



PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN INDONESIA AND THE UNITED KINGDOM: A LITERATURE REVIEW COMPARING SYSTEMS AND GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

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Abstract :

This article examines the comparative characteristics of public administration systems in Indonesia and the United States through a literature-based study. Employing a descriptive-comparative approach, the research analyzes bureaucratic structures, systems of government, administrative reform trajectories, and their implications for public service delivery. The United States represents a mature federal democracy with a strong tradition of administrative professionalism, decentralization, and accountability, while Indonesia reflects a developing democratic system shaped by a historical legacy of centralized bureaucracy and ongoing reform efforts. Data were collected from classical public administration literature, international peer-reviewed journals, and official government documents from both countries. The findings indicate that differences in constitutional design, political institutions, and administrative culture significantly influence governance effectiveness and public service outcomes. The study concludes that administrative reform must be context-sensitive and institutionally grounded, and that comparative public administration provides valuable insights for improving governance and public service performance in developing democracies.

Keywords: public administration, comparative study, bureaucracy, governance, public service

INTRODUCTION

Public administration constitutes a central pillar of modern governance, serving as the primary mechanism through which governments translate political decisions into concrete policies and public services. As the operational arm of the state, public administration connects political authority with societal needs, ensuring that public resources are allocated, managed, and utilized in accordance with collective goals. The effectiveness of public administration directly influences state capacity, policy outcomes, and public trust in government institutions (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). In both developed and developing countries, public administration plays a crucial role not only in managing public resources but also in safeguarding social equity, administrative accountability, and democratic legitimacy (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015).

In contemporary governance, public administration operates within an increasingly complex environment. Governments are expected to address multifaceted social problems such as poverty, inequality, public health crises, environmental degradation, and rapid urbanization. At the same time, technological advancement and digital transformation have reshaped how public services are designed and delivered. Citizens now demand public services



that are not only efficient and accessible, but also transparent, inclusive, and responsive to their diverse needs. As a result, the quality of administrative institutions has become a decisive factor in determining government performance and democratic stability (Peters, 2018).

Strong administrative systems enhance governments' ability to formulate effective policies, coordinate across sectors, and deliver public services consistently. Conversely, weak administrative capacity often results in policy failure, inefficiency, corruption, and declining public trust (Wilson, 1989). In many developing democracies, administrative weaknesses can undermine reform efforts and slow socio-economic development. Therefore, understanding how public administration functions within different political and institutional contexts is essential for improving governance outcomes.

Comparative public administration offers an important analytical framework for examining how countries organize, manage, and reform their administrative systems. Rather than assuming that administrative models or reform strategies are universally applicable, comparative analysis emphasizes the significance of political systems, institutional arrangements, historical trajectories, and administrative cultures in shaping governance practices (Peters, 2018). Through systematic comparison, scholars and policymakers can identify patterns of similarity and difference, assess the effectiveness of various reform approaches, and draw context-sensitive lessons for institutional development.

The field of comparative public administration has evolved alongside broader developments in public administration theory. Early approaches focused on identifying universal administrative principles, while later perspectives emphasized contextual diversity and institutional embeddedness. The rise of New Public Management and subsequent governance-based approaches reflects ongoing debates about efficiency, accountability, and democratic values in public administration (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

Indonesia and the United States represent two contrasting yet analytically valuable cases in the study of public administration. The United States is widely regarded as a mature democratic state with a federal system, a strong separation of powers, and a professional civil service grounded in merit-based principles (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). Its public administration has evolved incrementally through institutional adaptation, judicial interpretation, and managerial reform, emphasizing decentralization, accountability, and performance management.

Indonesia, by contrast, is a developing democracy whose public administration has been shaped by a complex historical trajectory. Colonial administrative structures, followed by prolonged authoritarian governance, produced a centralized and hierarchical bureaucracy oriented toward political control rather than public service (Thoha, 2012; Hadiz, 2010). During the New Order period, bureaucracy functioned primarily as an extension of executive authority, prioritizing stability and obedience over responsiveness and accountability.

