

Constitutional Limits of Regional Autonomy in Indonesia: A Legal Assessment of Local Government Practice

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ABSTRACT

Regional autonomy in Indonesia presents a continuing constitutional challenge concerning the balance between regional self-government and central state authority. This study examines whether contemporary local government practices remain within the constitutional limits of regional autonomy, particularly in relation to the distribution of authority and central government supervision. The study concludes that regional autonomy can be constitutionally legitimate when exercised within clear legal boundaries, proportionate supervision, institutional accountability, and safeguards for citizens' constitutional interests. The findings indicate generally positive perceptions of constitutional compliance (overall mean = 3.60/5.00), although central government supervision received the lowest assessment (mean = 3.46), indicating concerns regarding the boundary between legitimate supervision and excessive intervention. The findings indicate an overall mean assessment of 3.60 out of 5.00, reflecting generally positive perceptions of constitutional compliance. Constitutional authority received the highest mean score of 3.72, while central government supervision received the lowest score of 3.46. The study concludes that regional autonomy can be constitutionally legitimate when exercised within clear legal boundaries, proportionate supervision, institutional accountability, and safeguards for citizens' constitutional interests. The study contributes a constitutionally bounded autonomy framework that evaluates regional authority through legal authorization, proportional central supervision, institutional accountability, and protection of constitutional interests.

Keywords: Regional Autonomy; Constitutional Law; Decentralization; Central Regional Relations; Constitutional Compliance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Regional autonomy occupies a central position in Indonesia's constitutional architecture because it determines how governmental authority is distributed between the central government and regional governments within a unitary state. The constitutional recognition of regional government under Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution establishes autonomy as a constitutional mechanism for accommodating regional diversity while maintaining national unity. The central legal problem is therefore to determine whether the current allocation and exercise of regional governmental authority remain within the constitutional limits established by the 1945 Constitution, particularly amid increasing central governmental control. Recent developments indicate a continuing tension between

decentralization and the strengthening of central governmental control. This tension raises a fundamental constitutional question concerning whether the redistribution and recentralization of governmental powers remain consistent with the constitutional design of regional autonomy. Recent scholarship has similarly identified the relationship between decentralization, constitutional development, and the distribution of governmental authority as an unresolved issue in Indonesia (Sabara, 2022; Baidhowah, 2022).

The legal framework governing regional autonomy has undergone substantial transformation since the post-Reformasi constitutional amendments. Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government established a more differentiated allocation of governmental affairs between central and regional authorities, while subsequent regulatory developments have increasingly strengthened central coordination and control. The enactment of Law No. 6 of

2023 concerning the ratification of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 on Job Creation has further intensified this debate. Recent regulatory changes have shifted authority in strategic sectors, including licensing, mining, spatial planning, and environmental supervision, thereby raising the constitutional question of whether such recentralization preserves the substantive scope of regional autonomy guaranteed by Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution (Yuliasih et al., 2026). Such developments demonstrate that regional autonomy should not be understood merely as an administrative delegation of power but as a constitutional arrangement requiring a legally defensible balance between national interests and regional self-government.

Empirical studies reinforce the complexity of this relationship. Decentralization has generated opportunities for greater local participation, accountability, and responsiveness, but its implementation has also produced institutional and governance problems. (Chandra, 2024), for example, links decentralization with democratic participation, regional empowerment, and accountability, while (Agustino et al., 2024) demonstrate that decentralization may simultaneously facilitate the emergence of local power structures and political regimes. Other studies demonstrate that local governmental capacity significantly affects the quality of public service delivery under decentralized governance, while intergovernmental transfers remain important for regional infrastructure financing because many local governments possess limited independent fiscal capacity (Aritenang, 2020). Taken together, these findings suggest that formal constitutional and statutory autonomy may not necessarily translate into substantive regional capacity to exercise governmental authority independently, accountably, and effectively.

