

Representation Of Indigenous Papuans In The Bureaucracy Of Southwest Papua Province: A Representative Bureaucracy Analysis

Dewiyanti Rengen¹, Hasniati², Muh. Akmal Ibrahim³, Didik Iskandar⁴
Hasanuddin University¹²³, Makassar State University⁴
Corresponding email: dewiyanti.rengen85@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

Affirmative action has increased the presence of Indigenous Papuans (OAP) in the bureaucracy of Southwest Papua Province, yet numerical representation does not automatically guarantee substantive representation in positions that determine policy direction. This study analyzes the quality of OAP representation through three components of representative bureaucracy: passive representation, linking conditions, and active representation. Using an interpretive qualitative approach with an embedded case study design in the Provincial Government of Southwest Papua, the study involved 25 informants, with data from in-depth interviews, documentation study, and limited observation, analyzed through theory-driven thematic analysis, pattern matching, and explanation building. The findings show that OAP representation is high in number and evenly distributed across ranks, but uneven by role weight—concentrated in supporting positions, while policy-determining positions remain limited. The five linking conditions (discretion, domain relevance, competence and legitimacy, leadership support, accountability) remain weak. Active representation is limited in the policy arena but stronger in service delivery, accompanied by the symptom of substantive roles being carried by other actors. The three components form a tiered chain that breaks at the middle, so that representation is strong in presence but shrinks in influence. The weak conversion stems from fragile evidence-based legitimacy and the absence of capacity development, so that strengthening representation requires building institutional conditions rather than merely adding numbers.

Introduction

Southwest Papua Province is in a phase of bureaucratic consolidation laden with a dual mandate. On one side, the merit system demands management of civil-servant (ASN) careers based on qualifications, competence, and performance as a prerequisite for the professional legitimacy of the bureaucracy. On the other side, affirmative action for Indigenous Papuans (OAP) demands correction of historical inequality through formation quotas and institutional favor, grounded in the Special Autonomy framework (Law No. 21 of 2001; Law No. 2 of 2021; Government Regulation No. 106 of 2021). Fulfilling the quota can indeed increase OAP presence, but at the stage of job placement and the distribution of authority the problem shifts: numerical representation does not automatically guarantee substantive representation

in strategic positions, does not always strengthen public trust, and may even give rise to accusations of tokenism if it is not accompanied by transparent career mechanisms and accountable evidence of capacity (Althaus & O’Faircheallaigh, 2022; Ikpebe et al., 2025; Rixom et al., 2023).

Two problems stand out. First, the fulfilled affirmation quota is not followed by proportional distribution to senior-executive and administrator positions holding strategic authority; placement in such positions is determined more by political proximity and patronage networks than by measurable competence records. (Arnesen & Peters, 2018; Dowding & Giuliani, 2026) distinguishes standing for from acting for; the numerical presence of OAP without access to authoritative positions meets only the first dimension, while (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020a) affirm that passive representation without a distribution of structural power does not produce substantive policy change. Second, the fulfilled quota has not automatically produced policies and public services responsive to OAP interests, because there is no formal mechanism ensuring that OAP civil servants in strategic positions actively articulate their group’s perspective. Ikpebe et al., (2025) argues that passive representation must transition into active representation to affect policy; without institutional mechanisms that drive it, (Portillo et al., 2020) warns that the bureaucracy continues to function as an instrument of domination rather than social transformation.

Theoretical Framework

Several perspectives explain bureaucratic representation only partially. Public Choice Theory deems demographic representation irrelevant because bureaucratic behavior is driven by institutional incentives; Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory strongly explains lower-level discretion but focuses too much on individuals; Institutional Theory explains the formal adoption of affirmation without substantive change through isomorphism but not the internal mechanism integrating merit and affirmation; and the Democratic Theory of Bureaucracy is normatively strong but too abstract. Meier, (2019) explains why and how demographic representation can, or fails to, transform into substantive influence (Bersch & Fukuyama, 2023; Brierley et al., 2023; Chang & Brewer, 2023a, 2023b).

