

## Research Article

# Examining the Indonesia Bureaucracy Response and Problem in Pandemic Times: A Preliminary Diagnostic Study

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**ORCID**Dodi Faedlulloh: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3381-2297>**Abstract.**

This investigation was prompted by the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, which created very rapid changes in the bureaucratic environment. This initial study is intended to explain how the Indonesian bureaucracy responds to changes due to the pandemic. A literature study is used to aggregate some of the findings of the latest research in Indonesia and official and accountable reports on bureaucratic governance. General results show that the bureaucracy in Indonesia is still stuttering in carrying out its functions. When the public requires quick and fair service, bureaucratic formalism, as an effect of Weberian bureaucracy, finds its contradiction. Still, the response required by the public does not accompany it. Further studies must be initiated to formulate an agile and public-centered bureaucratic model in the post-pandemic era.

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## 1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated disruption in every aspect of human life, including the bureaucratic realm. As the state's extension, the bureaucracy represents the state itself. The bureaucracy must continue to adapt to the various technological and societal developments of the times. In the trajectory of Indonesia's bureaucratic reform plan, 2020-2024 is a crucial phase in pursuing a bureaucracy of international caliber. However, this ideal still seems far away. Studies by Faedlulloh et al. (1)(2) indicate that the roots of bureaucratic transformation are not yet firmly established; consequently, the various programs implemented to reform the bureaucracy have been ineffective.

Bureaucracy and innovation ought to go hand-in-hand, but the public experiences the opposite. The pandemic that began at the beginning of 2020 demonstrates that

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the bureaucracy struggles to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. The various innovations implemented are incomplete. The government's various affirmative policies are moving slowly, whereas the number of victims of this pandemic is enormous. Multiple pandemic waves have occurred in Indonesia, but the Indonesian bureaucracy has failed to respond(3).

The bureaucracy carries out policies in the context of governance, development, and public services. Such conditions make the bureaucracy always central. If the bureaucracy does not function properly, then the impact is quite broad, including a decline in public trust in the government. The administration of the bureaucracy is associated with the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia, so at least the existing functions must also be carried out by implementing the COVID-19 health protocol.

Data released by the Ministry of Administrative Reform and Bureaucratic Reform (Kemenpan RB) noted that after the implementation of the WFH policy for ASN, there were complaints from the public because public services were often disrupted. The complaints include services related to population administration (153 reports), electricity services (116 reports), taxation (40 reports), licensing (20 reports), immigration (11 reports), and oil and gas (8 reports). Public complaints submitted directly by the community regarding public services during the COVID-19 pandemic experienced a spike. As of May 2020, the total number of complaints to the Indonesian Ombudsman Representative for South Kalimantan reached 216 more reports. The East Nusa Tenggara Ombudsman reported that from March-April 2020, it had received 167 reports of public complaints (4). The RI Ombudsman Representative for Central Java received 87 reports during the pandemic. The Indonesian Ombudsman Representative for West Papua received 101 public reports and 37 special reports related to COVID-19. Meanwhile, nationally, until Quarter 1, the reports submitted to the Ombudsman have reached around 5,000 (5).

The bureaucracy during the COVID-19 pandemic must play an essential role as a government tool in tackling COVID-19. The implementation of public services during the COVID -19 pandemic experienced various obstacles, such as the large-scale social distancing (PSBB) policy, which directly stopped public services and shifted to online public services; this encouraged the bureaucracy to continually develop strategies to provide public services to the community properly even if it has to be done online.

This article was conducted to examine the dynamics of the bureaucracy in Indonesia in the pandemic era. As a start, this study was conducted to see how bureaucratic practices respond to changes that occur in the pandemic era. Then, explore the implications of the process of change and adaptation efforts to provide a complete picture of the existing bureaucratic model.

