

Examining the Governance Impacts of Vice Regional Head Vacancies in Indonesia

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The vice regional head plays a vital yet often overlooked role in Indonesia's subnational governance structure. This article investigates the administrative and institutional impacts of prolonged vacancies in the vice head of region position, using Jakarta Province (2018 -2020) as a primary case study. During this 18-month vacancy, the absence of formal delegation and lack of legal enforcement mechanisms led to operational disruptions, weakened oversight, and delays in public service coordination. Through a qualitative policy analysis approach, the study draws from in-depth interviews, official documents, and comparative literature. Findings reveal that leadership gaps in local governments create institutional ambiguity, slow decision-making, and erode accountability mechanisms. These issues are compounded by the lack of legal instruments mandating interim delegation or establishing clear timelines for deputy replacement. The Jakarta case is reflective of broader trends across other Indonesian provinces, indicating a systemic vulnerability in leadership succession protocols. This article recommends realistic policy interventions, including formal delegation procedures, improved legal clarity, and stronger oversight roles for local legislatures. By institutionalizing these reforms, local governments can ensure administrative continuity, particularly during periods of political transition or emergency. The study contributes to filling the research gap on subnational leadership structures and highlights the urgency of addressing executive leadership vacuums in decentralized governance contexts.

INTRODUCTION

Decentralization has transformed the organization of public authority in Indonesia by assigning substantial governmental responsibilities to subnational governments. The effectiveness of this arrangement depends not only on the distribution of formal powers between central and regional governments, but also on the institutional capacity of regional executives to coordinate policies, maintain accountability, and sustain public services. Recent scholarship continues to identify institutional design, coordination, accountability, and administrative capacity as important determinants of governance performance in decentralized settings (Pratiwi, 2021; Heryani & Iskandar, 2025).

Within the regional executive, the head of region and deputy head of region constitute a formally connected leadership arrangement. Articles 65 and 66 of Law No. 23 of 2014 assign distinct functions to the regional head and deputy regional head. The deputy assists the regional head, coordinates certain governmental tasks, provides advice concerning policy implementation, and carries out other duties assigned by the regional head. Risal and Munawir (2021) argue that the legal allocation of authority between the two offices is important because unclear boundaries may create conflict and weaken administrative effectiveness. More recent studies likewise emphasize that the authority and institutional position of the deputy regional head remain contested and insufficiently operationalized (Hariyanto et al., 2025).

The problem becomes more consequential when the deputy position is vacant. A vacancy may arise because of resignation, death, dismissal, or other legally recognized circumstances. Law No. 10 of 2016 provides a mechanism for filling vacant deputy regional head positions under specified conditions, including the requirement that a vacancy with more than 18 months of remaining tenure be filled.

However, the legal framework does not fully resolve a different operational question: how should the functions normally associated with the deputy be distributed and documented while the replacement process is underway, Arifin and Rahmatullah (2019) identified the absence of a clear maximum time limit and procedural ambiguity as factors that can prolong vacancies. Hendri and Fikriana (2024) similarly find that political agreement among supporting parties can delay the nomination of replacement candidates.

Jakarta provides a strategically important case. Sandiaga Uno submitted his resignation as Deputy Governor in August 2018 in connection with his candidacy for vice president, leaving the governor to continue governing without a deputy while the replacement process proceeded. Contemporary reporting confirms the resignation and the ensuing vacancy (The Jakarta Post, 2018). The original manuscript identifies the vacancy as lasting approximately 18 months until the appointment of Ahmad Riza Patria in March 2020. This period offers an opportunity to examine how the absence of a formally occupied deputy position affects coordination, oversight, administrative workload, and policy continuity.

Existing Indonesian studies have largely examined the legal mechanism for filling vacant deputy positions or the broader relationship between regional heads and their deputies. For example, Arifin and Rahmatullah (2019) focus on the legal framework, Redi et al. (2020) examine performance implications in Rokan Hulu; Risal and Munawir (2021) analyze authority distribution; and Fikri et al. (2025) review disharmony between regional heads and deputies. What remains less developed is an integrated explanation of how a prolonged vacancy can generate institutional effects across coordination, accountability, and policy continuity.

This study therefore addresses the following question: How did the prolonged vacancy of the Vice Governor of Jakarta during 2018 - 2020 affect administrative coordination, delegation, oversight, and governance continuity, and what institutional reforms can reduce similar risks in the future. The study contributes by shifting attention from the political process of replacement alone toward the governance consequences of an unoccupied deputy office.

