

Regional Development Inequality and Political Representation: Southern West Java's Marginalization in Provincial Policy-Making

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Article Info :	ABSTRACT
Accepted: 17-08-2025	This study explores the regional development inequality and political representation in West Java, Indonesia, with a particular focus on the southern regions' marginalization in provincial policymaking. The objective is to investigate how unequal political representation in the provincial legislature affects the allocation of resources, infrastructure development, and overall regional inequality. A mixed-methods approach combining quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews was employed. The quantitative phase involved analyzing secondary data from 27 districts in West Java over the period 2015–2024, covering development indicators such as the Human Development Index (HDI), infrastructure quality, and budget allocation.
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Keywords: Decentralization; development disparity; political representation; regional inequality; West Java	The qualitative phase focused on in-depth interviews with local officials, legislators, and community leaders to understand the mechanisms of political marginalization. The findings reveal a significant disparity in political representation between southern and northern West Java, with the southern regions holding fewer legislative seats and experiencing lower levels of infrastructure investment and public service allocation. The research suggests that political representation is a key determinant of regional development outcomes, with underrepresented regions facing slower development and exacerbated inequality. The study calls for electoral reforms, equitable budget allocation mechanisms, and the creation of independent regional monitoring bodies to address these disparities and promote more inclusive development.

INTRODUCTION

Regional development inequality has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, threatening social cohesion, political stability, and sustainable economic growth across both developed and developing nations. Regional inequality poses a threat to national unity and social stability (Allo et al., 2025; Do Miswa & Kartiasih, 2025; Fointuna et al., 2025; Heidenreich & Wunder, 2008; Li & Wei, 2010; Rindrasih & Saputra, 2025), while the relationship between inequality and governance has become increasingly central to academic discourse and policy debates worldwide. This phenomenon is particularly acute in rapidly developing countries where the benefits of economic growth remain unevenly

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distributed across geographic spaces, creating disparities that manifest not only in economic outcomes but also in political voice and representation (Alam & Simanjuntak, 2023; Bartels, 2012; Mu'min & Iskandar, 2025; Solt, 2008). The intersection of spatial inequality and political representation has profound implications for democratic governance, as people with fewer resources participate less than those with more resources, and collective organizations lose their ability to counter these trends, ultimately leading to representative democracy becoming more biased in favor of higher-status social groups (Brata et al., 2025; Schäfer & Schoen, 2013).

Indonesia has emerged as a critical case study of regional inequality among developing nations, with inequality between provinces associated with higher unemployment rates (Sutomo et al., 2024). The gap between regions across 33 provinces in Indonesia during 2010 to 2021 demonstrates that the average level of disparity between provinces still experiences considerable inequality (Sutomo et al., 2024). While Indonesia's Gini index appears better than median ASEAN-6 and median G20 emerging market economies, this survey-based indicator masks income inequalities between regions, gender, and formal/informal sectors, as well as inequalities in access to services (International Monetary Fund, 2024). The persistence of regional disparities in Indonesia is particularly concerning given the country's ambitious goal of becoming a high-income nation by 2045, requiring comprehensive structural reforms that address these spatial inequalities (International Monetary Fund, 2024).

The island of Java, despite being Indonesia's economic powerhouse, exemplifies the complexity of regional development disparities within a single administrative unit. With an area of around 7 percent of Indonesia's total area, Java Island is inhabited by 151.6 million people or 56.10 percent of Indonesia's population and contributes 58.75% to the national economy (Populi Center, 2021). However, this aggregate economic dominance conceals significant internal variations. The most suffering regions are those located on the southern side of western Java, which were less developed than the north (Pravitasari et al., 2021). The disparity between northern and southern watersheds in western Java can be observed, with disparities coming from human forces such as population, urbanization, migration, accessibility and other socio-economic factors (Pravitasari et al., 2021), highlighting how political and infrastructural choices have systematically favored northern over southern regions.

West Java Province, as Indonesia's most populous province with approximately 49.94 million inhabitants, presents a microcosm of broader regional inequality challenges. Centralized political policies, particularly in

infrastructure development, were 'Java centric' especially during the New Order era, with strategic infrastructure development more focused on the island of Java (Populi Center, 2021). Within West Java itself, the southern regions have historically experienced marginalization in provincial policy-making processes, receiving disproportionately lower infrastructure investments, public services, and economic development initiatives compared to their northern counterparts. This north-south divide is not merely an artifact of geography or natural endowments but reflects systematic biases in political representation and resource allocation within provincial governance structures (Pravitasari et al., 2021).

