Reframing urban poverty: Policy dynamics and institutional interactions in Bekasi City

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Abstract

Bekasi City, Indonesia, has experienced significant economic growth over the past two decades, yet poverty remains a persistent issue, particularly in urban areas with high population density and a large informal sector. Despite various poverty alleviation policies implemented since 2003, such as social assistance programs and economic empowerment initiatives, poverty levels have remained stagnant or worsened, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This article explores the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi, focusing on the roles of political actors, institutions, and ideologies in shaping these policies. The research aims to analyze the evolution of poverty alleviation strategies and assess the effectiveness of these policies in addressing the root causes of poverty. Using a qualitative approach, the study examines policy shifts, actor interactions, and institutional responses, with a particular focus on the institutional challenges faced during the pandemic. The article introduces a new conceptual model for understanding poverty alleviation, emphasizing the need for an integrated, adaptive, and holistic approach that aligns policy, institutional reform, and community engagement. The findings suggest that Bekasi's poverty alleviation efforts must transition from short-term relief to long-term structural interventions that promote sustainable development.

Keywords: Actor interactions, Bekasi City, Institutional challenges, Policy dynamics, Policy model, Poverty alleviation.

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Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

1. Introduction

Poverty remains one of the most persistent and significant challenges for the Indonesian government [1, 2], particularly in urban areas experiencing rapid urbanization, such as Bekasi City, which is part of the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek), Bekasi City has become home to a large portion of the poor population who struggle to access essential services, facing significant socio-economic disparities [3]. Despite the implementation of various poverty alleviation

policies over the past two decades, the poverty rate in Bekasi City has remained stagnant and even increased during certain periods, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. The gap between urban and rural areas further exacerbates the distribution of poverty, with the majority of the poor concentrated in densely populated regions with limited access to education, health, and decent employment opportunities.

The dynamics of poverty alleviation in urban centers like Bekasi represent a complex interplay of actors, institutions, and ideologies that shape policy change over time [4]. This complexity is particularly evident in rapidly urbanizing regions such as Bekasi, where the growth of infrastructure, industry, and urban population continuously outpaces efforts to combat poverty. To effectively formulate strategies to combat poverty and promote sustainable development, a comprehensive understanding of these dynamics is needed. Poverty is a multifaceted issue, encompassing not only economic deprivation but also limited access to essential services like healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure [5, 6]. These constraints impact various populations differently, reinforcing cycles of inequality and making it more difficult for marginalized communities to break free from poverty [7, 8].

Poverty alleviation strategies, therefore, must address these diverse dimensions to effectively empower vulnerable communities and foster inclusive growth [9, 10]. Such strategies require a nuanced perspective, acknowledging the historical context, socio-political landscape, and specific challenges faced by the urban poor in Bekasi City [11]. This requires not only a focus on the economic aspects of poverty but also an understanding of the institutional and ideological forces that shape policies over time.

A rigorous analysis of the diverse actors involved, the institutional structures responsible for policy implementation, and the fundamental ideologies that underpin poverty alleviation strategies in Bekasi City between 2003 and 2023 is essential for understanding both the successes and the limitations of poverty reduction initiatives. This study highlights the key roles played by various actors, including the local government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based organizations (CBOs), and international agencies, in shaping and implementing poverty alleviation policies. Understanding the interactions between these stakeholders is crucial for evaluating the fairness, effectiveness, and sustainability of these policies.

A detailed examination of the mechanisms through which these actors participate in policy development, influence the allocation of resources, and ultimately affect the execution of programs on the ground is vital for understanding how well poverty alleviation strategies work in practice [12, 13]. By focusing on the specific case of Bekasi City, this research aims to provide a clearer picture of how the interplay between political leadership, institutional change, and ideological shifts has influenced the design and implementation of poverty alleviation policies. Additionally, it will shed light on the ongoing challenges in achieving significant poverty reduction in one of Indonesia's most densely populated urban areas.

This research, through its qualitative approach and policy analysis, will explore the factors influencing poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City and assess the roles of the actors, institutions, and ideologies that have shaped these policies over time. By analyzing the period from 2003 to 2023, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how the dynamics of poverty alleviation can be comprehended in the context of the ever-evolving political and social landscape in Indonesia, particularly in large cities like Bekasi, which are facing significant challenges related to urbanization and high population density.

Aligned with the importance of understanding policy dynamics in poverty alleviation, numerous studies have investigated policy change and its mechanisms across various countries over the past decades. As illustrated in the following overlay visualization generated from Scopus-indexed publications on policy dynamics in Figure 1, the topic has garnered considerable attention in recent years:
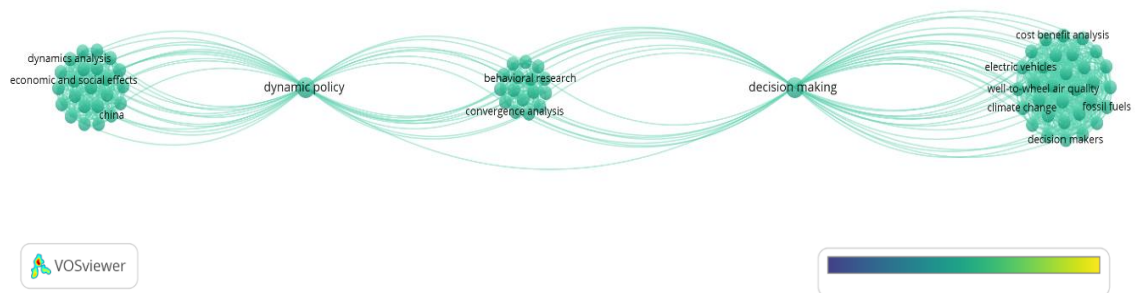

Figure 1.
Overlay Visualization of Research on Policy Dynamics.
Source: Scopus Database processed with VOSviewer, 2024.

