

The Application of the Concept of Asymmetric Decentralization in Local Government Governance

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Abstract

Asymmetric decentralization has emerged as an increasingly important framework for accommodating the political, fiscal, cultural, and historical diversity of subnational regions within unitary states. Unlike symmetric decentralization, which grants uniform authority to every local government, asymmetric decentralization allows a differentiated distribution of governmental authority based on the specific needs, historical claims, and administrative capacities of particular regions. This study examines the application of the concept of asymmetric decentralization in local government governance through a qualitative, normative-juridical, and comparative case study approach, drawing on twenty-five peer-reviewed academic sources published between 2021 and 2026. The analysis centers on special autonomy arrangements in Papua, Aceh, and Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and is triangulated against comparative international cases, including Pattani in Thailand, the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, Georgia, Portugal, England, Spain, China, Tanzania, and Ghana. The findings indicate that the success of asymmetric decentralization is strongly contingent upon local governance quality, particularly institutional capacity, fiscal capability, and accountability mechanisms, rather than on the breadth of devolved authority alone. This study proposes an integrative capacity-contingent framework that positions governance quality as a moderating variable linking asymmetric decentralization design to local governance outcomes, offering theoretical contribution and practical policy implications for governments designing differentiated regional autonomy arrangements.

Keywords: asymmetric decentralization; local government governance; special autonomy; regional autonomy; governance capacity

1. Introduction

Governance in unitary states has long grappled with a fundamental tension: how to preserve national integrity while accommodating the vast political, cultural, fiscal, and geographic diversity that exists among subnational regions. Decentralization, understood broadly as the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibility from central to local government, has been widely adopted as an instrument to bring public decision-making closer to citizens, improve service delivery, and



strengthen democratic accountability (Faguet & Shami, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose & Muštra, 2022). However, the conventional model of decentralization assumes a symmetric distribution of authority, in which every subnational unit receives an identical package of powers, functions, and fiscal instruments regardless of its administrative capacity, historical trajectory, or socio-political condition. In practice, this uniformity has often proven inadequate for regions marked by protracted conflict, distinct ethnic or religious identity, geographic remoteness, or historically rooted claims to self-governance.

Asymmetric decentralization offers an alternative paradigm. It permits central governments to grant differentiated scope, depth, and type of authority to specific regions, often as a political settlement to separatist tension, a recognition of cultural distinctiveness, or a strategy to address persistent socio-economic disparity (Muluk, 2021; Teles et al., 2025). Indonesia provides one of the most extensively studied laboratories of asymmetric decentralization in the contemporary world. Following the collapse of the New Order regime in 1998, Indonesia enacted sweeping decentralization reforms through Law No. 22/1999 and its successors, culminating in Law No. 23/2014 on Regional Government. Alongside this general decentralization framework, the state simultaneously granted special autonomy status to select provinces: Aceh, through Law No. 11/2006, in response to decades of armed conflict between the Free Aceh Movement and the central government; Papua and West Papua, through Law No. 21/2001 and its 2021 amendment (Law No. 2/2021), intended to address historical grievances, resource-revenue disputes, and demands for greater political recognition; and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, through Law No. 13/2012, which preserves a hereditary sultanate governance model rooted in pre-colonial tradition (Fauzan & Ardhanariswai, 2023; Suharno, 2021; Bachmid, 2022).

These arrangements were designed to grant selective broad autonomy that combines elements of political, fiscal, and cultural self-governance not available to ordinary provinces (Fauzan & Ardhanariswai, 2023; Asmorojati et al., 2022). Yet a substantial and growing body of literature documents that the mere existence of special autonomy status does not guarantee improved welfare, equitable development, or strengthened local governance. Studies on Papua, for instance, have shown that despite the transfer of substantial special autonomy funds, disparities in health, education, and infrastructure between Papua and other Indonesian provinces have persisted or even widened, a phenomenon attributed to weak fiscal absorption capacity, elite capture, and limited bureaucratic capability at the local level (Herdanawati, 2024; Dewi, 2021; Angela & Nursadi, 2025; Salama & Rohmadin, 2025). Similarly, in Aceh, asymmetric arrangements that grant authority over Islamic law implementation and a greater share of natural resource revenue have generated mixed outcomes, with implementation constrained by overlapping regulatory frameworks and uneven local institutional readiness (Suharno, 2021).

