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Public Policy Politics: Power Relations, Political Interests, And Governance in Public Decision-Making

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the relationship between power and political interests in the formulation and decision-making processes of public policy, examine the roles of governmental and non-governmental actors, and evaluate the application of good governance principles in realizing policies oriented toward the public interest. This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach. Data were obtained by reviewing scholarly journal articles, academic books, publications by international organizations, and policy documents relevant to public policy politics and governance. Data were collected through documentation, while data analysis employed a descriptive qualitative approach involving the identification, classification, interpretation, and synthesis of the literature. The findings indicate that power and political interests are closely interconnected in determining agendas, formulating alternatives, making decisions, and distributing public resources. The involvement of governmental and non-governmental actors can enrich the policy process; however, unequal access and influence may lead to the dominance of certain groups' interests. Furthermore, the application of good governance principles, particularly transparency, accountability, participation, and responsiveness, is essential to maintaining the legitimacy of policies and ensuring their orientation toward the public interest. This study also identifies several challenges, including the politicization of bureaucracy, the dominance of interest groups, weak inter-agency coordination, data limitations, and largely formalistic public participation. Therefore, evidence-based policymaking, bureaucratic professionalism, information transparency, inclusive participation, and continuous policy evaluation need to be strengthened. This study emphasizes that the quality of public policy is determined not only by the substance of decisions but also by the political processes and governance arrangements underlying them.

Keywords: public policy politics, power, political interests, governance, public policy

INTRODUCTION

Public policy is one of the government's primary instruments for regulating social life, addressing various public problems, and achieving development goals. Such policies may take the form of laws, government regulations, regional regulations, development programs, administrative decisions, or government actions that affect people's lives. In governance, public policy is not merely an administrative product; it is also the outcome of a political process involving power, interests, values, conflict, negotiation, and decision-making (Alim, 2024).

The relationship between politics and public policy can be seen in how governments determine priority issues, select alternative solutions, and identify the groups in society that benefit from a policy. Every government decision essentially has consequences for the distribution of resources, including budgets, service facilities, economic opportunities, and access to various development programs (Sulastri, Umar, Syaputra, & Zohandy, 2025). Therefore, public policy cannot be separated from the dynamics of power and political interests developing within society.

From a public administration perspective, power plays an important role in determining policy direction and influencing decision-making processes. Actors with formal authority or political influence can determine which issues enter the government agenda, influence policy alternatives, and set program implementation priorities. This condition indicates that the policy process does not always proceed neutrally and objectively because actors involved may differ in their interests, capacities, and access.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
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In addition to power, political interests are also factors that influence the quality of public policy. The government is responsible for meeting society's needs, while political parties, interest groups, business actors, civil society organizations, academics, and other community groups may have different objectives and orientations. These differences can generate constructive negotiation and compromise. However, if they are not managed transparently and accountably, they may produce policies that benefit certain groups more than the wider public.

In the context of Indonesian governance, these issues are increasingly important because the policy process involves multiple levels of government and institutional actors. The central government, regional governments, legislative institutions, bureaucracy, and society each play a role in determining and implementing policies. At the regional level, for example, governments must determine budget priorities for infrastructure development, education, health, social assistance, and public services. Budget constraints require governments to make choices based on public needs, urgency, benefits, and equitable distribution.

Studies of the policy process indicate that policymaking involves several interrelated stages, from agenda setting to evaluation. (Gaol, 2022) explains that the policy process can be understood through the stages of agenda setting, formulation, legitimation, socialization, implementation, and evaluation. Thus, policy success depends not only on the decisions produced but also on the government's ability to manage all these stages.

On the other hand, the development of modern governance requires information openness, institutional accountability, public participation, and coordination among actors. (Mareta, Brajahadi, Ichsan, & Eko, 2026) show that transparency and accountability are two distinct but complementary elements in achieving good governance. Transparency enables the public to obtain information about government decisions, while accountability ensures responsibility and follow-up concerning decisions and the use of public resources.

Based on these issues, studying public policy politics is important for understanding how power and political interests influence decision-making and how governance principles can ensure that policies remain oriented toward the public interest. This study develops this discussion through a literature review by integrating the concepts of public policy politics, the policy process, budget politics, public participation, and good governance principles. Based on the foregoing background and problems, this study aims to analyze the relationship between power and political interests in influencing policy formulation and public decision-making; examine the roles and interactions of governmental and non-governmental actors in policy dynamics; evaluate the application of good governance principles through transparency, accountability, and public participation; and identify challenges and formulate strategies to strengthen democratic, inclusive, and public-interest-oriented public policy politics.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method with a library research approach. According to (Habsy, 2017), library research is an effort to collect data and sources related to the topic selected for a study. Meanwhile, (Zed, 2025) states that library research is a series of activities involving data collection, reading, and processing research materials without direct fieldwork.