Here, Representative Bureaucracy Theory (Meier, 2019) is most relevant because it distinguishes passive representation—the demographic representation of OAP in composition and job structure—from active representation—the extent to which OAP bureaucrats use their discretion and influence to produce policies responsive to their group’s interests (Bishu & Kennedy, 2020b; Blume, 2023a; Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017). The two are bridged by linking conditions—discretion, domain relevance, competence and legitimacy, leadership support, inclusive culture, and accountability (Figueroa Huencho & Araya Orellana, 2021; Hong, 2021; Meier, 2019). Passive representation works at the structural and symbolic level as an initial source of legitimacy, but remains a condition rather than a guarantee of change; active representation requires the possibility of influence, not

mere presence, so the focus shifts from composition to the relation among bureaucrats, institutions, and policy outputs (Park, 2024; Riccucci & Van Ryzin, 2017).

Recent studies reinforce this framework. Johnston & Yarrow, (2024) identifies identity taxation—the extra burden borne by bureaucrats from marginalized groups when expected to champion their group’s interests—so that linking conditions require institutional protection, not merely leadership support. Cingolani (2023), through a cross-national study, shows that the absence of passive representation is consistently perceived as a legitimacy deficit. The concept of externally active representative bureaucracy (Keiff, 2024) shows that active representation is most effective when the bureaucracy deliberately involves the represented group in administrative decision-making.

Research Gap and Objectives

Studies of representative bureaucracy in special-autonomy regional bureaucracies in Indonesia remain limited, especially those examining the mechanism of converting passive into active representation; most literature focuses on developed-country contexts with structurally different minority configurations. Even classical theory does not sufficiently explain how patronage and a deficit of professional legitimacy work as barriers to conversion, particularly in a newly formed bureaucracy where the affirmation mandate and political pressure run alongside merit demands. Accordingly, this study aims to analyze passive representation, linking conditions, and active representation in the presence and distribution of OAP positions in the bureaucracy of Southwest Papua Province, in order to produce OAP bureaucrats who are of high quality and sustainable. The analytical framework is presented in Figure 1.

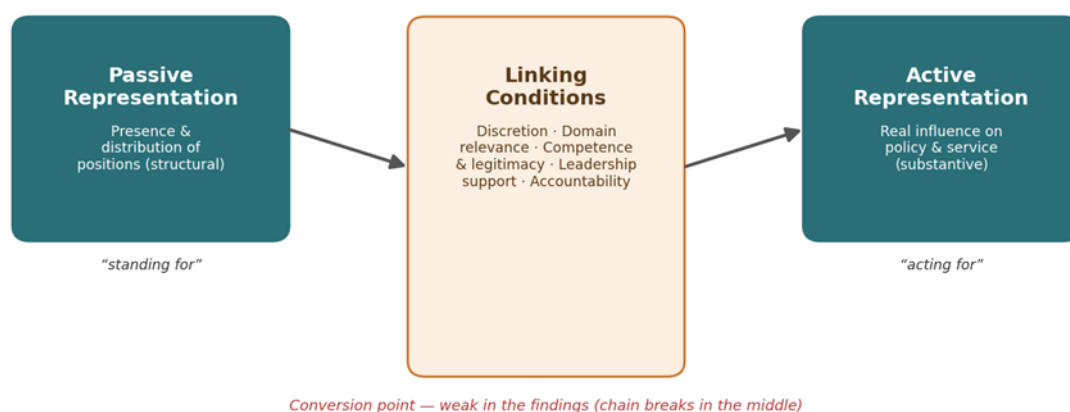


Figure 1. Analytical framework: representation as a tiered relation

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with an interpretive paradigm and an embedded case study design, because the focus is an in-depth understanding of how OAP representation works within the bureaucracy—from structural (passive) representation, to substantive (active) representation, to the institutional conditions enabling the transformation of the two.

