

Editorial: Navigating Uncertainty Through Policy Transformation

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The contemporary world is entering an era of uncertainty marked by accelerated sociopolitical, economic, and technological transformations at both global and regional levels. This uncertainty is no longer episodic but structural, shaping how states design policies, manage bureaucracies, and respond to crises. In developing countries, these dynamics are further complicated by limited institutional capacity and high levels of socio-economic vulnerability. The current era of uncertainty is indeed structural, rooted in technological transformation, global political-economic shifts, and changing institutional relations. For developing states, uncertainty becomes a source of vulnerability, particularly when state capacity is weakened by external pressures such as structural adjustment and sanctions, alongside internal social contradictions. The solution lies not merely in producing new regulations, but in building state capacity that is more autonomous, integrated, adaptive, and deeply embedded within domestic social networks (Glazyev, 2022; Mao, 2021).

In Indonesia, global uncertainty intersects with distinctive domestic characteristics. Geographically, Indonesia is highly prone to natural disasters, requiring bureaucratic agility in responding to crises swiftly and effectively. At the same time, national public administration is at a critical juncture due to rapid regulatory changes at the central level, particularly during the political transition of 2023–2024. These changes have had direct implications for the integrity, neutrality, and professionalism of the State Civil Apparatus (ASN), which should function as the backbone of stable and accountable governance. The combination of disaster vulnerability and bureaucratic politicization places Indonesia at a pivotal moment: without strengthening local capacity, coordination, and the firm enforcement of meritocracy and neutrality, the ASN will struggle to serve as the foundation of a government that is both agile and stable amid global uncertainty and political transition (Rahmadhani et al., 2025).

This uncertainty is further compounded by disparities in local development dynamics. Rural areas seek to sustain economic resilience through community strengthening and local collaboration, while large urban centers such as Surabaya face intense pressure from urbanization that fundamentally reshapes socio-economic structures. Urbanization generates economic opportunities but also imposes serious

pressures on labor markets, housing provision, infrastructure, and the environment. Under such conditions, rigid and sectoral policy models have proven increasingly inadequate. The rural–urban divide and urbanization pressures in major cities like Surabaya clearly demonstrate that inflexible, sectoral policies are incapable of managing the complexity of labor markets, housing, infrastructure, and environmental challenges. Recent evidence supports the need for integrated and adaptive policy approaches grounded in community empowerment, both in rural and urban contexts, to build more equitable economic and social resilience (Li & Diao, 2024; Yang et al., 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, global public administration has undergone a paradigm shift from hierarchical Old Public Administration (OPA), to the efficiency-oriented New Public Management (NPM), and subsequently to the participatory orientation of New Public Service (NPS). However, the application of Western Public Administration (WPA) paradigms in Indonesia has often encountered conceptual and practical limitations. These theories are frequently treated as universal models, neglecting Indonesia's distinctive social, cultural, and institutional contexts. As a result, policy innovation and public service delivery often lack cultural legitimacy and fail to address grassroots realities. Previous research substantiates concerns that the universal application of WPA paradigms in Indonesia frequently overlooks local contexts and produces innovations with weak legitimacy. The solution is not to reject OPA–NPM–NPS outright, but to revise and integrate them with Indigenous Public Administration and local wisdom, enabling global theory and local practice to mutually reinforce rather than negate one another (Suripto et al., 2021).

Public administration scholarship indicates a relatively consistent global evolution of paradigms, progressing from Old Public Administration (OPA) to New Public Management (NPM), then to New Public Service (NPS), and further toward New Public Governance (NPG). This evolution reflects a shift from hierarchical, legal–rational bureaucracy toward governance arrangements emphasizing networks, cross-actor collaboration, and sensitivity to social and cultural contexts (Ali & Kabul, 2025; Gupta & Lamsal, 2023; Iacovino et al., 2017). OPA traditionally positioned the state as the dominant actor through rigid bureaucratic structures oriented toward legal compliance. This paradigm was criticized for being unresponsive and inefficient, leading to the emergence of NPM, which emphasized efficiency, market logic, and private-sector managerial practices. However, NPM's dominance of efficiency and market mechanisms generated problems of democratic legitimacy, prompting the rise of NPS with its emphasis on citizen participation, civic values, and collective public interest. More recent developments in NPG further underscore the importance of policy networks, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and the state's role as a facilitator within complex governance ecosystems (Gupta & Lamsal, 2023; Kandel et al., 2025; Kim, 2021). Within NPS and NPG frameworks, values such as participation, social justice, and collaboration have become

central, replacing the dominance of bureaucratic rationality or market logic alone. The state is no longer understood as the sole provider of public services, but as the orchestrator of relationships among public, private, and civil society actors (Schnell & Gerard, 2023). This shift reflects growing recognition that public policy always operates within diverse social contexts and cannot be reduced to purely technocratic concerns.

