two parties who are working together. In the Principal-Agent Model, the Agent and Principal must have a common goal, and both must have the same information related to the public affairs being done by the agent (Mitchell & Meacheam, 2011). Inequality of purpose between the principal and agent will result in opportunistic actions (Andersen et al., 2008). Political and bureaucratic officials can organize meetings to minimize the disparity between objectives and information inequality. *Sowan* is intended as a bridge to a beneficial mutual understanding. The problem is whether *sowan* cannot be postponed until the elected officials are announced as the winner. This is important to eliminate two charges: violation of bureaucratic neutrality and the success of political officials in mobilizing bureaucracy in local head elections.

3.2. *Sowan* as Loyalty

The local officials who visited the elected regent, who was predicted to have a great chance of winning after the voting, also recognized *sowan* as a form of demonstrating loyalty to the leadership. Their presence at the local head candidate's residence is usually associated with friendship and congratulatory visits. However, several officials admitted that the presence of officials is a form of support and loyalty to the candidate who will soon lead the regency.

The bureaucracy in the ancient Javanese monarchy showed that courtiers' loyalty was displayed by performing ceremonies. During the ceremony, it would be observed which officials were present. Present officials were considered loyal, while absent officials were considered disloyal and even deemed disobedient. The framework of servants in the bureaucracy in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen also appears rich in this nuance. The bureaucracy, especially high-ranking officials, insist that they attend the 'open house event of the candidate with the most votes. They mostly assume that their absence may potentially endanger their career paths in the bureaucracy. Informant L4 stated that high-ranking officials led many officers. During a local head election and when the votes have been more or less certain, many officials conducted *sowan* to candidates. Officials with rational considerations sometimes play both sides or support several candidates who have a greater chance of winning since, generally those who participated in the election involved officials in the local government, and a show of loyalty is deemed necessary. Officials who conduct *sowan* may look like jumping fleas and alternately visit many candidates. Informant P3 stated that *sowan*, aside from expressing congratulations, was also part of showing loyalty. If one is absent during a moment of victory, he or she is deemed unhappy and disrespectful of the winning candidate. This has become

more natural since, according to Informant L8, emotional closeness is a very influential in determining one's position. Informant L8 stated, "At the official level, emotional closeness is influential,... approximately 80 percent, but it should not eliminate the required criteria..."

Bureaucratic loyalty demonstrated by congratulating candidates with the most votes, from a bureaucratic perspective, is part of showing support and loyalty. In addition to reaffirming friendship, extending congratulation, and expressing collective joy, they can also be interpreted as part of the winning camp. *Sowan* is therefore considered to be more beneficial for the bureaucracy since the candidate's residence suggests that one wishes to be claimed as part of the official winning camp. Moreover, being in one camp with the winning candidate becomes psychologically important in building work relations with the selected candidate. At the very least, being in front of the winning candidate at the moment of victory dispelled the suspicion that someone was supporting the opponent.

Local officials attempt to transfer risk by doing *sowan*. During post-election, officials always assume the risk of being considered part of the losing opponent's camp. Therefore, officials carry out *sowan* to transfer such risk. *Sowan* is strong proof in front of the winning candidate that those present are not part of the opponent. Officials conducting *sowan* try to formalize that they are part of the winning camp and are ready to secure and support the government under the leadership of the winning candidate.

3.3. *Sowan* as a Business Approach

Sowan, as a business approach, suggests that local officials believe that if political officials of the winning candidate do not recognize them, they may never be considered for appointment to structural positions. Officials with this belief seek to get close to the regent candidates, especially prospective regents with a high certainty of winning the most votes. Officials, as rational actors, feel more secure with such measures.

