



**REGULATED AUTONOMY ACROSS ADMINISTRATIVE TRADITIONS:
A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMPARING HIGHER
EDUCATION GOVERNANCE IN INDONESIA AND THE UNITED
STATES**

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Abstract

University autonomy is increasingly accompanied by performance requirements, regulatory controls, conditional funding, accountability mechanisms, and political intervention, creating a governance condition that this study conceptualizes as regulated autonomy. This study develops the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework to compare higher education governance in Indonesia and the United States. Adopting a conceptual research design grounded in theory synthesis and a most-different systems comparative logic, the study examines governance developments from 2012 to September 2026 using legal and policy documents, official higher education funding information, peer-reviewed scholarship, and selected policy sources. The analysis focuses on five dimensions: locus of authority, legal form of autonomy, dominant accountability instrument, funding logic, and degree of politicisation. The findings identify two contrasting configurations. Indonesia exhibits delegated autonomy in a centralized state, where



PTN-BH institutions receive formal legal autonomy but remain substantially embedded within national regulatory and fiscal structures. The United States exhibits emergent autonomy under conditional centralisation, where federalism, state authority, institutional governance, and multiple principals create substantial discretion while dependence on strategically important public resources enables external intervention. The study develops six propositions concerning administrative tradition as a filter, reversibility, the revenue paradox, the multi-principal shield and exposure, instrument convergence with authority divergence, and the displacement of performance by politicisation. The RAC framework contributes a comparative approach that conceptualizes autonomy as a multidimensional configuration rather than a single level and provides a foundation for future empirical testing across higher education systems.

Keywords: university autonomy; higher education governance; regulated autonomy; comparative public administration; Indonesia and United States

1. INTRODUCTION

University autonomy has become a central principle in contemporary higher education governance, yet its expansion has rarely meant a simple retreat of the state. Governments increasingly grant universities greater discretion over academic, organizational, managerial, and financial matters while simultaneously requiring stronger evidence of performance, efficiency, accountability, and public relevance. Across higher education systems, this has produced a tension between institutional discretion and external steering: some *ex ante* controls are relaxed while *ex post* monitoring, performance requirements, and financial conditions become more important (Enders et al., 2011; Neave, 2012). The resulting condition is not fully autonomous governance, but a form of regulated autonomy in which institutional freedom is accompanied by continuing and sometimes intensified mechanisms of state and political control.

Indonesia and the United States provide a useful contrast for examining how regulated autonomy is constructed under different administrative traditions. Indonesia represents a centralized, unitary, and predominantly legalistic administrative setting in which national authorities retain substantial influence over public universities. The development of Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Badan Hukum (PTN-BH) has provided selected state universities with wider organizational, financial, staffing, and academic discretion. However, the expansion of formal legal autonomy has occurred within a broader national regulatory framework, leaving institutions exposed to continuing state influence over funding, tuition, quality assurance, and institutional governance (Hill & Wie, 2012; Logli, 2016; Rosser, 2023). The Indonesian trajectory therefore illustrates a basic tension: legal status can enlarge institutional discretion without necessarily transferring control over the resources and regulatory instruments that make autonomy durable.



The United States presents a different institutional setting. Its higher education system is shaped by federalism, multiple levels of government, institutional boards, private actors, and a diverse public and private university sector. Clark (1983) positioned the American system relatively close to the market side of the state–market–academic coordination spectrum, but market orientation does not imply an absence of steering. State governments influence public universities through coordinating arrangements and funding mechanisms, while accreditation and federal student aid create additional forms of external accountability (McLendon et al., 2006). Performance-based funding has further strengthened output-oriented steering, although research has identified limited effects in some settings and unintended consequences associated with institutional incentives (Hillman et al., 2015; Ortagus et al., 2020). More recent federal interventions have also demonstrated how conditional resources, accreditation policy, and fiscal instruments can extend political influence into areas traditionally associated with institutional discretion.

These contrasting cases reveal an unresolved issue in higher education governance research. Previous studies have made important contributions by explaining the distribution of authority among the state, market, and academic community (Clark, 1983), identifying distinct dimensions of university governance (de Boer et al., 2007), and distinguishing state-centered, market-oriented, and academic self-rule models (Dobbins et al., 2011). Research on institutional autonomy has also demonstrated that formal decision-making discretion does not necessarily translate into equivalent financial, organizational, or strategic independence (Enders et al., 2013). However, these perspectives do not, individually, provide a sufficiently integrated explanation of how administrative traditions shape the interaction between the location of authority, the legal basis of autonomy, accountability instruments, funding arrangements, and political intervention. This limitation becomes particularly relevant when comparing a centralized unitary system, such as Indonesia, with a federal and institutionally differentiated system, such as the United States. Although both systems employ mechanisms such as performance evaluation, accreditation, and conditional funding, the governance implications of these instruments may differ according to who controls them, how institutions obtain their resources, and how political authority is distributed. Therefore, the central research gap is not the absence of studies on university autonomy, but the limited integration of these dimensions into a comparative framework that explains how autonomy is configured and constrained across contrasting administrative traditions.

Addressing this gap is important for both academic inquiry and higher education policy. From an academic perspective, understanding university autonomy requires more than identifying whether institutions possess formal legal or managerial discretion; it also requires examining how that discretion interacts with regulatory authority, financial dependence, accountability requirements, and political influence. An integrated comparative framework can therefore advance



higher education governance research by explaining why similar governance instruments may generate different autonomy configurations across institutional contexts. From a practical perspective, this issue is relevant to policymakers, university leaders, and higher education stakeholders who must balance institutional flexibility with public accountability. A clearer understanding of how funding arrangements, regulatory mechanisms, and political conditions shape autonomy can help policymakers design accountability systems that protect institutional decision-making while maintaining transparency and public responsibility. Comparing Indonesia and the United States is particularly useful because their contrasting administrative traditions provide an opportunity to examine both the contextual differences and the governance tensions that may emerge across different systems.

