



MECHANISMS, CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS OF POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN DEMOCRATIC COUNTRIES

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Abstract

This paper discusses leadership in the political sphere, focusing primarily on the understanding of political leadership concepts, the basis of legitimacy, the structure and functions of political leadership, as well as the succession process in democratic systems. The study adopts a literature review approach, involving the exploration of various sources, including academic books and relevant articles obtained through online research. The objective of this writing is to provide a comprehensive understanding of political leadership by referring to relevant theories, and to deepen insights into the dynamics of political leadership practices. Despite limitations in terms of sources and information, the author welcomes constructive feedback and suggestions from readers to improve the quality of this work. It is also hoped that this paper can serve as a useful reference for those interested in exploring political leadership, especially for individuals in society who aspire to become leaders in the future.

Keywords: political leadership; legitimacy; structure, political leadership.

Abstrak

Tulisan ini membahas kepemimpinan dalam ranah politik, dengan fokus utama pada pemahaman konsep kepemimpinan politik, dasar legitimasi, struktur dan fungsi kepemimpinan politik, serta proses suksesi dalam sistem demokrasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka, yang melibatkan eksplorasi berbagai sumber, termasuk buku-buku akademis dan artikel relevan yang diperoleh melalui riset daring. Tujuan penulisan ini adalah untuk memberikan pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang kepemimpinan politik dengan merujuk pada teori-teori yang relevan, dan untuk memperdalam wawasan tentang dinamika praktik kepemimpinan politik. Meskipun terdapat keterbatasan sumber dan informasi, penulis mengharapkan masukan dan saran yang membangun dari para pembaca untuk meningkatkan kualitas karya ini. Tulisan ini juga diharapkan dapat menjadi referensi yang bermanfaat bagi mereka yang tertarik untuk mendalami kepemimpinan politik, khususnya bagi individu-individu di masyarakat yang bercita-cita menjadi pemimpin di masa depan.

Kata kunci: kepemimpinan politik; legitimasi; struktur, kepemimpinan politik.

Introduction

In political analysis, a leader emerges from a group of people in a social and political context. The term 'individual' comes from the word "individe," which means that something is whole and cannot be separated. Therefore, 'individual' is understood as a unity of soul and body, where its activities take place comprehensively, both in personal and social aspects. As 2 individuals who are part of society, humans continue to interact, communicate, and need each other, so that a social structure is formed, one of which is leadership. Socrates once said that without humans, nothing can be led. Thus, leadership is an important component in social interaction in society.

Sedarmayanti stated that leadership includes a person's ability to influence others through their character, so that in a certain way the behavior of others can change or be maintained. Leadership in society includes formal leadership, such as that found in government or political organizations, as well



as informal leadership involving religious leaders, cultural figures, or traditional leaders. Among the Sundanese people, informal leadership is often rooted in the integrity of the leader, the skills they have, respect from the community, or the relationships they have.

Leadership is an important element in the success of an organization, including in government. Political leadership, as a form of leadership that has a broad impact on public policy and the direction of a country, certainly affects employee performance in various sectors. According to William G. Scott (2019), leadership is the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in an effort to achieve goals. In other words, leadership is a process that influences activities carried out in a group to achieve predetermined goals.

Leadership in politics is a concern for many people. Changes in leaders or regional heads occur along with the progress of democracy. People tend to choose regional heads based on their perception of the leader. In the eyes of the public, a leader is expected to be able to solve problems and have courage. In addition, many also choose based on experience. Kouzes and Posner (2012, p. 35) state, "In order for people to follow someone, most constituents believe that the leader must be honest, have a vision for the future, be competent, and inspire." This statement shows that someone will follow a leader if they believe in the leader's integrity, clear vision, competence, and ability to inspire. So, a leader is someone who is able to motivate and work with others to achieve common goals.

Leadership effectiveness is measured by the extent to which the leader is able to motivate individuals in the organization to achieve predetermined goals. The responsibility of the leader is to encourage the community to increase their knowledge, especially in the field of politics. However, it is very rare for leaders to actively invite citizens to better understand politics. The policies taken often show that political education is not a priority for a leader. On the other hand, society often views politics only as a field related to corruption and conflict. In fact, political education is very important in a democratic country that values freedom of expression.

Ethics in politics can be instilled through political education. Generally, the development of ethics in politics is most effectively done through this education. However, leaders who understand the importance of increasing political awareness among the community, either through formal or informal education provided by political parties or other community organizations, are rarely found. There is a widespread tendency to separate leadership from efforts to build political awareness, where many leaders seem hesitant to encourage the community to participate more actively in political life.

