

Research Article

Trends, Issues, and Future Directions of Decentralization in Unitary State Research: Bibliometric Analyses from 1975-2024

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Abstract.

This study presents the overall bibliometric analysis for the period 1975-2024 of research into decentralization in unitary states. This research was conducted to cover the voids existing in this field, such as the systematic examination of the evolution in themes, key contributors, and mapping of collaborative networks. These documents were analyzed using the Bibliometrix package in R Studio. The main findings of the study show a significant increase in publications over the years, culminating in 2016. From the thematic breakdown, a shift from foundational concepts to practical implications, such as public management and accountability. The study further identifies emerging trends, including how decentralization is being influenced by global challenges like COVID-19, making the need for resilient local governance systems, and bridging the role of decentralized structures in managing public health crises. This paper contributes to an overview of the research landscape, guiding future research directions and informing policy. It underscores the dynamism and interdisciplinarity of research in decentralization up a notch higher to be relevant to improving governance in unitary states.

Keywords: decentralization, unitary state, bibliometric analyses

1. Introduction

Decentralization has emerged as a pivotal concept in public administration and governance, particularly within unitary states where the centralization of power has historically been the norm. Over the last four decades, regionalization and decentralization have emerged as significant global trends, leading to the redistribution of power across borders and strengthening subnational capacity and function within unitary states [1]. The decentralized provision of public services in unitary states raises relevant problems about the nature and content of Constitutions, emphasizing the need to accommodate decentralization within the political agreement giving rise to a given Constitution [2]. Decentralization, both vertical and horizontal, can lead to more inclusive governments and more peaceful societies, improving efficiency and possibly reducing corruption [3].

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Decentralization in a unitary state involves the devolution of central control of administrative authority and economic resources to lower levels. It aims to integrate central authority, local authorities, and enterprises in a hierarchical administration [4]The process of decentralization in a unitary state can lead to the redistribution of resources, decision-making spaces, and political-economic power [5]Decentralization opens new opportunities for better governance by improving public sector efficiency through increased accountability of public servants, customization of fiscal regimes, and competition among jurisdictions for economic resources and tax bases [6]). It can deepen democracy without compromising state strength if adequately designed, affecting aspects such as conflict prevention, policy autonomy, and responsive, accountable service provision [7] However, there are challenges include the framing of the issue along regionally distinct lines, persisting preferences for decentralization over federalization, and the need for ongoing measures to improve consociationalism [8] Besides, Benefits encompass improved consociationalism, successful devolutionary federalism, and the potential for positive results in productive and allocative efficiency, as well as in promoting competition and accountability [7]; [8]

There is Differences Between Decentralization in a Unitary State and Decentralization in a Federal State. The distinction between unitary and federal systems has become increasingly blurred due to the emergence of regionalization and decentralization as significant global trends [1]. Decentralization in a unitary state involves the devolution of central control to lower levels without a federal constitution, leading to a changing central-local relationship and the emergence of a form of “federalism without a federal constitution” [9]; [1] In contrast, decentralization in a federal state involves the redistribution of power across borders and the strengthening of subnational capacity and function, leading to the blurring of the unitary vs. federation dichotomy and the need for revised classification based on developments in selected countries [1]

Decentralization in a unitary state, such as China, has led to a significant change in the central-local relationship, giving local governments considerable control over their resources [9]. The extent to which requests for greater decentralization can be accommodated within the boundaries of the political agreement giving rise to a given Constitution is a relevant consideration [2]Decentralization opens new opportunities for better governance and changes the incentives of public officials, potentially improving public sector efficiency through increased accountability of public servants and customization of fiscal regimes, regulations, and social programs to local needs and preferences [6] Decentralization can deepen democracy without compromising state

strength if adequately designed, affecting aspects such as authority over territory and people, conflict prevention, policy autonomy, responsive service provision, and social learning [7] Decentralization reforms in China have been found to significantly improve firm performance by reducing costs and increasing profits, with administrative reform having the greatest positive impact on private firm [10] Decentralization has consistent positive effects on both real and nominal gross regional domestic product (GRDP) growth rate, indicating that regional decentralization improves the efficiency of resource allocation in the public sector and contributes to economic growth [11]. The demand for decentralized government has increased with widespread political devolution, perceived as a more efficient and accountable form of government, but limited autonomy in subnational governments is criticized for its potential to increase corruption and harm government accountability [12] Preferences of statewide parties regarding decentralization are related to their positions on the economic and cultural ideological dimensions, with parties on the economic right and culturally liberal parties favoring decentralization more than their counterparts [13].