The problem becomes more significant when regional autonomy is examined from the perspective of constitutional accountability. Decentralized authority may strengthen local governance, but insufficient institutional

safeguards can also create opportunities for favoritism, corruption, and elite capture. (Gonschorek, 2021), using evidence from Indonesian local governments, found that discretionary grant allocation could be influenced by governors' political connections to particular districts, although electoral accountability constrained such favoritism. Similarly, (Saputra & Setiawan, 2021) identified an important relationship between fiscal decentralization, accountability, and corruption, while (Silitonga et al., 2023) demonstrated how decentralization may generate new relational structures that facilitate corrupt practices at the local level. These findings indicate that the constitutional legitimacy of regional autonomy depends not only on the formal allocation of authority but also on effective legal controls, institutional accountability, and safeguards against the misuse of autonomous powers.

Despite this growing body of research, an important research gap remains. Existing studies predominantly examine decentralization from economic, fiscal, administrative, democratic, or governance perspectives. However, existing legal studies have largely examined specific regulations or institutional relationships, leaving insufficient empirical-legal analysis of whether contemporary local government practices, particularly the exercise of regional authority and interaction with central supervision, comply with constitutional limits. For example, recent studies have examined regional autonomy in relation to the Job Creation Law, regional legislative institutions, and the relationship between regional heads and their deputies, but a broader empirical assessment connecting constitutional principles with observable local-government practices remains comparatively underdeveloped.

This study addresses that gap by positioning constitutional limits as the principal analytical concept. The research conceptualizes regional autonomy not as an unlimited transfer of governmental authority, but as constitutionally bounded self-government operating within the principles of the unitary

state, division of governmental affairs, accountability, legal certainty, and protection of citizens' constitutional rights. The framework is used to assess whether central supervision has a sufficient legal basis, remains proportionate to its regulatory purpose, preserves meaningful regional discretion, and protects citizens' constitutional interests. The approach is consistent with recent scholarship emphasizing that the Indonesian decentralization system must continuously negotiate the balance between regional autonomy and national unity (Putra & Lubis, 2024).

The study's contribution lies in integrating doctrinal constitutional analysis with limited empirical evidence to develop an analytical framework for assessing whether local-government practices remain within constitutionally legitimate boundaries. Rather than treating regional autonomy exclusively as a normative institutional arrangement, the study examines how constitutional principles are reflected in practical governance and whether existing practices demonstrate compliance with the constitutional boundaries of regional authority. This approach contributes to constitutional law scholarship by connecting the normative structure of Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution with empirical evidence concerning the implementation of regional governmental authority. It also provides a basis for evaluating whether current regulatory arrangements maintain an appropriate equilibrium between decentralization and national governmental control.

Accordingly, this study aims to assess the constitutional limits of regional autonomy in Indonesia and evaluate the extent to which local government practices remain consistent with the constitutional principles governing the distribution of central and regional authority. The principal research question is: To what extent do local government practices in Indonesia comply with the constitutional limits of regional autonomy, and what legal implications arise from existing patterns of authority distribution?

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design and Legal Research Approach

This study combines doctrinal legal analysis with descriptive empirical evidence to assess the constitutional limits of regional autonomy. The choice of a socio-legal design is based on the need to connect constitutional and statutory norms with the way governmental authority is understood and experienced in practice. Empirical legal research can provide evidence concerning the operation of law beyond the formal text of legislation, while socio-legal inquiry enables legal rules to be examined in relation to their institutional and social context (Choudhary, 2024; Cotterrell, 2023).

The study applies three complementary legal approaches. First, the statutory approach is used to examine the constitutional and legislative framework governing regional autonomy, particularly the provisions of the 1945 Constitution and legislation regulating the distribution of governmental affairs between central and regional authorities. Second, the conceptual approach is employed to establish the legal meaning and boundaries of regional autonomy, decentralization, constitutional accountability, governmental authority, and central supervision. Third, the case approach is used to examine relevant Constitutional Court decisions concerning regional autonomy and the distribution of governmental powers. These approaches are integrated to determine whether local governmental practices can be understood as legitimate exercises of autonomous authority within constitutional boundaries.