Nevertheless, numerous studies indicate that the application of Western Public Administration paradigms in developing countries often encounters conceptual and practical constraints. Models such as NPM, which emerged from OECD contexts characterized by specific institutional capacities and political cultures, frequently lose explanatory power when transplanted into structurally and culturally different administrative environments (Gupta & Lamsal, 2023). Differences in bureaucratic capacity, state–society relations, and political history mean that WPA-based policy transfers often result in implementation distortions. In Indonesia, critiques of WPA are particularly salient. Literature on Indigenous Public Administration (IPA) and non-Western approaches explicitly highlights the failure of universal paradigms to address local socio-cultural diversity. Studies in regions such as Aceh and Papua demonstrate that policies designed according to Western administrative assumptions frequently ignore local social institutions, customary values, and indigenous conflict-resolution mechanisms, thereby triggering legitimacy crises and political tensions (Lamawuran et al., 2025; Suripto et al., 2021). At the local level, particularly in villages, the limitations of WPA become even more apparent. Hierarchical OPA and market-oriented NPM paradigms have proven inadequate for addressing needs related to participation, empowerment, and community collaboration. Although a shift toward NPS is normatively acknowledged as necessary, its implementation is often constrained by centralized bureaucratic legacies and partial adoption of market logic misaligned with village social dynamics. Similar findings emerge in traditional market revitalization programs, where policy interventions emphasizing physical and managerial restructuring in line with WPA models tend to fail when local social institutions are ignored. Conversely, success is achieved when policy design is rooted in local wisdom and entrenched community practices (Lamawuran et al., 2025). Overall, this literature underscores that while global public administration paradigms increasingly emphasize collaboration and networks, their application in Indonesia requires deeper contextual adaptation. The failure of WPA to capture socio-cultural complexity creates space for developing non-Western public administration paradigms that are not only technically efficient but also socially and politically legitimate.

A central problem that emerges is the gap between formal policy design and the uncertain realities of implementation. This gap not only leads to failures in meeting citizens' needs but also contributes to the erosion of institutional integrity. Indonesia's bureaucracy faces a process of political–administrative marginalization that threatens

meritocratic principles, as short-term political interests increasingly override ASN neutrality. The weakening of merit system oversight, particularly during 2023–2024, has created space for bureaucratic politicization and risks undermining public trust in state institutions. The literature emphasizes that the disconnect between policy design and reality, exacerbated by politicization and weakened merit systems, directly degrades service quality and institutional integrity. Addressing this challenge requires reforms that go beyond normative commitments by separating political interests from ASN management, strengthening sanction-capable oversight mechanisms, and building governance capacity that is adaptive to field-level uncertainty (Kurniawati & Saprudin, 2025). At the same time, reliance on sectoral and reactive policies exacerbates multidimensional problems such as rural poverty, regional inequality, and urban pressure. Low public participation and weak policy synchronization across spatial planning, employment, and environmental protection indicate that Indonesia's public policy challenges cannot be resolved through technocratic approaches alone. Sectoral, reactive, and technocratic policies are insufficient to address rural poverty, regional inequality, and urban pressures. The way forward requires cross-sectoral and multi-level integration, territorially sensitive policy design, legally consequential public participation, and a reorientation of development from mere economic growth toward social and ecological justice (Koerner et al., 2024; Sitorus et al., 2025).

This editorial article aims to formulate more comprehensive and contextual policy transformation strategies for navigating such uncertainty. Previous public administration studies in Indonesia have tended to be sectoral and descriptive, focusing separately on demographic issues, economic performance, or bureaucratic procedures. A significant literature gap exists in linking the degradation of merit system oversight with the need for a more contextual, non-Western administrative paradigm oriented toward strengthening social capital. Existing literature confirms this gap in connecting merit system erosion with the development of non-Western, socially embedded public administration paradigms (Turner et al., 2022; M. P. H. Wijaya et al., 2019).

