

## Population and Civil Registration as the Spearhead of Inclusive and Effective Domestic Governance

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**Abstract:** Population and civil registration systems are increasingly recognized as foundational to effective governance. Yet, they are often examined as technical or sector-specific administrative functions rather than as core governance infrastructures. This study examines population and civil registration as pillars of inclusive and effective domestic governance in Indonesia, a decentralized, digitally transforming middle-income country. Using a qualitative documentary case study approach, the research analyses legal frameworks, policy documents, and peer-reviewed academic literature through an integrated theoretical lens combining state capacity theory, whole-of-government approaches, and digital governance theory. The findings reveal that population and civil registration enhance governance capacity by improving administrative visibility, facilitating intergovernmental coordination, and supporting the integration of digital governance. However, these benefits are conditional and influenced by institutional capacity, governance safeguards, and legitimacy, with persistent risks of exclusion and uneven implementation across regions. By conceptualizing population and civil registration as a governance capability rather than a purely administrative service, this study advances theoretical understanding of identity systems in public administration. It offers policy-relevant insights for strengthening inclusive and effective domestic governance in decentralized contexts.

**Keywords:** Population and Civil Registration; Domestic Governance; State Capacity; Digital Governance; Inclusion

Inclusive and effective domestic governance increasingly depends on a state's ability to identify its residents, register vital events, and reuse trusted population data across institutions for planning, service delivery, accountability, and crisis response (Acev et al., 2025; Darin, 2025). Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) systems are now widely recognized as foundational governance infrastructure rather than routine administrative functions (Ndiyun & Mukonza, 2025). This recognition is embedded in the global development agenda through Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 16.9, which calls for legal identity for all, including birth registration (Bera et al., 2025). Recent scholarship underscores that legal identity is not only a human rights instrument but also a prerequisite for administrative

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visibility, the capacity of the state to recognize individuals within formal systems and allocate services equitably (Breckenridge, 2021; Jacobs, 2024)).

Despite global progress, significant gaps remain. UNICEF estimates that, at 2023, approximately 150 million children under five remain unregistered worldwide, rendering them administratively invisible and potentially excluded from health care, education, and social protection systems (Bug et al., 2025). Empirical CRVS performance research further shows that improvements in registration coverage do not automatically translate into reliable, timely vital statistics unless institutional coordination, data interoperability, and quality assurance mechanisms are strengthened (AbouZahr et al., 2015; Mikkelsen et al., 2023). Thus, identity systems generate governance value only when embedded in end-to-end institutional processes that enable data reuse across sectors.

Parallel to this, legal identity scholarship warns that identity reforms can produce new forms of exclusion if service access becomes contingent on documentation without adequate safeguards (Beduschi, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). Digital identification systems, while enhancing efficiency and verification, may harden inequalities when regulatory protections, grievance mechanisms, and inclusion strategies are weak (Martin & Taylor, 2021; Shrestha & Bhattarai, 2022). Consequently, population registration systems sit at the intersection of inclusion and governance capacity: they can either enhance equitable state presence or, depending on institutional design and oversight, inadvertently deepen marginalization.

These dynamics make Indonesia a particularly significant case for examining population and civil registration as a pillar of domestic governance. Indonesia's governance operates across a vast archipelago under a highly decentralized administrative structure, where local governments possess substantial implementation authority (Hartono et al., 2023). Research on decentralization in Southeast Asia demonstrates that institutional coordination across levels of government critically shapes policy coherence and service delivery performance (Hadiz & Robison, 2017; Hm, 2021). In decentralized contexts, variations in subnational administrative capacity, digital readiness, and intergovernmental collaboration can either enable or constrain national governance reforms (Clark & Wylie, 2021).

Within this institutional setting, Population and Civil Registration (Administrasi Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil) has evolved beyond documentation. It increasingly functions as a reference layer for authentication, targeting, interoperability, and integrated public service delivery. Indonesia's digital governance transformation reinforces this shift from "records" to "governance infrastructure." Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018 established the Electronic-Based Government System (Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik, SPBE), positioning digital integration as a core administrative strategy (Rachmawati et al., 2022). Subsequently, Presidential Regulation No. 132/2022 introduced a National SPBE Architecture that frames digital government as an integrated ecosystem of business processes, data, applications, infrastructure, and security across central and local governments (Khaerah et al., 2025). Interoperability is no longer aspirational but institutionalized as a governance requirement. Complementing this architecture, Presidential Regulation No. 39/2019 on One Data Indonesia (Satu Data Indonesia) seeks to standardize, integrate, and ensure accountability in government data management (Bernot et al., 2024). Effective implementation of One Data depends heavily on reliable population identity data as a baseline for deduplication, standardization, and cross-sector linkage. However, emerging Indonesian governance research highlights persistent challenges to interoperability: coordination barriers, institutional fragmentation, and uneven subnational digital capabilities (Wicaksono, 2023). These constraints illustrate that digital governance success depends not merely on technological deployment but on intergovernmental alignment and institutional quality (Ateh et al., 2020).

Indonesia's ongoing identity modernization initiatives further demonstrate the repositioning of civil registration as a governance infrastructure. The World Bank-supported "ID for Inclusive Service Delivery and Digital Transformation in Indonesia (P175218)" project

operationalizes identity integration through cross-sector programmatic reforms and performance monitoring (Fitriyanti, 2024). Such initiatives treat population identity systems as enabling infrastructure for social assistance targeting, health insurance enrolment, taxation, and electoral administration. Meanwhile, recent Indonesian scholarship on Identitas Kependudukan Digital (IKD) emphasizes that digital identity adoption requires regulatory clarity, institutional coordination, and inclusive public communication to prevent exclusion risks (Syafitri et al., 2025). Against this backdrop, this study conceptualizes Population and Civil Registration as the spearhead of inclusive and effective domestic governance, grounded in three interrelated governance logics.

The first is administrative visibility. Civil registration confers formal recognition within state systems, enabling evidence-based planning, equitable resource allocation, and monitoring of inclusion outcomes. The persistence of under-registration globally reinforces that visibility remains foundational to both rights' realization and service delivery effectiveness (AbouZahr et al., 2015; Mikkelsen et al., 2023).

The second is interoperability and coordination. Unique identifiers and standardized population data enable cross-sector integration, reduce duplication, and strengthen administrative efficiency. In decentralized systems like Indonesia's, interoperable identity systems can mitigate siloed governance and enhance coordination across ministries and subnational governments (Fitriyanti, 2024).

The third is digital transformation with safeguards. Population data infrastructures underpin e-government and digital public service ecosystems. However, research cautions that digital identity systems must be governed through robust data protection frameworks, accountability mechanisms, and inclusion strategies to prevent new forms of exclusion (Beduschi, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). Governance quality, not technology alone, determines whether digital identity expands equitable access.

Despite the strategic positioning of identity and civil registration within Indonesia's governance agenda, existing literature frequently approaches these systems through narrower lenses such as technology adoption, sectoral service reform, or administrative compliance (Bera et al., 2025; Handoko & Nugroho, 2024; Saptanno & Timisela, 2024). Less attention has been devoted to explaining how integrated population systems function as cross-institutional governance capabilities that shape state capacity, coordination, and inclusion outcomes simultaneously (Khaerah et al., 2025). Moreover, the transformative promise of integration is impacted by practical constraints, uneven local capacity, institutional fragmentation, and evolving data governance regimes, which condition whether identity systems strengthen coherence and trust or reinforce fragmentation and exclusion. However, existing scholarships largely treat civil registration as either a technical administrative reform, a digital modernization initiative, or a human rights instrument. Less attention has been devoted to examining how integrated population systems function simultaneously as visibility infrastructure, coordination mechanisms, and digital governance enablers within decentralized state architectures. This gap limits the theoretical understanding of identity systems as a cross-sector governance capability.