This pattern is not unique to Indonesia. Comparative international evidence reinforces the observation that the design of asymmetric decentralization interacts with local governance quality to produce highly variable outcomes. In Thailand, the limited administrative and political concessions granted to the Pattani region have struggled to address underlying grievances precisely because the unitary constitutional structure restricts the depth of devolved authority (Triwahyuningsih et al., 2025). In Cameroon, asymmetrical constitutional accommodation for the Anglophone regions has been characterized as insufficient to resolve deep-seated political tension, again illustrating that formal asymmetry without adequate institutional and fiscal follow-through fails to achieve its intended pacifying or developmental function (Kanyimi, 2026). In Georgia, asymmetries between the capital and peripheral self-governing units have been linked to uneven local fiscal performance and governance capacity (Zakaradze et al., 2025). European experience

is similarly instructive: Portugal's effort to construct a rigorous decentralization index reveals substantial variation in the operational meaning of local autonomy across municipalities (Teles et al., 2025), while research on England's devolution periphery demonstrates that productivity gains from devolved governance are contingent upon pre-existing local governance capacity rather than devolution alone (Newman & Hoole, 2024). Studies of Spain's regional response to the COVID-19 pandemic further show that decentralized authority can become a liability rather than an asset when inter-governmental coordination mechanisms are weak (Erkoreka & Hernando-Pérez, 2022). Comparable dynamics have been documented in fiscal decentralization research in Tanzania, where uneven development and continued dependence on central transfers persist despite formal decentralization (Rugeiyamu, 2025), and in Ghana, where devolved district assemblies have generated uneven citizen satisfaction depending on local governance performance (Mohammed et al., 2024).

Taken together, this body of research points to a critical but underexplored proposition: the outcomes of asymmetric decentralization are not determined primarily by the formal scope of authority transferred, but by the interaction between that authority and the governance capacity of the recipient local government, including its institutional strength, fiscal management competence, and accountability infrastructure. Existing scholarship, however, has approached this issue in a fragmented manner. The dominant strand of literature, particularly within Indonesian legal and public administration scholarship, tends to adopt a normative-juridical lens focused on a single case, such as Papua, Aceh, or Yogyakarta in isolation, without systematically triangulating these findings against comparative international experience (Herdanawati, 2024; Dewi, 2021; Bachmid, 2022). Conversely, the comparative political-economy literature on decentralization more broadly tends to treat asymmetric arrangements as a peripheral variant of general decentralization theory, rarely centering governance quality as an explicit moderating mechanism linking decentralization design to outcomes (Faguet & Shami, 2021; Rodríguez-Pose & Muštra, 2022). Few studies have attempted to construct an integrative, cross-national framework that explicitly positions local governance quality as the pivotal variable mediating the relationship between the design of asymmetric decentralization and its realized outcomes in local government governance.

Conceptually, asymmetric decentralization can be situated within the broader typology of decentralization as political, administrative, and fiscal transfer of authority, but it departs from the standard typology by making the depth and combination of these three dimensions variable across regions rather than uniform. A region may, for example, receive extensive fiscal authority without commensurate political authority, or substantial political recognition without the administrative capacity to exercise it effectively. This variability is precisely what generates the empirical puzzle at the center of this study: two regions granted formally similar special autonomy status can nonetheless diverge sharply in governance outcomes, a pattern evident when comparing the trajectories of Papua, Aceh, and Yogyakarta within Indonesia itself, and further confirmed when placed alongside Pattani, the Anglophone Cameroonian regions, Georgian self-governing units, and devolved regions in England and Spain. Understanding why formally comparable grants of authority yield divergent outcomes requires moving beyond a purely legal-formal analysis of decentralization statutes toward an analysis that treats local governance quality as an independent explanatory variable in its own right.