Decentralization allows for experimentation, learning, and interjurisdictional competition, benefiting efficiency [14]. Sub-central governments may be better informed about local needs and can adapt policies accordingly, leading to improved governance. However, decentralization also poses dangers such as foregone economies of scale, duplication, waste, and reduced state capacity [14]. Moreover, combining fiscal decentralization with direct democracy can improve governance, as indicated by new empirical evidence across 47 countries [14] Decentralization reforms in developing countries affect governance and efficiency in public goods provision, with implications for social and political structure, resource mobilization, and corruption [15]). Also, decentralization can also lead to mismanagement, corruption, and lack of policy coherence, highlighting the potential negative side effects of this process [16].

Decentralization in Lithuania, driven by the transition to a market economy and democracy, was intended to improve the quality of state management and public services, but results revealed an increase in centralization over the past 25 years, indicating potential social and cultural challenges associated with decentralization [17]. State of the art in decentralization research reflects a dynamic and cross-disciplinary field that has changed dramatically over the past 49 years. Earlier studies were focused on the theoretical underpinnings and pilot implementations of decentralization policies. Gradually, attention was turned to empirical analysis: policy evaluations and comparative studies from different geopolitical contexts. Recent trends do, in fact, outline an

increasing orientation toward the practical implications of decentralization in areas of public management and accountability, and above all, global challenges such as COVID-19.

It fills these gaps by generating an all-inclusive bibliometric analysis in research into the process of decentralization processes within unitary states from 1975 to 2024. The current work has systematically captured changes in themes of research, major contributors and influential publications, and collaborative networks in the field. The broad search began with decentralization in general and yielded 148,231 publications; then one narrowed down to 21,828 documents dealing mainly with the local government aspects. Further filtration with a focus on unitary states but excluding the federal systems finally resulted in 134 relevant documents. Installing the Bibliometrix package in R Studio, all options remain open for deep analysis with respect to these documents: publication trends, thematic developments, and collaborative patterns.

The research will provide an overview of the decentralization research landscape in unitary states, offer insights into its historic evolution, and shape things up. This paper points to some of the most relevant trends, emergent topics, and influentials that would define future studies in the aspects of decentralization and policy decisions. This piece of work will be essential not only in deepening academics' understanding of decentralization but will also project practical relevance and potential for improved governance in unitary states.

2. Methods

This paper presents a bibliometric analysis regarding the decentralization research evolution path in unitary states over the past 49 years: 1975-2024. This approach is by data collection, refinement, and analysis in the light of advanced available tools of bibliometrics within R Studio following previous studies with the same methods [18]; [19]; [20]

The first step entailed the comprehensive search TITLE-ABS-KEY decentral* within a big academic database. This should have retrieved everything relating to decentralization, resulting in 148,231 documents, which can thus be considered a blanket dataset. In this regard, the asterisk character (*) was very instrumental in ensuring that all variants of this very term were retrieved, such as “decentralization” and “decentralisation,” hence providing comprehensive it coverage in that respect. Additional keywords

relating to local government were included in the search parameters to focus further on local government aspects of decentralization. Refining the queries returned 21,828 documents, reducing the number considerably to publications directly concerned with decentralization in the context of structures and processes of local governance. Since specific interest was decentralization within unitary states, further filtration was applied. This has been filtered to include only documents that contain the term “unitary” and exclude those containing the term “federal.” Since documents irrelevant to the context of unitary states and relating to federal systems had been carefully filtered out at the beginning, this brought down the final dataset to 134 documents.

The final dataset consisting of 134 documents was analyzed using the Bibliometrix package in R Studio. It is a comprehensive tool for carrying out quantitative research in scientometrics and bibliometrics. This analysis comprised several key components: first, producing basic descriptive statistics, such as the number of publications per year, growth rate, average citations per document, and types according to document; second, it provided the general overview of the research output and its temporal trends. The second level looked at patterns of authorship, including the most prolific authors, the extent of collaboration, single-authored versus co-authored documents, and rates of international co-authorship. This gave information on the collaborative dynamics and key contributors into this field. Keyword analysis conducted within the data collected revealed the most frequent terms and thematic areas. Using Sankey diagrams that also highlighted changes in foci over time and new trends emerging, this research was able to explore the evolution of themes. It provided insight into the changing decentralization research landscape within unitary states.

