

NAVIGATING REGIONAL AUTONOMY: AN INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK OF LEADERSHIP AND POLICY INNOVATION IN LOCAL GOVERNANCE

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the relationships among regional leadership, public policy innovation, and regional autonomy within the context of governance transformation. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA framework, this study synthesizes recent literature to identify theoretical patterns and conceptual alignments among the main variables. The findings indicate that regional leadership functions as a strategic node that unlocks autonomous space, while policy innovation serves as a mechanism that transforms authority into enhanced governance performance and policy effectiveness. In this context, regional autonomy plays a dual role: as an enabler that creates opportunities for innovation and as a structural constraint that limits innovation through regulations and institutional capacity. Thematically, the study identifies a shift from transformational leadership to adaptive and collaborative leadership, alongside a transition from technology-based innovation toward collaborative governance. Based on this synthesis, the study develops an integrated analytical framework called the Transformation Loop. This framework connects five key variables: leadership, regional autonomy, policy innovation, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness within a dynamic and reciprocal relationship. The novelty of this study lies in the integration of three major dimensions into a single conceptual model capable of explaining regional governance transformation systematically rather than partially. These findings contribute to the advancement of public administration literature and offer practical implications for strengthening strategic leadership and policy innovation in the autonomous regions.

INTRODUCTION

The post-decentralization era has reshaped central-regional relations and expanded the strategic role of regional leaders in public policy. In Indonesia, Law Number 23 of 2014 reaffirmed the redistribution of authority and regional accountability, positioning autonomy not merely as administrative devolution but as a governance transformation requiring institutional capacity, visionary leadership, and adaptive policy innovation ([Muhtadin, 2023](#)). However, decentralization has also produced disparities in institutional capacity, leadership quality, and fiscal resources, thereby elevating regional leaders as the central actors in directing local development and innovation.

Within the framework of bureaucratic reform, regional leaders possess political legitimacy and discretionary authority to act as policy entrepreneurs who generate breakthroughs and ensure effective policy implementation ([Rikza, 2022](#)). As societal complexity and digitalization accelerate,

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policy innovation has become essential for improving public services through administrative reform, technology utilization, and participatory design ([A. H. R. Ramadhan & Yusuf, 2025](#)). Yet, variations in innovation performance across regions indicate that leadership capacity, organizational culture, and institutional structure remain the decisive determinants.

International studies show a strong relationship between leadership and innovation. Leadership styles contribute to organizational innovative capacity ([Alblooshi et al., 2021](#)), while strategic leadership supports sustainable innovation through long-term orientation and resource management ([Kurzahls et al., 2020](#)). However, these studies rarely connect leadership with regional autonomy and public policy innovation. Conversely, existing innovation studies frequently emphasize organizational culture, structure, knowledge systems, and technology, leaving the role of leadership as a strategic actor under-examined ([Abbass et al., 2025](#); [Le Bas et al., 2015](#)).

Studies on regional autonomy also tend to focus primarily on institutional and regulatory dimensions. For instance, New Institutional Economics emphasizes formal and informal institutions ([Sanggrangbano, 2022](#)), while the semi-autonomous social field approach highlights the interaction between norms and practices in policymaking ([Fahmi, 2021](#)). However, these approaches have not systematically integrated leadership and innovation into a unified analytical framework.

This mapping reveals a distinct fragmentation in previous literature. Leadership studies are frequently separated from innovation studies. Innovation studies tend to neglect the role of strategic actors. Regional autonomy studies provide limited analysis of leadership. However, autonomy provides the necessary discretionary space, leadership determines strategic direction, and innovation serves as an instrument for solving public problems. Without integrating these dimensions, analyses of governmental performance and policy effectiveness remain partial and unable to capture the dynamic complexity of local governance systems.

In the contemporary Indonesian context, the tension between decentralization and recentralization further reinforces the urgency of innovative regional leadership. National policies that reclaim certain authorities to the central government indicate that autonomy does not always function linearly as a space of freedom, but as an arena shaped by political and regulatory configurations. This condition requires regional leaders to act not only as administrators, but also as strategic actors capable of managing autonomous space and promoting policy innovation.

To address these gaps, this study conducts a systematic synthesis to examine the interrelationship among regional leadership, public policy innovation, and regional autonomy. It aims to map conceptual and methodological evolution, identify research patterns and gaps, and analyze how decentralization design and institutional capacity shape the space of innovation. Ultimately, this study develops an integrated conceptual framework that connects these elements, thereby

contributing to the strengthening of leadership and innovation in Indonesian local governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regional Leadership

Regional leadership is a strategic factor in determining the direction and quality of local governance under decentralization. Regional leaders are not only administrative actors, but also vision setters, policy agenda drivers, and bureaucratic mobilizers. In facing social complexity, digitalization, and rising public expectations, regional leadership can be understood through four perspectives: transformational, public, adaptive, and political leadership.

Transformational leadership emphasizes the ability to inspire change, cultivate collective commitment, and reorient organizational culture toward performance-oriented governance and public service delivery ([Wahyuni & Cahyani, 2025](#)). Conversely, public leadership stresses collaboration, accountability, and the management of cross-actor networks, particularly the capacity to integrate administrative and political interests while fostering public participation in policymaking ([Din et al., 2025](#)).

Adaptive leadership highlights flexibility, continuous learning, and cross-sectoral coordination in responding to uncertainty and building resilient governance systems ([Ansell et al., 2021](#)). Concurrently, political leadership is equally important, as elected regional leaders require legitimacy, negotiation capacity, and political will to promote innovation while managing relations with legislatures and interest groups ([Bachir-Bendaoud, 2025](#)).

