

From National Strategy to Local Reality: A Framework for Effective E Government in Indonesia's Decentralized Bureaucracy

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ABSTRACT: This study investigates the institutional and infrastructural challenges affecting the implementation of e government in Indonesia within the context of administrative decentralization. Over the past decade, Indonesia has significantly improved its E Government Development Index (EGDI), rising from 0.45 in 2016 to 0.72 in 2022. Despite national level progress, regional disparities persist, driven by institutional fragmentation, limited human capital, and uneven ICT infrastructure. The objective of this study is to examine these constraints and offer a conceptual framework for addressing them. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study draws on secondary data from UN EGDI reports, national regulations, and case studies such as North Barito and urban-rural comparisons. The research utilizes thematic and comparative analyses to identify patterns in policy disconnection, leadership gaps, and citizen participation. Findings reveal that institutional coherence, participatory governance models, and adaptive leadership significantly influence successful e government implementation. Integrated policy models, such as Whole of Government and Interoperable Digital Government Frameworks, improve alignment between national strategies and local applications. Additionally, participatory design and feedback loops are essential for increasing service quality and trust. The study concludes that Indonesia's path forward requires not only technological investment but also structural and cultural reforms. This includes capacity building for public servants, equitable infrastructure development, and inclusive digital engagement mechanisms. The insights gained have broader implications for other decentralized states aiming to advance digital transformation through coordinated, participatory, and context sensitive governance models.

Keywords: E Government, Decentralization, Institutional Design, Digital Transformation, Indonesia, Public Sector Reform, Digital Participation.



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia has significantly advanced its digital governance, reflected in the rise of its EGDI ranking from 116th in 2016 to 77th in 2022. Despite these gains, persistent gaps remain compared

to regional leaders such as Singapore and Malaysia, largely due to fragmented institutional arrangements and uneven ICT capacity. This study addresses these unresolved challenges by examining how decentralization shapes e-government adoption, focusing on institutional fragmentation, infrastructural disparities, and leadership gaps. The research seeks to clarify why national strategies often fail at the local level and how more integrated governance models can bridge this divide (Kencono et al., 2024; Yuniarti et al., 2024).

Indonesia's journey toward digital governance has been underpinned by a series of targeted strategic reforms introduced since 2016. Among the most notable is the Smart ASN initiative, a platform aimed at integrating digital tools into civil service management to improve efficiency, accountability, and performance monitoring (Yuniarti et al., 2024). Complementing this is Presidential Regulation No. 95 of 2018 on Electronic Based Government Systems (SPBE), which articulates a national roadmap for implementing e government practices at all levels of public administration. This regulation emphasizes key pillars such as digital infrastructure, open government data, cybersecurity, and human resource capacity development. Together, these frameworks represent a cohesive strategy to transform public service delivery, enhance transparency, and improve citizen access through digital means (Chanias, 2017). Despite the ambitious scope, practical implementation has revealed persistent challenges, including disparities in local capacity, uneven infrastructure distribution, and cultural resistance to bureaucratic change. These issues often lead to inconsistent adoption rates and reduced impact in under resourced regions.

At the heart of Indonesia's digital transformation vision lie foundational goals of improving governance efficiency, increasing transparency, and promoting inclusive development. These objectives align not only with internal reform agendas but also with global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). E government is viewed as a powerful tool to reduce bureaucratic complexity, enhance responsiveness, and deliver services more equitably, especially to marginalized populations (Setiawan, 2024). The government's citizen centric design approach is intended to reorient service delivery around public needs, preferences, and experiences. Projects to digitize administrative workflows and introduce real time feedback mechanisms are indicative of this shift. However, the policy execution divide remains significant, particularly in districts and provinces that lack adequate infrastructure, trained personnel, or consistent support from central authorities. Bridging this gap is crucial for realizing the full potential of Indonesia's digital governance framework.

Indonesia's decentralized administrative model introduces both opportunities and obstacles to e government implementation. On one hand, decentralization empowers regional governments to innovate and tailor digital services to local needs, promoting experimentation and responsiveness (Utama, 2020). On the other hand, it contributes to fragmentation, variability in service standards, and inefficiencies in system wide integration. Digitally advanced cities such as Jakarta and Surabaya have developed sophisticated e government platforms that streamline citizen interaction and service access. In contrast, rural and remote regions continue to struggle with basic digital infrastructure, lack of trained personnel, and inconsistent implementation of national policies (Yerina, 2024). This uneven development results in a digital divide that not only reflects existing socioeconomic inequalities but also threatens to widen them further unless addressed through

coordinated national local strategies. Without a clear and enforceable framework to standardize minimum e government service benchmarks across jurisdictions, the benefits of digital transformation will remain inequitably distributed.

