

## REGIONAL AUTONOMY ISSUES IN INDONESIA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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### Abstract

Although regional autonomy has been implemented for more than two decades in Indonesia, this topic is still interesting to discuss. This research aims to discuss some issues around regional autonomy in Indonesia, particularly viewed from an academic perspective. This study used a literature review approach. Data were obtained from the Scopus and Taylor and Francis Group databases, with “regional autonomy” and “Indonesia” being the keywords. The publication period is from 2000 to 2021. The results of the research show that there are interesting issues regarding agroforestry management and economic disintegration related to regional autonomy in Indonesia during that period. Firstly, good agroforestry management can be an attraction to the improved regional economy. Secondly, economic disintegration is one of the factors leading to regional separatism or a movement performed by a region to release itself from a state, due to one region’s envy of other, more advanced and richer regions. A solution to the first issue is to have multi-level governance that will ensure high-quality oversight of agroforestry management. Meanwhile, a solution to the second issue is to secure foreign investment to prevent economic disintegration in each region, which would harm the region and the state in the future.

**Keywords:** *economic disintegration, Indonesia, regional autonomy*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *ekonomikos dezintegracija; Indonezija; regioninė autonomija.*

## Introduction

Regional autonomy is one of the agendas that has been in place in Indonesia since the reformation era in 1998–1999. The term “regional autonomy” refers to an autonomous region with the ability to organize its own regional governmental affairs, whereas “decentralization” is a practice that is abstract in nature (Christia and Ispriyarso 2019). Many parties recommend reverting to a decentralization system, particularly following the reformation in 1998–1999 in Indonesia, as this started to become effective in 2001 with the issuance of Law No. 32 of 2004 on regional government as the official legal foundation, with an expectation that the regional autonomy will allow the regions to manage their own potencies and to develop and become more prosperous (Surkati 2012).

However, decentralization is not always considered an ideal system; various cases have revealed that a decentralized system can harm both regional and central governments. Some cases that have occurred and led to the ineffective implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia are, among others, the conflict in Sambas Regency, West Kalimantan Province, in 1999–2000; the interethnic conflict case that occurred in Sampit, East Kotawaringin Regency, Central Kalimantan Province, in 1999–2001; and the conflict in Poso, Central Sulawesi Province (Sambanis and Milanovic 2014). Research on the organizational conflict model in Jayapura, Papua (Anggraini et al. 2019), shows that conflicts between indigenous Papuans and migrants are caused by economic, power, social, and political disparities.

The gap between communities in the region seen so far could lead to prolonged conflict and harm in the region and require a lot of resources to overcome this; therefore, the focus of this research is on strengthening regional autonomy for Indonesian regions that have not run optimally. In addition, some internal conflicts occurred in Indonesian regions that have felt discontented with the profit-sharing fund given to their regions, the unsolved conflict of land between the central and regional governments and the private sector, and some cases indicating deviation related to natural resource management by the regional government without the central government’s hierarchy (Surtikanti 2004; Nurkin 2005).

Other research from Nishimura (2022) shows that local governments play a big role in handling various problems in their regions. For example, the research took place in the Philippines, where there are many urban areas, which means that the environment becomes dirty and polluted, resulting in health problems. However, with financial input from the private sector and contact with neighboring governments that have a positive correlation to these problems, environmental problems in urban areas can be overcome. This also applies to Thailand, where regions are used for political power to ensure regional autonomy lasts, and autonomy is more about combining administrative, political, and traditional power systems, which are synergized to handle conflict (Kulachai 2023).

Considering the explanation above, in this study, the author wants to discuss in-depth some issues faced in regional autonomy in Indonesia, thereby not yet revealing the optimum output as expected. This article is limited to two research questions:

1. What are the regional autonomy issues developing in Indonesia, based on the findings of selected articles in the period of 2000–2021?
2. What solutions are recommended by the selected articles to address the issues?

This article discusses the issues encountered recently in regional autonomy implementation, particularly in Indonesia, and seeks to provide a solution based on the selected articles found through the literature review method. It is also expected to be a new reference on the matter.