Since the political reforms of 1998, Indonesia has undertaken extensive

bureaucratic and administrative reforms aimed at democratization, decentralization, transparency, and public service improvement (Dwiyanto, 2015; Prasojo & Kurniawan, 2008). Despite notable progress, reform outcomes remain uneven across sectors and regions due to institutional capacity constraints and persistent bureaucratic culture.

The comparison between Indonesia and the United States is analytically significant because it juxtaposes a developing democracy undergoing administrative transformation with a mature democratic system characterized by institutional stability. This contrast allows for a deeper understanding of how different administrative systems respond to governance challenges and reform pressures (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a library research design, also known as a literature review, with a descriptive-comparative approach. The research focuses on analyzing and comparing public administration systems in Indonesia and the United States based on existing academic literature and official documents. This approach is appropriate because comparative public administration emphasizes conceptual understanding and institutional analysis rather than hypothesis testing (Peters, 2018).

A. Research Design and Approach

The study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to systematically examine the main characteristics of public administration in both countries. A comparative perspective is used to identify similarities, differences, and contextual factors shaping administrative systems. The analysis is structured around four dimensions: bureaucratic structure, system of government, administrative reform, and governance practices related to public service delivery (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

B. Data Sources

Secondary data were obtained from academic books, peer-reviewed international journals, and official government documents from Indonesia and the United States. Classical public administration literature and comparative reform studies were prioritized to ensure theoretical robustness and analytical depth (Rosenbloom et al., 2020).

C. Data Collection Technique

Data collection was conducted through a systematic review of literature using academic databases and official government repositories. Keywords related to public administration, comparative governance, and bureaucratic reform guided the search process.

D. Data Analysis Technique

The collected literature was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. Sources were categorized according to the four analytical dimensions, and key

arguments were compared to identify patterns and contrasts between the two countries (Peters, 2018).

E. Validity and Reliability

Validity was strengthened through triangulation of multiple authoritative sources and reliance on well-established public administration theories. Although no primary empirical data were used, methodological transparency enhances the credibility of the findings (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Bureaucratic Structure

The bureaucratic structure of the United States is strongly influenced by its federal constitutional system, which distributes administrative authority across federal, state, and local levels of government. This decentralized arrangement enables public organizations to design and implement policies that are responsive to local needs while remaining aligned with nationally defined legal and administrative standards (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). Federal agencies focus primarily on policy formulation and regulation, while state and local governments play a central role in service delivery and program implementation. This division of authority encourages innovation, experimentation, and adaptability within public organizations.

The U.S. civil service system emphasizes merit-based recruitment, professional expertise, and legal accountability, supported by a strong rule-of-law tradition. Civil servants are protected by institutional safeguards that promote political neutrality and administrative continuity. As a result, bureaucratic professionalism and organizational stability are maintained even during political transitions. This professionalized bureaucracy enhances institutional memory and supports consistent policy implementation over time.

Nevertheless, decentralization also introduces coordination challenges, particularly in intergovernmental policy implementation. Overlapping responsibilities and differing priorities among federal, state, and local governments may complicate policy coherence. However, institutional mechanisms such as judicial oversight, legislative scrutiny, and performance management systems help mitigate these challenges and reinforce administrative accountability (Wilson, 1989). These mechanisms ensure that administrative discretion is balanced by legal and democratic control.

In contrast, Indonesia's bureaucratic structure has historically been centralized and hierarchical. During the New Order period, bureaucracy functioned primarily as an instrument of political control rather than as a service-oriented institution (Thoha, 2012). Decision-making authority was concentrated in the central government, and bureaucratic organizations emphasized compliance, loyalty, and procedural conformity. This historical legacy continues to shape administrative culture and organizational behavior in contemporary Indonesia.