To address this gap, this study develops the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework through a comparative conceptual analysis of higher education governance in Indonesia and the United States. The study addresses three research questions: (1) How is regulated autonomy constructed in two contrasting administrative traditions? (2) Which dimensions best capture the similarities and differences between these configurations? and (3) What propositions follow concerning the durability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of university autonomy under increasing fiscal and political pressure? The analysis focuses on public universities and examines governance developments from 2012 to September 2026, while considering private institutions where national or federal instruments directly affect them.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of five dimensions, locus of authority, legal form of autonomy, dominant accountability instrument, funding logic, and degree of politicisation, into a single comparative framework. Unlike approaches that primarily classify governance models or examine individual dimensions of institutional autonomy, RAC examines how these dimensions interact and how their interaction is shaped by administrative traditions. The comparison distinguishes between delegated autonomy in Indonesia's centralized state structure and emergent autonomy under conditional centralisation in the United States. Through this approach, the study contributes a conceptual explanation of why formal institutional discretion may coexist with continued regulatory, fiscal, and political constraints. It further develops six theoretical propositions concerning the configuration, durability, and legitimacy of university autonomy, providing a basis for subsequent empirical testing in other higher education systems.

The article develops the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework to answer these questions. RAC conceptualizes autonomy not as a single continuum from low to high discretion, but as a configuration formed through five dimensions: the locus of authority, the legal form of autonomy, the dominant accountability instrument, the funding logic, and the degree of politicisation. The framework enables comparison of how common governance instruments are filtered through contrasting administrative traditions and how these configurations shape the



durability of autonomy, the effectiveness of steering, and the legitimacy of accountability. The analysis is organized into the Literature Review, Methodology, Results, Discussion, and Conclusion, with the RAC framework and six propositions providing the central analytical contribution of the article.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Public Administration Paradigms and University Steering

The governance of universities cannot be separated from broader transformations in public administration. A Weberian-legalistic model emphasizes hierarchy, formal rules, administrative procedures, and centralized authority. Under this model, public organizations are primarily controlled through ex ante requirements concerning budgets, staffing, organizational structure, and compliance. New Public Management (NPM) subsequently challenged this input-oriented approach by emphasizing managerial discretion, output measurement, competition, contracts, and performance-based accountability. Rather than removing state intervention, NPM changes its form: institutions are given greater operational freedom while being evaluated against measurable results (*Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017*). Higher education became an important arena for this transformation because governments sought to combine institutional flexibility with stronger accountability for efficiency and performance.

New Public Governance (NPG) extends the discussion by emphasizing networks, interdependence, coordination, and the involvement of non-state actors in public service delivery (*Osborne, 2006; Rhodes, 1996*). In higher education, this perspective is reflected in growing relationships among universities, governments, industry, professional organizations, regional authorities, and civil society. However, the emergence of NPG does not imply that hierarchical or managerial forms of steering disappear. *Ferlie et al. (2008)* demonstrate that higher education systems can simultaneously incorporate managerial reforms and network-oriented governance. Similarly, *Capano (2011)* argues that governments do not simply retreat from higher education when autonomy expands; instead, they modify the ways through which they steer institutions.

This persistence of multiple governance logics is central to understanding contemporary university autonomy. *Christensen & Lægreid (2007)* show how administrative reforms often combine rather than replace existing organizational principles, while *Mahoney & Thelen (2010)* conceptualize institutional change as a process in which new rules and practices become layered onto existing arrangements. University autonomy can therefore be understood as an outcome of institutional layering. Legal-administrative controls may remain in place while NPM-style performance instruments and network-oriented partnership mechanisms are added to the governance mix. The relevant analytical question is consequently not whether a system is purely



Weberian, NPM-oriented, or network-based, but how different governing logics are combined and translated through particular administrative traditions.

2.2 Principal–Agent Theory and the Autonomy–Accountability Relationship

Principal–agent theory provides a second foundation for understanding the relationship between governments and autonomous universities. Moe (1984) conceptualizes delegation as a response to institutional complexity, information asymmetry, and the need to assign decision-making authority to specialized organizations. In higher education, governments can be understood as principals that delegate authority to university agents while retaining mechanisms to influence organizational behavior. Autonomy therefore represents delegated authority rather than complete independence.

This relationship is complicated by the fact that universities rarely have a single principal. Ministries, legislatures, courts, funding bodies, accreditors, students, and multiple levels of government may simultaneously impose expectations on institutions (*Lane & Kivisto, 2008*). Multiple principals can create additional institutional room for maneuver when their preferences conflict, but they can also increase administrative burden and reduce discretion when demands accumulate. Kivistö (2008) therefore highlights the importance of distinguishing between formal delegation and the mechanisms through which principals retain control.

The autonomy–accountability relationship can further be understood through *ex ante* and *ex post* mechanisms. Governments may shape institutional behavior before decisions are made through legal status, appointment rules, regulatory requirements, and organizational constraints. *Ex post* mechanisms operate after decisions through performance monitoring, reporting, accreditation, financial incentives, and sanctions. Autonomy reforms often loosen the former while strengthening the latter. Enders et al. (2013) demonstrate why this distinction matters: institutional autonomy is multidimensional, and formal expansion of discretion does not automatically translate into equivalent strategic capacity or improved institutional performance.

The key implication is that autonomy depends not only on delegation but also on the credibility of delegation. If a principal can readily intervene in budgets, leadership, tuition, or institutional priorities, formal autonomy may remain vulnerable. This leads to the idea of reversible autonomy, in which legal delegation exists but can be constrained or withdrawn through political and financial instruments. The credibility of autonomy therefore becomes a central issue for comparative governance.



2.3 Policy Instruments as Mechanisms of Governance

The policy instruments literature provides a third theoretical lens by shifting attention from institutional structures to the mechanisms governments use to influence organizations. *Hood & Margetts (2007)* classify policy instruments according to the resources through which governments act, including nodality through information, authority through legal power, treasure through financial resources, and organization through administrative capacity. In higher education, these resources can appear as performance indicators, regulations, accreditation systems, funding formulas, research grants, student aid, or organizational controls.

