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Procurement of Official Vehicles Worth IDR 8.5 Billion in East Kalimantan: An Analysis of Power Legitimacy from Max Weber's Perspective

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Abstract

Public policy, legitimacy of power, and social acceptance are closely connected in the exercise of government authority. This study analyzes the procurement policy of an official car for the Governor of East Kalimantan, valued at IDR 8.5 billion, through Max Weber's concept of the legitimacy of power. The study uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on a literature study and secondary data obtained from scientific journals, books, and relevant media coverage. The analysis interprets information by relating the policy process, public response, and policy outcome to Weber's theory, particularly rational-legal legitimacy and social recognition. The findings indicate that the procurement policy could be regarded as formally legitimate because it was associated with government authority, bureaucratic procedures, and legal decision-making. However, its social legitimacy was weakened because the policy was perceived as inconsistent with community needs and socio-economic conditions. Public criticism and resistance subsequently increased and contributed to the cancellation of the procurement. This case demonstrates that formal legality alone does not guarantee sustained legitimacy. Government policies also require transparency, accountability, responsiveness, and public trust. The study concludes that Weberian legitimacy in contemporary public policy should be understood through the interaction between formal authority and citizens' acceptance of its implementation.

Keywords: Public policy, Legitimacy of power, Society

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Introduction

Public policy at the local government level not only serves as an administrative tool but also reflects how power is exercised and perceived by the community. In the framework of Indonesia's decentralization, local governments hold extensive authority to manage budgets and set development priorities (Diar & Munandar, 2025). This authority should be utilized to improve the welfare of citizens, but it often sparks controversy if the chosen policies are deemed inconsistent with public aspirations. A striking example is the procurement of an official car for the East Kalimantan governor worth Rp8.5 billion, which has drawn widespread condemnation from the public (Sun et al., 2026).

The policy was criticized for being insensitive to the socio-economic conditions of the community, especially when infrastructure such as damaged roads and other public facilities remain urgent issues (Harits et al., 2025). Many residents questioned the allocation of the regional budget, arguing that such a large amount of funds would be better allocated to needs that directly impact the public (*Ironi Mobil Dinas Rp 8,5 Miliar Gubernur Kaltim: Mewah Atau Butuh?*, n.d.). This vocal public response underscores the active role of citizens in monitoring and criticizing government policies (Hasbi et al., 2026). Intense public pressure ultimately forced the local government to cancel the procurement, proving that the legitimacy of policies does not solely depend on formal procedures, but also on social support (Tukimun & Hadid, 2025).

A phenomenon that is closely associated with money politics is the emergence of patron-client relations between political actors and society. From the perspective of political sociology, patron-client relations represent reciprocal yet asymmetrical relationships, in which patrons, as resource holders, assist clients, while clients reciprocate through political support (Chaker, 2024). Such relationships tend to foster transactional political loyalty, wherein voters' choices are not based on the quality of candidates, but rather on material incentives received (Carnehl & Weiergraeber, 2023). Empirical studies indicate that money politics not only shapes voter preferences but also contributes to the development of a pragmatic political culture within society (Boadu et al., 2022). In many developing democracies, patron-client exchanges operate not only through vote buying, but also through social reciprocity, informal obligations, and local political networks that normalize transactional participation within electoral competition. (Westphal et al., 2025).

Public criticism of regional budget expenditures is not limited to the case of official cars but extends to other items such as the budget for official residences and the operational costs of the governor and deputy governor, which amount to Rp25 billion (Boadu et al., 2022). This situation further solidifies the public's view that regional budgeting must be re-evaluated to be more effective and aligned with public priorities (*Setelah Mobil Dinas Mewah, Rujab Dan Operasional Gubernur-Wagub Kaltim Rp25 Miliar Jadi Sorotan - Bontang Post*, n.d.). This phenomenon indicates a shift in public attitude from passive to proactive in evaluating and shaping government policy direction.

