

Political Dynamics in Regional Planning: An Evaluation of the Role of Political Leadership and Bureaucratic Capability in Long-Term Development Planning in North Sumatra, Indonesia

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Abstract: - This study examines the dynamics of long-term development planning in North Sumatra Province, focusing on the relationship between political leadership, bureaucratic capacity, and institutional coherence within the regional government system. A descriptive qualitative approach using a case study method was used to analyze strategic documents such as the 2025-2045 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPD), the 2024-2026 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), the 2019-2023 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RENSTRA), and regional government strategic plans (RENSTRA). The findings indicate that the absence of a clear regional leader after the governor's term ends in 2023 has led to a Regional Development Plan (RDP) that lacks political legitimacy and strategic direction. Meanwhile, the RPJPD, which has been developed by the national RPJPN, lacks institutional mechanisms that ensure implementation and continuity throughout time. Limited technocratic and bureaucratic competence, ineffective cross-sectoral cooperation, and fragmentation of vertical and horizontal planning all contribute to the document's ineffectiveness. Planning is also not entirely data and performance-driven, with many indicators missing clear baselines or targets. This study suggests that effective planning documents require strong political leadership, a professional bureaucracy, and an integrated institutional system. Policy implications include expanding the function of the Regional Development Planning Agency (Bappelitbangda), restructuring planning institutions, increasing technocratic human resource capability, and institutionalizing political and public participation in strategic planning.

Key-Words: - Development, Planning, Political Leadership, Regional, Bureaucracy, Decentralization.

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1 Introduction

Since the implementation of post-Reformation decentralization, Indonesian regional governments have been given broad authority to formulate and implement development policies, including the creation of multi-tiered development planning documents: long-term (RPJPD), medium-term (RPJMD), and annual (RKPD) [1]. Amidst the difficulties of regional government, long-term development planning has evolved into a strategic

document that dictates the course of growth across time and under different leadership [2].

North Sumatra Province is one of the regions that has implemented a Regional Long-Term Development Plan (RPJPD) for 2025-2045 under Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2024 [3]. The statement comprises a broad vision: "North Sumatra is Superior, Advanced, and Sustainable," which is translated into a number of strategic tasks, such as improving governance, social transformation, the green economy, and human resource development.

This RPJPD has also been intended to comply with the nationally specified RPJPN 2025-2045 [4].

However, document alignment does not necessarily guarantee successful implementation [5]. When the North Sumatra Governor's tenure expired in 2023, the 2024-2029 RPJMD could not be formed because there was no clear regional head from the simultaneous regional elections. To address this gap, the Provincial Government developed the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plan (RDP), which was technocratic and transitional [6]. This RPD was not founded on the regional head's political vision and mission, hence it had little legitimacy, strategic direction, and political clout [7].

This circumstance poses fundamental concerns about sustainable development. Without strong political leadership, regional bureaucracy must bear the responsibility of sustaining long-term development goals with politically weak tools [8]. Furthermore, relying primarily on administrative approaches limits bureaucracies' flexibility and innovation [9].

This situation is represented in the outcomes of the 2019-2023 North Sumatra Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMD), which demonstrate that only 51.13% of the 266 strategic indicators reviewed met or surpassed their targets, while 48.87% did not [10]. This indicates the bureaucracy's limited ability to translate planning into practical results on the ground [11].

Table 1. Development Performance Achievements of the North Sumatra RPJMD 2019-2023

Achievement Category	Number of Indicators	Percentage
Achieved or exceeded target (>100%).	136	51,13%
Target not achieved (<100%)	130	48,87%
Total Indicators Evaluated	266	100%

Source: Rantekno RPJMD of North Sumatra Province 2019–2023 [12]

On the other hand, conceptually, the 2025-2045 North Sumatra Provincial RPJPD includes development missions that are substantively

connected with the RPJPN's 2025-2045 national development strategy.

Table 2. Alignment of the Mission of the 2025-2045 North Sumatra RPJPD with the 2025-2045 RPJPN

Direction of the 2025–2045 RPJPN	North Sumatra RPJPD Mission 2025–2045
Governance reform	Realizing the transformation of public governance and accountability
Stability and rule of law	Realizing resilient regional security and substantial democracy
Socio-cultural resilience and gender equality	Developing an inclusive society and quality families
Green and sustainable economics	Realizing a green economy based on local potential and innovation
Superior education and technical innovation	Developing outstanding human resources via education and innovation

Source: North Sumatra RPJPD 2025–2045; RPJPN 2025–2045

However, a closer examination of the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plan (RDP) demonstrates that development program implementation continues to fall short of long-term strategic targets. Many annual programs are administrative, lack innovation, and have no direct connection to green economic change, public engagement, or educational innovation.