The novelty of this analysis lies in employing the frameworks of embedded autonomy and collaborative governance to bridge bureaucratic independence with active community engagement. The concept of embedded autonomy builds on the idea that effective bureaucracies must be both autonomous and socially embedded, enabling them to maintain professional capacity while absorbing societal aspirations and information (Carelli & Pierre, 2024; MacKinnon, 2002). Many decentralization and local autonomy studies emphasize institutional independence from excessive political control but often fail to elaborate how such autonomy remains socially “connected” (Jafarova, 2025). Meanwhile, collaborative governance literature has mapped how states and non-state actors—civil society organizations, communities, and the private sector—can construct joint forums characterized by institutional design, power balance, trust, and leadership

(Ansell & Gash, 2016; Ansell & Gash, 2007; Emerson et al., 2012). Indonesian studies show that government–civil society collaboration at the local level can strengthen value-based and socially just public administration, provided that genuine dialogue and participatory spaces are opened (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2011; Saleh et al., 2021). However, many collaboration studies assume relatively “open” states, rather than addressing classic problems of overly autonomous or excessively centralized bureaucracies. This is where the present contribution lies: positioning embedded autonomy as a prerequisite for collaboration design, ensuring that bureaucrats remain independent from narrow interests while being institutionally required to embed themselves in local community networks (Bjärstig et al., 2024; Carelli & Pierre, 2024; Saleh et al., 2021).

By integrating embedded autonomy and collaborative governance, this analysis offers a relatively novel framework for Indonesia’s public administration context. State officials are not merely controlled or “opened” to participation; they are designed as autonomous actors who are institutionally obligated to network and negotiate on an equal footing with local communities. Empirically, this approach is reflected in successful village potential management through collaborative schemes such as Village-Owned Enterprises (BUMDes), which strengthen local economies while building social trust. The case of BUMDes Mitra Sejahtera in Sikapat Village demonstrates that collaboration among village governments, banking institutions, and communities can improve public service access and promote economic welfare, despite ongoing human resource capacity challenges. Empirically and conceptually, Indonesian public administration literature has opened pathways but has not explicitly linked merit system crises with the need for non-Western, social capital-based paradigms. Employing embedded autonomy and collaborative governance to redefine the relationship between ASN autonomy and community engagement constitutes a distinct theoretical and methodological contribution beyond the descriptive sectoral studies that have dominated the field (Sutangsa, 2024; S. S. Wijaya, 2022). In urban contexts such as Surabaya, policy transformation must instead emphasize the integration of legal and rational planning instruments. Rapid urbanization necessitates evidence-based policies capable of managing negative development externalities, including labor market skill mismatches, informal settlement expansion, and environmental degradation. Synchronization among labor policies, spatial planning, and environmental protection is a critical prerequisite for equitable and sustainable urban development.

By strengthening two core pillars—microsociety as a space for community-based innovation and human capital as the driver of bureaucratic competence—this article offers a policy transformation roadmap that is not only technically efficient but also inclusive, sustainable, and culturally resonant. Navigating global and domestic uncertainty requires the courage to reconstruct public administration paradigms toward

governance that is more pluralistic, humane, and adaptive to Indonesia's realities. Uncertainty has become a permanent feature of contemporary public governance. Rapid regulatory changes, fluctuating political dynamics, and simultaneous socio-economic transformations place unprecedented adaptive pressure on government institutions. In Indonesia, such uncertainty stems not only from global forces but also from domestic dynamics that directly affect bureaucratic capacity, policy quality, and public trust. This journal issue appears at a critical moment when Indonesian public administration is being tested for its ability to remain professional, adaptive, and responsive amid turbulence. The articles compiled in this issue collectively examine how public policies, institutions, and governance actors attempt to navigate uncertainty through various forms of transformation at national, local, and community levels.