Informant L6 stated that when he was an auditor and unwilling to carry out *sowan* to political officials, the *sowan* approach would not help much in erasing his image in front of political officials. It shows that *sowan* is a mechanism that local officials commonly use. Informant L7 illustrated that *sowan* is mainly done by high-ranking officials (Echelon II) in the area; therefore, those officials not doing *sowan* will risk being relocated or marginalized. Informant L5 stated that *sowan* is a mechanism for introducing oneself to political officials. No benefit is gained if political officials do not recognize one. However, he underlined that the placement of officials still must meet the predetermined criteria. The visit is a must if one wishes to aim for a better position.

Sowan, in an attempt to approach the winning candidate shows that the bureaucracy is weak in the presence of political officials. The control of political officials in Banyumas, Purbalingga, Banjarnegara, Cilacap, and Kebumen is very high. Bureaucracy does not display high self-confidence to show that choosing bureaucratic leaders based on merit is possible. Local officials believe that the most effective way to retain and/or aim for a position is to approach political officials. This is the background of the numerous violations of bureaucratic neutrality at local governments in Indonesia. Bureaucratic officials feel they must obtain political support from political officials to secure positions. On the other hand, political officials cannot be refrained from using the bureaucratic machine as an effective and efficient political machine.

3.4. *Sowan* as a Negotiations

Local officials are known to switch affiliations during local head elections based on the voting results. Some officials support the incumbent, while others offer support to other candidates. Local officials supporting the almost defeated candidate will immediately approach the winning camp if a supported candidate is certain to be

defeated in the elections based on the vote count. This measure is a form of attempting to save themselves and turns out to be occasionally successful. Some officials who initially support the opposing camps continue to occupy their positions or still retain equivalent positions if they are relocated. This suggests that *sowan* is a negotiating mechanism. Officials who feel the risk of being displaced due to different political choices must immediately initiate "peace efforts" with the candidate who is almost certain to win. These negotiations sometimes succeed but occasionally fail as well. Shrewd officials are generally adept at lobbying and securing bureaucratic positions.

Informant L9 stated that bureaucratic officials supporting a candidate that was certain to lose after the vote count was progressively revealed would immediately jump to the winner's camp upon learning about the vote count. According to Informant L9, officials who were docked after the election were mainly those who were originally in the opposing camp. Informant L10 and L11 also informed informant L9: "For officials who supported the eventual election winner from the beginning, *sowan* indicated their loyalty. But for officials who initially supported other candidates who eventually lost, *sowan* displayed an effort to save themselves" (Informant L10). Informant L11 stated his experience, "People who initially did not support the eventual winner would immediately *sowan*. It means that they want to be close to the winner, and they want to get something. It occasionally worked, and people who did not support the winner could stay in office."

Bureaucratic officials who supported losing candidates would quickly switch sides in favor of the winner to save their bureaucratic positions. Bureaucratic officials are political individuals with an instinct to defend their interests. They conduct activities that can protect their interests, even though other people will consider them to have no shame. According to the study informants, the number of bureaucratic officials who switched sides when the votes of the winning candidate were certain was more significant than the number of officials who were originally in the opposite camp. The presence of officials who were originally in the opposing camp and subsequently switched to the winner camp demonstrates a form of new negotiations by the officials to the elected local head candidate. Their presence at the residence of the winning candidate is an attempt to secure and negotiate their present and future position. It at least sends a signal that, even though they were originally in the opposing camp, they admit defeat and are ready to support the winning candidate.

In the beginning, Public Administration saw the relations between political and administrative officials more as a dichotomous relationship, emphasizing that administrators were not permitted to allocate values (political-administrative dichotomy) (Goodnow, 1900; Taylor, 1912; White, 1926; Willoughby, 1918; Wilson, 1887). Such a relationship makes the administrator only a complementary function, and the election of bureaucratic officials can thus be simply carried out. In the view of the Principal-Agent, the relationship between political and bureaucratic officials is a popular perspective to explain the relations between political and bureaucratic officials (Bendor et al., 1987; Cook & Wood, 1989; Miller, 2005; Waterman & Meier, 1998). Political officials are the principal who assigns tasks to the agents; some agents believe they can take action autonomously, and some believe that agents cannot take action independently. In complementing the principal-agent approach, there is another approach called the "Reining in" theory of delegation to ensure effective and efficient bureaucratic performance, the relationship between political officials and bureaucratic officials is translated into the form of strict administrative procedure design (Baum, 2007; Moe, 2006).

