

4. The politics of local government environmental evaluations

Assessing bureaucracy in post-*Reformasi* Indonesia

Abstract: This article argues that bureaucracy plays politics in Indonesia, not only during the electoral periods, but also in public service. Using the case of environmental evaluation in local government, where natural resources comprise most of the local economy, this article discusses the politics of bureaucracy in undergoing daily governing processes. The environment and natural resource businesses are two opposing fields. Environmental evaluation becomes a contentious area and is usually highly political. This article identifies the bureaucracy's politicisation in environmental evaluation as occurring in at least in two forms—in measurement and in project implementation. In terms of measurement, bureaucracy tends to use minimum standards, while in project implementation, there are some occasions where bureaucracy tends to sub-contract the work to the third party, usually NGOs, especially in relations to sensitive issues, so that it is politically safer for them, once the result is not as pleasing as expected. This article uses some cases in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java, and Bangka Belitung, and applied case study as research approach.

Keywords: bureaucracy, case studies, environment, environmental communication, environmental evaluations, Indonesia, local government, natural resources, public policy, Reformasi

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Introduction

THIS ARTICLE discusses the politics of bureaucracy in the case of environmental evaluations in four provinces in Indonesia—Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java, and Bangka Belitung. It is usually

seen that bureaucracy is commonly politicised by politician executives and political parties in order to pursue their political and economic interests through public policy. Bureaucracy is described merely as an instrument for achieving particular political purposes. In fact, bureaucracy is not static like a machine. Bureaucrats play politics and actively take part in shaping the face of public policy.

In Indonesia, bureaucracy's politicisation is inseparable from the country's regimentation. During the Indonesian New Order, patron was centered in Suharto and bureaucracy in the country was made to totally serve Suharto's interest. Following the fall of the Suharto authoritarian regime in 1998, patronage became dispersed into local government, and local executive heads became the center of power. The introduction of decentralisation policy and direct elections in Indonesia since *Reformasi* era¹ have brought consequences, not only on the strengthening of democracy, but also on the rise of the oligarchy (Diprose, McRae & Hadiz, 2019).

Decentralisation, together with direct elections since the *Reformasi* era, however, are seen not only to strengthen democracy. They also have excesses in the rise of a new oligarchy. Decentralisation together with direct elections have created new 'local kings', which refer to the powerful figures as local government heads, who became strongmen. Local leaders being chosen democratically through elections, but then misusing their power for personal interest has led the country into patrimonial democracy (Webber, 2006). As Webber (2006, p. 411) argues, patrimonial democracy refers to the weak rule of law and state's incapacity to govern in a country, despite the democratic election processes. Although elections are relatively democratic, governance runs slow, and is interest and elite-biased (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1984; Haugaard, 2016). Bureaucracy is described merely as a tool for political elites to fulfill their personal interests. Bureaucracy, as such, is politicians' object of power.

This article, however, tries to reveal a different point of view. Using the case of environmental governance in regions rich with natural resources in Indonesia, this article reveals that bureaucrats also develop political strategies to either avoid career risks or pursue their own interests. Based on field research conducted in four natural resource rich regions in Indonesia between 2018 and 2019—East Kalimantan, Central Kalimantan, Central Java and Bangka Belitung—this article argues that in a situation where elite-driven politics feature most, the face of decision-making processes, bureaucracy also plays politics. Bureaucrats not only play politics during electoral periods by supporting particular candidates to secure their positions in government offices (Berenschot, 2018), but also in the daily making of public policy. The case of environmental evaluation in local governments sheds light clearly on how bureaucracy applies particular political approach in environmental governance.

Based on its research findings, this article argues that bureaucracy's politicisation in environmental evaluation occurs at least in two forms, namely in the measurement and in project implementation. In terms of measurement, bureaucracy tends to use minimum standards, while in project implementation, they tend to sub-contract the work to the third party, especially in relation to sensitive issues, so it is politically safer for them, once the result is not as pleasing as expected. In natural resource-rich regions, where exploitation is rampant, and political structure is paternalistic, there is almost no room for bureaucracy, especially in the Environmental Office, to consistently comply with environmental standards set up by the national government. If they do so, then it means they risk their professional career, because the local government heads are in charge of the bureaucracy's structure and promotion.