Consequently, regional leadership can be analyzed through five dimensions: strategic vision, political will, bureaucratic mobilization capacity, political legitimacy, and collaborative leadership. These dimensions position regional leaders as drivers of policy transformation who connect autonomous authority with public innovation agendas.

Public Policy Innovation

Public policy innovation strengthens the capacity of local governments to respond to societal, economic, and technological change. Within regional autonomy, innovation is no longer optional but a structural necessity for producing relevant, effective, and adaptive policies. The studied literature conceptualizes this through three frameworks: diffusion of innovation, public sector innovation, and governance innovation.

The diffusion of innovation perspective explains that innovation involves not only generating new ideas, but also adopting and replicating them within governmental systems. The success of this diffusion process depends on relational dynamics among actors, institutional support, and the system's capacity to absorb change, making innovation ecosystems and horizontal learning among

regions essential for disseminating best practices ([Palm, 2022](#)).

Public sector innovation views innovation as part of administrative reform and bureaucratic modernization aimed at creating public value, improving service delivery quality, and strengthening accountability. It includes managerial reform, procedural simplification, technological integration, service digitalization, and integrated information systems ([Kruhlov & Tereshchenko, 2024](#)).

Governance innovation extends innovation to the transformation of coordination patterns, decision-making mechanisms, and stakeholder relations. It emphasizes policy integration and social dynamics to sustain innovation in complex systems, particularly through collaborative forums, cross-sectoral integration, and data-driven decision-making at the regional level ([Radtke, 2025](#)).

Analytically, public policy innovation includes five dimensions: substantive policy innovation, service process innovation, digital innovation, institutional innovation, and collaborative innovation. These dimensions position innovation as a strategic instrument for improving governmental performance, legitimacy, and the capacity of local governments to manage change sustainably.

Regional Autonomy and Decentralization

Regional autonomy and decentralization provide the structural foundation for authority, responsibility, and decision-making at the local level. Decentralization is not merely an administrative transfer of authority, but a transformation of central-local relations that creates discretionary policy space for contextual and innovative responses. It can be understood through four dimensions: administrative decentralization, fiscal decentralization, political decentralization, and local governance. Administrative decentralization refers to the delegation of authority in managing public affairs and services. It provides organizational flexibility, enables policy adaptation to local characteristics, and supports innovation diffusion, policy variation, and local experimentation ([Hidayat & Mukminin, 2022](#)).

Fiscal decentralization focuses on local autonomy in financial management, budget planning, and resource allocation. Fiscal capacity enables local governments to design programs according to local priorities and create public value through resource integration and actor collaboration. Innovation space becomes limited without fiscal capacity ([Torfing et al., 2021](#)). Political decentralization delegates political authority through regional elections and local legislatures, strengthening legitimacy, accountability, and discretionary space for innovation. However, its effectiveness depends on democratic institutional quality and leadership capacity ([Baltzii, 2023](#)). Local governance emphasizes horizontal relations among government, the private sector, and society. Transparency, participation, and accountability determine the success of autonomy in fostering collaboration and needs-based innovation ([Pinargote et al., 2025](#)).

Conceptually, regional autonomy can be understood as policy discretion, an institutional structure enabling innovation, and a governance foundation supporting collaboration and public value creation. Thus, autonomy determines the effectiveness of regional leadership in promoting sustainable policy innovation.

Theoretical Synthesis and State of the Art

Recent literature shows a shift in public sector leadership from transformational approaches toward adaptive and collaborative leadership in response to increasing governance complexity and policy uncertainty ([Ansell et al., 2021](#)). Leadership is no longer understood merely as individual capacity, but as a relational process involving interactions among actors within complex governance systems.

At the same time, public policy innovation has shifted from technology-based innovation toward collaborative innovation. While digital innovation alone improves efficiency and transparency, it is insufficient for addressing multidimensional public problems. Collaborative innovation therefore emphasizes multi-actor participation, collective learning, and cross-sectoral integration in the policy process ([Torfing et al., 2019](#)).

Within the context of regional autonomy, these developments are shaped by decentralization dynamics that provide discretionary space while imposing institutional constraints. Institutional capacity, fiscal resources, and local political configurations determine the effectiveness of autonomy in promoting innovation. Thus, regional autonomy functions both as an enabling structure and as a constraint shaped by regulation, capacity, and local politics.

Despite these developments, studies on leadership, policy innovation, and regional autonomy remain fragmented. Leadership studies emphasize styles and behaviors, innovation studies focus on technology and policy processes, and decentralization studies concentrate on institutional structures. This separation indicates the absence of a comprehensive framework explaining the dynamic relationship between leadership, innovation, and autonomy in local governance. Therefore, an integrated approach is needed to explain how regional leadership activates autonomous space, promotes policy innovation, and contributes to governmental performance and policy effectiveness in a sustainable manner.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize studies on regional leadership, public policy innovation, and regional autonomy. The SLR method was selected because it enables the identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of literature in a structured,

transparent, and replicable manner ([Pati & Lorusso, 2018](#)). To strengthen reporting transparency, this study follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, which provide a systematic framework for documenting the literature selection process through checklists and flow diagrams ([Page et al., 2021](#)).