Existing scholarship on regional inequality and political representation provides important theoretical foundations for understanding these dynamics. Legislatures worldwide are dominated by politicians who are wealthier and more educated than their constituents, particularly in developing democracies where clientelist politics and wealth inequalities make it difficult for lower-class citizens to run for office (Warburton et al., 2021). Studies on economic inequality and political representation have demonstrated that political information, efficacy and engagement are not equally distributed, affecting the representativeness of citizens in politics and policy (Bartels, 2012), while research on decentralization suggests that decentralization can improve political stability by giving aggrieved minorities control over subnational governments with limited power over issues that affect them directly (Faguet, 2014). However, in developing democracies where parties tend to be poorly institutionalized and their policy platforms on social and economic issues are difficult to distinguish, descriptive inequalities matter for the representation of lower-class interests (Warburton et al., 2021).

Despite this growing body of literature, a critical research gap exists in understanding how subnational political structures within provincial governments perpetuate regional marginalization in decentralized governance systems. While scholars have extensively examined inequality between provinces or between national and subnational levels (Canare et al., 2020; Sepulveda & Martinez-Vazquez, 2011), intra-provincial spatial inequalities and their relationship to political representation structures remain understudied (Andayani et al., 2025; Goh, 2025; Nugroho et al., 2025; Obeng-Odoom, 2025; Okere et al., 2025; Purusa et al., 2025). Little is known about the experiences of communities in the context of decentralization, particularly regarding how decentralization is "lived locally" by citizens (Kao & Lust, 2025). Furthermore, existing research on Indonesia has predominantly focused on interprovincial disparities (Sutomo et al., 2024) or

urban-rural divides ([Pribadi & Pauleit, 2015](#)), leaving unexplored the political economy mechanisms through which certain regions within provinces become systematically marginalized in policy-making processes.

This study addresses this critical research gap by providing the first comprehensive analysis of how intra-provincial political representation structures influence regional development outcomes in Indonesia. Unlike previous research that examines interprovincial disparities, this study focuses specifically on the political economy mechanisms operating within West Java Province, investigating how unequal representation in the provincial legislature (DPRD) systematically marginalizes the southern regions in policy-making and resource allocation decisions. By examining the relationship between legislative seat distribution and development outcomes at the district level, this research reveals how provincial-level political structures rather than merely national or local governance arrangements—play a decisive role in perpetuating regional inequality. This intra-provincial focus represents a significant theoretical contribution, as it demonstrates that decentralization reforms, while potentially reducing inequality between provinces, may inadvertently create or exacerbate inequalities within provinces when political representation is not proportionally distributed according to population or development needs.

The urgency of this research is underscored by several pressing contemporary concerns. First, widening intra-provincial inequalities threaten to undermine Indonesia's decentralization reforms, which were explicitly designed to promote more equitable development and bring government closer to citizens ([Faguet, 2014](#)). Second, the persistent marginalization of Southern West Java in provincial policy-making risks exacerbating social tensions and political disaffection in a region home to millions of citizens who perceive themselves as second-class constituents within their own province. Third, as Indonesia pursues its Vision 2045 development goals, understanding and addressing subnational inequality becomes critical for inclusive and sustainable national development. Fourth, more than 50 percent of people believe that economic inequality exists between different regions in Indonesia ([Populi Center, 2021](#)), indicating widespread public awareness and concern about spatial disparities that demand policy attention.

This research offers several novel contributions to scholarly and policy discourse. First, it provides one of the first systematic examinations of intra-provincial political representation and its impact on regional development outcomes, extending beyond conventional provincial-level analyses. Second, it develops an analytical framework that integrates spatial political economy

with decentralization theory to explain how provincial governance structures can create and perpetuate internal regional hierarchies. Third, by focusing on Southern West Java a politically significant but understudied region this research fills an important empirical gap in Indonesian regional studies. Fourth, methodologically, this study employs a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative analysis of development indicators and budget allocations with qualitative investigation of political representation patterns, offering richer insights than single-method studies.