On the other hand, today's society wants political leaders who are not only capable of leading, but also have moral integrity and commitment to the interests of the community. The emergence of distrust in political institutions and increasing populism indicate the need for political leaders who can strengthen ties with the people and gain continued support for the political programs they implement.

Deep understanding of the concept of political leadership is an important basis for designing effective policies and strategies to address the complex problems faced by a country or community. Therefore, this paper will discuss in depth the concept of political leadership, the legitimacy of political leadership, and the structure and function of political leadership which are the basis for better understanding the succession of political leadership in a democratic country

Method

This study adopts a library research or literature survey approach. A literature survey is a comprehensive summary of previous research on a particular field, aiming to provide readers with insight into existing knowledge and unexplained issues, so they can explore the reasons behind existing research or generate ideas for future studies. This literature review provides a broad understanding of political leadership, with an emphasis on the definition of political leadership, legitimacy, and the structure and role of political leadership. In addition, in collecting data, the author applies the Library Research method which includes the use of books and online searches to find related articles that serve as references for the author



Discussion

1. Political Leadership

In leadership research, it is important to distinguish between administrative or structural leadership and leadership that focuses on politics. Therefore, in addition to studying the definition of leadership, understanding political leadership is also very important. Basically, leadership is part of power, but not identical to it. Leadership involves the relationship between the influencing and the influenced, as well as the ability to utilize sources of influence effectively. Although power has many sources of influence, leadership emphasizes the ability to influence others through persuasive means. In addition, power is often used for personal or group gain, while leadership should be oriented towards the common interest.

Mintzberg (2004) explains that a leader plays three main roles that are divided into different categories: (1) interpersonal role that includes three functions, namely figurehead, leader, and communicator. Figurehead is a role that requires the leader to be involved in official activities. The leader functions as a leader who is able to provide motivation to his subordinates with good communication. Meanwhile, the communicator serves as a liaison who builds cooperation with various parties. (2) Informational role, which is related to how the leader collects and conveys information, with duties as an observer, disseminator, and spokesperson. (3) Decision-making role, where the leader must be able to manage and utilize all available resources. These three roles highlight the importance of communication skills, decision-making, and delegation of authority in achieving organizational goals. In addition, in the informational role, a leader must also ensure accountability in the information he conveys.

Political leadership refers to leaders who operate within larger political structures, including government institutions and political organizations such as political parties and community organizations. Political leaders differ from heads of government agencies who use more formal authority to motivate their subordinates. In contrast, political leaders rely more on informal and personal relationships to move followers toward common goals.

Leadership in a political context means directing others through means that involve prestige, power, or position. This leadership is manifested in a political structure consisting of government institutions and political organizations, which function to influence and regulate society.

In addition, leadership in politics can be analyzed from three perspectives: 1) leadership as a behavioral pattern. 2) leadership as an individual characteristic. 3) leadership as a political principle. From a behavioral pattern perspective, leadership is closely related to the ability to influence others to achieve desired goals. In a political context, a leader is required to be able to maintain support from constituents in a good way, be able to create meaningful political support, manage potential conflicts efficiently, and be able to motivate his team and constituents with optimism and resilience in the face of setbacks.

In addition, leaders are also expected to be able to interact and communicate with various segments of society, provide examples and support the process of education and enlightenment in the political field, create a healthy elite circulation in the organization, and position their people in important positions in political institutions. Political leadership also needs to be in line with deep democratic values. An effective leader must truly understand the ethics of politics, so that all political processes and dynamics take place with good manners.

Andrew Heywood suggests that there are three ways to view political leadership, namely the behavior of a leader, the qualities possessed, and the values adopted. Political leadership usually appears in a political environment at both structural and institutional levels such as government, parties, and society. Therefore, a political leader is different from the head of a government institution because they use more influence than formal power to motivate their subordinates. Unlike the head of a government institution who tends to use formal power, political leaders use informal relationships and personal relationships to encourage their subordinates to achieve certain goals. These three ways serve to understand political leadership: (1) leadership as a pattern of behavior, (2) leadership as an individual



quality, and (3) leadership as political values. When referred to as a pattern of behavior, leadership is related to the ability to influence others in order to achieve the desired goals. The key word here is influence. Leadership is also associated with charisma as an individual characteristic. While in the context of political values, leadership means the ability to move others with moral and ideological strength.

