



Synchronization of Central and Regional Government Policies in Public Services

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/par.v2i4.4758>

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Received: 05-08-2025

Accepted: 12-08-2025

Published: 31-08-2025



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Abstract: Public service is the face of successful democratic and inclusive governance. In the context of Indonesia as a decentralized state, the role of local governments in delivering public services has become increasingly significant. However, one of the fundamental challenges that continues to surface is the lack of synchronization between central and local government policies. This misalignment not only leads to overlapping authorities and program inefficiencies but also directly impacts the continuity and quality of services that should ideally benefit citizens. This article aims to critically analyze the dynamics of policy misalignment across governmental levels and propose relevant strategies to foster a more adaptive and responsive policy harmonization. Employing a qualitative-descriptive approach based on literature review, the article examines regulations, policy documents, and relevant academic literature. The analysis reveals that the root causes of policy synchronization issues lie in several key factors: weak vertical and horizontal coordination, sectoral ego among institutions, limited institutional capacity at the local level, and the absence of an institutionalized consultative mechanism. To address these challenges, reforms in

governance coordination are necessary strengthening the facilitative role of the Ministry of Home Affairs, integrating development planning through a national digital system, and designing a decentralized model that allows contextual flexibility while maintaining the principle of national policy unity. Strong policy synchronization is a vital prerequisite for building public services that are citizen-oriented and aligned with the vision of sustainable national development.

Keywords: Policy Synchronization, Public Service, Regional Autonomy, Governmental Coordination

Introduction

Public service is the main pillar in realizing the goals of the state, as stated in the Preamble to the 1945 Constitution, namely to protect all Indonesian people and all Indonesian territory, advance general welfare, and improve the life of the nation (Riska Chyntia Dewi & Suparno Suparno, 2022). Within the framework of modern governance, public service is no longer understood merely as an administrative activity, but rather as a form of state responsibility in fulfilling the basic rights of citizens through responsive, efficient, and equitable governance.

As political reforms rolled out in the late 1990s, Indonesia entered a new era in its governance system through the adoption of decentralization. Through Law Number 22 of 1999, (DPR RI, 1999), which was then perfected by Law Number 32 of 2004 (DPR RI, 2004) and is currently in effect in the form of Law Number 23 of 2014 (DPR RI, 2014). Regarding

Regional Government, the state grants regions broad authority to regulate and manage certain government affairs within the framework of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI). This spirit of decentralization is based on the principle of regional autonomy, which aims to bring services closer to the community, accelerate locally-based development, and increase public accountability and participation.

However, the implementation of regional autonomy has not been without its challenges. One crucial issue that continues to challenge governance practices in Indonesia is the disharmony between central and regional government policies. This lack of synchronicity is evident in various aspects, from the development of development plans and budgeting to the implementation of public service programs. Several policy studies have found that regional governments often struggle to adapt normative and uniform central policies to heterogeneous local realities (Kuncoro, 2016). Conversely, some regional policies are also considered contradictory or inconsistent with national policy directions, leading to authority friction and program inefficiencies.

This phenomenon is exacerbated by overlapping regulations between ministries/agencies at the central level and regional apparatuses. For example, in basic education, the central government, through the Ministry of Education, can issue instructive policies, while district/city governments, responsible for implementation, face fiscal or bureaucratic limitations to follow through. Similar issues occur in the health sector, environmental management, spatial planning, and regional investment licensing. This policy misalignment ultimately leads to ineffective public services, inability to adapt to local needs, and potentially leading to social inequality in various regions.

Theoretically, policy asynchrony can be understood through a systems theory approach. (Sloan, 2023), which views public policy as the result of input and output processes within a political system. When relationships between subsystems, such as between the central and regional governments, are not aligned, the resulting policy output will be fragmented. Furthermore, the theory of Good Governance (Jefri, 2018), emphasizes the importance of coordination, accountability, and participation as principles of good governance. In this context, policy synchronization is a crucial element in ensuring cohesion among government actors and creating certainty in public services.