From a broader developing country perspective, Indonesia's experience encapsulates many of the structural challenges associated with e government adoption. The absence of adequate digital infrastructure in large parts of the archipelago, particularly in eastern Indonesia, continues to limit citizens' access to essential online services (Multama et al., 2019). Moreover, the lack of skilled ICT professionals within public institutions severely hampers efforts to implement and sustain e government systems. Training programs are often underfunded or absent, and many local agencies operate without dedicated IT support staff. Cultural inertia within the bureaucracy further complicates reforms, as longstanding administrative practices and resistance to innovation delay transformation. Public trust remains fragile, with concerns about data security, surveillance, and misuse of personal information fueling skepticism toward government led digital initiatives (Mahmood et al., 2018). These interrelated barriers highlight the necessity of comprehensive reform efforts that go beyond technology and engage deeply with governance culture and citizen expectations.

The institutional architecture of digital governance plays a decisive role in shaping Indonesia's success in this arena. Effective digital transformation is contingent not only on technological upgrades but also on institutional coherence and administrative integration. A fragmented institutional environment where ministries, agencies, and local governments operate with misaligned objectives impedes coordinated efforts and undermines the scalability of digital innovations (Yerina, 2024). Indonesia's challenge is to foster collaboration across administrative boundaries, develop interoperable data systems, and build trust among stakeholders in order to achieve a shared vision for e government. Harmonizing regulatory frameworks, aligning strategic priorities, and streamlining bureaucratic procedures are all essential to constructing an equitable and resilient digital governance system. Without this foundational institutional alignment, the country risks stagnation despite technological progress (Kencono et al., 2024).

Accordingly, this study investigates administrative and policy barriers specifically institutional fragmentation, infrastructural limitations, and disparities in regional readiness that inhibit Indonesia's e-government goals. By situating the analysis in the decentralized governance context, the research contributes by offering a conceptual framework for aligning national strategies with local realities, thus extending debates on adaptive and inclusive digital transformation in emerging economies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology to explore in depth the administrative and institutional barriers that impact the implementation of e government in Indonesia. Qualitative research has emerged as a foundational tool in digital governance studies, particularly in countries where public administration is diverse, multilayered, and undergoing rapid transformation. This approach allows for the examination of complex institutional behaviors, user perceptions, and the contextual conditions that shape policy effectiveness. Qualitative methods focus on meaning

making and emphasize human interaction within governance systems, offering nuanced insight into the lived experiences of both government officials and the public they serve. As Windah et al. (2023) argue, the strength of qualitative case studies lies in their ability to reveal structural inefficiencies and service delivery gaps that would remain obscured in quantitative analysis. The method is especially appropriate in settings like Indonesia, where administrative decentralization and regional variation present unique governance challenges.

A multi case study design was selected to provide a comprehensive understanding of e government challenges across different administrative environments. Two primary case studies are employed: (1) North Barito Regency, a representative of under resourced and institutionally fragmented regions; and (2) a comparative analysis between urban and rural localities to highlight the digital divide and variations in service accessibility. North Barito is examined in detail due to its status as a digitally lagging region, characterized by limited ICT infrastructure, inconsistent policy adoption, and gaps in civil service training. In contrast, urban areas such as Jakarta or Surabaya are assessed for their advanced digital capabilities, offering a stark contrast in implementation effectiveness. The urban rural lens enables the study to draw meaningful conclusions about equity, policy diffusion, and infrastructural disparities. As supported by Hooda & Singla (2020), case based research is a vital strategy in understanding localized responses to national policy and uncovering the sociotechnical complexities within digital transformation initiatives.

Given the exploratory nature of the research, the study exclusively uses secondary data obtained from multiple credible sources. These include: (1) UN E Government Development Index (EGDI) annual reports, which provide longitudinal insights into Indonesia's digital maturity; (2) national documents and regulations, such as Presidential Regulation No. 95 of 2018 on Electronic Based Government Systems (SPBE); (3) academic journal articles that analyze various aspects of Indonesia's public administration and digital infrastructure; and (4) national statistics and government performance reports. These sources were selected for their relevance, recency, and reliability in capturing trends and identifying implementation gaps. As highlighted by Abdurahman and Kabanda (2024), secondary sources offer a robust foundation for qualitative analysis, especially when seeking to uncover policy perceptions, developer experiences, and user level challenges in accessing digital services.

