

Research Article

Human Resource Management in the Public Sector in Relation to the Political Orientation of Papuan Ethnic Groups During the 2024 Legislative Elections in Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province

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Abstract.

The 2024 legislative elections in Sorong City, Southwest Papua Province, reveal significant dynamics in the political orientation of Papuan ethnic groups. This study analyzes how human resource management (HRM) practices in the public sector influence and are influenced by ethnic identity politics during the election process. Employing a qualitative approach, the research involved in-depth interviews with 15 participants, including local government officials, community leaders, and political party representatives. It examines how recruitment, placement, and promotion of public officials are shaped by ethnic affiliations and political interests. The findings indicate that public sector HRM, which ideally should prioritize meritocracy and professionalism, is often compromised by ethnic considerations, leading to challenges in governance, service delivery, and public trust. Strengthening inclusive, competency-based human resource management practices is essential to ensure fair representation and improve governance quality in Sorong City. This study contributes to the broader understanding of ethnicity, public sector management, and electoral dynamics in multicultural societies.

Keywords: human resource management, public sector, ethnic orientation, legislative elections, Southwest Papua

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1. Introduction

The interaction between ethnic identity and political dynamics has long characterized public sector governance in Indonesia. In culturally diverse regions such as Southwest Papua, ethnicity functions not only as a social identity but also as a determinant of power relations and bureaucratic structures. Ideally, human resource management (HRM) in the public sector should be grounded in principles of meritocracy, professionalism, and political neutrality. However, in practice, ethnic affiliations and political considerations often influence the recruitment, placement, and promotion of civil servants.



Sorong City, as the administrative and economic center of Southwest Papua Province, presents a unique case to examine these dynamics. The 2024 Legislative Elections served as a critical moment that revealed the growing strength of ethnic-based political alliances and preferences within the local political landscape. This phenomenon raises important concerns about the extent to which public sector HRM systems can uphold fairness and professionalism amidst identity-driven political pressures.

Based on this context, this study aims to analyze the influence of ethnic identity politics on human resource management practices in the public sector of Sorong City during the 2024 Legislative Elections, with a particular focus on recruitment, placement, and promotion processes within local government institutions.

Research on public sector human resource management (HRM) in Indonesia reveals persistent challenges such as nepotism, lack of transparency, and the influence of local power dynamics. In ethnically diverse regions like Papua, these issues are further complicated by identity politics, where ethnic affiliation often becomes a decisive factor in bureaucratic appointments [1]; [2].

Contemporary scholars such as Dwiyanto [3] and Turner [4] emphasize the importance of inclusive HRM practices for promoting fair governance and improving service delivery in multicultural societies. However, ethnic favoritism frequently undermines these principles, leading to inefficiencies and diminished public trust in the bureaucracy.

The theory of representative bureaucracy [5] [6] and the broader framework of multicultural public administration provide a conceptual foundation for understanding the need for public institutions to reflect the diversity of the populations they serve. This theory suggests that a bureaucracy composed of demographically representative personnel is more likely to be responsive to the needs and values of various social groups. Two main dimensions are central to this theory:

1. Passive representation, where the demographic composition of the bureaucracy mirrors that of the public, and
2. Active representation, where public servants from certain social or ethnic backgrounds actively advocate for the interests of their communities.

In this study, the theory of representative bureaucracy is applied to examine the extent to which ethnic diversity within the Papuan bureaucracy translates into substantive representation of local communities, or whether it reinforces exclusionary power structures. The theory also serves as a framework to analyze the tension between

identity-based representation and the principle of meritocracy in recruitment and promotion within public institutions. Thus, it is not only a normative model but also a practical tool for assessing how diversity within the bureaucracy affects governance quality and service effectiveness.

While local (Setiawan, Rumambi) and international (Turner) literature highlight the challenges of balancing meritocracy and representation in multicultural settings, the current scope of references remains limited and lacks deeper engagement with broader comparative studies. Notably, the literature does not yet incorporate comparisons with other Indonesian regions or international case studies facing similar dilemmas.