The combination of doctrinal and empirical components is particularly appropriate because contemporary legal scholarship increasingly recognizes the value of methodological pluralism when addressing legal questions involving both formal norms and their implementation. Mixed and multi-method approaches can strengthen socio-legal inquiry when the empirical component is clearly connected to the legal question rather than

treated as an independent social-science exercise (Blackham, 2022; Choudhary, 2024).

2.2 Legal Materials and Empirical Participants

The primary legal materials comprise the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government and its amendments, Law No. 1 of 2022 concerning Financial Relations between the Central Government and Regional Governments, Law No. 6 of 2023 concerning the Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law No. 2 of 2022 on Job Creation, and relevant Constitutional Court decisions addressing regional autonomy and the allocation of governmental authority.

The secondary legal materials consist of peer-reviewed journal articles, scholarly books, legal commentaries, and academic publications addressing constitutional law, decentralization, regional autonomy, central–regional relations, and constitutional accountability. Legal materials were selected according to three criteria: (1) direct relevance to regional autonomy or constitutional allocation of authority; (2) authoritative legal status or scholarly credibility; and (3) substantive relevance to the research question. This selection strategy is intended to make the legal analysis transparent and reproducible, and an important consideration in empirical legal scholarship (Chin & Zeiler, 2021).

The empirical component involved 25 purposively selected participants and was intended to provide contextual rather than generalizable evidence. Participants were required to possess direct experience, professional knowledge, or substantial familiarity with local government administration and regional autonomy. The participants comprised 10 local government officials (40%), 8 community members (32%), 4 legal practitioners (16%), and 3 legal academics (12%). The relatively small number of participants is deliberately positioned as supporting empirical evidence rather than as a statistically representative sample of the

Indonesian population. Accordingly, the findings are interpreted within the context of the selected participants and are not generalized to all Indonesian local governments.

2.3 Data Collection

Legal materials were collected through systematic identification and review of constitutional provisions, legislation, judicial decisions, and relevant scholarly literature. The materials were organized according to their legal hierarchy, subject matter, and relevance to the research question. Particular attention was given to provisions concerning the division of governmental affairs, regional authority, central supervision, and mechanisms for ensuring constitutional accountability.

Empirical data were collected using a structured questionnaire covering four dimensions: constitutional authority, central government supervision, regional autonomy, and constitutional compliance, with specific indicators for each dimension. Each statement was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Likert-type instruments are widely used to measure perceptions and attitudes, although careful attention must be given to instrument construction and interpretation when dealing with ordinal response categories (León-Mantero et al., 2020).

Before distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed by relevant experts to assess the clarity, relevance, and alignment of each item with the research objectives. To enhance methodological credibility, the study maintains a clear correspondence between the questionnaire items, the underlying legal concepts, and the research question. Transparency in data collection and analytical procedures is particularly important in empirical legal research because reproducibility and verifiability remain significant methodological concerns within the field (Chin & Zeiler, 2021).

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis consists of two interconnected stages: doctrinal legal analysis

and descriptive empirical analysis. The doctrinal component employs qualitative legal analysis and statutory interpretation to identify the constitutional basis, scope, and limitations of regional autonomy. Legal provisions and judicial decisions are examined comparatively to determine whether the allocation and exercise of governmental authority remain consistent with constitutional principles.

The empirical component uses descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and response distributions. Because the empirical sample consists of only 25 participants and is purposively selected, the study does not use the data to make population-level statistical generalizations. Instead, the descriptive results are used to identify patterns in participants' assessments of constitutional authority, central supervision, regional autonomy, and constitutional compliance. This approach is consistent with methodological guidance emphasizing that empirical legal research should match its analytical claims to the design and quality of its evidence (Chin et al., 2021).