The collected data were subjected to thematic content analysis, a method that involves coding and categorizing textual data to uncover recurring patterns, categories, and themes. This process was carried out iteratively, allowing new insights to emerge as the analysis progressed. Major themes included institutional fragmentation, lack of inter-agency coordination, infrastructural bottlenecks, digital illiteracy, and unequal resource distribution. The thematic approach also enabled the researchers to track how certain patterns recur across multiple administrative levels from central agencies to district offices. Complementing this was comparative analysis, particularly between the urban and rural case contexts, which highlighted the divergent trajectories in digital governance and their underlying determinants. These analytical strategies collectively helped uncover how administrative culture, regulatory coherence, and resource allocation contribute to implementation outcomes.

This study did not involve human subjects and relied entirely on publicly available materials, thus not requiring formal ethical approval. Nonetheless, ethical research standards were upheld by

ensuring proper citation, transparent methodology, and objective interpretation of the data. Acknowledged limitations include: (1) the inability to incorporate primary stakeholder interviews, which would provide firsthand accounts of implementation realities; (2) possible time lags in secondary data reporting, which may omit the most recent developments; and (3) the challenge of generalizing findings across Indonesia's highly heterogeneous regions. While North Barito and the urban rural contrast provide illustrative examples, they may not capture all possible institutional or geographical nuances. Despite these constraints, the study remains a valuable contribution to the literature by synthesizing existing knowledge and offering a structured, empirically grounded exploration of Indonesia's digital bureaucracy challenges.

The choice of a qualitative descriptive approach is further justified by the study's objective to unravel the "how" and "why" of policy performance rather than merely measuring "what" occurs. In contexts like Indonesia, where digital transformation is ongoing and uneven, qualitative approaches allow for reflexivity and adaptation to emerging themes. They are particularly suited for diagnosing implementation blockages and institutional inertia, which often remain undetected by numerical indicators. Moreover, the integration of secondary data enhances methodological triangulation, lending credibility and depth to the findings. This synthesis of qualitative inquiry and data validation supports a holistic understanding of governance challenges and creates a foundation for evidence based recommendations that are responsive to both national priorities and local realities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Institutional Constraints

The first layer of findings revolves around institutional readiness and fragmentation in the implementation of e government in Indonesia. Frameworks such as the Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI) and Digital Transformation Readiness Assessment Framework (D'TRAF) offer useful templates for evaluating institutional maturity (Fu et al., 2018; Prasetyo, 2017). Applied to North Barito, these frameworks reveal systemic issues such as lack of strategic alignment, unclear performance indicators, and limited leadership support. Policy fragmentation remains a consistent challenge, with siloed agencies failing to coordinate on shared digital objectives. This results in redundant platforms, inefficiencies, and a disjointed citizen experience.

Findings show that institutional silos hinder data integration across agencies, restricting comprehensive service provision and delaying responsiveness. Weak governance frameworks, coupled with limited inter-ministerial communication, further slow implementation timelines. Variation in leadership capacity also influences outcomes: regions with technically literate leaders demonstrate faster progress, while those lacking leadership capacity show inconsistent execution, limited funding, and weaker monitoring.

Leadership emerges as a critical determinant of success. In regions where visionary and technically literate leadership is present, digital initiatives tend to progress more rapidly. Conversely, a lack of leadership capacity often leads to inconsistent execution, underfunding, and inadequate policy

monitoring. Governance structures lacking accountability mechanisms further dilute implementation quality and stakeholder engagement.

Infrastructural and Human Capital Barriers

The second set of findings pertains to disparities in ICT infrastructure and workforce digital capabilities. Regional inequalities are stark: while urban centers enjoy high speed broadband and robust digital ecosystems, many rural areas experience bandwidth limitations and unstable connections. For instance, urban internet penetration rates exceed 60%, whereas rural rates hover near 20%. This divide curtails equal access to e government services and exacerbates socio economic inequality (Kumorotomo, 2010).

Human capital is another pressing concern. The digital literacy of civil servants significantly influences the effectiveness of e government service delivery. A digitally proficient workforce can operate platforms, manage data securely, and engage citizens effectively. However, gaps remain particularly in non-metropolitan regions where public servants lack training in digital tools and information systems. Studies suggest that limited staff readiness leads to procedural delays, miscommunication, and weakened public trust.

To address this, the National Civil Service Agency (BKN) has initiated training programs in data management, cybersecurity, and digital systems usage. These are complemented by the Ministry of Communication and Information's Digital Literacy Initiative, which provides resources such as workshops, online courses, and certification programs. Although promising, such programs are still unevenly distributed and have yet to reach most rural regions.