This study addresses that gap. Its novelty lies in three contributions. First, it synthesizes Indonesian case evidence on Papua, Aceh, and Yogyakarta with comparative international cases spanning Asia, Africa, and Europe within a single analytical frame, rather than treating these

bodies of literature separately. Second, it proposes a capacity-contingent conceptual framework in which local governance quality, comprising institutional capacity, fiscal capability, and accountability mechanisms, is explicitly modeled as the moderating variable that determines whether a given asymmetric decentralization design translates into improved welfare, equitable development, and strengthened local governance, or instead reproduces dependency, disparity, and weak accountability. Third, it offers a structured comparative table that maps the basis of asymmetry, scope of authority, and empirical outcomes across ten jurisdictions, providing a practical reference for policymakers designing or reforming differentiated regional autonomy schemes. Building on this foundation, the present article seeks to answer the following research question: how is the concept of asymmetric decentralization applied in local government governance, and under what governance conditions does this application produce its intended outcomes?

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative research design combining a normative-juridical approach with a comparative case study method. The normative-juridical dimension is used to examine the legal-constitutional basis of asymmetric decentralization in Indonesia, particularly Law No. 11/2006 on the Governing of Aceh, Law No. 21/2001 as amended by Law No. 2/2021 on Special Autonomy for Papua, and Law No. 13/2012 on the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The comparative case study dimension is used to triangulate the Indonesian experience against nine additional jurisdictions identified in the literature as instructive examples of asymmetric decentralization: Pattani (Thailand), the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, Georgia, Portugal, England, Spain, China, Tanzania, and Ghana.

Data for this study consist entirely of secondary sources obtained through a structured literature search conducted between June and August 2026. The search was carried out across Google Scholar, Crossref, and indexed journal databases using the keyword combinations "asymmetric decentralization," "special autonomy," "local government governance," and "regional autonomy," restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2026 with an active and verifiable Digital Object Identifier (DOI). An initial pool of sources was identified from two curated reference sets supplied for this study, supplemented by an independent search that yielded five additional sources meeting the same recency and DOI-verification criteria. After removing duplicate records and screening for direct relevance to asymmetric decentralization and local government governance, twenty-five sources were retained for full analysis, forming the evidentiary basis of this article.

The analytical process followed four sequential stages, illustrated in Figure 1. The first stage, identification, involved compiling all candidate sources addressing asymmetric decentralization across legal, political, and fiscal governance perspectives. The second stage, screening, applied inclusion criteria limiting sources to those published in 2021–2026, indexed with an active DOI, and directly concerned with asymmetric or differentiated decentralization arrangements at the subnational or local government level. The third stage, extraction and categorization, involved coding each source thematically according to its jurisdiction, the constitutional or statutory basis of asymmetry, the scope of devolved authority (political, fiscal, or administrative), and the reported governance outcome. The fourth stage, comparative synthesis, involved cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns linking governance capacity to the realized outcomes of asymmetric decentralization, from which the capacity-contingent conceptual framework presented in this article was derived.

This method is appropriate for the research problem because asymmetric decentralization is fundamentally a legal-institutional phenomenon whose consequences are best understood through systematic comparison of documented cases rather than through primary quantitative measurement, which would be constrained by the heterogeneity of governance indicators across the jurisdictions examined.