LITERATURE REVIEW

1. The Institutional Role of the Deputy Regional Head

The deputy regional head is not merely a ceremonial or political companion to the regional head. The legal framework gives the office administrative and coordinating functions. Risal and Munawir (2021) demonstrate that the division of authority between the regional head and deputy regional head is embedded in the regional government system. Hariyanto et al. (2025) likewise emphasize that the deputy's authority requires clearer normative and institutional grounding to avoid ambiguity in governance practice.

The literature also shows that the position can become vulnerable when political and administrative roles are not aligned. Agustina (2020) identifies disharmony between regional heads and deputies as a recurring governance issue, while Fikri et al. (2025) show that political interests, unequal authority, elite intervention, and differences in political orientation can affect the relationship. These findings are relevant to vacancy analysis because they demonstrate that the deputy office is already institutionally sensitive even when occupied; when it becomes vacant, the potential for ambiguity increases.

2. Vacancy, Succession, and Legal Certainty

A vacancy is a governance problem when the legal system specifies how a position is ultimately filled but provides insufficient guidance for maintaining the position's functions during the interim period. Arifin and Rahmatullah (2019) argue that the Indonesian framework contains ambiguity concerning the time and procedure for filling vacant deputy positions. Hendri and Fikriana (2024) further show that Article 176 of Law No. 10 of 2016 does not eliminate practical delays because nomination depends on political parties or coalitions reaching agreement.

The issue is also visible in cases where simultaneous vacancies create uncertainty about succession and acting authority. Zawawi et al. (2023) demonstrate that simultaneous vacancies in Muara Enim and Ogan Komering Ulu reveal gaps between statutory provisions and complex administrative circumstances. Redi et al. (2020), examining Rokan Hulu, found that the absence of a deputy regional head was associated with declines in aspects of regional government performance and budget realization. Together, these studies indicate that vacancy management should be understood as an institutional-continuity problem rather than solely an electoral or political matter.

3. Governance Continuity and New Public Governance

The concept of governance continuity is closely connected to New Public Governance (NPG), which emphasizes interdependence, collaboration, and coordination among actors rather than exclusive reliance on hierarchical command (Osborne, 2006). In a complex metropolitan government, executive leadership must integrate multiple agencies and policy networks. The deputy office can therefore be interpreted as part of the coordination architecture that supports horizontal integration and vertical accountability.

From an institutional perspective, the deputy position can also provide leadership redundancy. Redundancy does not mean duplication of authority; rather, it provides an additional institutional capacity that can absorb coordination and monitoring tasks when the principal executive is overloaded. This perspective is particularly relevant to metropolitan government, where policy implementation requires simultaneous coordination across transportation, health, infrastructure, disaster management, spatial planning, and social services.

4. Research Gap and Analytical Proposition

Three gaps emerge from the literature. First, research on deputy regional heads is still smaller than research on decentralization, regional elections, and regional heads. Second, legal studies tend to concentrate on the procedure for replacing a vacant deputy, while public administration studies rarely trace the administrative consequences of the vacancy itself. Third, the relationship between vacancy, delegated authority, inter-agency coordination, oversight, and policy continuity has not been sufficiently integrated into one analytical framework. The present study addresses these gaps by treating vacancy as an institutional stress test. The analytical proposition is that prolonged vacancy increases governance risk when the functions attached to the deputy office are not supported by explicit delegation, clear reporting lines, and enforceable succession procedures.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative case-study design focused on the Vice Governor of Jakarta vacancy during 2018 - 2020. A case-study strategy is appropriate because the research seeks to explain an institutional process in its real administrative context rather than estimate a statistical relationship across regions. The analysis combines the empirical material reported in the original manuscript with documentary and legal analysis.

1. Data Sources

The original manuscript identifies three sources of evidence in depth interviews with former government officials, public policy experts, and local bureaucrats, analysis of laws, gubernatorial instruments, and regional planning documents; and academic and institutional literature. For publication, the author should retain the interview transcripts, interview dates, respondent codes, and consent documentation as the audit trail for the primary-data component. Documentary analysis focuses particularly on the legal provisions governing the functions of the deputy regional head and the process for filling a vacancy.

2. Analytical Procedure

The policy-analysis logic follows Patton et al. (2016), problem identification, objective setting, data gathering, development of policy alternatives, evaluation, and recommendation. Qualitative evidence was organized thematically using the logic of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing described by Miles et al. (2014). Triangulation was used by comparing interview-based observations with statutory provisions and published studies. Four analytical themes were established a priori and refined during analysis: (1) administrative coordination, (2) authority and delegation, (3) oversight and accountability, and (4) governance continuity.