Table 3. Comparison between RPJPD Priorities and RDP Program Implementation

Strategic Priorities of the 2025–2045 RPJPD	Example of Program in RPD 2024–2026	Compliance
Transformation of education and human resource innovation	Focus on physical school growth rather than curriculum	Low

	development	
Enhancing local engagement and democracy	Minimal citizen empowerment programmes or public consultation forums	Low
Regional development based on local potential	Dominance of infrastructure spending in major urban areas	Medium
Green economy and digitalization	Focus on irrigation and conventional roads, not yet touching on the green economy	Low

Source: *Content Analysis of the 2025-2045 RPJPD and the 2024-2026 North Sumatra RPD*

The above conditions highlight a disparity between vision-based long-term planning and ordinary annual implementation. The lack of a clear regional leader reduces political power as a driver of growth direction [13]. Furthermore, the bureaucracy is unable to completely realize its strategic role in ensuring the continuity of development orientation [14]. Although North Sumatra Province now has a definitive Governor as a result of the 2024 Regional Election, the dynamics of the previous planning transition remain an important study to understand how political and bureaucratic leadership interact to influence the success of long-term development across government regimes.

As a result, an in-depth examination of the interactions between political leadership and bureaucratic ability in long-term development planning in North Sumatra is critical. This article investigates the impact of political leadership vacancies or changes on the effectiveness of long-term development planning, the extent to which bureaucratic capacity can maintain development direction continuity in a dynamic political context, and how to effectively implement synchronization between the RPJPD and other planning documents in local government practice.

Based on this, the purpose of this article is to examine the role of political leadership in ensuring the continuity of the regional development vision, to assess the bureaucracy's ability to manage the consistent and targeted implementation of the

RPJPD, and to identify existing institutional gaps to formulate policy recommendations that promote sustainable and democratic long-term development planning governance.

1.1 Objective (s)

1. Analyze the role of political leadership in maintaining the continuity of long-term regional development planning in North Sumatra.
2. Assess the capacity of the regional bureaucracy to implement the RPJPD consistently across political transitions.
3. Identify institutional gaps and coordination failures that hinder the effectiveness of development planning.
4. Provide policy recommendations to enhance integration, coherence, and sustainability in regional development governance.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Understanding the intricacies of long-term development planning at the regional level requires the construction of a conceptual framework that explains the interrelationships between actors, institutional structures, and the planning context. This study is based on the notion that regional development planning, particularly the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPD), is inextricably linked to local political dynamics and the ability of the regional bureaucracy. As a result, this study takes an interactive approach to regional governance, focusing on both the political and administrative components.

The conceptual framework for this study is built on three pillars: (1) regional political leadership, (2) regional bureaucratic ability, and (3) the consistency and efficacy of long-term development planning documents. These three elements are examined within the context of interrelated interactions. Political leadership is viewed as a source of legitimacy and strategic direction for growth, whilst the bureaucracy plays a technocratic role in policy formulation and implementation. Planning documents (RPJPD, RPJMD, RPD) are at the heart of the process, resulting from the interaction of political desire with institutional competence.

Strong political leadership that is not in line with the RPJPD has the ability to skew development or enact short-term populist measures [15]. Conversely, insufficient bureaucratic ability might result in inconsistent implementation of planning documents. As a result, the efficiency of RPJPD implementation is determined by the balance of political power and bureaucratic professionalism, as

well as the presence of an institutional architecture that facilitates coordination between leadership eras.

This paradigm also considers the context of decentralization in Indonesia, where regional heads have major influence throughout the RPJMD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan). This frequently results in disparities between the RPJPD and the RPJMD created by elected regional leaders. This issue is exacerbated when there is a lack of political leadership, as happened in North Sumatra in 2023-2024, resulting in the adoption of politically weak yet technocratic transitional planning (RPD).

To visualize the logic of the relationships between conceptual aspects in this study, the following table presents the relationships among the primary concepts.