Decentralisation and direct election era, as such, have forced bureaucracy not only to comply with administrative regimes, where daily businesses are made to fit with legal regulations, procedures, and mechanisms. This also has forced bureaucracy to make a deal with political regime, so that they have to move strategically in order to make sure their tasks accomplished, and their careers are safe. The case of environmental evaluations in natural resources-rich regions have let us know clearly how the politics of the bureaucracy runs in daily governance and policy making.

This article seeks to enrich the existing studies on the politics of the bureaucracy that have already had a devastating impact (see Moe, 1989; Peters, 2001; Meier & O'Toole Jr., 2006; Esmark, 2020). This article also tries to deepen the political sense of environmental evaluation, which is rarely explained from the framework of bureaucratic politics studies (see for instance Fruh at. al., 1976, Lazzari and Levizzari, 2000; Cheung & Leung, 2008; Shonensein, DeCelles, & Dutton, 2014; Lovebrand, Mobjork, & Soder, 2020). This article aims to gain a deeper meaning of the politics of bureaucracy by portraying the practices of environmental evaluations in Indonesian local government.

Research methods

This article draws on empirical experiences in four different provinces in Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Bangka Belitung and Central Java. Except for Central Java, the provinces are known to rely economically on natural resources. Central Kalimantan is the centre of oil palm plantation. East Kalimantan is the centre of coal mining. Bangka Belitung is the source of tin. Yet, in Central Java, the regions where cement factories are established, as Pati and Rembang, cement industries also play crucial roles in local economy. The research applied case study as an approach to elaborate the issue and use in-dept interviews and direct visit to collect data. There are 20 informants in Central Kalimantan, 12 in East Kalimantan, 11 in Bangka Belitung, and 30 in Central Java. The informants

consist of business actors in companies and community, regency government, provincial government, NGO activists, journalists and university academics. Direct visits were conducted to palm oil plantation and mining areas, community cooperatives, government offices, media offices and NGO offices. In 2018, field work the location included Central Jawa Province, while in 2019 it included Bangka Belitung, East Kalimantan and Central Kalimantan.

Bureaucracy, politics, and environmental governance

The relationships between bureaucracy and politics have always been an interesting topic to discuss. Peters (2001, p. 12) has highlighted that the politics of bureaucracy reveals the interconnectedness between bureaucracy, the public (citizen), and the (elected) governments in governing processes. In theory, what bureaucracy does is administrative, to operationalise decision making, administer it, and put everything into paper. The politics of bureaucracy tries to see bureaucracy as political actors more empirically in daily decision-making practices. As such, it does not see bureaucracy as merely as an object of power. Rather, it sees bureaucracy as another political actor that equally plays crucial roles in a room called policy making and governance, entailing some interest within (Pekonen, 1985), and exerting influence on policy outcomes (Whitford, 2002, p. 167-168).

Some studies have been done on the politics of bureaucracy, including in developing democracies. There are at least four main interrelating scopes that scholars discuss in the study of the politics of bureaucracy—the structure of bureaucracy (Whitford, 2002; Moe, 1989; Rockman, 2001; Warburton, 2018), the (bureaucratic) processes—the administration (Meier, 1997; Peters, 2001; Spicer, 2015; Jiang, 2018; Bartl, Papilloud & Terracher-Lipinski, 2019; Shidarta & van Huis, 2020), the modes of the politics of the bureaucracy (Wood & Waterman, 1991; Wood and Waterman, 1993; Waterman, Rouse, & Wright, 1998; Balla, 1998; Furlong, 1998; Meier and O’Toole Jr., 2006; Rudalevige, 2009; Tanwir & Fennel, 2010; Ahn & Bretschneider, 2011; Naseemullah & Chhibber, 2018; & Chan, 2020), and the policy and political implications (Meier, 1997; Bucchi, 2009; Rogers, 2019; Esmark, 2020).

