

ARTICLE

Dynamics of Bureaucratic Neutrality Policy in Indonesia

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How to cite: Indiahono, Dwiyanto. (2022). Dynamics of Bureaucratic Neutrality Policy in Indonesia. *Jurnal Borneo Administrator*, 18(3), 309-320. <https://doi.org/10.24258/jba.v18i3.1104>

Article History

Received: 29 April 2022

Accepted: 28 November 2022

Keywords:

Bureaucracy,
Neutrality,
Party,
Politics,
Policy.

ABSTRACT

This research reveals the dynamics of relations between civil servants and political parties in Indonesia from the Old Order, the New Order to the Reform Era. This study is an important effort to observe the dynamics of civil servants and political parties in Indonesia and create social learning contributions for the betterment of the country. A qualitative research method with secondary data/literature study was selected. The literature study examined policy documents related to bureaucratic neutrality in the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. The study data were collected through documentation, including data from papers related to bureaucratic neutrality in the periods above. The study shows that the idea of bureaucratic neutrality had been initiated since the Old Order, disappeared during the New Order, and was reborn in the Reform Era. The challenge of bureaucratic neutrality was the pull of political parties in the parliamentary system during the Old Order, the power of bureaucracy to be the political supporters of the rulers during the New Order, and the contestation of presidential and regional head elections in the Reform Era, which often tests bureaucratic neutrality.

A. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic officials or civil servants (*Pegawai Negeri Sipil/PNS*) or what is now referred to as Civil Service (ASN-Aparatur Sipil Negara) are public servants appointed to address public issues through policies and provide excellent services to the general public. ASNs are present in all sectors of Indonesian citizens' lives throughout the country, without exception. Therefore, ASN must display impartiality (not taking sides) in executing public policies and providing services to the public. This is important to ensure that ASNs are not utilised as a political machine like in the past. ASNs are prohibited from engaging in practical politics and must be free from the influence of any political party. The neutrality of ASN has historically been strongly influenced by the wishes of legislators (Perdana, 2019).

As of December 2019, the number of civil servants in Indonesia, including central government and provincial and regency/municipal officials, was 4,189,121, as presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Number of Civil Servants in Indonesia in 2019

Agency	December 2019
Central	953,731
Regional	3,235,390
Total	4,189,121

Source: (BKN, 2020)

A large number of civil servants is a state asset whose neutrality must be maintained to become servants of the general public with clean, professional, and authoritative values. Bureaucratic neutrality is civil servants' freedom from the influence or interests of certain political parties (Martini, 2015; Yuniningsih, 2019). In other words, the determination not to take sides for the interests of certain parties or their adherence to not playing a role in the political process for fear that officials may misuse state facilities for the benefit of certain parties. The principle of neutrality plays a strategic role in preventing the abuse of power or authority and creating a fair and equal competitive climate by eliminating structured fraud using state facilities and authority (Sudrajat & Hartini, 2015).

Sutrisno's study demonstrated that some civil servants in Surakarta, Sragen, and Bantul were partial during their duties due to several contributing factors. Including ASN loyalty, familial relations, career ambitions, position ambiguity, regulatory ambiguity, weak law enforcement, and low public awareness of civil servants-related laws. An example of weak law enforcement for violations of bureaucratic neutrality was an incident in which a sub-district head in Surakarta attended a resident meeting at a resident's house in *Pucangsawit* village to declare his support for an incumbent candidate. The Election Supervisory Committee had recommended that the sub-district head be sanctioned for violating bureaucratic neutrality. However, the mayor did not impose any sanctions (Sutrisno, 2019). Simamora also shows that the neutrality of ASN in regional head elections is not evident. Neutrality should occur before and during the campaign period. Non-neutrality can be present in several forms, such as attending political declaration events and participating in events held at the residence of a particular election candidate (Simamora, 2018).

The relations of civil servants and political parties in Indonesia from the Old Order to the Reform Era thus become an interesting subject to study since the dynamics can be used as lessons and guidance for future generations. The political-legal aspect is significant when examining the neutrality regulations during the three periods. This article attempts to answer the question: What are the policy dynamics of regulating relations of civil servants and political parties in the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era?