Several regions across Indonesia exhibit similar dynamics. In Aceh, affirmative policies rooted in regional autonomy are often influenced by local patronage networks, reinforcing the dominance of specific ethnic groups within the bureaucracy. In West Kalimantan, historical ethnic tensions have shaped bureaucratic recruitment to prioritize social stability over merit-based appointments. Similarly, in North Sulawesi, dominant ethnic groups tend to monopolize strategic bureaucratic positions [2]. These comparisons indicate that challenges related to ethnic representation in bureaucracy are not unique to Papua but are part of a broader national pattern that requires systemic and conceptual responses.

International case studies further underscore the relevance of representative bureaucracy theory. In the United States, affirmative action policies in public employment and education aim to increase the representation of minority groups, though they continue to generate debates regarding fairness and meritocracy [5]. In post-apartheid South Africa, bureaucratic transformation efforts sought to correct racial imbalances by promoting Black representation in public service, but these efforts often encountered issues related to bureaucratic capacity and professionalism [1]. Canada offers a more institutionalized multicultural model, where cultural sensitivity training and diversified recruitment are emphasized while maintaining national competence standards [1].

These international examples demonstrate that the tension between representation and meritocracy is not merely a local issue but a global challenge in public sector governance. Incorporating such perspectives strengthens the theoretical grounding of this study and underscores the analytical utility of representative bureaucracy theory in understanding the intersections of ethnicity, local power, and administrative performance in multicultural contexts

2. Methods

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a case study design to understand the dynamics of human resource management in the context of ethnic politics in Sorong City. The main focus of the research is to explore practices, perceptions, and the influence of ethnicity in the recruitment, promotion, and placement processes of government employees at the local level.

Data Collection Techniques

Three primary techniques were employed in data collection:

1. In-depth Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 informants, including local government officials, civil servants, legislative candidates, and community leaders from various ethnic backgrounds. Each interview lasted between 45 to 90 minutes and focused on the participants' experiences, views, and involvement in HRM practices and ethnic political dynamics.

2. Field Observation:

The researcher conducted non-participant observations in government institutions and political campaign activities. Field notes were taken to capture social interactions, ethnic symbols, and decision-making processes that reflected ethnic involvement in institutional contexts.

3. Document Analysis:

Analyzed documents included recruitment policy guidelines, internal HR reports, and media archives or campaign materials relevant to local elections and ethnicity-related issues.

Participants and Sampling Techniques

Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their positions, experiences, and direct involvement in decision-making or political activities related to ethnicity. In addition, snowball sampling was used to reach informal leaders and individuals with extensive insider knowledge as identified by previous informants. Inclusion criteria involved individuals actively engaged in local bureaucracy or politics during the 2024 election period.

Research Timeframe and Location

The study was conducted from January to March 2024, covering three main phases: pre-election, during the election, and post-election. The research took place in Sorong

City, focusing on government institutions, local political parties, and influential ethnic communities.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards for qualitative research. All participants were provided with informed consent forms and were clearly briefed about the purpose, benefits, and their right to withdraw at any time. Participant identities were anonymized to ensure confidentiality, and data were securely stored in accordance with data protection procedures.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke [3]. The process included five stages:

1. Transcription of data and repeated readings.
2. Manual coding to identify key meanings in the data.
3. Grouping of codes into recurring major themes.
4. Reviewing and refining themes based on data consistency.
5. Interpretation and narrative writing based on the finalized themes.

To ensure data validity, source triangulation was applied (interviews, observations, and documents), and member checking was conducted with several informants to verify the researcher's interpretations. Peer debriefing was also performed to assess the consistency of the analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

The Link Between Ethnicity and Public HR Practices: Findings, Challenges, and Reform Directions, This research presents an in-depth analysis of the relationship between ethnicity and human resource (HR) practices in the public sector in Sorong City. Three key issues consistently identified are the erosion of meritocracy, declining public trust, and inefficiency in public services. These findings are not only empirically relevant but also reflect current realities in the dynamics of local bureaucracy.

1. Erosion of Meritocracy

The recruitment, placement, and promotion processes of employees in the Sorong City government are strongly indicated to be influenced by ethnic affiliation, especially ahead of political contests such as the 2024 elections. As described in the findings:

“During the 2024 elections, political candidates and party elites tend to recruit individuals from their own tribes to strengthen their support base.”

