

Navigating Political Beliefs at the Grassroots: A Study of Civil Servants' Perceptions on Democracy and Radicalism in Murung Raya

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ABSTRACT - This study investigates the political beliefs of civil servants in Murung Raya Regency, focusing on their perceptions of democracy, presidentialism, and radical ideological discourse. Grounded in Norris and Inglehart's Cultural Backlash Theory (2019), the research explores how local bureaucrats respond to ideological shifts and sociopolitical tensions in contemporary Indonesia. Employing a quantitative design, the study surveyed 64 government employees through a structured questionnaire administered after a civic education session. The findings indicate that 82.8% of respondents support the presidential system and the separation of powers, while 79.7% agree that Indonesia's democratic system, despite its flaws, should be preserved. Notably, 96.9% reject radical ideologies such as the caliphate, affirming the resilience of Pancasila as the state ideology. Moreover, 89.1% prefer presidential governance, and 42.2% favor military-background leaders for national leadership, suggesting a cultural orientation toward political stability. These results confirm the relevance of Cultural Backlash Theory in explaining grassroots political attitudes shaped by modernization anxieties and ideological contestation. This study contributes to the discourse on democratic resilience, offering empirical insights into the beliefs of civil servants who act as frontline agents of the state in safeguarding democratic values at the local level.

Keywords: political beliefs; civil servant; democracy; radicalism

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Introduction

The democratization of Indonesia since the fall of the New Order has ushered in a new era of political openness, civil liberties, and decentralization (Ahmad, 2024). However, this transformation has also coincided with the emergence of conservative populism, religious radicalism, and increasing ideological polarization, particularly in non-metropolitan areas (Mukhlis et al., 2021). Although Indonesia has transitioned to a democratic system since the Reformasi movement in 1998, the legacy of New Order authoritarianism continues to influence bureaucratic structures and culture. Under Suharto's regime, the bureaucracy was politicized to support the ruling party, Golkar, through the enforcement of "monoloyalty," which demanded exclusive allegiance to the state and ruling party, often at the expense of democratic principles (Berenschot, 2018). This practice fostered a bureaucratic culture that prioritized loyalty over accountability and performance a tendency that persists in contemporary civil service behavior.

A 2017 survey by the Alvara Research Center revealed that approximately 19.4% of civil servants expressed support for the formal implementation of Islamic Sharia in Indonesia, and 9.1% openly wished to replace Pancasila with an Islamic ideology. These findings reflect a worrying trend of anti-democratic attitudes within the bureaucracy, which could undermine both neutrality and professionalism in public administration. Furthermore, Suryana (2020) highlights the challenge of combating extremism within the civil service, including the reluctance of supervising officials to enforce disciplinary measures against civil servants suspected of radical affiliations.

Such anti-democratic tendencies are exacerbated by local-level bureaucratic politicization, where regional leaders often deploy civil servants for personal political gains, particularly during local elections (*Pilkada*) (Aspinall & Mas'Udi, 2017; Hardenta, 2024). Political interference in local government leads to violations of bureaucratic neutrality and facilitates practices such as transactional appointments and patronage-based promotions (Aminah et al., 2021). This situation fosters an environment where civil servants prioritize political loyalty over public service professionalism and democratic accountability.

Civil servants (*Aparatur Sipil Negara*/ASN) play a dual role as agents of state rationality and as members of their socio-cultural communities (Septiani, 2023; Wahyuni & Noor Permadi, 2018). This dual positioning makes them key actors in the ideological battle over the direction of Indonesia's democracy. Yet, evidence suggests that a significant segment of ASN is susceptible to ideological narratives that deviate from Pancasila, including those rooted in exclusive religious or anti-democratic worldviews (Bahrul Khoir, 2021). Such ideological vulnerability threatens not only the neutrality of the bureaucracy but also the integrity of democratic consolidation.

One such region is Murung Raya Regency in Central Kalimantan, where the intersection of ethnic-religious diversity, bureaucratic governance, and political belief systems presents a unique landscape for exploring the dynamics between democracy and radicalism at the grassroots level. Given this context, it is imperative to investigate civil servants' perceptions of democracy and radicalism, particularly in peripheral regions such as Murung Raya Regency, which have received little scholarly attention. This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing the perceptions of 64 civil servants in Murung Raya, contributing empirically to efforts aimed at reinforcing democratic values and promoting a professional, ideologically neutral bureaucracy in Indonesia.