On the other hand, from a regulatory perspective, there is no binding and systemic policy harmonization mechanism. Coordination forums such as the Development Planning Conference (Musrenbang) often serve as mere administrative formalities without producing strategic agreements that can be operationally followed up. The Regional Government Information System (SIPD), developed to integrate regional and central planning and budgeting, also faces challenges in implementation and data uniformity.

The issue of synchronization also concerns institutional aspects. The Ministry of Home Affairs, as the institution responsible for fostering and overseeing regional governments, has not yet optimally coordinated policies across ministries/agencies that directly impact the implementation of regional government affairs. Often, policies issued by sectoral ministries do not go through harmonization mechanisms involving the Ministry of Home Affairs, making it difficult for regions to develop consistent and sustainable planning.

The urgency of policy synchronization is growing amid public demands for fast, transparent, and high-quality public services. In the digital era and global economic integration, central and regional governments are required to work collaboratively, not competitively. Policy harmonization is not merely a technocratic issue, but a reflection of the state's institutional capacity to deliver integrated governance based on citizen needs.

Based on the problem formulation that has been put forward, the purpose of this study is to analyze the dynamics of policy disharmony between the central and regional governments in the implementation of public services, identify the main factors causing such policy disharmony, and formulate relevant strategies to strengthen the synchronization and harmonization of policies between institutions and between levels of government. This study also aims to contribute to the development of a more adaptive, effective, and oriented framework for policy coordination and integration that is oriented towards improving the quality of public services within the framework of a unitary state.

Methodology

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach (Sholikhah, 1970). This study aims to deeply understand the dynamics of policy synchronization between the central and regional governments in the delivery of public services. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for studying complex, interactive, and non-directly quantifiable socio-political phenomena. Through this approach, researchers seek to build a contextual understanding of policy relations between levels of government, which are fraught with institutional, political, and bureaucratic dynamics.

This type of research is a library research (Darmalaksana, 2020), where data is obtained and analyzed from various written sources of scientific relevance and authority. Secondary data sources used include legal documents such as Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government, government regulations, ministerial regulations, and sectoral policy documents from relevant ministries. In addition, national and international scientific journal articles, reference books, previous research reports, and official publications from government agencies such as Bappenas, the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (KemenPAN-RB) also served as analytical references.

Data collection was conducted through a systematic literature search, taking into account credibility, thematic relevance, and depth of substance. The literature review focused on documents discussing the formulation and implementation of central and regional policies, the dynamics of inter-institutional coordination, and challenges in public service delivery.

Data analysis was conducted using content analysis, a technique for interpreting the meaning of written documents through a systematic and objective process. Researchers identified key themes, patterns of relationships between policies, and regulatory inconsistencies that underlie synchronization issues. Additionally, a comparative-critical approach was used to compare policy practices across various sectors and regions as a basis for argumentative generalizations.

The entire analysis process was conducted inductively, while maintaining reference to key theories in public administration, governance, and decentralization. With this methodology, the research is expected to produce findings that are not only descriptive but also reflective and prescriptive in formulating applicable and evidence-based policy synchronization strategies.

Results and Discussion

The Complexity of Relations Between Central and Regional Governments in a Decentralized System

Decentralization has been an important milestone in the reform of Indonesian governance since 1999 (Mahmuzar, 2020). Within the framework of regional autonomy, local governments are granted the authority to manage and regulate their own affairs, except for those designated as the absolute authority of the central government. However, in practice, the relationship between the central government and the regions is not always harmonious and often creates conflicts of authority that directly impact the quality of public services.

The decentralization policy outlined in Law Number 23 of 2014 has attempted to clarify the division of authority between the central government, provinces, and districts/cities. However, the reality on the ground shows overlapping authority in various sectors. For example, in education and health matters, national regulations often fail to address the highly diverse fiscal and administrative capacities of local governments.

