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A Comparative Study of The Leadership of Regional Heads, Political Cadres, and Civil Servants on Development Outcomes: The Perspective of Local Government Employees in Cirebon City

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Abstract: The paper aims to look at the difference between the leadership styles of the regional heads who are political appointees and those who are civil servants (ASN) and some of them under President Jokowi are ousted by Acting Mayors or Regents who are administrative tools of the President. This paper is based on a comparative study in the city of Cirebon, which had a change of leadership to an ASN acting mayor. This research fills a research gap that prevails since most researches have focused much on performance in policy or innovations in delivering public services but not the leadership process. The other gap is that there is no direct comparison of the political cadres and the civil servant local heads in the same region. The research design is descriptive qualitative, comparative methodology which entails in depth interviews and field observation. The results indicate that the political cadres leadership is more susceptible to the political factor and more inclined toward the populist politics, and the civil servant leadership is more bureaucratic with its focus on professionalism, responsibility and sustainability of the public services. This research paper illuminates on the issue of political and administrative legitimacy and its influence on the style of leadership and its impact on the delivery of the services by the government.

Keyword: Leadership, Political Cadres, Civil Service, Policy Transition, Public Service.

INTRODUCTION

The administration of local government in Indonesia is a mandate 1945 Constitution, Article 18 which reaffirms the principle of regional autonomy and the division of authority between the central and regional governments. This indicates that the success of regional development is largely determined by the quality of leadership demonstrated by regional heads. The leadership of regional heads plays a highly strategic role in guiding regional development, formulating policies, and ensuring the quality of public services and the effectiveness of local government administration (Saputra et al., 2024). Local leaders are not only responsible for the progress of the regions they lead, but also for ensuring the achievement of sustainable development goals. Therefore, changes in local leadership—

whether resulting from elections or appointments—always bring about significant changes that affect bureaucratic structures, governance dynamics, and relationships among stakeholders within the local government (Robbins & Judge, 2017).

In recent years, Indonesia has faced an unusual political transition, particularly with the expiration of the terms of many regional heads prior to the 2024 Simultaneous Regional Elections. These vacancies in regional leadership positions are addressed through Law No. 10 of 2016 Article 201(9), which authorizes the President to appoint an Acting Regional Head (Pj.). The appointment is then formalized through Decree of the President of the Republic of Indonesia, which served as the basis for administrative legitimacy in the administration of local government during the transition period. These officials came from the ranks of the Civil Service (ASN). This policy created a new phenomenon in local government politics: a leadership transition that replaced regional heads from political parties with regional heads drawn from the Civil Service. This transformation has resulted in major reforms in the system of bureaucracy and government administration which has also been of interest in comparative leadership research.

One of the places where this change of leadership is being witnessed is Cirebon. The city has shifted away, from a political cadres leadership; a regional head of the Democratic Party elected locally by popular vote, to an acting mayor, who is a civil servant, a career civil servant of the West Java Provincial Government. It is this difference of background which has produced two very distinct models of leadership. Political cadres are described as political in nature and populist in nature whereby they are more focused on bringing closeness to the community and providing results on development which can be directly observed on the ground. Meanwhile the civil servants would tend to adopt the more bureaucratic and rational mode of thought, administrative stability and focus on professionalism of local government administration.

The basic distinction of the two forms of leadership is the legitimacy of leadership and policy orientation. The fact that regional heads were elected due to the support of the masses through the electoral process of the period of political cadres leadership accorded legitimacy to the regional heads which led to more responsive policies to the political needs and dynamism of the people. On the other hand under the civil servant leadership, legitimacy of the regional head lies on an administrative mandate vested by the President through Minister of Home Affairs and that the leadership is supposed to be more interested in bureaucratic stability, administrative impartiality and providing continuity of the services of the people. Thus, the implications of the leadership models of both the regional heads to the governance and quality of the public services of the City of Cirebon have had different implications.