Addressing this gap, the present study investigates how integrated population and civil registration systems strengthen governance capacity in Indonesia and under what institutional and intergovernmental conditions they contribute to inclusive and effective domestic governance. Specifically, the study pursues three objectives: (1) to examine how population administration and civil registration enhance governance capacity through administrative efficiency, coordination, and integrated service delivery; (2) to identify regulatory, institutional, and intergovernmental mechanisms that enable or constrain integration across sectors and levels; and (3) to assess inclusion risks and governance safeguards necessary to ensure that integration expands equitable access rather than reproducing exclusion. From a policy perspective, Indonesia's ongoing SPBE and One Data reforms position population

administration as foundational governance infrastructure. Yet, in practice, tensions emerge between central standardization and local execution. Understanding how identity integration operates across institutional levels is therefore critical for both governance reform and inclusive service delivery. Guided by this theoretical and policy gap, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does Indonesia's integrated population and civil registration system function as a governance capability for domestic administration and service delivery?
2. What coordination mechanisms support or hinder integration across sectors and levels of government?
3. What inclusion challenges and governance safeguards determine whether integration strengthens equitable access to services and rights?

By positioning population and civil registration as the spearhead of domestic governance, rather than merely an administrative service, this study contributes to contemporary debates on state capacity, intergovernmental coordination, and inclusive digital transformation. It offers evidence-informed insights for Indonesian policymakers while advancing broader discussions on how identity systems can be institutionally embedded to strengthen both governance effectiveness and social inclusion in the digital era.

## **Domestic Governance, Population, Civil Registration, and Scholarly Debates**

### ***Indonesia's Decentralized Governance and Population Data as a Governance Issue***

Indonesia's domestic governance operates through a distinctive combination of central standard-setting and far-reaching territorial decentralization (Hidayat et al., 2025). Following the post-Reformasi reforms, substantial administrative and fiscal responsibilities were transferred to subnational governments, with the stated aims of improving local responsiveness, strengthening democratic participation, and making public services more efficient (Hermanto et al., 2024). Yet the empirical record is consistent: decentralization has produced uneven governance and service outcomes across regions because local governments vary widely in bureaucratic competence, professionalism, resources, and political incentives (Hasanudin et al., 2025; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Where local capacity is strong, decentralization can support faster adaptation and closer responsiveness to citizen needs. Where capacity is weak, the same autonomy can generate uneven service quality, fragmented implementation, and inconsistent compliance with national standards.

These decentralization dynamics matter especially in policy domains that require standardized procedures and the continuous sharing of information across administrative boundaries (Annahar et al., 2023). Population administration and civil registration are not "sectoral" services in the way that health or education may be organized; rather, they constitute the administrative backbone that allows other sectors to identify beneficiaries, verify eligibility, coordinate across agencies, and monitor inclusion. In decentralized systems, the need for reliable cross-jurisdictional integration is greater because fragmentation risks multiply when hundreds of local governments operate semi-autonomously (Siburian, 2024). Consequently, domestic governance performance is closely linked to whether population data systems can be coordinated, standardized, and trusted across levels of government (Irawan, 2023).

The Indonesian case shows why this coordination challenge is structural rather than incidental. National policies can mandate data standards and interoperability. Still, implementation is filtered through local realities: budget constraints, staff capability, infrastructure gaps, and local political dynamics that influence compliance and prioritization (Lewis & Smoke, 2017). This is why population administration and civil registration should be treated as a governance capability. They are the means by which the state maintains

administrative oversight of its population across a dispersed territory and multiple layers of government.

### **Civil Registration and State Capacity: From “Records” to Governance Infrastructure**

The governance significance of civil registration and population administration is well established in state capacity scholarship. Classic accounts of state formation and bureaucratic development emphasize that the ability to identify, enumerate, and register populations supports core state functions such as taxation, service provision, and political accountability by making society administratively legible (McDonnell, 2025; Tilly, 1992).

Contemporary public administration research extends this logic by arguing that population data are not merely descriptive inputs; they shape what governments can do, how policies are designed, and how inclusion is operationalized in practice (Fukuyama, 2013). The practical implication is that weaknesses in population data infrastructure can become bottlenecks for seemingly unrelated policy goals, poverty targeting, universal health coverage, disaster response, or education planning, because those outcomes depend on the state’s ability to identify and reach eligible individuals reliably. Comparative governance research similarly shows that states with weak or fragmented civil registration systems often struggle to implement inclusive public policy at scale (Djatmiko et al., 2025). Administrative errors and incomplete registries increase transaction costs and reduce targeting accuracy. At the same time, fragmentation across agencies and jurisdictions undermines monitoring and evaluation (Schneider & Ingram, 2019).

These issues intensify in decentralized contexts where variations in capacity and compliance produce uneven governance outcomes across regions. As a result, civil registration and population administration have become not just an administrative service but an enabling infrastructure for domestic governance. However, a key lesson from the broader CRVS and legal identity literature is that governance value depends on more than improving registration rates. Even when registration coverage increases, governments often struggle to convert administrative records into timely, reliable data usable for planning and policy, unless institutional processes and data governance systems are strengthened end-to-end (Mikkelsen et al., 2023). Thus, the “infrastructure” view requires attention to institutional architecture: how data are captured, validated, updated, shared, secured, and used, not merely whether records exist.

### **Indonesia’s Adminduk Architecture: Central Coordination and Local Execution**

Indonesia’s population administration and civil registration (Administrasi Kependudukan dan Pencatatan Sipil, Adminduk) is anchored in the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Ditjen Dukcapil) within the Ministry of Home Affairs. Dukcapil sets national standards, manages core population databases, and supervises implementation. Yet operational delivery, frontline registration, documentation services, and local record updating occur largely through district and municipal governments (Diprose, 2023).

This institutional design mirrors Indonesia’s broader governance model: centralized rules with decentralized execution. The effectiveness of this hybrid arrangement depends on whether national coordination mechanisms can align administrative practices, systems, and incentives across heterogeneous local governments (Syakur & Khoiroh, 2021). Where alignment works, civil registration becomes more consistent, data quality improves, and interagency integration becomes feasible (Hastono & Ratnasari, 2020). Where it fails, local discretion and capacity gaps lead to inconsistencies: incomplete records, variable data quality,

uneven service access, and delayed updates. In this sense, Adminduk's governance performance is not simply a function of national policy intent, but of practical intergovernmental capacity, standards, systems, oversight, incentives, and local readiness (Irawan, 2023).

Two components are especially central to understanding Adminduk as governance infrastructure: (1) the unique identifier (Nomor Induk Kependudukan, NIK), and (2) integrated information systems (notably SIAK) that connect local offices with national databases and enable continuous updating. These components are the technical and institutional mechanisms through which administrative visibility and interagency coordination are pursued.