Policy instruments are not neutral technical devices. *Lascoumes & Le Gales (2007)* argue that instruments embody particular assumptions about how governing relationships should be structured and how policy problems should be understood. A performance indicator, for example, does more than measure an outcome; it can change organizational priorities by defining what counts as success. *Bevan & Hood (2006)* similarly demonstrate that target-based performance systems can produce behavioral responses that differ from policymakers' original intentions, including gaming and strategic adaptation.

This perspective is particularly important for university autonomy because the same instrument can have different meanings across administrative settings. Conditional funding may function as a mechanism of performance steering in one system while becoming a source of political leverage in another. Accreditation can serve as a quality assurance mechanism but may also become a channel through which governments influence institutional priorities. Consequently, the analysis of regulated autonomy must consider not only whether an instrument exists, but who controls it, what resources it mobilizes, and what forms of institutional behavior it encourages.

2.4 Higher Education Governance and Institutional Autonomy

Higher education scholarship provides several complementary frameworks for understanding these dynamics. Clark's (1983) coordination triangle positions higher education systems according to the relative influence of the state, market, and academic oligarchy. This framework remains useful because it demonstrates that university governance reflects different combinations of authority rather than a universal institutional model. Neave (2012) adds the concept of the evaluative state, in which government increasingly steers institutions through evaluation, monitoring, and performance assessment rather than detailed direct administration.

The governance equalizer developed by de Boer et al. (2007) further disaggregates governance into state regulation, stakeholder guidance, academic self-governance, managerial self-governance, and competition. Dobbins et al. (2011) similarly distinguish state-centered,



market-oriented, and academic self-rule models. More recent work emphasizes that contemporary higher education systems are rarely pure examples of one model. *Capano & Pritoni (2019)* demonstrate the hybrid character of governance arrangements in which state, market, and institutional mechanisms coexist.

These perspectives also suggest that institutional autonomy should be treated as multidimensional. Autonomy may concern organizational structure, academic decisions, staffing, finances, or strategic management, and gains in one dimension do not necessarily imply equivalent gains in another (Enders et al., 2013). Funding structures are particularly important because the practical value of legal autonomy depends partly on control over resources. *Marginson (2011)* emphasizes the broader significance of resource distribution and the financial structures within which universities operate. Institutional discretion may therefore exist formally while remaining constrained by dependence on externally controlled revenue.

Taken together, these approaches provide strong foundations for analyzing autonomy but leave room for a more integrated framework. They explain coordination, evaluation, institutional discretion, and resource dependence, yet they do not fully capture how these dimensions interact with administrative traditions and political intervention.

2.5 Indonesia and the United States in Existing Literature

Research on Indonesia illustrates how the expansion of institutional autonomy has unfolded within a highly centralized administrative context. *Hill & Wie (2012)* document the movement toward greater institutional flexibility and corporatized governance, while *Logli (2016)* shows how autonomy reforms have interacted with broader political and institutional transformations. *Rosser (2023)* further emphasizes the continuing importance of bureaucratic and political interests in shaping institution-level governance. Collectively, this literature suggests that Indonesian autonomy is not equivalent to state withdrawal; rather, delegated discretion remains embedded within national regulatory and political structures.

The US literature presents a different configuration. *McLendon (2003)* and *McLendon et al. (2006)* emphasize the importance of state-level governance and the institutional diversity produced by American federalism. Performance-based funding has become a major mechanism of state steering, but evidence concerning its effectiveness is mixed. *Hillman et al., (2014, 2015)* identify relatively limited or uneven effects on completion outcomes, while *Dougherty (2015)* demonstrate that the adoption and design of performance-based funding are shaped by political coalitions as well as policy evidence. *Kelchen (2018)* places these developments within the broader accountability architecture of American higher education, including the relationships among



institutions, states, federal authorities, and accreditors. Ortagus et al. (2020) further identify unintended consequences associated with performance-based approaches, demonstrating that financial incentives can reshape institutional behavior in ways that may conflict with equity objectives.

The comparison therefore reveals an important analytical distinction. Indonesia represents a system in which autonomy is substantially conferred through state action, whereas the US configuration allows autonomy to emerge from fragmented authority and competing principals. Yet both systems employ increasingly similar instruments, including performance measures, accreditation, conditional resources, and partnership mechanisms. The key difference lies not necessarily in the instruments themselves, but in the institutional and political environments through which they operate.

2.6 Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

Three gaps emerge from the literature. First, existing higher education governance frameworks frequently conceptualize autonomy as a level or collection of dimensions, but provide less explanation of how authority, legal status, accountability instruments, funding, and political intervention interact as a single configuration. Second, politicisation remains relatively underdeveloped as an analytical dimension of institutional autonomy, even though governance instruments can increasingly be used to shape values, organizational choices, leadership, and academic priorities. Third, many established comparative frameworks were developed primarily from European or single-system settings and have limited capacity to explain the contrasting dynamics of a centralized unitary system and a federal, pluralistic system within one analytical framework.

The Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework addresses these gaps by integrating five dimensions of university governance: locus of authority, legal form of autonomy, dominant accountability instrument, funding logic, and degree of politicisation. Its principal contribution is to explain autonomy as an interconnected configuration rather than a single level of institutional discretion or a collection of independent dimensions. By applying the same analytical framework to Indonesia and the United States, the study examines how contrasting administrative traditions shape the operation and implications of similar governance instruments. The framework also connects these institutional configurations to the durability of autonomy, the effectiveness of governmental steering, and the legitimacy of accountability. Accordingly, RAC offers a conceptual contribution to comparative higher education governance and generates propositions that can be examined through future empirical research.



