



## LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONFLICTS AND PUBLIC SERVICE EROSION: A CRITICAL POLITICAL ETHICS ANALYSIS

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<p><b>Info Article</b></p> <p>Received : 01 April 2026</p> <p>Revised : 04 Mei 2026</p> <p>Accepted : 02 Juni 2026</p> <p>Publication : 30 Juni 2026</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> <i>This study aims to analyse conflicts in local leadership from the perspective of political ethics theory, examine their impact on the quality of public services, and formulate strategies for strengthening political ethics in local government governance. The study employs a qualitative approach using the library research method. Data were obtained from various academic literature, nationally &amp; internationally reputable journals, policy documents, and regulations relevant to political ethics, public leadership, and public services. The findings indicate that local leadership conflicts have the potential to erode public services through weakened governmental coordination, increased politicisation of the bureaucracy, hindered policy implementation, and a decline in public trust in local government. This study also found that the application of political ethics principles, such as integrity, accountability, public responsibility, and ethical leadership, is a key factor in maintaining the effectiveness of public services and the quality of governance. Therefore, strengthening political ethics is necessary to create a local government that is professional, responsive, &amp; oriented towards the interests of the community.</i></p>
<p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Local Leadership Conflicts, Political Ethics, Public Service, Ethical Leadership, Governance.</i></p> <p><b>Kata Kunci:</b> <i>Konflik Kepemimpinan Daerah, Etika Politik, Pelayanan Publik, Kepemimpinan Etis, Tata Kelola Pemerintahan.</i></p>	<p><b>Abstrak:</b> Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konflik kepemimpinan daerah berdasarkan perspektif teori etika politik, mengkaji dampaknya terhadap kualitas pelayanan publik, serta merumuskan strategi penguatan etika politik dalam tata kelola pemerintahan daerah. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif metode studi kepustakaan. Data diperoleh dari berbagai literatur ilmiah, jurnal bereputasi nasional dan internasional, dokumen kebijakan, serta regulasi yang relevan dengan etika politik, kepemimpinan publik, dan pelayanan publik. Hasil penelitian bahwa konflik kepemimpinan daerah berpotensi menimbulkan erosi pelayanan publik melalui lemahnya koordinasi pemerintahan, meningkatnya politisasi birokrasi, terhambatnya implementasi kebijakan, serta menurunnya kepercayaan masyarakat terhadap pemerintah daerah, temuannya bahwa penerapan prinsip-prinsip etika politik, seperti integritas, akuntabilitas, tanggung jawab publik, dan kepemimpinan etis, menjadi faktor penting dalam menjaga efektivitas pelayanan publik &amp; kualitas tata kelola pemerintahan. Oleh karena itu, penguatan etika politik diperlukan untuk menciptakan pemerintahan daerah yang profesional, responsif, &amp; berorientasi pada kepentingan masyarakat.</p>
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## INTRODUCTION

Public service is one of the key functions of government, which directly determines the level of public trust in state institutions. From the perspective of modern public administration, the success of public service is determined not only by the capacity of the bureaucracy and the availability of resources, but also by the quality of political leadership capable of maintaining governmental stability, policy integrity and a service-oriented approach towards the public (Denhart & Denhart, 2015).. When leadership conflicts arise at the local level, the focus of governance often shifts from public service towards a struggle for political influence, thereby leading to a decline in the effectiveness of the bureaucracy and the quality of services provided to the public (Bryson et al., 2014), (Cooper, 2002).

In the context of decentralisation, regional heads occupy a strategic position as key actors who determine the direction of development and the quality of governance. However, various political conflicts between regional heads and their deputies, conflicts amongst government elites, and rivalries over local political interests frequently lead to bureaucratic fragmentation, policy uncertainty, and disruptions to public services. These conditions indicate that the issue of local leadership is not merely a political one, but also a matter of public ethics, as it concerns the moral responsibility of public officials to fulfil the rights of the public as service recipients.

Political ethics places the public interest at the heart of the exercise of power. From this perspective, public office holders are required not only to comply with the law, but also to uphold the values of integrity, justice, accountability and a commitment to the interests of the wider community. Prolonged leadership conflicts may indicate a deviation from the principles of political ethics, as power is used more to defend the interests of groups or individuals rather than to meet public needs (Bevir, 2011).