(Habsy, 2017) further explains that library research does not merely involve collecting references; it also includes critically analyzing existing sources to identify patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature. This approach enables researchers to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study without collecting primary data in the field. Meanwhile, (Habsy, 2017) emphasizes that the strength of library research lies in its ability to access diverse sources across different periods, thereby enabling a deeper and more contextual analysis of the development of an issue or phenomenon. This approach is used to obtain conceptual understanding and develop a synthesis of the relationship among power, political interests, public policy, and governance.

The research data consist of secondary sources in the form of relevant scholarly publications and documents. These sources include national and international journal articles, academic books, publications by international organizations, and policy documents discussing public policy politics,

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

decision-making processes, budget politics, public participation, transparency, and government accountability with recent sources prioritized (2021–2026), alongside foundational theoretical publications.

Data were collected by searching journal databases (such as SINTA and Garuda) and government institutional repositories using the following keywords: public policy politics, power, political interests, governance, and public policy. The information obtained was grouped by theme and then critically analyzed through interpretation and synthesis to identify patterns, gaps, and relationships among variables. Since no primary data were used, the findings represent a literature synthesis intended to provide a conceptual framework and policy recommendations, rather than empirically measure the level of public trust in a particular region.

The literature was selected based on its relevance to the research focus, its connection to the concepts analyzed, and the clarity of the source's identity and bibliographic information. This study also draws on previous studies discussing the policy process, participation in public budgeting, and the strengthening of good governance.

Data were collected using documentation techniques, namely identifying, reading, recording, and categorizing information from various relevant sources. The data were then analyzed using descriptive qualitative analysis through four stages:

1. Literature identification, namely collecting scholarly sources related to public policy politics and governance.
2. Information classification, namely grouping the literature according to the themes of power, political interests, policy actors, the policy process, budget politics, and good governance.
3. Analysis and interpretation, namely examining relationships among concepts and comparing the perspectives and findings of previous studies.
4. Synthesis of findings, namely formulating conclusions based on the relationships among power, political interests, and governance in the public policy process.

This approach is not intended to produce statistical generalizations or establish causal relationships between variables, but rather to develop a comprehensive conceptual understanding through a systematic examination and critical interpretation of relevant literature. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives, previous research findings, and existing scholarly discussions, this approach seeks to identify key concepts, underlying assumptions, emerging patterns, and relationships among the issues being investigated. It also provides an analytical foundation for comparing different viewpoints, identifying gaps in existing knowledge, and developing well-grounded arguments. Accordingly, the emphasis is placed on the depth of theoretical analysis, conceptual clarity, and the relevance of the literature rather than on numerical measurement or statistical representativeness. The findings are therefore expected to contribute to the refinement of existing theoretical perspectives and provide a conceptual basis for further empirical research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Public Policy Politics as a Process of Exercising Power

Public policy politics is a process that explains how power, interests, institutions, and interactions among actors influence the formulation and implementation of government policies. Public policy is not understood merely as an administrative decision, but as the outcome of a political process that determines the direction of government action and the distribution of resources to society.

From this perspective, power operates not only through formal decisions but also through the ability to define problems, control information, and determine which alternatives receive serious consideration. Consequently, an analysis of public policy needs to examine both the authority stated in institutional rules and the actual influence exercised by actors throughout the policy process. This distinction helps explain why formally legitimate decisions may still generate unequal outcomes when opportunities to influence decisions are unevenly distributed.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

The multidimensional nature of political power is particularly evident in multilevel and polycentric governance. Eckersley (2026) emphasizes the relationship among institutional levels, polycentric arrangements, and power in European environmental policymaking. This perspective suggests that the formal distribution of responsibilities does not automatically produce an equal distribution of influence. Fischer and Sciarini (2015) similarly address why some policy actors are perceived as more influential than others, drawing attention to the reputational dimension of power. For public administration, these perspectives provide a basis for distinguishing authority granted by law from influence generated through expertise, networks, information, and access to strategic forums.

In the context of government, power can be understood as the ability of an actor or institution to influence decisions that are binding on society. Such power may derive from formal authority, institutional position, political influence, ownership of economic resources, or the ability to control information. Therefore, parties with greater power often have broader opportunities to influence agenda setting and policy choices.

The relationship between power and public policy is evident when governments set development priorities. For example, a regional government may have to choose between repairing roads, improving health facilities, expanding educational scholarships, or upgrading the drainage system. Each option has different supporters and beneficiary groups. Such decisions require not only technical considerations but also a political process to determine which interests should be prioritized.

In this regard, the exercise of power should be based on legitimate authority, compliance with the law, and responsibility toward the public interest. Power that is not accompanied by oversight may lead to abuse of authority, the dominance of certain groups, and decisions that do not reflect public needs.