The VOSviewer overlay analysis indicates that research on policy dynamics has experienced significant development over the past 15 years (2008–2024). The analysis was performed through a rigorous filtering process based on subject area and relevant keywords. The results reveal three main clusters of research, each representing interconnected themes.

- The first cluster focuses on environment, climate change, and transportation;
- The second cluster explores socio-economic issues, land use, and trade;
- The third cluster centers on behavior, decision-making methods, and policy modeling.

To better illustrate the concentration and intensity of these themes, a density visualization was generated in Figure 2 below:
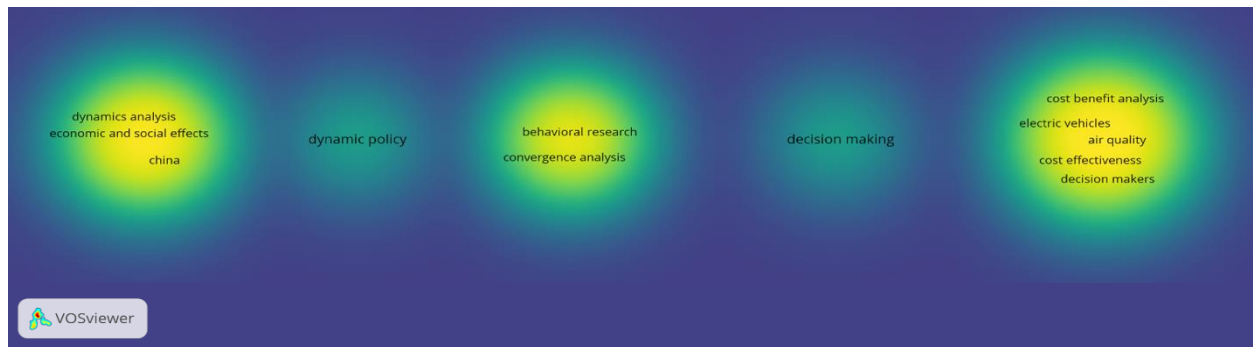

Figure 2.
Density Visualization of Research on Policy Dynamics.
Source: Scopus Database processed with VOSviewer, 2024.

In the density visualization, the brightness of color indicates the frequency and depth with which certain keywords appear in the literature. The denser the color, the more frequently those keywords are used in published studies. To further refine the understanding of the field, the literature review focused on highly cited articles, offering insights into the evolution and scope of research on policy dynamics.

Among the key studies reviewed:
- Brasil and Jones [14] contributed to agenda-setting theory by examining policy change and dynamic interactions.
- Chen and Feng [15] highlighted the need for adaptive and well-organized implementation in security systems.
- Coaffee and Headlam [16] analyzed tensions between national policy dynamics and tendencies of centralization.
- Engeli et al. [17] emphasized how religious and secular conflicts affect policy only when filtered through party system dynamics.
- Gopakumar [18] explored water policy dynamics in India.
- Howlett [19] mapped out the evolution of policy change models with substantial empirical backing.
- Jung et al. [20] investigated policy shifts due to inefficiencies in previous implementations.

In the context of poverty alleviation, foundational works by Barder [21] emphasized its multidimensional nature; Bastiaensen et al. [22] focused on the role of local institutions; and Grindle [23] underscored poverty reduction as a key benchmark of good governance. By integrating empirical studies, bibliometric mapping, and contextual analysis, this study aims to fill the gap in the literature regarding the policy dynamics of poverty alleviation in rapidly urbanizing areas, particularly in Bekasi City. This comprehensive approach offers a robust understanding of the institutional, actor-based, and ideological frameworks shaping anti-poverty strategies in urban Indonesia.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Dynamics of Public Policy

Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan introduced a framework for understanding power and social structures within the context of public policy and politics [24]. They discussed key concepts such as power, social institutions, influence, and the interaction between political actors, emphasizing the importance of these concepts for analyzing power dynamics systematically. Lasswell and Kaplan explored how power and influence are formed, distributed, and exercised within society, highlighting that the distribution of power often determines who gets what, when, and how. This concept is deeply connected to public policy as policies reflect the allocation of resources and values held by political actors. Thus, public policy provides a conceptual framework to understand power dynamics and how such power can be directed to achieve various political and social goals [24, 25].

David Easton further expands on this by explaining that public policy is the allocation of values either forcibly or legitimately to all members of society [25]. Public policy is not value-neutral; rather, it is inherently value-laden. The values within society, representing the public's interests, compel the government to formulate and realize them in public policy. Therefore, public policy governs the allocation of these societal values across the population, and the formulation and allocation of these values are government decisions aimed at achieving societal goals [25]. The influence of interests is especially significant during the formulation stage of public policy. This stage is critical, as it is where issues can be redefined and solutions may be proposed that are unpopular with the public but reflect the interests of the policymaking majority. This occurs through the interaction of policymakers, whether as individuals, groups, or parties via negotiation, bargaining, responsiveness, and compromise when selecting alternatives [25].

Easton [25] and Lasswell [24] understanding of public policy is mirrored in Dye [26], which details the relationship between public policy, public administration, and political science as a unified system. Political science provides the theories and concepts to understand power dynamics and influence in policymaking; public policy is the result of these political processes; and public administration ensures that established policies are effectively implemented to achieve the desired outcomes. Dye [26] uses a diagram to explain the causes and consequences of public policy, labeling it the "system

model" to classify societal conditions, political system characteristics, and public policies, showing the potential relationships among these elements.