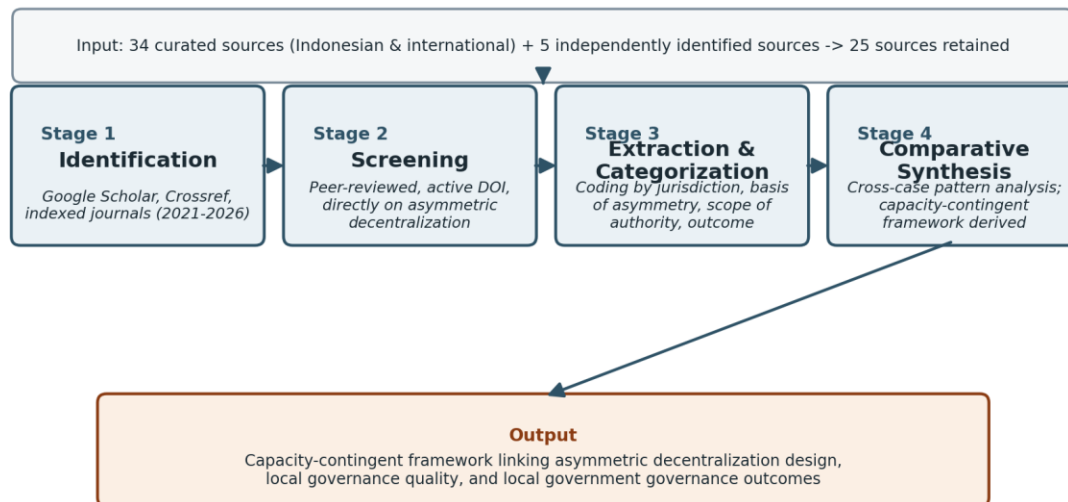


Figure 1. Research method flow for the comparative analysis of asymmetric decentralization

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3. Results and Discussion

The comparative synthesis of twenty-five sources reveals a consistent pattern across the ten jurisdictions examined: asymmetric decentralization is applied through markedly different combinations of political, fiscal, and administrative authority, and these combinations correlate closely with the quality of local governance rather than with the formal breadth of authority alone. Table 1 summarizes the basis of asymmetry, the scope of devolved authority, and the principal governance outcome documented in the literature for each jurisdiction.

Table 1. Comparative overview of asymmetric decentralization arrangements across ten jurisdictions

Jurisdiction	Basis of Asymmetry	Scope of Devolved Authority	Principal Governance Outcome	Key Source(s)
Papua, Indonesia	Historical grievance; conflict & resource-revenue dispute	Political + fiscal (special autonomy fund)	Persistent welfare gap despite large fund transfers; weak fiscal	Herdanawari (2024); Dewi (2021)

			absorption and elite capture	
Aceh, Indonesia	Post-conflict peace settlement (2005 Helsinki Agreement)	Political + fiscal + Islamic legal jurisdiction	More consolidated political stability; regulatory overlap remains	Suharno (2021)
Yogyakarta, Indonesia	Hereditary sultanate; cultural-institutional continuity	Political (gubernatorial succession) + administrative	Comparatively stable governance outcomes	Fauzan & Ardhanariswai (2023); Asmorojati et al. (2022)
Pattani, Thailand	Ethnic/religious identity; regional insurgency	Limited administrative concession within unitary structure	Concessions insufficient to resolve underlying grievance	Triwahyuningsih et al. (2025)
Anglophone regions, Cameroon	Colonial-linguistic distinctiveness	Constitutional “special status”	Formal asymmetry without matching administrative devolution	Kanyimi (2026)
Georgia (self-governing units)	Capital–periphery structural difference	Fiscal and administrative	Uneven local fiscal performance across units	Zakaradze et al. (2025)
Portugal (municipalities)	Institutional/administrative variation	Municipal autonomy statutes	Wide variation in effective operational autonomy despite similar statutes	Teles et al. (2025)
England (devolution deals)	Negotiated sub-regional devolution	Political + fiscal (devolution deals)	Productivity gains contingent on pre-existing local capacity	Newman & Hoole (2024)
Spain (autonomous communities)	Historic regional autonomy	Political + administrative (health authority)	Weak coordination turned decentralization	Erkoreka & Hernando-Pérez (2022)

			n into a liability during COVID-19	
Tanzania	Fiscal decentralization reform	Fiscal authority	Persistent central dependence; uneven development	Rugeiyamu (2025)

Special Autonomy in Papua and Aceh: Political Recognition Without Sufficient Institutional Capacity