## 2. Methods

This article uses a qualitative approach with a desk study to collect data and information based on the outcomes of secondary data analysis and a literature review. A literature review is a research because it enables researchers to determine the relationship between problems, pertinent studies, and contextual theories. A literature review aims to provide an overview of the problem under investigation, theoretical and conceptual support, and research material (6). The systematics of writing this article 1) examines the evolution of bureaucratic transformation in Indonesia, 2) Describes bureaucratic problems in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. 3) alternative efforts to improve bureaucratic stuttering amidst extremely dynamic circumstances.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Transformation of Indonesian Bureaucracy

Several theories contend that bureaucracy and public policy are difficult to change (7). This is because regulations are the foundation of bureaucracy, and public policies are typically debated at round tables involving the executive, legislature, and judiciary. In contrast, the COVID-19 pandemic has forced all parties to clean up. The government must evolve; specifically the bureaucracy and the public policies it implements. The bureaucratic system and government-run public policy should ideally have a mechanism for responding to and adapting to change (8). However, the reactions are generally gradual. The COVID-19 era has narrowed the range of possible stages. To continue to provide the best possible service to the public, the government must be responsive and devise strategies quickly and precisely. After all, the general public has numerous needs that government organizations must address. However, the general public cannot move as freely as it did prior to the COVID-19 era.

In Indonesia, bureaucratic reform is an essential component of efforts to improve bureaucratic performance, including central and regional government management (9). Theoretically-normatively, bureaucrats are being forced to shift from a rule-based bureaucracy to a performance-based one, which would eventually become a dynamic government. This is done to realize the good and clean government that has been established through the acceleration of bureaucratic reform implementation. As a result, the government will restructure the government administration system, with bureaucracy serving as the backbone of change.

According to the Grand Design of Indonesian Bureaucratic Reform, the vision of bureaucratic reform is establishing a world-class government. To realize this vision, the government must have a professional bureaucracy with integrity that can be more accessible to the public by providing excellent service.

Bureaucratic reform in local government can encourage changes toward a more competitive bureaucracy (10). Following the fall of the new order, bureaucratic reform has become a strategic priority for the Indonesian government. As previously stated, bureaucratic reform affects government effectiveness and efficiency, economic growth, and a country's competitive advantage. On the other hand, corruption, inefficiency, and bureaucratic politicization continue to plague Indonesian bureaucracy.

In Indonesia, four models of bureaucratic reform in local government exist (1) Local governments that innovate but do not have a road map for bureaucratic reform; (2) Local governments that innovate and have a road map for bureaucratic reform; (3) Local governments that do not try to change the bureaucracy at the same time do not have a bureaucratic reform design; and (4) Local governments that have a road map for bureaucratic reform but do not innovate on aspects that can improve bureaucratic performance (11). According to the four discovered models, the problem of bureaucratic reform starts upstream (road map), and the stages of bureaucratic reform are consistently implemented in each government. In the context of the pandemic, this reform initiative has hit a significant roadblock. Because of the epidemic, the Indonesian bureaucracy is relatively slow to adapt to rapid changes. The demand for public services is not directly proportional to their availability and dependability. For example, when personnel test positive for COVID-19, services are jeopardized immediately. On the other hand, the government's online document management tools have been could be more effective the results of a survey conducted by the United Nations (UN) on the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), show Indonesia is now ranked 88th out of 193 countries in 2020. In 2019, Indonesia climbed 19 places to 88, up from 107 the previous year. However, Indonesia's average EGDI score remains far behind ASEAN countries such as Thailand and neighboring Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, and Singapore, which are ranked 11th and 12th in the world, respectively. The data presented above show that Indonesia's e-government capabilities are still incientneed to be improved andemic this condition poses an additional challenge. When the public service process is converted from offline to online, the existing infrastructure is insufficient—E-Government implementation essentially nline services as a replacement for traditional services. Supporting technology limitations can still be found in different parts of Indonesia. As a result, the victims, in this case, are once again those who desire high-quality public services.

Indonesia's competitiveness rating will fall in 2022. According to the Institute for Management Development's (IMD) (12) World Competitive Yearbook 2022, Indonesia's competitiveness is currently ranked 44th, down from 37th in 2021. According to the report, this is the lowest ranking in five years, since a year or since 2018. Indonesia's competitiveness ranked 43 in 2018 and 32 in 2019. Indonesia's competitiveness fell to 40th in 2020 after rising to 37th in 2017. 2021. The competitiveness level then dropped to 44th in 2022. The ranking considers four economic factors: performance, government efficiency, business efficiency, and infrastructure, each of which has five sub-factors. In 2022, the value of bureaucratic efficiency fell from 26 to 35, while the value of business efficiency fell from 25 to 31.