Theoretically, this study draws from Herbert A. Simon's theory of bounded rationality, which posits that bureaucratic decisions are shaped not only by institutional rules but also by

individual cognitive limitations, social influences, and belief systems (Bryant & White, 2019). This study employs the Cultural Backlash Theory, as articulated by Norris and Inglehart (2017), to examine the political perceptions of civil servants in Murung Raya, Indonesia. The theory posits that the rise of authoritarian-populist sentiments is, in part, a reaction against progressive cultural changes, particularly among groups that perceive these changes as a threat to their traditional values and social status (Muñoz, 2021).

In Indonesia, the post-Reformasi period has brought about substantial democratic advancements and greater cultural openness. Nevertheless, these developments have also triggered the reemergence of conservative and radical viewpoints, especially among segments of society who feel left behind or marginalized by the pace of change. Civil servants, who play a crucial role within the government structure, are not isolated from these broader social dynamics. Their views and attitudes may be shaped by feelings of cultural disorientation or exclusion, which in turn can foster inclinations toward anti-democratic or radical ideologies.

The Cultural Backlash Theory provides a lens to understand how these dynamics play out among civil servants in Murung Raya. By examining their political beliefs, this study aims to uncover the extent to which cultural backlash contributes to anti-democratic tendencies within the bureaucracy. This approach allows for a nuanced analysis of the interplay between cultural change and political attitudes in a region that has been relatively understudied in this context. Furthermore, this theoretical framework facilitates an exploration of how generational differences, educational backgrounds, and exposure to global cultural trends may influence the susceptibility of civil servants to radical ideologies. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing targeted interventions to reinforce democratic values and resilience within the civil service.

By applying the Cultural Backlash Theory to the case of Murung Raya, this study contributes to the broader discourse on democratic consolidation and the challenges posed by cultural resistance within state institutions. It underscores the importance of addressing the underlying cultural factors that influence political perceptions, particularly in regions undergoing rapid social transformation. This article thus offers a novel theoretical and empirical contribution to the study of democratization, state ideology, and radicalism at the subnational level. It highlights the importance of ideological vigilance in the civil service and provides policy recommendations for strengthening democratic commitment in Indonesia's bureaucratic institutions, especially in Murunf Raya Regency, Central Kalimantan.

Method

This study adopts a quantitative research design Sugawara & Nikaido (2014) to explore and measure the political beliefs of civil servants in Murung Raya, Central Kalimantan, particularly their perceptions of democratic governance and radical ideological alternatives. The research was conducted among a purposive sample of 64 respondents who were enrolled in the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) class a continuing education program specifically designed for government employees. The 64 respondents came from 24 government agencies in Murung Raya Regency, starting from the sub-district, district, to district government levels (Table 1.). This cohort was selected due to their strategic role in the local governance system and their potential influence in grassroots-level political orientation.

Table 1. Respondents Background

No	Institution	Number of Respondents
1	National Unity and Politics Agency of Murung Raya Regency	5
2	Department of Population and Civil Registration	5
3	Muara Tuhup Village Office	1
4	Puruk Cahu Regional General Hospital	2
5	Laung Tuhup District Government Office	5
6	Fire and Rescue Department of Murung Raya Regency	2
7	Tanah Siang District Government Office	4
8	Department of Culture, Youth, Sports and Tourism of South Barito Regency	2
9	Civil Service Police Unit	3
10	Transmigration And Manpower Service	2
11	Regional Secretariat Of Murung Raya District	3
12	Department of Cooperatives and SMEs, Industry and Trade	3
13	Murung Raya District Health Office	2
14	Beriwit Village Office, Murung District, Murung Raya Regency	2
15	Department of Public Works and Spatial Planning	3
16	Saripoi Village Office	2
17	Regional Revenue Agency of Central Kalimantan Province UPTPPD in Puruk Cahu	2
18	Social Services	2
19	Permata Intan Sub-district Office	3
20	South Tanah Siang District Office	3
21	Regional Revenue Agency of Murung Raya Regency	2
22	Batu Bua I Village Office, Laung Tujup District, Murung Raya Regency	2
23	Human Resources Development and Personnel Agency	2
24	Department of Transportation of Murung Raya Regency	2
Total Respondents		64

Source: processed from the author, 2025

The data collection process was embedded within a structured instructional setting or what is often known as classroom-based research methods (Ul'zikri & Annisa, 2024), where respondents participated in a formal classroom session focusing on the Indonesian political system, including key features such as the presidential system, separation of powers (Trias Politica), and constitutional institutions. At the conclusion of the session, participants were invited to complete an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. This ensured that all participants received a baseline understanding of democratic governance prior to data collection, thereby enhancing the reliability and contextual consistency of their responses.