### **NIK, SIAK, and the Logic of Administrative Integration**

The introduction of the NIK as a unique, lifelong identifier is a pivotal development because unique identifiers are widely recognized as mechanisms that can reduce duplication, streamline service delivery, and enable cross-sector integration, when supported by coherent institutions and data governance (Breckenridge, 2021). In Indonesia, NIK is used across a wide range of administrative domains, including electoral registration, health insurance, and social assistance targeting (Alvember & Asri, 2025). In principle, this creates a shared administrative reference layer across agencies and levels of government. Yet the governance literature emphasizes that unique identifiers do not automatically produce inclusion or efficiency. The benefits depend on data quality, interoperability standards, enrollment accessibility, and institutional safeguards (Yilmaz & Saleem, 2023).

Research on digital identity in developing contexts cautions that identity-linked service systems can produce exclusion when enrollment is uneven, documentation requirements are burdensome, or administrative discretion is inconsistently exercised (Martin & Taylor, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). These concerns are highly relevant in decentralized environments, where local implementation differences can create uneven identity coverage and variable service access. Thus, the question is not whether NIK exists, but how consistently and equitably it is operationalized across Indonesia's diverse territories and bureaucracies.

Operationally, Indonesia's integration efforts rely heavily on the Sistem Informasi Administrasi Kependudukan (SIAK), which is designed to standardize population data management, enable real-time updates, and facilitate interoperability across administrative units (Alfarizy & Balahmar, 2025). Digital government scholarship argues that integrated information systems are not mere technical tools; they are institutional arrangements that shape accountability, authority, and coordination across government (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). SIAK therefore functions as a governance mechanism: it links local registration offices to national databases, reduces fragmentation, and enables standardization, provided infrastructure and capacity are adequate. The broader digital government literature reinforces that centralized platforms can improve administrative efficiency and data consistency, but only when accompanied by clear standards, sustained oversight, and local capability (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). This is the central governance challenge in Indonesia: technical integration must be matched by institutional integration, especially where subnational variation is large.

### **Government Integration and Interoperability: Data Sharing as Governance, Not IT**

A major body of public administration scholarship stresses that complex policy problems increasingly require coordination across organizational boundaries, often described as whole-of-government governance. Whole-of-government theory argues that effective public action depends on collaboration, shared infrastructures, and aligned institutional incentives across agencies (Christensen & Lægveid, 2011). In data-driven governance environments,

interoperability becomes a practical precondition for coherent service delivery. Shared population data infrastructures can reduce transaction costs, improve targeting accuracy, and strengthen accountability when effectively governed rather than treated as purely technical projects (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Indonesia's recent governance reforms institutionalize this logic. Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018 establishes SPBE (Electronic-Based Government System) as a national direction for improving governance and service delivery through digitalization and integration. Presidential Regulation No. 132/2022 further specifies the National SPBE Architecture and frames digital government as an integrated ecosystem of business processes, data and information, applications, infrastructure, and security across central and local governments. Meanwhile, Presidential Regulation No. 39/2019 aims to ensure that data are accurate, up-to-date, integrated, accountable, and shareable.

In practice, these frameworks elevate population and civil registration data from administrative datasets to a core governance reference for standardization and cross-sector linkage. However, interoperability ambitions encounter real governance constraints. The literature on intergovernmental relations highlights that differences in capacity, organizational culture, incentives, and legal interpretation can impede coordination even when systems exist (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Janssen et al., 2020). Indonesia's decentralization amplifies these challenges because local governments differ in digital readiness and administrative professionalism. Therefore, population and civil registration serve as a stabilizing reference infrastructure only when coordination mechanisms, standards enforcement, incentives, oversight, and support are strong enough to manage uneven implementation.

### **Digital Identity (IKD) as Governance Transformation**

Building on NIK and SIAK, Indonesia's development of Identitas Kependudukan Digital (IKD) represents an additional step toward repositioning population administration as a core element of digital governance. Digital identity systems are increasingly conceptualized as foundational infrastructures for digital states, enabling secure authentication and reducing administrative burdens for citizens accessing services (Janssen et al., 2020). IKD potentially extends civil registration beyond documentation to enable new forms of state-citizen interaction, especially in service ecosystems that require reliable authentication. Yet research cautions that digital identity outcomes depend less on technical sophistication and more on institutional design, regulatory clarity, and inclusion strategies (Fitriyanti, 2024).

Comparative evidence shows that digital identity initiatives can enhance efficiency and access, but they can also exacerbate exclusion if enrollment is inaccessible, digital literacy is uneven, or accountability mechanisms are weak (Martin & Taylor, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021; Weitzberg et al., 2021). These risks are particularly salient in large, diverse countries where connectivity, literacy, and administrative capacity vary markedly. Therefore, in governance terms, IKD should be analyzed not as a technology but as an institutional reform that reallocates burdens and capabilities: it can reduce transaction costs for citizens and agencies, but it can also shift exclusion risks onto those with limited digital access or those facing documentation barriers. This implies the need to study how IKD is embedded into existing administrative workflows, how inclusion is safeguarded across regions, and how accountability is maintained when identity becomes a gateway to services.

### **Inclusion Risks, Data Governance, and Accountability: Safeguards as Part of Effectiveness**

A critical strand of scholarship argues that identity-linked systems can generate governance risks alongside governance benefits. When access to services becomes conditional

on registration, those who face structural barriers, such as remote communities, informal migrants, and people lacking foundational documents, may experience intensified exclusion (Fitriyanti, 2024). Legal identity research warns that identity reforms can produce harm if systems become prerequisites without inclusive design and remedy mechanisms (Mahardhika, 2023). This concern is reinforced by studies of administrative access, which show that bureaucratic complexity and discretionary practices can disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable groups, especially under decentralized implementation, where practices vary by locality. Beyond inclusion, data protection and accountability concerns become more salient as population data are reused across sectors (Hartono et al., 2023).

Governance and legal scholarship highlight risks of surveillance expansion, misuse, unauthorized access, and “function creep” when identity-linked data systems become widely interoperable without strong safeguards (Janssen et al., 2020; Lyon, 2014). These risks can undermine public trust and legitimacy, which governance scholarship treats as essential to long-term effectiveness. In other words, capability without legitimacy can weaken governance performance even if systems appear efficient in narrow technical terms. For Indonesia, the combination of decentralization and expanding data integration creates a dual governance task: improving administrative capacity and ensuring that governance safeguards (transparency, accountability, accessible remedies, and protections against misuse) are embedded into the design and implementation of integrated identity systems (Bernot et al., 2024; Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Yilmaz & Saleem, 2023). This is precisely why population and civil registration are best conceptualized as a pillar of domestic governance rather than merely an administrative function.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To analyze Adminduk as a pillar of inclusive and effective domestic governance, this study employs an integrated theoretical framework built from three complementary strands. The sequencing below is designed to be conceptually coherent and analytically cumulative rather than repetitive. Rather than proposing a new grand theory, the framework consolidates and systematically aligns established strands of governance scholarship to examine identity systems as cross-sector institutional infrastructure in decentralized contexts.

### **State Capacity and Administrative Visibility**

The first pillar draws on state capacity theory, which emphasizes governments’ ability to implement policies effectively through administrative systems and infrastructural reach (Fukuyama, 2013). Civil registration and population administration support administrative visibility, rendering individuals and households governable in practical terms, by enabling identification, targeting, and monitoring across dispersed territories (Scott, 1998). In Indonesia, where decentralization increases fragmentation risks, administrative visibility depends on whether population records are consistent, accurate, and continuously updated across local offices. Civil registration is conceptualized not merely as record-keeping but as a foundational visibility infrastructure that conditions the operational reach of state capacity across sectors.