The division of the general period in Indonesia consists of three major parts, namely the Old Order (1945-1966), the New Order (1966 – 1998), and the Reform Era (1998 to the present). This study aimed to examine the dynamics of bureaucratic relations and political parties in the three periods above. This is key as a reference in maintaining bureaucratic neutrality and designing policies that can ensure bureaucratic neutrality in the changing times.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship patterns of political officials and bureaucratic officials showed that political intervention remains present in the bureaucracy and that there has been rampant politicisation of the bureaucracy (Lestari, 2014; Nurprojo, 2014; Rustinsyah & Prasetyo, 2019; Verina., Efendi., & Zetra., 2019). This has encouraged The National Institute of Public Administration (known as LAN) to argue that the relationship pattern between political officials and bureaucratic officials should not merely be a relationship between leaders and subordinates but must display a design of parallel partnership. The appointment of bureaucratic officials by political officials are deviations from the structural appointments process since

discrimination due to the practice of patronage, family system, and the spoiled system is prevalent (Agustino & Fahrul, 2018; Firas, 2016; Nugroho., Warsono., & Yuniningsih., 2020; Rahardi., Daffa., Ajeng., & Partotaruno, 2020). The intervention of political officials is powerful, causing bureaucratic officials to be entirely subservient to political officials and ignore the public interest. The relationship between political officials and the bureaucracy is thus vulnerable to corrupt practices. The politicisation of the bureaucracy is a pressing issue because there should be no sub-coordination between political officials and bureaucratic officials, which leads to a conflict of interests (Atmaja, 2013; Rakhmawanto, 2020). With the resources of the bureaucracy and parliament, each is prone to committing corrupt acts.

The relationship between bureaucracy and political parties is one part of the initial debate in the study of public administration. At the beginning of the public administration study, there was a solid push to separate administrators from political actors (Goodnow, 1900; Taylor, 1912; White, 1926; Willoughby, 1918; Wilson, 1887). The separation is referred to as the political-administrative dichotomy. This paradigm considers political institutions as the appropriate institution to establish policies, and the administrator is the party responsible for their implementation.

The political dichotomy paradigm of this administration subsequently experienced a crisis when policy experts stated that the administrator also has the right to provide an allocation of values (Harmon, 1989; Simon., Peter., & Dwight, 1952; Waldo, 1952). Up to now, the policy data are invariably owned by the administrator, and it is impossible to take the policy without involving the administrator. This results in administrators legitimately entering the strategic policy environment.

The relationship between bureaucracy and political parties is therefore well established in policy creation. However, this relationship displays weakness when political parties utilise their proximity to the bureaucracy to perpetuate power. Thus, the study of bureaucratic neutrality in good governance is essential.

Political interference has changed the foundations of bureaucratic neutrality and resulted in development inertia (Idris., Otiche., & Aidelokhai, 2019). Empirical findings from the late 1970s onwards demonstrated that bureaucratic officials are not as neutral and 'apolitical' as initially assumed but rather highly involved in political processes (Hustedt & Salomonsen, 2018). The low quality of the Senior Executive Service (SES) officials of ASN is due to its selection process, which was highly political and lack of objectivity, fairness, and transparency (Rakhmawanto., Rusli., & Sintaningrum., 2019). ASNs are used as "tools" for political officials to maintain or secure their authority (Suwitri., Supriyono., Sulastrri., & Kuswandar, 2019). Strengthening merit-based appointments requires that capable human resources be employed for governments to execute their policies efficiently and effectively (Assefa, 2018). Filling positions on merit is one way to fight against political intervention in the bureaucracy. "Historically, merit-based recruitment was meant to minimise political patronage" (Portillo., Bearfield., & Humphrey, 2020). On the other hand, the value of merit has become so ensnared in law and policy that it ignores efforts to account for various performances and abilities (Borry & Reuter, 2022).

In the post-truth era, strict and collaborative ASN supervision from various elements of the government and society is crucial to ensure that it can narrow the gap for ASNs who want to cheat from ASN professional ethics (Faedlulloh & Duadji, 2019). Increased supervision also needs to be carried out by the Civil Service Commission (*Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara/KASN*) so that the implementation of the merit system can be optimal (Chariah., Ariski., Nugroho., & Suhariyanto, 2020). A study by Sihalo and Herlan (2020) emphasised the need to expand the Civil Service Commission's authority (KASN) to impose sanctions on violators of bureaucratic neutrality. Leadership commitment and consistency in implementing merit system policies are the determining factors (Suryanto & Darto, 2020).

C. RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative research method with secondary data/literature study was selected for the study. This literature study examined policy documents related to bureaucratic neutrality in the Old Order, New Order, and Reform Era. The study data were collected through documentation, including data from papers on bureaucratic neutrality during the three periods above. The data were subsequently analysed using the content analysis technique (Kuckartz, 2019). Each document was reviewed based on certain criteria and compiled into a full report that describes and explains the dynamics of bureaucratic neutrality in the three eras

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The relations between civil servants and political parties in Indonesia began to be regulated in detail since the enactment of the Presidential Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 1959 concerning the Prohibition of Political Party Membership for Government Officials, effective on July 27, 1959. The policy was then tightened with the issuance of Law No. 18 of 1961 concerning the Basic Provisions of Employment on July 21, 1961. This policy prohibited civil servants from becoming members of political parties. The ban resulted from a political-administrative dichotomy to maintain the effectiveness and efficiency of government activities by separating policy and administrative affairs. Bureaucracy was limited and focused on allocating values for policymaking.

The prohibition of bureaucratic officials from entering into practical political activities is also an approach which shields the officials from the influence of political actors. This insulated bureaucracy model recognises that political influence can jeopardise competencies and reduce bureaucratic incentives to invest in competence. Politicians desire to create an institution that protects the bureaucracy in providing important public services from the political competition, sometimes forcing the political elite to utilise patronage (Mueller, 2015). This insulated bureaucracy model encourages bureaucratic officials to work differently from political officials. They are encouraged to be a pioneer in developing policies and public management regulations. They are also trusted to move independently with their expertise and competence.

Critics of this bureaucratic insulation from politics are that this model will reduce the preference of the majority of the general public in its activities (Asuelime, 2017; Chemouni & Dye, 2020). The bureaucracy that operates independently and apart from politics also does not run smoothly. One criticism is that the bureaucracy is accused of reducing public preferences since it is considered to prioritise experience and competence without regard to public aspirations. Professional officials tend to consider developing their technocratic aspects rather than democratic aspects. Value preferences from the public are easily ignored if bureaucratic officials are left without the control of political officials or political institutions.

The parliamentary political environment in the past helped to encourage the birth of the policy. At the time, civil servants became tantalising figures to be controlled by political parties. Political parties were eager to control the bureaucracy and moved it in the interests of their parties (see Table 2). President Soekarno observed this. Hence the ban on civil servants in becoming members of political parties originated. The Presidential Regulation, which regulates the prohibition of civil servants, was signed on July 27, 1959, not far from the Presidential Decree on July 5, 1959, which returned the state constitution of the 1945 Constitution.

The policy prohibiting civil servants from involvement in politics in the Old Order lasted relatively long. The Old Order government maintained the neutrality of the bureaucracy until the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) rebellion broke out in 1965, signalling the collapse of the Old Order and the start of the New Order. During a transitional period, the New Order government took different measures from the previous government. Law Number 15 of 1969

About the Election of Members of the People's Consultative Assembly/House opened the way for participation bureaucracy in the elections administration. The bureaucratic officials of the central to regional governments are allowed to be election committee members at various levels. The supposed to be held in 1969 was postponed to 1971. This was suspected as a government scenario to perpetuate power.

The bureaucratic neutrality collapsed with the birth of Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 2 of 1970 concerning Revocation of Presidential Regulation Number 2 of 1959 concerning Prohibition of Political Parties Membership for Government Officials. This policy is reinforced by Government Regulation 6 of 1970 concerning the Organization of the Political Life of Civil Servants in the Context of Fostering the State Personnel System of the Republic of Indonesia (State Gazette of the Republic of Indonesia of 1970), which states that civil servants can become members and or administrators of political parties.

The bureaucracy regulations in the New Order indeed mandated a neutral position. In practice, civil servants were expected to display loyalty to the leadership and gradually pledge allegiance to the ruling party (*GOLKAR-Golongan Karya*). Presidential Decree of the Republic of Indonesia Number 82 of 1971 concerning the Indonesian Government Official Corps (*KORPRI*) has indicated that *KORPRI* is the only medium for aspirations of civil servants in Indonesia. When *Golongan Karya* succeeded in controlling *KORPRI*, it controlled the bureaucracy.

Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 8 of 1974 concerning Personnel Principles appeared not to mandate civil servants to display impartiality but rather emphasised that civil servants could side with a political party. Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 3 of 1975 concerning Political Parties and *Golongan Karya* was a regulation used as a guideline in the holding of elections. The existing political parties at the time were the United Development Party (*Partai Persatuan Pembangunan/PPP*), the Indonesian Democratic Party (*Partai Demokrasi Indonesia/PDI*), and *Golongan Karya*. In 1976, Government Regulation 20 of 1976 concerning the Membership of Civil Servants in Political Parties or *Golongan Karya* was issued. The link between Law No. 8 of 1974, Law No. 3 of 1975, and Government Regulation 20 of 1976 is that civil servants were able to side with one of the political parties and or *Golongan Karya*. This configuration turned out to be deeply rooted and difficult to break. Civil servants were deemed to be in an impartial position but, in reality, may side with political parties. Loyalty to the ruling party's leadership (*Golongan Karya*) and Soeharto, the founder of the *Golongan Karya*, was considered sacred and should not be tarnished by dissent. Civil servants became loyal supporters of the New Order authorities. Therefore when talking about the New Order, an idiom emerged: The New Order is *Golkar (Golongan Karya)*, and *Golkar* is the bureaucracy. Government bureaucracy, the Armed Forces of the Republic of Indonesia (*Angkatan Bersenjata Republik Indonesia/ABRI*) and *Golkar* became the three pillars that were difficult to be broken down by the political forces at the time (Dwiyanto, 2006; Imawan, 1997; Mas'ood, 1989, 1994; Thoha, 2012). Every action and work attitude of subordinates always had to be consulted by the leadership, and the attitude was manifested in the form of singular loyalty, which was very influential on the evaluation of a bureaucratic employee (Wimmy & Dwiranda, 2020).

Golongan Karya's and Soeharto's grip on the bureaucracy required a formalised structure, hence the significant changes to the *KORPRI* Statutes/By-Laws in 1994. The following are some of the main differences between Presidential Decree Number 82 of 1971 concerning the Indonesian Government Official Corps and Presidential Decree Number 63 of 1994 concerning the Ratification of the Articles of Association of the Indonesian Government Official Corps (*KORPRI*).

Table 2. Differences between *KORPRI* Statute 1971 and *KORPRI* Statute 1994

Aspect	<i>KORPRI</i> Statute 1971	<i>KORPRI</i> Statute 1994
Main Founder	Not available	President of the Republic of Indonesia
Vice Main Founder	Not available	Vice President of the Republic of Indonesia
Central Board of Trustees	Minister of Home Affairs	Minister of Home Affairs
Members	Active Public Servants	Active and Retired Civil Servants (as long as they do not declare to leave <i>KORPRI</i>)
Definition of Employee of the Republic of Indonesia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. government officials, b. public company employees, c. state-owned bank employees, d. regional government employees, e. state bank employees and officers f. officers are carrying out government affairs in villages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. government officials, b. state-owned bank employees, c. regional-owned bank employees, d. employees of state-owned enterprises, e. regional government officials, officials and officers carrying out government affairs in villages, f. officials and officers carrying out government affairs at home and abroad, g. members and retirees of the Indonesian Armed Forces employed at government agencies, state-owned banks, regionally-owned agencies, state-owned agencies, and regionally-owned business entities.

Source: Processed from Presidential Decree No. 82 of 1971 concerning Indonesian Government Official Corps and Presidential Decree No. 63 of 1994 concerning Ratification of the Articles of Association of the Indonesian Government Official Corps (*KORPRI*) (Indiahono, 2019).

The differences between the above two statutes are obvious in that former President Soeharto wanted to receive formal support from *KORPRI* as the main trustee and the Vice President as the deputy of the main founder. The formalisation was to ward off the initiative that the highest leadership of *KORPRI* might be taken by an external party other than the existing structure in government. Also, efforts to increase the quantity and quality of *KORPRI* members were realised by including retired employees and several categories of civil servants who were not previously defined as employees of the Republic of Indonesia.

Not long after the reform movement, Law Number 43 of 1999 concerning Amendment to Law Number 8 of 1974 concerning the Personnel Principle was issued. The law firmly mandated a position contradictory to the New Order regarding bureaucratic neutrality. Civil servants by Law 43 of 1999 are defined as an element of the state apparatus whose main responsibilities are to implement state, government and development tasks and provide services to the general public in a professional, honest, fair, and equitable manner. Civil servants must be neutral from the influence of all groups and political parties and not discriminatory in providing services to the citizens. Impartiality of civil servants is carried out by ensuring they are prohibited from becoming members and or administrators of political parties (Article 3 of Law 43 of 1999).

A transition phase of bureaucratic neutrality marked Indonesia's initial phase of bureaucratic reform. The transition is evidenced by the birth of many rules governing civil servants' associations with political parties. This phase is also characterised by rapid changes in the regulations for civil servants who are members or administrators of political parties. In line with Law No. 43 of 1999, Government Regulation No. 5 of 1999 concerning Civil Servants' Membership in Political Parties was published. Government Regulation No. 5 of 1999 was merely applicable for three days because three days later, the Government Regulation

No. 12 of 1999 concerning Amendment to Government Regulation No. 5 of 1999 concerning Civil Servants' Membership in Political Parties was introduced.