Environmental governance is a field where the politics of bureaucracy can be clearly seen, yet the studies revealing this are still not many. Environment is a contentious issue (Marantz & Ulibarri, 2019), moreover if it is related to natural resource (Edwards & Heiduk, 2015, Delabre & Okereke, 2019). It is contentious because it is prone to tension or conflict, sometimes it involves repression, and displacement, and its governance tends to be interest-based and elite-biased (Van Der Heijden, 2002).

Yet, there are not many studies that see this contention as a depiction of bureaucratic politics. In the Indonesian context, the contention gets more complex with the introduction of decentralisation policy and direct elections. The two

newly introduced policies have brought excesses on the strengthening of local oligarchy, of which actors can be usually related with business backgrounds, including with natural resource businesses (Fukuoka, 2012; Tomsa, 2015; Aspinall & As'ad, 2016; Hidayaturrehman, Ngarawula, & Sadhana, 2020).

Decentralisation and direct election bring together administrative and political regime to local governments, which later force bureaucracy to adapt and comply with the daily governing processes (Berenschot, 2018). As elected politicians in top executive positions determine bureaucratic appointment and promotions (Berenschot, 2018, p. 139), patronage and partisanship in bureaucracy becomes unavoidable (Demir, 2017, p. 157). This sometimes puts pressure on the bureaucracy, even tensions within (Konkipudi & Jacob, 2017, p. 10). In natural resource-rich regions, the pressure sometimes is heightened, given the multiple actors involved within, including those that come from the capital of Jakarta, the related provinces and the regency itself, as well as the huge resource accesses being contested. Yet, bureaucracy is not only politicized, as Berenschot (2018) argues, they also take part in the game and play politics.

Environmental policy, politics and bureaucracy: The case studies

Environmental evaluations in Indonesia are regulated through Law No. 32/2009, Government Decree No. 27/2012 and the Ministry of Environment's regulation No. 16/2012. The laws identified key terms which relate to environmental evaluations, including Strategic Environmental Studies (*Kajian Lingkungan Hidup Strategis-KLHS*), Environmental Impact Analysis (*Analisis Mengenai Dampak Lingkungan Hidup-AMDAL*), Environmental Quality Standard (*Baku Mutu Lingkungan Hidup*), Environmental Audit (*Audit Lingkungan*), and Environmental Permit (*Ijin Lingkungan*). The terms can be referred as mechanisms to regulate development policies prior and following the policies are implemented. The definition of these terms according to the laws are as the following.

Strategic Environmental Studies is a series of systematic, comprehensive and participatory analysis conducted to make sure that sustainable development principles have been made as the basis of and integrated with development activities in particular regions and/or policies, planning, and/or programmes. Environmental Impact Analysis is a study on the important forecasted impacts of businesses and/or activities planned to be conducted on environment, which is used as a basis for decision making on the business and/or activities' execution. Environmental Quality Standard refers to threshold or level of particular living things, substance, energy or component and/or polluter tolerable to bring impacts on environment. Environmental Audit refers to evaluation analysis on obedience of business and/or activities on laws and policies made by the governments. Environmental Permit refers to permit given to parties conducted business and/or other activities, which are included in those obliged with the fulfillment of

Environmental Impact Analysis or Environmental Management-Environmental Control, as an effort to protect and manage environment. Environmental Permit is a requirement for those willing to gain business and/or activity permit.

Strategic Environmental Studies, Environmental Impact Analysis, Environmental Permits are types of environmental evaluations prior to a business and/or activity to consider the impact on environment. Meanwhile, Environmental Audit is conducted during and following a business and/or activity operated and ended. The aims are clear. Environmental evaluation is meant to make sure that the business/activity is safe for the environment in the future. Environmental capacity is measured to see whether it is able to bear the forecasted impacts of the businesses and/or activities. Evaluation during and following the operation of a business/activity is meant to ensure that the level of environmental impacts of the businesses/activity still fit with the threshold set up by the government. As both environmental evaluations are crucial in development policy, are equally highly political (Ombudsmen of Republic of Indonesia, 2013), this article refers to both mechanisms in its analysis.