Data were collected from Scopus, Web of Science, and Garuda because these databases provide broad coverage of peer-reviewed literature in public leadership, policy innovation, decentralization, and local governance. The search used combinations of the keywords “Regional Head Leadership,” “Public Policy Innovation,” “Regional Autonomy,” “Decentralization,” “Local Government Performance,” and “Policy Effectiveness,” combined with Boolean operators AND and OR. The publication period was limited to 2020–2025 to capture recent developments in leadership and policy innovation studies.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected articles. Included studies were peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025, focused on regional leadership and/or public policy innovation in local government contexts, available in full text, and methodologically clear. Excluded studies included non-journal publications, studies outside the local government context, private-sector or central-government studies without local relevance, articles published before 2020, unavailable full texts, and studies with unclear methods. The criteria are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Article Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Selection Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication Type	Scientific journal articles that have undergone a peer-review process	Proceedings, books, research reports, working papers, opinion articles, or non-journal documents
Research Focus	Discusses regional leadership and/or public policy innovation within the context of local government	Does not discuss regional leadership, public policy innovation, or is not relevant to the context of local government
Study Context	Research conducted at the local government level	Research conducted in the private sector or central government without relevance to local government
Publication Period	Published within the 2020–2025 period	Published before 2020
Article Availability	Available in full-text form	Full text unavailable
Methodological Clarity	Research methodology is explicitly and systematically explained	Methodology is not explained or unclear

Source: Author’s own calculations, 2026

Article Selection Process

The article selection process followed the PRISMA stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Identification was conducted through database searches and duplicate removal. Screening involved reviewing titles and abstracts to assess relevance to regional leadership, policy innovation, and local government. Eligibility was assessed through full-text review based on research

context, methodological clarity, and variable relevance. Articles meeting all criteria were included for further synthesis. The selection flow was documented using the PRISMA 2020 framework (Haddaway et al., 2022). The flow and number of articles at each stage of the selection process are summarized in the figure below.

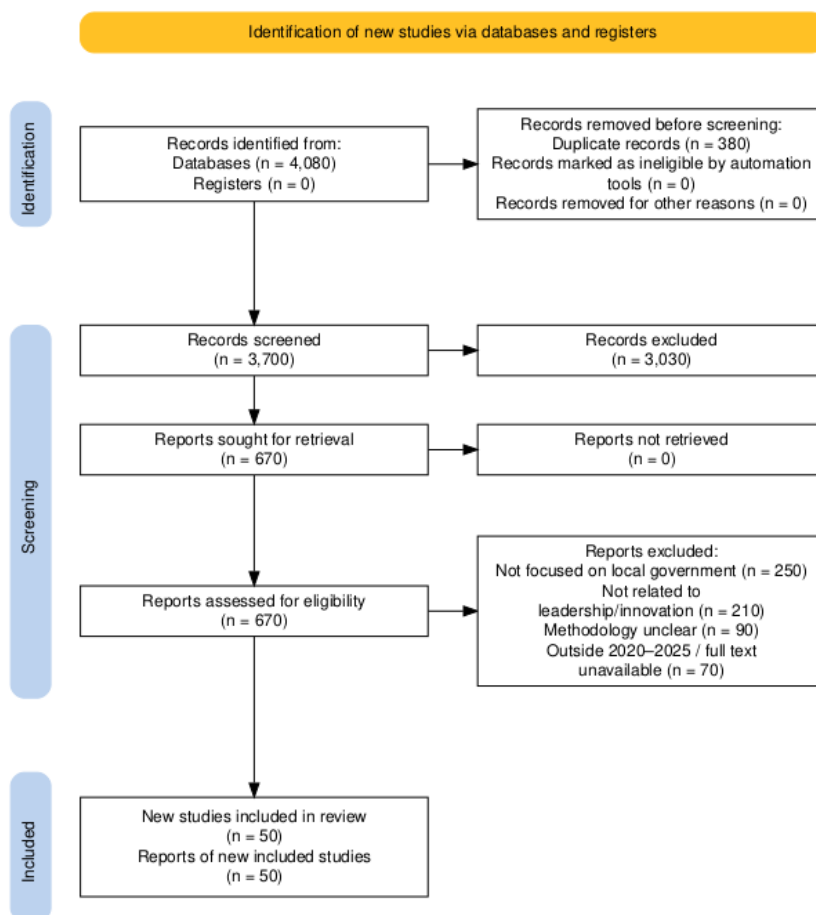


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram

Source: PRISMA 2020 flow diagram generated following Haddaway (2022)

Study Quality Assessment

The quality of the selected articles was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) approach. The assessment considered the clarity of research objectives, suitability of design and methodology, validity and reliability of data, consistency between analysis and findings, and theoretical contribution. This process ensured methodological credibility and minimized bias in the synthesis.

Data Extraction and Analysis Techniques

After selection, data were extracted systematically, including author(s) and publication year, country or research context, method, main variables or concepts, and key findings. The extracted data were categorized into five groups: regional leadership, public policy innovation, regional autonomy or decentralization, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness. The analysis involved three stages: thematic coding to identify conceptual patterns, variable categorization to map dominant

relationships among variables, and narrative synthesis to integrate findings into an analytical framework (Snyder, 2019). This process enabled the study to identify conceptual and methodological gaps and develop an integrated framework for understanding local governance transformation.

RESULTS

Literature Selection Results

The literature selection process followed the PRISMA stages of identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Database searches through Scopus, Web of Science, and Garuda yielded 4,080 articles. After removing 380 duplicates, 3,700 articles proceeded to title and abstract screening. At this stage, 3,030 articles were excluded because they did not meet the criteria of peer-reviewed publication, local government relevance, or focus on regional leadership and/or public policy innovation. A total of 670 articles were assessed through full-text review, of which 620 were excluded due to publication period, full-text availability, substantive relevance, or methodological clarity. Finally, 50 articles met all criteria and were included for data extraction and thematic synthesis.

Research Publication Trends

The publication trend of the 50 selected articles shows a gradual increase during 2020–2025, with the highest concentration occurring in 2023–2025. The number of publications increased from five articles in 2020 and six in 2021 to ten in 2023, eight in 2024, and seventeen in 2025. This trend indicates growing academic attention to regional leadership, policy innovation, digital transformation, collaborative governance, accountability, and local government performance.