This public response also highlights the importance of transparency, accountability, and public orientation in government decision-making. (Widodo et al., 2026) emphasize that public procurement should be supported by transparency and accountability as part of good governance. When government decisions are not adequately connected to public interests, the implementation of formally valid policies may generate distrust among citizens (Yani et al., 2026).

From the perspective of political sociology, this event can be analyzed through Max Weber's concept of power legitimacy, which states that power is considered legitimate if it receives societal recognition. In modern states, rational-legal legitimacy dominates, where power relies on legal rules and bureaucratic procedures. However, legitimacy is not limited to formal legality alone. The study by (Kurniawati & Saprudin, 2025) reveals that the legitimacy of power today is also influenced by public trust, community involvement, and the quality of the relationship between the government and citizens (Valls-Val et al., 2025).

(Selviaridis et al., 2023) research reinforces that rational-legal legitimacy in practice depends on transparency, procedural justice, and public perception of public institutions. In other words, even procedurally legitimate policies can lose legitimacy if they are not socially supported. Weber also highlighted the principles of rationality, meritocracy, and impersonality as the foundation of modern bureaucracy, but research by (Christiana & Melati, 2026) found that Indonesian bureaucracy is still disrupted by patron-client patterns that undermine objectivity and professionalism.

The relationship between bureaucratic rationality and public interests is also important when examining the ethical dimension of government institutions. (Alrasheed et al., 2024) show that bureaucratic reform in Indonesia continues to face challenges related to corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency. These conditions indicate that formal bureaucratic structures do not automatically guarantee that government practices will fully reflect rationality, professionalism, and public interests.

Furthermore, government procurement of goods and services becomes an arena prone to legitimacy crises. (Maigari et al., 2026) show that the lack of transparency, accountability, and oversight in the process has the potential to trigger deviations and undermine public trust (Hang & Zhan, 2023). Meanwhile, (Emordi et al., 2026) add that legitimacy encompasses ethical-moral dimensions, so policies must reflect justice and the public interest to be socially accepted .

The complexity of bureaucratic structures can further increase the potential for inefficiency and misuse of public resources. (Silaschi et al., 2024) explain that bureaucratic structures can create gaps that facilitate corruption and waste. In the context of public procurement, this suggests that budget decisions need to be assessed not only from their procedural legality but also from their substantive

benefits to the public.

(Fauzi et al., 2026) further highlight the gap that can emerge between formal legal approaches and substantive justice in addressing corruption. This distinction is relevant to the present case because a policy may satisfy formal administrative requirements while still generating public rejection when citizens perceive that the policy does not reflect fairness or public interests (Alifia Nurshadrina Hermawan et al., 2024).

From these studies, a gap is evident between formal legitimacy and social legitimacy in public policy (Fauzan et al., 2025). The case of official cars in East Kalimantan serves as a real illustration of how legally valid policies can still provoke rejection because they are deemed irrelevant to the realities of society. This proves that the legitimacy of power is not only about legality but also the ability of policies to meet the expectations and needs of citizens (Mattsson & Junker, 2023).

Therefore, the main focus of this research is to explain the phenomenon of the procurement of official cars through the lens of Weber's legitimacy of power, as well as to unravel why a legitimate rational-legal policy still provokes social resistance (Oktawati et al., 2026). This research aims to analyze the tension between rational-legal legitimacy and social legitimacy in the practice of Indonesian public policy, as well as to identify the factors that shape public acceptance or rejection of government policies.

This research refers to previous studies such (Brugués et al., 2024) on the role of public trust, (Chong et al., 2026) regarding transparency in rational-legal legitimacy, on the challenges of Weberian bureaucracy, (Li et al., 2024) on the vulnerability of goods/services procurement, and [Click or tap here to enter text.](#) discussing ethical-moral legitimacy. However, these studies are general in nature and have not specifically highlighted regional cases. Therefore, this research is unique in analyzing actual cases as an empirical study to test the application of Weber's legitimacy theory in the context of Indonesian public policy.