Dynamics of the State Civil Apparatus and the Crisis of Institutional Integrity

The article *"Uncovers the Dynamics of the State Civil Apparatus in Indonesia: Implications for Governance and Institutional Quality"* offers the most critical analysis in this issue. It underscores that any policy transformation will remain fragile without a professional, neutral, and integrity-driven bureaucracy. During 2023–2024, Indonesia's bureaucracy faced significant political-administrative pressure, marked by weakened merit system oversight and increased political intervention in ASN management. The article reveals that the marginalization of merit oversight institutions has created a dangerous institutional grey zone. As oversight weakens, patronage, nepotism, and political loyalty risk replacing competence and professionalism. Over time, this condition not only degrades public service quality but also undermines the foundations of public trust in the state. What distinguishes this article is its ability to link micro-level ASN behavior with macro-level governance stability. Administrative uncertainty does not arise solely from regulatory change but from institutional failure to maintain clear boundaries between politics and administration. Accordingly, the required transformation extends beyond procedural reform toward reconstructing institutional integrity by restoring the merit system as the central pillar of modern bureaucracy. The article offers strong theoretical and practical contributions by affirming that strengthening the independence of oversight bodies such as KASN is not a technical issue but a prerequisite for administrative democracy. Amid political uncertainty, ASN neutrality serves as an anchor of state stability.

From State to Community: Collaborative Governance as an Adaptive Strategy

While the first article highlights state foundations, *"Collaborative Governance in BUMDes Management: A Study in Sikapat Village, Sumbang Subdistrict, Banyumas Regency"* brings the discussion to the grassroots level. The study demonstrates how rural economic uncertainty can be managed through collaborative governance involving village governments, BUMDes, external partners, and communities. Analysis of BUMDes Mitra Sejahtera illustrates that collaboration is not merely participatory rhetoric but a

concrete mechanism for compensating resource limitations. Face-to-face dialogue, information transparency, and clear role distribution have proven effective in improving public service performance and stimulating local economic growth. Implicitly, this article reinforces the argument of the first: when local bureaucracies possess healthy autonomy and actors are trusted to collaborate, uncertainty can be managed productively. However, the study also highlights persistent challenges, particularly human resource capacity and sustained community participation—issues that again emphasize the critical role of bureaucratic quality in driving policy innovation.

Urban Uncertainty: Urbanization as a Test of Rational Policy

While rural areas confront local economic uncertainty, metropolitan cities such as Surabaya face structural pressure from rapid urbanization. The article *“Urbanization Dynamics and Socio-Economic Changes in Surabaya City”* analyzes how migration flows generate multidimensional challenges, from labor market pressure to informal settlement expansion. It emphasizes that urbanization is not merely a demographic phenomenon but a socio-economic transformation demanding data-driven, cross-sectoral public policies. Without integration across spatial planning, labor policy, and environmental protection, cities risk being trapped in cycles of inequality and declining quality of life. In the context of this editorial, the Surabaya study broadens the meaning of uncertainty—not only political or economic instability, but also policy incapacity to keep pace with social change. Urban policy transformation thus becomes imperative to ensure that urbanization is directed toward inclusive development rather than new crises.

Innovation, Actor Networks, and Human Capital

Other articles in this issue further enrich perspectives on policy transformation. Analysis of regional financial management in West Sumatra highlights the importance of adaptive fiscal management in maintaining regional stability. An Actor Network Theory-based study in Pemalang Regency demonstrates that environmental policy implementation depends on the stability of human and non-human actor networks. Meanwhile, research on ASN capacity development in Rote Ndao Regency highlights bureaucratic transformation challenges in peripheral regions often overlooked in national discourse. Significant theoretical contributions also emerge from *“Microsociety and Human Capital as Foundations for Public Service Innovation in the Non-Western Public Administration Perspective”*, which advances a Non-Western Public Administration framework positioning microsociety and human capital as primary sources of public service innovation. In Indonesia, this approach serves as a critical counterpoint to the dominance of Western paradigms that often marginalize local values such as *gotong royong* and *musyawarah*.

Mapping the Roadmap

Collectively, the articles in this issue demonstrate that navigating uncertainty cannot rely on a single approach. Policy transformation requires bureaucratic integrity, inclusive collaborative governance, data-driven rational policies, and the courage to develop more contextual public administration paradigms. This editorial conveys a central message: uncertainty is not a justification for stagnation, but a call for more reflective and humane transformation. Bureaucratic reform, village-level innovation, urban restructuring, and human capital strengthening must be understood as interconnected components of a single governance ecosystem. We hope this issue not only enriches academic discourse but also serves as a reflective reference for policymakers and governance practitioners. In a rapidly changing world, relevant policy scholarship is that which remains critical, contextual, and committed to the sustainability of public governance. *Happy reading.*

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