Such a change in leadership styles provokes an interesting question in the scholarly community: how can the leadership processes of these two types of leaders operate in the same conditions (i.e. with the same bureaucratic structure, the same socio-political environment and the same governmental location) and still have such diametrically opposite leadership dynamics? To date, there are few studies which dissect the processes of leadership. Numerous researches have been centring on the outcomes of policy and the performance of the government without considering the leadership process which is an important pillar of the development of good governance (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

Previous research has primarily focused on public service innovation, political leadership in general, or the role of civil servants as policy implementers. However, very few studies have directly compared the leadership of politically appointed regional heads and civil servant regional heads within the same region and across consecutive leadership terms. This gap needs to be addressed, given that fundamental differences in legitimacy and political pressures can influence how leaders manage the bureaucracy, communicate with the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), approach regulations, and engage the

public in public decision-making (Hasibuan, 2024).

Researchers are examining this phenomenon with the aim of making theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, this study enriches the field of local leadership by offering a comparative perspective on leaders from diverse backgrounds within the frameworks of leadership theory and the New Public Service (NPS) theory, which emphasizes the importance of public participation, accountability, and collaboration between government and the public in decision-making (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). In practical terms, the findings of this study can serve as recommendations for the central government, particularly Ministry of the Interior (Kemendagri), in formulating recommendations for the appointment of acting regional heads and in guiding the regional bureaucracy during periods of political transition.

This paper aims at learning more about how the leadership processes are implemented by these two regional heads in a manner that can leave a tangible mark in the development results of the region, what are the reasons behind the differences in their leadership styles, and how a public service orientation is exhibited in leadership practices both by political appointees and civil servants in the City of Cirebon. It is through this understanding that hopefully a perfect leadership model can be identified to be used during the political transition period in the region consequently contributing practically towards the development of the region.

METHOD

The research design adopted in this study is a comparative qualitative research design since the study wants to have an in depth insight and description of the leadership processes of the regional heads of political parties and regional heads of the civil service that spearheaded the City of Cirebon in their successive terms. This was done so that the complexity of the leadership dynamics, leadership communication patterns, policy orientations, interaction with the bureaucracy and what aspects of legitimacy affect the leadership style of each leader could be understood.

Data was also gathered in several government offices in Cirebon City that are directly connected to leadership process of the government head in the area and they are; the Civil Service and Human Resource Development Agency (BKPSDM), the Regional Secretariat (Setda) and the Regional People Representative Council (DPRD) of Cirebon City. The reason why these three institutions were chosen is that they are strategic in the formulation of policies, management of civil service, government coordination and political checks. The research sites also justify the range of the research since it does not focus on the performance outcomes or developmental achievements but on the leadership process.

The study concentrates on two local leaders who assumed leadership of the City of Cirebon during 2018-2023 and 2023-2025, one a mayor belonging to a political party, the other an acting mayor, which is the civil service. In this paper, the researcher will explain how the aspects of legitimacy, political pressure, bureaucratic culture and organizational traits impact the leadership styles of these two leaders. The study does not compare the outcomes of development but looks at the situation, the internal process and the decision making which took place under their leadership.

The purposive sampling technique was employed in this research to sample informants, where a selective sampling was done towards their suitability, knowledge and personal involvement in the leadership processes of both mayors. The structural officials and staff of the local government apparatus were the first informants who were in close contact with the regional head, i.e. the officials of the BKPSDM and the Regional Secretariat, i.e. Government Division and the Organization Division. Also, Cirebon City Regional People Representative Council (DPRD) members worked as informants to offer political views and opinions of the formal association between the DPRD and the regional head.

Informants were selected based on the consideration that they possess knowledge and experience regarding how the instructions, coordination, communication, and strategic decisions of local government leaders are implemented in daily practice.

The data used in this study consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews, limited observation, and informal conversations with informants involved in the governance process. Secondary data was obtained from official government documents, performance reports, laws and regulations, archives of local government leaders' decisions, and relevant academic publications. All of this data was used to construct a comprehensive picture of the differences in the leadership styles of the two local government leaders.