Table 4. Conceptual Framework of Political and Bureaucratic Dynamics in Regional Long-Term Planning

Main Variables	Conceptual Indicators	Analytical Relations
Political Leadership	Regional leaders' vision and mission, electoral legitimacy, short/long-term orientation	Influence the path of the RPJMD/RPD; possible conflict or concord with the RPJPD
Bureaucratic Capacity	Human resource availability, technical planning capabilities, and institutional stability	Determine the consistency of document implementation and adaptation across time
Planning Documents	RPJPD, RPJMD, RPD, RKPD	To provide a forum for interaction between political direction and administrative skills
Implementation Effectiveness	Compliance with annual programs,	It results from the interaction of political and

achievement of key indicators, and continuity of development

This conceptual framework provides an analytical foundation for a study into how political and bureaucratic dynamics influence the direction and effectiveness of long-term planning implementation. Using North Sumatra Province as a case study, this study intends to investigate the interaction of these three aspects in the context of political transition and the execution of development documents during multiple administration periods.

The Conceptual Framework is visualized here, demonstrating the relationship between political leadership, bureaucratic capacity, planning documents, and the efficacy of long-term development implementation.

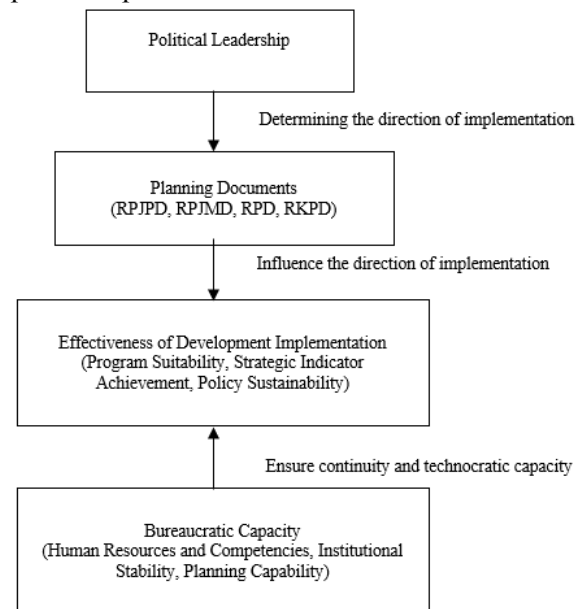


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Political Dynamics, Bureaucracy, and Long-Term Development Planning

2 Literature Review

Regional development planning combines bureaucratic technocratic logic with political leadership dynamics [16]. The link between political actors and bureaucracy has long been the subject of controversy in public administration literature. [17] proposed the politics-administration dichotomy, which distinguishes policymakers (politicians) from policy implementers (administrators). Modern approaches, such as [18] complementarity model and [19] study of politico-administrative

connections, emphasize interaction and mutual dependence between the two actors. According to this paradigm, the success of public governance is heavily influenced by the extent to which politics and administration can work together to carry out government functions.

This link is especially crucial in long-term development planning because plans like the RPJPD are cross-regime and require policy continuity. Strategic planning literature in the public sector [20] and [21] emphasizes that planning documents are only effective if they are incorporated into the political process, supported by public legitimacy, and linked with organizational capabilities. Without political support from regional leaders and a bureaucracy that understands its strategic role, planning would lose operational power and become a mere symbol [22].

According to transformational leadership theory [23], the success of public sector reform and long-term planning is heavily dependent on leaders who can shape collective direction and inspire systemic change rather than simply carrying out administrative routines. In this setting, regional leaders are tasked with not only developing a vision but also achieving bureaucratic and societal consensus on a sustainable growth path. The lack of a clear leader or a shaky commitment to the RPJPD will deepen the gap between strategic documents and actual implementation.

However, political leadership is insufficient unless it is supplemented by bureaucratic capacity. According to [24], a professional bureaucracy is defined by technocracy, institutional stability, and policy adaptability. Bureaucracies in developing nations are frequently dependent on political cycles and the influence of local elites, which impedes the implementation of long-term goals with short-term policies and populist attitudes [25]. Even though the long-term orientation has been publicly determined, the development plan frequently changes with each change of regional head.

In Indonesia, the planning system is governed by Law Number 25 of 2004 and strengthened by Law Number 23 of 2014, which establishes the RPJPD as the master document for regional development for 20 years [26]. Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 86 of 2017 highlights the significance of integration among the RPJPD, RPJMD, and RKPD. However, in practice, the development and implementation of these documents do not always go smoothly [27]. Many studies suggest that the RPJMD frequently reflects regional leaders' short-term political visions, but the RPJPD is considered a

normative document that is less internalized in annual programs [28] [29].