### **Whole-of-Government Coordination and Interoperability**

The second pillar draws on whole-of-government scholarship, which explains why shared infrastructures and cross-agency coordination are prerequisites for coherent public service delivery in complex states (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011). Identity-linked data infrastructures provide a reference layer that can reduce duplication and enable policy coherence across agencies, if governance arrangements align incentives, standards, and accountability across levels (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). In Indonesia, SPBE and One Data

institutionalize interoperability as a governance requirement, positioning Adminduk at the core of domestic coordination. The framework advances this strand by explicitly linking interoperability to administrative visibility, demonstrating how shared identity infrastructures operate as cross-sector coordination mechanisms rather than as sector-specific digital reforms.

### **Digital Governance, Data Infrastructures, and Safeguards**

The third pillar draws on digital-era governance research emphasizing that digital infrastructures reshape administrative processes and state–citizen relationships, with consequences for efficiency, inclusion, and legitimacy (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Systems such as SIAK and initiatives like IKD are thus understood not merely as technological upgrades but as socio-technical governance reforms. At the same time, digital integration introduces risks, including privacy concerns, data misuse, and exclusion, that must be addressed through robust data governance and accountability mechanisms (Janssen et al., 2020; Lyon, 2014). By integrating safeguards into the analytical model, the framework highlights that digital identity systems generate governance value only under institutional conditions that protect legitimacy and equitable access.

Together, these pillars yield a unified analytical claim: Adminduk strengthens domestic governance by simultaneously enhancing administrative visibility, enabling whole-of-government coordination through interoperable reference data, and embedding safeguards that protect inclusion and legitimacy. In Indonesia’s decentralized context, the governance value of integration is therefore conditional. Value depends not only on technology, but also on intergovernmental alignment, institutional capacity, and accountability design. The novelty of this framework lies in its articulation of a conditional governance model in which visibility, coordination, and digital infrastructure are analytically linked and jointly impacted by safeguards and institutional coherence. This integrated framework directly informs the study’s analytical focus by linking population registration to governance capacity, coordination mechanisms, and inclusion outcomes.

Figure 1 presents population and civil registration as a layered governance infrastructure. The model illustrates how civil registration functions as the foundational platform that generates administrative visibility, facilitates intergovernmental coordination, and supports digital governance infrastructure. These mechanisms collectively contribute to inclusive and effective domestic governance, influenced by institutional safeguards, administrative capacity, and legitimacy. Accordingly, the contribution is best understood as a theoretical consolidation and contextual refinement of decentralized and digitally transforming governance systems, rather than a paradigm-disruptive intervention.

## **Methodology**

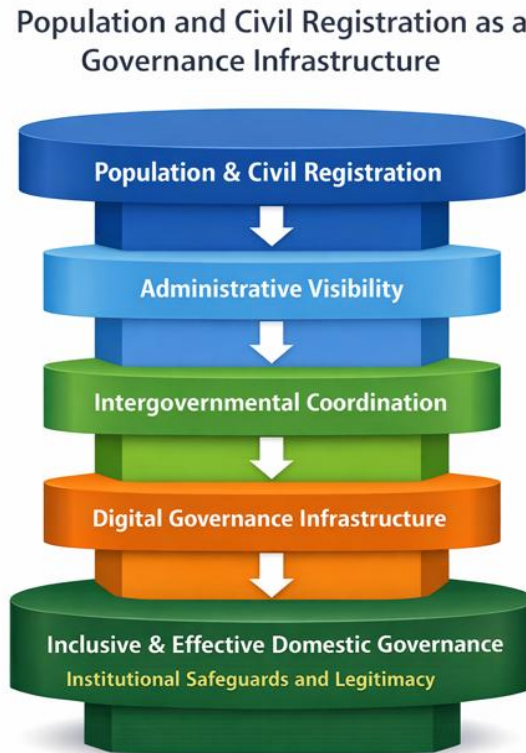
### ***Research Design and Analytical Approach***

This study employs a qualitative documentary case study design to examine population and civil registration as a governance infrastructure in Indonesia. Documentary analysis is widely used in public administration and governance research to investigate institutional arrangements, policy evolution, and regulatory architectures through systematically analyzed secondary data (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018). The study is explicitly positioned as an institutional governance analysis rather than an empirical performance evaluation. Its objective is to examine the architecture, logic, and institutional embedding of population and civil registration within Indonesia’s governance system, rather than to measure implementation outcomes at the service-delivery level. This design is appropriate for identity systems, which are

institutionalized, regulation-driven, and extensively documented through legal instruments, administrative frameworks, and policy reports.

### Figure 1

*Population and Civil Registration as a Pillar of Inclusive and Effective Domestic Governance*



Rather than focusing on individual perceptions, the analysis centers on institutional logic, governance structures, and policy narratives embedded in official texts and scholarly assessments. Documentary materials are treated as institutional artifacts that reveal how authority, coordination, and accountability are structured within governance systems (Malhotra & Anand, 2020; O'Leary & Hunt, 2017), thereby enabling analysis of how governance capacity is formally constructed and articulated in regulatory design. This approach aligns with contemporary interpretive governance research that analyzes how policy texts articulate administrative intent and shape governance capacity. Accordingly, the study does not seek to generate primary field-level data but to synthesize and systematically interpret institutional evidence to refine theoretical understanding of identity systems as governance infrastructure.

### Case Selection: Indonesia

Indonesia was selected for its analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. Case study research prioritizes theoretically informative cases that illuminate broader governance dynamics (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2018). Indonesia's extensive decentralization, large population, and sustained reforms in population administration and digital governance provide a critical setting for examining how civil registration functions as governance infrastructure within a multilevel administrative system. The case is particularly suitable because population administration reforms are embedded within broader digital governance initiatives, including SPBE and One Data Indonesia. The availability of extensive legal documentation, policy frameworks, implementation guidelines, and scholarly research

enables systematic analysis without reliance on primary fieldwork, consistent with comparative governance methodology (George & Bennett, 2005). The choice not to incorporate interviews or administrative performance datasets reflects the study's focus on institutional architecture and governance design. While such data would enrich implementation-level analysis, the present study concentrates on how integration is structured and justified within formal governance frameworks.

## Data Sources

The study relies exclusively on secondary sources drawn from three categories:

1. Legal and regulatory instruments, including laws and presidential regulations governing population administration, decentralization, and digital governance. These sources are analyzed as expressions of regulatory design, reflecting formal institutional mandates and governance intent.
2. Official policy documents and administrative reports outline system integration strategies, institutional mandates, and implementation mechanisms. These documents provide insight into policy articulation and administrative framing of governance reforms.
3. Peer-reviewed academic literature in public administration, governance, digital government, and development studies, which is treated as scholarly evaluation, offering empirically grounded and analytical assessments of governance processes and outcomes.

To enhance analytical clarity, the study explicitly distinguishes between regulatory design (formal provisions), scholarly evaluations (analytical and empirical assessments), and normative interpretation (the authors' theoretical synthesis of governance implications). This distinction ensures that institutional intent, observed patterns, and interpretive conclusions are not conflated. Triangulation across these categories strengthens analytical credibility by allowing comparison between formal mandates, policy intentions, and scholarly evaluations (Bowen, 2009; Malhotra & Anand, 2020). This multi-source approach facilitates the identification of consistencies and tensions between regulatory frameworks and documented governance practices. Although the study does not provide independent empirical verification of institutional performance, triangulation across regulatory texts and scholarly evaluations enhances interpretive robustness and mitigates reliance on single-source narratives.

