

The rise of reformist strongman: statutory executive aggrandizement and performative legitimacy in decentralized Indonesia

Aditya Putra^{1*)}, Muh. Farid², Muh. Akbar³, Andi A. Unde⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Department of Communication Science, Universitas Hasanuddin, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examines a key paradox in decentralization in Southeast Asia: the emergence of strong local figures who drive policy innovation while simultaneously consolidating executive power. Focusing on the city of Parepare, Indonesia, during the 2018–2023 period, this study addresses the urgent need to explain how decentralized governance can simultaneously enable reform while undermining democratic accountability. Based on qualitative case studies, this article introduces the concept of the mayor's entrepreneurial mechanism, understood as a form of sequential entrepreneurship in which a mayor moves from narrative framing toward policy institutionalization. Findings show that this mechanism operates through the expansion of executive power based on legislation, where the autonomy mandate is used to centralize administrative authority, as well as through political co-optation that neutralizes legislative oversight. This study contributes to the governance and decentralization literature by demonstrating that reformist executive dominance may accelerate local development, yet also erodes the system of checks and balances. This tension raises critical concerns regarding the democratic sustainability of decentralized governance in Indonesia and the broader region.

Keywords: decentralization, local strongmen, mayoral entrepreneurship, executive aggrandizement, democratic accountability

^{*)}corresponding author

E-mail: adityaputra.marzuki@gmail.com

Introduction

Urban transformation in small and medium-sized cities has become a critical frontier in public policy research, as these contexts often reveal institutional dynamics obscured at the national level. In Indonesia, the post-2000 decentralization reforms fundamentally reshaped this landscape by devolving significant authority to municipalities, allowing them to tailor development strategies to local socio-economic conditions (Fahmi et al., 2014; Firman, 2009). However, this devolution produced a dual-edged outcome: while it incentivized public innovation (Wijayanti & Fathurrahman, 2024) as one of the outcomes of mayoral entrepreneurship (Esposito et al., 2025; Takao, 2025) it also simultaneously consolidated the power to executive actor (mayor), and threaten the power balance inherent in democracy system.

This phenomenon in Indonesia reflects a broader global trend in which the boundary between technocratic reform and political bossism is increasingly blurred. Similar patterns have been observed among local strongmen in the Philippines and "CEO-Governors" in Thailand, who use development narratives to consolidate legitimacy (Platzdasch, 2011). Similarly, in Western contexts, power consolidation often occurs through legal-institutional capture, information control, weakened civil society, and ideological legitimation of extraordinary institutional changes (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Krause, 2019; Norris, 2017; Pytlas, 2021).

Unlike traditional predatory bosses who rely solely on coercion, a new breed of 'reformist strongmen' is emerging. These leaders utilize policy innovation and public service improvements not merely as administrative outputs, but as objects of "political imagineering." In this strategy, the local political project operates on a dual track: transforming the physical cityscape through iconic infrastructure while simultaneously modernizing public service delivery to demonstrate administrative responsiveness. Especially in decentralized states, "city building" defines the development agenda (Lederman & Anders Whitney, 2023), where land use and capital investment are integrated with image creation to enact "symbolic and concrete imaginations" (Short & Kim, 1999). This constitutes urban "imagineering" (Ramírez, 2022; Sepehr & Felt, 2025), a process where creating a global or modern city image is inextricably linked to the leader's personal branding. By successfully altering the built environment and streamlining services, the mayor validates their political competency, thereby converting concrete urban changes into intangible political legitimacy (Olausson, 2020). Through the construction of such hegemonic narratives, they amplify the perceived scale of reforms, often obscuring actual limitations. Consequently, they convert this projected success into the primary currency for "political capital," which Bourdieu (1986) defines as "a form of symbolic capital, credit founded on credence or belief and recognition or, more precisely, on the innumerable operations of credit by which agents confer on a person (or on an object) the very powers that they recognize in him (or it)."

This study positions Parepare Municipality as an empirical case demonstrating how physical development projects were strategically coupled with the mayor's effective consolidation of political authority in form of Mayoral Entrepreneurship (ME). Under Mayor Taufan Pawe 2018–2023, Parepare advanced the "Smoke-stack Free Industrial City" initiative, a service-led model anchored in health, education, and tourism. While consistent with international industrial classifications (United Nations, 2008) and paralleling tertiary-sector strategies seen in Japan's compact cities (Takao, 2025) this initiative was more than a technocratic response to fiscal constraints; it served as a political vehicle. Despite growing interest in entrepreneurial governance, existing research seldom examines the political mechanisms through which entrepreneurial mayors build and consolidate authority in non-Western decentralized settings.

To analyze the tension between innovation and power consolidation, this study synthesizes theories of policy and political entrepreneurship through the lens of Mayoral Entrepreneurship. While Policy Entrepreneurship grounded in Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework typically focuses not just on actors' willingness to invest resources (Arnold, 2021) but also on the "meaning-making" process where narratives are used to frame crises and advocate solutions (Petridou & Mintrom, 2021), this perspective often overlooks the implementation phase. Conversely, Political Entrepreneurship focuses on the strategic use of power to implement and sustain those ideas (De Vries et al., 2021). We argue that in the context of Indonesia's decentralized governance, Mayoral Entrepreneurship manifests as a "Sequential Trajectory": the mayor acts initially as a policy entrepreneur to secure electoral victory through narrative framing, then transitions to a political entrepreneur to enforce these visions via institutional power. Internally, mayoral entrepreneurs utilize Statutory Executive Aggrandizement to centralize bureaucratic command (Law No. 23/2014). Externally, they employ political co-optation (Kavasoglu, 2022; Szakonyi, 2025) to neutralize legislative oversight, absorbing veto players into a ruling cartel to ensure policy stability (Aspinall, 2014; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Lestari et al., 2025). To bridge this

conceptual framework with empirical observation, this study operationalizes these key concepts through specific, measurable indicators within the Parepare context. First, Urban Imagineering is observed through analysis of the mayor's public communications and policy narratives. Second, the Sequential Trajectory is traced chronologically by examining how campaign promises were institutionalized into the legally binding Medium-Term Development Plan. Third, Statutory Executive Aggrandizement is empirically measured by mapping patterns of bureaucratic reshuffles, strategic appointments, and the centralization of flagship programs under the mayor's direct purview. Finally, Political Co-optation is observed through the expansion of the ruling coalition in the Regional People's Representative Council and the systematic absence of legislative vetoes—such as the right of interpellation or budget rejections—during the approval of the regional budget. By adopting Moore's (1995) concept of Public Value alongside these empirical measures, this study further examines whether such consolidation produces genuine substantive value or merely "performative legitimacy."