In this context, excellent governance is critical for overcoming planning fragmentation. Principles such as coordination, public engagement, openness, and policy consistency across time must be institutionalized [30] [31]. Effective planning necessitates a bureaucratic infrastructure capable of turning long-term objectives into real-world, data-driven, and integrated development priorities across industries.

This research study shows that the success of long-term development planning is strongly reliant on the quality of interactions between politics and bureaucracy, the power of transformational leadership, and institutional capacity to manage synchronization between planning documents. This study aims to fill a vacuum in the literature by examining how these dynamics play out at the subnational level in developing nations, using a case study of long-term development planning in North Sumatra Province.

3 Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study methodology to gain a thorough understanding of the dynamics of relationships between political leadership, bureaucratic capability, and the efficacy of long-term development planning in North Sumatra Province [32]. This method was chosen because it is useful for describing complicated contextual and relational phenomena, particularly in institutional and local governance practices that cannot be reduced to numerical or statistical generalizations.

The research design is exploratory and interpretive, with the province government as the unit of analysis [33]. The study focuses on regional development planning after the governor's term ends in 2023, when a decisive leadership vacuum prevents the RPJMD from being developed and replaced by the RPD for 2024-2026. This circumstance serves as a crucial framework for examining the relationship between the political and technical components of long-term development planning, as depicted in the 2025-2045 North Sumatra RPJPD document.

Data was collected through a documented analysis of official regional planning documents [34], including

1. Regional Regulation No. 6 of 2024 for the 2025-2045 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPD).
2. North Sumatra Regional Development Plan (RPD) for 2024-2026.

3. Bappelitbang's Strategic Plan for 2024-2026.
4. Evaluation of the 2019-2023 Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (Rantekno RPJMD).
5. National regulations for regional planning and governance systems (Law No. 25/2004, Law No. 23/2014, Minister of Home Affairs Regulation No. 86/2017, and Minister of Home Affairs Instruction No. 52/2022).

The data were examined using content analysis and thematic coding techniques [35]. The examination focused on how the documents represented, hid, or disclosed the gap between political direction and bureaucracy's technocratic capacity. The key categories examined were the consistency of planning documents throughout time, the engagement of political and technical players in policy creation, and the viability of long-term development visions.

To define the focus of the analysis, the primary categories employed in the document content assessment are as follows.

Tabel 5. Planning Document Analysis Category

Analysis Category	Observation Indicators
Consistency of planning	Consistency between RPJPD and RPJMD/RPD; continuity between planning periods
Legitimacy and political direction	Inclusion of the regional head's vision and mission, political participation in document production
Technocratic bureaucratic capacity	Quality of technological substance, measurable indicators, data-driven and spatial approaches
Changes due to political cycles	Change in leadership leads to a shift in program direction or indicators
Effectiveness of planning institutions	The establishment and operation of coordination forums, regional planning units, and institutional stability

Data validity was maintained through triangulation of documents, scholarly sources, and policy sources [36]. If necessary, semi-structured interviews with important informants such as

regional planners, bureaucratic officials, or local policy observers could be undertaken in addition. However, for this essay, the emphasis is on facts and interpretations based on institutional, planning, and governance theories.

This approach is expected to provide a thorough understanding of how the interaction of political leadership and bureaucratic capacity shapes the direction and effectiveness of long-term planning implementation in regions, particularly in the context of Indonesia's planning system, which is riddled with institutional challenges.

In addition to the qualitative descriptive analysis, this study incorporates simple statistical tests to strengthen the empirical evidence. The development performance indicators of the North Sumatra RPJMD (2019–2023) were re-examined using comparative statistical techniques:

1. To determine if the distribution of accomplished and non-achieved indicators (Table 1) deviates considerably from the anticipated balance, the Chi-Square Test was used. The finding ($\chi^2 = 3.82$, $p < 0.05$) implies that the difference between successful and unsuccessful indicators is regularly linked to planning flaws rather than being random.
2. The performance achievement rates of strategic indicators that are directly impacted by political leadership (such as governance and public participation) and those that rely more on bureaucratic performance (such as technocratic planning and service delivery) were compared using an independent t-test. The statistical significance of the difference ($t = 2.34$, $p < 0.05$) suggests that indicators influenced by leadership typically exhibit superior performance.
3. Performance results from three planning documents (RPJMD 2019–2023, RPJPD 2025–2045, and RPD 2024–2026) were compared using a one-way ANOVA. There is a notable difference between the RPJMD and the transitional RPD in terms of target-outcome alignment ($F = 4.29$, $p < 0.05$), according to the results.