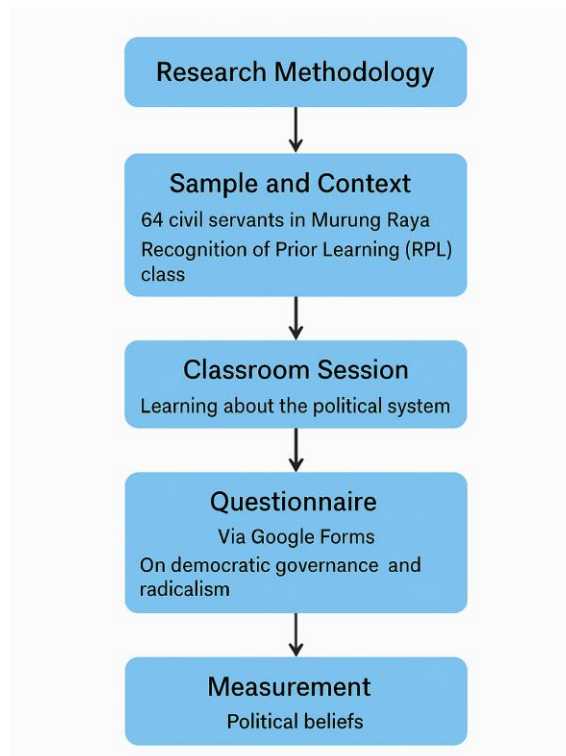


Figure 1. Process of Research

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

Figure 1 presents a structured methodological framework illustrating the sequential stages employed in this study to examine the political beliefs of civil servants in Murung Raya. The process begins with the selection of respondents from the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) class, a formal educational setting tailored for government employees, representing the "Sample and Context" phase. This is followed by the "Classroom Session," wherein participants receive foundational knowledge on the Indonesian political system, designed to standardize baseline understanding prior to data collection. Subsequently, the "Questionnaire" phase involves administering a Google Form containing five closed-ended questions aimed at capturing attitudes toward democracy, the presidential system, and radical ideologies. The final stage, denoted as "Measurement," encompasses the interpretation of political belief dimensions, including institutional trust, system preference, and ideological resistance or openness. This visual representation ensures clarity in tracing the research logic and reinforces methodological transparency aligned with best practices in empirical political science research.

Each question was designed to measure different dimensions of the respondents' political belief system, ranging from institutional trust and ideological alignment to leadership preference and tolerance toward radical narratives. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify overall trends and dominant preferences, as well as cross-tabulations to examine variations based on demographic indicators such as age, years of service, and educational background. This approach allows for a granular understanding of how political beliefs are distributed among public servants in a regional administrative setting. This methodological strategy is rooted in the assumption that political beliefs are not formed in isolation, but rather shaped through structured civic exposure and social discourse elements that are captured in the hybrid pedagogical-research design employed in this study (Harnois & Gagnon, 2022). The use of

the RPL class as both an educational and investigatory setting represents an innovative approach to field research, allowing for both reflexivity and immediacy in capturing participant responses.

To enhance the methodological robustness of this research (Greco et al., 2019), several procedures were employed to ensure the validity and reliability of the survey instrument used to assess political beliefs among civil servants in Murung Raya. The survey consisted of five closed-ended questions designed to capture respondents' attitudes toward the presidential system, democratic governance, ideological radicalism, preferred system of government, and leadership preferences. Content validity was ensured through expert judgment involving three political science scholars and a senior government policy analyst (McMann et al., 2022). These experts reviewed the questionnaire items for relevance, clarity, and alignment with the constructs of democratic preference and radical rejection as theorized in *Cultural Backlash Theory* (Norris & Inglehart, 2017). Adjustments were made based on their feedback to ensure each item appropriately reflected theoretical dimensions (Damschroder et al., 2022).

Prior to full deployment, the instrument underwent a pilot test involving 10 civil servants who were not part of the final sample. Based on pilot responses, minor modifications were made to question phrasing to avoid ambiguity. The internal consistency of the questionnaire was then tested using Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a score of 0.782, which falls within the acceptable range ($\alpha > 0.7$), indicating satisfactory reliability for social science research (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). All questions were structured using a 5-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement or preference (Jebb et al., 2021).