In public administration theory, the ethics of public service form a vital foundation for the realisation of a responsive and democratic government. Integrity and ethics are key factors in building public trust in government. Denhardt and Denhardt, through the New Public Service paradigm, emphasise that government officials must be oriented towards serving citizens (serving rather than steering), rather than merely pursuing political interests or power (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

The phenomenon of local leadership conflicts leading to disruptions in public services remains a widespread issue across many regions in Indonesia. Various studies indicate that weak public leadership ethics are often correlated with poor governance,

declining bureaucratic professionalism, and a weakening of public trust in government institutions (Bisri & Asmoro, 2019)

Although much research has been conducted on local political conflict and public services, studies that specifically analyse the relationship between local leadership conflicts and the erosion of public services through the lens of political ethics theory remain relatively limited. Therefore, this research is important for explaining how local leadership conflicts affect the quality of public services and how political ethics theory can be used as an analytical framework for understanding this phenomenon.

From a contemporary public administration perspective, local leadership is no longer viewed merely as an instrument of bureaucratic management, but rather as a key actor in the creation of public value. Moore explains that the success of government is measured not only by organisational efficiency, but also by its ability to create collective benefits that are felt by the community (M. Moore, 1995). This concept was subsequently reinforced by Moore, who emphasised that the primary objective of government is to generate public value through the ethical, democratic and accountable exercise of state authority (M. H. Moore, 2014). When conflicts within local leadership cause the government's energy to be diverted towards power struggles and political interests, the process of creating public value risks being distorted, leading to public services losing their focus on the interests of the community.

From a political ethics perspective, Thompson explains that public officials are not only accountable for the legality of their actions but also for the moral consequences of exercising public power. Political ethics demands that every public office holder exercises power based on the principles of integrity, accountability, transparency, and responsibility towards the interests of citizens (Thompson, 2019). Prolonged conflicts over local leadership can be seen as a form of political ethical failure, as power is no longer used to serve the public interest, but rather to safeguard the interests of certain groups or elites.

Research by Hassan et al. shows that ethical leadership has a significant impact on organisational commitment, staff performance and public trust in government institutions (Hassan & Wright, 2014). The findings of this research confirm that weak ethical leadership has the potential to cause organisational dysfunction and reduce the quality of public services. An organisational ethical culture built through ethical leadership contributes to improving the effectiveness of local government and the quality

of services provided to the public. These findings demonstrate that the quality of public services is greatly influenced by the ethical standards of its leaders.

From a good governance perspective, conflicts within local leadership have the potential to undermine the fundamental principles of good governance, such as accountability, transparency, effectiveness, responsiveness, and the rule of law (Astutiek, 2021). Various studies show that the quality of governance has a strong relationship with the effectiveness of public services and the level of public trust in the government. When political conflict dominates the governance process, the bureaucracy tends to become fragmented, decision-making becomes ineffective, and the quality of public services declines.

Research by Aryani et al. shows that the quality of public services provided by local governments is influenced by leadership capacity, governance, and local political stability. This study reveals that leadership conflicts can undermine local governments' ability to deliver high-quality services (Aryani et al., 2023). Meanwhile, Reddick et al. emphasise that integrity, fairness, accountability, and a public service orientation are the key dimensions of ethical public leadership that determine the success of public sector organisations (Reddick et al., 2025).

Although various previous studies have examined the relationship between leadership, organisational ethics, and public service, the majority of research still focuses on managerial aspects, organisational behaviour, or bureaucratic governance. There has been little research that specifically analyses local leadership conflicts as a political ethics issue impacting the erosion of public service by integrating the theories of Political Ethics, Public Value, Good Governance, and Ethical Public Leadership within a single conceptual framework. Therefore, this study offers a new perspective by framing local leadership conflicts as a moral and public governance issue that directly impacts the creation of public value and the quality of public services.