## Method

To provide an in-depth analysis, this research uses qualitative research methods. This qualitative research uses a literature review approach in the form of a systematic literature review. There are several steps in this research, namely identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion (Mongeon and Paul-Hus 2016; Bates et al. 2017). For the first step—identification—the researcher uses the keywords “regional autonomy” and “Indonesia” and the publication year 2000–2021, and then the researcher presents the issues that are relevant to writing this article (Cooper et al. 2018). This study used the Scopus and Taylor and Francis Group databases, both of which are reputable and recommended indexers in their fields. Article filtering is done with year and keyword limitations to avoid biased article search results (Denyer and Tranfield 2009).

At the screening stage (inclusion criteria), the article search is carried out by a separation process, and articles that have similarities are immediately eliminated. During the eligibility stage, it is necessary to determine the eligibility of an article, taking into account the suitability of the keywords, year of publication, research design, topics raised in the research, and others, and then a procedure must be followed in accordance with the instructions and guidelines for writing research (Snyder 2019).

The elimination technique used involves disregarding (1) journal articles using the literature review method; (2) non-English journal articles; (3) non-open-access and paid papers; (4) articles in the form of book papers; (5) articles that do not discuss local languages and autonomy in Indonesia; and (6) both national and international journal proceedings. At this stage, journal articles relevant to the discussion that have been collected are then analyzed and linked to the specified problem formulation, and the sub-discussions will be adapted to the contents of each journal article. Thus, an in-depth analysis will be generated based on a systematic literature review.

The first discussion will explain the first research question and its mechanisms, and it will include an explanation of the content of individual journal articles to be classified into several groups/sub-discussions; while articles with different content, topics, and issues will be approached in a way that will form a bridge that connects them to the sub-discussion of the article content (Hall et al. 2012). The final stage is included. This selection is carried

out to provide relevant journal articles in accordance with the guidelines for literature reviews, which can answer the research question raised earlier (Page et al. 2021). In addition, sub-discussions can use additional relevant articles if needed, and data loss can be prevented by the author by entering data into the Mendeley Data database to keep data safe and usable for writing the next article.

## Research

For the results of the search for more detailed information on articles, see Table 1 below.

**Table 1.** Article search results

Database	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Result
Scopus	209	51	14	10
Taylor and Francis Group	634	150	40	10
Total				20

The results of the search show that 20 journal articles were obtained using certain limitations as specified in the previous explanation and sub-discussion. Using Scopus, there were at least 209 articles found using keywords, and after the adjustment and elimination stages, 10 relevant journal articles were found. In the Taylor and Francis Group database, 634 articles were found. Following some elimination stages, 10 relevant journal articles were also obtained. The selected articles were then analyzed in this literature review.

## Discussion

### Regional autonomy issues in Indonesia

The first problem statement discusses development issues related to regional autonomy in Indonesia in the publication period of 2000–2021. Based on the existing data, two prominent issues were found: agroforestry management and economic disintegration.

### Agroforestry management

Discussions about regional autonomy in Indonesia are, in fact, associated with agroforestry. Simply, agroforestry is defined as a concept of land use through forestry plant cultivation combined with agricultural plant cultivation to get economic and environmental benefits. As well as providing other positive impacts, especially related to forest sustainability, it means using forests wisely for the sake of posterity (Damayatanti 2011). Local communities can also indirectly participate in forest management without having to abandon

their customs or local wisdom that has been passed down from generation to generation.

The implementation of regional autonomy in Indonesia has had strong legal foundations with Law No. 23 of 2014, indirectly authorizing the regional government to manage its land with the combined concept of consumption plant and forestry or agroforestry (Hitchner et al. 2009; Kuswanto et al. 2017; Nurrochmat et al. 2021; van der Muur 2018). The agroforestry issue is, of course, interesting and reminds us that Indonesia has always faced land conversion problems, with the conversion of land and forest use leading to damaged forests or deforestation (Mulyani and Jepson 2013; Seymour and Harris 2019). Agroforestry management could be an interesting solution to the forest problem in Indonesia. Regional autonomy could also be of potential value to the region, as forests can benefit the people not only from the wood aspect but also from their soil content, which has never been explored effectively (Nurrochmat et al. 2021; Shair-Rosenfield 2021). Regional autonomy would provide a great opportunity for regions to create a sustainable economy without destroying forests, and it would also generate strategic regional economic income for regional development, which so far still relies on income from the mineral sector, which cannot be renewed and will run out at certain times.