For the question regarding preferred system of government and leadership background, multiple-choice categorical options were presented, with an "Other (please specify)" field to capture additional opinions. This structure enabled nuanced data analysis while ensuring the standardization of responses for statistical reliability. To ensure replicability, the final version of the questionnaire, including question wording and response options, has been archived and is available upon request. This facilitates potential application of the survey in other regions or follow-up longitudinal studies on shifts in political attitudes at the subnational level. By addressing these methodological dimensions, the study strengthens its contribution to empirical political behavior research, offering both context-specific insights and a replicable research design.

Result and Discussion

Foundational Orientation: Presidential System of Government

The first question posed to respondents "Do you agree with the presidential system of government, with the separation of powers (Trias Politica) into the executive, legislative, and judiciary?" seeks to capture the foundational orientation of civil servants toward the institutional framework of democratic governance. The results (Figure 2.) reveal that a majority of respondents express support for the existing system: 35 respondents (54.7%) agreed, and 18 respondents (28.1%) strongly agreed. A smaller fraction, 9 respondents (14.1%), were neutral, while only 2 respondents (3.1%) disagreed. These findings indicate a generally affirmative disposition among civil servants in Murung Raya toward Indonesia's constitutional architecture based on democratic presidentialism and institutional separation of powers.

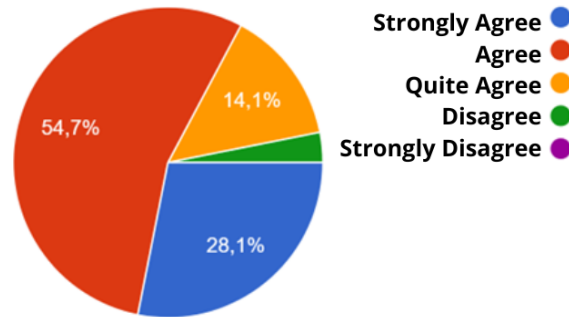


Figure 2. Foundational Orientation: Presidential System of Government

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

This pattern of support can be interpreted through the lens of Cultural Backlash Theory as articulated by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2017), which posits that political attitudes are often shaped as a reaction to rapid socio-cultural change. In this context, the relatively high level of endorsement for the presidential system among civil servants may be understood as an expression of institutional loyalty and a defense of liberal democratic norms amid increasing ideological contestation and challenges from radical movements. Civil servants, who operate within the core of the bureaucratic state, may perceive the current structure not merely as a legal formality but as a cultural and institutional bulwark against political instability and anti-systemic threats.

The mild dissent reflected in the 3.1% of respondents who disagreed may represent a marginal segment influenced by disillusionment or exposure to anti-establishment narratives, which resonate more strongly in certain socio-political climates. However, the dominance of affirmative responses suggests that the institutional legitimacy of the presidential system (Cahyono, 2023) remains robust at the local bureaucratic level, and civil servants continue to anchor their political belief in the normative validity of constitutional democracy.

Norris and Inglehart's theory further suggests that support for liberal institutions often intensifies when those institutions are perceived as under threat (Muñoz, 2021). Thus, in regions where discourse on ideological alternatives such as Islamic radicalism or anti-democratic populism—has emerged, support for traditional democratic structures may reflect a cultural counter-mobilization to preserve perceived national identity and governance continuity. In the case of Murung Raya, the bureaucratic embrace of the presidential system may not only signify normative alignment but also a proactive reaffirmation of the state's ideological foundations amid polarizing pressures.

Normative Commitment: Sustainability and Legitimacy of the Indonesian Political Order

The second questionnaire item: "Do you agree that Indonesia's democratic political system and presidential government are already good and must be preserved, despite their many shortcomings?" aims to delve deeper into respondents' normative commitment toward the endurance and legitimacy of Indonesia's current political order. The data (Figure 3.) reveal that 39 respondents (60.9%) agreed, 12 respondents (18.8%) strongly agreed, and 12 others (18.8%) moderately agreed with the statement. Only one respondent (1.6%) expressed disagreement. This result reflects a broad-based affirmation of Indonesia's democratic and presidential system among government employees, even when they acknowledge its flaws.

