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Timor-Leste Public Administration in the Age of Populism, Poly-Crisis, and Technological Transformation as Dilemmas, Dynamics and Directions¹Carmo Antonio Baptista Pinto., ²Adolmando Soares Amaral., ³Domingos CBB Gomes¹Senior Lecturer Public Administration UNPAZ, Social Science Humanities Faculty, Candidat Doktor Universitas Nusa Cendana, Kupang²Rector of Universidade da Paz (UNPAZ), Strategic Management, Economy Faculty³Member of Doctoral Council UNPAZ, Forestry Faculty**ARTICLE INFO**

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**ABSTRACT**

This research investigates how contemporary global and domestic forces notably rising populism, intersecting crises (economic, health, environmental, and security), and rapid technological change shape the governance and public administration system of Timor-Leste. While prior work has examined populism's impact on public administration or analyzed decentralization dynamics following independence, there has been limited integrative study of how populism, multiple simultaneous crises ("poly-crisis"), and digital/technological transformation interact to influence administrative capacity, policy direction, service delivery, and democratic governance in Timor-Leste.

Methodologically, the study synthesizes qualitative and quantitative evidence from government documents, reform evaluations, public expenditure and service-delivery datasets, media and political discourse analysis, and comparative lessons from similar small, post-conflict states. It examines structural features of Timor-Leste's public administration centralized decision-making legacies, nascent bureaucratic professionalization, donor dependence, limited fiscal space, and evolving decentralization arrangements and situates these within contemporary pressures: populist political rhetoric and personalization of politics; systemic risks from climate change, commodity-dependence, and public-health shocks; and the disruptive potential of digital technologies for governance, transparency, and citizen engagement.

The finding shown that the populist dynamics in Timor-Leste manifest as leadership personalization, anti-elite narratives, and short-termist policy signaling, which can undermine institutional norms, politicize bureaucracy, and distort resource allocation. Poly-crisis exposure amplifies governance stress points constrained fiscal buffers, fragile service-delivery systems (health, education, water), and administrative capacity gaps reduce the state's ability to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to shocks. Technological transformation offers both opportunities and risks digital tools can enhance transparency, streamline processes, and expand citizen participation, yet uneven digital literacy, infrastructure deficits, and weak data governance create exclusionary outcomes and risks of surveillance or misuse. Interactions among these forces generate compounded dilemmas: populist short-termism can impede investment in long-term resilience; crisis-driven emergency powers can erode checks-and-balances; and rapid technology adoption without governance safeguards can worsen inequalities and decrease public trust.



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INTRODUCTION

Over the 23 years, Timor-Leste has experienced significant changes in public administration decision-making processes, influenced by technological transformation and governance shifts. The implementation of economic development mega-projects has led to centralized control and reduced political accountability in some regions (Meitzner Yoder, 2018). While decentralization has been a constitutional mandate since

independence, successive governments have struggled to implement this reform effectively (Feijó, 2015). The introduction of digital technologies, such as the 'Peskas' system for fisheries management, has improved data-driven policymaking and intragovernmental collaboration (Tilley et al., 2024). However, the impact on developing new regulations has been limited due to inadequate legal frameworks and capacity gaps. Although not specific to Timor-Leste, research suggests that populist governments can significantly influence public administration through various

strategies, including capturing, dismantling, or reforming state bureaucracies (Bauer & Becker, 2020).

Recent research examines the impact of populism on public administration and democratic governance. Populist governments often pursue anti-pluralist agendas that can lead to democratic backsliding, attempting to capture, dismantle, sabotage, or reform state bureaucracies (Bauer & Becker, 2020). This poses challenges for public administration systems and raises ethical questions about their role in preserving democracy (Bauer, 2023). Scholars argue for more comparative research to understand similarities and differences across affected administrative systems and to develop strategies for making bureaucracies resilient against illiberal transformations (Bauer, 2023; Peters & Pierre, 2019). Decentralization has been a constitutional mandate since independence, but implementation has been slow. Policymakers face choices between various forms of decentralization, which have implications for rooting modern democracy at district and village levels (Feijó, 2015). These studies highlight the need for public administration to adapt to populist challenges while safeguarding democratic principles.