Table 1. State of the Art and Novelty of the Research

Researcher	Research Focus	Key Findings	Limitations / Research Gap
Hassan & Wright (2014)	Ethical Leadership	Ethical leadership enhances organisational commitment and improves civil servants' performance.	Does not examine conflicts between regional heads and deputy regional heads.
Bebasa (2018)	Conflicts of Interest Between Regent and Deputy Regent	The division of authority through informal agreements contradicts legal provisions. Conflicting interests, power struggles, and elite intervention create leadership	Does not analyse the issue from a political ethics perspective.

		fragmentation, bureaucratic conflict, and declining public service performance.	
Taufik et al. (2021)	Ethics of Local Government Leadership	Leadership ethics significantly influence work implementation, organisational performance, and governance outcomes.	Does not discuss conflicts between regional heads and deputy regional heads.
Aryani et al. (2023)	Quality of Local Public Services	Political stability and good governance positively affect the quality of public services.	Does not examine the moral and ethical dimensions of political power.
Iswandi (2024)	Conflicts Between Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads: Prevention and Resolution Strategies	Leadership incompatibility and unclear division of authority are major causes of conflict. Prevention should begin during candidate selection, followed by legal agreements and political consensus, supported by DPRD oversight and mediation mechanisms.	Does not integrate a political ethics framework into conflict analysis.
Reddick et al. (2024)	Ethical Public Leadership	Integrity, accountability, and ethical leadership are essential for improving organisational effectiveness in the public sector.	Does not examine conflicts among political elites in local government.
Arifin et al. (2024)	Analysis of Conflicts Between Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads	Leadership conflicts cause policy stagnation, declining public trust, disruption of public services, and political instability. Recommended solutions include stronger regulations, mediation, ethical leadership, empowerment of deputy regional heads, and enhanced public oversight.	Political ethics is mentioned but not developed as the primary analytical framework.
Fikri et al. (2025)	Disharmony Between Regional Heads and Deputy Regional Heads	Direct elections often create disharmony due to short-term political interests, unequal power-sharing, elite competition, and ideological differences. These conflicts weaken bureaucracy, reduce service quality, create discrimination in public services, undermine public trust, and hinder regional development.	Does not analyse the phenomenon using a comprehensive political ethics perspective.
This Study	Leadership Conflicts and the Erosion of Public Services	Develops an integrated analytical framework combining political ethics, ethical public leadership, public value, and good governance to explain how leadership conflicts affect the quality of public services and public trust in local government.	Research novelty lies in integrating these theoretical perspectives into a comprehensive model for analysing leadership conflict and its implications for public service governance.

Research Novelty:

Theoretical novelty, integrating four perspectives simultaneously:

1. Political Ethics (Thompson)
2. Public Value (Moore)
3. Good Governance
4. Ethical Public Leadership

to explain the relationship between local leadership conflict and the erosion of public services.

### **Conceptual Novelty**

Developing a model that posits:

**Leadership Conflict → Degradation of Political Ethics → Weakening of Good Governance → Erosion of Public Value → Decline in Public Services**

Based on this description, this study aims to critically examine local leadership conflicts and their implications for the erosion of public services, using the perspective of political ethics as the basis for analysis.

### **Research Questions**

Based on this background, the research questions for this study are:

1. How can local leadership conflicts be analysed from the perspective of political ethics theory?
2. How do local leadership conflicts affect the quality and effectiveness of public services?
3. What strategies for strengthening political ethics can be implemented to prevent the erosion of public services resulting from local leadership conflicts?

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research and critical analysis based on political ethics theory. This approach was chosen because the study aims to understand and explain the phenomenon of local leadership conflict and its implications for the erosion of public services through a theoretical and empirical examination of various academic sources.

The research data sources consist of secondary data obtained from reputable national and international journal articles, academic books, public policy documents, government agency reports, and previous research findings relevant to local leadership, political ethics, governance, and public services. Data collection was carried out through documentary studies and literature reviews using scientific databases such as Scopus,

Web of Science, SINTA, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, Sage Journals, Emerald, and Google Scholar. The criteria for selecting literature included topic relevance, source reputation, recency of publication, and relevance to the concepts of political ethics and public service.

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis and thematic analysis. The stages of analysis included: (1) identification and selection of literature; (2) categorisation of main themes; (3) interpretation of the relationship between local leadership conflicts and the quality of public services; (4) analysis based on the perspective of political ethics theory; and (5) the formulation of a conceptual synthesis regarding strategies for strengthening political ethics in local government administration. To enhance the validity of the research, source triangulation was carried out by comparing various research findings, theories and relevant policy documents, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local leadership conflicts and the erosion of public services.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Local Leadership Conflicts from a Political Ethics Perspective**

The findings of the study indicate that local leadership conflicts generally arise due to differences in political interests, competition amongst the governing elite, weak political communication, and the dominance of a power-oriented approach over a public service-oriented one. These conflicts not only affect relations between political actors but also impact the stability of the bureaucracy and the quality of public services.