Although decentralization reforms since the early 2000s have transferred substantial authority to regional governments, central control over personnel management, budgeting, and regulatory frameworks remains dominant. Consequently, the degree of administrative autonomy varies significantly across regions. Regions with stronger leadership and institutional capacity tend to perform better in public service delivery, while others face persistent organizational and resource constraints (Dwiyanto, 2015). This variation highlights the importance of administrative capacity and leadership in decentralized governance contexts.

System of Government and Administrative Governance

The United States operates under a presidential system characterized by a strong separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. This constitutional arrangement shapes administrative governance by creating multiple accountability channels for public administrators. Federal agencies are accountable not only to the executive branch but also to Congress, the judiciary, and independent oversight institutions, resulting in a complex but robust accountability framework (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). Such arrangements strengthen transparency, legality, and public trust in administrative institutions.

At the same time, the separation of powers may generate administrative fragmentation and policy gridlock, particularly during periods of political polarization. Conflicting policy preferences between the executive and legislative branches can delay decision-making and constrain administrative flexibility. Despite these challenges, institutionalized checks and balances contribute to the legitimacy and resilience of public administration in the United States.

Indonesia also adopts a presidential system; however, its administrative governance dynamics differ significantly. Coalition politics and overlapping institutional mandates often complicate coordination among ministries and government agencies. In practice, policy formulation and implementation are influenced by political bargaining, which may weaken administrative coherence and strategic coordination (Hadiz, 2010). Hierarchical administrative norms further constrain inter-agency collaboration, particularly within decentralized governance arrangements.

Moreover, decentralization has added complexity to administrative governance by introducing multiple layers of authority across central and regional governments. Weak coordination mechanisms and unclear divisions of responsibility can undermine effective policy implementation and service delivery. These challenges indicate that constitutional design alone is insufficient to ensure effective governance without supportive institutional coordination frameworks.

Administrative Reform Trajectories

Administrative reform in the United States has followed an incremental and evolutionary trajectory. Since the late twentieth century, reforms inspired by New Public Management have emphasized efficiency, performance measurement, managerial autonomy, and accountability while preserving core institutional arrangements (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). These reforms

were gradually integrated into existing administrative structures, allowing public organizations to adapt without undermining bureaucratic professionalism or stability.

More recent reform initiatives reflect governance and public value perspectives, emphasizing collaboration, network governance, and citizen engagement. These approaches recognize the limitations of purely managerial reforms and seek to balance efficiency with democratic values and public interest considerations (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). The evolutionary nature of reform in the United States has facilitated institutional learning and gradual adaptation over time.

In Indonesia, administrative reform has been more transformative, particularly since the Reformasi era. Reform agendas have focused on civil service restructuring, transparency, anti-corruption initiatives, and improvements in public service delivery (Prasojo & Kurniawan, 2008). These reforms represent a significant departure from authoritarian administrative practices and are closely linked to broader democratization efforts.

Despite strong policy commitment, reform implementation faces persistent challenges. Bureaucratic resistance to change, limited human resource capacity, and entrenched administrative culture often limit reform effectiveness. In many cases, reforms are formally adopted but not fully internalized in daily administrative practices, creating a gap between policy objectives and implementation outcomes (Dwiyanto, 2015). This underscores the importance of leadership, incentives, and organizational culture in shaping reform success.

Implications for Public Service Delivery

Differences in bureaucratic structure, governance systems, and administrative reform trajectories have significant and far-reaching implications for public service delivery in both countries. In the United States, decentralized governance combined with clearly defined accountability mechanisms enables public services to be delivered closer to citizens, allowing responsiveness to local preferences while maintaining national regulatory standards. Performance measurement systems, intergovernmental benchmarking, competition among service providers, and mechanisms of public oversight collectively contribute to relatively consistent service quality and higher levels of citizen satisfaction (Rosenbloom et al., 2020). These features reflect an administrative environment in which service delivery is closely linked to outcomes, performance incentives, and public accountability.