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a conceptual research design situated within the theory synthesis and typology tradition. Following Jaakkola (2020), conceptual research is appropriate when the objective is to integrate existing theoretical perspectives into a framework that can describe, explain, and generate propositions about a phenomenon rather than test predetermined hypotheses through newly collected empirical data. Accordingly, the study does not employ surveys, interviews, experiments, statistical modelling, or other forms of primary quantitative or qualitative data collection. Instead, it synthesizes established perspectives from higher education governance, public administration, principal-agent theory, and the policy instruments approach to develop an integrated explanation of how university autonomy is constructed and constrained across different administrative traditions. The domain theory is higher education governance and university autonomy, while the principal method theories are public administration paradigms, principal-agent theory, and policy instruments theory.

The purpose of the synthesis is to move beyond treating autonomy as a single level of institutional freedom. The study instead develops the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework, through which different forms of authority, delegation, accountability, funding, and political intervention can be examined as an interconnected configuration. The framework is subsequently used to formulate six propositions concerning the durability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of institutional autonomy.

3.2 Comparative Logic

The comparison follows a most-different systems logic, drawing on Przeworski & Teune (1970). Indonesia and the United States are selected because they differ substantially across several structural and institutional characteristics while both represent major higher education systems in which university autonomy has become an important governance issue. Indonesia operates within a unitary and centralized state structure, whereas the United States operates within a federal and multi-level system. Indonesia's administrative and legal environment is predominantly associated with a civil-law tradition, while the United States follows a common-law tradition. The Indonesian higher education sector is also comparatively public-dominated, whereas the United States contains a highly differentiated public-private system. Finally, the two cases reflect different political-economic traditions, with Indonesia characterized by a developmental orientation and the United States by a more market-oriented governance environment.

These differences provide analytical leverage. If similar governance instruments and tensions appear in both systems despite their contrasting institutional structures, they may indicate broader dynamics associated with regulated autonomy rather than effects unique to one national



context. Conversely, where the same instruments produce different configurations, those differences can be interpreted in relation to administrative tradition, authority structures, and institutional resource dependence.

3.3 Source Materials

The analysis draws primarily on documentary and secondary source materials. Primary materials include Indonesian laws and regulations governing higher education and PTN-BH, presidential regulations and instructions, US executive orders, federal legislation, and other official policy documents. Official higher education funding information, including state-level funding data, is also used where relevant. These primary materials establish the formal rules, allocation mechanisms, and policy interventions through which governmental authority is exercised.

Primary evidence is complemented by peer-reviewed scholarly literature and selected reputable policy sources. Scholarly publications provide theoretical concepts and established interpretations, whereas policy and institutional sources are used to contextualize recent developments and policy changes. The distinction between primary evidence and scholarly interpretation is maintained throughout the analysis so that legal or policy claims are not treated as equivalent to theoretical arguments.

3.4 Analytical Procedure

Documents and scholarly literature are examined through five analytical dimensions constituting the RAC framework: (1) locus of authority, (2) legal form of autonomy, (3) dominant accountability instrument, (4) funding logic, and (5) degree of politicisation. The locus of authority identifies where binding decisions are made and how many principals share decision-making power. Legal form concerns whether autonomy is explicitly conferred through a legal act or emerges through institutional charters and dispersed authority. Accountability instruments identify the principal mechanisms used to monitor and influence institutional behavior. Funding logic considers the concentration and controllability of institutional revenue, while politicisation captures the extent to which governance instruments are used to influence values, content, leadership, or organizational choices.

The analysis then compares how similar instruments are translated through different administrative traditions and how the resulting configurations relate to three outcomes: the durability of autonomy, effectiveness of steering, and legitimacy of accountability. Courts, legislatures, and public responses are considered as potential checks on these relationships.

3.5 Scope and Delimitation

The analysis focuses on public universities: PTN and PTN-BH in Indonesia, and state flagship and regional public universities in the United States. The period examined extends from



2012 to September 2026, beginning with Indonesia's Law No. 12/2012 on Higher Education. Private institutions are considered only where national or federal governance instruments directly affect them, particularly through accreditation, federal student aid, research funding, or related fiscal mechanisms. The study is therefore deliberately conceptual and comparative, providing an analytical framework and illustrative propositions rather than statistical estimates or causal tests.

4. RESULTS

The comparative analysis identifies two distinct configurations of regulated autonomy in higher education. In Indonesia, institutional autonomy is formally delegated through a legal framework but remains embedded within a centralized national regulatory and fiscal structure. In the United States, autonomy emerges from federalism, state authority, institutional governance, and multiple principals, while access to important public resources creates mechanisms for external intervention. Across both systems, similar governance instruments are present, but their application differs according to the distribution of authority, legal arrangements, funding structures, and political conditions.

4.1 Indonesia: Delegated Autonomy in a Centralized State

Indonesia's higher education governance has developed a differentiated structure of institutional autonomy. Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education provides the principal statutory framework for higher education governance, including institutional organization, quality assurance, financing, and the responsibilities of government and higher education institutions (Republic of Indonesia, 2012). The law provides the legal foundation for differentiated forms of state higher education institutions, including public universities with legal-entity status (PTN-BH). PTN-BH status provides greater authority for organizational, academic, financial, asset, and institutional management than is available under more directly administered forms of public university governance.

The expansion of PTN-BH status, however, has not eliminated national government authority. Legal-entity universities continue to operate within national higher education standards, accreditation requirements, and government regulation. The 2026 establishment of Universitas Udayana as a PTN-BH through Government Regulation No. 35 of 2026 illustrates that legal-entity status remains conferred through a formal state decision rather than emerging solely from institutional initiative (Republic of Indonesia, 2026a). The resulting arrangement combines expanded institutional discretion with continuing national regulation, consistent with the Indonesian higher education literature (Hill & Wie, 2012; Logli, 2016; Rosser, 2023).