From a political ethics perspective, this situation indicates a shift in leadership orientation from the public interest towards the interests of specific groups. Thompson explains that political ethics require public officials to be accountable for every decision based on the interests of the community and the moral principles of good governance. When political conflict takes precedence over public service, this constitutes a breach of the principle of public accountability (Thompson, 2019)

This finding is consistent with the research by Christensen et al., which explains that conflict amongst the political elite can reduce the capacity of public organisations to carry out their service functions effectively (Christensen & Rykkja, 2016). Protracted conflict causes organisations to focus more on internal dynamics than on addressing the needs of the community. In the context of local government, leadership conflicts also have the potential to create policy dualism and bureaucratic fragmentation. These conditions

hinder coordination between local government agencies, thereby reducing the effectiveness of development programme implementation.

### **The Erosion of Public Services Due to Leadership Conflict**

The success of decentralisation is largely determined by the ability of local governments to foster leadership that is responsive, innovative and oriented towards the needs of the community (Hidayati, 2017). When local leadership becomes entangled in political conflict and the interests of the elite, public service functions tend to stagnate or even regress. The results of the analysis show that local leadership conflicts have a direct impact on the decline in the quality of public services. The erosion of public services is evident in delays in decision-making;

1. poor bureaucratic coordination;
2. weakened accountability in service delivery;
3. increasing politicisation of the bureaucracy;
4. declining public satisfaction.

These phenomena indicate that leadership conflicts are not merely a political issue, but a matter of public administration, as they have a direct impact on the performance of government services. According to Moore, the primary objective of public organisations is to create public value through high-quality services, public legitimacy and the effective management of resources (M. Moore, 1995). Protracted leadership conflicts lead to a decline in this public value, as the public witnesses more elite infighting than the resolution of public issues.

Hartley et al. assert that effective public leadership requires political astuteness, namely the ability to manage political dynamics without compromising the public values that constitute the primary objectives of government (Hartley et al., 2019). Meanwhile, Cooper explains that the ethics of public administration serve to maintain a balance between power, responsibility and the public interest in the conduct of government (Cooper, 2002).

Research by Grimmelikhuijsen et al. indicates that low public trust in government correlates with low effectiveness of public services (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2012). When political conflicts are constantly in the public eye, the legitimacy of local government declines, thereby weakening public participation in development. According to Rutgers, public values form a crucial foundation of modern governance as they serve as a moral compass for state administrators (Rutgers, 2015). Consequently, leadership

conflicts that lead to a loss of focus on public service have the potential to undermine the legitimacy of local government in the eyes of the public. These findings reinforce the argument that the quality of public services is significantly influenced by the quality of leadership and the stability of local government governance.

### **Public Value and Good Governance in Addressing the Public Service Crisis**

The study's findings indicate that resolving local leadership conflicts cannot be achieved through a purely political approach alone, but requires the strengthening of the principles of good governance. The principles of good governance emphasise the importance of transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, efficiency and the rule of law in the administration of government (Kaufmann, 2010). When leadership conflicts result in public policies failing to function effectively, this effectively constitutes a deviation from these principles

Furthermore, the public value approach places the community at the centre of the entire governance process. From this perspective, the success of local government is not measured by the political victories of the elite, but by its ability to deliver tangible benefits to the community (Moore, 1995). According to Fuertes, public ethics and public value must form the foundation of professionalism in public administration, as both serve to ensure that the focus of public service remains on the interests of the community (Fuertes, 2021).

Research findings indicate that regions capable of maintaining leadership stability tend to have better quality public services than those experiencing protracted political conflict. Political stability and governance influence service quality (Aryani et al., 2023). Therefore, strengthening the public service orientation is an urgent necessity in local government governance.

### **Strengthening Ethical Public Leadership as a Solution**

The results of the study indicate that strengthening ethical public leadership is a key strategy for preventing the erosion of public services caused by local leadership conflicts. Ethical leadership emphasises not only managerial competence, but also integrity, public responsibility, fairness, transparency and moral exemplarity. Research by Zheng et al. found that ethical leadership has a positive influence on bureaucratic behaviour in providing responsive, accommodating and public-interest-oriented services (Zheng et al., 2024). Van Wart explains that the quality of ethical leadership has a

significant influence on the performance of public sector organisations (Wart et al., 2017)

In the context of local government, ethically-oriented leaders will be better able to:

- Manage political conflicts;
- Maintain the neutrality of the bureaucracy;
- Strengthen public trust;
- Improve the quality of public services;
- Build an organisational culture of integrity.