Thus, the frequency of the terms was plotted against time to evaluate the emerging and declining topics in this field. The trend analysis showed current research interests and probable future directions by virtue of its dynamism for the changing research landscape. Mapping collaboration networks was the final step to visualize connections between the authors, institutions, and countries. This network analysis identified the key contributors and the extent of international collaboration, thereby giving a panoramic view of the decentralization research community in unitary states. To this end, it provides complete and systematic coverage of the research conducted on decentralization in unitary states through the use of such a methodological framework. The combination of descriptive, thematic, trend, and network analyses guarantees that the development of the field will be understood comprehensively, the trends establishing a key role, influential contributors, and rising areas of interest. This method will trace not only

almost five decades of evolution in research but also provide critical insight into the present state and the future trajectory of decentralization studies in unitary states. Details of this method are shown in Figure 1.

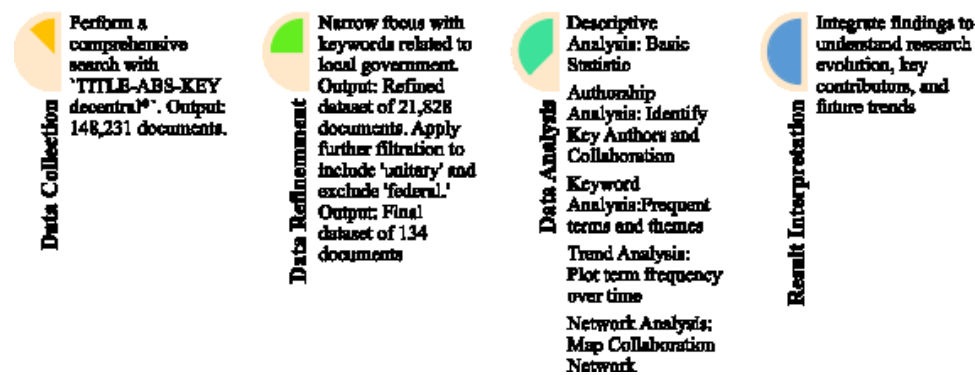


Figure 1: Workflow Methods. Source: Authors analyses. 2024.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Research Output

This paper relates to general aspects within almost five decades’ worth of research output: from 1975 to 2024. For the present analysis, this information uses 112 sources, including journals, books, and other documents, comprising a total of 134 documents. It holds an annual growth rate of 2.87%, where it can be observed that scholarly attention is increasing at a steady rate. On average, each document is 13.2 years old, with about 11.63 citations, which is evidence of average to high engagement from the academic community.

Content analysis for the documents is conducted by the strong use of keywords in Registro, where it has been found that there are 284 Keywords Plus and 315 Author’s Keywords stating that a wide and diversified scope of topics deal with the genre of decentralization in unitary states. It also exhibits high authorship, with 217 different authors contributing to the literature; of these, 77 have single-authored documents. That means there is high effort from scholars working in solitude compared to collaborative work. Notably, 78 documents are sole authored, while on average, each document contains 1.72 co-authors, putting it in the midpoint between solitary and collaborative research efforts. Moreover, international co-authorships are 13.43%, something that insinuates there is global interest and a collaborative nature in this line of research. Document types analysis indicates that articles dominate with 91 documents. Other

TABLE 1: Document Details.

Description	Results
MAIN INFORMATION ABOUT DATA	
Timespan	1975:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	112
Documents	134
Annual Growth Rate %	2,87
Document Average Age	13,2
Average citations per doc	11,63
References	6751
DOCUMENT CONTENTS	
Keywords Plus (ID)	284
Author's Keywords (DE)	315
AUTHORS	
Authors	217
Authors of single-authored docs	77
AUTHORS COLLABORATION	
Single-authored docs	78
Co-Authors per Doc	1,72
International co-authorships %	13,43
DOCUMENT TYPES	
article	91
book	5
book chapter	25
conference paper	5
review	8

Source: Authors analyses. 2024

types include: books: 5; chapters of books: 25; conference papers: 5; review papers: 8. This distribution underlines the diversity of publication formats used by researchers to spread their findings. The bibliometric data gives a rather comprehensive and fine-grained picture of scholarship related to the development of decentralization in unitary states, publication trends, authorship, and thematic focus across a fundamentally long period.