Using data collection techniques Sugiyono (2020) Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted to allow for flexible exploration of the informants' experiences and perspectives. The interviews focused on themes such as the communication patterns of local government heads, leadership styles, decision-making, relationships with local government officials, political dynamics, and external pressures. Limited observations were conducted to examine patterns of interaction within the bureaucratic environment. Documentation was used as the primary support to verify and enrich field findings. Data analysis employed an interactive analysis model Miles et al. (2014), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. This process is carried out simultaneously throughout the research. Data reduction is performed by sorting out important information related to the leadership processes of the two regional heads. Data presentation is conducted in the form of thematic narratives. Conclusions are drawn gradually through the repeated interpretation of findings to ensure consistency.

This analysis provides an in-depth understanding of how political and administrative legitimacy, career backgrounds, external pressures, and bureaucratic structures influence the leadership styles, management approaches, and coordination patterns of the two regional heads.

To guarantee validity of the data, this study has used source triangulation and methodological triangulation. There was triangulation of sources when the information of various agencies (BKPSDM, Setda, DPRD) was compared and the views of structural officials were compared with the documents. Triangulation methodology employed a mix of interviews, observations and documentation to be able to guarantee the consistency of the results. In addition, the key informants also underwent member checking to ensure that the meanings given by the researcher are well aligned with facts in the field. This is the test of validity that was selected so that the research findings have high level of credibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

This research paper seeks to get a critical insight into the leadership process as practiced by two categories of local leaders in Cirebon City; political appointees and the acting mayor who is a civil servant. This study presents a comparative study of the leadership styles of these two leaders using primary data collected through in-depth interviews with different informants, who were directly involved in the leadership process, and six days of field observations.

Based on in-depth interviews with informants from the Regional Secretariat staff, the Head of the Regional Civil Service and Human Resources Agency (BKPSDM), and members of the Cirebon City Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), a number of indicators were identified that consistently point to differences in leadership processes between regional heads from political parties and those from the civil service. These

differences are evident not only in communication styles and decision-making but also in leadership legitimacy, leadership orientation, accountability, and development priorities.

This comparison can be viewed more systematically in the following comparative table

Table 1. Regional Head Comparison Indicators

NO	INDICATOR	POLITICAL ACTIVIST	CIVIL SERVANT / ACTING OFFICIAL	IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES
1	Sources of Legitimacy	Electoral (regional results)	Administrative (presidential appointment)	Political legitimacy drives visible and rapid development, while administrative legitimacy drives stable and sustainable development
2	Leadership Orientation	Strategic, populist politics	Administrative bureaucracy	Politicians tend to prioritize physical infrastructure projects during election seasons, while civil servants focus on strengthening system governance
3	Leadership Styles	Transformational, communicative	Procedural, technocratic	Projects initiated by politicians are implemented quickly but may lack integration, whereas civil service policies are more planned and systematic
4	Communication Pattern	Hierarchical and strategy-driven	Intensive, coordinated, data-driven	Coordination by politicians is swift but sometimes poorly documented, whereas coordination by civil servants is more orderly and well-documented
5	Decision-Making	Quick, adaptable to political dynamics	Through technical and regulatory reviews	Decisions made by politicians are swift but prone to changes in direction, whereas the civil service process is slower but more consistent
6	Accountability	Political and image-driven	Administrative and performance-based	The results of politicians are visible quickly, whereas the long-term outcomes of civil servants are more assured

NO	INDICATOR	POLITICAL ACTIVIST	CIVIL SERVANT / ACTING OFFICIAL	IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES
7	Development Priorities	Physical infrastructure and populist programs	Government systems and digitalization	The public feels the immediate impact of politicians' performance, while civil servants experience long-term effects on efficiency and transparency

Based on the table, it is evident that differences in leadership not only influence the internal dynamics of the bureaucracy but also result in substantially different patterns of development.

Political cadres leadership is more likely to deliver a fast and visible development responsive to the needs of the people but with the risk of instability in the long run. The leadership by civil servants, on the other hand, is more focused on systemic consistency, enhanced governance, and sustainability of policies even though the concrete effects are not always directly observable by the citizens.