The primary purpose of this research is threefold: (1) to empirically document the extent and patterns of development inequality between Southern and Northern West Java across multiple dimensions including infrastructure, public services, and economic opportunities; (2) to analyze the political representation structures and decision-making processes within West Java provincial government that contribute to Southern regions' marginalization; and (3) to identify the mechanisms through which unequal political voice translates into unequal development outcomes. Through systematic investigation of budget allocation patterns, infrastructure investment decisions, and political participation structures, this research aims to provide evidence-based insights into how subnational political dynamics shape regional development trajectories.

This research makes important contributions to both academic knowledge and policy practice. Academically, it advances theoretical understanding of how political representation operates at subnational levels in decentralized systems, challenging assumptions that decentralization automatically improves local voice and equity. It contributes to the growing literature on spatial inequality in developing countries by demonstrating that regional disparities are not merely economic phenomena but are deeply embedded in political structures and power relations. Practically, the research provides actionable insights for policymakers seeking to address regional imbalances within provinces, offering evidence on how provincial governance reforms might promote more inclusive development. The findings have direct implications for West Java's regional development planning, budget allocation processes, and political representation mechanisms, while also offering generalizable lessons for other Indonesian provinces and subnational governments in developing countries facing similar challenges of internal regional inequality.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a mixed-methods explanatory sequential design that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively

examine the relationship between political representation and regional development inequality in Southern West Java ([Creswell & Clark, 2017](#)). The quantitative phase utilizes a correlational research design to analyze the statistical relationship between political representation indicators and regional development outcomes, while the qualitative phase employs a case study approach to provide in-depth understanding of the mechanisms through which political marginalization occurs in provincial policy-making processes ([Yin, 2018](#)).

This methodological triangulation allows for both breadth and depth in examining how political representation structures influence development disparities between southern and northern regions of West Java Province. The research population consists of all 27 regencies and cities (*kabupaten/kota*) within West Java Province, encompassing both the northern developed regions and the southern marginalized areas. For quantitative analysis, the census sampling technique is employed, utilizing complete secondary data from all 27 administrative units covering the period 2015-2024, including regional development indicators (Human Development Index, Gini ratio, poverty rates, infrastructure quality indices), budget allocation data, and political representation metrics obtained from Statistics Indonesia (BPS), West Java Provincial Government documents, and the Ministry of Home Affairs. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling is utilized to select six regencies (three from southern West Java and three from northern West Java) based on maximum variation in development levels and political representation patterns. Within these selected regencies, snowball sampling identifies 45 key informants including provincial legislators (DPRD members), regional development planning agency (Bappeda) officials, district-level government officials, civil society representatives, and community leaders who possess direct knowledge of provincial policy-making processes.

The research instruments comprise both quantitative and qualitative tools designed to capture multiple dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation. For quantitative data collection, a structured documentation protocol systematically extracts secondary data from official government databases, including the Regional Development Index (IPD), infrastructure investment records, provincial budget allocations (APBD), and legislative representation statistics. The qualitative instruments include a semi-structured interview guide with 25 open-ended questions organized thematically around political representation, policy-making processes, budget allocation mechanisms, and perceived marginalization, developed based on theoretical frameworks from [Bartels \(2012\)](#) and [Faguet \(2014\)](#); a

focus group discussion (FGD) protocol designed to facilitate collective dialogue among stakeholders regarding regional development priorities and political voice; and a document analysis checklist for examining provincial policy documents, development plans (RPJMD), legislative meeting minutes, and budget deliberation records.

To ensure instrument validity, expert judgment validation is conducted with three academics specializing in regional development and political science, along with two practitioners from regional planning agencies, who assess content validity using the Content Validity Index (CVI) with an acceptable threshold of 0.78 ([Polit & Beck, 2006](#)). The interview guide undergoes construct validity testing through pilot interviews with five stakeholders not included in the main sample, followed by refinements based on clarity and relevance feedback. For reliability, the documentation protocol achieves inter-rater reliability through independent coding by two trained researchers of 15% of documents, calculating Cohen's kappa coefficient with a target of $\kappa \geq 0.80$ ([McHugh, 2012](#)). The interview process ensures dependability through audio recording, verbatim transcription, and member checking with 30% of informants to verify interpretation accuracy ([Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#)).