A senior civil servant also stated:

“If you’re not from the same clan, it’s very difficult to pass the selection, even if your scores are high.”

This practice shows that the principle of meritocracy is being eroded. Recruitment is no longer based on competence and professionalism, but rather on ethnic and political loyalty.

2. Declining Public Trust

When the bureaucracy appears to favor certain groups, the public loses trust in state institutions. One community leader stated:

“The government seems to only work for their own group. Those of us who are not part of them feel neglected.”

This widens the gap between the state and the citizens and threatens social cohesion in culturally plural areas like Sorong City.

3. Inefficiency in Public Services

When public officials are placed without regard to expertise, the performance of public services is affected. In one case, a department head with a non-technical background was placed in a technical sector, leading to poor service quality:

“There was a department that failed to implement a health program because its head had no medical background at all,” said a technical official.

This results in low efficiency and effectiveness in services delivered to the public.

Implementation of Inclusive Policies: Examples and Expectations Although discriminatory practices still occur, there are examples of public institutions that have begun implementing inclusive policies. Some agencies, such as the Sorong City Health Office, have adopted a competency-based recruitment system with an independent panel.

“We have started using computer-based tests and involving third parties for interviews to ensure objective results free from political or ethnic influences,” said a civil service agency official.

Another example is SLBN 73 Malaingkedi, a special needs school established for children with disabilities in Sorong City and surrounding areas. The school’s existence is a concrete implementation of:

Sorong City Regional Regulation No. 11 of 2019 on the Implementation of Protection and Fulfillment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which guarantees access to education for vulnerable groups.

Relevant Regional Regulations

Several regulations serve as key references in assessing human resource (HR) practices and inclusivity in the City of Sorong, including:

1. Regional Regulation (Perda) of Sorong City No. 11 of 2019 Concerning the Protection and Fulfillment of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Guarantees access to education, healthcare, and employment for persons with disabilities.

2. Mayor Regulation (Perwali) of Sorong City No. 3 of 2024 Concerning Guidelines for Civil Servant (PNS) Recruitment Regulates general procedures for civil servant recruitment; potentially serves as an instrument for merit-based recruitment if implemented according to principles of fairness.

These findings reinforce the argument that politicization and ethnicity in public recruitment pose serious challenges to bureaucratic reform at the regional level. However, the presence of good practices and supportive regulations provides room for optimism that inclusivity can be more widely implemented through measurable policies, transparent evaluations, and strong commitment from local leaders.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that ethnic politics significantly shape human resource management (HRM) practices in the public sector of Sorong City, particularly during electoral cycles. This influence is evident in recruitment, promotion, and placement processes, which often lack a competency-based foundation. To promote fairness, efficiency, and public trust, it is imperative to strengthen HRM systems grounded in meritocracy, transparency, and inclusivity.

Based on the findings, the following five practical policy recommendations are proposed, tailored to address the specific challenges facing Sorong's bureaucracy:

1. Establish an Independent Recruitment Agency The Sorong City Government, in collaboration with the local legislature (DPRD), should create an autonomous recruitment body that is free from political and ethnic interference. This agency must be granted full authority to oversee civil service selection based on merit.

2. Implement Competency-Based HRM Policies Across All Public Institutions Heads of regional government organizations (SKPD) and the local civil service agency (BKPSDM) must ensure that all promotion and transfer decisions are grounded in qualifications, experience, and performance — not ethnic or political considerations.

3. Promote Inter-Ethnic Training and Team-Building Initiatives To bridge ethnic divides and foster internal cohesion, joint training and team-building programs should be regularly organized by BKPSDM and relevant HR departments, involving staff from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

4. Enforce Performance-Based Evaluations Using Clear Metrics The Regional Inspectorate should implement a performance evaluation system based on transparent, measurable indicators. Evaluation outcomes must serve as a primary reference for decisions on career advancement and rotation.

Develop Civic Education Programs for Civil Servants and the Public The Education Office and the Agency for National Unity and Politics (Kesbangpol) should design civic education initiatives that emphasize professionalism, national unity, and ethical public leadership - both for civil servants and young citizens.

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