Thus, the discussion of political leadership focuses on the interaction and impact between leaders and followers, and develops into the results of interactions between individuals, groups, institutions, and organizations with the leader. This at least revolves around how the power of the leader utilizes all available resources to invite, influence, and encourage in order to achieve certain goals. In this context, political leadership style can be viewed as one approach used to analyze the political behavior of a leader, related to the way decisions are made and how to build positions and expand influence. Political leadership style basically implies a form of behavior from a leader, which is related to his ability to lead. This manifestation usually creates a certain pattern or form.

2. Legitimacy of Political Leadership

In the context of political leadership, it is important for society to understand the meaning of legitimacy. In the study of social and political sciences, the concept of legitimacy often arises when the practice of power begins to be questioned. Hegel once stated that theoretical reflection only arises when practice becomes problematic. Since the beginning of systematic reflection on social life, questions have arisen about the moral value and truth of various forms of power. Rousseau, through his ideas in *The Social Contract*, showed how a political authority can be considered legitimate or "valid," which later became the initial foundation for the emergence of thinking about legitimacy in modern political theory.

To exercise power effectively in a political system, legitimacy becomes a very important element. Legitimacy is closely related to the concept of authority; generally, it is applied in political systems where authority is delegated to certain individuals or officials. The existence of legitimacy provides a legitimate basis for the government to make decisions, while the people have the responsibility to obey those decisions. In general, legitimacy reflects the public's acceptance of a leader's right to govern and to determine and implement political policies. In a conceptual framework, political legitimacy refers to the people's belief that the leader has the moral right to govern, and they as citizens have an obligation to obey that order. Etymologically, the word "legitimacy" comes from the Latin *lex*, which means law, and in its use, this term refers to the public's recognition and acceptance of the authority and power exercised by the leader.

3. Structure and Function of Political Leadership

Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell Jr. see structure as an important part of political systems. They argue that every political system has certain elements that perform specific roles and functions, although these structures are usually multifunctional. In their view (Almond & Powell Jr., 1978), political structures can be categorized into three main aspects: systems, processes, and policies. System structures relate to institutions and organizations that maintain or change the political order. These structures perform functions such as political socialization, political recruitment, and political communication—all of which are common to many political systems.

Meanwhile, the structure of the political process describes how the system handles the articulation and aggregation of interests, policy formulation, and implementation. This process involves various actors such as political parties, the media, executive institutions, and other interest groups. In the context of democracy, the role of political leadership is very important because it has a direct influence on the direction and progress of a country. Political leadership has a vital role in achieving collective goals.

According to Fahmi (2012), political leadership is the ability to direct and influence individuals or groups to move towards a set target. Pasalong (2008) describes several main functions of political



leadership, including: 1) Instructional function, namely providing one-way direction from the leader to the led; 2) Consultative function, namely two-way communication between leaders and subordinates whose implementation depends on the leader's policy; 3) Participatory function, namely active involvement between leaders and subordinates in a mutually respectful and effective relationship; and 4) Delegation function, namely the delegation of authority to make and implement decisions, either with direct permission or independently.

4. Succession of Political Leadership in a Democratic Country

In a political system based on democratic principles, political parties and general elections are two inseparable components, because they complement each other. Elections are a means for political parties to compete for power through public support. This is in accordance with the view of Syamsuddin Haris, who stated that political parties and elections are the main pillars in the implementation of democratic governance. Political parties are tasked with absorbing and channeling the aspirations of the people, while elections provide space for open competition between parties and candidates to gain legitimacy from the public. Syamsuddin also emphasized that these two elements do not only play a role as governmental tools, but also have a crucial function in democratic political management.

In democratic practice, the implementation of elections must uphold the principles of freedom, confidentiality, and fair competition. Political parties are expected to actively contribute to the formation of a democratic political system. Therefore, many parties consider that the quality of elections reflects the extent to which democracy has developed in a country. The ideal of building a democratic government must be realized through a constitutional mechanism. The succession of political leadership in a democratic country, such as Indonesia, takes place through a process of power transition based on legal and constitutional provisions. In Indonesia, this transition is carried out through free and fair elections, held periodically to elect the president, vice president, members of parliament, and regional heads. In this process, the General Election Commission (KPU) as the organizer, and political parties as participants, are required to carry out their duties in accordance with applicable regulations. The KPU has a great responsibility to ensure that the elections run honestly and fairly.