This study makes three critical contributions to the literature on Asian local governance. First, it demonstrates that ME is inseparable from partisan dynamics, challenging the view of policy innovation as a purely administrative act. Second, it identifies the mechanism of "Sequential Entrepreneurship," offering a nuanced model of how leaders transition from campaigning on ideas to governing through power. Third, and most crucially, it reframes local innovation through the lens of statutory executive aggrandizement and political co-optation. While existing studies often view innovation and authoritarianism as opposing forces, this study argues that in Indonesia's decentralized democracy, they can be mutually reinforcing. We posit that the ME's "efficiency" in driving the "Smoke-stack Free" agenda was achieved through a dual strategy of consolidation: internally, using statutory executive aggrandizement to centralize bureaucratic command, and externally, employing political co-optation to neutralize legislative oversight. By analyzing the Parepare case, this article questions whether ME strengthens local democracy or subtly replaces checks and balances with a logic of executive efficiency.

Research Methods

This study integrates insights from policy entrepreneurship, political entrepreneurship, mayoral entrepreneurship (ME), and public value theory to construct an analytical framework for examining mayoral-led policy innovation in decentralized urban governance. The framework conceptualizes ME as a set of interconnected practices that shape both policy outputs and political-institutional outcomes. To operationalize this theoretical framework into empirical observation, the research methodology was designed around a qualitative single-case study approach utilizing within-case process tracing.

The research was conducted through a systematic four-stage procedural flow. The first stage involved data collection and chronological mapping. Primary and secondary data were collected from semi-structured elite interviews, official administrative documents, including the Medium-Term Development Plan, mayoral decrees, and budget realization reports, as well as media archives. Using process tracing, these data were used to construct a chronological map of the mayor's policy initiatives, tracing the transition from campaign narratives to institutionalized local statutes. The second stage involved thematic coding.

All interview transcripts and textual data were rigorously coded and categorized according to the entrepreneurial behaviors outlined in the analytical framework, namely opportunity recognition through narrative framing, resource mobilization through indicators of statutory executive aggrandizement and political co-optation, and value creation.

The third stage involved mechanism testing, in which empirical observations derived from the coded data were assessed against the theoretical expectations of the ME framework. This stage examined the causal mechanisms underlying policy implementation, particularly whether implementation efficiency was structurally dependent on the consolidation of executive power and the systematic weakening of legislative oversight. The final stage involved triangulation and critical juncture analysis to ensure analytical validity and reduce potential elite bias. This was achieved through strict cross-verification of interview data, official documents, budgetary records, and media archives, allowing the study to identify key moments when political authority, statutory instruments, and administrative capacity converged to institutionalize policy innovation.

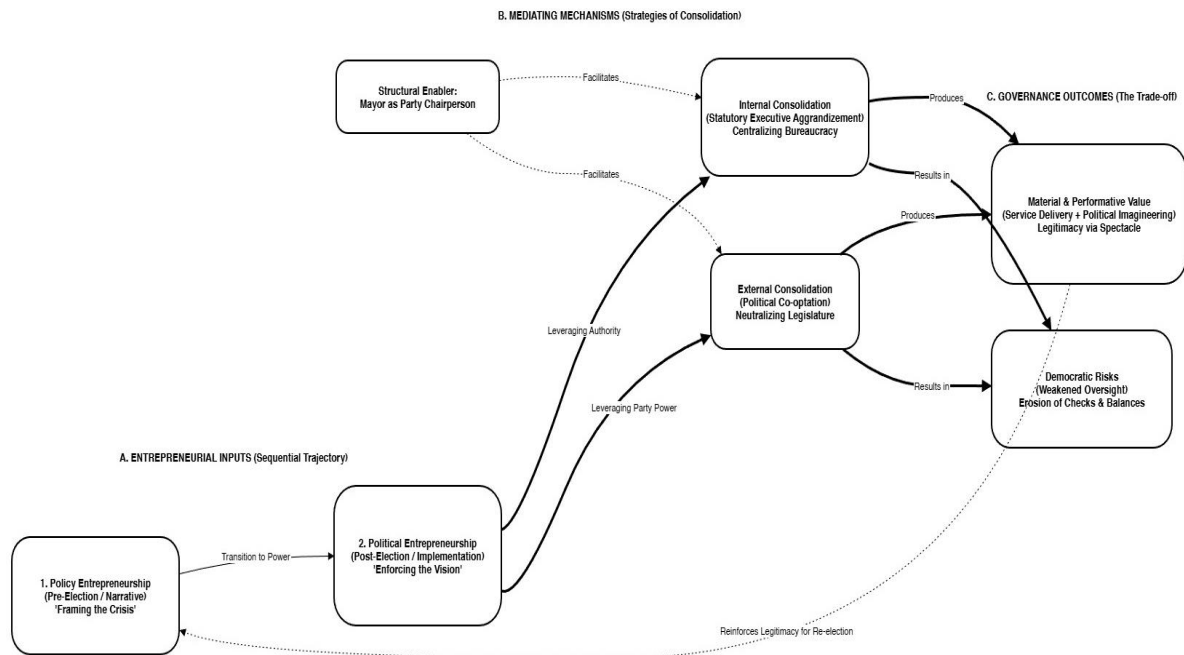


Figure 1. Analytical Framework Diagram
Source : processed by author

The analytical framework conceptualizes mayoral entrepreneurship (ME) as a sequential process through which leaders transition from campaigning on ideas to governing through power. To ensure parsimony, the framework operates through a linear causal chain in which Sequential Entrepreneurship as input necessitates Power Consolidation as a mediating mechanism and ultimately produces an Innovation-Democracy Trade-off as the outcome. The process begins with entrepreneurial inputs divided into two sequential phases. First, in the pre-election phase, the actor functions as a policy entrepreneur and meaning-maker by constructing a crisis narrative and framing specific innovations, such as a "Smoke-stack Free City," as the only viable