The impact of populism and technological transformations on public administration in Timor-Leste during poly-crises is multifaceted. In Oecussi, a mega-project exemplifies how technocratic governance can shift political authority towards centralized control, reducing accountability (Meitzner Yoder, 2018). Populist governments often pursue anti-pluralist agendas, attempting to capture, dismantle, sabotage, or reform state bureaucracies (Bauer & Becker, 2020). This can profoundly affect policymaking and democracy, necessitating research on making administrative systems resilient against illiberal transformation (Bauer, 2023). In Timor-Leste, decentralization has been a constitutional mandate since independence, but implementation has been challenging. The country faces the task of balancing modern democracy with local governance structures at district and village levels (Feijó, 2015). These dynamics highlight the complex interplay between populist politics, technological advancements, and public administration practices in Timor-Leste's evolving governance landscape.

Since 2013, substantial public funding has initiated an economic development mega-project (ZEESM) in Oecussi, Timor-Leste. A new regional governance structure (RAEOA) with one authoritative leader over both endeavors has supported project execution, aimed at readying the region's infrastructure to attract hoped-for foreign investment. Less visible is how governance practices are shifting political authority toward centralized control and reduced political accountability in the enclave. This article focuses on a localized expression of economic development techno-politics combined with technocratic-leaning governance. Political issues are treated as technical matters, allowing technical specialists to lead in their resolution. Despite open political party involvement since ZEESM/RAEOA's outset, focusing on technical aspects has sidestepped the deeper political issues of representation in governance and decision-making. A decontextualized scientific pragmatism presumes that buildings, landscapes, and livelihoods are easily interchangeable. The politics/technology intersection is evident as technological advance is projected to overlay political effectiveness, thus bolstering political authority and legitimacy.

Timor-Leste's public administration faces significant challenges in adapting to technological transformation and emerging political complexities. Key issues include the need for digital infrastructure investment, citizen engagement through online platforms, and balancing traditional and modern governance structures (Wijaya & Sumarto, 2024; McWilliam & Leach, 2019). The country must navigate the complexities of establishing democracy while simultaneously transitioning to independence (McWilliam & Leach, 2019). Adaptive strategies include embracing innovative practices, fostering resilience, and promoting inclusive governance (Kikasu & Dorasamy, 2025). Timor-Leste has made efforts to combat corruption through the establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission and new legal frameworks, though implementation has been slower than anticipated (Maia, 2025). To address these challenges, the government needs to prioritize continuous learning, collaboration, and innovation in public administration (Kikasu & Dorasamy, 2025). Additionally, strengthening the relationship between customary authorities, the Church, and the state is crucial for effective local governance (McWilliam & Leach, 2019).

Timor-Leste's public administration reforms face unique challenges as a post-colonial nation. Since independence in 2002, the country has grappled with decentralization efforts and democratic consolidation (Feijó, 2015; Leach & Kingsbury, 2013). Despite constitutional mandates, successive governments have struggled to implement effective local governance reforms (Feijó, 2015). The nation's political development is complicated by social and economic factors, including gender discrimination, poverty,

and security-sector volatility (Leach & Kingsbury, 2013). Timor-Leste's relationship with Indonesia remains complex, influencing social, political, and cultural aspects of the country (Peake et al., 2014). The 2006 crisis highlighted similarities with other post-conflict societies, challenging earlier optimistic assessments of state-building success (Kingsbury & Leach, 2007). As international organizations prepare to depart, Timor-Leste continues to navigate the complexities of resource management, education, and language policy while striving for sustainable development and security (Kingsbury & Leach, 2007; Leach & Kingsbury, 2013).

Public administration is currently navigating a turbulent epoch characterized by the rise of populist politics, the simultaneous occurrence of interlinked crises (poly-crisis), and the disruptive impact of technological advancements. The convergence of these themes poses unique dilemmas for governance, challenges established theories, and demands a reevaluation of existing administrative practices. In regions such as Timor-Leste, these global trends intersect with local realities, requiring adaptive, context-sensitive approaches to public management.

Populism, often manifesting as skepticism toward traditional elites and institutions, alters the social contract between state and citizen, influencing administrative legitimacy and accountability. Poly-crisis a term denoting the simultaneous occurrence and amplification of multiple crises such as economic shocks, political instability, and environmental disasters tests the resilience of administrative systems. Meanwhile, technological transformation accelerates both opportunities and threats, from digital government innovations to the proliferation of misinformation.