Methods

This research applies a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design to unravel the phenomenon of public policy in the social dimension, particularly the legitimacy of power related to the procurement of official cars for the governor of East Kalimantan. The qualitative approach was chosen because it focuses on exploring the meaning, perceptions, and reactions of the community toward the policy, rather than on the quantitative measurement of variables. Qualitative methods are suitable for exploring the natural conditions of the object, with the researcher as the main tool in interpreting the data.

The object of study is the procurement policy for the East Kalimantan governor's official car worth Rp8.5 billion, which has sparked public controversy. The research not only highlights the policy itself but also the public perception and the dynamics of the formation and denial of power legitimacy in that context. Thus, this research reveals the relationship between public policy and the legitimacy of power from a political sociology perspective.

The data sources are secondary, including related literature such as scientific journals, books, and media coverage of the case. Secondary data is prioritized because of the emphasis on analyzing recorded social phenomena. Qualitative secondary data can take the form of documents, archives, or relevant texts. This research also utilizes sociological theory, particularly Max Weber's concept of the legitimacy of power, as the basis for analysis.

Data collection was conducted thru document study, namely collecting written documents related to the topic, such as news articles, journals, and official policies. This technique was chosen because it provides a comprehensive view without direct field observation. Sugiyono (2017) refers to documentation studies as a way to examine relevant documents to extract research information.

Data analysis adopts a descriptive qualitative model, by interpreting the data and linking it to theory. The process includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Miles et al. (2014) describe qualitative analysis as an interactive process that is iterative until the data is sufficient to address the research issue.

Data collection took place from February to April 2026, covering the period from the emergence of the controversy to the evolution of public response. This period was chosen because it captures crucial dynamics, from initial criticism to the cancelation of the procurement by the government. The data is expected to illustrate the processes of legitimation and delegitimation comprehensively. Thru a qualitative approach, secondary data, and Weber's legitimacy theory analysis, this research is expected to provide deep insights into public perception of policies and the mechanisms of power legitimacy in regional governance.

Result and Discussion

Based on the analysis of documentation studies from various literatures, scientific journals, and media coverage, the procurement policy for the East Kalimantan governor's official car worth Rp8.5 billion transcends mere administrative issues, becoming a social phenomenon that reveals the dynamics of power legitimacy in regional governance (Sorte Junior, 2022). Formally, this policy is supported by legal grounds and falls within the authority of regional budget management. However, in reality, it has sparked public outcry because it is considered misaligned with the priorities of the community.

The key findings of this research reveal a dissonance between formal legitimacy (legality) and social legitimacy (community support). According to Max Weber, rational-legal legitimacy relies on formal rules, bureaucratic procedures, and a legal framework Weber, In this case, the procurement meets the criteria of rational-legal legitimacy because it follows valid bureaucratic channels. However, Weber added that legitimacy also requires public trust in the authority.

In this case, public rejection indicates a failure of social legitimacy, creating tension between bureaucratic rationality and the social context of the community. Legitimate administrative policies are instead seen as unfair and insensitive, thereby weakening the legitimacy of power due to the lack of recognition from the affected citizens (Prakasa et al., 2022). This phenomenon reflects Weberian social action, where the actions of officials have subjective meaning and influence on others. The procurement of official vehicles is not merely a routine decision, but a social action that shapes public perception of the government.

The research also found that government procurement of goods/services is vulnerable to a legitimacy crisis, as it often focuses on administrative efficiency without a social-moral dimension. Although procedurally accountable, the procurement of official vehicles is considered non-urgent by the public, indicating a mismatch between bureaucratic and social rationality.

This finding is supported by (Fauzi et al., 2025), who emphasize that public procurement must be based on transparency, accountability, and public orientation for good governance; non-compliance triggers distrust. The lack of transparency and communication regarding the urgency of procurement exacerbates public criticism. In the Indonesian bureaucracy, (Pernica et al., 2024) reveal that bureaucratic reform has not fully addressed corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency, deviating from Weber's rationality due to the influence of personal interests.