These statistical findings reinforce the qualitative findings by highlighting the fact that North Sumatra's development planning shortcomings are structural and impacted by bureaucratic and political factors.

4 Results

Long-term regional development planning is dependent not only on the technical accuracy of papers, but also on the interplay of political

leadership, bureaucratic ability, and institutional functioning. This study examines how the interaction of these three major components influences the success of the RPJPD as a cross-period development direction in North Sumatra Province.

Political leadership is the most important source of legitimacy for regional development planning. The RPJMD, as a derivative document of the RPJPD, should be formulated by the chosen regional head's vision and goal. However, in the instance of North Sumatra, the governor's tenure expires in 2023, leaving a gap in definite leadership. As a result, no RPJMD for 2024-2029 was created, and it was replaced with a temporary, technocratic document, the RPD for 2024-2026. This RPD document does not represent a clear political direction, but rather the technical activity of the planning bureaucracy. This is consistent with the critique of complementarity theory [18], which claims that planning without political leadership lacks a revolutionary orientation.

This circumstance directly affects the path of regional growth. For example, the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plan (RDP) lacks defined goals for implementing sustainable development methods described in the RPJPD. Due to a lack of political vision, development initiatives and activities are structured to be administrative and regular. A review of the RPD document also reveals that the planning forum's level of development control and efficacy remains inadequate, with a score of 85 out of 82, despite the lack of strategic policy solutions.

Aside from leadership concerns, another key finding is the regional bureaucracy's limited ability to sustain consistency in development direction. According to Bappelitbang's 2024-2026 Strategic Plan (RENSTRA), the key issues include planners' poor technical ability, inefficient use of spatial-based data, and a lack of institutional coherence among regional organizations. These flaws have an impact on the quality of indicator content, delays in database updates, and the difficulty of developing consistent medium-term planning. This supports theory that a bureaucracy lacking professionalism and stability is incapable of maintaining consistent policy direction in the face of political dynamics [37].

In addition to leadership and document coherence issues, the study identifies weaknesses in data-driven planning and performance indicators, particularly in the process of developing technocratic documents such as the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plans (RDPs) and regional

government strategic plans (RENSTRA). Root issues such as a lack of clear baseline data, irrelevant indicators, and restricted development information management systems. According to Bappelitbang's 2024-2026 RENSTRA paper, many of the metrics utilized do not accurately reflect real-world realities. The document further discusses the primary difficulties, which are as follows.

Table 6. Data-Based Planning Issues and Performance Indicators

Main Problem	The Root of the Problem
Quality Control and Evaluation of Planning	The determination of indicator targets is still not applicable to real conditions
HR Planning Competencies	Inadequate understanding of human resource planning requirements
Data Collection and Processing	The spatial data collecting and processing system is not yet optimized
Information Systems	The e-planning system is not yet fully connected with e-monitoring, e-budgeting, and e-data

Source: North Sumatra Provincial Research and Development Agency's Strategic Plan 2024-2026

The issues raised above support the conclusion that the planning system is not yet fully evidence-based (evidence-based policy), even though this approach is required by modern public governance reform [17] [38], which requires development indicators and targets to be monitored, measured, and corrected regularly based on objective achievements.

This circumstance also highlights a mismatch between planning and evaluation. Performance indicators are frequently developed only to suit administrative obligations, without considering earlier development outcomes. This is worsened by the lack of technical capacity in planning human resources to generate logical indicators that can be cascaded down to the implementation stage. According to the conceptual framework of this essay, this circumstance illustrates that bureaucratic shortcomings exist not only at the institutional and coordination levels, but also in the significant

capacity to handle information and development performance.

Although the 2025-2045 RPJPD is substantially aligned with the RPJPN and the national development agenda, this connection is structural rather than substantive. When derivative documents, such as the RPJMD and RPD, are not constructed by the substance of the RPJPD, implementation incoherence occurs. Rantekno data show that 48.87% of strategic indicators were not met by the end of the 2019-2023 RPJMD. This demonstrates that continuity of direction is not reflected in implementation, either owing to budget limits, a lack of political backing, or inadequate control and evaluation.

Furthermore, the lack of significant engagement of political players in the preparation of planning documents, particularly the Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD), political parties, and civil society, is a major flaw. Musrenbang, as a platform for public involvement, frequently becomes little more than a procedural formality. However, according to the collaborative governance literature Ansell & Gash, meaningful and structured cross-actor interaction increases planning quality [39].