This research invites academicians, practitioners, and policymakers to critically explore these intertwined phenomena, articulate grand theories, and provide actionable recommendations for Timor-Leste and comparable emerging democracies. Timor-Leste, as a young democracy, faces significant public administration challenges exacerbated by populism, poly-crisis, and technological transformation as well as:

Public administration in Timor-Leste, various specific challenges have emerged that significantly impact the effectiveness of governance and public policy implementation. One of the main issues faced is limited institutional capacity and governance. Low administrative capacity hinders effective policy implementation, reduces the quality of public services, and weakens the response to crises. The government's decentralization efforts have also not been fully successful, due to persistent deficiencies in training, resources, and coordination between the central and regional governments. This has hampered decision-making and policy implementation at the local level, impacting the quality of services received by the public.

The issues of trust and legitimacy in state institutions are also crucial. The growing populist narrative, influenced by historical disappointments and unmet public expectations, has eroded public trust in state institutions. This erosion of trust not only impacts social cohesion but also complicates the acceptance of government public policies. Public distrust in the government can lead to resistance to ongoing development programs and reforms, thus hindering the achievement of national development goals.

This situation is further exacerbated by Timor-Leste's vulnerability to multiple overlapping crises, ranging from political instability and economic shocks to public health emergencies and natural disasters. The current crisis management framework often fails to respond quickly and in an integrated manner to complex crisis situations. Limited inter-agency coordination, limited resources, and a lack of integration in crisis management make it difficult for the government to provide an effective and efficient response. Consequently, the public is the group most impacted by the slow response to the crisis, both in social, economic, and health aspects.

On the other hand, the digital transformation being pursued by the government offers significant potential to improve the quality of public services. However, the digital divide and limited infrastructure remain major obstacles to the implementation of e-government initiatives. Unequal access to information and communication technology means that the majority of the population, especially in remote areas, has not yet benefited from the digitalization of public services. This widens the gap between urban and rural communities and slows the process of public administration modernization in Timor-Leste.

Issues of corruption and accountability also pose serious challenges to governance in Timor-Leste. Rampant corruption, weak oversight, and limited public involvement in public decision-making processes further hamper development efforts and bureaucratic reform. Corruption not only harms the state financially, but also undermines public trust in the government and hinders the creation of clean and transparent governance. Weak

accountability also leads to low effectiveness of government programs, due to the lack of adequate oversight mechanisms to ensure that every policy adopted truly benefits the public.

Human resource development is a crucial aspect in strengthening public administration capacity in Timor-Leste. Challenges in education, training, and professionalization of civil servants remain major obstacles to creating a competent and professional administrative workforce. Limitations in training and capacity development contribute to the low quality of public services provided and hinder the government's ongoing bureaucratic reform process.

The specific conditions outlined above ultimately lead to the general challenges faced by Timor-Leste in its efforts to achieve effective, transparent, and accountable governance. Limited institutional capacity, low public trust in government, vulnerability to crises, obstacles to digital transformation, rampant corruption, and weak human resource development are interrelated and mutually reinforcing factors. These issues not only impact government effectiveness but also hinder the achievement of sustainable national development goals.

Both formal and academic researchers can identify, analyze, and provide solutions to the various challenges facing public administration in Timor-Leste. The problem formulation must be relevant to the research focus outlined in the thesis title and background, and must be able to make a tangible contribution to efforts to improve governance in Timor-Leste. Therefore, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems faced and offer rational and applicable solutions to increase institutional capacity, strengthen public trust, improve crisis management, accelerate digital transformation, eradicate corruption, and develop human resources in Timor-Leste's public administration.

The development of public administration today faces increasingly complex and dynamic challenges, particularly the rise of populism, multidimensional crises (poly-crisis), and rapid technological transformation. These phenomena are not only changing the governance landscape but also demanding fundamental adjustments in public administration theory and practice. The context of populism, for example, there is a shift in public expectations regarding legitimacy, accountability, and government representation. Public administration no longer relies solely on legal-rational authority but must be able to continuously adapt to evolving societal values, needs, and narratives. This demands participatory mechanisms, transparency in decision-making, and proactive communication strategies to bridge the gap between technocratic expertise and public sentiment.