The qualitative legal findings and empirical patterns are subsequently integrated through triangulation. Where empirical responses indicate perceived inconsistencies in the implementation of regional autonomy, the relevant constitutional provisions, statutory rules, and judicial interpretations are examined to determine their legal significance. Conversely, where the legal framework provides clear boundaries but empirical responses suggest implementation difficulties, the discrepancy is treated as an issue of legal implementation rather than evidence of constitutional invalidity. This integration enables the research to distinguish between normative constitutional limits and practical implementation problems.

For the qualitative component, relevant open-ended responses or explanatory comments, where available, are organized into themes corresponding to the principal legal issues. Thematic organization facilitates systematic interpretation while preserving the connection

between participants' observations and the underlying legal framework (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Byrne, 2022).

2.5 Validity, Reliability, and Research Ethics

The questionnaire was subjected to a content review to ensure that each item corresponded to the legal concepts and research objectives. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with the reliability coefficient reported for each questionnaire dimension. The methodological process was documented to enhance transparency and reproducibility, which are recognized as important quality standards for empirical legal research (Chin et al., 2021).

Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the general purpose of the research before completing the questionnaire. No identifying information was included in the analytical dataset or manuscript. Findings are presented in aggregate form, and individual participants are not identifiable. The study also recognizes the methodological limitation associated with the small purposive sample. The 25 participants provide contextual empirical evidence rather than statistically representative evidence; therefore, the principal legal conclusions remain grounded in the analysis of constitutional provisions, legislation, and judicial decisions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Respondent Characteristics and Empirical Context

The empirical component involved 25 participants selected purposively according to their knowledge, experience, or involvement in local government and regional autonomy. The participants consisted of local government officials, community members, legal practitioners, and legal academics. This composition was intended to provide different perspectives on the practical operation of regional autonomy rather than to establish a statistically representative population estimate. The use of multiple stakeholder perspectives is

particularly relevant because the implementation of decentralization may produce different experiences depending on institutional position, administrative capacity, and access to governmental decision-making.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Category

Respondent Category	Frequency	Percentage
Local government officials	10	40%
Community members	8	32%
Legal practitioners	4	16%
Legal academics	3	12%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 1, local government officials constituted the largest respondent group (40%), followed by community members (32%). Legal practitioners accounted for 16%, while legal academics represented 12%. The distribution is useful for the legal analysis because constitutional limits on regional autonomy are not experienced solely within government institutions. They also affect citizens, legal practitioners, and academic observers who assess the consistency between formal legal authority and its practical implementation.

This multidimensional perspective is consistent with recent research showing that decentralization in Indonesia produces different outcomes depending on institutional and regional circumstances. Studies of disadvantaged regions have identified weaknesses in administrative and fiscal capacity, while research on regional governance has demonstrated that decentralization can also generate new local power structures. Thus, the constitutional assessment of regional autonomy should not be restricted to the formal allocation of powers but should also consider whether those powers can be exercised effectively and accountably.

3.2 Assessment of Constitutional Dimensions of Regional Autonomy

The questionnaire measured four principal dimensions: constitutional authority, central government supervision, regional autonomy, and

constitutional compliance. Each dimension was assessed using a five-point Likert scale. The descriptive results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Assessment of Constitutional Dimensions

Constitutional Dimension	Mean Score	Interpretation
Constitutional Authority	3.72	High
Central Government Supervision	3.46	Moderate-High
Regional Autonomy	3.58	Moderate-High
Constitutional Compliance	3.64	High
Overall Mean	3.60	Moderate-High

Table 2 indicates that respondents generally perceived the constitutional framework and implementation of regional autonomy positively, with an overall mean score of 3.60 out of 5.00. The highest score for constitutional authority (3.72) reflects respondents' perceptions of the constitutional basis of regional government. Constitutional compliance followed with a mean score of 3.64, while regional autonomy recorded 3.58. Central government supervision obtained the lowest score (3.46), although it remained within the moderate-to-high category.