## Analytical Procedure

Documentary analysis followed an iterative and theory-informed interpretive process. Documents were selected based on relevance to population administration, digital identity integration, intergovernmental coordination, and governance safeguards. The initial close reading identified dominant themes of administrative visibility, interoperability, institutional alignment, and inclusion. Coding combined deductive and inductive strategies. Deductive codes were derived from the integrated theoretical framework, state capacity, whole-of-government coordination, and digital governance, while inductive codes emerged from recurring patterns in the documentary material (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

This hybrid strategy ensured theoretical coherence while allowing context-specific dynamics to surface. Specifically, deductive coding categories included: (1) administrative visibility mechanisms (e.g., standardization of NIK, registry consolidation), (2) interoperability and coordination mandates (e.g., cross-ministerial data sharing provisions), and (3) digital governance safeguards (e.g., accountability clauses, data protection references). Inductive coding identified recurring implementation themes, including capacity disparities, procedural

complexity, and regional variation. Codes were subsequently clustered into higher-order thematic groupings corresponding to the three governance dimensions presented in the findings.

Importantly, the analytical process emphasized interpretive transparency: documentary claims were traced back to identifiable regulatory provisions, policy frameworks, or published scholarly assessments. To maintain analytical clarity, regulatory provisions were interpreted as expressions of institutional design, policy documents as articulations of administrative intent, and scholarly sources as evidence of evaluated or observed governance outcomes. For example, findings regarding interoperability and shared identity validation were traced to specific provisions within Presidential Regulations on SPBE and One Data Indonesia, while inclusion safeguards were linked to clauses addressing data protection, oversight, and service accessibility. To strengthen evidentiary anchoring, selected short excerpts from key regulatory provisions are incorporated in the analysis to directly illustrate how governance mechanisms are formally articulated. The aim was not to test hypotheses empirically but to assess how governance capacity is institutionally framed, structured, and conditionally articulated within official and scholarly sources. The analysis focused on how population and civil registration are framed as governance instruments, how coordination mechanisms are institutionalized across levels of government, and how inclusion safeguards are articulated within regulatory and policy texts. Temporal shifts in policy framing were also examined to trace the evolution of identity systems from administrative records to digital governance infrastructure. Normative interpretation was then applied to synthesize governance implications across these domains, ensuring that institutional intent, evaluated outcomes, and interpretive conclusions remain analytically distinct.

### **Analytical Framework**

The earlier-integrated framework guided interpretation. State capacity theory informs the analysis of administrative visibility and implementation capability (Fukuyama, 2013). Whole-of-government theory frames examination of interoperability and cross-level coordination (Christensen & Lægreid, 2011; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Digital governance scholarship provides analytical leverage for understanding identity-linked data infrastructures and associated risks (Janssen et al., 2020; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Theoretical constructs function as sensitizing devices rather than rigid variables, allowing empirical evidence to refine conceptual understanding (Charmaz, 2017). This approach is consistent with contemporary qualitative governance research that emphasizes contextual interpretation over variable-based modeling. Accordingly, the framework guides structured interpretation rather than serving as a confirmatory testing instrument, reducing the risk of purely theory-driven validation.

### **Research Rigor and Ethical Considerations**

Rigor is ensured through systematic source triangulation, transparent analytical procedures, and explicit linkage between documentary evidence and theoretical constructions. Consistent coding procedures and cross-verification across legal, policy, and academic sources enhance credibility. Analytical transferability is supported by a detailed contextualization of Indonesia's decentralized governance environment, enabling readers to assess its relevance to other multilevel or middle-income systems (Yin, 2018). The study relies exclusively on publicly available documents and secondary literature and does not involve human participants. No formal ethical approval was required. Scholarly integrity is maintained through accurate representation of sources and contextualized interpretation of regulatory and policy materials. Hence, the study offers analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization, consistent with qualitative case study methodology (Yin, 2018).

## **Analysis and Findings**

This section presents findings from a systematic qualitative documentary analysis of legal frameworks, administrative regulations, digital governance policies, and peer-reviewed scholarship on Indonesia's population and civil registration system (Bowen, 2009; Prior, 2003; Yin, 2018). The findings explicitly distinguish between (a) regulatory design as articulated in legal and policy frameworks, (b) scholarly evaluations reporting implementation patterns and outcomes, and (c) normative interpretive analysis that synthesizes these strands to assess governance implications. The analysis demonstrates that population administration operates not merely as a technical registry but as a structural governance infrastructure that shapes administrative visibility, intergovernmental coordination, digital transformation, and inclusion outcomes within Indonesia's decentralized state architecture (Fukuyama, 2013; Janssen et al., 2020; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Rather than treating these dimensions separately, the findings show how they operate interdependently and condition the overall effectiveness of domestic governance, while maintaining analytical separation between institutional design, evaluated outcomes, and interpretive conclusions (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011; Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018;).

### **Population and Civil Registration as Administrative Visibility Infrastructure**

Across regulatory texts and governance analyses, population and civil registration are consistently positioned as the foundational mechanism through which the Indonesian state renders its population administratively legible (Fukuyama, 2013; Scott, 1998). The centralization of identity data through standardized unique identifiers transforms fragmented local records into a nationally interoperable administrative reference (Breckenridge, 2021; Fitriyanti, 2024). This infrastructural role enables demographic monitoring, fiscal planning, beneficiary targeting, and program evaluation across policy domains (Bernot et al., 2024; Mikkelsen et al., 2023;). In this sense, civil registration functions as the empirical backbone of state capacity: without standardized identity data, planning and policy implementation lack operational precision (Fukuyama, 2013; Scott, 1998). Scholarly evaluations indicate that consolidating population data through nationally standardized systems has reduced duplication, strengthened eligibility verification, and improved demographic consistency across ministries (Bernot et al., 2024; Wicaksono, 2023). Prior scholarly evaluations report that the use of unified identifiers has been associated with improved targeting accuracy in social assistance programs and greater cross-sector data consistency (Fitriyanti, 2024; ; Wicaksono, 2023).

At the macro-governance level, these developments reflect an expansion of administrative visibility, allowing the state to align planning and service allocation more systematically (Fukuyama, 2013; Hidayat et al., 2025). However, the analysis also reveals that administrative visibility remains uneven. Secondary research documents persistent gaps in registration completeness in geographically remote regions and among socioeconomically marginalized populations (Mahardhika, 2023). These disparities illustrate that administrative visibility is not uniformly distributed across territory or social groups (Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Siburian, 2024). While the institutional architecture enables systemic legibility, the inclusiveness of that visibility depends on local implementation capacity and outreach effectiveness (Diprose, 2023; Hastono & Ratnasari, 2020; Syakur & Khoiroh, 2021). Thus, population and civil registration strengthen governance capacity structurally, but the depth of visibility, and therefore the equity of governance outcomes, remains conditional (Fitriyanti, 2024).