National steering is also visible in the development of performance-oriented governance. During the MBKM period, universities received greater flexibility in academic arrangements while



institutional performance was increasingly connected to national Key Performance Indicators. From 2025, the Diktisaintek Berdampak orientation further emphasized higher education's social, economic, research, innovation, and partnership impacts. The institutional setting for these policies was strengthened through Presidential Regulation No. 189 of 2024, which established the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology and assigned it responsibility for formulating and implementing higher education policy. This regulation was subsequently amended by Presidential Regulation No. 7 of 2026 (Republic of Indonesia, 2024, 2026b).

Quality assurance provides another layer of national steering. The earlier Ministerial Regulation No. 53 of 2023 on Higher Education Quality Assurance was subsequently replaced by Ministerial Regulation No. 39 of 2025, which regulates national higher education standards, institutional standards, quality assurance, and accreditation. The latter was amended again by Ministerial Regulation No. 10 of 2026, effective from July 2026 (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi Sains dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2025, 2026). This regulatory sequence indicates that institutional autonomy operates within an evolving national quality-assurance framework rather than outside government oversight.

Tuition regulation provides more direct evidence of continuing government intervention in institutional financial decisions. Although PTN-BH universities possess greater financial discretion, tuition remains subject to national policy. Ministerial Regulation No. 2 of 2024 established rules concerning operational cost standards and tuition at public universities (Kementerian Pendidikan Tinggi Sains dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2024). The subsequent 2024 intervention over proposed tuition increases demonstrates that institutional authority over a major revenue instrument remained politically and administratively constrained.

Fiscal policy provides an additional constraint. Presidential Instruction No. 1 of 2025 instructed ministries and other government bodies to review and implement expenditure efficiencies in the 2025 state and regional budgets (Republic of Indonesia, 2025). The instruction therefore created a broader fiscal environment within which public universities and government-supported higher education activities operated.

Overall, the Indonesian configuration is characterized by five features: authority remains concentrated at the national level; institutional autonomy is formally conferred through legal status; national regulation and quality assurance remain important accountability mechanisms; institutional financing remains connected to public resources; and executive and ministerial discretion remains relevant to tuition, budgets, and strategic priorities. The resulting configuration is delegated autonomy in a centralized state.



4.2 United States: Emergent Autonomy under Conditional Centralisation

The United States exhibits a more dispersed authority structure. Public universities are principally governed by states, while the federal government influences higher education through student aid, research funding, civil rights requirements, and accreditation-related mechanisms. State governments operate through different combinations of governing boards and coordinating structures, while private accreditors influence institutional access to federal student aid. Universities therefore operate within a system involving federal, state, institutional, and accreditation actors (Kelchen, 2018; McLendon, 2003; McLendon et al., 2006).

Performance-based funding represents an important state-level accountability instrument. State funding formulas connect public resources with institutional outcomes such as completions and credit accumulation. Existing scholarship identifies mixed or limited effects in some contexts and unintended consequences associated with performance-based funding (Hillman et al., 2014, 2015; Ortagus et al., 2020). Dougherty (2015) further demonstrates that the adoption and design of performance funding are shaped by political coalitions. The latest State Higher Education Finance data show that, nationally, performance-based funding represented 13.3% of public operating funding for two-year institutions and 9.0% for four-year institutions in FY2025 (State Higher Education Executive Officers Association, 2026).

Federal developments from 2025 onward introduced additional instruments of intervention. Executive Order 14242, issued on March 20, 2025, directed the Secretary of Education to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education to the maximum extent permitted by law and to return authority over education to states and local communities. The order also linked the allocation of federal Department of Education funds to compliance with federal law and administration policy (The White House, 2025a).

Executive Order 14279, issued on April 23, 2025, further targeted higher education accreditation. The order characterized accreditors as important gatekeepers for institutions seeking access to federal student loans and Pell Grants and directed the Department of Education toward accreditation reform (The White House, 2025b).

Federal research funding provides another channel of institutional leverage. The 2025 Harvard litigation illustrates how federal funding decisions became directly connected to disputes concerning institutional policy and governmental demands. In *President and Fellows of Harvard College v. United States Department of Health and Human Services*, the District Court for the District of Massachusetts addressed federal actions freezing and terminating approximately \$2.2 billion in Harvard grants. The September 3, 2025 memorandum and order granted Harvard summary judgment on several claims and provided relief concerning the challenged funding actions (United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, 2025).

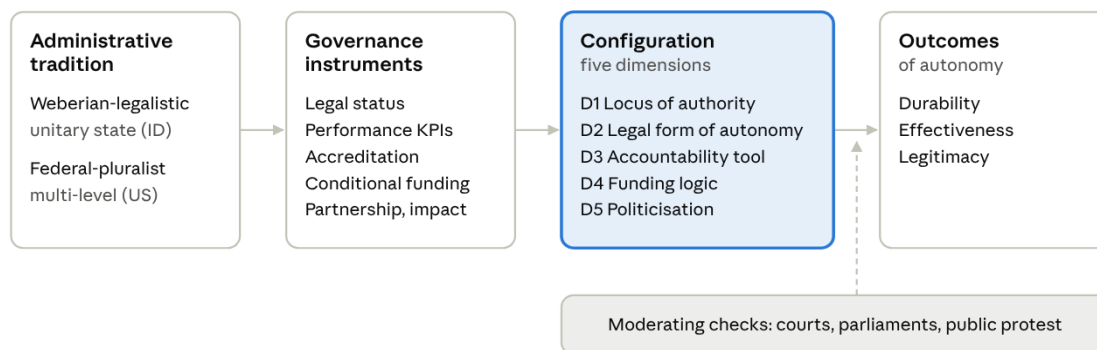


Federal legislation also introduced additional financial instruments. The One Big Beautiful Bill Act, enacted as Public Law 119-21 on July 4, 2025, modified the federal excise tax applicable to investment income of certain private colleges and universities and made changes affecting federal student-loan programs (United States Congress, 2025).