The relatively high perception of constitutional authority provides contextual evidence for the subsequent legal analysis. Article 18 of the 1945 Constitution does not merely provide an administrative arrangement; it establishes regional government and recognizes the principle of autonomy within the framework of the unitary state. Therefore, the existence of regional autonomy is constitutionally protected, although its precise scope is subsequently structured through legislation. Recent constitutional scholarship similarly emphasizes that decentralization in Indonesia must maintain equilibrium between regional autonomy and national unity (Putra & Lubis, 2024).

At the same time, the comparatively lower score for central government supervision is important. The lower score for central supervision (3.46) suggests that participants perceived greater uncertainty regarding the boundary between supervision and intervention. This concern corresponds with recent

scholarship identifying tensions between decentralization and centralization in Indonesia. Studies of the contemporary regional government system have noted that changes in sectoral regulation have increasingly transferred strategic authority toward the central government. (Yuliasih et al., 2026; Sulaiman et al., 2025).

3.3 Distribution of Respondents' Assessment

The distribution of responses provides a more detailed picture of how respondents evaluate the constitutional consistency of local government practices.

Table 3. Respondents' Assessment of Constitutional Compliance

Assessment Category	Frequency	Percentage
Very low	1	4%
Low	2	8%
Moderate	6	24%
High	11	44%
Very high	5	20%
Total	25	100%

As shown in Table 3, 64% of respondents classified constitutional compliance as high or very high, while 24% considered it moderate. Only 12% provided low or very low assessments. The distribution suggests that most participants perceived regional government practices as broadly consistent with constitutional requirements. Nevertheless, the presence of respondents reporting moderate or low compliance is legally relevant because it suggests that formal constitutional recognition does not automatically guarantee uniform implementation.

This finding should be interpreted cautiously. With only 25 purposively selected respondents, the percentages do not represent the views of Indonesian citizens or local governments generally. Instead, they provide contextual evidence concerning how individuals with relevant knowledge perceive the operation of regional autonomy. The empirical pattern nevertheless supports the broader literature showing that decentralization outcomes are uneven across Indonesian regions. (Shoesmith et al., 2020), for instance, demonstrated that the implementation of decentralization in

disadvantaged regions can be constrained by administrative capacity, fiscal resources, and infrastructure.

The result also complements research demonstrating that decentralization does not produce uniform governance outcomes. (Astriaana & Khoirunurrofik, 2024) found a relationship between fiscal decentralization and governance performance across Indonesian districts and cities, indicating that the consequences of decentralization depend partly on the institutional capacity of local governments.

3.4 Constitutional Limits of Regional Authority

The central legal issue arising from the findings concerns the meaning of constitutional limits. Regional autonomy should not be interpreted as an independent sphere of sovereign authority comparable to a federal state. Indonesia remains a unitary state, meaning that ultimate constitutional authority remains vested in the national constitutional order. Regional governments therefore exercise autonomous powers within boundaries established by the Constitution and legislation.

Table 4. Legal Assessment of Regional Authority

Legal Dimension	Constitutional Basis	Practical Issue	Legal Assessment
Regional autonomy	Article 18 UUD 1945	Scope of autonomous authority	Constitutionally recognized
Distribution of affairs	Article 18(5) UUD 1945	Overlapping central-regional authority	Requires clear allocation
Central supervision	Article 18 and statutory framework	Risk of excessive intervention	Must remain legally proportionate
Regional regulation	Article 18(6) UUD 1945	Regulatory consistency	Subject to higher legal norms
Accountability	Constitutional principles	Uneven institutional capacity	Requires effective oversight
Citizen participation	Constitutional democratic principles	Limited involvement in some policies	Requires procedural safeguards

As shown in Table 4, the constitutional recognition of regional autonomy does not

eliminate central authority. Instead, the legal relationship requires a balance between autonomous decision-making and constitutional supervision. The legal problem therefore arises when central supervision moves beyond ensuring legality, national standards, or constitutional compliance and becomes a substantive replacement of regional decision-making without adequate legal justification.