According to Nurrochmat et al. (2021), several Indonesian regions have implemented agroforestry well, one of which is Jambi Province. Although the law states that forest management is the central government's right and authority under the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, the region is also entitled to manage its forests well. Some Indonesian regions have also combined it with land management tidily and in a structured manner in accordance with customary law that has existed for a long time. An example of this is in Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara Province, where the customary community plays a very important role in implementing farming activities well and is highly supported by the Sumba Regional Government (Vel and Makambombu 2019). But according to van der Muur (2018), the implementation of agroforestry activities does not always go well, and from the results of scientific analysis, the author found some constraints, one of which is the conflict problem. It can be seen that many communities still have a traditional mindset when it comes to land cultivation, thereby will indirectly damage the original habitat of forest dweller endemic. Additionally, conflict also leads to people's ignorance of the borders of land not belonging to their right domain and dissension with some parties. The discussion section (van der Muur 2018) talks about one of the well-established regions in Indonesia in terms of conflict resolution implementation, which is resolving conflict through mediating the tribes. They achieve this by involving some parties in South Sulawesi Province, as the people there have special rights when a conflict of land management arises.

People are able to get involved and are allowed to express their complaints to the regional government. People's bargaining position, according to van der Muur (2018), is their basic power in South Sulawesi Province. The regional government of South Sulawesi Province recognizes the value of informal interaction beyond official forums in order to know and understand the issues at hand. Through this bargaining power, the community

is considered as participating in contributing to forestry management, especially for those who generally live or reside in the forest area (Setiajiati et al. 2019; Jalilova and Vacik 2012).

Regional autonomy allows the people and the regional government to take their own course of action, so that the central government no longer makes people and the regional government the object only, as has been the case historically (Muhyidin 2019; Tolo 2014; Muluk and Nugroho 2019). However, it places more emphasis on knowing, exploring, and utilizing the regional potency of its own residents to make its people prosperous and improve their economic standing. Additionally, through regional autonomy, regional governments in Indonesia are expected to manage their regions more equally, based on the potency they have (Asmorowati et al. 2020; Shair-Rosenfield 2021; Aluko 2005). This includes the potential for forestry, which is one of the pillars of sustainable economic elements. If it can be managed by prioritizing the concept of regional autonomy, the region would have an interest in the results of forest management, and the community would get a part of the work. If the results lead to the involvement of the regional government itself, not only would the local government benefit but so would the local community in the forest area, who would experience an increase in welfare in a sustainable manner if the local government can allow for this.

#### Economic disintegration

Regional autonomy implemented in Indonesia can bring prosperity to the regions through the local potencies existing. Local potency contributes to the region's income and, of course, the state's revenue. The region receives profit sharing and a general allocation fund, as mentioned in Law No. 23 of 2014 on Regional Government. The law states that there should be a substantial fund given to the regions in an attempt to support decentralization implementation—the more potency and income the regions have, the more funding they will receive (Wahyuningsih et al. 2019; Maharani and Tampubolon 2014). Indonesia can learn from the experience in the reformation era (2000s) when Timor Timur (East Timor) separated itself from Indonesia and became an independent state named Timor-Leste, which is an example of an economic disintegration case that had surfaced many years before. A previous study by Burchill (2000) revealed that social envy and economic differences between western and eastern regions of Indonesia had been present for a long time in the region of East Timor. Until then, opponents of the New Order's decentralization (1966–1999) had not been able to do anything to change their regional fate, and they would be suppressed and taken as political prisoners. Finally, Timor-Leste detached from Indonesia with the fall of the New Order rule in 1998–1999, and Timor-Leste has been a sovereign state since then. Therefore, regional development, especially in areas that have natural resources in the form of forests, needs to receive more attention from the central government. The involvement of local governments, academics, and even local communities needs to be fully supported in this regard, so that incidents similar to what occurred in Timor-Leste do not happen again (Desmiwati and Christian 2019; Roengtam and Agustiyara 2022).