The US evidence therefore shows dispersed authority combined with dependence on strategically important public resources. Universities may benefit from multiple centers of authority, but federal or state actors can exert substantial influence when they control research funding, student aid, accreditation recognition, or other critical resources. The resulting configuration is characterized as emergent autonomy under conditional centralisation.

4.3 Comparative RAC Configuration

The comparison demonstrates that Indonesia and the United States use several similar governance instruments, including performance indicators, accreditation, conditional funding, and partnership-oriented mechanisms. The principal difference lies in the authority structures through which these instruments operate. Indonesia combines formally delegated autonomy with concentrated national authority, whereas US institutions operate within a more dispersed system of federal, state, institutional, and accreditation relationships.



Source: Authors' conceptual framework.

Figure 1. Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) Framework

Figure 1 presents the analytical sequence in which administrative tradition filters governance instruments into a configuration consisting of five dimensions: locus of authority, legal form of autonomy, dominant accountability instrument, funding logic, and degree of politicisation. The configuration is associated with the durability of autonomy, effectiveness of steering, and legitimacy of accountability, while courts, parliaments or legislatures, and public protest operate as moderating checks.



Table 1. Comparative Regulated Autonomy Configuration of Indonesia and the United States

Dimension	Indonesia	United States	Theoretical anchor
Locus of authority	Concentrated in the national executive (ministry, President, finance ministry)	Dispersed across federal government, 50 states, and private accreditors	Lane & Kivisto (2008)
Legal form of autonomy	Conferred: PTN-BH status granted by government regulation, institution by institution	Emergent: state charters, private governance, and competing principals	Clark (1983); Enders et al. (2013)
Dominant accountability instrument	Authority and nodality: national regulation, accreditation (BAN-PT/LAM), and ministerial KPIs	Treasure and authority: PBF, accreditation, conditional federal aid, and earnings test	Hood & Margetts (2007); Neave (2012)
Funding logic	State allocation plus nationally regulated tuition (UKT); limited philanthropy	Diversified: state appropriations, tuition, research grants, and endowments	Marginson (2011)

Source: Authors' analysis based on the five RAC dimensions.

Table 1 shows that the two countries differ most clearly in the location of authority and legal basis of autonomy, while both increasingly employ financial and performance-related instruments of accountability.

4.4 RAC Propositions

The comparative analysis generates six propositions for subsequent empirical testing. They summarize the recurring patterns identified across the two cases.

Table 2. RAC Propositions and Comparative Evidence

Proposition	Core mechanism	Indonesia evidence	US evidence	Expected implication
P1. Tradition as filter	Administrative tradition shapes how governance instruments are translated.	Centralized legal-administrative framework.	Multiple federal, state, institutional, and accreditation actors.	Similar instruments may produce different configurations.
P2. Reversibility	Autonomy can be constrained through executive or fiscal intervention.	2024 tuition intervention and 2025 fiscal measures.	State and federal conditional resources.	Formal autonomy can remain vulnerable to intervention.



P3. Revenue paradox	Autonomy may be limited when institutions lack control over major revenue sources.	Dependence on state assistance and regulated tuition.	Greater revenue diversity but dependence on important public resources.	Resource control affects substantive autonomy.
P4. Multi-principal shield and exposure	Multiple principals can protect or constrain institutional discretion.	National authority remains comparatively concentrated.	Federal, state, institutional, and accreditor relationships.	Fragmentation can both protect and expose autonomy.
P5. Instrument convergence, authority divergence	Governance instruments may converge while authority structures remain different.	KPIs, accreditation, and impact-oriented programmes.	PBF, accreditation, conditional aid, and research funding mechanisms.	Instrument convergence does not equal autonomy convergence.
P6. Politicisation displaces performance	Governance instruments may extend from performance steering toward political intervention.	Tuition, budgets, and strategic priorities.	DEI, accreditation, research funding, admissions, and governance.	Politicisation can alter how accountability instruments operate.

Source: Authors' analysis based on the six RAC propositions and comparative evidence.

The six propositions summarize the main comparative patterns identified in the analysis. P1 concerns the different translation of similar instruments through contrasting administrative traditions. P2 and P3 are reflected in the relationship between formal autonomy, fiscal intervention, and resource dependence. P4 captures the different consequences of multiple principals in the US system. P5 identifies convergence in governance instruments alongside continued divergence in authority structures. P6 captures the increasing presence of political considerations within governance mechanisms in both countries. Detailed theoretical interpretation of these findings is developed in the Discussion.

5. Discussion

The comparative findings suggest that regulated autonomy is better understood as a multidimensional institutional configuration than as a simple continuum ranging from low to high autonomy. The Indonesian and US cases demonstrate that universities can possess substantial formal or operational discretion while remaining strongly dependent on external authorities, funding arrangements, and accountability instruments. The theoretical significance of the RAC framework therefore lies in connecting the amount of institutional discretion to the institutional conditions under which that discretion is created, exercised, and potentially constrained.



5.1 Autonomy as Configuration Rather than a Single Level

The findings challenge approaches that treat university autonomy principally as a matter of degree. Clark's (1983) coordination triangle established that higher education systems occupy different positions according to the relative influence of the state, market, and academic community. This remains useful for distinguishing broad governance orientations, but the comparison indicates that positioning a system toward the state or market does not by itself reveal how autonomy actually operates. The United States may appear more market-oriented and decentralized, while Indonesia is more state-oriented and centralized, yet neither characteristic alone determines the practical stability of institutional discretion.

The findings are consistent with de Boer et al. (2007), who conceptualize governance through several dimensions rather than a single scale, and with Dobbins et al. (2011), whose typology distinguishes alternative governance models. They also reinforce Capano & Pritoni (2019) argument that contemporary higher education systems are generally hybrid rather than pure expressions of one governance model. The present analysis extends this insight by proposing that the relevant unit of comparison is not simply the governance model, but the configuration produced by the interaction of several dimensions.