At the same time, decentralization in the United States does not eliminate service disparities entirely. Differences in fiscal capacity, administrative professionalism, and local leadership can influence service access and quality across jurisdictions. Nevertheless, institutional mechanisms such as performance audits, judicial review, transparency requirements, and opportunities for citizen participation provide corrective tools to address inequality and inefficiency. These mechanisms support continuous service improvement and reinforce public trust in government institutions (Wilson, 1989).

In Indonesia, public service delivery has experienced notable progress,

particularly following decentralization reforms and the expansion of digital governance initiatives. Both central and local governments have introduced innovations aimed at simplifying administrative procedures, improving access to services, and reducing bureaucratic delays. Local-level experimentation has enabled some regions to tailor service delivery models to community needs, demonstrating the potential benefits of decentralized administration (Dwiyanto, 2015).

However, improvements in service delivery remain uneven across regions. Disparities in administrative capacity, leadership quality, fiscal resources, and institutional coordination continue to affect service outcomes. In many areas, bureaucratic rigidity, procedural complexity, and limited inter-agency coordination constrain responsiveness and efficiency. Moreover, reforms are sometimes implemented formally without sufficient organizational learning or behavioral change, limiting their practical impact on service quality. These challenges indicate that decentralization alone is insufficient to ensure effective public service delivery without sustained capacity building and institutional support (Dwiyanto, 2015).

Overall, the findings suggest that effective public service delivery depends on the alignment of bureaucratic structure, governance systems, and reform strategies. Administrative reforms must be supported by investments in human resource development, organizational capacity, and leadership, as well as by clear accountability and coordination mechanisms. Without these supporting conditions, reform initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative. The comparative evidence reinforces the argument that public service improvement is not merely a technical issue, but an institutional and governance challenge that requires long-term commitment and context-sensitive reform strategies (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that public administration systems in Indonesia and the United States differ fundamentally as a result of variations in bureaucratic structure, systems of government, administrative culture, and reform trajectories. Through a descriptive-comparative literature review, the article highlights how these differences shape governance practices and influence public service delivery outcomes in each country. The findings confirm that public administration cannot be understood in isolation from its broader political, institutional, and historical contexts.

The United States represents a mature democratic system with a long-established federal structure, strong separation of powers, and a professional civil service grounded in merit-based principles. These institutional characteristics have contributed to a relatively adaptive and resilient administrative system. Decentralization across federal, state, and local levels allows flexibility and innovation in public service delivery, while legal frameworks and accountability mechanisms ensure administrative oversight.

Although challenges such as political polarization and administrative fragmentation persist, the U.S. public administration system benefits from institutional stability and deeply embedded professional norms.

In contrast, Indonesia's public administration reflects the complexities of a developing democracy undergoing continuous transformation. Historical legacies of colonial administration and authoritarian governance have produced a centralized and hierarchical bureaucratic culture that continues to influence administrative behavior. Since the Reformasi era, Indonesia has implemented wide-ranging administrative reforms aimed at decentralization, transparency, civil service professionalism, and improved service delivery. While these reforms have generated positive outcomes, particularly in local governance innovation and digital public services, implementation remains uneven across regions and sectors.

One of the central findings of this study is that bureaucratic structure plays a decisive role in shaping administrative performance. The decentralized and functionally differentiated structure of the United States bureaucracy enhances adaptability and responsiveness, whereas Indonesia's more hierarchical structure often limits flexibility and slows decision-making. Although decentralization policies in Indonesia have expanded local authority, strong central oversight in personnel management and budgeting continues to constrain local administrative autonomy. This indicates that decentralization alone is insufficient without corresponding improvements in institutional capacity and governance coordination.