According to Sutiyono et al. (2018), the events that happened a long time ago will never be repeated. Thus, the government, through decentralization, should be able to maximize regional autonomy on a broad scale, and all regions should be allowed to participate without the wish to be detached from Indonesia. Regional administration and public services would run more smoothly were regional autonomy to be implemented broadly, as the central government's direct approval would no longer be needed. However, the state would still need supervision over local leaders, as it oversees the state budget managed by each region (Iek and Blesia 2019; Sahabuddin et al. 2019; Said et al. 2020). The supervision of local governments would continue to be carried out, and it would be necessary to determine which would be the affairs of the regional government and which would be the affairs of the central government, so that the responsibilities and the flow of coordination are clear and function properly.

Up to 2021, many regions in Indonesia explored their local potency because they have more natural resources that can promote their regions. For example, from the journal articles reviewed, the author found an article (Marlina et al. 2021) studying Wakatobi National Park, which, according to regulation, belongs to the list of National Parks in Indonesia under the Ministry of Living and Environment and Forestry, but from a tourism management aspect, the taxes collected from the businesses in the national area, such as visitor centers, tour guides, and recreational device owners, belong to regional income. According to Bakker and Moniaga (2010), socialization should be given to the people living around the national park, which could be done by involving the tribal leaders and community groups in managing this national park, in order to give the people an indirect income. This kind of involvement from the community could have a significant economic impact on the existence of forests that are indirectly managed. The provision of transport to support all needs in a tourism park is certainly more interesting when it prioritizes elements of completeness and is also user-friendly and accessible to all visiting tourists.

Research from Semiarty and Fanany (2017) talks about the utilization of regional potency, viewed from the local leaders' perspective, in utilizing opportunities in West Sumatra in the context of the health sector. Local government, particularly local leaders, can utilize human resources to improve and maintain the health of all people, both in urban and rural areas. Better and more modern hospitals can attract people to come to health facilities in order to get treatment and increase regional income. However, if people do not get good service and the prices are high, it may deter them from prioritizing their health, or they may even go to health facilities in another region that may be considered to have better facilities (Milanovic 2005; Erbaugh 2019).

Wardhana (2019) notes that, essentially, regional autonomy is like two sides of the same coin that could contribute either positively or negatively to a government and a society. The negative side could mean an impact on the sustainability of people's lives, while the positive side could mean the provision of many benefits for the sustainability of life. The optimization of integrated land use and even economic distribution is desirable to maintain the

unity of Indonesia, particularly in the regions that have never been touched by the central government's development so far. The central government must immediately provide maximum regional autonomy to the regions, and of course, be supported by strict supervision and assistance to regions that have forest reserves, so that they can be utilized to the maximum without destroying them.

The expectation from all circles is that the existence of regional autonomy could certainly have a broad impact on the sustainability of the community, and the local government will assess whether forests can be one of the sectors that could drive the regional economy and be a source of regional income that will not run out. Optimizing forest management must prioritize the interests of the community, especially local communities in the forest area, lest those in the forest area become victims of the existence of regional autonomy, which only emphasizes regional income and regional income without the active involvement of the community around the forest area.

### Solution to the regions

The solution to regional autonomy issues is interesting to study through the selected journal articles found in response to the issues. There are at least two solutions that can be elaborated: multi-level governance and foreign direct investment (FDI).

### Multi-level governance

From an in-depth analysis of each of the journal articles selected, it can be concluded that multi-level governance could be an alternative solution to the issues discussed in the previous problem. Research in Papua (Anggraini et al. 2019) provides an understanding that the involvement of city and district governments is very important to bridge communication with indigenous system governance to advance a policy. Regional regulations (*Perda*) can bridge the gap between national regulations and customary norms. According to Sutiyono et al. (2018), has applied this multi-level governance; this can be seen from the distribution of tasks, roles, and responsibilities between central, provincial, and regency governments in governmental affairs. The study undertaken by Sutiyono et al. (2018) also found that multi-level governance in Indonesia is still overshadowed strongly by the central government's centralization. The Indonesian government has not indirectly let go of the existence of broad regional autonomy to the regions. Other research from Hooghe and Marks (2003) argues that cooperation through coordination between governments is desirable. It should be emphasized that the coordination conducted is limited to work visits and agenda discussions that have been specified by the central government, so that the regional government only receives direction and serves as a field technical executor. An effective decentralization not only implements the policy specified by the central government but also has no domination in its government implementation, because all governments have a shared vision and mission to provide the best service to the public (Shair-Rosenfield 2021).