The data presented above exemplifies the bureaucracy's long-standing problems. The bureaucracy is not adaptable to change due to its adherence to standard formalism. Bureaucracies are often rigid by nature, limiting an organization's adaptability and capacity for innovation. In this context, the study by Mckenna, Lorenzo, and Bridgman (13) emphasize the need to replace bureaucratic organizations with new organizational forms and practices, in this case, post-bureaucracy, which becomes a critical element to be re-inserted into Indonesia's bureaucratic discourse gap.

The following study by Janssen and van der Voort (8). highlights the government's agility and flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak. Agility is primarily concerned with the speed with which a specific institution responds, whereas adaptability is concerned with government-wide systemic change. These two factors ideally work together for a bureaucracy to remain relevant to the public's highly dynamic needs.

### 3.2. Bureaucratic Stuttering in the Pandemic Era

Max Weber is universally acknowledged as the authoritative source of modern bureaucracy by all writers. The primary goal of bureaucracy was to administer the state through offices. Bureaucracy, in this context, refers to an organization where administrative work is performed through specialization and division into many occupations, with the determination of substantive ties among them. When Weber developed his theory of bureaucracy, pure bureaucracy, it served as a model for effective administration in large administrative organizations such as the government apparatus.

The Weberian bureaucratic organization appears vast and extensive, implying that it has evolved into a highly hierarchical structure. This large and hierarchical organization's logical consequences are 1) slow decision-making bureaucracies, 2) lengthy bureaucratic service procedures, 3) employee disorientation, 4) the emergence of employee

solidarity with a nepotistic bent, and 5) bureaucrats who avoid taking responsibility for their actions (14). Slow decision-making is inherent in hierarchical, bureaucratic institutions. Bottom-level bureaucrats are only allowed to carry out orders from their superiors. The pandemic severely impacted the Indonesian bureaucracy in several ways. The decision to impose quarantine was made so slowly that public officials and bureaucrats did counterproductive things in dealing with the pandemic, such as providing economic stimulus to the tourism industry.

Ma'ruf Amin, Vice President of Indonesia, stated that one of the barriers to the recovery of the health and economic sectors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was the slow bureaucracy (15). Bureaucratic issues include slow planning and budgeting, inaccurate data, purchasing goods and services delays, and overlapping programs or activities between ministries/agencies and local governments.

Government officials must ensure service continuity by changing the service method that reduces the physical distance between the government and citizens as service users (physical distancing). Changes in how citizens are served are an unavoidable necessity, keeping with B. Libois's principles of continuity and adaptability in public services (16). Continuity implies that public services to citizens should not be interrupted during the pandemic; essential services will continue to be provided, at least in part. At the same time, adaptive is defined as a change in service delivery during a pandemic that allows citizens easy access to public services.

Many community service users have complained about delays in public services since the implementation of the work-from-home (WFH) ASN policy. Complaints range from population administration services to electricity, taxation, and licensing. In this regard, digital-based public services, which are frequently advocated for, could be more optimal. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, this must be a driving force that forces the bureaucracy to move faster. A bureaucracy must be capable of implementing various innovations in order to provide services to the community in a timely, easy, and cost-effective manner.

However, the State Civil Service Agency (BKN) discovered that approximately 30% of ASN still needed to complete their work during the implementation of the work-from-home system due to technological stuttering (17). This situation demonstrates that the quality of human resources is still an issue.

The brief note above exemplifies a symptom of Weberian bureaucracy, which is still prevalent in Indonesian bureaucracy. When a crisis occurs, the bureaucracy is slow to make decisions. Then in the context of public services, the bureaucracy still puts forward lengthy procedures even though the government has often carried out campaigns on

digital transformation. The implication is that the public’s right to access services is disrupted.

In brief, some of Indonesia’s bureaucracy’s problems during a pandemic need

TABLE 1: Indonesian Bureaucracy Problems in the Pandemic Times.