solution to secure public support (Mintrom et al., 2020). Second, in the post-election phase, electoral victory functions as the critical causal mechanism, providing the democratic mandate that enables the incumbent to transition into a political entrepreneur (De Vries et al., 2021). This mandate allows the mayor to shift from discursive persuasion to institutional command by mobilizing state resources to embed these narratives into binding regulations, such as the Medium-Term Development Plan. To convert these entrepreneurial inputs into rapid policy outputs, the mayor must bypass institutional frictions through two mediating consolidation mechanisms.

Internally, this is achieved through Statutory Executive Aggrandizement. While Western literature often frames executive aggrandizement as an illegal subversion of democratic norms (Bermeo, 2016; Laebens, 2023), in the Indonesian context it manifests as a legally permissible hyper-centralization of power. Empowered by the Regional Government Law, particularly Law No. 23/2014, the mayor weaponizes statutory authority to compel bureaucratic compliance and make their personal vision legally unassailable. Externally, this internal centralization is protected through Political Co-optation. By absorbing potential legislative veto players into a ruling cartel (Aspinall, 2014; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2007; Lestari et al., 2025), the mayor neutralizes opposition. The causal link is direct: by silencing legislative pushback and centralizing bureaucratic command, these dual mechanisms create a frictionless enabling infrastructure that guarantees the rapid execution of the mayor's agenda. The interaction between sequential entrepreneurship and power consolidation therefore produces a stark governance outcome: the innovation-democracy trade-off. On one hand, frictionless governance enables rapid urban transformation. The mayor engages in urban imagineering by using symbolic communication and tangible infrastructure to project administrative success (Hoole & Hincks, 2020; Korsgaard & Anderson, 2011). This successfully converts physical development into performative legitimacy, thereby validating the mayor's leadership (Taylor, 2021). On the other hand, the direct consequence of this efficiency is severe democratic erosion, as the very mechanisms that enable rapid innovation also marginalize alternative development discourses, weaken legislative oversight, and distort public accountability.

Within this framework, Mayoral Entrepreneurship is framed not as a normative ideal, but as a dual-edged governance mechanism specific to Indonesia's decentralized polity. The central logic posits a causal trade-off: the entrepreneurial strategies that facilitate rapid policy innovation are often predicated on the consolidation of power by the executive. In this model, success in public value creation, including efficient service delivery and infrastructure development, is frequently achieved by bypassing the friction of democratic deliberation. The framework therefore suggests that, in contexts of strong partisan dominance, innovation and democratic erosion are not opposing forces but mutually reinforcing outcomes. The mayor's ability to act as a sequential entrepreneur, moving from narrative construction to political enforcement, demonstrates how good governance outcomes can paradoxically emerge from executive-heavy and quasi-authoritarian political structures.

To examine these mechanisms, this study employs a qualitative, theory-testing case study design (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Parepare Municipality was selected as a most-likely case for observing the interaction between innovation and political power. The city presents a unique confluence of factors that closely reflects the theoretical tension of this study: strong executive leadership under Mayor Taufan Pawe, structural political dominance in which the mayor simultaneously chaired the ruling party, Golkar, and a nationally recognized record of public sector innovation. This configuration makes

Prepare an ideal analytical site for tracing how Sequential Entrepreneurship unfolds and how political capital is converted into binding policy outcomes. To reconstruct the causal mechanisms linking entrepreneurial action to governance outcomes, the study uses process tracing (Beach & Pedersen, 2018). This method enables the analysis to move beyond correlation and identify the sequential steps through which the mayor's actions evolved, particularly from the discursive phase of framing the "Smoke-stack Free" narrative during the campaign to the political enforcement phase of institutionalizing it through the Medium-Term Development Plan. The analysis focuses on detecting the empirical fingerprints of the hypothesized consolidation mechanisms, namely Statutory Executive Aggrandizement as internal bureaucratic control and Political Co-optation as external legislative neutralization.

Data collection was designed to ensure triangulation across multiple sources of evidence. First, document analysis examined primary policy documents, including the Municipal Medium-Term Development Plan for 2019 to 2024, mayoral decrees, and budget realization reports. These official records were cross-referenced with internal innovation proposals to trace the institutionalization of campaign promises. Second, elite interviews were conducted using a semi-structured format with twelve key decision-makers. To ensure confidentiality and encourage candor regarding sensitive political dynamics, all respondents were anonymized. The sample included five legislators from the Golkar Party, coded as Leg-01 to Leg-05, members of coalition parties, coded as Leg-06 onwards, senior administrative officials, coded as Bureau-01 and onwards, and civil society leaders, coded as CSO-01. Given the sensitive nature of political power relations, respondents were selected based on their direct involvement in the policymaking process. The small sample size is consistent with elite interviewing strategies, where the objective is deep causal insight rather than statistical representativeness (Tansey, 2007). It is also aligned with the principles of process tracing, where the validity of causal inference depends on depth of access and triangulation with primary documents rather than statistical frequency (Beach & Pedersen, 2018).