This distinction is particularly visible in the relationship between legal and practical autonomy. PTN-BH status in Indonesia provides formal institutional authority, but national regulation and resource dependence continue to shape its exercise. In the United States, institutional autonomy is less dependent on a single legal status and more closely associated with dispersed authority and institutional governance. Yet the control of strategically important resources can still constrain institutional choices. The findings are therefore consistent with Enders et al. (2013), who emphasize that autonomy is multidimensional and that formal autonomy does not automatically translate into equivalent strategic capacity. The RAC framework adds a further question: which dimensions of autonomy are controlled by the institution, and which remain vulnerable to external intervention?

5.2 Governance Layering across Administrative Traditions

The findings also challenge a linear interpretation of administrative reform in which systems supposedly move from Weberian hierarchy to New Public Management and subsequently toward network governance. Hood (1991) and Pollitt & Bouckaert (2017) provide the foundation for understanding NPM as a shift toward performance, managerialism, and output-based control, while Osborne (2006) and Rhodes (1996) emphasize networks, interdependence, and governance beyond hierarchical government. The two cases suggest that these modes coexist rather than replace one another completely.



Indonesia combines a legalistic and centralized administrative base with NPM-style indicators and performance expectations. At the same time, newer policy language emphasizes impact, collaboration, and partnerships among universities, government, and industry. The United States presents a different layering pattern: market-oriented mechanisms and performance-based funding coexist with renewed hierarchical intervention through executive and legislative instruments. The result is not a movement from one paradigm to another, but a coexistence of governance logics.

This pattern is consistent with Christensen & Lægreid (2007) argument that administrative reforms frequently add new organizational principles without completely eliminating earlier ones. It also corresponds to Ferlie et al. (2008), who identify combinations of managerial and network-oriented governance in higher education, and to Capano (2011), who argues that governments continue to steer universities even when formal reforms appear to expand autonomy. Mahoney & Thelen (2010) concept of institutional layering is particularly useful because it explains why old and new governance principles can coexist within the same institutional arrangement.

RAC contributes to this literature by making the administrative tradition as filter explicit. Imported governance instruments do not enter institutionally neutral environments. Their meaning is shaped by constitutional arrangements, administrative structures, legal cultures, and patterns of resource dependence. The same performance instrument can consequently operate as an additional layer of national regulation in one setting and as one component of a multi-principal funding system in another. The framework therefore shifts attention from identifying which governance paradigm a system belongs to toward explaining how multiple paradigms are assembled within a particular administrative tradition.

5.3 Principal-Agent Theory and Reversibility

The comparison also extends the principal-agent perspective by emphasizing the credibility and reversibility of delegated autonomy. Moe (1984) conceptualizes delegation as a means of assigning authority to specialized organizations under conditions of information asymmetry and divergent interests. In higher education, however, delegation does not necessarily produce durable institutional discretion. The crucial issue is whether the principal retains effective mechanisms for reversing or constraining the delegation.

Lane & Kivisto (2008) highlight the importance of multiple principals in higher education, while Kivistö (2008) emphasizes the control problems inherent in the principal-agent relationship. The present framework adds reversibility as a condition of autonomy. Where institutional discretion can be rapidly altered through budget decisions, tuition regulation, executive intervention, or control over critical resources, formal delegation may be less durable than its legal form suggests.



This does not imply that reversibility inevitably produces weak governance. Rather, it suggests that the credibility of institutional autonomy is partly dependent on the institutional costs of reversing it. In Indonesia, the concentration of authority makes reversal comparatively direct. In the United States, multiple principals can create greater room for institutional maneuver, but resource concentration can produce similar exposure when one principal controls a strategically important funding or regulatory mechanism. RAC therefore extends principal–agent analysis by treating the durability of delegated discretion as an analytically distinct issue.

5.4 Policy Instruments and Politicisation

The findings further demonstrate that policy instruments cannot be interpreted independently of their political context. Hood & Margetts (2007) distinguish instruments according to resources such as authority, treasure, nodality, and organization. These categories are useful for identifying how governments steer universities, but the comparison shows that the same instrument may assume different functions depending on who controls it and what objectives are attached to it.

Lascoumes & Le Gales (2007) conceptualize instruments as institutional arrangements that shape relationships between governing actors and governed organizations. The findings support this interpretation. Accreditation, performance indicators, and conditional funding do not merely measure or reward institutional performance; they can also influence organizational priorities and redefine the boundaries of acceptable institutional behavior. Bevan & Hood (2006) warning concerning target-based performance systems is therefore relevant: once particular outcomes become targets, institutions may adapt their strategies to the measurement system itself.

This becomes particularly important when accountability instruments become politicised. A performance mechanism may initially seek to improve efficiency or completion rates but can subsequently be used to influence institutional values, academic organization, admissions, leadership, or curriculum. The distinction between performance steering and value steering therefore becomes increasingly important. RAC's sixth proposition, *politicisation displaces performance*, captures this possibility without assuming that every political intervention necessarily has the same consequences. Where political intervention becomes more prominent, the legitimacy of accountability may depend increasingly on whether the instrument retains a credible connection to its stated performance purpose.

5.5 Implications for Comparative Higher Education Governance

For Indonesia, the findings are broadly consistent with Hill & Wie (2012), Logli (2016), and Rosser (2023), which together indicate that autonomy reforms have expanded institutional discretion without removing the influence of the state and political authorities. RAC adds that the sustainability of this autonomy depends on the relationship between legal status and resource control. The PTN-BH model is therefore better understood not simply as an increase in autonomy,



but as a configuration in which organizational and managerial authority expands while fiscal and regulatory dependence remains significant.

For the United States, the findings complement McLendon (2003) and McLendon et al. (2006) by demonstrating that federal fragmentation does not automatically protect institutional autonomy. Multiple principals can provide institutional space when authority is divided, but that protection is weakened when one actor controls a resource on which institutions depend. Kelchen (2018) similarly demonstrates the importance of the broader accountability architecture linking institutions, states, accreditors, and federal policy. The RAC framework consequently treats multi-principal governance as both a potential shield and exposure, rather than assuming that decentralization necessarily increases autonomy.