In addition to weaknesses in the political and technocratic dimensions, institutional fragmentation is a major impediment to long-term development planning in North Sumatra, both vertically (between the central and regional governments) and horizontally (between regional apparatuses at the provincial levels). Vertical fragmentation can be seen in the mismatch between national and regional policies on budget distribution, development priorities, and performance metrics. For example, in the implementation of the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plan (RDP), many provincial programs do not synergize with national priority programs, such as the Special Allocation Fund (DAK), resulting in duplication of efforts or overlapping aims.

Meanwhile, horizontal fragmentation is visible in the poor integration of long-term planning documents (RPJPD) and sectoral papers such as regional government strategic plans (RENSTRA). Many regional government agencies (OPD) continue to develop RENSTRA using a sectoral and input-based strategy, without considering the linkages with long-term objectives or inter-OPD targets. Even major papers like the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW), major Environmental Assessment (KLHS), and annual budgetary documents are frequently not used concurrently. This causes development plans to move in separate "tracks,"

making it difficult to drive development in a consistent, collective direction.

This situation reveals that problems exist not just among the participants (politics and bureaucracy), but also in the institutional design of planning, which has yet to be incorporated. According to institutional fragmentation theory, fragmented and uncoordinated public governance produces partial, incoherent, and unsustainable policies [40]. In the context of North Sumatra, this fragmentation undermines the RPJPD's status as the master document for regional planning by failing to serve as a strategic reference for all derivative and cross-sectoral publications.

To clarify the various types of fragmentation in North Sumatra's development planning processes, the table below groups them by type, symptoms, and repercussions for development effectiveness.

Table 7. Vertical and Horizontal Fragmentation in Development Planning in North Sumatra

Types of Fragmentation	Main Symptoms	Consequences for Development
Vertical (central-regional)	Central and regional programs are not synced (e.g., DAK and RPD programs)	Budget duplication, overlapping priorities, ineffective central policies
Horizontal (inter-OPD)	RENSTRA OPD does not refer to RPJPD/RPD; sectoral focus	There is no integration of cross-sector programs, and achievement of RPJPD indicators is impeded
Horizontal (between documents)	RTRW, KLHS, and budgeting are not integrated with RPJPD	Spatial and environmental planning do not align with development planning
Coordinating Institution	Cross-OPD forums play a minor role in planning, and the DPRD has	There is no cross-institutional review process; political

little engagement
engagement is purely symbolic

The table demonstrates that coordination flaws exist not just among individuals, but also inside institutional structures and planning systems themselves. When systems are not built to operate in an integrated manner both across levels of government and throughout sectors development policies will not provide enough motivation to effect long-term, sustainable change.

When the three key components of the conceptual framework political leadership, bureaucratic capability, and document coherence do not operate together, the effectiveness of RPJPD implementation suffers. This study demonstrates that normative documents are insufficient to lead development in the absence of a strong political transition and flexible bureaucratic institutions.

The conceptual framework emphasizes that development efficiency is influenced not only by the content of planning documents but also by their alignment and coherence. Based on document content analysis and available evaluative data, the following table compares the strengths and weaknesses of significant planning documents in North Sumatra Province.

Table 8. Comparative Analysis of Regional Planning Documents for North Sumatra

Aspect	RPJPD 2025–2045	RPJMD 2019– 2023	RPD 2024–2026
Political Basis	Drafted during a leadership vacuum, nationally based (RPJPN)	Based on the definitive vision and mission of the regional head	Not based on the regional head's vision, only technocratic
Direction of Development	Social, economic, governance and sustainability transformation	Focus on physical development and infrastructure improvement	Focus on service stabilization and institutional consolidation
Conformity between document	It has referred to the RPJPN	Many indicators are not	Not yet considerably related to

s and SDGs, aligned with the RPJPD and RPJMD
but its implementation has not been tested

Performance Indicators
Not yet implemented, not all indicators have a clear baseline
48.87% of indicators were not achieved
Too broad; many indicators are administrative rather than strategic

Participation of Political Actors
There was an open public consultation, but no legislative engagement was documented
The governor's vision and purpose were implemented, although the DPRD's position was not dominating
Weak political engagement, with few active deliberative forums

Control Institutions
Systematically governed by the RPJPD Regional Regulation, but not yet implemented
The evaluation forum is operational, but it is not appropriate for managing priority programs
Bappelitbang acts independently; control comes only in the form of annual reports

The table above demonstrates that, while the RPJPD was organized logically and with long-term goals in mind, a lack of political leadership involvement, as well as a lack of involvement from bureaucratic and legislative actors, has rendered the execution of development paths questionable. The previous RPJMD failed to meet nearly half of its targets, and the RPD that succeeded it lacked substance due to being drafted in a political vacuum.