(Hm et al., 2026) add that the complex bureaucratic structure creates gaps for corruption and waste; the large budget for official cars appears extravagant without clear benefits for the public, undermining legitimacy. (Alhakim, 2026) reinforce that public law emphasizes formality over substantive justice, creating a gap between legality and social justice, as seen in this case.

The findings can also be related to the broader issue of accountability in public procurement. Show that fraud in public procurement is closely connected with internal supervision and political-economic challenges in the Indonesian context (Maheswari Jelita Adristi, 2026). Their findings indicate that procurement risks cannot be assessed only from the final transaction, but also from the institutional and political conditions surrounding the procurement process. In the context of the East Kalimantan official car procurement, this perspective helps explain why public rejection may emerge when budgetary decisions are perceived as being insufficiently connected to public interests.

Furthermore, identifies different forms of collusion in Indonesian public procurement and emphasizes the importance of the legal framework in addressing procurement conspiracies. This finding is relevant to the present case because it demonstrates that procurement decisions should not

be understood solely through formal administrative procedures. The relationships among actors, the decision-making process, and the possibility of conflicting interests also need to be considered when evaluating the accountability of public officials.

Another relevant finding concerns the role of public participation and digital oversight in preventing procurement irregularities. That digital oversight becomes more effective when combined with law enforcement, public participation, and institutional coordination. This supports the argument that citizens' criticism of the East Kalimantan governor's official car procurement is not merely a form of rejection, but can also be understood as part of a broader social mechanism for monitoring government decisions and public spending.

The findings (Wicaksono et al., 2025) also suggest that procurement risks may occur through actors beyond the principal contracting parties. Subcontractors in Indonesian public procurement and identify potential risks and fraud factors associated with procurement practices. This reinforces the need to view procurement as a broader institutional process involving multiple actors rather than as an isolated administrative transaction. In this sense, the legitimacy of a procurement policy is also shaped by how transparently and responsibly the government manages the entire process.

Overall, the legitimacy of power in public policy depends on the perception of justice and relevance, not just legality. Public pressure forced the cancelation of the procurement, proving the crucial role of social legitimacy in the sustainability of policies. In Weber's lens, this case illustrates that rational-legal legitimacy is insufficient without social support. The government must not only adhere to the rules but also build trust thru transparent, fair, and pro-public policies; otherwise, policies are vulnerable to delegitimization and loss of public trust.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be summarized that the procurement of the East Kalimantan governor's official car worth Rp8.5 billion reflects a conflict between rational-legal legitimacy and social legitimacy in public policy. From Max Weber's perspective, this policy is formally legitimate because it follows bureaucratic procedures and legal provisions. However, social legitimacy fails to materialize, as evidenced by public condemnation and resistance. This addresses the problem statement that even legally valid policies can be rejected if they contradict the needs, values, and expectations of the public. Thus, the legitimacy of power is not only about formal legality but also about dynamic and contextual social support.

Although this research has outlined the relationship between the legitimacy of power and public policy, there are several limitations worth noting. The research relies on secondary data such as literature and media news, thus it has not captured direct public perspectives thru interviews or field observations. Focusing on a single case in East Kalimantan also limits generalization to other regions. The main approach is Weberian theoretical, without the integration of other theories that

could potentially enrich it.

Therefore, the recommendation for future research is a more holistic approach, such as combining primary data thru interviews with residents, officials, and policy experts for deeper insights. Further research could compare similar cases in other regions to identify broader legitimacy patterns. The application of additional political sociology theories is also recommended to expand the analysis of power relations, public policy, and societal reactions. With that, subsequent studies are expected to contribute more significantly to understanding the dynamics of power legitimacy in Indonesian regional governance.

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