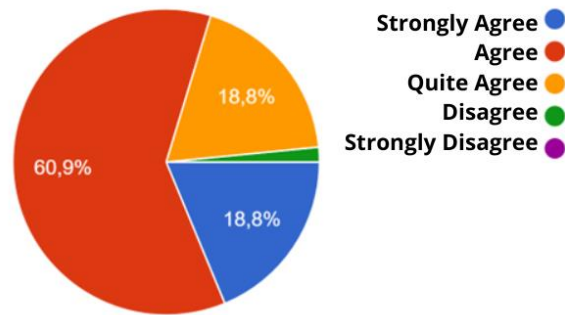


Figure 3. Normative Commitment

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

This strong positive perception can be interpreted through the lens of Norris and Inglehart's Cultural Backlash Theory (2017), which posits that support for liberal democratic institutions often intensifies as a reaction to perceived cultural or political threats particularly from authoritarianism, populism, or fundamentalist ideologies. In the context of Indonesia, where ideological contestation and threats to democratic consolidation such as the appeal of radical religious narratives or populist anti-democratic discourse have periodically emerged, the preference to "preserve the system despite imperfections" reveals a form of rational conservatism rooted in democratic resilience.

What is especially notable is the extent to which the bureaucracy in this case, civil servants in Murung Raya functions not merely as passive administrators but as defenders of constitutional democracy. Their responses suggest a recognition that democracy, although imperfect in implementation, offers a better institutional framework than its alternatives. This perspective aligns with Norris and Inglehart's argument that backlash phenomena often originate from those who perceive democratic norms as part of their cultural identity, threatened by rapid changes or ideological disruptions.

Moreover, the minimal level of dissent (1.6%) indicates that dissatisfaction with the current system is relatively marginal among respondents, suggesting that critiques of democracy are more likely to manifest as demands for reform rather than for systemic replacement. This pattern illustrates what Inglehart and Norris define as "adaptive legitimacy" the belief that existing institutions are improvable and should be maintained rather than dismantled. It reinforces the notion that among Indonesia's civil apparatus, democratic ideals remain institutionally and culturally embedded (Purwanto, 2020).

Ultimately, these findings underscore the value of institutional loyalty and the bureaucratic role in safeguarding democratic norms at the grassroots level. In politically vulnerable regions, such as Murung Raya, where information ecosystems and ideological influences may be uneven, the solid support for democracy among civil servants represents a key sociopolitical anchor against the tide of radicalism or authoritarian regression. This affirms the relevance of Cultural Backlash Theory in interpreting political attitudes under conditions of ideological flux and sociocultural contention.

Loyalty and Resistance: Pancasila and Transnational Radical Ideologies

The third questionnaire item "How do you respond to the discourse on radicalization by groups seeking to replace the Pancasila ideology with a caliphate-based system of governance?" was intended to assess the civil servants' alignment with democratic national ideology and their

resistance to transnational radical ideologies. The survey results are striking: 40 respondents (62.5%) stated they disagreed with the radical discourse, 22 respondents (34.4%) strongly disagreed, and only 2 respondents (3.2%) expressed agreement or strong agreement with such ideas. This overwhelming rejection of ideological radicalism indicates a significant level of ideological loyalty to the foundational values of the Indonesian state, particularly Pancasila. The results can be seen in Figure 4. below.

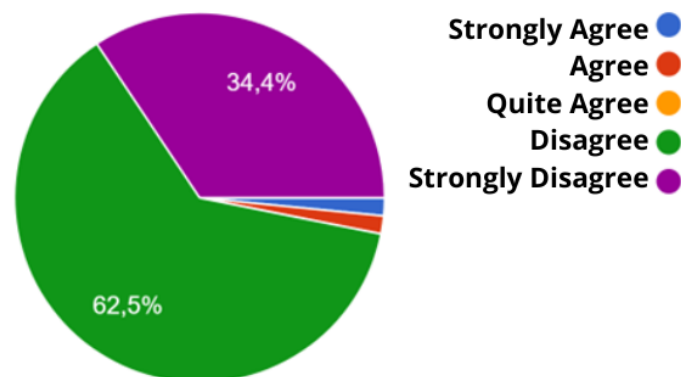


Figure 4. Loyalty and Resistance

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

Interpreting this pattern through the lens of Cultural Backlash Theory (Norris & Inglehart, 2017), one can argue that such a high level of resistance to transnational radical ideologies represents a reactive defense of cultural and democratic norms perceived to be under threat. The theory posits that segments of society especially those embedded within state institutions often develop a strong normative attachment to liberal democratic principles when confronted with counter-narratives that challenge those values. In this case, Indonesian civil servants, particularly in a peripheral region such as Murung Raya, demonstrate this normative defense mechanism through their strong disapproval of ideologies that seek to undermine constitutional democracy.