Power also operates through the ideas and representations that shape public understanding of policy problems. Milsom, Smith, and Walls (2022) argue for greater attention to power and ideas in public health policy analysis, while Hajer (2010) discusses how authoritative policymaking is shaped within mediated political environments. Taken together, these approaches indicate that power may be visible in final decisions, less visible in agenda control, or embedded in prevailing assumptions about which solutions are credible. A comprehensive analysis should therefore ask not only who formally decides, but also who frames the issue, whose evidence is accepted, and whose concerns are excluded from consideration.

Thus, public policy politics should be understood as a process of responsible power management. Policy quality is largely determined by the government's ability to balance authority, interests, and public needs in the decision-making process.

2. Political Interests and Their Influence on Decision-Making

Political interests are an important element influencing the direction of public policy. In government processes, each actor may have different goals, needs, and priorities. The government is oriented toward achieving development goals, political parties pursue political agendas, the private sector expects regulatory certainty, while society needs fair and high-quality public services.

The influence of political interests therefore needs to be assessed by examining whose preferences are represented, how competing claims are negotiated, and whether the final decision can be justified in terms of public needs. A transparent decision-making process does not eliminate differences in interests; rather, it makes the reasons, procedures, and consequences of compromise open to scrutiny. This is important to prevent negotiations among powerful actors from displacing the needs of groups with limited political and economic resources.

These differences in interests are not always negative. In a democratic process, differing views can provide a basis for compromise and produce more representative policies. Problems arise, however, when certain groups' interests exert excessive influence and override the needs of society as a whole.

One form of this problem is the dominance of interest groups in the policy formulation process. Actors with economic resources, political networks, and access to decision-makers may have greater influence than community groups with limited resources.

The relationship between public and private interests can be further understood through political economy. Rausser and Roland (2010) discuss tensions between special interests and the public interest in policy determination, while Rausser, Swinnen, and Zusman (2011) examine the connections between

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

political power and economic policy. These perspectives help explain why technically feasible alternatives may receive different levels of political support, depending on how benefits and costs are distributed. Dubois (2018) also conceptualizes policymaking as occurring within structured fields of actors and institutions. This literature points to the need to examine bargaining positions, institutional access, and the resources actors can mobilize rather than treating political preferences as equally influential.

Suhanda, Huda, & Rosidin (2024), in their study of the politics of regulatory formation, explain that the process of drafting government regulations cannot be separated from oversight by political institutions and the involvement of groups seeking to influence regulatory substance. This demonstrates that the policy process needs to consider a balance of access and influence among actors.

In the Indonesian context, one challenge that requires attention is the politicization of bureaucracy. The bureaucracy should implement policies in accordance with legal provisions, professional standards, and the public interest. However, when policy implementation is influenced by personal interests or political groups, bureaucratic neutrality may be undermined.

Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the merit system, institutional oversight, openness in decision-making processes, and law enforcement. These measures are important to ensure that government policies do not become instruments for serving particular political interests but remain oriented toward public services and social welfare.

Political interests may also be expressed through organizational negotiation rather than direct electoral competition. Bleiklie, Frølich, and Michelsen (2025), in examining managerial dialogue during higher education merger reform, offer an institutional setting in which multiple actors negotiate organizational change. This example is conceptually relevant to public policymaking because administrative reforms often require agreements among actors who face different incentives, responsibilities, and constraints. Consequently, the evaluation of political interests needs to consider both the substantive positions advanced by stakeholders and the decision-making arrangements that enable or restrict negotiation.

3. Actors and Dynamics in the Public Policy Process

The public policy process involves various actors from both government and society. Formal actors include the executive, legislature, bureaucracy, oversight institutions, and judicial institutions within their respective authorities. Meanwhile, non-formal actors include political parties, civil society organizations, academics, mass media, community groups, professional associations, and the private sector.

Actor involvement should consequently be understood in terms of both representation and influence. The number of participants in a consultation is not, by itself, evidence of meaningful participation. The policy process also needs to consider whether participants receive relevant information, have sufficient opportunities to present their views, and can see how their proposals are considered in the final decision. These conditions help distinguish substantive participation from participation that is merely procedural.

Each actor has different functions and interests in the policy process. The executive plays a role in formulating agendas and preparing government programs. The legislature performs legislative, budgeting, and oversight functions. The bureaucracy is responsible for translating decisions into programs and services. Academics provide scholarly analysis, while the media and civil society communicate information and conduct public oversight.

Bureaucratic actors should not be viewed merely as passive recipients of instructions from elected officials. Hegele (2018) approaches bureaucratic power in intergovernmental relations through networks, highlighting the importance of connections among administrative actors. Bach (2026) likewise situates bureaucratic politics within the study of international bureaucracies. These contributions underscore that bureaucrats may influence policy through technical expertise, preparation of alternatives, coordination, implementation discretion, and control of administrative information. Such influence requires accountability, but it can also improve policy quality when exercised transparently and in support of public objectives.