The Indonesian cases of Papua and Aceh illustrate a recurring pattern in which extensive political and fiscal authority is transferred to a region as a conflict-resolution mechanism, yet the intended welfare outcomes are undermined by weak local institutional capacity. In Papua, special autonomy funds transferred under Law No. 21/2001 and its 2021 amendment were intended to accelerate development and narrow the welfare gap between Papua and the rest of Indonesia. However, Herdanareswari (2024) and Dewi (2021) both document that special autonomy financing has not translated into proportionate improvement in the welfare of the indigenous Papuan population, a finding echoed by Salama and Rohmadin (2025), whose analysis of district-expansion policy in Iwaka District shows that administrative fragmentation, intended to bring governance closer to communities, has instead generated coordination challenges without addressing the underlying capacity deficit. Bachmid (2022) further shows that unresolved constitutional questions regarding the legal standing of the Papua People's Assembly complicate the political dimension of Papua's asymmetric arrangement, weakening the institutional mechanisms meant to translate autonomy into accountable local governance. Angela and Nursadi (2025) similarly conclude that the relevance of Papua's asymmetric decentralization framework remains constrained by persistent implementation problems at the operational level, reinforcing the pattern documented across this body of literature.

Aceh presents a partially contrasting picture. Suharno (2021) finds that Aceh's special autonomy, which combines fiscal authority with recognition of Islamic legal jurisdiction, has produced more consolidated political stability than in Papua, largely because the conflict-resolution objective underlying the 2005 Helsinki peace agreement created stronger elite consensus around the implementation of asymmetric authority. Nonetheless, the study notes that overlapping regulatory frameworks between national and Acehnese law, combined with uneven bureaucratic capacity at the district level, continue to constrain the full realization of Aceh's autonomy. Yogyakarta, by contrast, illustrates a case in which asymmetric decentralization is anchored not primarily in conflict resolution but in the preservation of an established hereditary governance institution; Fauzan and Ardhanariswai (2023) and Asmorojati et al. (2022) characterize this as a form of selective and sequential asymmetry, rooted in the legitimization of the sultan's line as governor, that benefits from long-standing institutional continuity, contributing to comparatively stable governance outcomes relative to Papua.

Comparative International Evidence: Governance Capacity as the Decisive Variable

The pattern observed within Indonesia is corroborated by the comparative international cases. In Thailand, Triwahyuningsih et al. (2025) find that the limited scope of asymmetric concessions granted to Pattani, constrained by the unitary constitutional structure, has been

insufficient to address the region's underlying political and identity-based grievances, suggesting that when the depth of devolved authority does not match the intensity of the underlying regional demand, asymmetric decentralization functions largely as a symbolic rather than substantive governance mechanism. Kanyimi (2026) documents a related dynamic in Cameroon, where constitutional accommodation for the Anglophone regions, while formally asymmetric, has not been matched by sufficient administrative devolution to satisfy demands for self-governance, again underscoring the gap between formal authority and effective governance capacity.

European and Eurasian cases reinforce the centrality of governance quality. Zakaradze et al. (2025) show that asymmetries between Georgia's capital and its peripheral self-governing units are closely associated with disparities in local fiscal performance, indicating that even within a single national asymmetric framework, governance capacity varies enough to produce divergent local outcomes. Teles et al. (2025) similarly find, through their construction of a rigorous decentralization index for Portugal, that formally similar municipal statutes conceal wide variation in the operational autonomy municipalities are actually able to exercise, a finding directly consistent with the capacity-contingent framework proposed in this study. Newman and Hoole (2024) extend this insight to England's devolution periphery, demonstrating that productivity gains attributed to devolved governance arrangements depend heavily on pre-existing local governance and institutional capacity rather than on devolution itself. Erkoreka and Hernando-Pérez (2022) offer a particularly striking illustration from Spain, where decentralized authority during the COVID-19 pandemic became a liability rather than an asset in regions where inter-governmental coordination mechanisms were weak, a finding that parallels Papua's coordination difficulties documented by Salama and Rohmadin (2025). This pattern is consistent with the broader cross-national finding of Cadaval-Sampedro et al. (2023) that the resilience of decentralized governance systems when confronting extreme or crisis events depends less on the formal degree of decentralization than on the strength of inter-governmental coordination and administrative capacity, a conclusion that lends further support to the capacity-contingent interpretation advanced in this study.