Substantively, the 2020–2021 literature was dominated by transformational leadership and bureaucratic culture change. During 2022–2023, attention shifted toward digital innovation, smart governance, service digitalization, and integrated information systems. In 2024–2025, the focus moved further toward collaborative governance and adaptive leadership, emphasizing cross-sectoral collaboration, public participation, and local government adaptability.

In essence, these trends reveal a clear conceptual evolution, moving from transformational leadership toward digital innovation and eventually toward collaborative and adaptive governance. The significant increase in publications during 2023–2025, accounting for 35 out of the 50 analyzed articles, confirms that issues of regional leadership and policy innovation within the framework of regional autonomy have increasingly become central concerns in contemporary public administration literature.



Figure 2. Research Publication Trends on Regional Leadership and Public Policy Innovation within the Framework of Regional Autonomy (2020–2025)

The increasing research focus on collaborative governance and adaptive leadership during the 2024–2025 period not only reflects academic developments, but also represents a response to the growing complexity of public problems at the local level. Rapid digital transformation, the emergence of various global crises, and increasing demands for transparency and public participation have driven the need for more flexible and collaborative governance approaches.

In this context, hierarchical and linear models of leadership are becoming less adequate, leading to a shift toward adaptive leadership capable of managing uncertainty and policy dynamics. This shift also indicates that policy innovation is no longer understood merely as an internal bureaucratic process, but rather as the result of interactions among government, society, and the private sector within a collaborative governance framework.

Characteristics of Previous Studies

The 50 selected articles demonstrate diverse research characteristics in terms of context, method, and variable focus. Most studies examine local governance, public administration, regional finance, digital public services, rural governance, urban performance, administrative reform, and sectoral policy areas such as health and environmental policy. These studies indicate that leadership, innovation, and autonomy frequently overlap, although they are still commonly analyzed separately.

Methodologically, the reviewed studies employ qualitative, quantitative, legal-normative, evaluative, econometric, field-experimental, policy design, and exploratory approaches. Quantitative approaches are mainly used to measure performance, policy effectiveness, transparency, and digital technology impacts, while qualitative and juridical-normative approaches examine political leadership, ethics, accountability, and decentralization dynamics.

From a methodological perspective, previous studies demonstrate the dominance of qualitative and quantitative approaches with methodological variations including policy analysis, legal studies, implementation evaluation, econometric analysis, field experiments, policy design, and exploratory studies. Quantitative approaches are widely employed to measure local government performance, policy effectiveness, transparency, and the impact of digital technology. Meanwhile, qualitative and juridical-normative approaches are more frequently used to examine political leadership, ethics, accountability, and decentralization dynamics.

In terms of variable focus, the leadership cluster emphasizes leadership styles, political legitimacy, responsibility, and transformational leadership. The policy innovation cluster focuses on digital innovation, collaborative innovation, service effectiveness, and administrative reform. Meanwhile, the regional autonomy cluster emphasizes administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization, as well as regulatory compliance and governance performance. Evidently, the characteristics of previous studies indicate a tendency toward partial approaches, thereby reinforcing the urgency of conceptual integration between regional leadership, public policy innovation, and regional autonomy within a more comprehensive analytical framework.

Table 2. Characteristics of Selected Articles

No	Author(s) (Year)	Main Research Focus	Journal	Research Context	Method	Variable Focus
1	Springer et al. (2020)	Leadership styles of rural leaders in local governance	<i>Sustainability</i>	Rural Local Governance	Qualitative/Quantitative (Inference)	Leadership Style
2	Taufik et al. (2021)	Study on the ethics of regional government leadership	<i>Masyarakat, Kebudayaan dan Politik</i>	Local Government	Ethical Study	Leadership Ethics
3	Sabchev (2022)	The role of local political leadership in governance	<i>Territory, Politics, Governance</i>	Local Political Governance	Political Analysis	Local Political Leadership
4	Sancino et al. (2023)	Relational leadership in local governance	<i>Public Management Review</i>	Local Public Management	Relational Leadership	Leadership Relations
5	Ndraha (2023)	Optimizing public services through disharmony reconstruction	<i>Journal of Digitainability, Realism & Mastery</i>	Public Services	Policy Reconstruction	Public Service Disharmony
6	M. R. Ramadhan (2023)	The nature of regional leaders' responsibility	<i>Pancasila International Journal of Applied Social Science</i>	Regional Administration	Juridical-Normative (Inference)	Regional Leadership Responsibility
7	Septiana et al. (2023)	Accountability reports of	<i>International Journal of</i>	Public Accountabilit	Document Analysis	Accountability