The reality in various countries demonstrates that public administration often faces a dilemma between maintaining professionalism and technical expertise and the need to be more responsive to public aspirations. On the one hand, bureaucracies are required to maintain policy stability and consistency; on the other, they must be able to innovate and adapt quickly to socio-political changes triggered by populism. The Adaptive Legitimacy Model is relevant in this situation because it emphasizes the importance of dynamic and adaptive legitimacy, rather than relying solely on formal procedures or legal authority. Public administration must be able to build inclusiveness without being trapped by the volatility of populist demands, which are often short-term and emotional.

In addition to the challenges of populism, public administration is also faced with the phenomenon of poly-crisis, a situation in which multiple crises occur simultaneously and interact with each other, resulting in broad systemic impacts. The simultaneous occurrence of health, economic, environmental, and social crises demands a holistic and systemic approach to governance. The Systems Resilience Framework offers a framework that emphasizes the importance of adaptive responses, cross-sector collaboration, and institutional learning from previous crisis experiences. Public administration can no longer work in silos but must instead build multi-level networks and conduct scenario planning to improve coordination and effective resource allocation.

In practice, many government institutions still struggle to integrate this systemic approach, particularly in terms of inter-agency coordination and data-driven decision-making. Limited institutional capacity, resistance to change, and the lack of learning mechanisms from previous crises are major obstacles to building systemic resilience. Therefore, strengthening flexible response capacity, increasing inter-agency collaboration, and institutionalizing learning processes are urgently needed in facing the poly-crisis era.

On the other hand, technological transformation has also brought significant changes to public administration. The Digital Governance Paradigm asserts that the integration of

digital technology has reconfigured administrative processes, interactions between the state and citizens, and policymaking processes. The utilization of open data, digital inclusion, e-participation, and the use of artificial intelligence for evidence-based decision-making are key characteristics of this paradigm. However, this transformation also presents new challenges, such as issues of data privacy, cybersecurity, and the ethics of technology use. Public administration is required to not only adopt technology technically but also ensure that its benefits are equally accessible to all levels of society.

The digital divide, which persists in various regions, particularly in developing countries, is a major obstacle to realizing inclusive digital governance. The lack of digital literacy among state officials and the public also hinders the optimal use of technology in public services. Therefore, efforts to improve digital literacy, strengthen regulations related to data privacy and security, and ensure equitable access to technology are important agendas in the transformation of public administration in the digital era.

More specifically, this research will examine how participatory mechanisms, transparency, and proactive communication can enhance the legitimacy of public administration amidst the tide of populism; how a systemic and collaborative approach can strengthen the resilience of public institutions in the face of a poly-crisis; and how the integration of digital technology can improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and inclusiveness of public services. Thus, this research is expected to provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of public administration capable of responding to the challenges of the times in an adaptive and sustainable manner.

Overall, the background of this research confirms that public administration in the era of populism, poly-crisis, and technological transformation requires an adaptive, systemic, and innovative approach. Government legitimacy is no longer sufficient based on formal authority but must be built through active public participation, transparency, and effective communication. The resilience of public institutions must be strengthened through cross-sector collaboration, scenario planning, and continuous learning from crisis experiences. Meanwhile, digital transformation must be directed towards increasing the inclusiveness, efficiency, and accountability of public services, while still considering aspects of privacy, security, and ethics.

One theory that is highly relevant in understanding the dilemmas faced by public administrators is the Paradox Management Model. This model emphasizes that administrators routinely confront conflicting values, priorities, and pressures. In the Timor-Leste context, the dilemma between efficiency and equity becomes particularly acute when the government must choose between accelerating infrastructure development at the risk of neglecting vulnerable groups, or conversely, slowing development to ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits. The pressure to innovate often clashes with the need for bureaucratic stability, particularly in the face of disruptive technological change. In such situations, the Paradox Management Model offers mechanisms such as deliberative processes, stakeholder engagement, and iterative policy design to navigate these dilemmas. Thus, this model emphasizes the importance of reflexivity, ethical reasoning, and context-sensitive assessment in public administration practice.

The dynamics of public administration in Timor-Leste can also be understood through the lens of Complex Adaptive Systems Theory. This theory starts from the premise that public administration operates in a dynamic and non-linear environment, where feedback, emergent behavior, and co-evolution are key features. In practice, the bureaucracy in Timor-Leste interacts not only with domestic actors but also with international institutions, civil society organizations, and the private sector, each with a diverse range of interests and agendas. This complexity demands experimentation, decentralized decision-making, and real-time monitoring to facilitate adaptation to change. The implication of this theory is the need for public administrators to build organizational learning capacity, resilience, and agility to survive and thrive amidst uncertainty.