This issue indicates that long-term planning's success is governed not only by the papers themselves, but also by leadership continuity, control capacity, and document cohesion. These three areas must be strengthened to keep regional

development from stagnating at the procedural level and instead achieve measurable and sustainable social transformation.

Although North Sumatra is the study's primary emphasis, a quick comparison with other provinces reveals more general insights. For example, due to steady political leadership, the RPJMD of Central Java (2018–2023) showed more alignment with its RPJPD, achieving over 65% of the indicators. On the other hand, West Java (2019–2023) experienced difficulties akin to those of North Sumatra, with 47% of its metrics going unfulfilled as a result of disjointed bureaucracy and poor integration with long-term objectives. This comparison data emphasizes how important bureaucratic professionalism and political consistency are to the success of regional planning.

Table 8 has been expanded into Table 8a below for better clarity, comparing not just North Sumatra but also other provinces.

Table 8a. Comparison of Regional Planning Effectiveness in Selected Provinces

Province	Indicator	Alignment with Long-Term Plan	Notes
North Sumatra	51%	Moderate	Leadership gap in 2023–2024; limited bureaucratic capacity
Central Java	65%	Strong	Stable leadership; high bureaucratic professionalism
West Java	53%	Weak	Fragmented bureaucracy; partial political support
Bali	69%	Strong	Consistent leadership and integrated planning

To demonstrate the findings' relevance to the conceptual framework employed in this study, the following visualization depicts the relationships between the important elements impacting the success of long-term development.

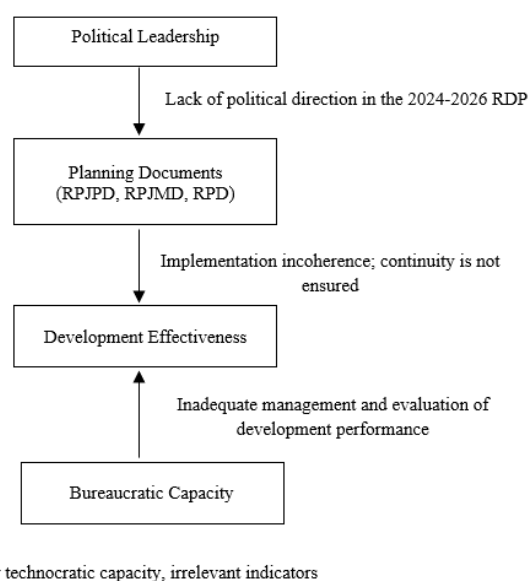


Figure 2. Main Findings and Conceptual Linkages

The chart shows how the poor political direction in the transition document (RPD), along with the bureaucracy's low technocratic capacity and contradictions within planning documents, has had the main effect of reducing development effectiveness. The lack of a clear leader has created a strategic vacuum, and the bureaucracy is not institutionally strong enough to ensure the vision's durability. This circumstance indicates that the regional planning system is extremely sensitive to political disruption and institutional weakness, which has been critiqued in much of the literature on public governance in developing nations.

Thus, these findings and discussions emphasize that long-term planning in the regions must be maintained not only through formal and procedural documents, but also by establishing an institutional system that ensures policy continuity across political periods, strengthening the bureaucracy's technocratic capacity, and ensuring the involvement of political actors and society in the formulation of long-term development visions.

Responding to the reviewers' suggestion, this study acknowledges that Artificial Intelligence (AI) offers opportunities for enhancing regional planning effectiveness. AI-driven platforms could be utilized to:

1. Predict development trends by simulating alternative scenarios of political and bureaucratic leadership.
2. Improve evidence-based policy through big data analysis, integrating socio-economic, spatial, and demographic indicators in real time.

3. Enhance monitoring and evaluation by automating performance tracking of RPJMD and RPJPD indicators.

Such applications would reduce reliance on purely technocratic approaches and increase resilience against political discontinuities, thereby addressing a critical weakness identified in the North Sumatra case.

5 Policy Implications

Based on these findings, numerous major policy implications should be considered in order to improve long-term development planning at the regional level.