3. Research Rigor and Limitation

Credibility was strengthened through source triangulation and comparison between the Jakarta case and documented cases in other regions. However, the available manuscript does not report the number of interview informants, recruitment criteria in sufficient detail, or the exact interview period. These details should be completed from the author's field records before journal submission. The study should also avoid presenting the Jakarta case as proof that every deputy vacancy necessarily produces identical effects; the appropriate inference is analytical and institutional rather than statistical generalization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

1. Administrative Coordination and Decision Making Bottlenecks

The evidence reported in the original manuscript indicates that the vacancy was associated with slower cross-sectoral coordination. Coordination meetings and functions previously associated with the deputy office were either delayed or informally handled by other officials. The consequence was not the complete cessation of government activity, but a redistribution of coordination burdens toward the governor and the central secretariat of the regional government.

This finding is consistent with the broader literature on decentralized governance: administrative autonomy does not automatically generate effective service delivery when coordination mechanisms are weak (Pratiwi, 2021). In Jakarta, the scale and interdependence of government programs amplify this problem. Cross-sectoral issues such as flood management, transportation, health, spatial planning, and climate resilience require sustained integration rather than isolated decisions by individual agencies.

2. Institutional Ambiguity and Delegation

The most important institutional finding is the absence of a sufficiently explicit interim delegation mechanism for functions associated with the vacant deputy office. The original manuscript reports that no gubernatorial decree or equivalent formal instrument was identified assigning the deputy's functions to a specific official or unit. Consequently, bureaucrats could face uncertainty over reporting lines, escalation routes, and responsibility for cross-sector decisions.

The distinction between legal authority and operational responsibility is important. A vacancy does not necessarily remove the capacity of government agencies to act; however, it can make the chain of responsibility less visible. In administrative law, such ambiguity is problematic because accountability depends on identifiable authority. The finding therefore supports the argument by Risal and Munawir (2021) that the division of authority must be made operational, not merely stated in legislation.

3. Weakening of Oversight and Accountability

The vacancy also affected the internal distribution of oversight. The original manuscript reports delays in follow-up coordination and monitoring activities and indicates that no single official was formally

designated to replicate all cross-sectoral monitoring functions normally associated with the deputy. This should not be interpreted as evidence that Jakarta lost all internal control; rather, it indicates that one layer of executive coordination and monitoring was removed without an equivalent institutional substitute.

This finding is important because accountability is relational. When authority becomes concentrated at the top, the governor's office may become overloaded while agencies receive less frequent cross-sector direction. The risk is not only slower administration but also greater dependence on informal communication. Agustina (2020) and Fikri et al. (2025) show that unclear relations between regional heads and deputies can already generate institutional problems; a vacancy creates a different but related form of structural imbalance.

4. Risks to Strategic Policy Continuity

The case also indicates risks to the continuity of multi-year initiatives. Programs that require sustained cross agency sponsorship may experience slower implementation when responsibility is not explicitly reassigned. The original manuscript identifies strategic planning, smart-city integration, and climate-resilience initiatives as areas in which leadership continuity was important.

The appropriate interpretation is that vacancy increases coordination and continuity risk, not that the vacancy alone caused every delay. Public policy implementation is influenced by multiple factors, including budgets, organizational capacity, political priorities, regulatory changes, and external shocks. This qualification strengthens the causal discipline of the article and avoids attributing complex outcomes to a single institutional factor.

5. Crisis Management Implications

The vacancy period overlapped with the emergence of COVID-19 in early 2020. The original manuscript associates the absence of a deputy with additional coordination burdens during the early crisis response. Because the pandemic introduced many confounding factors, the study does not treat the vacancy as the sole cause of delays. Instead, the case demonstrates the value of leadership redundancy and predefined delegation mechanisms during emergencies. In complex crises, the ability to distribute executive coordination tasks can be an important component of administrative resilience.

Table.1 Summary of Key Impacts

Governance Area	Observed Impact During Vacancy
Coordination	Slower cross-sectoral collaboration, delays in joint programs
Legal Delegation	No SK Gubernur or formal assignment of vice governor duties
Oversight	Weakened audit follow-ups, limited performance monitoring
Accountability	Reduced internal checks, greater risk of discretionary behavior
Crisis Response	Delayed emergency coordination, slower vertical integration
Strategic Planning	Postponement of medium- and long-term development initiatives

Data source processed in 2025

Discussion

1. Vacancy as an Institutional Design Problem

The Jakarta case suggests that the core problem is not simply the absence of an individual but the absence of a contingency design for an important executive function. Indonesian law provides a pathway for replacing a vacant deputy regional head, yet the replacement process can depend on political agreement and therefore may take time (Hendri & Fikriana, 2024). During that interval, the administrative system needs a legally recognizable method for preserving functional continuity.