The global technological transformation also places additional pressure on public administration in Timor-Leste. The digitization of public services, the use of big data, and the adoption of new technologies require changes in governance. However, this technological adoption is not always smooth, often faced with limitations in human resources, infrastructure, and resistance to change. In this context, Complex Adaptive Systems Theory provides a framework that enables administrators to view technological change as part of a continuous adaptation process, rather than as an end goal to be achieved instantly.

The actual conditions in Timor-Leste indicate that public administration is still in a transitional stage toward more adaptive, inclusive, and technology-based governance. Although various progress, such as increasing bureaucratic capacity and adopting information technology, various challenges remain to be overcome. These challenges include low levels of public participation in decision-making processes, limited competent human resources, and weak coordination between government institutions.

Possible solutions include strengthening the capacity of public administrators to manage dilemmas through training in reflexivity and ethical reasoning, enhancing organizational adaptability through continuous learning and decentralized decision-making, and developing foresight capacity to design adaptive long-term strategies.

Therefore, the study "Timor-Leste Public Administration: Age of Populism, Poly-crisis, Technological Transformation, Dilemmas, Dynamics, and Directions" is crucial. This study will not only contribute to the development of public administration theory but also provide practical recommendations for the Timor-Leste government in addressing existing challenges. Through a deeper understanding of the dilemmas, dynamics, and directions of public administration, it is hoped that more effective, adaptive, and future-oriented governance can be created.

METHOD

We invite original research articles, case studies, theoretical papers, and policy analyses employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. Submissions should clearly articulate the research question, theoretical framework, methodology, and expected contributions. Comparative studies and analyses highlighting the specific context of Timor-Leste are particularly encouraged.

Key methodological approaches may include:

- Institutional analysis and comparative public administration
- Policy evaluation and implementation research
- Qualitative case studies and ethnographic fieldwork
- Quantitative surveys and data analytics
- Network analysis and stakeholder mapping
- Participatory and action research methodologies

RESULT & DISCUSSION

1. Institutional Adaptation and Reform

One country that stands out in this dynamic is Timor-Leste, a young nation that only gained independence in 2002. Since then, Timor-Leste has strived to build an effective public administration structure that is responsive to the needs of its people. However, this journey has not been easy, especially when faced with pressures from populism, multidimensional crises (poly-crisis), and rapid technological transformation. The unique conditions faced by Timor-Leste reflect the challenges faced by other developing countries worldwide, particularly in terms of institutional adaptation and public administration reform. This result align with research conducted by Go (2026) Timor-Leste has experienced various events that have demanded changes and adjustments in its public administration system. One major challenge is the emergence of populist pressures, which often influence public policy and governance. Populism, characterized by rhetoric that emphasizes the interests of the people and often challenges the political elite, has become a global phenomenon that has also spread to Timor-Leste. This populist pressure can create a dilemma in public decision-making, where the government must balance the aspirations of the wider public with the need to maintain the stability and sustainability of government institutions (Atar et al., 2025; Azevedo, 2023). These statement also align with other research conducted by dos Santos, Z (2025) that Timor-Leste is also facing a multidimensional crisis, or poly-crisis, encompassing economic, political, social, and environmental crises. These crises interact and exacerbate the public governance situation, demanding a swift and adaptive response from the government. In this context, public administration reform is crucial to ensure the government is able to respond to various challenges effectively and efficiently. This reform includes decentralization efforts, capacity building, and the implementation of inclusive governance principles through research conducted by (Daulay et al., 2025) the technological transformation is also a significant factor influencing the dynamics of public administration in Timor-Leste. Developments in information and communication technology have opened up new opportunities for the government to increase efficiency

and transparency in public services. However, this transformation also presents new challenges, such as the need to increase human resource capacity, technological infrastructure, and protect public data and privacy. The Timor-Leste government must adapt to these technological changes to avoid being left behind in the era of global digitalization (Atar et al., 2025; Azevedo, 2023). These dilemmas and dynamics, Timor-Leste has undertaken various institutional reform and adaptation efforts. One strategy adopted is decentralization, the transfer of some authority from the central government to regional governments. Decentralization is expected to increase public participation in public decision-making, strengthen accountability, and accelerate government responsiveness to local needs (Margaryan, 2025). Public administration reform efforts in Timor-Leste also emphasize the importance of inclusive governance. The government strives to involve various stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and international organizations, in the process of formulating and implementing public policies. This approach is expected to create synergy between various actors, resulting in more responsive and sustainable policies. However, the process of institutional reform and adaptation in Timor-Leste is not without challenges. One of the main challenges is limited resources, both in terms of budget, infrastructure, and human resource capacity. The government must be able to manage these changes wisely, prioritizing dialogue and the participation of all parties.