The tug-of-war between central and regional interests is not only structural but also political. Regional heads elected through direct elections often have agendas that are not entirely aligned with national priority programs. This creates a high potential for disharmony in the planning and implementation of public service policies.

This complexity is exacerbated by the absence of effective and regular vertical communication mechanisms between policy actors at the central and regional levels. Many strategic central policies are passed down directly to the regions through circulars or ministerial instructions, without prior dialogue or consultation. As a result, regions feel their policies are merely extensions of the central government, with no room for adaptation to local needs.

In the context of public services, the problem becomes more apparent when the public, as service users, is faced with uncertain procedures and service standards that vary across regions. This indicates that asynchronous public policies have created inequality and inefficiency within the service bureaucracy.

This disharmony is also reflected in various findings by the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK) and the Indonesian Ombudsman, which indicate a mismatch between regional program planning and implementation due to excessively dynamic changes in central government policies. This situation creates additional administrative burdens for regions, which must continually make adjustments, even though these may not be relevant to their local context.

On the other hand, the provincial government's role as a coordinating intermediary between the central government and districts/cities is suboptimal. This is because provinces often focus on their own affairs, failing to actively serve as mentors or facilitators of policy synchronization.

In some cases, successful synchronization depends more on personal relationships between regional heads and central officials than on institutional mechanisms. When political relations are harmonious, coordination runs smoothly; conversely, if there are conflicts of interest, public services can be disrupted. This demonstrates weak coordinating institutions and low institutional trust between levels of government.

Therefore, it is necessary to redesign a more functional framework for central-regional relations, based on clear legal norms, fiscal equity, and participatory coordination mechanisms that adapt to local contexts. This way, the complexity of the relationships that have hampered public service performance can be systematically minimized.

The Problem of Regulatory Inconsistency and Fragmentation of Authority

One of the main roots of the policy asynchronization between the central and regional governments in public services is the problem of regulatory inconsistency (Hafidurrahman, 2021). In Indonesia's legal system, which adheres to the principle of legislative hierarchy, lower-level regulations should not conflict with higher-level regulations. However, in practice, many regional regulations (Perda), gubernatorial regulations, and even circulars

from regional heads are found to be inconsistent with or even contradict central government policies.

This phenomenon isn't always caused by bad faith on the part of local governments, but often results from inconsistent sectoral regulations issued by ministries/agencies. For example, the health sector, regulated by the Ministry of Health, often creates technical regulations that differ from the general guidelines issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the implementation of mandatory basic service matters. This disharmony confuses regions in implementation, as they face a duality of directives.

Furthermore, central regulations often change very quickly, leaving local governments with no room for comprehensive adjustments. For example, regulatory changes in the national education system or the National Health Insurance (JKN) system often occur without adequate transition mechanisms and technical assistance. This not only complicates regional implementation technically but also creates the potential for budget waste and inconsistencies in service output.

The problem of inconsistency also arises at the level of legal interpretation. Many central regulations use normative phrases such as "in accordance with regional authority," "can be implemented," or "adapted to regional needs," which ultimately lead to multiple interpretations at the implementing level. This interpretive gap can create chaos in the regional decision-making process, particularly in developing strategic public service programs.

The fragmentation of authority between institutions and levels of government further exacerbates the problem. Often, a single government function falls under the responsibility of multiple ministries simultaneously, without adequate coordination. For example, clean water management involves the Ministry of Public Works and Housing, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Home Affairs, but no single authority is responsible for harmonizing its implementation at the regional level. This leads to overlapping, budget wastage, and confusion for local governments.

On the other hand, fragmentation of authority also occurs due to unclear delegation of concurrent functions. Many local governments lack clarity regarding the boundaries of their authority in certain matters, particularly in sectors requiring cross-regional collaboration, such as transportation, the environment, and disaster mitigation. This situation directly impacts legal uncertainty and ineffectiveness in cross-regional public service planning.