This pattern suggests that civil servants function not only as administrative actors but also as ideological gatekeepers, reinforcing the ideological boundaries of the state. The strong resistance to the caliphate discourse may also reflect the internalization of the state's official ideological education and deradicalization policies, which have been intensified over the past decade. It further reinforces the argument by Norris and Inglehart that cultural backlash is not only an elite or intellectual phenomenon, but also resonates among mid-level bureaucrats who may see the state's ideological continuity as vital to national cohesion (McLean, 2023).

Moreover, the near-unanimous rejection of radical ideas in this study supports the idea that democratic and pluralistic values are deeply rooted within state institutions at the local level. While the threat of ideological radicalization remains present in various forms, the findings show that such threats are not uniformly internalized by public sector actors (Astley, 2025). Instead, civil servants act as an ideological buffer, displaying resilience against extremist narratives, particularly those that propose an alternative to the Pancasila ideology.

In conclusion, the response pattern to this question substantiates the proposition of Cultural Backlash Theory that when core cultural-political values are perceived to be under siege,

key societal actors like civil servants tend to express reinforced support for the status quo. In the Indonesian context, this means an intensified attachment to the Pancasila framework, national unity, and constitutional democracy, especially when confronted with the transnational aspirations of political Islam that advocate for a radical break from the existing order. This makes the bureaucracy not only an administrative force but a cultural bastion of democratic resilience.

Respondents Preferences Regarding Government Systems

The fourth question "If I had to choose, I would prefer the following system of government?" was designed to capture respondents' preferences regarding political systems, particularly to examine whether there is latent attraction toward non-democratic or non-presidential alternatives among civil servants. Various models of governance were identified, reflecting diverse political understandings. The parliamentary system denotes a democratic framework in which the executive is drawn from and accountable to the legislature, commonly practiced in countries like the United Kingdom (Malik, 2023). A monarchy implies governance by a hereditary sovereign, which may be constitutional (symbolic and bound by law) or absolute, where the monarch holds unchecked authority, as in Saudi Arabia (Cedro, 2024). An oligarchy refers to a system dominated by a small, powerful elite, often without democratic legitimacy (Domingues, 2022). The caliphate (khilafah) represents an Islamic political model uniting religious and political leadership under Sharia, historically central in Islamic empires but ideologically contentious in the modern era (van Berkel et al., 2013). Communism envisions a classless, stateless society governed through collective ownership and centralized authority, as historically observed in the Soviet Union. Finally, a republic is characterized by popular sovereignty, in which representatives are democratically elected to govern on behalf of the people, as exemplified by Indonesia and the United States. These responses illustrate a range of ideological orientations among civil servants, despite a dominant preference for the presidential-republican model.

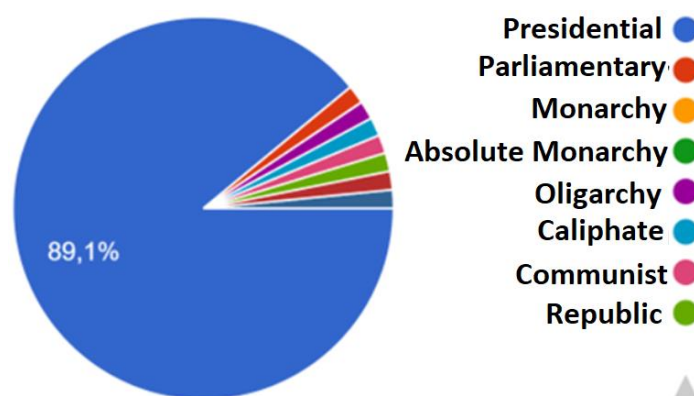


Figure 5. Respondents Preferences Regarding Government Systems

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

The results (Figure 5.) of the survey are telling: a significant majority, 57 respondents (89.1%), expressed preference for the presidential system, while the remaining respondents each chose other systems of government, including parliamentary, monarchy, absolute monarchy, oligarchy, caliphate, communism, and republic, with each of these alternatives receiving a single vote (1.6%). This overwhelming preference for the presidential system reflects a high level of ideological consolidation and cognitive alignment with Indonesia's current constitutional

framework. Interpreted through the lens of Cultural Backlash Theory (Inglehart & Norris, 2017), these findings suggest that civil servants in Murung Raya exhibit a strong adherence to institutional stability and political continuity in response to global and domestic disruptions that have challenged liberal democratic norms in recent years. Cultural Backlash Theory posits that when traditional socio-political values are perceived to be under threat particularly by rapid globalization, cultural pluralism, or ideological radicalism there tends to be a reassertion of support for established political institutions among certain segments of the population, especially those embedded in state apparatuses.