The involvement of multiple actors can improve policy quality because decisions receive input from various perspectives. However, the presence of many actors does not automatically produce inclusive

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

policies. Unequal access to information, advocacy capacity, and resources may cause the voices of certain groups to become more dominant.

(Bartocci, Grossi, Mauro, & Ebdon, 2023), through a systematic review of the literature on participatory budgeting, show that participatory budgeting has developed into an important practice for involving the public in public budget management. Their review emphasizes the importance of considering how public participation is developed in budgeting practices.

Thus, the government needs to ensure that public involvement is not merely a formality. Participation must provide equal opportunities for community groups to express their needs, correct information, and influence decisions. The government also needs to explain how public input is considered in the policies adopted.

4. Stages of the Public Policy Process and Political Influence

The public policy process can be analyzed through several interrelated stages. These stages include problem identification, agenda setting, formulation of alternatives, decision-making, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

Political influence may arise differently at each stage, rather than appearing only when a final decision is adopted. During agenda setting, actors may seek to define which problems deserve attention; during formulation, they may support or oppose particular alternatives; and during implementation, they may affect the allocation of resources and the interpretation of policy rules. Monitoring and evaluation are equally important because evidence about implementation can reveal whether the original objectives have been achieved or whether adjustments are required.

a. Problem Identification and Agenda Setting

This stage involves determining societal issues that require government attention. Not all public issues can immediately become policy priorities. Therefore, data, research, service reports, public complaints, and other information are needed to determine the urgency of an issue. Political influence may emerge when certain actors attempt to promote issues that serve their interests so that they enter the government agenda.

An important analytical issue at this stage is the selection and validation of information used to define a public problem. When decisions rely only on complaints or information from groups with easier access to government, the needs of less visible communities may be overlooked. Combining administrative data, research findings, service records, and inclusive public consultation can provide a more balanced basis for determining policy priorities.

b. Formulation of Policy Alternatives

At this stage, the government develops various options for resolving problems by considering legal, technical, administrative, economic, and social aspects. Each alternative needs to be analyzed in terms of costs, benefits, risks, and impacts on different groups in society. The formulation process may be influenced by negotiation, lobbying, and differences in interests among actors.

Policy alternatives should be compared using explicit criteria, including feasibility, cost, expected benefits, distributional effects, and potential risks. Making these criteria clear can reduce the possibility that an alternative is selected mainly because it serves the preferences of influential actors. It also enables decision-makers and the public to understand the trade-offs involved in choosing one policy option over another.

c. Decision-Making

This stage involves selecting the alternative considered most appropriate for addressing a public problem. Decisions must be made through legitimate and accountable procedures. Political compromise may be part of the democratic process, but it must not eliminate the public interest or undermine compliance with the law.

The legitimacy of a decision is strengthened when the reasons for selecting an alternative are documented and made accessible to the public. This includes explaining which evidence was considered, how competing interests were addressed, and why certain proposals were accepted or rejected. Such explanations support accountability and provide a basis for evaluating whether the decision is consistent with legal requirements and public objectives.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

d. Policy Implementation

Implementation is the process of translating government decisions into programs, activities, services, and budget utilization. Successful implementation is influenced by bureaucratic capacity, institutional coordination, resources, communication, and societal conditions. A well-formulated policy may encounter obstacles if it is not supported by adequate implementation capacity.

At the implementation stage, the relationship between policy design and institutional capacity becomes particularly important. Clear responsibilities, adequate resources, coordination procedures, and communication with target groups are needed to translate decisions into services and measurable outputs. Without these conditions, implementation gaps may emerge even when the policy objectives and formal regulations are well designed.

e. Monitoring and Evaluation

The government needs to assess whether implementation is aligned with policy objectives. Evaluation is conducted to determine target achievement, the effectiveness of budget utilization, equitable distribution of benefits, and unintended impacts. Evaluation results should be used as a basis for policy improvement.

Evaluation should examine more than administrative compliance or budget absorption. It should also consider whether intended beneficiaries have received the expected services, whether benefits are distributed fairly, and whether unintended consequences have emerged. Publishing evaluation findings and explaining follow-up actions can strengthen public oversight and ensure that evaluation contributes to policy learning.

(Gaol, 2022) explains that the policy process consists of several stages that can be used to understand policy formulation and implementation. Meanwhile, (Lovell, Nixon, & Betzold, 2023) that policy stages can also be used to analyze policy transfer and learning throughout the process, from formulation to evaluation.

This indicates that the policy process is not entirely linear. Changes in social conditions, political dynamics, and evaluation results may lead the government to reconsider decisions that have already been made.