More specifically, Dye [26] presents this "system model" as a visual framework for understanding how social and economic conditions, political systems, and public policies interact and influence each other in Figure 3. The model suggests that public policy is not produced in isolation but rather is shaped by institutional behaviors, political inputs, and the demands of society, while in turn influencing future socio-economic conditions.
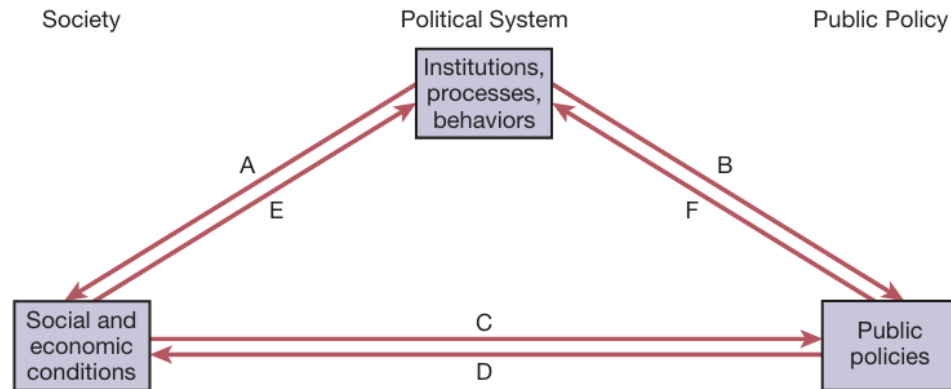

Figure 3.
Dye's System Model of Public Policy.
Source: Dye [26].

Dye [26] model of the public policy cycle outlines several stages in the policymaking process, each serving specific functions and challenges. These stages include Problem Identification, where societal issues needing government attention are identified by various groups or individuals; Agenda Setting, where identified issues draw attention from policymakers and the media; Policy Formulation, which involves the development of policy proposals by interest groups, government staff, legislative committees, or think tanks; Policy Legitimation, where policies are ratified by the legislature or the judiciary; Policy Implementation, where policies are executed by government bureaucracies; and Policy Evaluation, where the effectiveness and impact of policies are assessed. These stages reflect how policies progress from issue identification to post-implementation evaluation. This cyclical process assumes that policy decisions are made based on objective analysis, rather than subjective or purely political considerations.

Hogan and Howlett [27] and Howlett [19] describe the stages of the policy cycle in more detail, focusing on how societal issues are prioritized by policymakers. They explain that during Agenda Setting, societal issues are identified and prioritized for policymakers' attention, with a focus on empirically supported facts and data. Policy Formulation follows, where policymakers develop alternative solutions grounded in scientific evidence and rational analysis. The Decision-Making stage involves policymakers selecting the best policy alternative based on the best available evidence. Policy Implementation is the stage where approved policies are executed by relevant government agencies and stakeholders. Lastly, Policy Evaluation assesses whether the implemented policy achieved its objectives, using empirical evidence and scientific methods. After evaluation, policies that are ineffective or outdated may be terminated or modified based on the findings.

2.2. Concept of Policy Dynamics

The concept of policy dynamics, which requires a specific time span to navigate changes, aligns with several earlier studies. This understanding emphasizes the importance of time in the policy process and the various factors at play, such as historical institutional aspects, policy design, and evolving policy content and discourse over time. While the concept of policy dynamics is not explicitly defined as a singular theory in *Theories of the Policy Process* [28], this book provides a comprehensive overview of various policy process theories that contribute to our understanding of policy dynamics. These include Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, which explains policy stability and change through periods of gradual adjustment interspersed with brief and substantial changes; the Multiple Streams Framework, which suggests that policy change occurs when three independent streams problems, policies, and politics align to create opportunities for significant change; and Policy Feedback Theory, which focuses on how policies, once implemented, shape political behavior, preferences, and institutional development, creating a feedback loop that influences future policy decisions.

Other frameworks include the Advocacy Coalition Framework, which explains that policy change arises from the interaction and competition between advocacy coalitions, groups of actors with shared beliefs working to influence policy within a subsystem. Additionally, the Narrative Policy Framework examines the role of storytelling and narratives in shaping policy processes and influencing policy outcomes, while the Institutional Analysis and Development Framework focuses on how institutional arrangements influence policy outcomes through rules, norms, and individual and group behaviors within these institutions. Policy Diffusion and Innovation theory explores how policy ideas spread and are adopted across jurisdictions, while the Ecological Framework of Policy Analysis studies how various policy actors operate within complex systems of overlapping institutions and decision-making arenas, leading to interrelated policy dynamics.

Each of these frameworks offers insights into different aspects of policy dynamics, including stability and change, actor interactions, institutional effects, and the role of narratives in the policy process. Together, they provide a multifaceted understanding of how policies evolve over time and the forces driving these changes. As Daugbjerg [29], Hogan and Howlett [27] and Hogl et al. [30] emphasize, policy change is not instantaneous; it develops within historical contexts, evolving policy designs, and shifting policy discourses. This long-term perspective aligns with Dudley and Richardson [31], which stresses the importance of a broad temporal understanding to fully grasp policy evolution.

The Four I Framework by Dudley and Richardson [31] remains central to understanding policy dynamics, highlighting how four key elements Ideas, Interests, Institutions, and Individuals interact to influence significant policy changes. They argue that major shifts in public policy, particularly those that require a paradigm shift (third-order change), arise from the interplay of these factors. The Ideas element refers to new conceptualizations of how policy problems should be solved, while Interests refers to the motivations of various actors, such as advocacy groups, political elites, and businesses. Institutions like government bodies, regulatory agencies, and political systems provide the structural framework for policymaking, and Individuals, such as politicians, leaders of interest groups, or bureaucrats, play a pivotal role in facilitating or hindering policy change.

3. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a policy analysis method to explore the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City during the 2003–2023 period. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing poverty alleviation policies at the local level, as well as how actors, institutions, ideologies, and interests are involved in the policymaking process.

3.1. Research Approach

The approach used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach. This research focuses on understanding how the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies have developed in Bekasi City by identifying the roles of actors and institutions and examining policy changes over time. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the social, political, and economic aspects that influence these policies in greater depth.

3.2. Research Design

The research design is a case study focused on poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City. Bekasi was chosen because it is one of the metropolitan cities that has experienced stagnant poverty levels despite significant economic development. This study will examine the policies implemented by the Bekasi City Government in an effort to tackle poverty, as well as the dynamics that have occurred in the policymaking process from 2003 to 2023.

3.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data in this study were collected through in-depth interviews and documentary studies. Interviews were conducted with key informants involved in the policymaking process, including government officials, representatives from non-governmental organizations, academics, and individuals involved in poverty alleviation programs. In-depth interviews provide insights into the views, experiences, and perceptions of the actors related to the dynamics of the policies being implemented.

In addition, the study also uses documentary analysis to examine various policy documents, annual reports, and statistical data related to poverty and poverty alleviation programs in Bekasi City. These documents provide a more complete context regarding the development of poverty alleviation policies and the evaluation of their success.

3.4. Informant Selection Techniques

Informant selection in this study was conducted through purposive sampling. The selected informants are individuals who have significant knowledge, experience, or roles in the development and implementation of poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City. The informants include:
- Local government officials involved in policy formulation.
- Representatives from non-governmental organizations actively involved in poverty alleviation programs.
- Academics and researchers with knowledge of public policy and poverty.
- Members of the community who are beneficiaries of poverty alleviation policies.

3.5. Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected through interviews and documentary studies will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The steps in data analysis are as follows:
- Transcription of interview results to facilitate analysis.
- Categorization of data based on themes that emerge from the interviews and policy documents.
- Development of themes that reflect the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies, including the roles of actors, institutions, and ideologies in the policymaking process.
- Content analysis of policy documents to identify patterns of policy and policy changes during the 2003–2023 period.
- Interpretation of data to generate a deeper understanding of the factors influencing poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City.

3.6. Data Validity Testing

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation and method triangulation. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing information obtained from various informants, while method triangulation involves comparing data from interviews, documentary studies, and other secondary data. Additionally, member checking is conducted by requesting feedback from informants on the interpretation of the analyzed data to ensure the validity of the research findings.

3.7. Research Location and Time Frame

This research was conducted in Bekasi City, which is part of the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek). Bekasi was chosen because it faces significant challenges in poverty alleviation, with relatively high poverty levels despite rapid economic growth. The study covers the period from 2003 to 2023, focusing on the poverty alleviation policies implemented during that time span.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Dynamics of Poverty Alleviation Policies in Bekasi City (2003–2023)

The rapid economic development experienced in Bekasi City over the past two decades, driven by the expansion of infrastructure, industrial zones, and integration into the wider Jabodetabek metropolitan economy, has not yielded commensurate improvements in poverty reduction. While infrastructure investment has increased and economic indicators have improved, the city's poverty rate has remained stubbornly persistent, even rising during specific periods such as after the COVID-19 shock of 2020. This mismatch underscores that poverty persists not as a mere income deficit but as a multifaceted condition encompassing restricted access to healthcare, quality education, sanitation, clean water, and dignified housing. Such deprivation constrains individuals' ability to engage in socio-economic and political life, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and vulnerability.

Figure 4, which charts the monthly per capita poverty line in Bekasi from 2003 through 2023 (in IDR), shows a steady upward trajectory, reflecting inflation and rising costs of basic needs. Despite this rising threshold, the proportion of people falling below it has not declined notably, signifying structural impediments to sustainable poverty alleviation. Poverty here acts as both cause and effect: low income reduces access to services, and lack of services maintains low income a classic poverty trap.
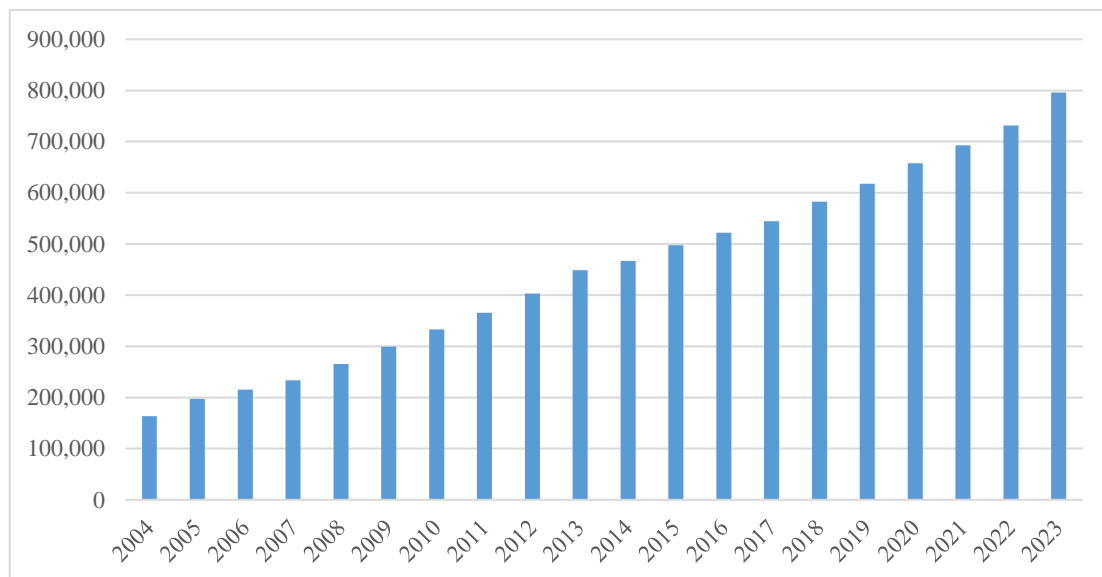

Figure 4.
Poverty Line in Bekasi City (IDR/Capita/Month), 2003–2023.
Source: Bekasi City Statistical Data, 2024.