Urban–Rural Implementation Gap

The third axis of results reveals the depth of the urban–rural divide in digital governance outcomes. Urban areas exhibit high e government adoption rates, facilitated by advanced ICT infrastructure, well trained personnel, and stronger institutional capacity. In contrast, rural areas are marked by fragmented infrastructure, minimal citizen awareness, and inconsistent application of e governance standards. Citizens in remote districts often rely on manual processes, face delays in service access, and lack familiarity with available digital platforms.

These disparities are driven by multiple factors. First, unequal infrastructure investment results in service quality gaps. Second, governance capacity in rural areas is limited, with local leaders often lacking both resources and expertise. Third, the decentralization framework, while promoting regional autonomy, inadvertently contributes to implementation inconsistency. Without national enforcement of minimum service standards, local disparities remain entrenched.

Nonetheless, community led models of e government success offer important lessons. Rural digital literacy campaigns, community based apps for agriculture and health, and participatory budgeting platforms have shown that citizen engagement plays a pivotal role in digital adoption. When citizens feel ownership over platforms, trust and utilization increase. These models advocate for inclusive, bottom up approaches tailored to local contexts.

Finally, leadership and inter agency collaboration remain cross cutting enablers of e government success. The study confirms that where leadership is aligned with strategic vision and capacity building is prioritized, both institutional and infrastructural gaps can be bridged.

National Local Integration through Policy Models

Indonesia's experience with e government implementation within a decentralized governance framework illustrates the dynamic interplay of policy alignment, institutional preparedness, and regional disparity in digital capabilities. Although notable improvements have occurred at the national level including increases in EGDI scores and the rollout of strategic digital governance regulations the translation of these policies into effective local practice remains inconsistent. This inconsistency reflects a deeper issue of policy disconnection between central and sub national governments. The adoption of an integrated policy model such as the Whole of Government approach is critical to narrowing this gap (Trilestari et al., 2023). This model fosters collaboration among ministries, regional authorities, and civil society stakeholders under a unified digital governance blueprint, enabling more coherent service delivery and greater efficiency in resource allocation.

The Interoperable Digital Government Framework builds on this foundation by establishing standardized digital protocols that local governments can adopt and adapt. This ensures that digital infrastructure, platforms, and services remain interoperable across jurisdictions, thus improving both vertical and horizontal integration of e government functions. For Indonesia, such frameworks are especially valuable in minimizing disparities in digital public services among provinces with divergent technological capabilities. When citizens in remote or rural regions can access the same level of digital service quality as those in metropolitan centers, governance becomes more inclusive and equitable. In this context, the lack of uniformity in platform adoption and the presence of fragmented digital systems at the local level have been identified as key challenges.

Furthermore, Participatory Governance Models, which engage local communities in policymaking and platform design, reinforce this alignment by making governance responsive to the needs and values of diverse communities (Ntshangase & Msosa, 2022). These participatory approaches enhance policy legitimacy and foster local ownership of national digital initiatives, thereby facilitating smoother implementation. Such integration also supports the customization of services to local contexts while retaining alignment with central strategies. National local collaboration, when grounded in shared values and a clear strategic vision, becomes a catalyst for digital inclusion and governance equity across administrative boundaries.

Strengthening Institutional Design and Leadership

Institutional design remains a linchpin in determining the long term effectiveness and scalability of digital transformation initiatives. Indonesia's decentralized structure presents both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it empowers local innovation and responsiveness; on the other, it can exacerbate fragmentation and inefficiencies. To mitigate this, the country must

transition from rigid, siloed bureaucratic systems toward more agile and integrated governance structures. The network governance model is one such paradigm that encourages cross sectoral partnerships between government bodies, private companies, and community based organizations (Lappi et al., 2019). This approach not only shares the burden of service delivery but also leverages diverse expertise, data, and resources to enhance public value.

Effective leadership is a necessary condition for successful institutional transformation. Leaders must go beyond administrative oversight and embody a change oriented, adaptive mindset capable of navigating complex technological landscapes. The integration of adaptive leadership principles into public sector governance allows decision makers to respond flexibly to emerging challenges, disruptions, and citizen feedback (Nkgapele & Mokgolobotho, 2024). Leadership that embraces technological innovation, encourages experimentation, and promotes a learning oriented environment lays the foundation for agile and responsive digital public services.