First, regarding the role of the KPU in political education, this institution has a mandate to conduct socialization to the public. Whether at the national, provincial, or district/city levels, the KPU is obliged to provide information to the public regarding the election process and the importance of political participation. This socialization is not only technical or administrative, but also includes education about democratic values and the importance of being a smart voter.

Second, the role of the KPU in providing access for groups with disabilities is also an important aspect in implementing inclusive elections. Based on Law Number 4 of 1997 concerning Persons with Disabilities, accessibility is defined as the convenience provided to persons with disabilities so that they get equal opportunities in various areas of life. Article 10 paragraph (2) states that the provision of this access aims to create an environment that supports the full participation of persons with disabilities in community life, including in exercising their right to vote in elections.

5. The Role of the KPU in Increasing Voter Participation in a Democratic System

The General Election Commission (KPU) as an independent institution with a constitutional mandate is responsible for organizing all stages of the general election. In carrying out this function, the KPU has a strategic role in increasing public political participation, especially through legal education and awareness of the rights and obligations of citizens in the electoral democracy process. These efforts are carried out through various forms of socialization that target all levels of society, including political parties, election monitoring organizations, and potential voter groups. Socialization is not only procedural, but also aims to form intelligent and critical voters.



6. Contemporary Democracy and Normative Foundations

The transformation of democracy from ancient Greece to modern democratic practices shows a fundamental difference in its application. Modern democracy is run based on the principle of the rule of law, which guarantees human rights through the constitution. Some of the main characteristics of the contemporary democratic system include: constitutional protection of individual rights, an independent judicial system, free and fair elections, freedom of opinion and association, and inclusive civic education. Sargent (1987) argues that democracy consists of five main components: active participation in political decision-making, equality of rights among citizens, individual freedom and autonomy, a representative system, and an election mechanism based on the principle of majority. The essence of democracy lies in public involvement in the political process, both directly and through representation. This involvement is considered a manifestation of citizens' responsibility for the direction and content of public policy.

7. Challenges of Democracy: Money Politics and Threats to Leadership Integrity

One of the crucial challenges in the implementation of electoral democracy is the practice of money politics, which is an early form of systemic corruption in the political process. This phenomenon not only damages the quality of democracy, but also threatens the principles of justice and accountability in political leadership. Money politics makes power a commodity, which is sought for personal or group interests through transactional means. This can encourage the birth of policies that are not in favor of the people, but rather benefit certain elites.

Therefore, eradicating the practice of money politics must be a top priority in strengthening democracy. The public has a significant role in this, especially by rejecting candidates who use material rewards as a campaign strategy. Leaders who are elected through such practices are at high risk of ignoring the public interest. In addition, imposing strict legal sanctions on perpetrators of money politics and corruption is a non-negotiable step in order to maintain the integrity of the democratic system.

Conclusion

Based on the author's findings on the main topic, political leadership includes individuals who hold important positions in the political arena, which allows them to manage, lead, organize, or control the efforts of others, either through personal qualities or by utilizing the power, influence, or position they have. This can be seen both in internal political elements such as political parties and community organizations, as well as at a higher level such as government institutions. Andrew Heywood puts forward three approaches to understanding political leadership, namely by looking at the behavior of leaders, leadership character, and underlying political values. This approach highlights how leaders use their power to influence others in order to achieve certain political goals. Legitimacy is an element that provides a basis for government action; thus, legitimacy gives the government the right to make decisions, while the public is expected to obey those decisions. In a conceptual view, political legitimacy can be interpreted as the public's belief in the government's moral right to lead and the people's obligation to obey the decisions taken.

Political structures consist of three main elements: systems, processes, and policies. System structures refers to organizations and institutions that serve to maintain or change political structures, with a focus on functions such as political socialization, political recruitment, and political communication. These three functions are generally found in almost all political systems. In addition, the function of political leadership can be understood through four main dimensions: (1) Command function, which is one-way leadership from the leader to the led; (2) Consultative function, which is two-way leadership, although it depends on the leader's decision; (3) Participatory function, where the leader engages in two-way interaction with the led, with a focus on effective interpersonal relationships; (4) Delegation function, where the leader gives authority to make decisions and implement them, either with or without their consent.



The process of political leadership succession in Indonesia is a complex process, involving many elements such as political parties, the General Election Commission (KPU), and voters. Although challenges such as money politics and corruption still exist, democratic mechanisms in Indonesia are quite effective in ensuring that the leadership transition takes place in an orderly and peaceful manner. In the future, it is hoped that increasing political education and strengthening integrity in the implementation of elections can improve the quality of the leadership succession process in democratic countries.

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