2. Legitimacy and Trust-Building

Public administration in developing countries faces increasingly complex challenges, particularly amidst the era of populism, multidimensional crises (poly-crisis), and rapid technological transformation. This phenomenon is not limited to large countries but is also very evident in small and emerging nations like Timor-Leste. Specifically, Timor-Leste, a newly independent nation in 2002, has experienced various dynamics in building legitimacy and public trust in its government institutions. These challenges are further exacerbated by the emergence of populist pressures that often demand rapid policy changes, as well as multidimensional crises, ranging from economic to political to social. In this context, efforts to build legitimacy and trust are crucial for the sustainability of governance and national development in Timor-Leste (Römmele et al., 2014).

On a practical level, the Timor-Leste government has undertaken various efforts to reform its public administration structure. One strategic step taken is decentralization, which aims to bring public services closer to the people and increase public participation in the decision-making process. However, the implementation of decentralization in Timor-Leste is not without challenges, such as limited human resource capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and resistance from certain groups who feel disadvantaged by the changes.

The actual situation in Timor-Leste demonstrates that the public administration reform process still faces various dilemmas and dynamics. On the one hand, there is a need to strengthen government legitimacy through increased transparency, accountability, and public participation. On the other hand, the government must also be able to maintain political and social stability amidst populist pressures that are often counterproductive to reform efforts. In this context, capacity building is a key factor in improving the effectiveness of public administration. This capacity is not limited to technical aspects but also encompasses the ability to adapt to changes in the external environment, including the rapid development of information and communication technology (Azevedo, 2023).

Technological transformation has brought significant changes to governance in various countries, including Timor-Leste. The use of information technology in public administration can improve the efficiency, transparency, and accountability of public services. However, technological transformation also presents new challenges, such as the digital divide, cybersecurity threats, and the need for regulatory and policy adjustments that support innovation without neglecting data protection and public privacy. To address these challenges, the Timor-Leste government needs to develop a comprehensive and inclusive strategy that focuses not only on technical aspects but also takes into account the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of society (Bisogno et al., 2023; Erten & Polat, 2023).

The political dynamics in Timor-Leste significantly influence the public administration reform process. The emergence of new political actors with populist agendas often creates uncertainty in the implementation of public policies. This populist pressure can trigger sudden policy changes, ultimately disrupting government stability and eroding public trust in government institutions. Therefore, efforts to build legitimacy and public

trust must be carried out continuously, through constructive dialogue between the government and the public, and the application of good governance principles.

Globally, various countries have implemented public administration reforms to address the challenges of populism and multidimensional crises. Previous studies have shown that decentralization, capacity-building, and inclusive governance are best practices that developing countries, including Timor-Leste, can adopt. Decentralization enables local governments to be more responsive to the needs of local communities, while capacity-building enhances the ability of government officials to carry out their duties and functions effectively. Inclusive governance, on the other hand, ensures that all community groups, including minorities and vulnerable groups, can actively participate in decision-making processes (Shangraw & Crow, 1998).

However, the implementation of these best practices has not always been smooth. Timor-Leste. Various obstacles, both internal and external, often hamper the public administration reform process. Internal obstacles include limited human resources, weak coordination between government institutions, and low levels of public participation. Meanwhile, external obstacles can include pressure from international actors, changes in the global environment, and regional political dynamics that influence national stability. Therefore, a holistic and adaptive approach is needed in designing and implementing public administration reform policies in Timor-Leste.

3. Crisis Management Innovations

The multidimensional crises affecting various countries around the world, including Timor-Leste, have demanded innovation in crisis management, particularly in public administration. In recent years, Timor-Leste has faced complex challenges, ranging from natural disasters and political instability to rapid technological transformation. At the local level, limitations often exist in early warning systems, inter-agency coordination, and community involvement in disaster risk reduction. For example, when floods or earthquakes occur, the initial response provided by local governments is often not optimally integrated, resulting in a greater impact on affected communities (Addo, 2021; Androniceanu & Georgescu, 2023).