4.1.1. 2003–2008: Infrastructure and Social Assistance

During the 2003–2008 period, policy emphasis was placed on physical infrastructure improvements roads, housing projects, clean water systems and direct social assistance tools such as the Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT). These measures were politically expedient and visually tangible. Improved roads and access to utilities certainly benefitted poor communities, but the approach proved shallow: it treated poverty's symptoms while ignoring root causes such as economic inequality, poor education, and lack of formal employment. Drawing on path dependency theory [32], we see that early policy choices anchored later administrations in a reactive, aid-oriented mode rather than sustainable structural reform.

4.1.2. 2008–2013: Economic Empowerment Initiatives

From 2008 to 2013, the city government pivoted towards economic empowerment, partnering with NGOs and the private sector to deliver skill-training programs, vocational initiatives, and microcredit for small and medium enterprises. These initiatives heralded a more integrated view of poverty, aiming to boost agency and entrepreneurship among the poor.

Yet, the informal sector still the largest employer in Bekasi, was largely left out. Moreover, credit and training programs often failed to reach those with the least resources or starting capital. Under Four I Theory [31] policy ideas here reflected evolving ideational content, but the limited institutional and interest-based support constrained impact.

4.1.3. 2013–2018: Toward Social Development and Human Capital

In the Rahmat Effendi administration (2013–2018), poverty alleviation was reframed within human capital discourse: greater emphasis on community-based education, health services, and integration of these with empowerment programs. Yet institutional inefficiencies, coordination deficits among local government agencies, poor monitoring mechanisms, and fragmented resource allocation led to drift between policy design and outcomes. Here the feedback theory [33] highlights how weak feedback loops undermine public trust and citizen participation, compounding policy ineffectiveness.

4.1.4. 2020: COVID-19 and Emergency Measures

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic constituted a punctuating event. Economic instability and rising unemployment forced rapid adjustments: emergency BLT disbursements, food aid, and crisis relief measures became central. According to punctuated equilibrium theory [34], this crisis catalyzed sharp policy shifts. While necessary as a short-term crisis response, these policies failed to address systemic drivers of poverty, further exposing the limitations of a model built on episodic relief rather than durable reform.

4.1.5. Policy Evaluation and Future Challenges

Across the full 2003–2023 timeline, Bekasi's poverty alleviation policy mix changed in style but not in substance. Short-term aids, empowerment projects, and human capital investments appeared periodically, yet structural inequality, labor market informality, and uneven access to public services persisted. The trajectory aligns with incremental change theory [35] and path dependency [32]: policy variation occurred, but deeper structural reform remained elusive. Future policy directions must therefore embrace a more holistic strategy: bridging social assistance, economic inclusion, institutional coordination, and long-term investment in education and employment.

4.2. The Role of Actors in the Dynamics of Poverty Alleviation Policies
4.2.1. Political Actors and Ideational Leadership

Mayors and key political figures during each period have shaped policy direction. Following Dudley and Richardson [31], specific leaders introduced their ideational approach, some emphasizing infrastructural relief, others economic empowerment or social welfare. Election cycles often drove election-year BLT expansions for political gain, illustrating Easton's theory of public policy [25] where political actors distribute societal values according to political incentives that may diverge from long-term poverty goals.

4.2.2. Government Bureaucracy and Institutional Actors

Agencies like Bappeda and Dinas Sosial are central to policy design and execution. Weible [28] suggests that institutions define the rules, norms, and procedures that shape outcomes. In Bekasi, siloed departmental structures and limited cross-agency coordination foster policy fragmentation. Path dependency reifies earlier institutional modes, constraining policy innovation. Bureaucratic capacity challenges resource limits, weak monitoring, and limited data systems, resulting in slow rollout, uneven implementation, and weak accountability, undermining policy efficacy.

4.2.3. Non-Governmental Organizations and Community-Based Actors

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) have played crucial roles by filling service delivery gaps, fostering grassroots empowerment, and advocating for systemic change. In line with the advocacy coalition framework [36], coalitions of NGOs have successfully shifted policy discourse toward empowerment and inclusion. Yet, their influence is often limited by funding dependency, political resistance, and institutional turf conflicts. The lack of formal channels for community input and NGO collaboration at the policymaking table diminishes the potential for sustained change.

4.2.4. Private Sector Engagement

Corporate actors in Bekasi, particularly manufacturing and housing developers, participate in CSR-driven poverty alleviation efforts. These include training programs, vocational schooling, affordable housing investments, and health outreach. Under Dudley & Richardson's framework, the private sector is seen as an institutional actor with resources and influence. However, the absence of regulatory frameworks and poor alignment with public policy goals often limit effectiveness, leading to fragmented, short-lived initiatives rather than integrated poverty reduction strategies.

4.2.5. Actor Interactions and Policy Outcomes

Applying Kingdon [37] policy change in Bekasi occurs when problem recognition, viable policy proposals, and political will converge, often during crises or regime changes. For instance, COVID-19 created such a convergence, catalyzing rapid BLT expansions. Feedback loops between NGOs, communities, and government sometimes push for reforms, but political and institutional inertia frequently impede deep transformation. Consequently, while actor networks occasionally align for short-term change, long-term structural reorientation remains rare.