Finally, observations and media archives were used to analyze campaign speeches, local news archives, and digital footprints from the mayor's social media teams in order to reconstruct the narrative framing strategies used during the 2018 election. The study also observed the physical manifestations of urban development, including landmarks and infrastructure branding, to analyze the urban imagineering strategies used to construct performative legitimacy. To meet the rigorous standards of within-case process tracing, data analysis followed a transparent four-step protocol designed to test the hypothesized causal mechanisms. First, chronological mapping was conducted to construct a detailed timeline of the "Smoke-stack Free Industrial City" initiative, tracing its trajectory from a discursive campaign idea to an institutionalized local statute. Second, rigorous thematic coding was applied to interview transcripts and policy documents using deductive categories derived from the analytical framework: Opportunity Recognition, Resource Mobilization, and Value Creation. Third, causal mechanism testing was conducted by searching for specific observable implications of the theoretical expectations. Rather than merely describing events, the analysis tested whether the efficiency of mayoral innovation was structurally predicated on the weakening of checks and balances. This was done by tracking the empirical footprints of power consolidation, including the correlation between rapid bureaucratic reshuffles, the sudden absorption of opposition factions into the ruling cartel, and the subsequent frictionless approval of the Regional Budget for iconic infrastructure projects.

Lastly, to control for elite bias and ensure analytical validity, a robust triangulation strategy was employed. Because elite interviews in decentralized local politics are highly susceptible to performative narratives, claims of political harmony or unanimous legislative support were not taken at face value. Instead, these subjective accounts were systematically cross-verified against objective administrative evidence, including legislative meeting minutes, budget disbursement records, and independent local media archives. Any empirical discrepancies between projected public narratives and actual administrative friction were isolated and analyzed as critical junctures. Throughout this process, ethical protocols were strictly maintained, with all respondents anonymized to encourage candid disclosure regarding informal political maneuvering.

Results And Discussion

The Discursive Construction of Crisis (Policy Entrepreneurship)

Mayoral entrepreneurship in Parepare did not begin with infrastructure construction, but with narrative construction. The first mechanism involved a strategic reframing of the city's identity, marking the policy entrepreneurship phase. Mayor Pawe diagnosed a critical structural weakness: Parepare's heavy reliance on central government transfers, which constituted the vast majority of regional income (see Table 1). Rather than treating this merely as a fiscal statistic, Pawe weaponized it politically. He framed this dependency as an existential threat to local autonomy, creating a "crisis narrative" that necessitated a radical departure from traditional development models.

Table 1. Parepare Municipality Regional Income During Taufan Pawe's First Term

Year	Locally-Generated Income (Billions IDR)	Central Balancing Fund (Billion IDR)	Other Income (Billions IDR)	Regional Income (Billion IDR)
2015	115.37	588.31	132.89	836.57
2016	136.31	730.12	51.49	917.93
2017	140.62	682.41	69.23	892.26
2018	134.34	624.86	64.73	823.93

Source: processed by author

To counter this structural deficit, Pawe introduced the "Smoke-stack Free Industrial City" (*Kota Industri Tanpa Cerobong Asap*) vision. This initiative was a quintessential act of "political imagineering". By promoting the "Footprint Theory" (*Teori Telapak Kaki*), he reframed the city's lack of natural resources not as a liability, but as a virtue—an opportunity to leapfrog into a modern, service-based economy. This narrative served a dual purpose: it provided a technocratic solution to fiscal dependency while simultaneously constructing an aspirational identity for citizens. The strategic nature of this framing is evident in his 2018 re-election campaign (Table 2). Pawe's rhetorical strategy followed a distinct narrative arc: he positioned "fiscal dependency" and "old thinking" as villains, while casting his service-oriented vision (and himself) as the heroic solution. By weaving together technocratic evidence with emotional appeals, he constructed a "hegemonic narrative" that marginalized opposition. To criticize the "Smoke-stack Free" vision was implicitly framed as opposing Parepare's progress.

Table 2. Analytical Examination of Taufan Pawe's 2018 Campaign Speeches Pattern

Component	Sample Speech Excerpt	Observation/Analysis	Function/Implications
Setting	"...Parepare has no natural resources. Our city has no mines or oil. So, whoever becomes its leader must find alternative solutions to finance its development."	Taufan Pawe frames Parepare as a small city with limited mineral and energy sources, shifting focus on other alternative development model.	Provides background for understanding structural constraint and opportunities, helping citizens contextualize policy initiatives.
Character (Hero)	"This is the birthplace of B.J. Habibie, a national figure renowned for his intelligence. I will use him as inspiration in formulating a development model appropriate for this city. I believe that together we can achieve this"	Pawe presents himself and community members as capable actor. He also emphasizes his connection to local figures such as B.J. Habibie, signaling continuity with respected local leadership. Campaign analysis indicates he integrates values and emotional appeal to engage citizens of Parepare.	Position Pawe and community members as active participants in development while leveraging local symbolic authority to strengthen legitimacy.
Characters (villain/problems)	".. our city faces challenges from lack of resources to finance development programs. These are the main issues that I mapped out during my first term in office. And there is a solution to this problem that doesn't requires manufacturing or extractives industries"	Challenges are frames as systemic rather than personal failures. Speeches combines policy knowledges with emotional framing to emphasizes the need for action.	Highlights key issues and legitimizes proposed pollicy measures
Plot/Storyline	"Parepare has great potential to become a leader in industries with minimal environmental pollution. Three sectors with significant potential are healthcare, tourism, and education. These three industries align with the characteristics of our city, which is limited in natural resources but benefits from its location and geographical conditions."	Presents a coherent narrative, linking problems, actors, and actions. Analysis shown that Pawe functions as policy brokers, coupling problems with feasible policy solutions.	Demonstrates strategic agenda-setting and problem-solution alignment.
Moral/Policy Solution	"As a native of Parepare, I am committed to developing this city so that all residents can enjoy prosperity without harming the environment. Our city is blessed with a strategic location. Therefore, I ask for your support in electing me so that we can build this city together."	Encourages collective action and integrates values, emotion, and knowledge. Campaign analysis confirms Pawe's action in directing citizens focus and actionable policy proposals.	Reinforces policy legitimacy, support and encourages public supports.