These findings are supported by Siundu TW., who concluded that ethical leadership contributes to enhancing the accountability of public organisations and strengthening the government’s legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Shiundu, 2024). Mozumder’s research also demonstrates that ethical political leadership plays a vital role in rebuilding public trust in public institutions (Mozumder, 2022). Conversely, protracted political conflict will reinforce the public’s negative perceptions of the government and undermine the political legitimacy of local leaders. Consequently, strengthening political ethics and ethical leadership are strategic tools for ensuring the sustainability of public services amidst the dynamics of local politics.

Table 2. Synthesis of Research Findings and Discussion

Research findings	Analysis of political ethics theory	Impact on public services	Support from previous research
Conflicts over local leadership lead to bureaucratic fragmentation and the emergence of policy dualism.	From a political ethics perspective, conflict amongst the elite highlights the lack of moral responsibility on the part of leaders towards the public interest. According to Thompson (1987), political ethics requires public officials to prioritise the interests of society over those of individuals or groups.	There have been delays in decision-making, poor organisational coordination and a decline in the effectiveness of public services.	Research by Christensen et al. (2015) shows that leadership conflict reduces the capacity of public sector organisations to deliver effective services.
Political conflict has shifted the bureaucracy’s focus from public service to the arena of political loyalty.	The Ethical Public Leadership perspective emphasises that public leaders must uphold organisational integrity and bureaucratic neutrality	Civil servants are more focused on maintaining their political standing than on improving the quality of services provided to the public.	Van Wart (2013) found that the quality of ethical leadership is directly linked to the performance of public organisations.
Leadership conflicts undermine public confidence in	According to Moore (1995), public legitimacy is the cornerstone of the creation of public value. When conflicts arise	A decline in public participation and trust in public institutions.	Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) demonstrated that low public trust leads to a decline in the

local government	amongst the elite, the government’s legitimacy is also undermined		effectiveness of government policies.
Conflict amongst the elite hinders the implementation of regional development programmes.	Good governance emphasises the importance of accountability, effectiveness and policy consistency (Kaufmann et al., 2011).	Development programmes are progressing slowly, and public service targets are not being met to the full extent.	Pierre and Peters (2020) explain that political instability has a direct impact on the failure to implement public policy.
Leadership conflicts increase the risk	In public administration ethics, the bureaucracy must operate in	The quality of public services is declining because promotions	The OECD emphasises that a merit system is a key
of the bureaucracy becoming politicised.	Accordance with the principles of professionalism and the merit system (Denhart & Denhart, 2015)	are based more on political loyalty than on competence.	prerequisite for improving the quality of public governance (OECD, 2023).

Therefore, the restoration of public services in regions experiencing leadership conflicts requires an approach that is not only administrative but also ethical. Strengthening political ethics and public value governance are key instruments in maintaining the quality of public services and reinforcing the legitimacy of local government.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study has produced a conceptual model demonstrating that local leadership conflicts are a factor that can trigger the erosion of public services through the mechanisms of political polarisation, bureaucratic fragmentation and a decline in public value.

**Local Leadership Conflict → Political Polarisation → Bureaucratic Fragmentation → Erosion of Public Services → Decline in Public Value → Decline in Public Trust.**

Conversely, the application of ethical political leadership, public value governance, and the principles of good governance can serve as a recovery strategy to improve the quality of public services and strengthen public trust in local government.

**CONCLUSION**

Conflicts over local leadership constitute a political ethics issue that has a direct impact on the quality of public services. From a political ethics perspective, conflicts centred on the pursuit of power indicate a deviation from the principles of public responsibility, integrity and governmental accountability. The main impacts of leadership conflicts include a decline in the effectiveness of decision-making, weakened bureaucratic

coordination, reduced public trust, and the erosion of public values in the administration of local government.

This study emphasises that high-quality public services require leadership that is ethical, integrity-driven, and oriented towards the public interest. Strengthening political ethics, fostering a culture of accountability, institutionalising codes of conduct for government, and implementing a public value governance approach are key strategies for preventing the erosion of public services caused by local leadership conflicts. Thus, the success of local government is determined not only by administrative and political capacity, but also by the moral calibre of its leaders in maintaining public trust and realising sustainable public values.

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