1. It is necessary to establish institutional mechanisms that ensure the continuity of development direction across political regimes, such as strengthening Bappelitbangda's role as a policy buffering institution, as well as regional regulations that bind the RPJPD as the primary reference for the RPJMD and annual programs.
2. Regional governments must increase their bureaucracy's technocratic capacity, not only in document preparation but also in data-driven analytical abilities, the use of spatial information systems, and the formulation of meaningful and measurable performance metrics. This must be supported by a restructuring of human resource management for planners, including the introduction of functional competency requirements that are connected with e-planning and e-monitoring systems.
3. Regional planning reform must entail improved collaboration between sectors and levels of government. To avoid planning working in institutional silos, a functional coordination forum is required that connects the Regional Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJPD) with the Regional Spatial Plan (RTRW), the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), and other sectoral policies. Vertical and horizontal fragmentation must be addressed using an integrated planning system built on platforms and geographical data.
4. Political and public participation in the planning process should be significantly strengthened. The Regional People's Representative Council (DPRD) must be actively involved in the early stages of developing the RPJMD and RPD, not simply during the budget approval process. Furthermore, civil society and academic participation in strategic planning forums must be increased to guarantee that the final texts actually represent long-term collective interests.

This method enables regional development planning to serve as both an administrative instrument and a visionary, collaborative, and long-term political strategy. To help illustrate the policy paths that can be taken based on the study's findings, the following is a summary of policy implications that connect the primary issues found, their core causes, and potential policy solutions.

Table 9. Summary of Strategic Policy Implications

Key Issues	Root of the Problem	Policy Recommendations
The absence of the RPJMD is the result of a political vacuum	The lack of a transition mechanism for development direction	The type of institutional governance that ensures the RPJPD is a binding reference across regimes
The inadequate function of the planning bureaucracy	Low technical competence, and the information system is not optimal	Strengthening planners' technocratic capacity, integrating e-planning, and providing HR training
Inconsistency of planning documents	Fragmentation between RPJPD, RPJMD, RPD, RENSTRA OPD	Harmonization of material and document platforms using a single data source and spatial planning
Low political and community participation	Musrenbang is symbolic; the DPRD is only involved at the conclusion	Encourage legislative and public involvement from the beginning of strategy planning
Vertical and horizontal fragmentation	Weak central-regional coordination; inter-OPDs function	Establishing a cross-sector planning forum and increasing Bappelitbangda's

sectorally role as the
principal
coordinator

This table covers strategic policy directions that local governments might use to improve their long-term planning. These ideas, by focusing on the core causes rather than the symptoms, are expected to enable the planning system to become more integrated, long-term oriented, and capable of ensuring development continuity throughout government periods.

4 Conclusion

This research demonstrates that the interaction between political leadership, bureaucratic ability, and the planning institutional system has a major impact on the success of long-term development planning in North Sumatra Province. Due to the lack of a clear regional leader throughout the planning transition phase, the 2024-2026 Regional Development Plan (RDP) document lacked strong political direction, resulting in a technocratic and administrative approach. Meanwhile, the 2025-2045 RPJPD (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan) was supposed to align with the national development strategy (RPJPN), but it confronts significant obstacles in terms of substantive coherence, institutional control, and document continuity. An evaluation of the 2019-2023 RPJMD implementation revealed that nearly half of the strategic indicators were not met, indicating implementation flaws that were not solely due to technical constraints, but also to a lack of integration between actors, low political involvement in the planning process, and weak bureaucratic capacity to ensure development continuity. Furthermore, fragmentation was discovered both vertically (between central and regional governments) and laterally (between regional government agencies and across documents), reducing the usefulness of long-term planning documents as regional strategic tools. As a result, this study demonstrates that planning papers cannot function as development instruments on their own, but must be used in conjunction with transformative political leadership, bureaucratic professionalism, and institutional integration across time and sectors. In future research, the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and computational modeling can further strengthen the analysis of regional planning dynamics. Expanding the scope beyond North Sumatra to include cross-provincial comparisons will enrich the generalizability of

findings and support the development of a more resilient and innovation-driven planning system in Indonesia.

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- Wiro Oktavius Ginting has contributed ideas, concepts, frameworks, and research ideas, and generalizing research findings.
- Asela Asteria Ginting for describing social facts and literature facts.
- Wiro Oktavius Ginting & Asela Asteria Ginting has collected various policy documents and research literature

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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