		regional leaders	<i>Social Science Research</i>	y		
8	Angelina et al. (2024)	The influence of audit opinions and regional characteristics	<i>The Contrarian: Finance, Accounting, and Business Research</i>	Regional Finance	Quantitative Analysis	Audit Opinion, Regional Characteristics
9	Wibowo & Sukardi (2025)	Implementation of transformational leadership by local governments	<i>EAS Journal of Humanities and Cultural Studies</i>	Local Government	Policy Implementation	Transformational Leadership
10	Bachir-Bendaoud (2025)	Leadership and digital governance innovation	<i>Advanced Research in Economics and Business Studies</i>	Digital Governance	Digital Innovation	Governance Innovation
11	Ahern (2025)	New anticipatory governance culture for innovation	<i>European Business Organization Law Review</i>	Public & Business Organizations	Organizational Culture Study	Anticipatory Governance
12	Casula & Migone (2025)	Collaborative innovation in the public sector	<i>Policy Design and Practice</i>	Public Sector	Policy Design	Collaborative Innovation
13	Kusnadi (2025)	Exploring new dimensions of public administration innovation	<i>International Journal for Science Review</i>	Public Administration	Exploratory Study	Innovation Dimensions
14	Deligiannis & Peristeras (2025)	Pioneering public sector innovation	<i>Administrative Sciences</i>	Public Administration	Pioneering Study	Public Sector Innovation
15	Okhrimenko (2025)	Public administration tools with innovative approaches	<i>Actual Problems of Innovative Economy and Law</i>	Economy & Law	Innovative Approach	Administrative Tools
16	Mokadam et al. (2025)	Public policy challenges in the digital era	<i>JIAN - Jurnal Ilmiah Administrasi Negara</i>	Digital Era	Challenge Analysis	Digital Public Policy
17	J. Zhang et al. (2025)	Does digital government promote collaborative innovation?	<i>PLOS One</i>	Digital Government	Innovation Evaluation	Collaborative Innovation
18	Liang (2025)	The role of government in public service innovation	<i>Academic Journal of Management and Social Sciences</i>	Public Services	Social Management	Government Role
19	Parinusa et al. (2024)	Effectiveness of digital government services	<i>The Journal of Academic Science</i>	Digital Services	Effectiveness Testing	Government Services

20	Cosoveanu et al. (2025)	The role and untapped potential of policy experimentation	<i>Environmental Policy and Governance</i>	Environmental Policy	Policy Experimentation	Policy Potential
21	Hadita (2020)	Legal politics of regional autonomy in regional governance	<i>NOMOI Law Review</i>	Regional Law	Legal Politics	Regional Autonomy
22	Sabir et al. (2021)	Administrative decentralization and authority transfer	<i>International Journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research</i>	Rural Development	Authority Analysis	Authority Transfer
23	Maulana et al. (2022)	Progress of regional autonomy and development policies	<i>Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi</i>	Public Administration	Policy Analysis	Regional Development
24	Sabara (2022)	Regional autonomy in political and governance systems	<i>Diponegoro Law Review</i>	Political System	Legal Study	Governance System
25	Kaban & Ramadani (2023)	Legal politics in implementing regional autonomy	<i>International Journal of Social Science and Human Research</i>	Legal Implementation	Juridical Study	Autonomy Implementation
26	Permatasari et al. (2023)	Regional autonomy in the context of local regulations	<i>Asian Journal of Social and Humanities</i>	Regional Regulation	Regulatory Analysis	Local Regulation
27	Baranyanan et al. (2024)	Compliance of regional autonomy with state principles	<i>Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues</i>	Sustainable Development	Regulatory Compliance	State Principles
28	Santos et al. (2025)	Implementing administrative decentralization	<i>Advances in Social Humanities Research</i>	Social Humanities	Implementation Study	Administrative Decentralization
29	Wilke et al. (2026)	Decentralization and ideology	<i>Political Science Research and Methods</i>	Political Science	Quantitative/Experimental	Ideology
30	Irwani (2025)	Fiscal, political, and developmental dimensions of decentralization	<i>Politeia: Journal of Public Administration and Political Studies</i>	Political Studies	Multidimensional Analysis	Fiscal, Political, Development
31	Kosec &	Improving	<i>World</i>	Rural	Field Experiment	Information &

	Wantchekon (2020)	rural governance and service delivery through information	<i>Development</i>	Development		Public Services
32	de la Riva Agüero (2022)	Do co-governance and CSOs complement city performance?	<i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i>	Urban Performance	Comparative Study	CSOs, Urban Performance
33	Setiawan et al. (2022)	Impact of local government capacity on public service performance	<i>Economies</i>	Local Economy	Econometric Analysis	Government Capacity
34	Salomo & Rahmayanti (2023)	Institutional progress and challenges in local governance performance	<i>SAGE Open</i>	Local Governance	Institutional Analysis	Institutional Challenges
35	Matlala (2024)	Factors influencing effective citizen-based monitoring	<i>Africa's Public Service Delivery & Performance Review</i>	African Public Services	Participatory Monitoring	Citizen Monitoring
36	Latupeirissa et al. (2024)	Transformation of public service delivery	<i>Sustainability</i>	Service Sustainability	Comprehensive Study	Service Transformation
37	Desmalita & Setyadi (2025)	Effects of transparency and accountability on local government performance	<i>Journal of Accounting and Finance Management</i>	Regional Accounting	Causal Analysis	Transparency, Accountability
38	Mofokeng et al. (2025)	Assessing the impact of digital technology on local government performance	<i>Journal of Local Government Research and Innovation</i>	Local Research	Impact Assessment	Digital Technology
39	Edwin Kariuki & S. M. A. Muathe (2025)	Enhancing public service delivery through good governance	<i>International Journal of Business Administration</i>	Public/Business Administration	Good Governance Analysis	Service Delivery
40	Zein & Septiani (2025)	Improving local government financial performance	<i>Journal of Posthumanism</i>	Government Finance	Performance Improvement	Financial Performance
41	Allen et al. (2020)	Quantitative measures of health policy implementation	<i>Implementation Science</i>	Health Policy	Quantitative Study	Implementation Outcomes