Data collection proceeds in three phases over 12 months: Phase 1 (months 1-4) involves comprehensive secondary data collection from BPS provincial offices, West Java Bappeda, provincial legislature secretariat, and online government databases, systematically downloading and organizing regional statistics, budget documents, and legislative records for 2015-2024. Phase 2 (months 5-9) encompasses qualitative fieldwork, beginning with formal permissions from provincial and district authorities, followed by semi-structured interviews of 60-90 minutes duration with each of 45 key informants, conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, audio-recorded with consent, and supplemented by field notes; this phase also includes six FGDs (one per selected regency) with 8-12 participants each, facilitated using participatory techniques to explore collective experiences of political representation and development marginalization.

Phase 3 (months 10-12) involves document analysis of 150+ policy documents, budget proposals, and legislative transcripts collected during fieldwork, using systematic content analysis protocols. Data analysis employs distinct techniques for each data type: quantitative data are analyzed using SPSS version 29 and STATA 17 software, applying descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distributions) to characterize development disparities, Pearson correlation analysis to examine relationships between political representation variables and development

outcomes, multiple regression analysis to identify predictors of regional development inequality controlling for geographic and demographic factors, and independent samples t-tests to compare development indicators between southern and northern regions, with statistical significance set at $\alpha = 0.05$ (Pallant, 2020). Qualitative data analysis utilizes NVivo 14 software, following Braun & Clarke (2006) six-phase thematic analysis: familiarization through repeated reading of transcripts, generating initial codes using both deductive codes from theoretical frameworks and inductive codes emerging from data, identifying themes by clustering related codes, reviewing and refining themes for internal coherence and external distinction, defining and naming final themes, and producing the analytical narrative with illustrative quotations. Data integration occurs through a joint display analysis that systematically compares quantitative patterns of inequality with qualitative explanations of political mechanisms, identifying convergence, divergence, or complementarity between datasets (Fetters et al., 2013), ultimately producing a comprehensive explanatory model of how political representation structures produce and perpetuate regional development marginalization in West Java Province.

This research adhered to rigorous ethical standards throughout the data collection and analysis process. All qualitative interviews were conducted after obtaining informed consent from participants, who were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time without consequences. Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained through the use of coded identifiers, and all data were stored securely in password-protected systems accessible only to the research team. The study protocol received institutional approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the researchers' affiliated institution prior to data collection. For secondary data obtained from government sources, appropriate permissions and acknowledgments were secured. The research posed minimal risk to participants, involving standard social science interview techniques with no invasive procedures or sensitive personal information beyond professional roles and perspectives on public policy matters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Comparative Development Indicators Between Southern and Northern West Java (2015-2024)

Indicator	Southern West Java	Northern West Java	Difference	t-value	p-value
Human Development Index (HDI)	68.42 (± 2.31)	74.58 (± 1.89)	-6.16	-8.234	<0.001***
Poverty Rate (%)	12.85 (± 1.67)	8.23 (± 1.12)	4.62	9.156	<0.001***
Gini Ratio	0.389 (± 0.021)	0.382 (± 0.018)	0.007	1.023	0.312
Infrastructure Quality Index	58.34 (± 4.23)	76.91 (± 3.56)	-18.57	-	<0.001***
Per Capita Regional Expenditure (IDR millions)	4.67 (± 0.89)	6.92 (± 1.12)	-2.25	-6.734	<0.001***
Road Quality Index (%) good condition)	52.7 (± 6.34)	73.4 (± 5.12)	-20.7	-	<0.001***
				10.234	

*Note: Values represent mean (\pm SD). ** $p<0.001$. $N=135$ district-year observations (27 districts \times 5 years, 2020-2024).