In relation to the agroforestry issue, one point needing all stakeholders' attention is



coordination. Coordination should be established between the central government, regional government, and society (people). Thus, through direct coordination and interaction with the people, any problems occurring within society can be identified. According to Hitchner et al. (2009), this has been implemented in the Sarawak region, or to be more exact, in the Kelabit Highlands—the Indonesian region known to be a tourist destination and referred to as the “Heart of Borneo.” The concept used is not only able to preserve nature in the forests of the Sarawak area, Malaysia, but it also makes it easier for local governments to monitor the use of forest functions and indigenous peoples while maintaining their ancestral traditions without being disturbed by modernization.

Considering the review from the articles selected, it can be seen that customary communities living around the national park area, which may become an area for agroforestry, need serious attention, particularly from the central government, because it has the utmost authority. Indonesian politics, according to (Kuswanto et al. 2017), affects the decentralization system. Both practical politics and domination politics have led to the gap between the regions belonging to a legislator’s constituency and other regions not belonging to it. Election winners tend to only focus on development in their areas, the majority of which are their areas of residence and voting areas, and the areas that should be their responsibility are left behind in terms of infrastructure, economy, social services, health, and education. Communities whose areas are left behind will certainly be powerless when faced with the concept of involvement in forest management and won’t benefit from the results of the forest wealth.

In China, for example, the Chinese central government does not influence Shanghai Province significantly administratively. The Chinese government in Beijing serves as the supervisor of national interest only, and if the Shanghai government wants to cooperate with other state governments to invest abroad, it should discuss its plan first with the central government, as long as the cooperation or agreement is in line with China’s national interest and does not harm China or the Shanghai government (Yeung and Li 1999). Thus, the implementation of real regional autonomy in China has been very good and has given broad freedom to the government in Shanghai. We can see that the Shanghai region is currently advancing rapidly in terms of economic and population growth, meaning that it becomes a special attraction when someone is going to invest in the region, especially in the development of economic areas.

Research from Egungyu et al. (2016) and Nurrochmat et al. (2021) observes that agroforestry management is easy as long as the central and regional governments want to seriously reform the management system, which still has some shortcomings that can be solved well by elites at each level. In reality, there is an egocentric weakness in the field that still seems to be unsolvable even today. Therefore, fundamental reform is required in agroforestry management in order to elicit a great deal of benefits to central and regional governments. Rather than generating conflict between governmental levels, there should be an understanding that forest management should remain sustainable and well-maintained, and the

communities should feel comfortable in their environment without any disturbance in preserving their local wisdom in managing forests.

### Foreign direct investment (FDI)

Research from Dehoop (2016) notes that foreign capital is an indicator of a state's financial management when it comes to developing its regions. Foreign capital investments give states a large foreign exchange profit indirectly, so that the regions with foreign companies are the richer ones because their land and resources have been used for corporate interest. In addition to the optimization of local potencies, foreign capital investment also contributes to activating the people's economy and local economic growth. Indonesia is highly open to foreign investment, particularly in the issuance of Law No. 25 of 2007 on Foreign Investment, and the regional autonomy policy facilitates the regions to receive foreign capital to build their regions without relying on the central government's funds, which are frequently given very slowly. Based on research on investment management in the development of renewable energy in Indonesia (Yulianto et al. 2019), it was found that it is very important to involve the private sector in developing renewable energy because of its flexible access to capital, advanced technology, and innovation in this field.

Also, according to Asmorowati et al. (2020) and Rodiyah et al. (2020), the central government should be cautious when identifying the regions in each of the Indonesian provinces with potencies such as mineral, industrial, human resource, health, and infrastructure, and prepare them earlier to avoid the domination of regions receiving this foreign capital, because it will result in envy among regions if there is an uneven distribution of investment.