The research was conducted in the Provincial Government of Southwest Papua, with an emphasis on the BKPSDM as the main institutional actor managing the personnel system, and related organizational units representing the arena of strategic positions and policy/service practice.

Informants were determined purposively by role to ensure each dimension was analyzed from the perspective of decision makers, technical implementers, supervisors, and civil servants as policy subjects. The total number of informants was 25 (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of Research Informants

Informant Group	Description
Core policy makers (BKPSDM)	Head, Secretary, and division heads for career management and personnel data
Organization & job-structure authorities	Organization/administration unit and/or Regional Secretariat handling job arrangement
Heads of agencies/strategic units	Heads of regional agencies/core service units as the arena of policy practice
Technical implementers	Personnel analysts, SIMPEG managers, assessors/competency-assessment unit
Oversight & compliance	Inspectorate/APIP and the regional office of the National Civil Service Agency
OAP civil servants (recipients)	OAP at various job levels to read the passive–active dimension
Non-OAP civil servants (comparison)	To capture perceptions of legitimacy, culture, and linking conditions

Source: Authors (2026). Total informants: 25.

The unit of analysis is OAP representation in the bureaucracy, read through the three dimensions—passive representation (distribution pattern across job structure), active representation (representative behavior in policy/service practice), and linking conditions (institutional factors that strengthen or hinder conversion). Data collection used semi-structured in-depth interviews (probing placement patterns, discretion experience, and organizational conditions), documentation study (ASN composition and job structure, job maps/job–workload analysis, appointment/rotation/promotion decrees, selection and competency-development documents, career-governance SOPs), and non-participant limited observation of technical meetings and service activities.

Analysis used theory-driven thematic coding. Data were coded according to the three dimensions, followed by pattern matching to compare empirical patterns with theoretical propositions, and explanation building to account for the mechanism that makes passive representation change—or not change—into active representation. Trustworthiness was maintained through source triangulation, method triangulation, member checking with key informants, and an audit trail.

Results And Discussion

The results follow the three components of representative bureaucracy, which form one tiered chain (Figure 1): passive representation is representation in number and presence, active representation is representation that genuinely influences decisions, and linking conditions are the institutional state determining whether the former can become the latter.

Passive Representation: Structural Representation of OAP

In number, OAP representation in the bureaucracy of Southwest Papua Province is high. Affirmative action since the province's establishment has made the proportion of OAP civil servants considerable, including in several strategic structural positions, so the representation target in terms of numbers can be said to have been met. Yet this figure depicts only presence—not the position or the influence that accompanies it—so it is better placed as a starting point of assessment, not a final conclusion.

By job level—from senior executive, administrator, supervisor, to executor and functional—OAP representation is relatively even; affirmative action has succeeded in placing OAP at various levels, without piling up only at the bottom. However, when positions are differentiated by role weight, a fairly clear imbalance emerges: OAP representation is concentrated in supporting and executing positions, while in policy-determining positions—planning, policy, and budget management—OAP presence is relatively more limited (Figure 2).