Table 2. Political Representation Analysis in West Java Provincial Legislature (DPRD) 2019-2024

Region	Population (%)	DPRD Seats (%)	Representation Gap	Committee Leadership Positions (%)
Northern Corridor	58.3	71.2	+12.9	78.4
Southern Region	41.7	28.8	-12.9	21.6

Table 3. Correlation Analysis Between Political Representation and Development Outcomes

Variable Pair	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
DPRD Representation \times HDI	0.687	<0.001***	Strong positive
DPRD Representation \times Infrastructure Investment	0.724	<0.001***	Strong positive
Committee Leadership \times Budget Allocation	0.612	<0.001***	Moderate positive
Provincial Origin of Governor \times Regional Development Index	0.543	0.002**	Moderate positive

*Note: ** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.001$

1. Research Data Analysis

The quantitative analysis reveals systematic and statistically significant disparities in development outcomes between Southern and Northern West Java regions. Independent samples t-tests demonstrate that Southern West Java consistently underperforms across multiple development dimensions, with particularly pronounced gaps in infrastructure quality ($t=-13.421$, $p<0.001$) and HDI ($t=-8.234$, $p<0.001$). The infrastructure quality difference of 18.57 points represents a substantive gap equivalent to approximately one standard deviation, indicating that the average northern district's infrastructure surpasses that of 84% of southern districts. Similarly, the HDI differential of 6.16 points translates to a development lag of approximately 8-10 years, assuming the national average annual HDI growth rate of 0.73% (BPS, 2024).

Multiple regression analysis examining predictors of regional development outcomes yielded a model with substantial explanatory power ($R^2=0.742$, $F(6,128)=61.34$, $p<0.001$). The standardized regression coefficients reveal that political representation in the provincial legislature emerges as the strongest predictor ($\beta=0.412$, $p<0.001$), followed by geographic location (north vs. south dummy; $\beta=0.287$, $p<0.001$), and committee leadership representation ($\beta=0.234$, $p=0.002$). Notably, when controlling for other factors, the raw north-south geographic difference explains only 23% of variance, suggesting that political representation structures substantially mediate the relationship between geography and development outcomes. This finding aligns with research demonstrating that in developing democracies where parties are poorly institutionalized, descriptive inequalities significantly affect representation of lower-class interests.

Budget allocation analysis through panel regression (2020-2024) reveals systematic bias favoring northern regions even after controlling for population and economic base. The fixed-effects model (Hausman test: $\chi^2=34.56$, $p<0.001$) demonstrates that districts with higher DPRD representation receive IDR 1.89 million more per capita in infrastructure investment annually ($p<0.001$), controlling for population density, poverty rates, and existing infrastructure stock. This pattern is consistent with findings that Indonesia's decentralization process significantly affects budget allocation at the sub-national level (Kis-Katos & Sjahrir, 2017), though our study extends this to intra-provincial dynamics. Furthermore, research demonstrates that birth districts of incumbent governors receive significantly larger shares of discretionary grants compared with other

districts within a province ([Gonschorek, 2021](#)), a pattern we observe operating at the sub-provincial scale in West Java.

2. Research Data Interpretation

The convergence of quantitative findings points to a structural political economy mechanism whereby underrepresentation in provincial decision-making translates directly into development disadvantage. The 12.9 percentage-point gap between Southern West Java's population share (41.7%) and its legislative representation (28.8%) represents systematic political marginalization that cascades through policy-making processes. Qualitative interview data provide mechanistic insights into how this underrepresentation operates. A senior Bappeda official noted: "When development priorities are debated in provincial planning meetings, the southern representatives are consistently outvoted. Northern legislators form voting blocks that prioritize projects in their constituencies" (Interview, June 2024). This observation is corroborated by document analysis of 47 provincial budget deliberation transcripts (2020-2024), which reveals that 73.4% of infrastructure projects approved were in northern regions, despite southern regions submitting proportionally similar project proposals.

The disproportionate allocation of committee leadership positions (78.4% to northern representatives despite representing 58.3% of population) creates additional structural advantages. Committee chairs exercise gatekeeping power over which proposals advance to plenary sessions and influence budget markup processes. A southern district legislator explained: "Without chairmanship in key committees like budget, public works, or development planning, our proposals lack champions who can navigate them through the legislative process" (Interview, July 2024). This finding resonates with research showing that priority gaps exist and have representational consequences, as the misrepresentation of political agendas occurs at the very beginning of the policy-making process ([Traber et al., 2022](#)).

The moderate but significant correlation between gubernatorial origin and regional development ($r=0.543$, $p=0.002$) suggests that executive leadership also contributes to spatial bias. Historical analysis reveals that 8 of the last 10 West Java governors (1985-2024) originated from northern corridor districts, with their administrations demonstrating measurably higher infrastructure investment in their home regions. This pattern aligns with empirical evidence that birth districts of governors receive preferential treatment in development grant allocations ([Gonschorek, 2021](#)), extending beyond district-level favoritism to broader regional preference patterns.

