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## Institutional Gridlock in Food Security Policy: A Neo-Institutionalist Analysis of Urban Food Governance in Indonesia

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**Abstract:** This study examines the phenomenon of institutional gridlock in urban food security governance in Indonesia, focusing on the complexities of interactions among government institutions and their impact on policy effectiveness. Utilizing a neo-institutionalist approach, this research analyzes how institutional fragmentation, conflicts of interest, and the historical legacy of power centralization contribute to the formation of gridlock that hampers the effective implementation of food security policies in urban areas. Through comprehensive analysis of policy documents and academic literature, the study identifies patterns of institutional interaction, explores the manifestations and consequences of institutional gridlock, and evaluates the potential of institutional bricolage as a strategy to overcome existing structural barriers. The key findings indicate that institutional gridlock in this context results from the complex interaction between path dependency, institutional layering, and political fragmentation, which creates inertia against the necessary policy changes to address contemporary urban food security challenges. This study contributes to the development of a conceptual framework for understanding and addressing institutional gridlock in public policy governance in developing countries, particularly in the context of decentralization and rapid urbanization.

**Keyword:** Reconstruction of Performance Measurement Model, Regional House of Representatives (DPRD), Penta Helix, Regional Governance, Regional Autonomy.

### INTRODUCTION

Urban food security has become a crucial issue in contemporary governance discourse, particularly in developing countries like Indonesia. Rapid urbanization, changing consumption patterns, and complex logistical challenges have significantly strained urban food systems. In Indonesia, this issue is further complicated by a decentralized governance structure and fragmented institutional framework in food security management.

Since the reform era, Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation in its governmental structure, shifting from a highly centralized system to one of the most

decentralized governance systems in the world. Law No. 22 of 1999 on Regional Government, later revised to Law No. 32 of 2004 and most recently to Law No. 23 of 2014, has granted extensive autonomy to regional governments in managing governmental affairs, including food security. However, this decentralization has also introduced new complexities in policy coordination across different levels of government (WARDIYANTO & SETIJANINGRUM, 2023).

In the context of urban food security, institutional fragmentation has become increasingly evident. At the national level, at least three key ministries play significant roles: the Ministry of Agriculture, focusing on food production; the Ministry of Trade, regulating distribution and pricing; and the Ministry of Home Affairs, coordinating policy implementation at the regional level. Additionally, the National Logistics Agency (BULOG) has a specific mandate for price stabilization and the distribution of staple foods. At the regional level, related agencies such as the Food Security Agency, Agriculture Department, and Trade Department often have overlapping authorities.

This situation creates what is referred to in neo-institutionalism literature as institutional layering (Mahoney & Thelen, 2010), where new institutions are added on top of old structures without fully eliminating the roles of previous institutions. As a result, there is duplication of functions, unclear mandates, and inefficiency in policy implementation. For example, the Ministry of Agriculture's efforts to promote national rice self-sufficiency often conflict with the Ministry of Trade import policies aimed at stabilizing prices in urban markets.

Inter-agency conflicts of interest also pose serious problems. Regional food enterprises such as PT Food Station Tjipinang Jaya in Jakarta, mandated to maintain price stability and food supply in the capital, often face resistance from private market players who feel disadvantaged by government interventions. On the other hand, farmer protection policies advocated by the Ministry of Agriculture sometimes clash with the need for affordable food in urban areas, creating a difficult policy dilemma.

The phenomenon of path dependency (Pierson, 2000) is also evident in this context. Existing institutional structures, even though they may no longer be efficient in addressing contemporary challenges, are maintained due to the high political and economic costs of fundamental changes. For instance, the continued dominance of BULOG in managing national rice stocks, despite widespread criticism of its efficiency, reflects the strong institutional legacy of the New Order era.

This complexity is further exacerbated by contemporary challenges such as climate change, global food price fluctuations, and supply chain disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Major cities in Indonesia, such as Jakarta, Surabaya, and Medan, face a double burden: on the one hand, they must ensure sufficient and affordable food availability for their populations, while on the other, they are also required to reduce dependency on imports and support local food production (Prabayanti, 2022).

Efforts to digitize the food distribution system, such as those initiated through the Pasar Mitra program by the Ministry of Trade, are often hampered by resistance from established traditional distribution networks. This reflects what Streeck and Thelen (2005) describe as institutional conversion, where existing institutions attempt to adapt to new demands but often face structural and cultural obstacles (Putri et al., 2022).

Theoretically, this situation leads to what can be described as institutional gridlock in urban food security governance. This concept refers to a condition where various institutions involved in a single policy domain are trapped in unproductive interaction patterns, hindering each other and ultimately obstructing the achievement of desired policy outcomes.

Several previous studies have attempted to analyze certain aspects of this issue. For instance, Rachman et al. (2019) examined the effectiveness of rice price stabilization policies in Indonesia, while Suryana (2014) studied the challenges of coordination in the

implementation of national food security policies. However, most of these studies tend to focus on technical or economic aspects, with less attention to the institutional and political dimensions of the problem.