		n outcomes				
42	Razumovskia et al. (2020)	Effectiveness of government policy in innovation systems	<i>Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity</i>	Innovation Systems	Policy Evaluation	Innovation Systems
43	Ghoddousi et al. (2022)	Outcome-oriented socio-ecological framework for policy evaluation	<i>BioScience</i>	Social Ecology	Framework Analysis	Policy Evaluation
44	Knill et al. (2024)	How policy growth affects policy implementation	<i>Journal of European Public Policy</i>	European Union	Growth Analysis	Policy Implementation
45	Fernández-i-Marín et al. (2024)	Policy growth, implementation capacity, and governance	<i>Governance</i>	International Governance	Governance Capacity	Implementation Capacity
46	March et al. (2023)	Limited knowledge on national plastic policy implementation	<i>Cambridge Prisms: Plastics</i>	Environmental Policy	Case Study	Plastic Policy
47	Whitsel et al. (2024)	Policy implementation and outcome evaluation	<i>Health Research Policy and Systems</i>	Health Systems	Outcome Evaluation	Outcome Evaluation
48	Mahmoudi & Abbasian-Naghneh (2024)	Critical factors affecting policy implementation success	<i>Evidence Based Health Policy, Management and Economics</i>	Health Management	Factor Analysis	Policy Success
49	Djamaludin et al. (2025)	Integrated policy implementation in administrative reform	<i>Journal of Posthumanism</i>	Administrative Reform	Integrated Policy Study	Administrative Reform
50	M. Le Zhang (2025)	Measuring the impact of place-based early-years policy	<i>International Journal of Population Data Science</i>	Population Data Science	Impact Measurement	Place-Based Policy

Source: Author's own calculations, 2026

Research Variable Mapping

The mapping of research variables across the 50 analyzed articles demonstrates a relatively balanced distribution into five major groups, each consisting of 10 articles. This distribution indicates that the literature on regional leadership, public policy innovation, regional autonomy, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness has developed in parallel, although these themes have not yet

been fully integrated into a comprehensive analytical framework.

The first group, regional leadership, focuses on leadership ethics, transformational leadership styles, accountability, and the role of leaders in promoting digital governance innovation and public service improvement. The approaches within this group are dominated by qualitative and descriptive methods, including ethical studies, political analysis, and implementation studies. Research in this cluster tends to explore the normative and behavioral dimensions of leadership, with emphasis on administrative responsibility and the political legitimacy of regional leaders.

The second group, public policy innovation, focuses on the application of digital technology, collaborative innovation in the public sector, policy experimentation, and anticipatory governance culture. The approaches commonly employed include innovation case studies, policy design, and analyses of digital government service effectiveness. The examined variables emphasize digital transformation, cross-sectoral collaboration, and policy adaptation to changes in social and technological environments.

The third group, regional autonomy or decentralization, examines the legal politics of administrative decentralization, compliance with state principles, and the fiscal and ideological dimensions of regional autonomy. Research approaches within this cluster tend to be normative and juridical-political, focusing on regulatory frameworks and the implementation of authority at the local level.

Meanwhile, the governmental performance and policy effectiveness groups predominantly employ evaluative and quantitative approaches. These two groups emphasize the measurement of transparency, accountability, institutional capacity, and the systemic impacts of policies. Overall, the variable mapping demonstrates that each cluster has developed strongly internally, while integration among variables remains an open area for further research.

Table 3. Classification of Research Variables Based on the Analyzed Articles

Variable Group	Main Research Focus	Number of Articles	Characteristics of the Approach
Regional Leadership	Leadership ethics, transformational leadership styles, accountability, and the role of leaders in digital governance innovation and public service delivery.	10	Predominantly employs qualitative and descriptive approaches to explore ethical dimensions and the administrative responsibilities of regional leaders.
Public Policy Innovation	Application of digital technology, collaborative innovation in the public sector, policy experimentation, and anticipatory governance culture.	10	Focuses on case studies of technological innovation, policy design approaches, and analyses of the effectiveness of digital government services.
Regional Autonomy or Decentralization	Legal politics of administrative decentralization, compliance with state principles, and the fiscal and ideological dimensions of regional autonomy.	10	Utilizes normative and juridical-political approaches examining regulatory frameworks and the implementation of authority at the regional level.
Governmental Performance	Transparency, financial accountability, institutional capacity, and the impact of digital technology on the quality of public services.	10	Employs evaluative and quantitative approaches to measure governance efficiency and citizen participation in performance monitoring.
Policy Effectiveness	Evaluation of policy implementation outcomes, measurement of socio-ecological impacts, determinants of policy success, and administrative reform.	10	Applies evidence-based approaches using quantitative methodologies and systemic evaluation frameworks to assess policy impacts.

Source: Author's own calculations, 2026

Table 3 illustrates that the literature on regional leadership, public policy innovation, regional autonomy, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness is evenly distributed across the analyzed studies. Each variable group demonstrates distinct research characteristics and methodological tendencies. Studies on regional leadership and regional autonomy are predominantly qualitative and normative, emphasizing ethical, political, and institutional dimensions. In contrast, studies on governmental performance and policy effectiveness tend to adopt quantitative and evaluative approaches to measure governance outcomes and policy impacts. Meanwhile, research on public policy innovation occupies an intermediate position by combining technological, collaborative, and governance-oriented perspectives. Overall, this mapping indicates that although each variable has developed substantially within its respective domain, the integration among these variables remains limited, thereby highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and interconnected analytical framework.

Table 4. Substantive Synthesis of the Literature Based on Leadership and Innovation

Category	Sub-Category	Main Characteristics	Implications
Leadership Style	Transformational	Vision-oriented and focused on organizational change	Encourages bureaucratic reform
	Adaptive	Responsive to complexity and uncertainty	Enhances policy flexibility
	Collaborative	Based on networks and multi-actor coordination	Strengthens participatory governance
Types of Innovation	Digital Innovation	Utilization of technology in public services	Improves efficiency and transparency
	Collaborative Innovation	Cross-sectoral collaboration	Produces participation-based solutions
	Governance Innovation	Transformation of governance systems	Promotes policy integration
Role of Autonomy	Enabler	Provides discretionary policy space	Encourages local innovation
	Constraint	Limited by regulations and institutional capacity	Restricts innovation

Source: Author's own calculations, 2026

The synthesis of the analyzed articles indicates that the development of the literature is not only quantitative in nature, but also reflects significant substantive shifts. Within the leadership dimension, there has been a transition from traditionally dominant transformational approaches toward more adaptive and collaborative forms of leadership, in line with the increasing complexity of local governance systems.