Source: processed by author

Upon securing re-election in 2018, the nature of Pawe's entrepreneurship underwent a crucial shift—from persuasion to formalization. He immediately translated the campaign narrative into the municipal Medium-Term Development Plan (2019–2024). This action marked the transition from *policy entrepreneurship* (selling an idea) to *political entrepreneurship* (enforcing a rule). By embedding the "Smoke-stack Free" model into the binding legal architecture of the city, Pawe converted a voluntary political vision into a mandatory administrative directive, compelling the entire bureaucracy to align with his agenda

From Persuasion to Power (Political Entrepreneurship)

Upon securing re-election in 2018, Pawe's entrepreneurship underwent a crucial shift from persuasion to formalization. This marked the transition to political entrepreneurship. He immediately translated the campaign narrative into the municipal Medium-Term Development Plan (2019–2024). By embedding the "Smoke-stack Free" model into the binding legal architecture of the city, Pawe converted a voluntary political vision into a mandatory administrative directive. To operationalize this vision, the administration deployed two specific consolidation mechanisms identified in the framework: Statutory Executive Aggrandizement and Political Co-optation.

Internally, the administration utilized Law No. 23/2014, which designates the Medium-Term Development Plan as the absolute guideline for regional development, to transform the bureaucracy from a rigid administrative body into a task-force-oriented machine. This consolidation was achieved by enforcing the Medium-Term Development Plan as a binding contract. As noted by a senior bureaucrat, Bureau-01, the mayor's instructions based on planning documents were treated as absolute, or *tuntas*, thereby stripping agency heads of the discretion to deviate from the executive agenda. This centralized control allowed the mayor to mobilize the Kotak Inovasi program, compelling all 33 municipal agencies to submit monthly innovation proposals. This was not merely an administrative suggestion but a political directive. Thus, the executive-heavy structure was not an extra-legal power grab, but rather a maximization of statutory authority delegated by the central government to accelerate local development.

Externally, the rapid implementation of the "Smoke-stack Free" agenda was enabled by a decisive political mechanism: the fusion of executive and partisan authority. Mayoral Entrepreneurship in Parepare did not operate in a vacuum; it leveraged a specific power configuration in which the mayor simultaneously served as the regional chairman of Golkar, the dominant party in the local parliament. This dual role allowed Pawe to convert political capital into administrative acceleration through two channels of control. First, hierarchical party discipline reduced the friction typically found in executive-legislative negotiations. As explicitly stated by Leg-01, a senior Golkar legislator, the faction functioned as "the party's extension in the Regional People's Representative Council." He acknowledged that, when dealing with the mayor, who was also their party chairman, legislators would "take a step back" to align with the executive agenda. Second, the administration employed a "Medium-Term Development Plan lock-in" strategy by framing the planning document as a no-objection environment. Leg-02, a coalition legislator, emphasized that the Regional People's Representative Council could not obstruct the process because the Medium-Term Development Plan was what the regional head was required to pursue. This logic justified the approval of controversial projects, such as the Floating Mosque, effectively replacing checks and balances with a logic of executive efficiency.

Table 3. Interview Evidence on Executive–Legislative Power Relations in Parepare Municipality

Theme/Code	Representative Interview Evidence	Interviews	Analytical Interpretations
Partisan Discipline & Hierarchy	“So if we want to back up the existing government, because this is the Golkar chairman, of course we will take a step back and hold a faction meeting with the Golkar chairman (Pawe), so the party's direct struggle tool in the Regional People's Representative Council is called a faction, there is the Golkar faction ...”	Senior Golkar Legislator (Leg-01)	Demonstrates how the party hierarchy (“taking a step back”) potentially neutralizes institutional checks mechanisms. Transforming the faction into a tool for executive support.
The “Rubber Stamp” logic	“So, if we truly understand what this partnership is, it should be mutually supportive. Mutual support in achieving the Medium-Term Development Plan. Because what the Regional Head is after is how to complete the Medium-Term Development Plan within five years. Because the Medium-Term Development Plan is five years. That's what the Regional Head is after: completing the Medium-Term Development Plan. Have the targets in the Medium-Term Development Plan been implemented within five years? For example, in the education sector? Whether they were completed in 10 years or five years or not. Well, the Regional People's Representative Council cannot obstruct. ”	Member of Coalition Legislator (Leg-02)	Reveals that once a narrative is institutionalized into the Medium-Term Development Plan, legislative oversights become procedural rather than substantives (“cannot obstruct”)
Bureaucratic Mobilization	“... all regional government officials, in this case the heads of Regional Work Units, must also understand the Mayor's vision and mission program... Because they are the ones who are truly responsible for explaining it: the heads of these regional government agencies ... We translate this into programs and activities that are already outlined in the Medium-Term Development Plan (Regional Medium-Term Development Plan). Then, we translate this into the Annual Development Plan... This means that the communication pattern carried out by Mr. Taufan at that time using the planning document was complete. ”	Senior Bureaucrat (Bureau-01)	Indicates a command-driven administrative culture where the Mayor's vision is treated as a rigid directive, minimizing bureaucratic discretions
Cooperatives Oversight	“... although there are pros and cons, usually because the goals are the same... we agreed to to amend the Medium-Term Development Plan to include the Floating Mosque... even though it wasn't originally included in regional revenue and expenditure budget.	Member of Coalition Legislator (Leg-02)	Illustrates “cooperatives oversight” where Medium-Term Development Plan were altered to accommodate the mayor's project without critical and deep assessment.

Source: process by author

Outcomes: Public Value and Symbolic Imagination

Once institutionalized through these power structures, Pawe's entrepreneurship generated public value through two distinct but reinforcing pathways: substantive improvements and symbolic dominance:

Substantive Value Creation

The bureaucratic mobilization driven by executive aggrandizement produced tangible service improvements. Initiatives like the *Callnak Centre* (animal health) and the *Salo' Karajae Tourism Task Force* earned national recognition, including the Top 99 Public Service Innovations. As detailed in Table 4, the decentralization of innovation via the Digital Innovation Laboratory (2022–2023) further embedded this agenda into the city's operational DNA. These inputs translated into measurable socio-economic outcomes, providing the substantive basis for the mayor's legitimacy.