Fiscal and Administrative Dimensions of Asymmetric Decentralization

The fiscal dimension of asymmetric decentralization emerges as a particularly consistent driver of governance outcomes across the literature reviewed. Tan and Avshalom-Uster (2021) demonstrate that asymmetric fiscal decentralization affects local fiscal performance in ways that are highly sensitive to the administrative competence of recipient local governments, a finding corroborated in the African context by Rugeiyamu (2025), whose analysis of fiscal decentralization in Tanzania shows that formal fiscal transfer without commensurate local revenue-generation capacity perpetuates dependence on central government rather than fostering genuine local autonomy. Rodríguez-Pose and Muštra (2022) provide broader cross-national evidence that the economic returns of decentralization are conditioned by the quality of government at the subnational level, directly supporting the capacity-contingent framework proposed in this study. Choudhury and Sahu (2025) extend this insight into the environmental policy domain, showing that fiscal decentralization's impact is itself asymmetric and sensitive to globalization exposure, reinforcing the claim that fiscal decentralization effects are conditional rather than uniform. Chen et al. (2024) add a further nuance from China, showing that decentralization generates local information advantages only where administrative units possess capacity to substitute effort effectively for centrally directed monitoring. In Ghana, Mohammed et al. (2024) find that citizen satisfaction with decentralized district assemblies varies considerably depending on local governance performance in specific service domains, even though the formal

decentralization framework applies uniformly across districts, illustrating that governance capacity differentiates outcomes even in ostensibly symmetric systems, let alone asymmetric ones.

These fiscal findings converge with a broader diagnosis found in the systematic literature review conducted by Muluk (2021), who surveys the accumulated scholarship on asymmetric decentralization and concludes that the field has historically over-emphasized the legal-formal design of asymmetric statutes while under-emphasizing the administrative and fiscal capacity required to operationalize them. A parallel diagnosis emerges from Febriandiela et al.'s (2024) critical literature review of decentralization theory in local government, which similarly finds that much of the existing scholarship treats decentralization design as a self-executing legal instrument rather than as a governance process whose success depends on local institutional readiness. The present study's comparative synthesis substantiates both diagnoses empirically across ten jurisdictions spanning three continents, suggesting that the capacity-oriented research agenda called for by Muluk (2021) and Febriandiela et al. (2024) remains as relevant in 2026 as at the time of their publication, and indicating that the gap identified in this literature has not yet been meaningfully closed by subsequent scholarship, most of which continues to examine single cases in isolation rather than constructing integrative comparative frameworks of the kind advanced in this article.

Policy Implications for Local Government Governance Design

The findings carry several practical implications for governments designing or reforming asymmetric decentralization arrangements. First, the calibration of devolved authority should be preceded by, or accompanied with, a structured assessment of recipient local governments' institutional capacity, so that the scope of political, fiscal, and administrative authority transferred is matched to realistic implementation capability rather than determined solely by the intensity of political negotiation, as appears to have occurred in Papua and, to a lesser extent, in Pattani. Second, fiscal transfer mechanisms accompanying asymmetric decentralization should be paired with binding capacity-building obligations and monitorable absorption benchmarks, addressing the pattern of unabsorbed or ineffectively utilized special autonomy funding documented in Papua by Herdanareswari (2024) and Dewi (2021), and in Tanzania by Rugeiyamu (2025). Third, accountability infrastructure, including transparent reporting mechanisms and functioning representative institutions such as the Papua People's Assembly discussed by Bachmid (2022), should be strengthened concurrently with the expansion of local authority, rather than treated as a secondary or subsequent reform. Fourth, inter-governmental coordination mechanisms, shown by Erkoreka and Hernando-Pérez (2022) to be decisive during crisis governance in Spain, should be explicitly designed into asymmetric decentralization frameworks from the outset, since asymmetric authority without functioning vertical coordination channels risks producing the same liabilities observed during the COVID-19 pandemic in decentralized regional systems.