In the dimension of innovation, a shift can be observed from technology-based innovation toward collaborative and governance-oriented innovation. This development suggests that innovation in the public sector is no longer merely technocratic in character, but rather an interactive process involving multiple actors within governance systems.

Integrated Perspective

The synthesis of the 50 analyzed articles demonstrates that although the studies are distributed across five variable clusters, conceptually they form an interconnected ecosystem of local governance. This integrated perspective positions regional leadership as the primary driving force, regional autonomy and decentralization as structures of opportunity and institutional constraints, public policy innovation as an instrument of transformation, and governmental performance and policy effectiveness as measurable outcomes.

At the leadership level, [Springer et al. \(2020\)](#), [Taufik et al. \(2021\)](#), [Sabchev \(2022\)](#), and [Sancino et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize the importance of leadership style, ethics, relational dynamics, and political legitimacy in local governance. The dimensions of responsibility and accountability are further reinforced by [Ndraha \(2023\)](#), [M. R. Ramadhan \(2023\)](#), and [Septiana et al. \(2023\)](#). Meanwhile, [Wibowo & Sukardi \(2025\)](#) and [Bachir-Bendaoud \(2025\)](#) demonstrate that transformational leadership and digital vision act as catalysts for governance innovation. Overall, these studies position regional

leaders as policy entrepreneurs who determine the direction of change within public organizations.

The structure of autonomy as an arena of action is examined by [Hadita \(2020\)](#), [Sabir et al. \(2021\)](#), [Maulana et al. \(2022\)](#), [Sabara \(2022\)](#), [Kaban & Ramadani \(2023\)](#), [Permatasari et al. \(2023\)](#), [Baranyanan et al. \(2024\)](#), [Santos et al. \(2025\)](#), [Wilke et al. \(2026\)](#), and [Irwani \(2025\)](#). These studies demonstrate that administrative, fiscal, and political decentralization provide discretionary space while simultaneously constraining innovation through regulations, ideology, and fiscal capacity.

Within this space, policy innovation develops through the studies of [Ahern \(2025\)](#), [Casula & Migone \(2025\)](#), [Kusnadi \(2025\)](#), [Deligiannis & Peristeras \(2025\)](#), [Okhrimenko \(2025\)](#), [Mokadam et al. \(2025\)](#), [J. Zhang et al. \(2025\)](#), [Liang \(2025\)](#), [Parinusa et al. \(2024\)](#), and [Cosoveanu et al. \(2025\)](#). Across these studies, digital, collaborative, and experimental innovations are understood as responses to the complexity of public services and increasing demands for transparency.

The impacts of these developments are reflected in governmental performance, as discussed by [Kosec & Wantchekon \(2020\)](#), [de la Riva Agüero \(2022\)](#), [Setiawan et al. \(2022\)](#), [Salomo & Rahmayanti \(2023\)](#), [Matlala \(2024\)](#), [Latupeirissa et al. \(2024\)](#), [Desmalita & Setyadi \(2025\)](#), [Mofokeng et al. \(2025\)](#), [Kariuki & A. Muathe \(2025\)](#), and [Zein & Septiani \(2025\)](#). These scholars collectively emphasizing transparency, institutional capacity, citizen participation, and digital technology.

Finally, policy effectiveness as an outcome is analyzed through evidence-based evaluative approaches by [Allen et al. \(2020\)](#), [Razumovskaia et al. \(2020\)](#), [Ghoddousi et al. \(2022\)](#), [Knill et al. \(2024\)](#), [Fernández-i-Marín et al. \(2024\)](#), [March et al. \(2023\)](#), [Whitsel et al. \(2024\)](#), [Mahmoudi & Abbasian-Naghneh \(2024\)](#), [Djamaludin et al. \(2025\)](#), and [M. Le Zhang \(2025\)](#).

Systemically, these five clusters form an integrative sequence in which strategic leadership utilizes autonomous space to promote innovation, thereby enhancing governmental performance and produces measurable policy effectiveness. This perspective confirms that the transformation of local governance can only be fully understood when these five dimensions are analyzed simultaneously rather than separately.

These findings indicate that the relationship between regional leadership, public policy innovation, and regional autonomy cannot be understood partially, but rather as an interconnected system within governance structures. Therefore, further discussion is required to explain how the interaction among these three dimensions operates within a more comprehensive theoretical framework.

DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the 50 analyzed articles demonstrates that regional leadership, public policy innovation, regional autonomy, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness form an interconnected governance system. Previous studies have generally treated these five dimensions separately, resulting in a fragmented understanding of local governance dynamics ([Snyder, 2019](#)). However, the findings of this systematic review reveal that leadership functions as the central driving node that activates autonomous space, while policy innovation serves as a strategic instrument transforming institutional authority into measurable governmental performance and policy effectiveness.

Although the existing literature has made significant contributions to understanding leadership, innovation, and regional autonomy, most studies remain sectoral in nature and leaving the dynamic interactions among these variables largely unexplained. Leadership studies tend to focus on individual styles and characteristics without linking them to institutional structures, whereas innovation studies emphasize technological aspects without adequately considering the role of strategic actors. Concurrently, the decentralization literature is still dominated by normative and institutional analyses, providing limited empirical understanding of how leadership and innovation operate within constrained autonomous spaces.