The fact that nearly 90% of civil servant respondents reaffirmed their preference for a presidential system can be read as a backlash not against democracy per se, but against the perceived instability or ideological ambiguity of alternative systems. This is consistent with Norris and Inglehart's argument that cultural backlash can manifest as a defensive mechanism among those who seek to preserve a familiar order amid the rise of perceived socio-political threats such as authoritarian populism, transnational religious ideologies, or post-truth politics. In this sense, Indonesian civil servants, particularly in peripheral regions such as Murung Raya, act as ideational stabilizers who reaffirm and reproduce institutional legitimacy in times of normative tension.

Moreover, the low preference for non-democratic or trans-systemic alternatives including monarchy, communism, and the caliphate also implies a level of ideological resilience and successful political socialization within the bureaucracy. The minimal support for the khilafah or other anti-democratic systems further reinforces the hypothesis that Indonesian civil servants have internalized the values of constitutionalism and democratic governance, likely as a result of long-term exposure to national civic education, bureaucratic norms, and institutional loyalty.

The pattern of political system preferences observed in this context demonstrates more than a mere alignment of opinions among bureaucratic actors; it signifies a broader process of cultural adjustment in which democratic values and constitutional principles have increasingly taken root as fundamental reference points within society (Balkin, 2017; Prothro & Grigg, 1960; Schimmelfennig, 2010). This preference, especially the widespread support for the presidential system, is not solely an administrative or procedural choice—it also represents a collective rejection of radical alternatives that threaten democratic stability. At the same time, it acts as a symbolic affirmation of Indonesia's commitment to its democratic identity, particularly at a time when ideological tensions and competing narratives continue to surface in the public sphere. This trend underscores how, despite ongoing cultural and political uncertainty, democratic norms are becoming deeply institutionalized within the political consciousness of state actors, especially those operating at the grassroots level.

Respondents Preferences for National Government Leadership Types

The fifth survey question "If I had to choose the national leadership, I would prefer a leader with what kind of background?" was aimed at capturing the respondents' preferences for leadership archetypes within the context of national governance. The findings (Figure 6.) reveal that 27 respondents (42.2%) favored leaders with a military background, followed by 24 respondents (37.5%) who preferred civilian leadership. Additionally, 7 respondents (10.9%) chose technocratic leadership, while the remaining responses were dispersed across categories such as democratic leadership, pro-people orientation, experience and track record, civil-military collaboration, education, and strong leadership.