4.3. The Role of Institutions in Poverty Alleviation Policy Processes

Institutions provide the rules and resources that shape policy inception, formulation, and adaptation.

4.3.1. Local Government Institutions

At the heart of poverty alleviation efforts in Bekasi is the local government, particularly key institutions such as Bappeda (Regional Development Planning Agency) and Dinas Sosial (Social Services Agency). These institutions are responsible for formulating poverty alleviation policies and ensuring their implementation across the city. According to Weible [28], institutions are the governing structures that regulate how policies are made, enforced, and adapted over time. In Bekasi, these institutions hold significant power in determining the types of poverty alleviation programs that are prioritized and implemented.

The role of Bappeda has been particularly significant in the planning stages of poverty alleviation policies. As the agency responsible for long-term development plans, Bappeda has had the task of integrating poverty alleviation into broader urban development strategies. However, despite its mandate, Bappeda has faced significant coordination challenges in aligning its plans with those of other government departments, as well as with local political agendas. This lack of coordination between agencies is one of the key barriers that have hindered the effective implementation of poverty alleviation programs. According to path dependency theory, Kay [32], previous decisions and institutional structures often limit the capacity for change, leading to reliance on existing policies that do not adequately address the evolving nature of poverty in Bekasi.

Similarly, Dinas Sosial plays a critical role in executing poverty alleviation initiatives, particularly those involving direct social assistance such as BLT (Direct Cash Assistance) and other relief measures. However, institutional constraints, including limited human resources, insufficient funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, have often undermined the success of these programs. The feedback theory Mettler and SoRelle [33] highlights that institutional feedback loops where previous policy outcomes shape future decisions are critical in the adaptation of policy. In Bekasi, the reliance on short-term social assistance programs, while necessary in emergency situations, has created a feedback loop that prioritizes immediate relief over long-term poverty reduction strategies. This has hindered the development of more sustainable, structural solutions to poverty.

4.3.2. NGOs and Civil Society

NGOs and CSOs act as institutional complements to government agencies mobilizing communities, providing service delivery, and advocating for policy change. Through advocacy coalition theory, they form policy networks pushing for empowerment and structural reform. Yet, institutional resistance concerns about accountability, control, and politics limits partnerships. Duplication of services, misaligned mandates, and lack of formal coordination mechanisms reduce overall impact.

4.3.3. Institutional Coordination and Capacity Constraints

Effective poverty alleviation requires inter-departmental coordination. However, Bekasi's institutional segmentation Dinas Sosial, Bappeda, Dinas Pendidikan, Dinas Tenaga Kerja, etc, regularly work in silos. Howlett [19] emphasizes how policy subsystems must collaborate to address multifaceted problems. But Bekasi lacks such integration, resulting in fragmented initiatives that fail to address interconnected poverty drivers. Staff shortages, limited training, and insufficient data systems further weaken institutions. Institutional isomorphism [38] describes how institutions tend to replicate established modes over time, even when ineffective. This bureaucratic inertia hampers innovation and adaptation to evolving urban poverty challenges.

4.3.4. National Policy Influence on Local Institutions

National policies and frameworks also play a significant role in shaping the local institutional responses to poverty alleviation. In Indonesia, the national government has long prioritized poverty reduction as part of its development agenda. Policies such as the National Program for Community Empowerment (PNPM) and Indonesia's poverty alleviation strategies have provided financial support and institutional frameworks for local governments, including Bekasi.

However, despite the national framework, local autonomy and the political dynamics at the local level often mean that national policies are adapted, reinterpreted, or undermined by local political leaders and institutions. This process, known as policy diffusion [39], highlights how national ideas are recontextualized and sometimes diverted by local institutions to align with local political interests. In Bekasi, this has resulted in policies that are often disjointed from national poverty alleviation objectives, limiting the impact of national strategies at the local level.

4.4. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Poverty Alleviation Policies

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economic systems worldwide and exposed structural vulnerabilities in Bekasi's poverty policy framework.

4.4.1. Immediate Responses to the Crisis: Emergency Social Assistance Programs

In the immediate aftermath of the pandemic, the Bekasi City Government implemented emergency measures aimed at alleviating the most urgent effects of the crisis. One of the primary strategies was the distribution of direct cash assistance (BLT) to those whose livelihoods were most affected by the pandemic. This form of social assistance was in line with emergency relief strategies commonly deployed during times of crisis. Social safety nets were expanded, with the

government increasing cash transfers, food aid, and basic necessities to low-income families and individuals working in the informal sector.

According to Kingdon [37], the pandemic served as a crisis event that converged with the need for policy change, aligning the problem of increasing poverty with an urgent need for immediate action. The convergence of these factors created a window of opportunity for rapid policy changes. However, while the cash assistance programs provided immediate relief, they were ultimately short-term solutions to an urgent problem. These measures, while necessary, failed to address the underlying structural causes of poverty, such as economic inequality, lack of access to decent jobs, and educational disparities. The Punctuated Equilibrium Theory Jones et al. [34] suggests that such abrupt policy shifts often occur during times of crisis, but their long-term effectiveness is limited if the systemic issues remain unaddressed..

While direct cash assistance and food distribution were essential in keeping families afloat during the pandemic, these programs highlighted weaknesses in long-term poverty alleviation strategies, which are generally more focused on sustainable economic growth and structural changes. The feedback loops created by emergency relief, as noted in the feedback theory Mettler and SoRelle [33], showed that while the immediate response helped alleviate the impacts of the pandemic, it did little to address the broader issues of economic resilience and social safety nets that the urban poor in Bekasi continue to face.