From the dominant bureaucracy perspective, although unpopular, this approach views bureaucracy as the party that can dominantly color the policy. Freeman (1958), Meier (1997), Muramatsu and Krauss (1984), and Miwa and Ramseyer (2003) are in a relatively opposite position to the administrative political dichotomy. They prefer that officials are the most competent and experienced in designing public policy (dominant bureaucracy). Experts disagree in response to the dominance of bureaucracy in policy,

arguing that this phenomenon signifies the success of the bureaucracy in working with political officials and not the absolute nature of bureaucratic dominance. Recruitment of bureaucratic officials from the perspective of bureaucratic domination is entirely in the hands of the officials. The bureaucracy strictly designs officials' careers and selects them on full merit. Bureaucracy can receive aspirations, input, and input from the general public to provide value to public policies and services. For this reason, the complaint mechanism in public services is important (Kumar & Kumar, 2016; Lervik-Olsen et al., 2016; Minelli & Ruffini, 2018; Pramusinto, 2014; Shin & Larson, 2020; Singh et al., 2016; Yahui Hsieh, 2012).

From a partnership perspective, Jerome and Legge (2002) argued that to prevent conflicts between bureaucratic and political officials, an attitude of equality and partnership must be developed. The partnership perspective is not a simple and easy concept since both parties display different characters and are at risk of causing conflicts. Political officials carry many values: responsiveness, accountability, energy, short-term, revitalization, power, conflict, compromise, and change. On the other hand, bureaucratic officials have nonpartisan values, professionalism, continuity, expertise, experience, problem-solving with many perspectives, and effectiveness. Differences of opinions between bureaucratic and political officials at the local government level can result in disharmonious relations between political officials and bureaucracy. This tenuous relationship is subsequently carried over during the local head election. Bureaucratic officials who feel threatened because of their harmonious relations with incumbent political officials are "forced" to find rescue in the form of supporting non-incumbent local head candidates. Werlin (2001, 2008, 2012) stated that to prevent conflicts between political and bureaucratic officials, political officials must act elastically (not rigidly) when dealing with bureaucratic officials (political elasticity).

Bureaucracy must be alienated from the hustle and bustle of practical politics. This is what is practiced in the implementation of post-reform bureaucratic neutrality, especially after the issuance of Law Number 5 of 2014 concerning State Civil Apparatus (ASN Law) (Perdana, 2019). Bureaucratic officials are prohibited from becoming a member and administrator of a political party, as well as a member of political campaign teams during executive and legislative elections.

Jennings (2009) and Norman and Gregory (2003) developed the "thermostatic" concept, which states that political officials must keep the temperature of the bureaucratic workspace at a warm level so that bureaucratic officials can work effectively and efficiently. This is almost similar to the statement that serving leaders are better than leaders with authority (Langhof & Guldenberg, 2019). The relations between political and bureaucratic officials during local head elections can be done so that political officials do not draw bureaucratic officials into practical politics. Political officials must see that bureaucracy is not a political machine to use even though incumbent officials (and other officials) have access to use their positions.

The Technocracy and Epistemic Drift Approach believes that bureaucratic officials are the most appropriate party in supplying knowledge to policymakers, and they help political officials in designing policies (Shapiro & Guston, 2006; V. Tselyutina et al., 2019). Svara (2001) stated that to achieve the level of complementarity between the political and bureaucratic officials, the independence of the bureaucracy and political control of political officials must be highly maintained. Meanwhile, according to Purwanto et al. (2018), complementary relations between political and bureaucratic officials can be achieved when the degree of political control by political officials and the degree of independence of the bureaucracy are at a moderate level.