### **Civil Registration and Intergovernmental Coordination**

The analysis demonstrates that civil registration functions as a critical coordination mechanism within Indonesia's decentralized governance structure (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011; Irawan, 2023; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Given the significant autonomy of subnational governments, administrative fragmentation poses a persistent challenge to policy coherence (Hidayat et al., 2025; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Population registries operate as one of the few standardized instruments capable of bridging institutional silos and aligning central ministries with local governments around shared identity data (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Janssen et al., 2020; Wicaksono, 2023). Documentary provisions establish shared mechanisms for identity validation to streamline interagency verification and align eligibility criteria across levels of government. Governance studies report that such integration has been associated with reduced administrative duplication and improved vertical consistency (Bernot et al., 2024; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Academic scholarship on decentralization indicates that shared data infrastructures are particularly important in systems characterized by uneven local administrative capacity (Clark & Wylie, 2021; Siburian, 2024). In this context, civil registration serves as a harmonizing mechanism, reducing inconsistencies across jurisdictions by anchoring service delivery in a common identity framework (Fitriyanti, 2024; Wicaksono, 2023). For example, Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018 explicitly mandates that "government agencies shall ensure data interoperability and integration across systems," illustrating how coordination is formalized within regulatory design.

Nonetheless, the coordination function of civil registration is contingent rather than automatic. Secondary analyses caution that interoperability benefits depend heavily on legal clarity, standardized data-sharing protocols, and institutional incentives (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Janssen et al., 2020). Where sectoral agencies maintain parallel databases or where subnational governments lack digital readiness, the integrative capacity of population data weakens (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Wicaksono, 2023). Thus, civil registration provides a necessary structural foundation for coordination, but effective intergovernmental alignment requires complementary governance mechanisms that reinforce interoperability norms and compliance standards (Bernot et al., 2024; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011; Janssen et al., 2020). Moreover, Table 1 presents the effects of intergovernmental coordination on population registration.

**Table 1**

*Intergovernmental Coordination Effects of Population Registration*

Coordination Domain	Institutional Role of Population Data	Governance Outcome	Structural Limitation
Central–Local Alignment	Standardized NIK validation	Improved vertical consistency	Capacity disparities
Inter-Ministerial Integration	Shared identity database	Reduced duplication	Sectoral silo persistence
Cross-Program Harmonization	Unified eligibility framework	Policy coherence	Legal ambiguity
Fiscal and Administrative Monitoring	Data-linked reporting	Enhanced accountability	Enforcement variation

### Digital Governance Transformation

A third major finding concerns the transformation of civil registration into digital governance infrastructure (Khaerah et al., 2025; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Documentary evidence shows that digitized population databases increasingly underpin automated verification processes, integrated service platforms, and data-driven administrative decision-

making (Bernot et al., 2024; Rachmawati et al., 2022). Rather than functioning as static registries, population systems have evolved into dynamic digital platforms that support interoperability across administrative domains (Janssen et al., 2020). Scholarly analyses describe this shift as a movement from document-centered administration toward platform-based governance (Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Integrated digital identity systems are designed to enable faster authentication, streamlined service access, and more efficient cross-sector coordination. Secondary assessments of Indonesia’s digital governance reforms report efficiency gains linked to these mechanisms (Fitriyanti, 2024; Syafitri et al., 2025). These developments reflect broader trends in digital-era governance, where identity-linked data infrastructures become central to public administration reform.

However, the digitalization of population data introduces governance risks, as documented in the literature. Centralized identity databases amplify concerns related to surveillance, data misuse, and power asymmetries (Lyon, 2014; Weitzberg et al., 2021). Furthermore, uneven digital literacy and infrastructure disparities may reproduce exclusion if access to services increasingly depends on digital authentication mechanisms (Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). Similarly, Presidential Regulation No. 132/2022 defines digital governance as “an integrated ecosystem of data, applications, and infrastructure across levels of government,” reinforcing the institutionalization of interoperability.

The analysis, therefore, indicates that digital transformation enhances governance capacity only when accompanied by strong regulatory safeguards, oversight mechanisms, and hybrid access pathways that accommodate citizens with limited digital access (Beduschi, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). Table 2 presents digital governance implications of population registration.

**Table 2**  
*Digital Governance Implications of Population Registration*

Digital Development	Administrative Effect	Governance Benefit	Governance Risk
Digitized Registries	Real-time updating	Efficiency gains	Data security concerns
Identity-Linked Platforms	Automated verification	Reduced transaction costs	Digital exclusion
Centralized Databases	Interoperability	Integrated services	Surveillance potential
Data-Driven Administration	Predictive planning	Enhanced policy precision	Accountability gaps

### **Inclusion as a Conditional Governance Outcome**

Across documentary sources, inclusion emerges not as an inherent outcome of integration but as a conditional governance effect (Beduschi, 2021; Manby, 2018; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). Policy narratives often portray civil registration as inherently inclusion-enhancing, yet academic evidence presents a more complex reality (Manby, 2018). Registration systems expand access for many citizens while simultaneously disadvantaging those who face documentation barriers, geographic isolation, or administrative discretion (Mahardhika, 2023; Tjiptoherijanto, 2018).

In Indonesia, secondary research identifies structural barriers that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Siburian, 2024). These include complex documentation requirements, variations in local administrative practice, and uneven outreach in remote regions (Diprose, 2023; Syakur & Khoiroh, 2021). Regulatory frameworks also emphasize inclusion safeguards, for instance, provisions requiring accessible registration

services for all citizens, highlighting that inclusion is formally embedded, though unevenly realized in practice.

As population data become increasingly embedded within digital service ecosystems, the risk of exclusion intensifies if safeguards are insufficient (Martin & Taylor, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021; Weitzberg et al., 2021). From a governance perspective, inclusion must therefore be actively governed rather than presumed (Beduschi, 2021). Simplification of registration procedures, oversight of administrative discretion, and inclusive digital design are necessary conditions for ensuring that integration translates into equitable access (Mahardhika, 2023; Manby, 2018; Fitriyanti, 2024). The findings underscore that legitimacy and fairness condition the relationship between administrative capacity and governance effectiveness (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Determinants of Inclusion in Population Administration*

Inclusion Dimension	Exclusion Risk Mechanism	Governance Safeguard Required
Geographic Accessibility	Remote under-registration	Mobile outreach and decentralized service support
Documentation Requirements	Eligibility denial	Simplified procedural standards
Digital Access	Platform-based exclusion	Hybrid service channels
Administrative Discretion	Uneven enforcement	Oversight and accountability frameworks

### **Integrated Governance Model**

Synthesizing the documentary evidence, population and civil registration in Indonesia function as a layered governance infrastructure operating through three mutually reinforcing mechanisms: administrative visibility, intergovernmental coordination, and digital governance integration. Administrative visibility establishes the informational foundation of governance by rendering individuals and households legible within formal systems, thereby enabling evidence-based planning, accurate targeting, and demographic monitoring (Mikkelsen et al., 2023; Scott, 1998). Intergovernmental coordination builds upon this visibility by aligning ministries and subnational governments around a shared identity reference, reducing fragmentation and strengthening policy coherence in a decentralized environment (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Wicaksono, 2023). Digital integration further extends these capacities by embedding identity infrastructure within interoperable service platforms that support automated verification, streamlined access, and data-driven administrative processes (Rachmawati et al., 2022).

However, the analysis demonstrates that these mechanisms do not operate in isolation and do not automatically generate inclusive and effective governance. Their impact is influenced by institutional coherence, legal clarity, administrative capacity, and the strength of inclusion safeguards (Beduschi, 2021; Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Janssen et al., 2020). Where regulatory alignment, data governance frameworks, and implementation capacity are robust, population administration enhances policy precision, cross-sector coordination, and institutional legitimacy (Bernot et al., 2024; Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011). Conversely, where institutional incentives are misaligned, oversight mechanisms are weak, or registration completeness is uneven, integration may exacerbate administrative fragmentation, reproduce exclusion, and undermine trust in governance systems (Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021; Weitzberg et al., 2021).