Table 4. Public Service Innovation in Parepare Municipality (2019-2023)

Year	Program/ Initiative Examples	Description	Key Outcomes / Recognition
2019	<i>Kotak Inovasi</i> (Innovation Box Program)	Mayor Taufan Pawe instructed all municipal agencies (33 regional work unit or Regional Work Units technical implementation unit, and health centers) to submit monthly innovation proposals facilitated by Development Planning Agency at Sub-National Level or <i>Bappeda</i>	One of the innovation, which is <i>CallNak Centre</i> or hotline for assistance with livestock and animal management, was listed among Indonesia's Top 99 Public Service Innovations
2020	Public Service Innovation during the COVID-19 pandemic	The pandemic prompted a shift toward "new normal" service models across seven key sectors (markets, hotels, tourism, transportation, etc).	Parepare's <i>Salo' Karajae Health Protocol Task Force</i> won the National Tourism Sector Award at the 2020 Regional Innovation Competition
	<i>Berdaya Srikandi</i> Innovation	Innovation in empowering coastal women through an educational-facilitative approach, utilizing local female graduates as mentors to guide female fisheries processors and cultivators in managing resources and increasing productive businesses, which has succeeded in significantly increasing women's participation, product types, and economic income. This program was nominated for the UN Public Service Awards (UNPSA) 2021, and becomes the only entry from Eastern Indonesia.	Recognition from UNPSA and replication by Barru District for their own Medium-Term Development Plan innovation program
2022-2023	Digital Innovation Laboratory	The Innovation Laboratory was digitized and expanded to include participants from school, urban wards, and technical implementation unit.	The 2023 award-winning innovations included Kantor Dewiku, Yuli Ogawa, and Mantra Bugis Pakajang, covering tourism development, mental health care, and Bugis-Lontara literacy preservation.

Source: process by author

Indicators such as the rise in HDI to 79.03 served as the "performance evidence" that vindicated the heavy-handed leadership style (see table 4). A local youth leader (**CSO-01**) described this as a "*result-oriented approach*," noting that the administration secured legitimacy by forcing implementation until physical results became undeniable.

Table 5. Parepare Municipality's Development Index 2019-2023

Indicator	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Economic Growth (%)	6.65	6.65	4.41	4.41	5.05
Inflation Rate (%)	3.53	2.45	4.09	4.37	2.22
Poverty Rate (%)	5.59	5.44	5.40	5.41	5.43
Gini Ratio (%)	0.35	0.423	0.381	0.379	0.381
Income per Capita (Million IDR)	49.8	49.8	51.18	56.16	57.61
Gross Regional Domestic Product/ GRDP (Trillion IDR)	7.23	7.32	7.85	8.70	9.31
Human Development Index/ HDI (%)	77.62	77.86	78.21	78.54	79.03
Labor Force Participation Rate (%)	63.27	65.63	66.99	66.80	65.52
Community Satisfaction Index (%)	75.32	71	72.6	72.8	73.2

Source: process by author

Symbolic Value via Political Imagineering

However, the most distinct feature of Pawe's value creation was his use of hegemonic symbolic communication. The "Smoke-stack Free" narrative was not just a policy slogan; it was a dominant discourse operationalized through urban imagineering. As illustrated in Table 5, Pawe strategically appropriated the symbolic capital of B.J. Habibie (Indonesia's 3rd President and a Parepare native).

Table 6. Key Development Sectors Under Taufan Pawe's Leadership in Parepare

Sector	Description
Tourism Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revitalized <i>Jompie</i> City Park and built <i>Cempae</i> Tier • Renovated <i>Mandiri</i> Stadium and renamed it as <i>Gelora B.J Habibie</i> Stadium for sport tourism (as one of the national football club's Home Base) • Construct <i>B.J Habibie's Floating Mosque</i> and public spaces along <i>Mattirotsi</i> Beach • Promoting annual <i>Salo' Karajae</i> Festival at <i>Tonrangeng</i> Riverside
Education Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established <i>Habibie Institute of Technology</i> • Strengthened collaboration with local universities (e.g. State Islamic Centre of Parepare or <i>IAIN</i> Parepare, Universitas Muhammadiyah Parepare, and <i>Andi Sapada Business Institute</i>)
Health Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construct <i>dr. Hasri Ainun Habibie Regional Hospital</i> (medical tourism model) • Upgraded <i>Andi Makkasau Regional Hospital</i> with advanced facilities • Launched <i>112 Call Centre</i> for free ambulance services • Established <i>COVID Centre</i> during the pandemic
Administration and Public Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implemented ICT-based E-Governance (Mayor Regulation no.11/2018) • Launched Public Service Mall, integrating multiple agencies for one stop public service centre • Improving connectivity (e.g. construct <i>Twin Bridge</i> in <i>Lumpue</i> District as alternative route as an alternative route to reduce congestion on the <i>Sumpang</i> Bridge which has so far been the only proper access into the city)

Source: process by author

By naming major infrastructure, including the stadium, hospital, and institute of technology, after Habibie, Pawe connected his local regime to a national narrative of technological progress. This framing made the mayor's vision politically difficult to challenge, as opposition to his projects could be implicitly interpreted as opposition to Habibie's legacy. In this sense, narrative dominance functioned as a deliberate tool of governance, transforming physical infrastructure into symbolic monuments of recognition and consolidating the mayor's image as a visionary leader. He further reinforced the perceived effectiveness of his development agenda by presenting every award and achievement received by the Parepare municipal government as evidence of success across various communication channels, including online media interviews, public speeches, social media, and official events.

Reformist Strongman Governance and the Politics of Public Value

This study posits that Mayoral Entrepreneurship (ME) serves as the operational mechanism that enables the rise of the Reformist Strongman. The relationship between the two is constitutive: reformist legitimacy is constructed during the policy entrepreneurship phase through narrative framing and service innovation, while strongman authority is consolidated during the political entrepreneurship phase through statutory aggrandizement and political co-optation. Thus, ME is not merely a style of governance, but a strategic vehicle through which a leader converts rapid development outputs into hegemonic political control, producing a regime that is developmentally innovative yet institutionally centralized.