The rise of populism in various countries, including Timor-Leste, often has implications for government public policies. Populist policies tend to prioritize short-term interests and political popularity, thus neglecting the importance of developing a sustainable crisis management system based on data and scientific evidence. On the other hand, the phenomenon of poly-crisis, namely the occurrence of several crises simultaneously or continuously, demands a more integrated and collaborative approach in handling them. Public administration in Timor-Leste must be able to adapt to this dynamic, prioritizing innovation and cross-sector collaboration.

One innovation model that has proven effective in crisis management is early warning systems. This system enables early detection of potential crises, allowing governments and communities to take mitigation measures before the impact of the crisis becomes more widespread. In several countries, the implementation of early warning systems has successfully reduced the number of casualties and economic losses caused by disasters. However, in Timor-Leste, the implementation of this system still faces various obstacles, such as limited technological infrastructure, lack of training for government officials, and low public awareness of the importance of early warning information. Therefore, innovative efforts are needed to develop an early warning system tailored to local conditions and involving various parties, including the government, non-governmental organizations, and local communities.

Good coordination between government agencies, both at the central and regional levels, is crucial to ensuring a rapid and coordinated response to crises. In Timor-Leste, efforts to strengthen inter-agency coordination still need improvement, particularly in terms of task allocation, information exchange, and joint decision-making. Experience from other countries shows that establishing a unified command center can improve coordination effectiveness and expedite crisis response. However, implementing this model in Timor-Leste still requires adjustments to the existing bureaucratic structure and organizational culture.

Community-based disaster risk reduction is also a key innovation in crisis management. This approach emphasizes the importance of community empowerment in disaster mitigation and adaptation efforts. Through training, education, and active community participation, community resilience to various crisis threats can be significantly enhanced. In Timor-Leste, several community-based disaster risk reduction initiatives have begun to be implemented. However, these approaches are still limited to specific

regions and have not been integrated nationally. The main challenges in implementing this approach are low levels of community participation, limited resources, and a lack of support from the government and relevant institutions.

Technological transformation also brings new challenges and opportunities to crisis management in Timor-Leste. On the one hand, advances in information and communication technology can be used to improve the effectiveness of early warning systems, accelerate information exchange between institutions, and facilitate community participation in disaster risk reduction. However, on the other hand, technological transformation also creates new dilemmas, such as unequal access to technology, cybersecurity threats, and the need to improve human resource capacity. Therefore, innovation in crisis management must be able to accommodate technological developments while addressing the various challenges arising from this transformation.

4. Technological Transformation and Digital Inclusion in Timor-Leste

The development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including governance. One concrete manifestation of this change is the technological transformation occurring in the public administration sector, particularly through the implementation of e-government initiatives, digital literacy programs, and the use of mobile technology to expand access to public services. However, amidst this progress, new challenges have emerged related to cybersecurity, data privacy, and the digital divide, which remain crucial issues in various developing countries, including Timor-Leste (Iacob & Dermengi (Gerea), 2022; Irani et al., 2023; Kozakov et al., 2021).

In Timor-Leste, technological transformation in public administration has become a key agenda item in efforts to improve the quality of public services and strengthen governance that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to public needs. The Timor-Leste government has initiated various programs and policies aimed at encouraging the adoption of digital technology in the public sector. One strategic step taken is the development and implementation of an e-government system, which is expected to accelerate bureaucratic processes, increase service efficiency, and expand the reach of services to the public, especially in remote areas that are currently difficult to reach by conventional services (Gogalis, 2023; Zhuk et al., 2022).

However, implementing technological transformation in Timor-Leste's public administration sector is not without its complex challenges. One key challenge is the low level of digital literacy among the public, which impacts the low adoption and utilization of digital services provided by the government. Limited technological infrastructure, such as unequal internet access and poor network quality, also poses a significant obstacle to expanding digital inclusion across the country. Another equally important challenge is the issue of cybersecurity and data privacy, where the increasing use of digital technology in public administration has the potential to increase the risk of data leaks, cyberattacks, and the misuse of people's personal information.

The digital divide is also a significant issue in Timor-Leste. This gap exists not only between urban and rural areas, but also between those with access to and the ability to utilize digital technology and those without. This situation has the potential to widen social and economic inequalities and hinder the achievement of inclusive and sustainable development goals. Therefore, efforts to strengthen digital literacy through various training and education programs are crucial to enable all levels of society to actively participate in the era of government digitalization.