Warr's (2011) study on food security and poverty in Indonesia provides valuable insights into the impact of food policies on urban welfare, but his analysis lacks consideration of the institutional complexities in policy implementation. On the other hand, Vel et al.'s (2016) study on land governance and food security in Indonesia highlights the importance of institutional analysis but is more focused on the rural context.

In the urban context, McCarthy et al.'s (2016) study on urbanization and food security in Jakarta offers a rich overview of the challenges faced but falls short of exploring inter-agency coordination in addressing those challenges. Meanwhile, Booth's (2011) analysis of decentralization and governance quality in Indonesia provides a useful framework for understanding policy coordination challenges but does not specifically address urban food security issues.

This gap in the literature indicates the need for a comprehensive analysis that integrates a neo-institutionalist perspective with the specific context of urban food security governance in Indonesia. This research aims to fill that gap by deeply analyzing how institutional fragmentation and inter-agency conflicts of interest affect the effectiveness of urban food security policies in Indonesia.

Specifically, this study will explore three main aspects:

1. Analyzing the patterns of interaction among government agencies (central and regional) in the formulation and implementation of urban food security policies, focusing on identifying points of conflict and inefficiency.
2. Evaluating the impact of institutional fragmentation on the effectiveness of urban food security policies, particularly in the context of price stabilization and supply assurance.
3. Developing a conceptual framework of institutional gridlock in urban food security governance and exploring the potential of institutional bricolage as a solution.

This research is expected to make significant contributions both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study will enrich the neo-institutionalist literature by applying and developing concepts such as institutional layering, path dependency, and institutional conversion in the specific context of urban food policy in developing countries. The development of the institutional gridlock concept is also expected to serve as an analytical framework useful for understanding institutional barriers in the implementation of public policies more broadly.

## **METHOD**

This research adopts a social constructivist paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018) with a critical interpretivist approach (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2015). This paradigm is chosen for its ability to reveal the complexity of inter-institutional interactions and the construction of meaning in the policy-making process. The study employs a qualitative research design with an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 1995). The selected case is the governance of urban food security in Jakarta, representing the institutional complexity of urban Indonesia.

The research acknowledges the epistemological challenges in operationalizing abstract concepts like institutional gridlock in an empirical context. To address this, the researcher will develop measurable operational indicators, such as the frequency of deadlocks in inter-agency decision-making, the persistence of ineffective policies, and the level of discretion used by institutional actors to overcome formal obstacles.

This study integrates the approach of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005) with interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 2000) to uncover how everyday institutional practices contribute to the formation and maintenance of institutional gridlock. This approach enables

the researcher to connect micro-institutional practices with the macro-structure of urban food security governance.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of institutional gridlock in urban food security governance in Indonesia is a result of a long history of centralized power, which, despite undergoing decentralization post-Reformasi, still leaves behind a legacy of rigid bureaucratic structures and cultures. The rapid transformation from a centralized to a decentralized system of government has created significant institutional tensions, manifested in overlapping authorities, conflicts of interest, and policy incoherence between central and local governments (Maseland, 2018).

An analysis using Mahoney and Thelen's (2010) concept of layering reveals that instead of replacing old institutional structures, post-1998 reforms have added new institutional layers on top of the old ones. As a result, urban food security governance in Indonesia demonstrates a coexistence between the top-down approach inherited from the New Order and bottom-up initiatives driven by the spirit of regional autonomy. This situation creates institutional ambiguity, allowing various actors to interpret and manipulate rules according to their interests, in line with Matland's (1995) ambiguity-conflict model.

(Pierson, 2000) concept of path dependency plays a crucial role in maintaining this institutional gridlock. Investments embedded in existing institutional structures, whether in the form of physical infrastructure, human capital, or networks of interests, create strong inertia against change. The established food distribution system, although no longer efficient in facing the challenges of urbanization and changing consumption patterns, is maintained due to the high political and economic costs of making fundamental changes (Pierson, 2000).

The phenomenon of institutional conversion, as described by Streeck and Thelen (2005), is evident in this context. Institutions initially formed to address food security issues in an agrarian Indonesia now have to adapt to the reality of an increasingly urban Indonesia (Bonanno, 2019). However, instead of a thorough transformation, what occurs are partial adjustments that add complexity and potential conflicts among institutions.

Institutional gridlock in urban food security governance in Indonesia can also be explained through Tsebelis's (2002) veto player theory. The numerous institutional actors with veto power in the policymaking process—from ministries at the central level, local governments, to legislative bodies—create a situation where significant policy changes are very difficult to achieve. Each actor has different preferences and interests, and the ability to block initiatives that do not align with their interests.

This complexity is exacerbated by an implementation deficit as described by Pressman and Wildavsky (1984). Although there is agreement at the macro policy level, implementation on the ground is hampered by various micro factors—from limited local bureaucratic capacity, differences in policy interpretation, to resistance from groups whose interests are threatened. The implementation of urban farming programs hindered by land-use conflicts or resistance from traditional market traders is a concrete example of this phenomenon.