4.4.2. Impact on the Informal Sector and Long-Term Economic Vulnerabilities

The informal sector, which constitutes a large portion of Bekasi's workforce, was hit particularly hard by the pandemic. Workers in this sector, such as street vendors, small-scale traders, and construction workers, were the most vulnerable to job losses due to social distancing measures, lockdowns, and restricted business operations. The inability to work remotely, combined with the lack of adequate social protections for informal workers, deepened existing economic inequalities.

These workers, often lacking access to formal social safety nets, were disproportionately affected by the pandemic's economic fallout. While government aid programs helped address some of these challenges in the short term, they did not resolve the fundamental problem of economic insecurity for informal sector workers. The pandemic underscored the institutional gaps in social protection systems for the urban poor, which had long been a point of concern for policymakers.

The theory of path dependency [32] is relevant here, as it explains how past decisions and institutional structures shape future policy choices. In the case of Bekasi, the pre-existing reliance on temporary relief programs and limited focus on informal sector workers led to inadequate preparedness for a crisis like COVID-19. The pandemic, therefore, exposed the structural weaknesses in existing poverty alleviation policies, which were unable to provide long-term security for the most vulnerable segments of society. As the informal sector continued to suffer, the demand for sustainable policies that address job creation and social protections for workers in this sector became more pronounced.

4.4.3. Healthcare System Strain and Social Inequality

The COVID-19 crisis also revealed vulnerabilities in the healthcare system, especially for poor and marginalized communities. The pandemic exacerbated health inequities by disproportionately affecting people from lower socio-economic backgrounds who have less access to quality healthcare, live in overcrowded conditions, and are more likely to suffer from pre-existing health conditions. In Bekasi, the city's healthcare infrastructure was stretched to its limits, with overcrowded hospitals and a shortage of medical supplies. The pandemic response, which was initially focused on urgent health needs, became a major policy priority and significantly affected the ability of the city government to address poverty-related issues, as resources were diverted to pandemic control.

This is where Dye [26] comes into play, illustrating how a crisis shifts the policy agenda. The prioritization of health over other sectors, while necessary, resulted in a neglect of broader poverty alleviation efforts, such as education, job training, and housing. As the focus shifted to managing the health crisis, the long-term social problems faced by the poor were delayed. This reflected the dynamics of policy change that often occur during crises, where existing priorities are disrupted and new urgent concerns rise to the forefront. However, this also created a feedback loop in which poverty alleviation policies were not reevaluated or restructured to adapt to the newly exposed vulnerabilities.

4.4.4. Long-Term Implications: Resilience and Recovery

While the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic focused on emergency relief, the long-term implications for poverty alleviation in Bekasi will depend on how the city transitions from crisis management to sustainable recovery. The pandemic exposed the limitations of short-term interventions and highlighted the need for resilient policy frameworks that can withstand future shocks. Moving forward, policy reforms are needed to address the underlying causes of poverty, such as lack of access to education, unemployment, and limited access to healthcare.

The Multiple Streams Framework Kingdon [37] provides an important lens for understanding how the crisis could create windows of opportunity for policy change. The pandemic has laid bare the need for a more comprehensive social safety net that includes healthcare reform, social insurance for informal sector workers, and public employment programs. Moreover, as discussed in the Theory of Policy Feedback [33] the long-term success of poverty alleviation efforts will depend on how effectively the government integrates feedback from communities and adapts policies to meet their needs.

A critical step in this process is to ensure that pandemic recovery policies are aligned with broader poverty alleviation goals, ensuring that marginalized groups are not left behind. The challenge for Bekasi and for other cities facing similar challenges is to build sustainable resilience into poverty alleviation policies, preparing them for future crises while addressing the chronic issues of inequality that have been exacerbated by COVID-19.

4.5. The Contribution of a New Conceptual Model in the Dynamics of Policy

The development of a new conceptual model to understand the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City offers a fresh perspective on how poverty reduction strategies can be more effectively formulated and implemented. This model integrates multiple dimensions actor dynamics, institutional factors, ideological influences, and policy frameworks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interactions that drive policy change. In the case of Bekasi, the evolution of poverty alleviation policies over the past two decades highlights the necessity of moving beyond traditional approaches and adopting more integrated, adaptive models that can respond to the evolving nature of urban poverty.

4.5.1. Integrating Actor Dynamics into Policy Design and Implementation

One of the core contributions of this new conceptual model is the focus on the dynamic interactions between various actors involved in the policy process. Political actors, such as local government leaders (mayors and council members), are key decision-makers in the formulation of poverty alleviation policies, but their decisions are also influenced by a broader set of actors. These include governmental institutions, NGOs, private sector entities, and the community. The model emphasizes the importance of understanding how these actors interact, negotiate, and sometimes compete in shaping policy outcomes.

For instance, in Bekasi, the local government and NGOs have often been seen as partners in poverty alleviation efforts, yet their collaboration is frequently hindered by conflicting interests or political considerations. The new model accounts for these complexities by recognizing that the alignment of interests between these actors is critical for achieving policy success. It also highlights how policy entrepreneurs, individuals or groups advocating for specific changes can influence the direction of policy by acting as bridges between these diverse actors. The model, therefore, supports actor-driven policy innovation, which allows for the inclusion of marginalized groups in policy discussions, ensuring their needs are addressed in a more participatory and inclusive manner.

By recognizing the fluidity of relationships between actors, the model highlights the importance of coalition-building and the need for policies that can adapt to changing political climates and evolving public priorities. Kingdon [37] suggests that policy change occurs when problems, policies, and political opportunities converge. In Bekasi, political shifts, such as changes in mayoral leadership, often create windows of opportunity for new policies, especially when actors come together to advocate for them.