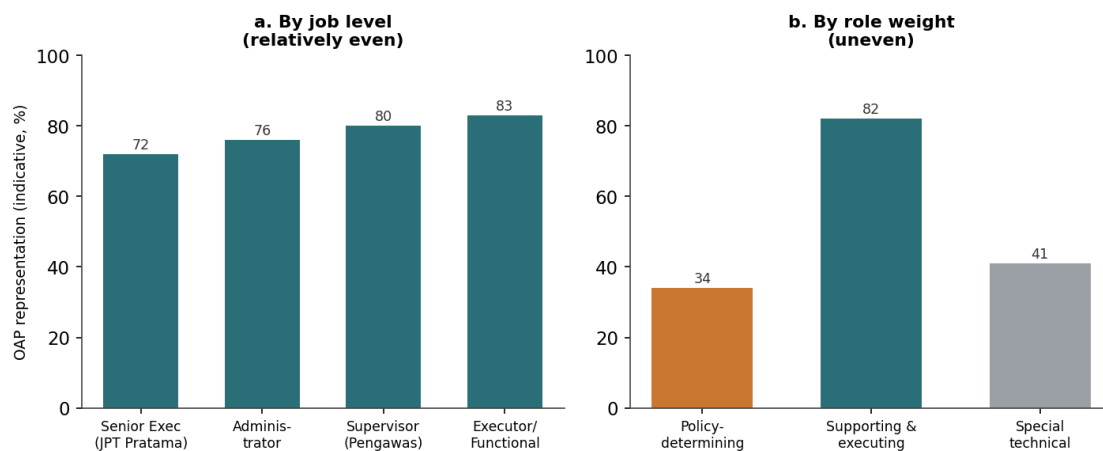


Figure 2. OAP representation by job level and by role weight

Source: BKPSDM (2026).

Table 2. OAP Representation by Role Weight of Position

Position Category	OAP Representation	Notes
Policy-determining positions	More limited	Planning, policy, and budget positions
Supporting and executing positions	Larger	Administrative and routine-service positions
Special-competence technical positions	Varies, tends to be limited	Depends on availability of qualifications

Source: Research findings (2026)

A similar pattern appears by unit type: OAP representation is larger in supporting units, whereas in core units handling strategic affairs OAP presence in key positions is relatively more limited. Thus, the structural opportunity for representation has opened, but it is not yet fully directed toward influential positions—the evenness across ranks in fact masks the real imbalance by role weight and unit type. This finding directly supports (Hong, 2021) thesis: OAP representation meets the dimension of presence but not the dimension of authority, and precisely in the most decisive arena that representation is thinnest.

Linking Conditions: The Bridging Conditions of Representation

Linking conditions are the bridge between presence and influence. The study examined five conditions—discretion, policy-domain relevance, professional competence and legitimacy, leadership support, and accountability mechanisms—and found most of them below an adequate threshold (Figure 3).

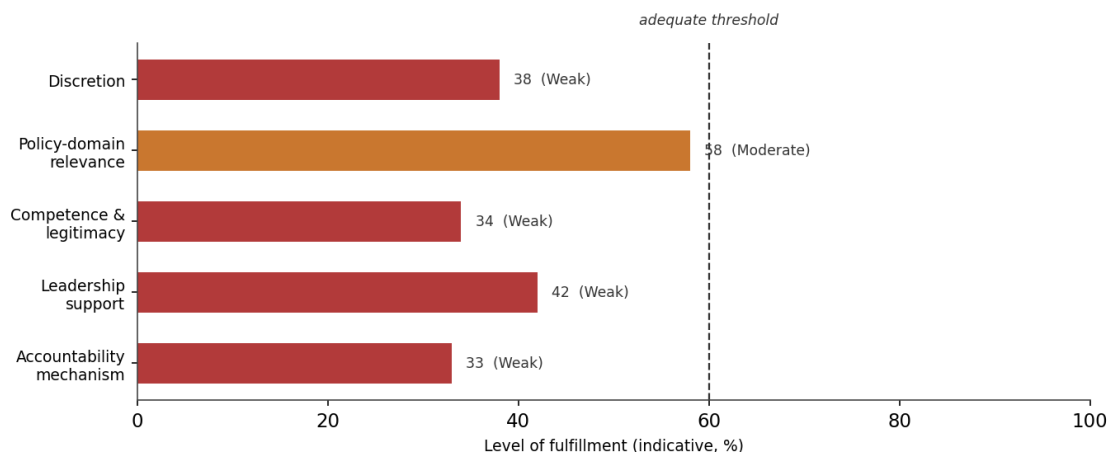


Figure 3. Level of fulfillment of the five linking conditions

Source: BKPSDM (2026).