From a broader perspective, these findings align with the New Public Governance (NPG) approach, which emphasizes the importance of collaboration, networks, and multi-actor interactions in modern public governance ([Ansell et al., 2021](#); [Torfing et al., 2019](#)). NPG argues that policy success is no longer determined solely by bureaucratic capacity, but by the government's ability to manage relationships with multiple actors. In this context, regional leaders function as facilitators who integrate interests, coordinate resources, and encourage collaboration-based innovation.

Within the leadership dimension, various studies emphasize that regional heads act as strategic actors who determine the direction of public organizational change. Transformational and adaptive leadership have been shown to contribute significantly to improved public organizational performance and policy innovation ([Alblooshi et al., 2021](#); [Kurzahls et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, the ethical dimension of leadership serves as a foundation for legitimacy and public trust in governance systems ([Torfing et al., 2021](#)). These findings indicate that leadership extends beyond administrative capability to include strategic vision, political legitimacy, and the capacity to mobilize bureaucracy in producing systematic change.

Nevertheless, leadership does not operate within a value-free or unlimited space. Regional autonomy and decentralization provide discretionary opportunities while simultaneously imposing institutional constraints that shape the actions of regional leaders. The literature shows that fiscal

capacity, institutional quality, and local political configurations are major determinants of decentralization effectiveness ([Kraus et al., 2020](#)). In this regard, regional autonomy plays a dual role: as an enabler that opens opportunities for innovation and as a structural constraint that limits action through regulations and capacity limitations.

In the Indonesian context, these dynamics have become increasingly relevant due to tendencies toward recentralization in several national policies. This phenomenon indicates that decentralization does not always progress linearly, but is strongly influenced by political dynamics and national regulatory frameworks ([Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019](#)). Such conditions require regional leaders to develop adaptive and strategic leadership capacities in utilizing the available autonomous space.

Public policy innovation subsequently emerges as a response to social complexity and the demands of service digitalization. Digital transformation within the public sector has become a major driver of policy innovation in recent years. From the perspective of Digital Era Governance (DEG), technology functions not merely as a tool, but as a catalyst that transforms governance structures and processes. However, the findings of this study indicate that effective innovation is not solely digital in nature, but also collaborative, where technology acts as an enabler for multi-actor interaction within policy processes ([Torfing et al., 2019](#)).

The integration between leadership and innovation has direct implications for local governmental performance. Studies demonstrate that governance quality and institutional capacity are significantly associated with improvements in public services and policy effectiveness. Transparency, accountability, and adaptive capacity emerge as important indicators reflecting the success of governance transformation processes. In this regard, governmental performance functions as a bridge connecting innovation processes with policy effectiveness.

Conceptually, the integrated perspective developed from this literature synthesis forms a clear systemic pathway. Strategic leadership utilizes autonomous space to promote policy innovation; innovation strengthens governmental performance; and optimal performance ultimately produces higher policy effectiveness. This model is visualized in Figure 3 (Transformation Loop), which illustrates the dynamic and circular relationship among actors, structures, processes, and outcomes within local governance systems.



Figure 3. Integrated Perspective Model of Leadership, Autonomy, Innovation, and Policy Effectiveness

Unlike previous literature approaches that tend to be partial and fragmented, this model emphasizes that local governance transformation is an interdependent and continuous process. Within this framework, regional leaders are not merely policy implementers, but strategic nodes that connect decentralization with the sustainable achievement of public policy outcomes. Accordingly, the primary contribution of this study lies in the development of an integrated analytical framework capable of explaining the dynamics of leadership, innovation, and regional autonomy within a unified governance system.

This model does not merely represent linear relationships among variables, but rather demonstrates a cyclical mechanism explaining how leadership, autonomy, and innovation mutually reinforce one another throughout the governance transformation process. Consequently, the model offers a conceptual contribution that goes beyond the partial approaches commonly found in previous literature.

CONCLUSION

The systematic literature review of 50 articles published between 2020 and 2025 demonstrates that studies on regional leadership, public policy innovation, regional autonomy, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness have developed significantly, although they are still predominantly analyzed in a partial manner. Through the application of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach guided by PRISMA, this study successfully maps the conceptual relationships among these variables in a more structured and comprehensive way.

The findings confirm that regional leadership constitutes a strategic node in governance transformation, functioning as a policy entrepreneur that integrates vision, legitimacy, and bureaucratic capacity within the framework of regional autonomy. Regional autonomy operates both

as a space of opportunity and as a structural constraint, while policy innovation serves as the primary instrument linking leadership with improved governmental performance and policy effectiveness. The integration of these three dimensions demonstrates that policy effectiveness is determined not only by policy design, but also by the quality of leadership and the governance system's ability to manage change in an adaptive and collaborative manner.

Conceptually, this study offers an integrated framework through the Transformation Loop model, which explains the dynamic interactions among leadership, autonomy, innovation, governmental performance, and policy effectiveness. These findings affirm that partial approaches are conceptually inadequate. The integration of three major dimensions of leadership, autonomy, and innovation is essential for understanding the transformation of local governance systems.

Regarding research implication, future studies should empirically test this model, particularly regarding the role of adaptive leadership in crisis situations and the utilization of artificial intelligence-based technologies in regional policy innovation. Practically, the government, especially the Ministry of Home Affairs, needs to strengthen the strategic leadership capacity of regional heads. Furthermore, policymakers should promote collaborative, digitally integrated innovation ecosystems to foster local governance structures that are adaptive, accountable, and driven by the creation of public value.

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