Regulatory conflicts often result in judicial review in the Supreme Court or the Constitutional Court, but legal resolution does not necessarily address the root of the problem. When a regional regulation is revoked, the central government often lacks a replacement to fill the regulatory gap, resulting in a legal vacuum in the provision of public services in that region.

The problems of regulatory inconsistency and fragmentation of authority demonstrate the weakness of policy planning based on integration across levels of government. The lack of harmonization from the policy formulation stage is the primary cause of the lack of synchronization during implementation. Sectoral and exclusive policy designs must be revised to become inclusive, collaborative, and based on the logic of inter-actor and inter-regional systems.

To address this problem, a legislative planning system is needed that involves regional governments from the outset of the national policy formulation process. Furthermore, it is crucial to establish periodic, deliberative national-regional regulatory forums to ensure that each central regulation is properly internalized by the regions, in accordance with their respective characteristics and capacities.

The Need for Harmonization of Planning and Budgeting

Development planning and budgeting are two key instruments in governance that cannot be separated. In the context of the relationship between the central and regional governments, planning and budgeting often become critical points that trigger policy asymmetries. The central government has a long-term national development vision outlined in the RPJPN (National Medium-Term Development Plan) and RPJMN (National Medium-Term Development Plan), while regional governments develop RPJPD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan) and RPJMD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan) taking local conditions into account. Unfortunately, this disharmony between planning documents often results in overlapping programs, misaligned priorities, and ultimately, the failure to achieve overall development goals.

The lack of synchronization between central and regional planning documents is also influenced by differences in development cycles and timelines, as well as the political dynamics in each region. Many regions are developing new RPJMDs that do not fully adhere to the RPJMN due to leadership transitions, limited human resources for planners, or an inability to access comprehensive national macroeconomic information. As a result, development program implementation often proceeds independently and does not reinforce each other.

Beyond planning, the budgeting process also faces similar challenges. Transfers to regions through the General Allocation Fund (DAU), Special Allocation Fund (DAK), and Regional Incentive Fund (DID) are often inconsistent with regional development priorities. The central government tends to standardize allocations based on specific indicators, without considering local specificities outlined in regional planning documents. This mismatch creates tension between regional fiscal flexibility and central government normative provisions.

Another challenge in harmonizing planning and budgeting is the weak integration of information systems between the central and regional governments. Platforms like the SIPD (Regional Government Information System) developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs still face implementation challenges, both in terms of the technical capacity of regional human resources and infrastructure readiness. As a result, data integration, reporting, and monitoring processes are not optimal enough to ensure alignment between national and regional policies.

One effort to strengthen this harmonization is to promote an integrated planning approach, where national and regional development plans are formulated through coordinating forums such as the National Development Planning Forum (Musrenbangnas) and Regional Development Planning Forum (Musrenbangda), which are participatory and synergistic. Unfortunately, the Musrenbang process is often merely a formality and does not yet produce binding recommendations for strategic decision-making.

Strengthening coordination across ministries and agencies is needed to design policy instruments capable of integrating local needs into a national framework. One example is the thematic-holistic-integrative-spatial (THIS) approach, introduced in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN). This approach aims to integrate issues across sectors and regions to support more inclusive sustainable development.

On the other hand, local governments must also improve their planning capacity through ongoing education and training, as well as the use of data for evidence-based planning. Reliance on vertical instructions from the central government without a solid understanding of the national framework will increase the potential for policy fragmentation.

Thus, harmonization of planning and budgeting is key to creating synergy between the central and regional governments. Without strong alignment in the planning and resource allocation stages, public services will be less than optimal. Greater political will is needed from both levels of government to build an integrated, responsive system capable of comprehensively addressing public needs.

Policy Synchronization Strategy: A Coordinative and Collaborative Approach

To address the challenges of policy inconsistencies between the central and regional governments, a coordinative and collaborative strategy is a key approach to building synergistic governance. This strategy emphasizes not only formal bureaucratic mechanisms but also the importance of building intensive, participatory, and results-oriented communication between various levels of government. In the context of decentralization, this approach allows for the articulation of local needs into national policy while maintaining a unified direction for national development.