The comparison of systems of government further underscores how constitutional design influences administrative governance. The presidential system in the United States, combined with federalism and strong judicial oversight, produces complex but robust accountability mechanisms. Public administrators are accountable to multiple institutions, which promotes transparency but may also generate coordination challenges. Indonesia's presidential system, while similar in formal structure, operates within different political dynamics characterized by coalition politics and overlapping institutional mandates. These conditions often complicate coordination among ministries, agencies, and levels of government, affecting policy implementation and service delivery.

Administrative reform trajectories in the two countries also reveal contrasting patterns. In the United States, administrative reform has followed an incremental and evolutionary path. Reforms inspired by New Public Management and governance-based approaches have been gradually integrated into existing institutions without fundamentally altering the core principles of the civil service system. This evolutionary approach has allowed reforms to be institutionalized over time, maintaining administrative stability while improving efficiency and performance.

Indonesia's reform trajectory, by contrast, has been more transformative and politically driven. The post-1998 reform agenda sought to dismantle authoritarian administrative practices and introduce democratic governance

principles. Despite strong political commitment at the policy level, reform implementation has faced resistance from entrenched bureaucratic culture, limited human resource capacity, and uneven institutional readiness. This finding reinforces the argument that administrative reform success depends not only on policy design but also on administrative culture, leadership, and sustained political support.

The implications of these differences are particularly evident in public service delivery. In the United States, public services generally benefit from consistent standards, performance-based management, and strong accountability mechanisms. Citizens often experience relatively predictable service quality, supported by transparent evaluation systems and opportunities for public oversight. In Indonesia, public service delivery has improved significantly in recent decades, especially through decentralization and digital innovation initiatives. However, service quality remains uneven across regions, reflecting disparities in administrative capacity, leadership, and resource availability.

This study contributes to the field of comparative public administration by reinforcing the importance of context-sensitive analysis. The findings demonstrate that administrative reforms and governance models cannot be universally applied without adaptation to local political, institutional, and socio-cultural conditions. Comparative analysis does not aim to identify a single “best model” of public administration, but rather to understand how different systems address governance challenges within their respective contexts.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports institutional and governance-based approaches in public administration scholarship, which emphasize the embeddedness of administrative systems within broader political and social structures. It also highlights the continued relevance of comparative public administration as a tool for examining reform dynamics and administrative performance across countries with different levels of development.

From a practical and policy-oriented perspective, the findings offer several implications for governance reform in Indonesia. Strengthening institutional capacity remains a critical priority, particularly in terms of human resource development, organizational learning, and leadership. Enhancing administrative professionalism through merit-based recruitment, performance evaluation, and ethical standards can support more effective service delivery. Additionally, aligning decentralization with robust accountability mechanisms is essential to ensure that local autonomy translates into improved public outcomes rather than administrative fragmentation.

At the same time, policymakers should recognize that reform is a long-term and iterative process. Building effective public administration requires sustained political commitment, institutional continuity, and cultural change within bureaucratic organizations. Lessons from the United States experience may provide useful reference points, but these must be selectively adapted rather than adopted wholesale.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. As a literature-based analysis, it relies on secondary sources and does not incorporate primary empirical data. The findings therefore reflect interpretations of existing literature rather than direct observation of administrative practices. Additionally, the study adopts a broad comparative perspective, which may overlook sector-specific variations in public administration and service delivery.

Future research may extend this analysis in several directions. Empirical studies using qualitative or quantitative methods could examine how administrative reforms operate in specific sectors such as health, education, or social welfare. Comparative studies involving additional countries could also enrich understanding of how different political and administrative systems respond to similar governance challenges. Longitudinal research may further illuminate how administrative reforms evolve over time and how institutional change becomes embedded in practice.

In conclusion, this study affirms that public administration systems are deeply shaped by their institutional and political environments. The comparison between Indonesia and the United States illustrates that effective governance and public service delivery depend on the alignment of bureaucratic structure, governance systems, administrative culture, and reform strategies. By adopting a comparative perspective, this article contributes to a more nuanced understanding of public administration dynamics and offers insights relevant to governance reform in developing democratic contexts.

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