3. Specific Findings

Five specific findings merit particular attention. First, the research identifies a "representation multiplier effect" whereby initial underrepresentation compounds over time. Districts with below-average DPRD representation in 2019 experienced 2.3 times slower HDI growth over the subsequent five years compared to overrepresented districts (0.42% vs. 0.97% annual growth; $t=4.567$, $p<0.001$), even when controlling for initial HDI levels. This suggests that political marginalization creates path-dependent development trajectories. Second, spatial analysis reveals that infrastructure investments follow the residential patterns of provincial legislators rather than population distribution or development needs. Using GIS analysis, we find that 68.7% of provincial road projects are located within 25km of a DPRD member's registered residence, with this pattern significantly stronger for committee chairs ($r=0.712$, $p<0.001$).

Third, the study documents systematic exclusion of southern regional priorities from provincial planning documents. Content analysis of the 2018-2023 and 2023-2028 Regional Medium-Term Development Plans (RPJMD) reveals that southern-specific development challenges (agricultural productivity, tourism infrastructure, disaster mitigation) receive 3.2 times less textual coverage than northern priorities (industrial zones, urban transportation, port development), despite southern districts submitting detailed needs assessments. Fourth, budget execution data reveal that even when southern districts secure project allocations, implementation rates are systematically lower (67.3% vs. 89.4% for northern districts; $\chi^2=43.21$, $p<0.001$), suggesting that administrative bias extends beyond allocation to implementation. Fifth, community perception surveys ($n=1,240$) demonstrate that 76.3% of southern respondents perceive provincial government as "prioritizing northern development," compared to only 23.7% of northern respondents, indicating widespread public awareness of spatial inequality.

4. Comparison to Previous Research

These findings both corroborate and extend existing scholarship on regional inequality and political representation. The magnitude of development disparity we document in West Java (HDI gap of 6.16 points) is comparable to findings showing that the southern side of western Java remains less developed than the north (Pravitasari et al., 2021), though our study is the first to explicitly link this disparity to political representation structures rather than solely geographic or economic factors. Our results align with research documenting significant regional differences between

northern and southern regions of Java, with most north regions evolving into predominantly non-agricultural economic structures while southern regions remain agriculture-dominated (Setiawan, 2016), suggesting that political marginalization may perpetuate economic structural disadvantages.

The strong correlation between political representation and budget allocation ($r=0.724$) is consistent with but more pronounced than findings that stronger incumbent party alliances lead to higher degrees of budget manipulation in election years (Wiguna & Khoirunurrofik, 2021), indicating that representation effects operate continuously beyond electoral cycles. However, our findings diverge from research suggesting that after decentralization, districts with relatively lower levels of public infrastructure started to invest significantly more in health and physical infrastructure (Kis-Katos & Sjahrir, 2017). In West Java's intra-provincial context, we find the opposite: less-developed southern regions receive systematically lower investment, suggesting that provincial-level political dynamics may counteract pro-poor allocation incentives observed at national-district transfers.

Our documentation of the representation multiplier effect extends findings that regional inequality in Indonesia decreased slightly from 0.358 in 2000 to 0.332 in 2015 using the Theil Index (Cao & Tao, 2024) by demonstrating that aggregate improvements mask worsening intra-provincial disparities driven by political structures. The finding that infrastructure follows legislator residence patterns provides micro-level empirical support for theoretical arguments about how central governments allocate discretionary grants based on political considerations (Gonschorek, 2021), showing similar mechanisms operate at provincial scales.

5. Solutions and Recommendations

Based on empirical findings, this research proposes five evidence-based solutions. First, implement proportional representation reform for provincial legislatures that ensures constituency correspondence between population distribution and seat allocation. The current system's 12.9 percentage-point representation gap could be addressed through mixed-member proportional systems combining geographic and at-large seats, as successfully implemented in New Zealand and Germany. Second, establish mandatory regional equity requirements in provincial budgeting, mandating that infrastructure investment per capita across regions not exceed 1.5:1 ratios, like mechanisms in South Korea's balanced development policies (Yoo & Choi, 2022).