In this integrated model, population and civil registration are best understood not as a discrete administrative function, but as a structural governance pillar whose effectiveness depends on how technical systems, institutional arrangements, and equity safeguards interact within Indonesia's decentralized state architecture (Fitriyanti, 2024). Moreover, Table 4 presents the role of population and civil registration as governance pillars in an analytical matrix.

### Analytical Synthesis

The findings demonstrate that population and civil registration in Indonesia function as a structural governance infrastructure rather than a peripheral administrative service (Bernot et al., 2024; Fukuyama, 2013; Janssen et al., 2020). They enable administrative legibility, facilitate coordination in a decentralized system, and underpin digital transformation (Christensen & Lægveid, 2011; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013; Scott, 1998). However, these governance benefits are conditional. Institutional capacity, regulatory clarity, intergovernmental alignment, and inclusion safeguards determine whether integration produces effective and legitimate governance outcomes (Beduschi, 2021; Lewis & Smoke, 2017; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). The documentary record consistently indicates that integration strengthens domestic governance when technical systems are embedded within coherent institutional arrangements and equity-oriented implementation practices (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Fitriyanti, 2024; Gil-Garcia et al., 2018;).

**Table 4**

*Population and Civil Registration as a Governance Pillar: Analytical Matrix*

Governance Dimension	Institutional Mechanism	Capacity Contribution	Enabling (Conditional) Factors	Inclusive Governance Outcome	Governance Risk
Administrative Visibility	Standardized NIK and centralized population registry	Accurate identification, demographic monitoring, and policy targeting	Registration completeness, continuous data updating, and local administrative capacity	Evidence-based planning; reduced targeting errors; equitable fiscal allocation	Invisible or under-registered populations; exclusion from services; distorted planning data
Intergovernmental Coordination	Shared identity reference across ministries and subnational governments	Reduced duplication; cross-sector data alignment; vertical consistency	Legal clarity; interoperable systems; incentive alignment; enforcement of standards	Policy coherence; consistent service eligibility; improved cross-level accountability	Persistent institutional silos, parallel databases, and inconsistent service delivery
Digital Governance Integration	Digitized registries and interoperable service platforms	Automated verification; streamlined service access; data-driven decision-making	Data governance safeguards; cybersecurity; digital infrastructure; technical capacity	Inclusive digital service ecosystems, reduced transaction costs, and administrative efficiency	Data misuse; privacy breaches; digital exclusion; erosion of public trust

**Table 4**  
*Continued*

Digital Governance Integration	Digitized registries and interoperable service platforms	Automated verification; streamlined service access; data-driven decision-making	Data governance safeguards; cybersecurity; digital infrastructure; technical capacity	Inclusive digital service ecosystems, reduced transaction costs, and administrative efficiency	Data misuse; privacy breaches; digital exclusion; erosion of public trust
Inclusion and Legitimacy (Cross-Cutting)	Oversight mechanisms and procedural safeguards	Fair access to registration and services; strengthened institutional trust	Simplified procedures; outreach to marginalized groups; transparency; grievance mechanisms	Strengthened legitimacy; enhanced trust in public institutions; socially embedded governance	Reinforced inequality; discretionary exclusion; declining trust in state institutions

## Discussion

This study examined population and civil registration in Indonesia as pillars of inclusive and effective domestic governance through a qualitative documentary analysis. Three significant findings emerge from the analysis. First, population registration operates as an administrative visibility infrastructure. Second, it functions as a coordination mechanism in decentralized governance. Third, digital integration produces conditional governance effects influenced by safeguards. The findings show that integrated population administration functions not merely as an administrative registry but as a governance infrastructure shaping state capacity, intergovernmental coordination, and digital transformation within a decentralized political system (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Importantly, the findings do not uniformly confirm the theoretical expectations derived from the integrated framework. Instead, they reveal institutional tensions, uneven implementation, and governance risks that complicate linear assumptions about integration-led capacity enhancement. By situating these findings within broader theoretical debates, the Indonesian case advances contemporary governance scholarship.

### Reinterpreting Administrative Visibility in Decentralized Contexts

The findings extend state capacity theory by illustrating how administrative visibility operates in a territorially decentralized setting. Classical accounts emphasize legibility as foundational to effective governance (Fukuyama, 2013; Scott, 1998;). The Indonesian case confirms this principle but demonstrates that visibility is neither automatic nor evenly distributed. While standardized identifiers and centralized registries expand the reach of information, the inclusiveness of that visibility depends on subnational implementation capacity and the completeness of registration (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Notably, documentary evidence of uneven registration completeness and regional disparities complicates the assumption that standardized identity systems automatically generate comprehensive administrative visibility. This refines state capacity theory by showing that visibility is relational rather than purely centralized. In decentralized systems, administrative legibility requires coordinated updating, data validation, and institutional alignment across levels of government (Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Where such alignment is weak, formal visibility may coexist with practical blind spots. Thus, population and civil registration enhance governance capacity when data infrastructures are institutionally embedded and operationally

harmonized across jurisdictions, but the findings also indicate that institutional fragmentation and uneven local capacity constrain the full realization of this potential.

### **Civil Registration as Coordination Infrastructure**

The analysis also contributes to whole-of-government scholarship. In fragmented administrative systems, coordination depends on shared infrastructures and aligned incentives (Christensen & Læg Reid, 2011). Indonesia's population registry provides a standardized reference layer that connects ministries and subnational governments through common identity validation mechanisms (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018; Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Importantly, coordination gains stem not from digitization alone but from institutionalized interoperability. This supports arguments that integration is fundamentally a governance challenge rather than a technological one (Cordella & Tempini, 2015; Janssen et al., 2020). Where legal mandates, standards, and capacity align, population data reduces duplication and strengthens policy coherence. However, the findings also document instances of parallel databases, sectoral silos, and uneven digital readiness, indicating that interoperability is frequently partial rather than fully realized. Where institutional alignment is weak, fragmentation persists despite technical integration. The Indonesian case, therefore, highlights civil registration as a structural enabler of coordination in multilevel governance systems, while underscoring that coordination effects remain conditional and institutionally influenced rather than automatically generated.

### **Digital Governance and the Conditionality of Integration**

The findings deepen debates on digital governance by situating civil registration within broader processes of digital state transformation (Janssen et al., 2020; Margetts & Dunleavy, 2013). Identity-linked registries increasingly underpin automated verification, service integration, and data-driven administration. This aligns with digital-era governance theory, which emphasizes the centrality of data infrastructures in reshaping public administration. However, the Indonesian case reinforces a critical insight: digital integration expands both capacity and risk. While digitized registries enhance efficiency, they also raise concerns regarding surveillance, exclusion, and unequal access (Beduschi, 2021; Lyon, 2014; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021). The presence of documented inclusion risks and accountability concerns indicates that digital transformation does not uniformly validate the optimism about digital-era governance. Instead, the findings demonstrate that technological integration may amplify institutional weaknesses where safeguards are insufficient. Governance outcomes, therefore, depend not only on technological sophistication but also on safeguards that ensure accountability and equitable access. This challenges technocratic narratives of digital reform and underscores the role of governance quality in mediating the relationship between digital identity and inclusion.