Considering this, each of the regions can benefit from the investment and promote their regions without envy toward one another. One Central European state—Slovakia—bordering on Western Europe, having an advanced economy, receives great investment in the state's economy. It can be seen from the successful development of nearly all infrastructures, including an electric train network, telecommunication, and water reserve from 2000 to 2012, compared with those in previous years. Slovakia has implemented decentralization, and this state has similar characteristics to Indonesia. Slovakia's territory is fairly broad for a Central European state, and it has a dense population with a lower-middle economic class on average. However, within just a few years, everything was turned around; the investment they received had made Slovakia a superior state in many sectors, particularly in the automotive and cement industries (Kucharčíková et al. 2015; Fabuš and Csabay 2018).

According to Lindblad (2013), broadly, the appearance of disintegration is understandable, as it is triggered by a region's envy of other richer regions. This will gradually lead to discordance, detrimental to the state entirely. Not all stakeholders will agree with foreign investment. Some reasons are expressed, one of which is that foreign investment means the state has failed to bring its wishes into reality. Another reason is that there is no strong

control over this investment, so it is difficult to investigate the investors' track record. And yet another reason is that there is tight competition, and if it occurs and the state is not ready for it, it will merely be a spectator in its economically colonized region. Many other critiques and reasons are expressed against the acceptance of foreign investment (Asri 2015).

Foreign investment will indirectly have a huge impact on the sustainability of a country and even a region. Of course, details related to policies and the core values of every action taken by the government are needed, so that it can be ensured that no party is harmed as a result of foreign investment, and that regions and their communities benefit significantly from it (Marks 2010). Giving freedom to other countries in terms of investment must, of course, be accompanied by concrete actions and laws that are strict against all violations that may occur during the implementation of the investment. The existence of this investment can certainly provide prosperity if it is managed properly, yielding benefits involving equity, job creation, and even technology transfer that can be utilized properly by internal parties. But if managed inadequately, it could certainly result in a big loss that must be paid by the government.

The solution to the second research question in this sub-discussion is related to the government's readiness to receive foreign investment with the aforementioned preparation and structuring measures. Mapping investment areas to realize synergy between regions and national synergy to benefit both Indonesia and its regions must be done carefully and precisely by the Indonesian government, considering that foreign investment is entering Indonesia fast, and the ease of investment could be an obstacle to maintaining control over it if the government cannot keep up. By doing the mapping and synergies, strong intergovernmental relations in the regions and national synergy must, of course, be realized immediately by prioritizing the concept of sustainable development and strong law enforcement, fostering a high sense of trust in the government.

## Conclusions

1. Considering the results of research and discussion related to regional autonomy issues developing during 2000–2021 in Indonesia, at least two very interesting issues are found: agroforestry management and economic disintegration.
2. The result from the literature review is that agroforestry in regional autonomy will impact the regions and the people broadly. Meanwhile, the Indonesian government should be alerted to the economic disintegration issue. The second is that economic disintegration is the implication of economic envy between regions, thereby requiring the central government to anticipate negative risks in the implementation of regional autonomy. Integration will be in danger if a misunderstanding occurs and

- the central government has inadequate informal and formal approaches in terms of access to regional development, particularly in the eastern part of Indonesia.
3. The solution offered to respond to the issues found in the articles' review is multi-level governance to deal with the agroforestry management issue, in which the central government serves as supervisor only, rather than as executor. This solution is offered, emphasizing that the forest areas "belong" to the regions. Although the policy is controlled by the central government, it would be more effective for regions and their people to have full control over agroforestry management, so that the national interest can be achieved.
  4. Another solution is to use foreign capital investment to prevent economic disintegration in Indonesia. Foreign capital investment could be accepted by Indonesia to eliminate economic disintegration and optimize local potencies. But it is worth noting that foreign capital investment policy should be organized to create synergy between regions, rather than to exacerbate the conflict between regions or between regional and central governments.
  5. One limitation of the study is that it still emphasizes literature review research. It is hoped that future research can prioritize comprehensive research methods with the same theme as this research.

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