This study also challenges the normative view of policy entrepreneurship as an individual skill rooted primarily in persuasion. In Parepare, entrepreneurial capacity was inseparable from structural political capital. Pawe's dual role as mayor and regional chair of Golkar, the dominant legislative party, allowed him to expand his influence within the political stream far beyond what traditional frameworks typically assume. Legislative endorsement was secured not through open deliberation, but through internal party cohesion and hierarchical discipline. In this context, ME emerged from an institutionalized hierarchy in which the executive effectively captured the legislative agenda, transforming the theoretical separation of powers into a *de facto* fusion of powers to ensure implementation feasibility.

The evidence supports a Sequential Entrepreneurship model, showing that ME unfolded in two distinct but connected phases characterized by different power dynamics. In the pre-election phase, Pawe operated primarily as a policy entrepreneur by using narrative seduction to strategically link fiscal imbalance with the "Smoke-stack Free" concept, thereby opening a policy window. In the post-election phase, once in office, he shifted into the role of a political entrepreneur. At this stage, he did not merely advocate for his ideas, but institutionalized them into the Medium-Term Development Plan, effectively converting a campaign vision into a binding administrative mandate. This sequential logic extends existing scholarship by demonstrating that, in decentralized systems, successful mayors must transition from selling ideas to wielding power, using partisan networks to align both the bureaucracy and the legislature behind an institutionalized agenda.

The study further refines Public Value Theory by demonstrating that value creation in Parepare was not only an administrative output, but also a strategy of performative legitimacy constructed through material and symbolic dimensions. Substantive value functioned as political currency, as tangible improvements such as the Kotak Inovasi program, UNPSA nominations, and the increase in the Human

Development Index to 79.03 served as material justification for the regime. These metrics provided performance evidence that could be used to silence critics and legitimize executive dominance. At the same time, the administration generated symbolic value through hegemonic narrative construction and political imagineering. By anchoring the city's identity to the "Smoke-stack Free" vision and the iconic figure of B. J. Habibie, the mayor constructed a dominant narrative that did more than build civic pride; it monopolized local discourse and made the mayor's vision appear synonymous with the city's progress.

Consequently, public value in Parepare was co-produced through a combination of material delivery and symbolic alignment. Development achievements were not politically neutral outputs, but instruments through which the executive reinforced legitimacy, narrowed the space for opposition, and insulated itself from political challenges. This reveals the central innovation-democracy paradox identified in the study: the same entrepreneurial mechanisms that enabled rapid policy innovation also reinforced executive-heavy governance structures. In this sense, the Parepare case demonstrates how developmentally effective governance can coexist with, and even depend upon, the weakening of democratic deliberation and institutional checks and balances.

The Innovation-Democracy Paradox: Statutory Executive Aggrandizement and Political Co-optation

The core finding of this study is that Mayor Pawe's rapid implementation of the "Smoke-stack Free" vision relied on a dual strategy of consolidation that fundamentally altered the local democratic landscape. Internally, the mayor's effort to "cut bureaucratic red tape" represents a form of Statutory Executive Aggrandizement. Unlike traditional aggrandizement which often implies extra-legal power grabs (Amelia et al., 2025), this centralization was explicitly empowered by the regional autonomy mandate (Law No. 23/2014). By utilizing the Medium-Term Development Plan as a binding legal instrument to mandate the *Kotak Inovasi* program, Pawe systematically centralized administrative authority. This confirms the rise of "authoritarian innovations," where leaders use digital tools and performance metrics to tighten their grip on the state apparatus. In Parepare, the narrative of "acceleration" served as a legitimate, legally-backed cover for concentrating power within the mayor's office, effectively bypassing the deliberative layers of bureaucracy. Externally, the "harmony" between the executive and the legislature was a product of systematic political co-optation. In Indonesia, this often takes the form of "cartel politics," where the executive secures legislative compliance not through debate, but through resource sharing and partisan alignment (Aspinall, 2014) mayor's dual role as the Golkar Party chairman also enabled him to capture the "political stream" completely. As the interview data revealed, the legislature functioned less as a watchdog and more as a "rubber stamp," illustrating how co-optation neutralizes veto players. This confirms warnings that in Indonesia's post-reform era, development goals are often used to justify the erosion of checks and balances (Mietzner, 2020). The seamless approval of the Floating Mosque project, despite its initial absence from planning documents, exemplifies how co-optation prioritizes executive agility over procedural accountability.

Ultimately, Parepare presents a model of "Illiberal Innovation." The city achieved tangible public value precisely because it reduced the "friction" of democracy. This provokes a critical question for decentralized governance in Asia: is the erosion of democratic oversight a justifiable price for developmental acceleration? The findings

suggest that, under the current "Sequential Entrepreneurship" model, innovation outcomes are paradoxically emerging from, and reinforcing, executive-heavy structures that reflect a regression in democratic mechanisms.

This study challenges the traditional assumption of the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) that the political stream is an independent and chaotic environment that policy entrepreneurs must navigate (Kingdon, 2014). In the context of decentralized Indonesia, where party hierarchies remain rigid, the findings suggest that the political stream should not be understood merely as an external variable, but rather as a structural asset that can be captured and controlled. When an elected leader simultaneously holds executive authority and the position of party chair, they do not simply "couple" the streams; they are able to command the political stream and align it with their preferred policy agenda. This implies that, in party-centric local democracies, the "window of opportunity" is not necessarily random or contingent, but can be deliberately manufactured through structural dominance and political co-optation.

Building on this structural insight, the study advances the literature by proposing a trajectory of "Sequential Entrepreneurship," addressing the tendency in existing scholarship to treat policy entrepreneurship and political entrepreneurship as overlapping or indistinct activities. The findings indicate that the survival of an innovative idea depends on a functional shift in the role of political actors. At the initial stage, actors must operate as policy entrepreneurs by using persuasion, narratives, and symbolic framing to gain public support and win power. However, once in office, they must transition into political entrepreneurs who rely on authority, institutional control, and bureaucratic mobilization to govern and implement their agenda. This sequence helps explain why many innovations in the Global South fail: they remain trapped in the persuasive phase and do not successfully transition into the coercive and institutional phase required for effective implementation.