No	Problems	Reasons
1	Bureaucracy is slow to make decisions	Hierarchy and Proceduralism
2	Obstruction of public services	Lack of innovation
3	Not optimal digital/platform-based public services	Human Resources and Digital Infrastructure
4	Many officials do not do their jobs during the implementation of the work from home system due to technological stuttering	Human Resources

Source: analysis by reseachers, 2022

### 3.3. Towards an Agile Bureaucracy

In the COVID-19 era, the performance of an institution in administering an agency depends on various criteria. In addition to being agile and adaptive, leaders also need to comprehend the circumstance and have the courage to make strategic decisions while keeping accountability. Success can also be achieved if the organization learns, interacts, and coordinates with other organizations or groups (18). The condition of the bureaucracy, which is accustomed to acting in a formalistic manner and adhering to procedural rules, hinders its ability to assist the general population. Community-required response action is slowed down by suboptimal coordination among public officials. Therefore, a new method of objectively analyzing Indonesia’s bureaucracy needs to be needed. There is a need for a citizen- and community-centered bureaucracy to prioritize mission, service, and outcomes.

Improving the quality of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN) is a component of bureaucratic reform. This condition is required because the increasing professionalism of ASN will enhance the quality of government services. Indonesia currently has over 4,2 million ASN. Approximately 1,6 million of them are administrative personnel. Therefore, the government intends to increase the number of functional-level ASN positions. This effort is a crucial step toward making the bureaucracy more agile, but it is insufficient. Consequently, enhancing the quality of the apparatus’s human resources must be an ongoing responsibility.

Public sector organizations and the civil service must have a sense of purpose to construct resilient public services that can adapt to shifting conditions. Importantly, brilliant individuals are motivated not just by high incomes but also by the possibility of applying their expertise to the growth of the public good through rigorous analytical work. There must be incentives for taking risks, and experimentalism can be used to gain knowledge from failure. An agile bureaucracy necessitates highly motivated and competent public workers (careers) (19).

COVID-19 has demonstrated that governments require a more precise grasp of what constitutes a public service. Most public services necessitate long-term investment and the capacity to adapt to changing conditions and demands.

Several bureaucratic models can be viewed as alternatives to the Weberian bureaucracy intrinsic to Indonesian bureaucratic practice. From this context, there are two concepts of the bureaucratic model that can be experimented with.

The bureaucracy, it must be acknowledged, fundamentally requires stability. This cannot be simplified; thus the nature of stability must be complemented by a flexible bureaucracy. Kattel, Drechsler, and Karo (20) refer to these as Innovation Bureaucracies. This concept is necessary because there is no self-implementing policy, and the innovation bureaucratic ecosystem must be calibrated to meet the needs of the particular situation in the innovation process that sometimes reacts agilely and at other times provides the system with the stability it needs. The innovation bureaucracy is not meant to imitate the inventive organizations of the private sector; instead, it may be wiser to address demands that are not being met by the private sector. Stability is always associated with Weber, while agility is more often associated with Schumpeter (21).

An alternative bureaucratic organizational model is needed that positions everyone to have a shared responsibility for the overall success (the whole). Bureaucracies that can build relationships between their members are based on the nature of the problem rather than the organizational structure. Open agreement and dialogue become frameworks rather than hierarchy, control, and authority. Alvesson and Willmott (22) argue that the established bureaucratic control is not responsive and adaptable enough. Therefore, efforts are needed to encourage high mutual trust among members. Bureaucracy needs to run in the context of empowerment rather than being trapped in an "iron cage" that degrades humans to work like robots. This narrative has a spirit relevance to the post-bureaucratic concept, which believes that every organization member is a complete human figure. Post-bureaucracy builds a climate of accountability and strengthens equal and fair working relations so that when dealing with the public, the most important thing is to provide public services.

## 4. Conclusion

Inherently, the Indonesian bureaucracy is still stuck in the old problem of formalism. Although the Indonesian government's campaign on digital transformation is echoed (2), it has not shown the significance of digital-based bureaucratic reform. The Indonesian bureaucracy is stuttering with rapid changes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Theoretically, based on the context of the problem, two concepts of the bureaucratic model can be experimented with, namely Innovation Bureaucracies and Post-Bureaucracy. Further research is needed to formulate a relevant bureaucratic model for the context of the pandemic and post-pandemic.

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