Understanding politics as collective decision-making also clarifies why public policies evolve across stages rather than emerging from a single authoritative act. Matheson (2018) discusses the relationship between politics and public policy, providing a basis for interpreting political compromise, institutional decision rules, and the management of competing preferences. A policy process perspective therefore needs to examine how proposals are transformed through consultation, negotiation, administrative drafting, implementation, and evaluation. The direction of a policy can change during these stages as new information becomes available or as different actors gain or lose influence.

5. Budget Politics and the Distribution of Public Resources

Government budgets are important instruments in public policy implementation. A budget does not merely reflect the government's financial condition; it also indicates political priorities and the desired direction of development. Through the budget, the government determines which programs receive funding, which groups are targeted, and which regions receive resource allocations.

Budget decisions are therefore political choices with distributive consequences. An assessment of budget policy should consider not only the amount allocated to each sector but also the basis for determining priorities, the groups expected to benefit, and the extent to which allocations respond to differences in need. This perspective connects budget transparency with substantive accountability: the public needs information that allows it to assess whether spending decisions are fair and aligned with stated policy objectives.

In government practice, budget constraints require the government to set priorities. Regional governments, for example, must determine the proportion of funding allocated to education, health, infrastructure development, social assistance, and environmental management. Each budget decision has different impacts on society.

Problems may arise when budget allocation is not based on adequate needs assessments and evidence. Selecting programs based primarily on political popularity, proximity to decision-makers, or the interests of particular groups may result in an inequitable distribution of resources.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

(Bartocci et al., 2023) show that participatory budgeting is one mechanism for expanding public involvement in budget management. Through this mechanism, the public can communicate its needs and provide input on priorities for the use of public resources.

In addition, budget transparency is essential to ensuring that the use of government funds can be monitored. Budget information should include not only allocation amounts but also program objectives, beneficiaries, performance indicators, realization, and results achieved.

Thus, budget politics oriented toward the public interest must be based on the principles of justice, equity, efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. The government needs to ensure that budget decisions are explained openly and based on public needs.

6. The Application of Good Governance in Public Policy

The institutional design of governance shapes not only who participates but also how competing interests are translated into binding decisions. Rausser and Swinnen (2011) connect governance structures with political economy and public policy, emphasizing the importance of institutional arrangements in structuring policy choices. Aiyede (2022) discusses governance and the politics of public policy in African settings, providing a comparative perspective on how context affects the interaction between political authority and administrative practice. These works reinforce the view that formal laws, informal relationships, administrative procedures, and oversight institutions should be examined together when evaluating policy legitimacy and implementation capacity.

Good governance is a concept that emphasizes the importance of managing public authority transparently, accountably, participatively, responsively, effectively, and in accordance with the rule of law. These principles are necessary to ensure that the policy process produces decisions that are not only administratively legitimate but also socially legitimate and beneficial to society.

The principles of good governance are mutually reinforcing and should be assessed as part of the same decision-making system. Transparency makes information available; accountability requires officials to explain and answer for their actions, and participation creates opportunities for public input. Responsiveness, effectiveness, legal certainty, and justice then help determine whether these processes produce decisions and services that address public needs fairly. Applying only one principle in isolation is unlikely to ensure accountable policy outcomes.

The main principles of good governance in the public policy process include:

Sector-specific governance research further illustrates the consequences of overlooking power relationships. Suhardiman, Karki, and Bastakoti (2021), in their analysis of water governance in Nepal, place power and politics at the center of institutional analysis. Although the sector and national context differ from Indonesian public administration, the conceptual lesson is relevant: collaborative arrangements should be assessed in terms of who can shape decisions, influence resource allocation, and hold responsible authorities accountable. Participation without a meaningful opportunity to affect outcomes may strengthen procedural appearance without correcting structural imbalances.

a. Transparency

Transparency refers to the government's openness in providing information about decision-making processes, program planning, budget utilization, activity implementation, and policy outcomes. Openness of information enables the public to understand the basis of government decisions and oversee governance.

Transparency is meaningful when information is timely, understandable, relevant, and accessible to different groups in society. Merely publishing documents is insufficient if the information is difficult to locate or interpret. Governments should therefore provide clear explanations of policy objectives, decision criteria, budget allocations, implementation progress, and evaluation results.

b. Accountability

Accountability is the obligation of the government and public officials to explain and take responsibility for decisions, the use of resources, and policy implementation results. Accountability requires performance indicators, documentation, audit mechanisms, and follow-up actions on oversight findings.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

Accountability requires a clear relationship between authority, responsibility, performance, and corrective action. Officials and institutions should be able to explain the basis of their decisions and demonstrate how public resources were used. Oversight findings also need to be followed by appropriate responses; otherwise, accountability may remain limited to reporting procedures without improving policy implementation.

c. Public Participation

Participation is public involvement in policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Meaningful participation not only provides opportunities for the public to express opinions but also ensures that such input is considered in decision-making.