The concept of insulin bureaucracy, which desires to protect bureaucracy from the intervention of political actors, is extremely difficult to implement (Jerome & Legge, 2002; Mueller, 2015). This research shows that political officials still play dominant roles in local government, especially in recruiting bureaucratic officials. This demonstrates that organizational culture determines leaders (Akanji et al., 2020). Sowan is not only discussed as a mere cultural phenomenon but also part of the

efforts of local officials to maintain and secure positions from political officials. This study shows paternalistic bureaucracy also occurs in the democratic system during direct local head elections. It turns out that paternalistic bureaucracy can adapt quickly as soon as a local head candidate is certain to win. Bureaucracy seems to dependents fate only on the strong candidates and not on their competence.

In implementing local autonomy, improving the recruitment of bureaucratic elites in local government offices is important since many bureaucratic officials wish to occupy high-ranking positions due to their prestige and potential rewards (M. Budiyanto, 2003). Bureaucratic officials as political individuals always want to maintain and secure positions where adequate prestige and rewards are granted. Therefore, *sowan* is a part that a bureaucratic official can practice obtaining a position. At present, bureaucratic impartiality is generally demanded. Firas (2016) stated that the impartiality of bureaucracy in the Reformation Era is closely related to aspects of good behavior such as being accountable, responsive, transparent, free of corruption, collusion, nepotism, neutral, and non-discriminatory, polite, and other values. Therefore, merit or competitive selection system is a choice in recruitment that signifies the relationship between bureaucracy and democracy (van Waarden, 2015).

This research shows paternalistic bureaucracy is still a bureaucratic issue in realizing merit-based bureaucracy. The paternalistic bureaucracy is quickly adapted to the process of direct local head elections in the local democratic system. Bureaucratic officials, who are expected to display impartiality, are tempted to enter the gray political practice arena.

4. Conclusion

This study concluded that, in the perspective of bureaucracy, *sowan* means friendship, a display of loyalty, an approach, and negotiation effort (see Figure 1). *Sowan* signifies a friendship, and an effort to establish communication between political and bureaucratic officials is considered good. *Sowan* should be carried out after the candidate is declared the winner by the Local Election Commission. In addition to meaningful hospitality, *sowan* is also closely related to efforts to maintain and secure positions. The meaning of *sowan* proves this as an activity to show loyalty, approach, and negotiation. This shows that paternalistic bureaucracy can adapt to the direct election of local heads as part of the democratic system. This research shows that the recruitment of bureaucratic officials by political officials is still dominated by political control and does not yet reflect partnership relations.

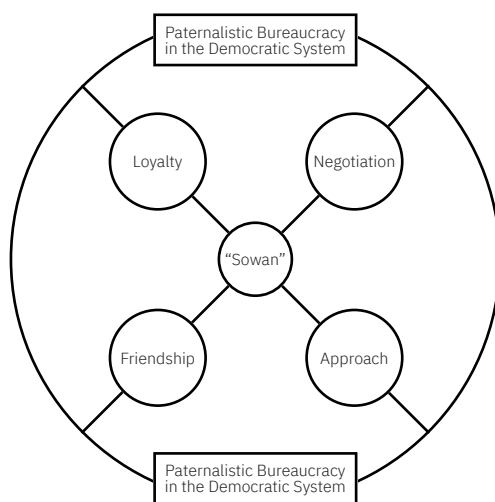


Figure 1. Paternalistic Bureaucracy in the Democratic System (Direct Election of Local Heads)

Source: Processed Research Data

This research recommends the importance of law enforcement for violators of bureaucratic neutrality without discrimination. Presently, violations of bureaucratic neutrality seem to be barren when the violators are from the election's winner. In addition, relations that better reflect the partnership between political and bureaucratic officials in recruiting career officials are needed. Bureaucracy must commit uphold the principle of merit in the selection of officials. On the other hand, political officials must not utilize the power and authority to intervene in the merit system built by the bureaucracy.

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