The findings of the research show that nature of the outcomes of the regional development is directly influenced by the leadership process, in terms of speed of implementation and persistence of policies..

Discussion

The variations in the leadership styles between mayors who are political appointees and acting mayors who are civil servants can offer valuable insights into the effects of the legitimacy of a local leader on the administration of government and services to the population. According to the research results, these two types of leadership have a great implication when it comes to the dynamics in bureaucracy, pattern of communication, decision making, and the rapport between the local leaders and local government officials in the City of Cirebon.

Leadership Styles and Legitimacy

The legitimacy of the leadership of these two leaders is one major element that differentiates them. It is this legitimacy (be it political (through direct election) or administrative (through appointment by the President) that shapes the policy orientations and communication strategies adopted by each of these leaders. According to Robbins & Judge (2017), Leadership is not just about the capacity of an individual to run an organization, but also on the environment and legitimate that one is granted.

A political appointee mayor, who has gained legitimacy with electoral support in local elections, has an obligation to maintain the electoral support in public view, which often influences the line of policy taken. This aligns with the transformational leadership theory which was advanced by Bass (1990) where a politically legitimate leader is geared towards achieving a bigger picture through charismatic appeal and attainment of long term goals that appeal to the people and the constituents. Political cadres tend to take decisions that are more responsive to the aspirations of the people, but these decisions are usually taken in a rush to uphold political support and image.

They are also more concerned with bureaucratic stability and conformity to the current administrative practices as opposed to civil servants who are given their legitimacy by an administrative directive issued by the President. This is characteristic of bureaucratic

leadership style whereby decisions are made after more rational and quantifiable analysis. In this case, the value of policy stability and permanence of the state services in a more stable and formalized system of state management is more important to the civil service regional heads. The emphasis on administrative procedures and responsibility indicates that such a kind of leadership is more concerned with the notion of professionalism and bureaucratic neutrality. (Hasibuan, 2024).

Communication and Decision-Making

Communication and decision making, which are processes used by these two local leaders, are also characterised as having significant differences between the two. The mayor as a political appointee with political legitimacy is more oriented towards direct and dynamical communication with the people and external stakeholders, such as the private institutions and central government agencies. This will make it easier to quickly respond to issues on the ground and can result in more populist and expedited policies. However, this under some cases creates a gap between the policies formulated and how they are applied to the ground because policies are mostly influenced by the politics.

On the contrary, more technocratic and data-driven style of communication and emphasize more on the organized and measurable process are the concerns of the regional heads of civil servants. These regional heads are more likely to use evidence-based analysis, as they are experienced civil servants, and underline periodic reviews of all policy decisions taken. This is more rational and procedural type of leadership yet the decision making process is slow as one must comply with laborious administrative procedures. The local leaders who are civil servants are concerned with transparency and accountability in decision making which are bureaucratic leadership traits. (Weber, 1947).

Government Bureaucracy and Coordination

One of the most important aspects that make the leadership of political cadres and that of civil servants different is bureaucracy. Political cadres, the leadership of which is highly determined by the nature of politics, are more inclined to promote quick and flexible decision making and are less concerned about the stability and compatibility of local government agencies. This usually leads to dislocation of the policies that are ready and the way they are implemented, intra-bureaucratic strain that can lead to the smooth functioning of the government. In its turn, the less bureaucratic leadership by civil servants focuses on the need to be consistent and administrative, which in its turn fosters better coordination within the local government and makes the process of providing the population with better-organized and measurable services more probable.

The findings of this study are consistent with the view that Siswoyo et al. (2019) Based on the leaders of the civil service on procedural responsibility and administrative predictability in running the government, and political leaders are more rational and adaptable to the fast in the society. In this way, the political leadership is more inclined to alterations of social and political life whereas the civil service leadership can provide more stable conditions in bureaucratic life despite lack of speed in responding to the needs of people.