Capacity building initiatives are equally critical to this transformation. Civil servants at all levels need opportunities for continuous learning in areas such as data analytics, digital communication, cybersecurity, and ethical governance. A digitally literate bureaucracy not only accelerates service deployment but also fosters institutional trustworthiness and innovation culture. Public servants equipped with up to date digital competencies and empowered by decentralized decision making structures can lead transformations at the ground level. In this way, leadership is not only top down but also distributed and embedded across multiple tiers of government. Such distributed leadership expands institutional capacity and builds resilience against disruptions while fostering a culture of accountability and shared purpose across agencies.

Participatory Design and Feedback Loops

Participatory design and feedback mechanisms are not merely supplementary to digital transformation they are foundational to its legitimacy and sustainability. E government platforms must reflect the lived realities and evolving expectations of the citizens they serve. By incorporating user centered design principles and creating structured feedback channels, governments can continuously adapt services to improve usability, accessibility, and trust. Indonesia has made efforts in this direction by introducing digital complaint systems, public feedback dashboards, and localized participatory platforms. These innovations are most effective when they are iterative constantly gathering data, adjusting interface elements, and refining workflows based on user insights (Tan & Fong, 2024).

The adoption of design thinking methodologies in public administration further amplifies this participatory ethos. When citizens are treated as co-creators rather than passive recipients, their engagement deepens, and the resulting services are more likely to meet actual needs. This transformation in the government citizen relationship fosters accountability, promotes digital inclusion, and enhances democratic resilience. Moreover, the incorporation of community generated knowledge ensures that services are culturally relevant and contextually grounded, making digital transformation both adaptive and sustainable over the long term.

These participatory mechanisms also provide governments with real time data on public satisfaction and pain points, which can guide policy adjustments and technological upgrades. By using surveys, citizen panels, and analytics dashboards, administrations can better align services with community expectations. Importantly, such inclusive models reduce the digital divide by giving voice to marginalized populations, allowing services to be tailored in an equitable and socially conscious manner.

Generalizing Lessons for Decentralized States

Indonesia's journey holds critical insights for other nations with decentralized administrative structures attempting to scale e government reforms. First and foremost, digital transformation must be underpinned by a unified national vision that provides clarity of purpose while accommodating local autonomy. This balance is difficult but essential to avoid fragmentation and ensure equitable access to services. Policy frameworks must enable innovation at the local level without compromising on standards, interoperability, or data integrity. A centralized vision should offer guidelines, technical assistance, and shared infrastructure, while local agencies adapt these tools to their unique challenges.

Second, the development of both hard infrastructure (such as broadband networks and digital identity systems) and soft infrastructure (such as digital literacy, governance capacity, and public trust) must proceed in parallel. Investments in connectivity and technology must be matched by parallel efforts to build digital skills, institutional capacity, and public awareness. Without this dual development strategy, the technological gains of digitalization risk being undermined by institutional bottlenecks or citizen disengagement (Mozin et al., 2025).

Indonesia's experience offers comparative insights for other decentralized states. Successful digital transformation requires balancing a unified national vision with local autonomy, while simultaneously investing in both hard (infrastructure) and soft (literacy, trust) capacities. Institutionalizing feedback mechanisms ensures responsiveness and adaptation, positioning Indonesia as a relevant case study for countries navigating decentralization and digital reform.

Finally, the institutionalization of feedback mechanisms both quantitative and qualitative ensures that digital governance remains responsive and accountable to real world conditions (Engvall & Flak, 2022). Regular evaluations, performance audits, and participatory assessments provide governments with the tools to course correct and adapt to changing societal needs. These insights make Indonesia a valuable case study for countries navigating the dual imperatives of decentralization and digital transformation, particularly those with complex administrative systems and diverse regional profiles.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's digital transformation has advanced considerably, as reflected in improved EGDI rankings and expanded digital service adoption, yet persistent institutional fragmentation, infrastructural disparities, and leadership limitations continue to hinder equitable implementation.

This study offers novelty by framing these challenges within a context-sensitive conceptual framework that links decentralization dynamics with digital governance outcomes. The findings emphasize that e-government success is not determined solely by technological investment, but by the interplay of institutional design, adaptive leadership, and participatory engagement that ensures policy alignment across governance levels.

From a policy perspective, the research highlights three actionable levers: mandating interoperable frameworks tailored to local capacities, establishing leadership incubators for regional officials, and embedding participatory design as a standard practice in service development. These recommendations move beyond broad strategies toward concrete interventions that can strengthen both inclusivity and resilience in Indonesia's governance system. The insights generated extend beyond the national context, providing comparative lessons for other decentralized states seeking to bridge national–local divides in their digital transformation agendas.

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