Although regulations have been clearly mentioned for environmental evaluations, implementation in practice remains a problem. As Ombudsmen of the Republic of Indonesia's investigation shows, all the problems originated from the involvement of consultants hired by companies to administer environmental permit (2013). The consultant merely functions as middlemen that links between companies and staffs in Environmental Office, including Local Environmental Governance Body (*Badan Pengelolaan Lingkungan Hidup Daerah-BPLHD*). In some cases, environmental permit administrators in BPLHD forced companies to use only BPLHD's partner consultant and turn over particular amount of money for getting the environmental recommendation released. Otherwise, permit administration would not be processed (Ombudsmen of Republic of Indonesia, 2013). The similar phenomena are found in the four cases being studied in this research.

Central Kalimantan

Central Kalimantan is one of the biggest palm oil producers in the world with 16,000 km² land coverage and 183 companies in 2019 (as reported by *Tirto*, 2020). Common violations against environmental regulations found in Central Kalimantan, according to the findings of Environmental Investigation Agency and Telapak, Pusaka, and Save Our Borneo, the local NGOs in Central Kalimantan, is plantation without legal environmental permit. The case, which can be referred as an example, is Suryamas Cipta Persada (2012) (Environmental Investigation Agency, 2012), Genting Plantation (2018) (Pusaka, 2018) and Salonok Ladang Mas (2019) (Save Our Borneo), the leading palm oil plantation companies in the region. Another violation relates to environmental quality standard, resulted from palm oil companies' activities that polluted rivers in the province, as in the case of Sukajadi Sawit Mekar (Antara New, 2018) and

Mustika Sembuluh (2019) (*Borneo News*, 2019). However, as an environmental activist states in Central Kalimantan asserts, ‘Non-enforcement is a clear mode of politics. The government is aware of the violation, but Office of Environment does not impose its power to correct the wrong-doing’ (Environment activist, interview, July 2020).

In addition to non-enforcement, another form of politicking in environmental evaluation is the incompatibility between what is seen in the field and what is written in the report. An informant in a government office asserts,

It sometime happens. We can see from the naked eyes that rivers’ water quality is degrading. The watercolor is not clear, but as written in the report the water quality index increases. Meanwhile, we can see clearly that concession for plantation in the region expands, forest and peatland fires still occur, air quality clearly worsened. Yet, written index told us its quality increases. (Government office informant)

As such, despite the long existing desks for regulating environmental issues, Offices of Environment in local governments is almost not functional. Decentralisation and local direct elections become a crucial context to explain the dysfunctionality of environmental offices in resources-rich regions in Indonesia. An interview with a government officer in Central Kalimantan implies that things become more difficult because the (palm oil) companies’ owners get involved in practice politics, handle executive seats in local governments, and dominate the political decision making. Therefore, all the policies are oriented to support palm oil businesses. ‘If the local leaders come from palm oil company, in decision making processes, they then become the men of the companies’ (Government officer, interview, October 2019).

Finally, the politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations is manifested through the sub-contraction of an NGO to conduct the environmental assessment. An informant, an environmental NGO activist in Central Kalimantan, says,

I realise, [the] Office of Environment has some environmental laboratories. However, they still lack capacity. On the other hand, the bureaucracy is not rare to face pressure and intimidation, as experienced by the Office’s chief in an emission research project that tries to measure the impact of forest and peatland fires. Therefore, it is us, NGO, that support them to do their jobs. The government is weak, that they allow us, as a civil society organisation to get involved within. We [are] like as if we are doing a government’s job. (Interview, June 2019)

Sub-contracting NGO, therefore, can have positive implication on the one hand, but can also have the negative one on the other hand. By distributing assessment job to NGO, at least, the bureaucrats in Office of Environment still has

awareness of the importance of monitoring the business impacts on environment. On the other hand, this, however, implies risk aversion, in which the bureaucrats avoid any risks born by the assessment result, once it is not as pleased as expected.