This distinction is particularly important following recent legislative developments. (Yuliasih et al., 2026) identify recentralization in strategic sectors such as licensing, mining, spatial planning, and environmental supervision following changes in the legal framework. (Sulaiman et al., 2025) similarly describe the recentralization of strategic natural-resource authority as raising a constitutional concern because it may weaken the substantive independence of regional governments.

However, recentralization should not automatically be characterized as unconstitutional. The constitutional question is whether the transfer of authority has an adequate legal basis and whether it preserves the constitutional purpose of regional autonomy. This distinction represents an important contribution of the present study: the existence of central control is not itself evidence of constitutional violation; the legality, proportionality, purpose, and institutional consequences of that control must be assessed.

3.5 Central Supervision and the Risk of Recentralization

The empirical score for central government supervision (3.46) was lower than the scores for constitutional authority and constitutional compliance. Although the result should not be interpreted as evidence of widespread constitutional violation, it indicates an area requiring closer legal scrutiny.

Recent studies provide an important context for this finding. (Sutresno et al., 2024), examining prefectural-system practices in Indonesian local government, show that Indonesia's governance structure contains

continuing interactions between deconcentration, decentralization, and central administrative control. (Khairi, 2021) similarly demonstrates that decentralization involves not only the delegation of authority but also the distribution of financial responsibility between central and regional governments.

The legal implication is that autonomy cannot be evaluated exclusively through the number of powers formally assigned to regional governments. Effective autonomy requires meaningful capacity to exercise those powers. If regional governments formally possess authority but remain excessively dependent upon central approval, financial control, or administrative direction, the substantive meaning of autonomy may be weakened even though the formal legal structure remains intact.

This concern is reinforced by (Hummel & Kusumasari's, 2025) analysis of local government financial performance, which demonstrates the continuing importance of fiscal responsibility and accountability within Indonesia's decentralized governance system. Similarly, (Kristanto et al., 2026) demonstrate that fiscal decentralization, governance, and corruption are interconnected across Indonesian local governments.

Accordingly, the constitutional issue is not the existence of central supervision but whether its exercise has a clear legal basis and remains proportionate. Rather, supervision should be legally defined, transparent, proportionate, and directed toward ensuring constitutional and statutory compliance. This provides a more balanced interpretation than either unrestricted decentralization or unrestricted centralization.

3.6 Regional Autonomy, Accountability, and Legal Compliance

Regional autonomy creates opportunities for local governments to formulate policies according to local needs. However, autonomy without accountability may generate institutional risks. This issue is particularly relevant because the purpose of decentralization is not merely to

move governmental power geographically but to improve governance while maintaining constitutional accountability.

Research on fiscal decentralization provides evidence of this tension. (Siburian, 2024) found that decentralization in Indonesia is associated with higher incidences of corruption, while the study by (Syarif, 2023) found that fiscal decentralization does not produce a uniform relationship with corruption and that institutional supervision remains important. These apparently different findings demonstrate that decentralization cannot be evaluated through a simple assumption that more regional authority automatically produces better governance.

The present study extends this discussion from an economic and governance perspective to a constitutional law perspective. The relevant legal question is not whether decentralization produces universally positive outcomes, but whether regional authority is exercised within a system of constitutional accountability. Accordingly, the study identifies three requirements for constitutionally legitimate autonomy:

1. Legal authorization: regional authority must have a clear constitutional or statutory basis;
2. Institutional accountability: regional decision-making must remain subject to lawful supervision and review; and
3. Protection of citizens' constitutional interests: autonomous authority must ultimately serve constitutional rights and democratic governance.

(Nugraha's, 2024) study of integrated coastal management illustrates this issue in a specific regulatory context. Although the legal framework provides a basis for local participation under regional autonomy, implementation problems may emerge through regulatory gaps, institutional dependence, and weak coordination. The finding supports the argument that formal allocation of authority must be accompanied by effective institutional mechanisms.