4.5.2. Institutional Factors and the Need for Policy Flexibility

Another crucial aspect of the new conceptual model is its focus on institutional factors that shape the policymaking process. Institutions, both formal (such as local government agencies) and informal (such as community-based organizations), play a significant role in policy outcomes. The model emphasizes the need for institutional flexibility, particularly in bureaucratic structures, which often hinder the implementation of more innovative or comprehensive poverty alleviation strategies.

In Bekasi, Bappeda and Dinas Sosial are responsible for coordinating and implementing policies, but their effectiveness is often limited by institutional fragmentation. The lack of coordination between different departments and agencies, as well as limited institutional capacity, can undermine the city's ability to respond effectively to changing needs. The model proposes that to improve policy outcomes, there must be an institutional redesign that fosters greater cooperation between government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders. This would involve cross-sectoral collaboration, where different departments or organizations work together in integrated ways to address the multiple facets of poverty such as education, healthcare, employment, and housing.

This conceptual framework draws on institutional theory, which emphasizes that institutional arrangements significantly influence policy decisions and outcomes [28]. In Bekasi, institutional weaknesses, such as lack of capacity and poor coordination, have hindered the effective implementation of poverty alleviation policies. The new model advocates for institutional reform to improve the ability of institutions to respond to complex social issues, suggesting a more adaptive and responsive institutional framework to address poverty in a more sustainable manner.

4.5.3. Ideological Influences and Policy Framing

Ideology plays a critical role in shaping how poverty is defined and, consequently, how policies are designed. In Bekasi, as in many other cities, the dominant political ideologies influence whether poverty is seen as an individual problem or a structural issue requiring systemic solutions. The new conceptual model recognizes that ideological perspectives affect policy choices, as different political leaders may have contrasting views on the role of the government in poverty alleviation.

For example, some political leaders in Bekasi have focused on individual empowerment and market-driven solutions, while others have promoted state-led interventions, such as expanded social protection programs or direct assistance. The new model emphasizes the importance of understanding ideological shifts within local government and political leadership, as these shifts often coincide with changes in policy priorities. The model advocates for policies that balance both economic empowerment and structural support for the most vulnerable, ensuring that ideological biases do not undermine efforts to reduce poverty comprehensively.

This approach aligns with Bardach [35], which suggests that policy changes occur gradually, shaped by ideological shifts and political debates. In Bekasi, the ideological shifts between different political administrations have resulted in varying approaches to poverty alleviation, with some emphasizing short-term economic relief, while others have focused on long-term structural changes in education, healthcare, and employment.

4.5.4. Policy Innovation and Integration: The Need for a Holistic Approach

A central feature of the new conceptual model is the need for policy innovation and integration. The model proposes a more holistic approach to poverty alleviation, one that recognizes the interconnection between different policy areas, such as education, health, housing, and employment. In Bekasi, these policy areas have often been treated in isolation, leading to fragmented efforts that fail to address the multifaceted nature of urban poverty.

The new model calls for integrated policy frameworks that foster collaboration between different sectors and institutions to provide comprehensive solutions to poverty. This idea is consistent with Dye [26], which highlights the importance of problem identification, policy formulation, and evaluation in the policy process. By ensuring that poverty alleviation is not viewed as a single, isolated issue but rather as a complex and interconnected set of challenges, the new conceptual model offers a more adaptable and effective approach to poverty reduction.

Additionally, the model emphasizes the role of community participation in shaping policies that are both inclusive and effective. By incorporating the views and needs of the people most affected by poverty, the model supports bottom-up policy design that ensures policies are relevant, impactful, and sustainable. This is particularly important in cities like Bekasi, where grassroots movements and community organizations can provide valuable insights into the practical realities of poverty and the effectiveness of existing programs.

5. Conclusion

This article has explored the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies in Bekasi City over the past two decades, focusing on the role of actors, institutions, and ideologies in shaping policy change. It has provided an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities faced by local authorities in tackling urban poverty and emphasized the importance of adopting a more integrated, adaptive, and holistic approach to poverty alleviation.

The analysis of policy dynamics revealed that while Bekasi has seen significant economic growth, this growth has not translated into meaningful poverty reduction. Despite various interventions, including infrastructure development, social assistance programs, and empowerment initiatives, the poverty rate in the city has remained persistent. This suggests that poverty alleviation policies have been largely reactive, addressing immediate needs without addressing the deeper, structural causes of poverty, such as income inequality, access to quality education, and decent employment opportunities.

The role of political actors was shown to be central in shaping policy, with local leaders and governments having the power to set priorities and define poverty alleviation strategies. However, the lack of institutional coordination and capacity within government agencies has often led to fragmented and inefficient policy implementation. The involvement of NGOs and community-based organizations has played a critical role in filling gaps, but their efforts have often been constrained by limited resources and political resistance.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the inadequacies of existing poverty alleviation policies, with emergency relief measures such as direct cash assistance providing only short-term solutions to a long-term problem. The pandemic highlighted the need for a more resilient and sustainable poverty alleviation strategy that incorporates social protection systems for the informal sector, universal healthcare, and inclusive economic policies.

The introduction of a new conceptual model for understanding the dynamics of poverty alleviation policies offers a promising framework for addressing these challenges. By integrating the roles of actors, institutions, ideologies, and policy innovation, this model provides a comprehensive approach to poverty reduction. It emphasizes the need for institutional reform, greater coordination, and inclusive policy design that takes into account the voices and needs of the most vulnerable populations in Bekasi.

In conclusion, poverty alleviation in Bekasi requires a paradigm shift from short-term, crisis-driven responses to long-term, structural interventions. Policymakers must prioritize inclusive growth, ensure inter-institutional coordination, and design policies that are flexible, adaptive, and grounded in the realities of the urban poor. Only through this integrated approach can Bekasi hope to break the cycle of poverty and achieve sustainable development for all its residents.

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