Third, create independent regional development monitoring bodies with statutory authority to audit budget allocations and publish regional equity scorecards, modeled on Scotland's Community Planning Partnerships (Sinclair, 2008). Fourth, reform committee assignment processes to ensure proportional representation in leadership positions, potentially through rotating chairmanships or weighted voting systems that account for constituency population. Fifth, implement participatory budgeting mechanisms that allocate 15-20% of development budgets through direct citizen input, reducing elite capture, as demonstrated effective in Porto Alegre, Brazil (Baiocchi, 2005).

6. Relation to Theoretical Frameworks

The empirical findings substantiate multiple theoretical frameworks while challenging others. The research strongly supports spatial political economy theory, which posits that political power asymmetries create and reinforce geographic inequalities (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018). Our evidence of representation gaps translating into development disparities provides concrete empirical grounding for theoretical claims that representative democracy becomes more biased in favor of higher-status social groups when people with fewer resources participate less (Schäfer & Schoen, 2013), extending this logic to spatial rather than class-based stratification.

The findings align with median voter theorem extensions that account for agenda-setting power (Romer & Rosenthal, 1978). In West Java's context, northern legislators' numerical dominance allows them to structure policy agendas around northern priorities, with southern preferences systematically excluded even when they might command median support if voted upon. This supports arguments that agenda denial of some segments of society effectively excludes them from expressing preferences and having problems solved (Traber et al., 2022).

However, our findings challenge optimistic fiscal federalism theory predictions that decentralization improves allocative efficiency by bringing government closer to citizens (Oates, 1999; Tiebout, 1956). The evidence suggests that without adequate political representation safeguards, decentralization can enable subnational elite capture and regional favoritism. This complicates theoretical arguments that decentralization can improve political stability by giving aggrieved minorities control over subnational governments (Faguet, 2014), showing that provincial-level minorities may lack such control. The research also provides empirical support for cumulative causation theory (Sheppard, 2017), demonstrating how initial

political disadvantages create self-reinforcing development lags through the representation multiplier effect documented in our longitudinal analysis.

Discussion

The systematic marginalization of Southern West Java in provincial policy-making revealed by this research reflects broader tensions in Indonesia's decentralization project. While national decentralization successfully transferred authorities from Jakarta to provinces and districts, this study demonstrates that intra-provincial power asymmetries can reproduce centralization dynamics at smaller scales. The 41.7% of West Java's population residing in southern regions experience democratic deficits comparable to those that motivated Indonesia's initial decentralization reforms, suggesting that multi-level governance requires representation safeguards at each tier.

The role of committee leadership in shaping development outcomes highlights how seemingly technical institutional details have profound distributional consequences. Provincial legislative committee assignments appear administratively neutral but function as gatekeeping mechanisms that advantage overrepresented regions. Similar patterns have been documented in other contexts; research shows that political budget cycles are stronger when incumbents are supported by large party coalitions ([Syam & Afdal, 2025](#)), suggesting that political organizational advantages compound across multiple dimensions. Reforming committee assignment processes therefore represents a high-leverage intervention point.

The disconnect between project proposals and approvals documented in budget deliberation analysis reveals how agenda-setting power operates in practice. Southern districts submitted 187 infrastructure project proposals during 2020-2024, compared to 214 from northern districts (proportional to population), yet approval rates were 41.2% and 68.7% respectively ($\chi^2=29.34$, $p<0.001$). This cannot be explained by project quality; external evaluation of a random sample ($n=60$) found no significant quality differences ($t=0.734$, $p=0.465$). Rather, qualitative evidence points to coalition-building dynamics whereby northern legislators trade support for each other's projects while southern proposals lack sufficient champions. This supports findings that infrastructure development in decentralized Indonesia reflects elite political agreements rather than technical planning ([Hidayat et al., 2025](#)).

Practical Implications

For policymakers, this research demonstrates that addressing regional development inequality requires political alongside economic interventions. Indonesia's national development plans emphasize infrastructure investment and human capital development but largely neglect political representation structures that mediate resource allocation. The West Java Provincial Government should prioritize three immediate reforms: (1) conducting comprehensive representation audits across all policy-making bodies to identify and address systematic exclusions; (2) establishing regional equity requirements in budget processes with transparent monitoring and public reporting; and (3) creating institutionalized mechanisms for southern region input into provincial planning beyond formal representation, such as regional development councils with advisory authority.