3.7 Local Government Practice and Constitutional Compliance

The empirical evidence indicates generally positive perceptions, which should be interpreted alongside the constitutional and statutory analysis. Nevertheless, the legal analysis reveals that compliance should be assessed through more than perceptions. Constitutional compliance involves a normative relationship between governmental action and the higher legal order.

Figure 1. Distribution of Respondents' Assessment of Constitutional Compliance

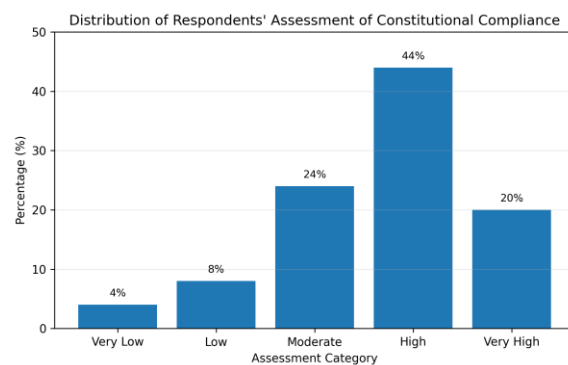


Figure 1 illustrates that the largest proportion of respondents (44%) assessed constitutional compliance as high, while 20% considered it very high. However, nearly one-third of respondents (32%) placed their assessment within the moderate or low categories. This distribution reinforces the need for legal mechanisms that can distinguish between formal compliance and substantive compliance.

Formal compliance exists when local government actions are based on legally recognized authority. Substantive compliance requires more: the exercise of authority must also respect constitutional principles, legal certainty, accountability, equality, and the rights of citizens. Consequently, a regional policy may possess a formal statutory basis while still requiring constitutional scrutiny if its implementation produces disproportionate restrictions on citizens or undermines the constitutional purpose of regional autonomy.

The distinction is consistent with research on decentralization in Indonesia that emphasizes the importance of institutional arrangements and local participation. (Lele, 2021) demonstrates through the cases of Aceh and Papua that decentralization arrangements produce different outcomes depending on accommodation, institutional design, and policy implementation. (Rahayu et al., 2021) likewise show that decentralized governance in shared-resource management requires intergovernmental cooperation because excessive local autonomy can generate rivalry and coordination problems.

Thus, constitutional compliance should not be measured solely by the presence of regional authority. It should also be assessed through the quality of intergovernmental relations and the ability of regional institutions to exercise authority consistently with constitutional objectives.

3.8 Legal Synthesis: Between Autonomy and National Unity

The principal finding of the study is that Indonesian regional autonomy operates within a constitutional middle ground between decentralization and centralization. The empirical evidence does not support the proposition that regional autonomy has become constitutionally ineffective. At the same time, the legal analysis indicates that recentralization in selected sectors creates a continuing need to clarify the boundaries of central intervention.

Figure 2. Constitutional Boundary of Regional Autonomy

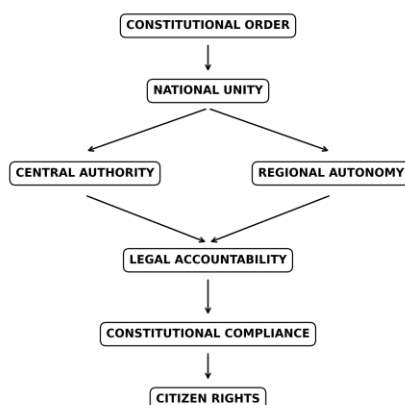


Figure 2 illustrates the analytical framework emerging from the findings. Regional autonomy and central authority should not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Both derive legitimacy from the constitutional order and must operate through legal accountability.

This interpretation differs from approaches that characterize recentralization as inherently negative. Some recent legal scholarship describes the withdrawal of regional powers as a setback for autonomy, particularly in strategic sectors. However, the present study argues that recentralization becomes constitutionally problematic only when it exceeds legitimate national interests, lacks adequate legal justification, weakens constitutionally recognized regional autonomy, or removes meaningful local participation without appropriate safeguards.