Meaningful participation requires more than inviting the public to attend meetings or submit opinions. The process should provide accessible information, inclusive opportunities to contribute, and feedback explaining how public input affected the decision. Particular attention is needed for groups that face barriers related to geography, disability, economic conditions, or access to digital communication.

d. Responsiveness

Responsiveness refers to the government's ability to address public needs, complaints, and aspirations. The government must be able to respond within a reasonable period and provide mechanisms for following up on public complaints.

Public preferences constitute an important but complex source of democratic legitimacy. Saglie (1996), in examining attitude change and policy decisions in Norwegian alcohol policy, illustrates the analytical importance of considering the relationship between policy development and public attitudes. This relationship should not be assumed to flow in only one direction: public opinion may shape decisions, while policy announcements, institutional practices, and public communication may also influence how citizens understand an issue. Meaningful participation therefore requires accessible information, opportunities for deliberation, and mechanisms for explaining how public input was considered.

Responsiveness can be assessed through the government's ability to receive, process, and resolve public concerns within a reasonable period. Complaint-handling systems should identify responsible units, establish follow-up procedures, and communicate the status of responses to the public. Information from complaints can also be used to identify recurring service problems and improve policy design.

e. Effectiveness and Efficiency

Effectiveness relates to the achievement of policy objectives, while efficiency concerns the optimal use of resources. Budget savings must not reduce service quality or eliminate access for vulnerable groups in society.

Effectiveness and efficiency should be considered together with service quality and equitable access. A program may spend its budget efficiently but still fail to achieve its objectives, while cost reductions may create barriers for vulnerable groups. Performance assessment should therefore connect resource use with outputs, outcomes, and the distribution of benefits.

f. Legal Certainty and Justice

Every government decision must be based on applicable regulations and consistently implemented. The principle of justice requires the government to provide equal opportunities for the public to obtain services and policy benefits.

Legal certainty requires consistent application of rules and predictable administrative procedures. Justice, however, also requires attention to whether people with different circumstances have fair opportunities to access services and policy benefits. These principles should guide both the formulation of eligibility criteria and the practical treatment of citizens during implementation.

(Mareta et al., 2026) explain that transparency and accountability are two complementary principles in achieving good governance. Transparency provides information as a basis for oversight, while accountability ensures responsibility for decisions and policy implementation.

Thus, good governance cannot be achieved merely by issuing regulations or providing information. These principles must be implemented in decision-making mechanisms, budget utilization, public services, and policy evaluation.

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7. Challenges of Public Policy Politics in Indonesia

Public policy implementation in Indonesia continues to face several challenges related to power dynamics, political interests, and institutional capacity.

These challenges are interconnected. For example, weak coordination can limit the exchange of data, while limited data can reduce the quality of policy analysis and evaluation. Formalistic participation may further weaken the government's ability to identify the effects of these problems on different communities. Addressing the challenges therefore requires institutional improvements that connect information, coordination, public oversight, and evaluation rather than treating each issue separately.

a. Dominance of Certain Group Interests

Differences in economic resources, political networks, and access to decision-makers may allow certain groups to exert greater influence in the policy process. This condition may reduce the representation of the interests of society as a whole.

The risk of dominance increases when access to policy forums, technical information, and decision-makers is concentrated among a small number of actors. A more balanced process requires disclosure of relevant interests, transparent consultation procedures, and mechanisms that enable less-resourced groups to participate. These measures do not remove legitimate competition among interests, but they can make the process more representative and accountable.

b. Politicization of the Bureaucracy

The bureaucracy is expected to work professionally and neutrally in implementing policies. However, the influence of personal interests or political groups may undermine the independence of public officials and cause policy implementation to deviate from its original objectives.

Politicization can weaken continuity and consistency in public services when administrative decisions are driven by partisan or personal considerations rather than professional standards. Strengthening merit-based appointments, clear performance criteria, and impartial oversight can help protect the bureaucracy's role as an implementer of lawful public decisions. These safeguards are important for maintaining public confidence in government institutions.

c. Weak Inter-Agency Coordination

The division of authority among various agencies may result in overlapping programs, differing priorities, and unclear responsibilities. These problems can hinder the effectiveness of policy implementation.

Coordination problems may appear as overlapping programs, fragmented data, delayed decisions, or uncertainty about institutional responsibilities. Addressing them requires clear task allocation, regular communication, shared information systems, and indicators that reflect common policy objectives. Coordination should also include mechanisms for resolving disagreements between agencies.

d. Limited Data and Analytical Capacity

Decision-making that is not supported by accurate and up-to-date data may produce policies that do not match public needs. Therefore, the government needs stronger policy analysis capabilities.

Reliable data are necessary to identify problems, compare policy alternatives, target beneficiaries, and evaluate results. Data limitations may arise from incomplete records, inconsistent definitions, weak data integration, or insufficient analytical skills. Improving data quality should therefore be accompanied by stronger analytical capacity and procedures for verifying information before it is used in decision-making.

e. Formalistic Public Participation

Public consultation activities may lose their meaning when the public is involved only to meet administrative requirements, while decisions have already been determined. Participation must be accompanied by feedback mechanisms and explanations of how public input is followed up.