In Government Regulation no. 5 of 1999, the policies for civil servants who had a membership or served as administrators in political parties appeared to be very loose. They could report themselves and still receive the last basic salary. Civil servants who were members and or administrators of political parties and were dismissed from public office did not lose their status as civil servants. If the civil servant, at the time of dismissal from a public office, were 56 years old or older with a pension period of at least ten years, they would be dismissed honourably as a civil servant with pension rights. The waiting money would be provided for a maximum of 1 (one) year and could be extended for a maximum of 1 (one) year, and may not be more than 5 (five) times. After completing the waiting period, if the civil servant were not yet 56 years old but had a retirement work period of 20 years or more, then the civil servant would be honourably terminated with pension rights when they reached 50 years of age or older.

On the other hand, if they had a retirement period of fewer than 20 years, even though they were 50 years or older but were not yet 56 years old, the civil servant would be honourably terminated without retirement rights. In addition to receiving waiting money, the person concerned was also provided periodic salary increases, family benefits, food allowances, and other benefits based on the legislation in force. Civil servants who passed away after completing the period of receiving waiting for money and had a service period of 20 years or longer were considered to be honourably dismissed as civil servants, and their widows/widowers would be given widows'/widowers' pension.

Government Regulation No. 12 of 1999 revised the above rules. Civil servants who were members of political parties and forwarded requests to direct superiors would be dismissed from public office and given waiting for money. The waiting money was only given within one year. One year was considered sufficient for an adjustment period. This shows that the impartiality of civil servants to political parties was a concern of the government, parliament, political parties, and reform activists. The amendment of Government Regulation No. 5 of 1999 to Government Regulation No. 12 of 1999, which occurred only in a matter of days, showed that the changes at that time were speedy.

After the Government Regulation, which prohibits civil servants from becoming members or administrators in political parties, in the Reform Era, it was also encouraged that the placement of bureaucratic officials in structural positions meets the competence, expertise, and work experience required in each position. Officials must be encouraged to have and display competence, knowledge, expertise, and experience to develop and implement public services and policies (Decarolis et al., 2018; Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2019; Pečarič, 2016; Rashid, 2014). The merit system has become a new spirit in the bureaucracy in the Reform Era. This is demonstrated by the issuance of Government Regulation No. 100 of 2000 concerning Appointment of Civil Servants in Structural Positions and Government Regulation No. 13 of 2002 concerning Amendment to Government Regulation No. 100 of 2000 concerning Appointment of Civil Servants in Structural Positions. The two government regulations drove the end of bureaucratic politicisation. Bureaucracy must be encouraged to be neutral in the dynamics of a country's political democracy (Carboni, 2010; Im, 2017).

After fifteen years of continuous reforms, a more comprehensive regulation was eventually issued that governed bureaucratic neutrality and merit-based civil service management. Law No. 5 of 2014 concerning Civil Service (ASN-State Civil Apparatus) was born amidst the momentum of increasingly strict bureaucratic neutrality and the desire for a bureaucratic generation that upholds professionalism, competence, integrity and moral values. However, in the regional governments, the financial burden and the debt of political officials who became regional heads and local legislative members became a problem. Hence the

politicisation of the bureaucracy could not be fully eliminated (Yuwono, 2017). During direct regional elections, bureaucratic officials are often in an unfavourable situation. Research shows that if incumbents are potentially winning the election, the politicisation of bureaucratic officials usually occurs. If the incumbents are predicted to lose, bureaucratic officials naturally isolate themselves from politicisation (Ting, James., Shigeo., & Olle, 2012).

Political officials' vision and mission must often be carried out and supported (Krisnajaya et al., 2019). Unfortunately, at the local government level, the structural positions under the regional head must be appointed based on a competency test and not merely on political considerations. This has become a source of anxiety among officials at the local government offices. However, the neutrality of the bureaucracy in the Reform Era after the Civil Service (ASN) Law demonstrated a very different style from similar policies in the New Order regime, as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Bureaucratic Neutrality during the Old Order, New Order and Reform Era

	Old Order	New Order	Reform Era
Characteristic	neutral civil servants	neutral civil servants but is set to support <i>Golongan Karya</i>	neutral civil servants
Challenges	Bureaucracy was drawn in party competition in a parliamentary political system.	Bureaucracy was drawn as a political force supporting the ruling party.	Direct presidential and regional head contestation often creates disruption and interference in bureaucratic neutrality.