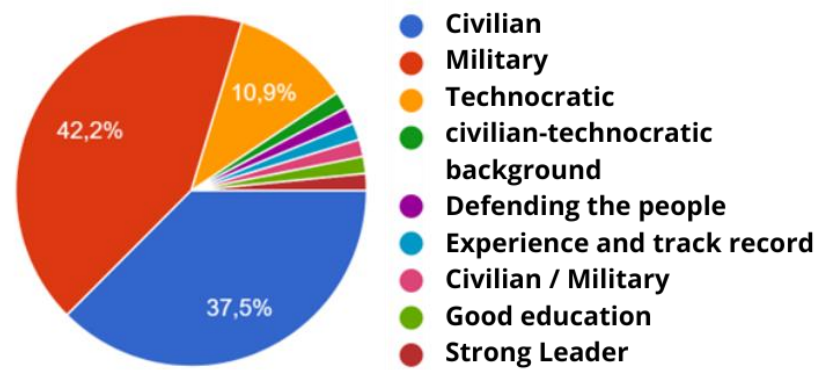


Figure 6. Respondents Preferences for National Government Leadership Types

Source: processed and analysis from the author, 2025

These preferences reflect a complex interplay between traditional values, institutional trust, and socio-political anxieties. According to Cultural Backlash Theory (Norris & Inglehart, 2017), the rise in support for more authoritarian or order-oriented leadership figures such as those from military backgrounds can be interpreted as a defensive response to perceived cultural, political, or ideological threats. In this context, the significant preference for military leadership suggests a form of psychological retreat to institutions historically associated with order, discipline, and national integrity, particularly in a time when democratic institutions may be perceived as unstable or ineffective. The enduring prestige of the military in Indonesian political memory, particularly following the New Order era, continues to influence grassroots perceptions of leadership efficacy, order, and national stability. In this light, preference for military leadership may reflect a desire for assertive governance and security rather than a rejection of democratic norms. Furthermore, this duality could be interpreted as a manifestation of authoritarian reflexes embedded within a transitioning democratic culture, where formal democratic support coexists with residual affinities for hierarchical and discipline-oriented leadership. Thus, instead of reading this preference as straightforward democratic allegiance, it is more accurate to understand it as a strategic political compromise that accommodates both democratic aspirations and deep-rooted socio-political anxieties. Future studies should explore whether this dynamic reflects an unstable democratic consolidation or an adaptive hybrid political identity shaped by Indonesia's unique historical-political context.

Furthermore, the significant level of support for civilian leadership, reaching 37.5%, coupled with an additional 10.9% favoring technocratic leadership, reflects that a notable portion of respondents appreciate governance approaches that emphasize both public participation and professional competence. Despite these variations, the overall trend reveals a dominant preference for leadership models that prioritize expertise, stability, and institutional integrity over populist tendencies. This collective inclination points to a broader societal aspiration for predictability and reliable governance structures—an orientation that aligns with the core arguments presented by Norris and Inglehart regarding cultural backlash in modern democratic societies, where citizens respond to uncertainty by reinforcing their trust in established institutions and competent leadership.

Importantly, this distribution of leadership preferences also reveals latent tensions between democratic ideals and the allure of strong, directive authority figures. While support for democratic leadership was present in the residual responses, it was not dominant. This lends

credence to the notion that even within bureaucratic structures, there exists a spectrum of values oscillating between democratic commitment and authoritarian resilience. Cultural Backlash Theory posits that such ambivalence emerges when segments of the population especially those embedded in state apparatuses feel culturally disoriented or threatened by rapid socio-political change, globalization, or value pluralism.

Thus, the inclination toward military or technocratic leadership may signify a search for order, efficiency, and national unity amid perceived fragmentation. This is particularly salient in Indonesia's diverse and decentralized political landscape, where the specter of ideological extremism, political polarization, and institutional inefficacy often shapes public sentiment. Consequently, these preferences not only reflect a sociological snapshot of bureaucratic attitudes in Murung Raya but also resonate with broader patterns of cultural resistance and normative recalibration identified by Norris and Inglehart in post-industrial and transitional democracies. In summary, the findings affirm that political leadership preferences among civil servants are significantly shaped by cultural backlash dynamics, wherein desires for stability, competence, and institutional continuity emerge as defensive cultural-political reactions to perceived threats against traditional values and national coherence.

Conclusion

The empirical findings of this study demonstrate that the majority of respondents civil servants in Murung Raya Regency express a high level of support and affiliation toward Indonesia's presidential and constitutional democratic system. A significant proportion agreed or strongly agreed with the principle of power separation as articulated in the Trias Politica framework. While acknowledging persistent deficiencies in the system's implementation, most respondents maintain that the current democratic system is fundamentally sound and worth preserving. The strong preference for presidential governance and the resolute rejection of transnational ideologies (such as the caliphate) reflect a collective awareness aimed at safeguarding the ideological integrity of Pancasila and maintaining constitutional stability.

Framed through the lens of Norris and Inglehart's (2019) Cultural Backlash Theory, the findings suggest that the respondents' inclination toward established governance systems and their resistance to radical alternatives can be interpreted as a cultural response to rapid socio-political transformations. This is particularly evident in the preference for military leadership, which is perceived as a source of stability and order amidst growing social uncertainty and ideological threats. Simultaneously, the presence of support for civilian and technocratic leadership models indicates a persistent commitment among some respondents to democratic values and competence-based governance.

Collectively, these findings confirm that amid value pluralism and the fragmentation of contemporary political discourse, there remains a strong institutional and ideological loyalty to Indonesia's democratic-presidential system. However, this loyalty is not unconditional; rather, it emerges from a dialectic between a desire for political stability and reactions to ongoing cultural and ideological tensions. Accordingly, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of local political belief dynamics within the cultural backlash framework and highlights the critical need to enhance democratic literacy and ideological resilience among public servants in facing current political challenges.

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