### **Inclusion and Legitimacy as Influencing Conditions**

A central contribution of this study is to demonstrate that inclusion is not an automatic outcome of integration. While civil registration can expand access to services, administrative barriers and uneven implementation can reproduce exclusion (Kusumaningrum et al., 2019; Manby, 2018). The analysis reveals that documentation complexity, regional disparities, and variable administrative discretion complicate theoretical expectations that identity integration inherently strengthens equity. This aligns with governance theories emphasizing that legitimacy depends on fairness and accessibility alongside administrative competence (Fukuyama, 2013; Rothstein, 2011). When safeguards reduce documentation burdens and strengthen outreach,

civil registration enhances both capacity and trust. When barriers persist, efficiency gains may undermine legitimacy. The Indonesian case, therefore, underscores that inclusion must be actively governed. Population and civil registration contribute to effective domestic governance only when they are institutionally designed to balance efficiency with equity, and the findings illustrate that this balance remains contingent rather than structurally guaranteed.

## **Contributions**

### ***Contributions to Integrative Theory***

Taken together, the findings advance a consolidated theoretical insight: population and civil registration function as a structural governance pillar through the interaction of administrative visibility, intergovernmental coordination, and digital infrastructure, all of which are influenced by inclusion safeguards and institutional legitimacy. Importantly, this model is supported not through uniform confirmation but through empirical evidence of both enabling mechanisms and institutional constraints, thereby reducing the risk of purely theory-driven validation.

In this context, this study makes three contributions to theory building. First, the study reconceptualizes civil registration as an infrastructural governance capability rather than a narrow administrative service. Identity systems provide institutional infrastructure for policy targeting, coordination, and digital transformation, as reflected in both regulatory design and documented reform evaluations. Second, the findings refine state capacity theory by showing that administrative visibility in decentralized systems is conditional. It depends on intergovernmental alignment, consistent updating, and regulatory coherence rather than centralization alone (Lewis & Smoke, 2017). Third, the study contributes to digital governance scholarship by linking identity integration directly to legitimacy and inclusion. Digital identity systems enhance administrative capacity but require safeguards to prevent exclusion and maintain trust (Beduschi, 2021; Masiero & Arvidsson, 2021).

Collectively, this synthesis reframes civil registration from a sectoral administrative function into a governance infrastructure embedded within broader institutional architectures. Governance outcomes depend on how visibility, coordination, digital integration, and inclusion safeguards align within the state. This integrated perspective provides a structured lens for analyzing identity systems in decentralized and digitally transforming governance contexts beyond Indonesia.

### **Contributions to Policymaking and Practice**

The findings of this study carry significant implications for policymakers seeking to strengthen domestic governance through population and civil registration reform.

First, identity infrastructure should be treated as a core governance investment rather than a technical modernization initiative. Population administration systems influence planning accuracy, service targeting, fiscal allocation, and cross-sector coordination. Accordingly, reforms should be integrated into broader governance strategies rather than confined to administrative departments responsible for civil registration.

Second, strengthening intergovernmental coordination must accompany technical integration. In decentralized systems, standardized identity frameworks yield governance gains only when subnational governments possess adequate administrative and digital capacity. Investments in training, infrastructure, and institutional incentives are therefore essential complements to system integration. Capacity-building should be understood as governance consolidation rather than technical support.

Third, digital identity expansion must be accompanied by robust data governance frameworks. Clear legal mandates for data sharing, defined accountability mechanisms, and enforceable privacy safeguards are necessary to prevent misuse and maintain public trust. As digital population systems increasingly underpin service access, governments must ensure that authentication processes remain accessible across multiple channels to avoid excluding digitally marginalized populations.

Fourth, inclusion must be actively governed. Simplifying documentation requirements, expanding mobile registration services, reducing administrative discretion, and strengthening oversight mechanisms are essential strategies for translating integration into equitable access. Without such measures, identity-linked service delivery risks reproducing structural inequalities.

Finally, although this study is grounded in the Indonesian context, its insights extend beyond a single national case. The findings have broader relevance for decentralized, digitally transforming governance systems globally. Policymakers operating in federal and multilevel systems, including those in Europe, Japan, and other OECD contexts, may draw lessons regarding the institutional conditions under which identity integration can enhance intergovernmental coordination, administrative visibility, and service coherence without inadvertently reinforcing exclusion or inequality.

Collectively, these implications suggest that effective population and civil registration reform requires institutional alignment across regulatory, administrative, and technological domains. Identity systems strengthen governance capacity not by virtue of digitization alone, but when embedded within coherent policy frameworks, clearly defined accountability mechanisms, and equity-oriented implementation strategies.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

This study has several limitations that clarify its scope. First, the analysis relies exclusively on secondary documentary sources. While appropriate for examining institutional design and governance architecture, this approach does not provide independent empirical verification of implementation outcomes or institutional performance. The study, therefore, focuses on governance frameworks rather than service-level effectiveness or measurable performance indicators.

Second, the research does not incorporate primary interviews, administrative datasets, or process-tracing of specific reform episodes. As a result, it does not capture frontline administrative practices, bureaucratic discretion, or citizen experiences. Future research employing multilevel interviews, administrative performance data, and detailed process tracing would strengthen causal inference and provide implementation-level validation of integration reforms.

Third, the study examines Indonesia as a single analytically relevant case. Although the findings offer insights applicable to other decentralized and digitally transforming contexts, comparative research across different governance systems would enhance generalizability. These limitations reflect the study's focus on institutional governance analysis rather than performance evaluation. By clarifying these boundaries, the research provides a structured foundation for future empirically grounded investigations of identity integration and governance capacity.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined population and civil registration as a pillar of inclusive and effective domestic governance in Indonesia through a qualitative documentary case analysis.

By integrating insights from state capacity theory, whole-of-government coordination scholarship, and digital governance research, the study demonstrated that population administration operates as a structural governance infrastructure rather than merely an administrative service.

The findings show that civil registration enhances domestic governance through three interdependent mechanisms. First, it strengthens administrative visibility by rendering populations legible for planning, targeting, and monitoring. Second, it facilitates intergovernmental coordination by providing a shared identity reference across ministries and subnational governments. Third, it underpins digital governance transformation by enabling interoperable, identity-linked service ecosystems. However, these governance gains are conditional. Institutional coherence, local administrative capacity, legal clarity, and inclusion safeguards determine whether integration translates into equitable and legitimate outcomes.

By reframing population and civil registration as infrastructural governance capabilities, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how identity systems shape domestic governance performance in decentralized, digitally transforming states. The Indonesian case illustrates both the transformative potential and the structural limits of integration-led governance reform. As governments increasingly rely on identity-linked data infrastructures to coordinate services and strengthen administrative efficiency, ensuring that such systems remain inclusive, accountable, and institutionally coherent will be central to building effective and legitimate governance in the digital era.

### **Authors Contributions**

Both authors contributed to the study conception and design. Gatiningsih led the conceptualization, theoretical framework development, and overall manuscript preparation. Romi Saputra contributed to data collection, document analysis, and drafting of the methodology and findings sections. Both authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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### **Ethics statement**

This study does not involve human participants, personal data, or identifiable human subjects. The research is based solely on publicly available documents, including legal frameworks, policy reports, and academic literature. Therefore, ethical approval was not required.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data supporting the findings of this study are derived from publicly available sources, including government regulations, policy documents, and peer-reviewed academic publications. All sources are appropriately cited within the article. No new datasets were generated or analyzed during this study.

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### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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