Participation becomes formalistic when consultation is conducted after the main policy choices have already been determined or when public suggestions receive no explanation or follow-up. To avoid this situation, consultation should occur early enough to influence policy options and should be accompanied

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

by a public record of the issues raised and the government's response. This can make participation more consequential and accountable.

f. Digital Divide

The use of technology in government can accelerate services and expand access to information. However, limitations in devices, internet networks, digital literacy, and accessibility may still hinder some members of the public. Therefore, digital services need to be complemented by non-digital service alternatives.

Digital channels can improve the speed and reach of public services, but they may also exclude people who lack reliable internet access, suitable devices, or digital skills. Inclusive digital governance should therefore combine accessible system design and assistance for users with non-digital alternatives. The choice of service channel should not determine whether a citizen can exercise their rights or obtain essential services.

g. Weak Policy Evaluation

Implemented policies are not always followed by comprehensive impact measurement. Evaluation that focuses only on budget absorption is insufficient to describe the success of a program.

Evaluation is weakened when it focuses mainly on activity completion or financial absorption without examining outcomes and impacts. A stronger approach uses indicators linked to the policy's stated objectives and considers both intended and unintended effects. Evaluation findings should be made available to relevant stakeholders and translated into concrete improvements in subsequent planning and implementation.

These challenges demonstrate that strengthening public policy requires simultaneous improvements in political, administrative, institutional, and public participation aspects.

8. Strategies for Strengthening Democratic and Accountable Public Policy Politics

Based on the literature review, several strategies can be implemented to strengthen the quality of public policy politics.

The strategies below are most effective when implemented as a coordinated set of institutional practices. Evidence-based decisions require reliable information; transparency makes the basis of decisions visible; participation broadens the information and perspectives available; and professional bureaucracy and coordination support implementation. Evaluation then provides feedback on whether these arrangements have improved policy outcomes and public accountability.

a. trengthening Evidence-Based Policy

The government needs to use data, research findings, needs analyses, and program evaluations as the basis for decision-making. This approach can reduce dependence on short-term political considerations.

Evidence-based policymaking requires the systematic use of credible data, research, stakeholder knowledge, and evaluation findings. Decision-makers should explain how evidence informs the selection of priorities and alternatives, while acknowledging uncertainties or limitations in available information. This practice can improve the quality of decisions and make the reasoning behind policy choices easier to scrutinize.

b. Expanding Transparency in the Policy Process

The government needs to disclose information about agendas, policy drafts, the basis for considerations, budget allocations, and program implementation results. Such openness is important for preventing abuse of authority and increasing public trust.

Transparency should cover the stages of the policy process, including agenda setting, draft formulation, decision criteria, budget allocation, implementation, and evaluation. Information needs to be published in formats that the public can access and understand. Clear disclosure can help identify inconsistencies between stated objectives, approved budgets, and actual implementation.

c. Increasing Inclusive Public Participation

Public involvement must take place from the planning stage through evaluation, with attention to vulnerable groups, people in remote areas, and groups with limited access to information.

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

Inclusive participation requires identifying groups that are often underrepresented and adapting consultation methods to their circumstances. Face-to-face meetings, written submissions, accessible digital channels, and community-based discussions can be combined where appropriate. The government should also provide feedback on how public input is used so that participation is connected to actual decision-making.

d. Strengthening Bureaucratic Professionalism and Neutrality

Policy implementation must be based on competence, legal provisions, and service standards. Oversight of conflicts of interest and the implementation of a merit system are important elements in maintaining the professionalism of public officials.

Professionalism is supported by recruitment and promotion based on competence, clear ethical standards, and performance assessment linked to public service responsibilities. Neutrality also requires safeguards against conflicts of interest and undue political pressure. These arrangements help ensure that implementation is consistent with laws and policy objectives.

e. Strengthening Cross-Sectoral Coordination

The government needs to establish a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, data-sharing mechanisms, and shared success indicators so that policy implementation can proceed in an integrated manner.

Cross-sectoral coordination needs practical arrangements, not merely general commitments to cooperate. These may include designated coordinating units, agreed data standards, clear division of responsibilities, joint performance indicators, and regular progress reviews. Such arrangements can reduce duplication and make it easier to identify and resolve implementation barriers.

f. Developing Inclusive Digital Governance

Digital government needs to be supported by personal data protection, system security, interoperability, and improvements in civil servants' competencies. In addition, the government must provide alternative services for people with limited digital access.