East Kalimantan

East Kalimantan is the largest producer of coal in Indonesia. Until 2018, coal production capacity in East Kalimantan covered almost 60 percent of national coal production (Extractive Industries Transparency, 2020, Ardianto et. al, 2019). Despite the ups and downs, in 2019, East Kalimantan produced 7.8 million metric tons. East Kalimantan, however, is known not only as among the richest provinces in Indonesia. It is also known as among the most environmentally destroyed regions. Mining in East Kalimantan has left highest number of pits in Indonesia—1735.

As in Central Kalimantan, non-enforcement is applied to deal with environmental complexities in East Kalimantan. As Toumbourou, Muhdar, Werner, and Bebbington (2020, p. 12) there is already Local Government Decree No. 8/2013, which opened up possibility for enacting law on reclamation and mining illegality. However, Mongabay investigation (2014) reveals law enforcement does not work. In addition, as #BersihkanIndonesia, a coalition of environmental NGOs, comprising Auriga, Green Peace, Indonesia Corruption Watch, JATAM (Jaringan Anti Tambang or Anti-mining Network), Walhi (Indonesian Environmental Forum) and YLBHI (Indonesian Legal Assistance Foundation) (2020), asserts, the policy scheme launched later through Law No. 4/2009 on Mineral and Coal Mining, Government Decree No. 78/2010 on Reclamation and Post-Mining, the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 26/2018 on Good Governance and Supervision of Mineral and Coal Mining Operations, and Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 7/2014 as amended by the Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources Regulation No. 26/2018, to tackle the mining pits and reclamation issues does not touch the roots of the problem, namely mining illegality. Through the relation, the government of Indonesia means to oblige companies to deposit some fund to guarantee post-mining responsibility. However, the #BersihkanIndonesia coalition asserts that the regulations are prone to corruption and potentially violated.

In addition to non-enforcement, confirming the Ombudsmen's finding, politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluation in East Kalimantan is manifested through third-party sub-contracting, which relates to environmental permit. An ex-staff member in an environmental consultant company in East Kalimantan adds, 'The company drives the environmental consultant and assessment committee to approve their environmental permission proposal' (Environmental consultant, interview, July 2019). This statement confirms WALHI (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia or Indonesian Environmental Forum), an environmental NGO in

Central Kalimantan, that Ministry (and Offices) of Environment and Forestry are not more than a national government's instrument to proceed their interest-based policy (Wahana Lingkungan Hidup Indonesia, 2020).

Another interesting practice of the politics of bureaucracy to see is the involvement of academicians in environmental project. An informant, who is an environmental activist in East Kalimantan asserts, 'Environmental impact assessment, conducted by an environmental consultant often involves academicians, some of them are professors, but as you may see, academicians are for legitimization' (Environmental activist, interview, July 2020). In addition, data deletion is the most common practice in environmental evaluation. An informant, who is an environmental activist in East Kalimantan, said, 'As an example, if the acid level in water is not acceptable by regulations in environmental impact assessment, then we do not present it in the document. Another way is to change the written number' (Environmental activist, interview, July 2019).

Central Java

Central Java is among the most densely populated provinces in Indonesia, with the population density 1022 per km² (2014). Its economy depends on trading and farming, yet there is potential for mining in some regencies. Oil and mineral mining are among natural resource-related activities in the provinces, with cement getting more important in shaping some regencies' economies, including Rembang, Pati, Blora, Grobogan, and Kebumen. Protest against cement mining has been massive, yet, the movement is often politically defeated, although there is already a legal verdict ruling that the mining is illegal, as in the case of Kendeng Mountain, Rembang.

Rather different from Central and East Kalimantan, environmental politics in Central Java is manifested in local government's disobedience to the national government in its environmental policy. As Enggarani and Spaltani (2019) argue, the politics of disobedience is manifested through the disregard of the High Court's decision on the environmental permit status of PT. Semen Indonesia, which is counted illegal, by changing the name and coverage of the company from PT. Semen Gresik to PT. Semen Indonesia, and from 5.2 to 2.93 km² [through Decision Letter No. 660.1/30, 2016 (*Tirto*, 2016)]. In addition, as Hadi, Purnaweni and Prabawani (2019) identify, the disobedience is also manifested through the unwillingness of the Central Java Province and Pati regency government to incorporate the Strategic Environmental Assessment in their environmental permit policy on cement industries.