Discretion remains limited for some OAP officials because important decisions tend to be centralized in certain leaders, so they largely execute rather than shape decisions. Domain relevance varies: in the fields of welfare, community empowerment, and education, OAP presence is close to their group's interests, whereas in technical and administrative fields the connection is looser. Competence and legitimacy are the most fragile condition: capacity development for OAP civil servants has never been arranged as a continuous track, so some officials face doubt about their own competence readiness—a doubt that spreads into legitimacy, when substantively correct decisions still fail to gain full recognition because of who made them.

Leadership support is uneven: in some units leaders are open and give space, in others OAP officials are confined to administrative roles, so active representation becomes fragile and dependent on who holds office. Accountability mechanisms are also weak because the basis of career decisions is often undocumented, so OAP presence is easily read as favoritism rather than the result of an accountable process, creating vulnerability to stigma. These three different roots—the absence of a

coaching system, uneven leadership stance, and weak documentation—converge on the same problem: passive representation has not been successfully converted into active representation (Table 3).

Table 3. Summary of the Five Linking Conditions

Linking Condition	Finding	Status
Discretion	Decisions tend to be centralized, latitude limited	Weak
Policy-domain relevance	Strong in social fields, weak in technical fields	Moderate
Competence and legitimacy	Coaching not continuous, legitimacy doubted	Weak
Leadership support	Uneven, dependent on the leader's stance	Weak
Accountability mechanism	Decision process not open or documented	Weak

Source: Research findings (2026)

This finding goes beyond the classical framework, which generally assumes linking conditions as a variable that facilitates conversion; in Southwest Papua the bridging conditions themselves are absent, so conversion never truly begins. The weakness of competence–legitimacy and accountability relates directly to fragile evidence-based legitimacy, consistent with Cingolani (2023) on legitimacy deficit and Johnston (2023) on *identity taxation*, which demands institutional protection rather than merely leadership support that is, in fact, uneven.

Active Representation: Substantive Representation of OAP

The influence of OAP officials in policy formulation is still limited: they are present in forums but do not always determine the direction of decisions, which is often held by officials deemed more technically experienced. This limitation is closely tied to narrow discretion and doubted competence legitimacy. Conversely, in the arena of service delivery, OAP influence is more pronounced—closeness to the community, understanding of local language and culture, and public trust strengthen that role (Figure 4).

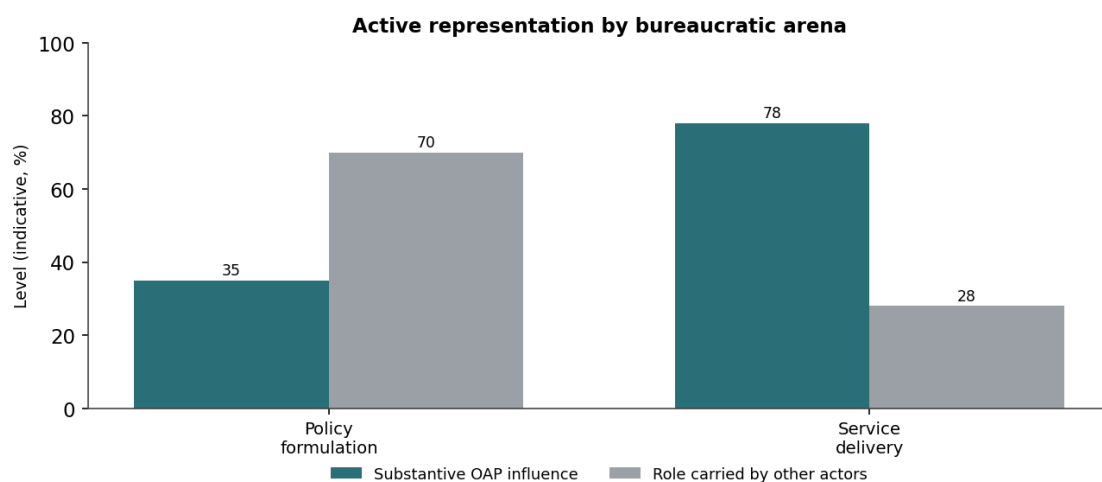


Figure 4. Active representation of OAP by bureaucratic arena

Source: Research findings (2026)