Conversely, unrestricted regional autonomy can also create constitutional problems when local authorities exceed their legal competence, undermine national legal standards, or fail to protect citizens' rights. The appropriate constitutional model is therefore neither absolute decentralization nor unrestricted centralization but bounded autonomy under constitutional accountability.

3.9 Comparison with Previous Research and Novelty

The findings confirm several aspects of previous research while extending the debate in an important direction. First, the study confirms the argument that decentralization in Indonesia produces uneven institutional outcomes. Research by (Shoesmith et al., 2020), (Agustino et al., 2024), and (Astria & Khoirunurrofik, 2024) demonstrates that local institutional capacity and governance conditions influence the effectiveness of decentralization.

Second, the findings extend research on fiscal and administrative decentralization by emphasizing the constitutional dimension of authority distribution. Existing empirical studies have often evaluated decentralization through fiscal performance, corruption, service delivery, or governance outcomes. (Kristanto et al., 2026),

for example, focus on fiscal decentralization and corruption, while (Hummel & Kusumasari, 2025) examine financial performance and local accountability. The present study instead asks whether the practical exercise of local authority remains within constitutionally legitimate boundaries.

Third, the findings complement recent legal scholarship concerning recentralization. (Yuliasih et al., 2026) identify potential constitutional tensions arising from the transfer of strategic regional powers to the central government. The present study extends this argument by proposing that the constitutional test should focus on legal basis, proportionality, accountability, and preservation of meaningful regional autonomy, rather than treating every transfer of authority as unconstitutional.

The study extends previous research by applying a constitutional compliance perspective to the assessment of regional autonomy. This perspective integrates normative legal analysis with limited empirical evidence and proposes that regional autonomy should be assessed through the relationship between constitutional authorization, statutory allocation, practical implementation, central supervision, and protection of citizens' rights.

3.10 Legal Implications and Contribution

The findings have implications for Indonesian constitutional law in three principal respects. First, legislation governing central–regional relations should provide clearer criteria for distinguishing supervision from intervention. Central supervision is constitutionally legitimate when directed toward legality, national standards, accountability, and protection of constitutional interests. However, interventions that effectively replace regional decision-making require stronger legal justification.

Second, the legislative framework should preserve meaningful regional discretion in matters constitutionally assigned to regional governments. Recentralization may be justified in areas involving national strategic interests, but it should not eliminate the institutional rationale of regional autonomy. This is particularly

important in sectors where local conditions materially affect policy implementation.

Third, mechanisms for reviewing central–regional authority should be strengthened. Clearer standards would assist courts, legislators, regional governments, and administrative institutions in determining whether a particular transfer of authority represents legitimate coordination or excessive centralization.

The study consequently contributes to constitutional law scholarship by reframing regional autonomy as constitutionally bounded authority rather than merely delegated administrative power. This conceptualization provides an analytical basis for examining the balance between Indonesia's unitary state structure and constitutionally recognized regional autonomy.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that regional autonomy in Indonesia operates within a constitutional balance between regional self-government and the authority of the unitary state. The empirical findings indicate generally positive perceptions of constitutional compliance, with an overall assessment of 3.60 out of 5.00. Nevertheless, the lower assessment of central government supervision (3.46) suggests that respondents perceived greater uncertainty regarding the boundary between legitimate supervision and excessive intervention. Legally, regional autonomy cannot be interpreted as unrestricted authority, nor can central control eliminate meaningful regional discretion. Its constitutional legitimacy depends on a clear legal basis, proportional supervision, institutional accountability, and protection of citizens' constitutional interests. The study contributes by framing regional autonomy as constitutionally bounded authority rather than merely delegated administrative power. Accordingly, legislators and policymakers should clarify standards for central–regional authority and strengthen accountability mechanisms to ensure that recentralization

remains legally justified, proportionate, and consistent with constitutional principles.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Formal Analysis, Writing Original Draft.

Author 2: Methodology, Writing, Editing.

Author 3: Investigation, Conceptualization.

Author 4: Data Curation, Review and Supervision.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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