These implications collectively suggest that policymakers should treat asymmetric decentralization not as a one-time statutory settlement but as an ongoing governance process requiring sustained capacity investment. Jurisdictions that paired asymmetric authority with deliberate capacity-building, such as Yogyakarta's continuity-based institutional model and, partially, Aceh's post-conflict consolidation, achieved comparatively more stable outcomes than jurisdictions where authority was transferred primarily as a rapid political settlement without matching institutional investment, as observed in Papua, Pattani, and the Anglophone regions of Cameroon.

Toward a Capacity-Contingent Framework

Synthesizing these findings, this study proposes that the application of asymmetric decentralization in local government governance should be understood through a capacity-contingent framework in which three governance-quality dimensions, institutional capacity, fiscal management competence, and accountability infrastructure, moderate the relationship between the design of asymmetric authority and its realized outcomes. Where governance capacity is strong, as in aspects of Yogyakarta's institutional continuity or Aceh's post-conflict elite consensus, asymmetric decentralization tends to produce more stable and legitimate local governance. Where governance capacity is weak, as documented extensively in Papua, Pattani, and the Anglophone Cameroonian regions, formally extensive grants of authority fail to translate into improved welfare or resolved political grievance, and may instead entrench dependency, elite capture, or persistent disparity. This framework reframes the central policy question from "how much authority should be devolved" to "how should the design of asymmetric authority be calibrated to the governance capacity of the recipient region, and what complementary capacity-building measures are required to close that gap." Wadipalapa et al. (2024) offer an instructive contemporary illustration of this calibration challenge in their analysis of Indonesia's ambitious artificial intelligence governance policy within a decentralized system, showing that even technologically progressive national policy initiatives encounter capacity bottlenecks when implemented across governance units with uneven administrative readiness, a dynamic structurally analogous to the asymmetric decentralization challenges documented throughout this study.

4. Conclusion

This study has examined the application of asymmetric decentralization in local government governance through a qualitative, normative-juridical, and comparative case study analysis of twenty-five peer-reviewed sources spanning Indonesia's Papua, Aceh, and Yogyakarta alongside nine comparative international jurisdictions. The evidence consistently shows that the formal scope of devolved political, fiscal, and administrative authority is not, by itself, a reliable predictor of successful local governance outcomes. Rather, outcomes are decisively shaped by the interaction between that authority and the governance capacity of the recipient region, encompassing institutional strength, fiscal management competence, and functioning accountability mechanisms. Regions in which asymmetric authority has been paired with institutional continuity or strong post-settlement elite consensus, such as Yogyakarta and, to a partial degree, Aceh, exhibit comparatively more stable governance outcomes, whereas regions in which extensive authority was transferred primarily as a rapid political concession without matching capacity investment, such as Papua, Pattani, and the Anglophone regions of Cameroon, continue to struggle with unresolved disparity, weak fiscal absorption, and persistent political grievance.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a capacity-contingent framework for understanding and designing asymmetric decentralization, in which governance quality functions as the pivotal moderating variable linking decentralization design to local governance outcomes. This framework contributes to the theoretical literature by integrating previously fragmented single-case and cross-national strands of decentralization scholarship into a unified comparative model, and it offers practical guidance for policymakers by emphasizing that the design of asymmetric authority must be accompanied by structured capacity assessment, binding fiscal absorption benchmarks, strengthened accountability infrastructure, and deliberate inter-governmental coordination mechanisms. Future research should extend this framework through longitudinal and mixed-methods investigation that can more precisely measure the causal weight

of each governance-quality dimension across a broader set of asymmetric decentralization cases, thereby refining the policy calibration this study has sought to advance.

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