Interestingly, the local bureaucrats also impose its politics in environmental policy by not completing environmental data, including environmental support and environmental capacity data, which are useful to refer to permit the new mining industry or not. The institution does not have recorded annual notes on the quality of water, air and soil. All these issues confirm an informant, who has

a background as a civil society organisation activist, who says, ‘[The] Office of Environment or Office of Environment and Forestry is not helpful to preserve environment. They rather look [as if they are] the gate opener for extractive and plantation business expansions’ (Civil society activist, interview, August, 2020).

Bangka Belitung

Bangka Belitung is used to be known as the biggest tin producer in the world. Currently, the production decreases, yet Bangka Belitung remains putting tin mining as the backbone of its economy, in addition to tourism. In 2018, Bangka Belitung produced 70,000 tons of tin ore (Ardianto, 2019), involving PT. Timah, Tbk, a state-owned company, as the main operator, which produced about 40 percent of tin, and the rest 60 percent is by private companies owned by foreign businessmen from China, India, Japan, and Taiwan (Ibrahim, Haryadi & Wahyudi, 2018; Stocklin-Weinberg, 2017; Ibrahim, Haryadi, & Wahyudi, 2018, p. 365) both offshore and onshore. Not only improving local wealth, tin mining is also seen to cause environmental destruction, in which offshore practice is seen to cause dangerous mining pits, while the onshore ones has led to seawater pollution.

Referring to Haryadi (2015, p. 52), bureaucratic politics in tin mining in Bangka Belitung is manifested through the inconsistent enforcement of environmental evaluations. In some occasions, the local government looks to strictly ban illegal mining operation, but in the other occasions they look to omit the practices. Similarly, in some mining areas, miners are arrested in the name of law enforcement, but in some other areas, miners are let to run their mining activities. On the one hand, inconsistent enforcement is political, because it implies the government’s motive to look as if they are committed for law enforcement. On the other hand, it leads to public distrust. Instead of resulting in positive impression from the public, inconsistency has led the perception that the government is unfair and selective (Ibrahim, Haryadi & Wahyudin, 2018, p. 375).

In addition to inconsistent enforcement, another face of the bureaucratic politics in Bangka Belitung is also manifested in non-enforcement of environmental laws, especially in onshore-mining. *Mongabay’s* reportage in 2020 reveals, tin mining has been refused by fishermen in Bangka Belitung, for polluting rivers and sea water (*Mongabay*, 2020). However, the local government never shows its seriousness to ban the onshore-mining practices, or to make sure that the pollution threshold is in acceptable level.

If traced further, all the problems of mining in Bangka Belitung rooted in the Environmental Impact Assessment that is not enacted strongly (Erwana, Dewi & Rahardyan, 2015). An informant in the region, who is an environmental activist said, ‘The environmental impact assessment is a copy paste from another region’ (Environmental activist, interview, September 2019). In addition, Environmental Impact Assessment documents issued by the Local Office of Environment only cover two suction vessels in South Bangka sea. Meanwhile, in that area, there

are dozens suction vessels operated to exploit tin. This implies that the assessment is placed merely a formal requirement, rather than as a way to make sure that despite the mining business, there is a guarantee that environmental damage can be managed and reduced.