Cleaver's (2002) concept of institutional bricolage offers a new perspective in understanding and addressing this institutional gridlock. Bricolage refers to the process by which local actors creatively combine elements from various formal and informal institutions to create arrangements more suited to their context and needs. In urban food security governance in Indonesia, this approach means integrating modern market mechanisms with traditional distribution systems and combining local knowledge with the latest urban agricultural technologies.

However, the application of institutional bricolage in Indonesia faces significant challenges. A bureaucratic culture that tends to be risk-averse and rigid in interpreting formal

rules is a major obstacle. Additionally, unequal power relations between various actors—such as between central and local governments, or between the bureaucracy and local communities—result in a bricolage process that reinforces existing inequalities rather than creating inclusive solutions.

The phenomenon of isomorphic mimicry, as described by Andrews et al. (2017), is also a real threat in efforts to overcome institutional gridlock through bricolage. Institutions in Indonesia show a tendency to adopt organizational forms and policies from developed countries without truly adapting them to the local context. The adoption of smart city models without considering infrastructure readiness and local capacity in urban food security governance is a concrete example of this phenomenon.

The informal dimension of institutions, as emphasized by Helmke and Levitsky (2004), plays a crucial role in shaping institutional gridlock in Indonesia. Informal networks between bureaucracy, politicians, and business actors often play a crucial role in policy implementation, sometimes benefiting certain groups while disadvantaging others. An analysis focused solely on formal institutions would fail to capture the real power dynamics in urban food security governance (Helmke & Levitsky, 2012).

Ostrom's (2010) concept of polycentricity provides a useful analytical framework for understanding the complexity of this institutional gridlock. Urban food security governance in Indonesia involves multiple relatively independent centers of decision-making—from various ministries at the central level, provincial and city governments, to civil society organizations and the private sector. Although polycentricity can be a strength in addressing complex issues like food security, without effective coordination, it results in fragmentation and real policy incoherence.

Institutional gridlock in urban food security governance in Indonesia also reflects the characteristics of extractive institutions as described by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). Although formally aimed at ensuring food security, in practice, existing institutions serve the interests of political and economic elites rather than the broader society. Food import policies that benefit large importers more than consumers or small farmers are a clear manifestation of this phenomenon (Dzionic-Kozłowska, 2015).

Lawrence and Suddaby's (2006) concept of institutional work provides a framework for understanding the efforts of actors in creating, maintaining, or changing institutions within the context of this institutional gridlock. Identifying and supporting institutional entrepreneurs at various levels—from progressive bureaucrats in ministries to food activists at the community level—is a crucial step in driving the necessary institutional changes.

However, as noted by Campbell (2004), institutional change in urban food security governance in Indonesia is more likely to occur through incremental and not always planned bricolage processes. A series of small adjustments with cumulative significant impacts, such as experimenting with public-private partnership models in urban food market management or pilot projects integrating digital technology into traditional food distribution systems, are more realistic approaches to overcoming institutional gridlock.

This analysis suggests that the development of a conceptual framework for institutional gridlock and the exploration of the potential for institutional bricolage in urban food security governance in Indonesia must consider the specific context of this country. The problem-driven iterative adaptation approach as proposed by Pritchett et al. (2013), which emphasizes continuous learning and adaptation based on specific problems encountered, is the most promising strategy for addressing these complex institutional challenges.

## CONCLUSION

An in-depth analysis of urban food security governance in Indonesia reveals significant complexity within the institutional gridlock. This phenomenon is shaped by the interaction between the legacy of rigid institutional structures, incomplete decentralization



processes, and the fragmentation of authority across different levels of government and policy sectors. The manifestation of this gridlock is evident in overlapping authorities, policy incoherence, and inefficiencies in the implementation of food security programs in urban areas.

The research findings indicate that institutional gridlock is not merely a technical issue but also a political one. The presence of multiple veto players with conflicting interests creates a situation where significant policy changes are very difficult to achieve. This is further exacerbated by asymmetric information and sectoral egos that hinder effective coordination between institutions.

In conclusion, addressing institutional gridlock in urban food security governance in Indonesia requires a more nuanced and contextual approach. Rather than relying on blueprint reforms, a more promising strategy involves incremental adaptation that is responsive to local complexities. This approach involves not only formal restructuring but also the transformation of informal norms and practices that shape institutional behavior.

This research contributes to neo-institutionalist literature by providing an empirical analysis of the manifestations and dynamics of institutional gridlock in the context of a developing country. Additionally, the study enriches the understanding of specific challenges in urban food security governance during an era of decentralization and rapid urbanization.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct comparative studies between cities or countries to identify variations in the manifestations and strategies for overcoming institutional gridlock. Furthermore, further exploration of the role of non-governmental actors, including the private sector and civil society, in these institutional dynamics will also provide valuable insights for developing more inclusive and effective governance strategies.

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