Source: Processed research data, 2020

Along with various political events in 2018-2019, the Circular of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform No. B / 71 / M.SM.00.00 / 2017 was issued on December 27 2017, to regulate the implementation of ASN neutrality during 2018 Simultaneous Local Elections, 2019 Legislative Elections, and 2019 Presidential and Vice President Election. This was a manifestation of the government's seriousness in maintaining bureaucratic neutrality. The circular even regulates the prohibition of uploading, responding (such as likes, comments) or distributing pictures/photos, vision, mission and other links of prospective regional head candidates through online and social media. Civil servants are also prohibited from taking pictures with regional head/deputy regional head candidates or indicating hand gestures/movements as a form of alignment.

The policy on bureaucratic neutrality in the Reform Era has been rigid and strict. However, law enforcement on violations of bureaucratic neutrality has not been easy. One source of the issue in applying bureaucratic neutrality among civil servants is the weak coordination and application of sanctions (Budiono, 2019; Hartini., Setiajeng., & Sudrajat, 2014). It is, therefore, necessary to strengthen the institutional structure in handling neutrality violations. Establishing a functional-structural working relationship between election supervisory agencies, election supervisory committees, local personnel agencies, and the Inspectorate in each region is necessary. A study by Sudrajat and Hartini concluded that it is necessary to strengthen the government's role to anticipate neutrality violations by establishing a pattern of handling neutrality violations between integrated institutions (Sudrajat & Hartini, 2017).

In addition, regional heads or political officials must understand that bureaucracy is not a political machine that can be used to enforce short-term political will. In certain conditions, this can lead to collective corruption efforts between the regional head and the bureaucracy (Wimmy & Dwiranda, 2020). Bureaucracy must be guarded against the intervention of any party, including political parties. Bureaucratic officials must also be able to maintain neutrality

as much as possible. They must be confident in remaining on the path of professionalism and a merit-based system (Berenschot, 2018; Edison, 2011; Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2019; Nuphanudin., Sugiarto., & Supadi, 2019; Rosliana & A, 2018). The ASN Law, which desires a professional and neutral bureaucracy, can only manifest when political parties, political officials and bureaucratic officials are committed to building the nation in their respective lines of duty. Political parties and actors can build a vision of development and policy values. The bureaucracy has capabilities at the data level, experience in implementing various policies, and a far-sighted technocratic vision. Political and bureaucratic actors with these abilities must synergise to achieve better development and policy outcomes. Political actors are expected not to take the risk of choosing bureaucratic officials merely due to the need for political support, which may result in officials who are weak at policy formulation and implementation. Political officials also need a reliable bureaucracy to translate their political vision into policy formulation and development.

E. CONCLUSION

Bureaucratic neutrality was the spirit of the Old Order regime, as evidenced by the birth of legislation prohibiting civil servants from becoming members or administrators of political parties. In that era, a neutrality policy was issued to maintain bureaucratic impartiality since the bureaucracy was an arena for power struggles among parties during the parliamentary system. The neutrality of the bureaucracy during the New Order was subtly eliminated through forced regulations of the ruling party. Civil servants were indeed not forbidden to be part of political parties. Still, the New Order authorities massively and systematically controlled *KORPRI*, the only governing institution for civil servants. This "neutral side" was maintained during the New Order only in appearance. After the collapse of the New Order, the Reform Era explicitly mandated bureaucratic neutrality. The neutrality of the bureaucracy in the early Reform Era was demonstrated by the prohibition of civil servants from becoming members or administrators of political parties. The professionalism of ASN, aside from being impartially driven, is also strengthened by a merit-based system. The merit system requires that each position only be held by a competent individual or expert with sufficient experience. The direct election mechanism for presidents and regional heads often serves as a trap for political and bureaucratic officials to engage in pragmatic interests and relinquish commitments to uphold a clean and transparent government. The bureaucratic neutrality, which became the spirit of the Reform Era, must be supported by the awareness and willingness of political parties not to carry out bureaucratic politicisation and bureaucratic awareness not to enter practical politics. The principle of neutrality encourages the bureaucracy to be professional, patriotic, and pro-public in carrying out its duties and responsibilities. It also encourages political actors to have a vision of development and policies that will be assisted by competent bureaucracy in policy formulation and implementation.

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