The findings also require a reconsideration of Public Value Theory when applied to non-Western political settings. While Moore emphasizes that legitimacy is generated through broad-based stakeholder deliberation, the Parepare case demonstrates that, in executive-heavy regimes, legitimacy may instead be produced through performative results and hegemonic narratives rather than through consensus-building. In this context, public value is not primarily the outcome of a democratic process, but functions as a currency of political survival. Tangible public services are delivered efficiently in order to secure civic acquiescence and protect the regime from criticism. This suggests a distinct Global South variant of public value, in which output legitimacy, understood as the delivery of concrete results, takes precedence over input legitimacy, understood as democratic participation and deliberation.

Furthermore, this research contributes to the debate on democratic backsliding by identifying the phenomenon of "Statutory Executive Aggrandizement." While executive aggrandizement is often understood as a violation of democratic norms or an extra-legal concentration of power, the findings suggest that, in decentralized Indonesia, such aggrandizement is facilitated by the legal architecture itself. Laws designed to accelerate development, particularly Law No. 23/2014, provide statutory cover for mayors to centralize authority and weaken bureaucratic autonomy. As a result, theoretical frameworks that analyze urban innovation must account for this paradox: effective entrepreneurial governance may emerge not from the deepening of democracy, but from the legal centralization of executive authority, producing a form of "illiberal innovation" at the local level.

This article therefore contributes to the literature on comparative local governance by proposing the Sequential Entrepreneurship model, which conceptualizes mayoral innovation as a two-stage process involving narrative construction followed by institutional consolidation. Theoretically, it advances the debate on illiberal innovation by conceptualizing Statutory Executive Aggrandizement and showing how legal mandates for development planning can be strategically weaponized to centralize administrative power. This challenges the binary assumption that executive aggrandizement is always extra-legal. Empirically, the study provides a nuanced corrective to Western-centric theories by demonstrating how political imaginering and legislative co-optation enable executive dominance to persist with limited resistance in the Global South.

The transferability of these findings is conditioned by specific institutional contexts. First, the mechanism of statutory aggrandizement, particularly the conversion of campaign narratives into binding regulations, is enabled by Indonesia's development planning laws, especially Law No. 25/2004 and Law No. 23/2014. In legal systems where local executives do not possess direct authority over planning documents, this form of institutional consolidation may be less feasible. Second, the intensity of executive dominance observed in Parepare is contingent upon the mayor's dual role as both local executive and regional party chairperson. In municipalities characterized by fragmented party systems or divided government, such consolidation would likely be more difficult to achieve. Third, Parepare's status as a medium-sized city facilitated rapid policy diffusion and direct bureaucratic control, dynamics that may differ in large metropolitan regions or rural districts with lower administrative capacity.

Although this study is grounded in a single Indonesian municipality, the mechanisms identified here, particularly the conversion of statutory authority and political capital into executive dominance, offer significant analytical generalizability for the Global South. The "Parepare Model" may be relevant for examining other decentralized political settings in which strong local executives operate within formally democratic institutions. Researchers studying "CEO-governors" in Thailand, local bosses in the Philippines, or subnational leaders in Latin America may find the Sequential Entrepreneurship framework useful for analyzing how urban innovation can paradoxically function as a vehicle for authoritarian resilience within democratic systems.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that Mayoral Entrepreneurship (ME) in decentralized Indonesia operates not merely as an administrative reform strategy, but as a mechanism of political consolidation. By examining the tenure of Mayor Taufan Pawe in Parepare (2018–2023), the analysis reveals that successful urban innovation often relies on a "Sequential Entrepreneurship" trajectory. Leaders first act as policy entrepreneurs to construct persuasive narratives, and subsequently transition into political entrepreneurs to institutionalize these visions. Crucially, this institutionalization is achieved through a dual strategy: internally, by leveraging statutory executive aggrandizement empowered by regional autonomy mandates to centralize bureaucratic control; and externally, by employing political co-optation to neutralize legislative oversight.

The findings offer a significant theoretical corrective to Western-centric governance models. First, we challenge the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) by showing that the "political stream" is not an external environment to be navigated, but

a structure to be captured. In contexts of strong party discipline, the mayor's dual role as executive and party chair allows for the "fusion" of streams, converting the Medium-Term Development Plan from a planning document into a tool of bureaucratic and legislative command. Second, the study refines Public Value Theory by introducing the concept of "Performative Legitimacy." In executive-heavy regimes, public value is co-produced through hegemonic narratives and urban imagineering. Here, the spectacle of modernization (e.g., naming landmarks after B.J. Habibie) serves the broader goal of political imagineering, monopolizing local discourse to insulate the regime from criticism.

However, this efficiency comes at a democratic cost. The research uncovers a distinct efficiency-democracy paradox: the very mechanisms that enabled rapid policy innovation, specifically the legal centralization of power and the co-optation of veto players, simultaneously eroded legislative oversight. The legislative council's transformation into a "rubber stamp" institution illustrates the risk of statutory authoritarianism at the local level, where accountability becomes legally subordinate to developmental acceleration.

For the broader study of Asian politics, the Parepare case serves as a microcosm of the "reformist strongman" phenomenon observed across Southeast Asia. It suggests that in developing democracies, the most effective entrepreneurial governance often emerges not from deepening democratic deliberation, but from the successful centralization of local power. Consequently, while ME is a potent force for creating public value, it remains an ambivalent one. Without robust institutional safeguards to decouple innovation from personalization, such entrepreneurship risks fostering a model of illiberal innovation—delivering modern services through pre-democratic power structures.

For policymakers and democratic reformers in decentralized Asia, this study offers three recommendations. First, innovation should be decoupled from political personalization by institutionalizing bureaucratic mechanisms, such as mandatory innovation labs, to sustain reform beyond charismatic leadership. Second, checks and balances should be restored through stronger external oversight, particularly by provincial authorities and independent audit bodies, over revised budgets that may bypass initial deliberation. Third, development narratives should be democratized by empowering civic forums to contest and co-create city branding, ensuring that it reflects diverse public interests rather than elite visions alone.

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