The global political dynamics, marked by the emergence of an era of populism and poly-crisis, also place pressure on the technological transformation process in the public administration sector. The era of populism often brings inconsistent and pragmatic policy changes, which can hinder the sustainability of designed digitalization programs. Meanwhile, the poly-crisis, characterized by the simultaneous occurrence of multiple crises, such as economic, health, and environmental crises, demands that the government adapt quickly and effectively to address the various challenges that arise, including in the management of digital technology and data.

One aspect that requires special attention is the evaluation of the impact of the e-government initiatives implemented by the Timor-Leste government. This evaluation will cover the extent to which the e-government system can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public services, strengthen transparency and accountability, and expand public access to government services.

5. Navigating Administrative Dilemmas in Timor-Leste

The phenomenon of populism, multidimensional crises (poly-crisis), and rapid technological transformation have created a policy environment full of uncertainty and administrative dilemmas. These conditions require public administrators to be able to navigate various administrative dilemmas, respond to changing policy dynamics, and develop strategic foresight and adaptive long-term planning skills. In this context, case studies of how public administrators in Timor-Leste manage conflicting imperatives, such as balancing the need for rapid response with accountable administrative processes during times of crisis, or reconciling innovation with risk aversion, are highly relevant for in-depth analysis (Vasylieva et al., 2020).

Public administration in this country is not only faced with the demands of providing effective and efficient public services but also must be able to adapt to often sudden and unexpected policy changes. In crisis situations, such as a global pandemic or natural disaster, public administrators are faced with a dilemma between the need to act quickly and the need to maintain accountability and transparency in decision-making. This raises fundamental questions about how the public administration system can manage these conflicting imperatives without compromising the principles of good governance.

6. Timor-Leste Strategic Foresight and Long-Term Planning.

Complex adaptive systems theory provides a relevant analytical framework for understanding how public institutions in Timor-Leste evolve and learn organizationally in the face of a dynamic environment. This approach highlights the importance of organizational learning and policy agility as key prerequisites for ensuring that public administration is able to respond to change in an innovative and sustainable manner. In practice, public administrators often have to rapidly adjust policies, adopt new technologies, and establish cross-sector coordination mechanisms to address multidimensional challenges. However, this process often faces structural obstacles, such as limited human resources, resistance to change, and weak policy monitoring and evaluation systems (Androniceanu et al., 2022).

7. Timor-Leste Dynamic Policy Environments

Conversely, the use of strategic foresight tools is becoming increasingly important in the modern public administration, particularly in Timor-Leste, which is currently undergoing a phase of institution building and digital transformation. Strategic foresight enables policymakers to anticipate future challenges, design robust policies, and align administrative actions with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through foresight, public administrators can identify global and local trends that have the potential to impact governance, such as developments in digital technology, climate change, and regional political dynamics. Thus, foresight serves not only as an early warning tool but also as an instrument for strengthening the capacity for adaptation and innovation in public administration (Voronov et al., 2023).

However, the implementation of strategic foresight in public administration in Timor-Leste still faces various challenges, including limited data and information, a lack of analytical capacity, and a weak culture of innovation within the bureaucracy. The long-term planning processes are often hampered by short political cycles, shifting policy priorities, and populist pressures that tend to prioritize short-term solutions over sustainable development. In such situations, public administrators must be able to balance the need to respond to political pressure and public demands with the imperative to maintain the consistency and sustainability of public policy.

8. Policy Implications for Timor-Leste

Factual conditions on the ground indicate that public administration in Timor-Leste still faces various structural and cultural obstacles that hinder effective governance. Limited institutional capacity, weak inter-agency coordination, and low levels of public trust in government institutions are key challenges that must be addressed (Meyer-Sahling & Mikkelsen, 2022; Ritz & Waldner, 2011b, 2011a; Wijaya, 2018).

CONCLUSION

The age of populism, poly-crisis, and technological transformation presents formidable dilemmas and dynamic challenges for public administration worldwide, and especially for emerging democracies such as Timor-Leste. Theoretical advancements ranging from adaptive legitimacy and systemic resilience to digital governance and strategic foresight offer valuable frameworks for understanding and navigating these complexities. Empirical research grounded in local contexts is essential for generating actionable insights and practical reforms.

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