Not merely being politicised, bureaucracy also play politics

Empirical experiences from Central Kalimantan, East Kalimantan, Central Java and Bangka Belitung have shown us that bureaucracy and politics is inseparable. The inseparability is not only caused by the intense interference of politicians and political parties in public policy, which need bureaucracy to set up the planning, budgeting, and implementation design. It also is caused by involvement of bureaucracy in the political grounds in the policy making area. The political system that shifted from authoritarian regime to a more decentralised one in Indonesia has led some changes in the bureaucratic politics forms. If in the past bureaucracy was centered to only serve the Suharto's regime in central government, in post-*reformasi* era, bureaucracy was shifted to serve the new local king born by direct local elections since 2005. Yet, due to the vast authority of local government heads in managing local bureaucracy, as in terms of mutation and career promotion, bureaucracy started to play politics, not only to serve the executive politicians, to safe their careers, as well as to gain material benefits through corruption (Busse & Gröning, 2013, p. 18).

Empirical findings in the four case studies confirm Peters (2001), Berenschot (2018), Demir (2017), and Konkipudi and Jacob's argument (2017) that bureaucracy in the environmental sector is unable to avoid politicisation—an objectification of bureaucracy for supporting elite politicians' interests. Yet, from the findings we can also see that bureaucracy is not merely being politicised. They also play politics.

The politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations, both prior and following the natural resource-related business execution, based on research findings collected from fieldworks in the four provinces, can be seen at least in three forms. The first is in terms of non-enforcement or inconsistent enforcement of environmental laws. The second is in terms of environmental data management. The third is in the sub-contraction of environmental project implementation.

Non-enforcement is a common practice of politicking, which can be explained as a risk aversion mechanism of local bureaucracy on disciplining environmental impact threshold by the companies. As findings in Central Kalimantan, environmental damage is hard to legally follow up because the local strongmen dominate the executive positions in the region, either in provincial or regency governments. Similarly, in East Kalimantan, coal mining is owned by a national politician, who has influence in national decision making. For local environmental bureaucrats, enacting environmental assessment will mean putting high risks on their bureaucratic

career in government office. Meanwhile, in Central Java and Bangka Belitung, the adherence of state-owned companies that operate the mining industries, make it difficult to regulate, because of the intimacy of the companies with executive politicians, as well as national political parties (Mietzner, 2007, p. 250).

Environmental data is a sensitive thing. It shows us clearly whether the institution functions well or not, and, further to what extent the institution enjoys autonomy in doing their assigned tasks. Data is key to understand the politics of bureaucracy, as in many occasions, it can legitimise or delegitimise policies that has implication to wider public, like plantation permission, plantation impacts, mining legal status, and mining impacts.

Meanwhile, environmental project sub-contraction, can have double implications. The first one is on the participation improvement of environmental policy implementation, in which non-government actors are allowed to participate in government-led environmental studies. However, on the other hand, this implies another risk aversion strategy. Environmental audit, for instance, requires high expertise on environmental studies. Environmental NGO usually has experts, which have ability to conduct such research. By involving experts from NGO, the local government can reduce the possibility of flaws in its analysis.

The empirical practices of the politics of bureaucracy in environmental evaluations as highlighted above enrich the existing studies that bureaucracy is a political entity (Peters, 2001). Bureaucracy does not only become the object of politisation (Berenschot, 2018; Demir, 2017) but also takes part in the political game, which in this case is done by applying the politics of non-enforcement, data management and project sub-contracting.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, bureaucracy is not merely a machine for politicians to help them achieve their interests through policy making. Bureaucracy also plays politics, because bureaucrats also have their own interest in public policy. The apparent interest of bureaucracy is related to career safety, as in terms of mutation and promotion. Another interest related to rent seeking, namely, to seek for material benefits from the policy the bureaucrats administer. Non-enforcement of environmental laws is the common mode of the politics of bureaucracy in environmental governance, followed with environmental data management that include data deletion and deliberate absence. Finally, environmental project sub-contraction is the last mode of bureaucratic politics, conducted though the devotion of environmental assessment to the third party, to avoid further risks, once assessment is conducted by the Office of Environment itself. The findings have shown bureaucracy is not merely an administrative body in the governmental institution. It needs to be seen as an active political actor, as well, in policy making.

Note

1. *Reformasi* refers to the changes in Indonesian politics that brought Indonesia out of authoritarian regime under Suharto's administration into a new era, identified with a more decentralised governance, called *Reformasi* era, since 1998.

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