A coordinative approach emphasizes the importance of clear institutional structures and inter-agency coordination procedures. One strategy that can be optimized is strengthening the role of the Ministry of Home Affairs as the focal point for coordination between central government policies and technical implementation at the regional level. Furthermore, coordination forums such as the National Coordination Meeting (Rakornas), the Development Planning Consultation (Musrenbang), and other sectoral forums should serve as platforms for actualizing synergies, not merely as mere formalities.

On the other hand, a collaborative approach emphasizes the importance of working relationships built on mutual trust, mutual need, and complementarity. Collaboration demands an open and adaptive bureaucratic culture, particularly in accepting input from the local level and integrating policies based on data and the real regional context. This type of collaboration involves not only government agencies but also non-governmental actors such as civil society, academics, and business actors as part of multi-actor governance.

One exemplary collaborative practice is regional involvement in national policy formulation through policy hearings or joint planning mechanisms, rather than just post-decision consultations. For example, in infrastructure development planning, cross-level collaboration can be facilitated through central-regional synchronization teams that are thematic and adaptable to strategic sectors.

The implementation of this strategy also requires support from an integrated information system. This system must be able to map the alignment and gaps between central and regional policies in various public service sectors. The use of digital technologies such as monitoring dashboards, e-policy tracking, and integrated databases can help central and regional governments monitor progress, identify obstacles, and make evidence-based policy decisions.

Furthermore, strengthening institutional capacity in the regions is a key prerequisite for ensuring that regions are not merely objects of central policy but are actively involved in the process of policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. The central government must design a scheme for strengthening human resources, funding, and technical support that can address concrete challenges in the regions without undermining their autonomy.

It's also crucial to restructure the role of oversight institutions like the Supreme Audit Agency (BPK), the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), and the Ombudsman so that they serve not only as top-down controls but also as facilitators of healthy and balanced policy dialogue between the central and regional governments. Constructive policy audits can create room for improvement, rather than simply administrative punishment, which can actually lead to policy stagnation at the regional level.

A coordinative and collaborative approach also needs to be strengthened by flexible yet firm legal norms. This means the central government must develop master regulations that can accommodate variations in regional policies, with clear and measurable guiding policy principles. An omnibus law policy can offer a compromise in streamlining regulations and reducing overlap, but its implementation must be monitored to ensure it does not eliminate the scope for regional creativity.

With the right strategy, policy synchronization can occur not through coercion, but through a collective awareness that quality public services can only be achieved through collaborative, targeted, and responsive work to community needs. The keys to success lie in political commitment, adaptive institutional design, and bureaucratic leadership capable of building bridges between levels of government.

Conclusion

Policy synchronization between the central and regional governments is a crucial element in creating an efficient, responsive, and equitable public service system. This research shows that policy misalignment remains a persistent problem in decentralization practices in Indonesia. This occurs due to differing political orientations, overlapping regulations, and weak coordination between levels of government. The complexity of the relationship between the central and regional governments often results in dual authority and implementation confusion in the field, ultimately harming the public as service recipients.

Furthermore, regulatory inconsistencies, both in the form of vertical disharmony between central and regional regulations and horizontal disharmony between regions, are major obstacles to the delivery of integrated public services. Conversely, misalignment in planning and budgeting, particularly in top-down mechanisms lacking substantive regional participation, further weakens the effectiveness of cross-sectoral and cross-regional public policies.

Therefore, a policy synchronization strategy is needed that is not only administrative, but also substantive and collaborative. A coordinating approach between institutions, consistent communication forums, alignment of national and regional planning systems, and regulatory improvements are urgent steps to strengthen alignment between the central and regional governments. Moving forward, public service development must be based on the integration of cross-actor roles, strengthening institutional capacity, and openness of information, so that the principle of decentralization goes beyond the distribution of authority to a shared vision for achieving equitable public welfare.

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