The difference between the policy and service arenas affirms that domain relevance (Keiser et al., 2002) is a decisive linking condition: active representation more readily emerges in fields close to the interests and daily life of OAP communities. The most notable finding, however, is the symptom of substantive roles carried by other actors—OAP officials formally hold positions while some technical decisions are made by other, more experienced officials or staff. This is an empirical manifestation of *shadow leadership* and, theoretically, the purest form of representation that stops at *standing for*: the position is filled, but *acting for* shifts to another actor. Blume, (2023b) warns that without mechanisms driving active representation, the bureaucracy continues to function as an instrument of domination—and here that domination works subtly through technical support that, ironically, conceals the need for coaching and thereby perpetuates dependence.

As a result, the legitimacy of the bureaucracy derived from representation is only partial: it strengthens in the service arena, reinforcing public trust, but is limited in the policy arena, so some policies do not yet fully reflect the needs of OAP communities. The ultimate goal of representation—a more responsive and more legitimate bureaucracy in the eyes of the community—is therefore only partially achieved.

Synthesis: A Tiered Chain That Breaks in the Middle

The three components form a chain that breaks in the middle: passive representation supplies the capital of presence, weak linking conditions fail to convert it, and active representation is only partially achieved (Table 4). Because the middle component is weak, the representation that is large at the presence layer shrinks as it moves toward the influence layer—this is why OAP representation looks high in number but limited in influence.

Table 4. Synthesis of Cross-Component Findings

Component	Key Finding	Role in the Chain of Representation
Passive representation	High in number, uneven by role weight	Supplies the capital of presence
Linking conditions	The five conditions remain weak	Cannot yet turn presence into influence
Active representation	Strong in service, limited in policy	A final outcome only partially achieved

Source: Research findings (2026)

The contribution of this study lies in its context: the literature on representative bureaucracy has been dominated by developed-country contexts with different minority structures, whereas this finding shows how passive–active conversion works (or fails to work) in a newly formed special-autonomy regional bureaucracy, where affirmation and political pressure run alongside merit demands. More importantly, the root of the conversion failure stems from the same source, namely fragile evidence-based legitimacy and the absence of continuous capacity development—so that strengthening representation requires building institutional conditions rather than merely adding numbers.

Conclusion

Representation of Indigenous Papuans in the bureaucracy of Southwest Papua Province has succeeded at the presence layer but not yet fully at the influence layer. In *passive representation*, the quantity and distribution of OAP positions are high and even across ranks but uneven by role weight, so the quality of decisions cannot yet provide the cultural bargaining value intended by affirmative action. This is caused by weak *linking conditions*—discretion, domain relevance, competence and legitimacy, leadership support, and accountability—so the bridge toward active representation does not function. Consequently, in *active representation*, OAP influence is limited in the policy arena but stronger in the service arena, and the symptom of substantive roles carried by other actors emerges—marking representation that still stops at formal presence.

Therefore, the Provincial Government of Southwest Papua should strengthen *passive representation* by placing OAP civil servants more proportionally in strategic positions consistent with their competence, and build *linking conditions* by expanding discretion, improving competence through continuous coaching, strengthening leadership support, and creating clear accountability mechanisms. These steps are expected to transform OAP representation from mere administrative presence into substantive representation with real influence in policy formulation and governance. This study is limited to a single province and is qualitative; further research could test the relationships among components longitudinally or compare several special-autonomy regions.

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