For legislative bodies, the findings indicate that current electoral systems produce malapportionment with tangible development consequences. Electoral system reform should be considered, potentially adopting mixed-member proportional representation that combines district-based accountability with proportional fairness. Committee reform is equally critical; implementing proportional allocation of leadership positions or rotating chairmanships could mitigate current biases. Parliamentary capacity-building programs should include training on evidence-based budgeting and regional equity considerations, helping legislators move beyond clientelistic allocation patterns.

For civil society and development practitioners, the research suggests that advocacy for political inclusion is development work. Organizations focused on southern West Java development should complement service delivery and economic programming with efforts to strengthen political voice and representation. This might include supporting candidate recruitment and training from underrepresented regions; conducting and publicizing budget analyses that document allocation inequities; building coalitions across southern districts to coordinate policy advocacy; and using participatory budgeting mechanisms to demonstrate demand for equitable development.

For academic researchers, this study demonstrates the value of examining intra-provincial governance dynamics, a relatively understudied scale in Indonesia's decentralization scholarship. Future research should investigate whether similar patterns exist in other provinces, examine specific mechanisms through which representation translates into development outcomes, and evaluate reform interventions. Comparative studies across provinces with varying representation structures could identify institutional designs that promote equity. Longitudinal research

tracking representation and development over longer periods would clarify causal mechanisms and identify potential inflection points for intervention.

Finally, for international development agencies and multilateral organizations, the findings suggest that governance programming should address political representation alongside administrative capacity and transparency. Projects supporting Indonesian decentralization have largely focused on technical systems for planning, budgeting, and service delivery while neglecting political structures that determine how these systems are used. Effective development assistance should include support for electoral system reform, representation monitoring, and participatory governance mechanisms that ensure marginalized populations influence resource allocation decisions affecting their communities.

Study Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between political representation and regional development inequality in West Java, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the temporal scope of the analysis (2015–2024) captures the contemporary manifestation of these dynamics but may not fully account for historical path dependencies and long-term structural factors that shaped the current distribution of political power and resources. Second, although the mixed-methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the analysis, the qualitative component relied on a purposive sample of key informants whose perspectives, while informed and representative of major stakeholder groups, may not capture the full diversity of views across all affected communities, particularly from the most marginalized populations in remote southern districts.

Third, the study focuses specifically on West Java Province, and while this provides depth of analysis, the generalizability of findings to other Indonesian provinces or developing countries with different political, geographic, and demographic characteristics requires careful consideration. Fourth, data availability constraints limited the analysis of certain variables, particularly detailed historical budget allocation data at the program level and comprehensive measures of informal political influence networks that may operate outside formal legislative structures. Fifth, the cross-sectional nature of some quantitative analyses, despite using panel data where available, limits causal inferences about the long-term effects of political representation on development outcomes.

Future research could address these limitations by extending the temporal frame, expanding the geographic scope to comparative provinces,

incorporating more granular micro-level data on household welfare and community participation, and employing longitudinal experimental or quasi-experimental designs to establish stronger causal linkages. Additionally, examining the role of civil society organizations, media, and digital platforms in potentially amplifying or mitigating political marginalization would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms at play in contemporary decentralized governance systems.

CONCLUSION

This research provides compelling empirical evidence that systematic political underrepresentation constitutes the primary mechanism perpetuating regional development inequality between Southern and Northern West Java, challenging conventional explanations centered on geography or economic factors alone. Through mixed-methods analysis combining quantitative examination of development indicators across 27 districts (2015-2024) and qualitative investigation of provincial policy-making processes, the study documents a 12.9 percentage-point representation gap whereby Southern regions comprising 41.7% of the provincial population hold only 28.8% of legislative seats.

The research impact extends across multiple domains: academically, it advances theoretical understanding of how political representation operates at subnational levels in decentralized systems and contributes empirical evidence to literatures on spatial inequality, democratic governance, and political economy of development; methodologically, it demonstrates the analytical value of examining intra-provincial dynamics and participatory budgeting mechanisms that collectively could address structural marginalization affecting 20.8 million citizens in Southern West Java.

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