This distinction advances the existing literature. Legal studies have correctly emphasized the need to fill the vacant position (Arifin & Rahmatullah, 2019; Redi et al., 2020), but governance analysis must also ask what happens between vacancy and replacement. The institutional gap is therefore temporal: the law can define who should eventually occupy the position without adequately specifying who performs the associated coordinating functions in the meantime.

2. Political Process and Administrative Continuity

The filling of a deputy position is inherently political because Law No. 10 of 2016 assigns a role to the political party or coalition that supported the elected regional head. Hendri and Fikriana (2024) identify political agreement as a practical source of delay. The policy implication is not to remove political parties from the process, but to prevent political negotiation from creating an indefinite administrative vacuum. A sound institutional arrangement should therefore separate two processes, the political process of selecting a replacement and the administrative process of maintaining continuity. The first may require negotiation; the second should be automatic, time-bound, documented, and subject to oversight.

3. Implications for Governance and Public Services

The results also reinforce the broader literature linking institutional quality to public service performance. Decentralization creates opportunities for local responsiveness, but service outcomes depend on administrative arrangements that can translate authority into coordinated action. Ginting's analysis of fiscal decentralization and public services, for example, demonstrates that decentralization effects are mediated by sectoral and institutional conditions. The present study adds an executive-leadership dimension: continuity of coordination is itself an institutional resource.

The finding is particularly relevant to metropolitan governments. In a large and policy-dense jurisdiction, the governor cannot personally supervise every cross-sector process. A deputy office can function as part of an executive coordination architecture. When that node disappears, other units may absorb the work, but only if their authority is explicit and the redistribution is documented.

4. Comparative and Institutional Lessons

Cases from other Indonesian regions show that deputy vacancies are not unique to Jakarta. Redi et al. (2020) documented performance implications in Rokan Hulu, while Zawawi et al. (2023) identified legal and governance complexity in simultaneous vacancies. The recurrence of such cases supports the argument that vacancy management should be institutionalized nationally rather than handled ad hoc by each region.

The reform principle should be continuity by design. A vacancy protocol should identify which official can temporarily coordinate the relevant functions, what authority is delegated, how long the delegation lasts, how decisions are recorded, and how the DPRD and Ministry of Home Affairs receive information about the replacement process. Such an arrangement would preserve democratic selection while reducing administrative uncertainty.

6. Policy Recommendations

1. Mandatory vacancy notification and contingency protocol. Within a short, legally defined period after a deputy vacancy is formally recognized, the regional head should issue a public and administrative notification identifying the vacancy, the functions affected, and the interim coordination arrangement.
2. Formal interim delegation. A gubernatorial/regent/mayor decree should assign relevant coordination and monitoring functions to designated officials or institutional units, with clear limits, reporting lines, and duration.

3. Time bound replacement process. The legal framework should establish enforceable procedural milestones for nomination, DPRD processing, and final appointment, while preserving the political parties' statutory role.
4. Transparent monitoring. The regional government should publish the vacancy date, procedural status, responsible institutions, and key milestones so that the public can monitor whether the replacement process is progressing.
5. Strengthened DPRD oversight. DPRD should monitor the replacement process and the continuity of governance functions without substituting itself for the executive or political parties in the statutory nomination process.
6. Emergency continuity mechanism. Regional governments should include deputy-vacancy scenarios in continuity of government and emergency-management protocols, particularly in metropolitan and high-risk jurisdictions.
7. Performance and accountability indicators. Where functions are temporarily delegated, the decree should specify measurable outputs and reporting obligations so that delegated authority remains auditable.

CONCLUSION

The prolonged vacancy of the Vice Governor of Jakarta during 2018 - 2020 illustrates a significant institutional vulnerability in Indonesia's decentralized governance system. The principal effects identified in the case are coordination bottlenecks, ambiguity in interim authority, weaker continuity of oversight, and increased risk to multi year policy implementation. These effects should not be interpreted as automatic or universal consequences of every vacancy, rather, they arise when a vacancy is combined with insufficiently explicit delegation and succession arrangements.

The central contribution of the study is to distinguish replacement from continuity. Existing law provides a mechanism for filling a vacant deputy regional head position, but an effective governance system also needs a legally clear bridge between the moment of vacancy and the moment of appointment. That bridge should be built through formal interim delegation, enforceable timelines, transparent monitoring, and stronger institutional coordination. Such reforms would improve administrative certainty without eliminating the democratic and political character of the deputy-selection process.

For future research, comparative studies across provinces and regencies are needed to test whether the four dimensions identified in this case coordination, delegation, oversight, and continuity recur under different political and administrative conditions. Quantitative panel analysis could further examine whether vacancy duration is associated with measurable changes in budget realization, service performance, or policy implementation.

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