The findings concerning performance-based funding also complement Hillman et al., (2014, 2015), Dougherty (2015), and Ortagus et al. (2020). The mixed evidence concerning PBF effectiveness suggests that performance-based governance should not be evaluated solely according to whether funding formulas produce the intended outputs. Political design, institutional incentives, and unintended behavioral responses are also relevant. RAC's emphasis on the dominant accountability instrument therefore encourages analysis of not only what an instrument measures, but also who designs it, what resources are attached to it, and how institutions respond.

Funding structure represents another important comparative implication. Marginson (2011) highlights the importance of resources in understanding higher education systems, and the present framework places funding logic directly within the configuration of autonomy. Institutions with diversified revenue sources may possess greater strategic room, but diversification alone does not guarantee autonomy when particular revenue streams remain highly conditional. The findings therefore suggest that control over resources, rather than revenue volume alone, is a critical component of institutional autonomy.

Taken together, the six RAC propositions provide the principal theoretical contribution of the study. P1 (Tradition as filter) receives comparative support from the different ways in which similar instruments operate in Indonesia and the United States. P2 (Reversibility) and P3 (Revenue paradox) receive particularly strong illustrative support from the Indonesian experience with tuition regulation and fiscal dependence. P4 (Multi-principal shield and exposure) is especially visible in the United States, where fragmented authority can simultaneously protect institutional discretion and create vulnerability through resource dependence. P5 (Instrument convergence, authority divergence) is supported across both cases through their shared use of performance, accreditation, and conditional funding instruments despite different authority structures. P6 (Politicisation displaces performance) is illustrated by the growing use of higher education



governance instruments in politically contested areas in both systems. These patterns provide illustrative rather than causal support, and the propositions remain open to empirical testing across additional countries and institutional settings.

Overall, the discussion suggests that the central theoretical value of RAC is its ability to connect administrative tradition, governance instruments, institutional autonomy, resource dependence, and politicisation within one comparative framework. Autonomy is consequently not treated as a fixed institutional attribute but as a configuration whose durability and legitimacy depend on how authority and resources are organized.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how regulated autonomy is constructed across two contrasting higher education governance traditions and identified the dimensions that best explain their similarities and differences. The comparison shows that university autonomy is better understood as a configuration of authority, legal form, accountability instruments, funding structures, and politicisation than as a single continuum ranging from low to high autonomy. The first research question is therefore answered by showing that administrative tradition shapes how autonomy is established and constrained. Indonesia represents delegated autonomy in a centralized state, in which institutional discretion is formally conferred through PTN-BH status but remains closely connected to national regulation and fiscal authority. The United States represents emergent autonomy under conditional centralisation, where institutional discretion develops through federalism, multiple principals, and institutional governance but remains vulnerable to actors controlling critical public resources.

The second research question is addressed through the five RAC dimensions: locus of authority, legal form of autonomy, dominant accountability instrument, funding logic, and degree of politicisation. These dimensions provide a common basis for comparing systems that differ substantially in constitutional and administrative structure. The third question is addressed through six propositions concerning administrative tradition as a filter, reversibility, the revenue paradox, the multi-principal shield and exposure, instrument convergence with authority divergence, and the displacement of performance by politicisation.

The principal theoretical contribution is the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework, which connects administrative tradition to governance instruments and institutional outcomes. The framework provides illustrative support for the six propositions but does not establish statistical causality. Its principal limitation is therefore its conceptual character and reliance on two contrasting cases. Future research should empirically test RAC through cross-national datasets, longitudinal institutional analysis, and comparative studies of university funding, accountability, and political intervention.



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Supplementary Materials

No supplementary materials are provided separately for this study. All documents, supporting information, analysis results, and materials relevant to the systematic literature review process have been presented and integrated into the manuscript.

Author Contributions

Dimas Husemahu developed the central research concept and the Regulated Autonomy Configuration (RAC) framework, formulated the education policy argument, and drafted the initial manuscript. Asma Wati Wabula reviewed the comparative education policy literature, analyzed Indonesian higher education policy documents, and contributed to writing and revising the relevant sections. Roland Ndun reviewed the literature on higher education governance and institutional autonomy, analyzed the United States higher education system, and contributed to drafting the corresponding sections. Abraham Felayau Yoku contributed to the comparative analysis of university governance, prepared the RAC table and diagram, and refined the discussion of implications for university leaders. Jonathan Luly Barnabas Ramandey developed the public administration perspective, particularly the discussion of Weberian bureaucracy, New Public Management, and New Public Governance, and contributed to writing and revising the theoretical foundations. Azaria Yacobus Kurey analyzed policy instruments, funding arrangements, and accountability mechanisms, and contributed to writing and revising the analysis of government–university relations. Muhammad Adi Nurcahyono contributed to the analysis of principal–agent relationships, the distribution of authority, and politicization, and refined the theoretical propositions and policy implications. Markus Donald Wetipo contributed to the synthesis of the higher education literature, critically reviewed the interpretation of institutional autonomy and accountability, and helped refine the discussion of implications for higher education institutions.

Institutional Review Board Statement

Not applicable. This study is a systematic literature review utilizing published scientific data and documents available through academic sources. The study did not involve human subjects, patients, research participants, personal or sensitive data, or specific experiments requiring approval from an ethics committee or Institutional Review Board.



Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study did not directly involve human participants, and all data used were derived from existing scientific publications and academic sources. Therefore, informed consent was not required for this study.

Data Availability Statement

The data used in this study were derived from scientific publications identified and analyzed through a systematic literature review process, following the search, screening, selection, and analysis procedures described in the methodology section. All information supporting the research findings—including the characteristics of the analyzed studies, data extraction results, analysis outcomes, and the synthesis of findings—is presented within the manuscript. There are no additional datasets or supporting materials stored separately from this manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the conduct of the research, the writing of the manuscript, or the publication of this article.

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