Inclusive digital governance should be developed alongside protections for personal data, system security, interoperability, and user accessibility. Government institutions also need sufficient staff capacity to maintain systems and assist users. Maintaining non-digital service options is important to ensure that technological modernization does not create new forms of exclusion.

g. Strengthening Policy Evaluation and Oversight

Evaluation must measure the achievement of objectives, equitable distribution of benefits, service quality, budget utilization, and policy impacts on society. Evaluation results need to be followed up through program improvements and subsequent decision-making. Evaluation and oversight should be connected to a clear cycle of reporting, public scrutiny, corrective action, and follow-up assessment. Indicators should reflect not only inputs and activities but also service quality, outcome achievement, equity, and longer-term effects where evidence is available. This approach allows evaluation to function as a learning mechanism rather than simply an administrative requirement.

These strategies indicate that strengthening public policy politics cannot be achieved solely through the establishment of regulations; it also requires changes in decision-making processes and the institutional culture of government.

9. Synthesis of the Findings: The Relationship among Power, Political Interests, and Governance

Based on the preceding discussion, the relationship among power, political interests, and governance is mutually influential throughout the public policy process.

The synthesis also indicates that governance principles do not remove politics from policymaking; instead, they establish standards for managing political competition and the exercise of public authority. When transparency, accountability, and participation operate effectively, competing interests can be made visible and assessed against legal obligations and public needs. Conversely, weak governance arrangements create opportunities for unequal influence to shape priorities and resource distribution.

Power determines who has the authority and capacity to influence decisions. Political interests influence the direction of choices, priorities, and the distribution of resources. Meanwhile, governance

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

provides the principles and mechanisms to ensure that the exercise of power and the management of interests remain within the boundaries of law and the public interest.

Across the literature, three interconnected mechanisms emerge. First, power determines the capacity to define problems and influence which alternatives are considered (Fischer & Sciarini, 2015; Milsom et al., 2022). Second, political interests shape negotiation over priorities and distributive outcomes (Rausser & Roland, 2010; Dubois, 2018). Third, governance institutions define procedures for allocating authority, establishing accountability, and enabling participation (Rausser & Swinnen, 2011; Aiyede, 2022). These mechanisms interact rather than operate independently: a formally inclusive process may still reproduce unequal influence unless information, representation, and access are addressed. This integrated interpretation reinforces the importance of examining both the substantive outcomes of decisions and the institutional processes through which those outcomes are generated.

Table 1:The relationship among these three elements can be explained through the following synthesis

Dimension	Role in public policy	Risks if not managed
Power	Determines authority and the direction of decisions	Abuse of authority and domination
Political interests	Influences policy agendas and priorities	Conflicts of interest and politicization of policy
Policy actors	Provide influence and input in the policy process	Unequal representation
Budget politics	Determines the distribution of public resources	Inequitable budget allocation
Transparency	Provides information about policies	Lack of openness in decision-making
Accountability	Ensures government accountability	Weak oversight and follow-up
Participation	Strengthens public involvement	Policies that do not meet public needs

This synthesis shows that governance functions as a mechanism for controlling the exercise of power and the management of political interests. Through transparency, accountability, participation, and oversight, government decisions can be more easily assessed in terms of their benefits, fairness, and contribution to the public interest. Thus, quality public policy does not mean policy that is entirely free from political influence, but rather policy that is capable of managing differing interests democratically, openly, and responsibly.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that public policy politics is a process inseparable from the relationship among power, political interests, and governance. Power influences authority and the direction of decision-making, while political interests also determine agenda setting, policy choices, and the distribution of public resources. In this process, the involvement of governmental and non-governmental actors can enrich decision quality, but it may also lead to dominance if not balanced by adequate oversight mechanisms.

The application of good governance principles is essential to ensuring that the policy process is transparent, accountable, participatory, responsive, effective, and grounded in the rule of law. Challenges such as the politicization of bureaucracy, the dominance of interest groups, weak coordination, data limitations, and formalistic participation need to be addressed by strengthening evidence-based policymaking, bureaucratic professionalism, information openness, public participation, and continuous evaluation.

The reviewed literature further demonstrates that policy analysis benefits from connecting the formal distribution of authority to informal influence, political bargaining, and bureaucratic networks. Comparative contributions on multilevel governance, water governance, and bureaucratic politics highlight the need to adapt analytical frameworks to institutional context rather than treating governance models as universally identical (Eckersley, 2026; Suhardiman et al., 2021; Bach, 2026). Future research

Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
DOI: https://doi.org/10.70188/dt3e5j75

could examine these interactions empirically through stakeholder mapping, policy-process tracing, institutional network analysis, and comparative case studies, while paying particular attention to groups whose participation and influence remain limited.

Thus, the quality of public policy is determined not only by the content of government decisions but also by the political and institutional processes underlying them. The democratic management of power and interests is a prerequisite for realizing governance oriented toward the public interest and social welfare.

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Volume 1, Issue 1, 2026, pp: 62-76
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