A Comparison of Development Outcomes Under the Leadership of Political Cadres and Civil Servants

According to the interviews conducted with different informants and the observations on the field, it can be concluded that every leader has different development outcomes, in regard to the pace of implementing them and their sustainability. Development within Cirebon City under the leadership of a mayor in the political cadres is often oriented towards

projects that can be easily seen by the population like building physical infrastructure like roads, markets and city parks among other facilities used by the people. Having a more populist and dynamic approach, political cadres local leaders are more focused on the short-term successes to show the population what they expect and gain the electoral popularity. An example is the building of traditional markets and economic zone development, which directly influence the growth of income of low-income households and MSMEs.

However, bureaucratic instability usually undermines development results in the leadership of regional heads being politically appointed because such policies are affected by electoral interests and politics. There are cases where development programs fail to unfold as desired or even concentrate on short term outcomes without taking into consideration the sustainability and consistency of policies. Indicatively, certain physical infrastructure projects that are advanced at the time of political cadres regional heads are at times left unimplemented because of lack of proper planning and effective coordination of the regional agencies. This results in the quality and sustainability of development being less assured in the long term.

The leadership of the Acting Mayor, who comes from a civil service background, has brought about significant changes in the approach to regional development in Cirebon City. The Acting Mayor, with his civil service background, places greater emphasis on administrative consistency and regulatory compliance in every policy decision made. Long-term development is the top priority, with a focus on efficiency, transparency, and accountability in the management of development projects (Rambe et al., 2025).

One of the standout projects under ASN's leadership is the development of an integrated regional information system, which aims to improve access to public data and promote more transparent budget management. Through a data-driven and analytical approach, ASN's regional leaders strive to ensure that every policy decision is accountable and has a sustainable impact on the community.

However, although the development outcomes achieved by the acting mayor—a civil servant—tend to be more structured and sustainable, the implementation process is often slower compared to the tenure of a political appointee. A focus on administrative stability and adherence to procedures results in policies that are more measured and systematically managed, but sometimes less responsive to the urgent needs of the community. For example, although smart city development and e-government systems are priorities, these do not immediately produce physical impacts visible to the public, which may be insufficient for segments of the community that desire more tangible physical development, as was the case during the tenure of political appointees.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the two types of leadership have different outcomes of development when it comes to speed of implementation and sustainability. The more dynamic and responsive to political changes political cadres leadership has managed to emphasize on physical development that is directly experienced by the community, but this is usually unsustainable and not effectively incorporated into a more professional administrative system. Civil servant leadership on the other hand, is more focused on continuity and sustainability of the development process, yet the process of making decisions is less responsive and responsive to the immediate demands of the community.

These leadership styles are also different and this has a direct impact on the public services. The activist and populist leadership of political cadres has more immediate payoff in the physical development, but is less interested in the stability and sustainability of the public services. Conversely, the leadership of civil services is less changeable but guarantees sustainability of the services provided to the society through a more arranged and controlled system.

CONCLUSION

The current paper has identified and talked about differences of leadership styles of heads of local government who are political appointees and civil servant (ASN), in the context of governance and service to people in the City of Cirebon. The results indicate that the leadership of the mayor by political legitimacy is more susceptible to political influences and concentrates more on policies that can be readily implemented to deliver on the expectations of the citizens though, this is subject to long term implementation inconsistency. On the other hand, the acting mayor, who is a civil service employee, leadership is more concerned with maintaining bureaucratic stability, professionalism, and adherence to regulations, but decisions are slower and less adaptable to the rapid changes. The importance of upholding balance between political processes and bureaucratic stability to ensure sustainability and quality of the public services is also demonstrated in this paper particularly when replacing the leadership. One of the weaknesses of this research is that it has not exhaustively delved into information as conceived by the actors in the leadership process, neither has it involved the view of the people who are the direct beneficiaries of the impacts of the policies. This is why additional studies are suggested to enlarge the circle of informants and include the views of the population to get a more holistic image of the dynamics of local leadership and its effect on the quality of the services to the population.

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