3.2. Literature Development

The below dataset illustrates the annual trends on issues of publications concerning the development of decentralization in unitary states from 1975-2024. Initially, the publication space had few, leaving it with intermittent activity throughout the late 20th century. The first ever-recorded publication was in 1975, represented by one article, followed by periods of inactivity or minimal contribution in the following years. This trend mirrors the fact that interest in this research area was only beginning in the 1970s and 1980s. Starting from the mid-1990s, an increased frequency of publications can be observed, with the number significantly reaching its peak in 1997 with seven articles. That increase would appear to indicate growing interest among scholars and perhaps the formation of theoretical approaches or delivery of empirical findings that gave impulses for more comprehensive research efforts. Another period of fluctuations, though generally ascending, marked the turn of the millennium, with peaks of five articles in 2005 and eight in 2009. Although the largest increase is noted in 2016, with ten articles marking a time period of peaked academic interest over decentralization themes, this crest could be attributed to changing political landscapes, decentralization reforms in various countries, or large and important conferences/symposia that set off this output. Thereafter, from 2016, there is a persistent interest reflected in three to eight articles per annum. Publishing rate stability over the past few years, eight articles being published in 2020 and 2022 alike, delivers a clearly setting role about what decentralization studies mean and play in contemporary relevant political and administrative discourses. Already including data from 2024 with four articles, results show continuing research activity and interest in the field.

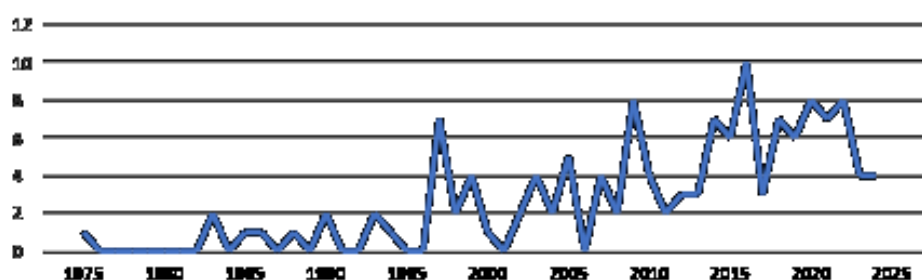


Figure 2: Number of Publication Development Year by Year. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024.*

Figure 3 is a Sankey diagram, which graphically illustrates how the research contributions have been made by individual authors, via their respective affiliations, to the key concepts that best describe the area of research on decentralization in unitary

states. This complete visualization was obtained using bibliometric methods within the R Studio environment, representing all these complex interrelations and distributions of scholarly activity for this domain.

On the left-hand side of this diagram, important writers are mentioned, like 'Steet J.' and 'Cooper H.', whose important contributions define the research landscape. The middle section shows that such writers are linked to a diverse range of well-known institutions like the World Bank, Utrecht University, Cardiff University, the Institute of Public Administration, and Leiden University. The width of the lines between the authors and institutions represents their amount of research output and the intensity of collaboration. For example, the 'Steet J' is strongly connected to Cardiff University, suggesting a high amount of research activity or collaborative effort with that institution.

The right section of the diagram includes the mentioned key words, namely, 'decentralization,' 'autonomy,' 'local government,' 'governance,' and 'reform.' The lines linking those keywords with institutions make explicit what each institution thematically focuses on. For example, the World Bank alone is strongly connected to 'decentralization' and 'governance,' indicating that its research is substantially focused on these themes. Similarly, Utrecht University demonstratively entertains a lot of linkages with markers like 'autonomy' and 'local government', showing interest specialization in these areas of decentralization.

This graph offers at least three different sets of analytical insights: First, the way in which expertise is seated within some, the World Bank and Utrecht University are linked to a lot of keywords, which shows their functions in forming research and policy discourses around decentralization. Notice that authors from different institutions overlap under multiple institutions, indicative of a robust collaborative network operating in this area of scholarly enquiry. Thirdly, institutions like Cardiff University and the Institute of Public Administration, Netherlands, have their keyword range spanning very wide, which could be interpreted as interdisciplinarily prolific. Finally, notice the presence of keywords such as 'decentralization' and 'governance,' cutting across several institutions, indicative of core drivers for the present research. There are also niche areas of focus, such as 'autonomy' and 'local government', associated with specific institutions, showing specialized research streams. Besides, there are strong links between some authors and institutions, for example, 'Steet J.' with Cardiff University, leading one to suspect influential research hubs where leading scholars are based. These likely drive big portions of the research agenda and discourse within the field. This enables the underlining of key institutions and authors, the collaborative nature of the research, and

thematic focal areas that constitute the current scholarly landscape. In this regard, the importance of such visualizations lies in the possibility of capturing the structure and dynamics of academic research networks and guiding future directions of research and engagement toward more focused and impactful collaborations.

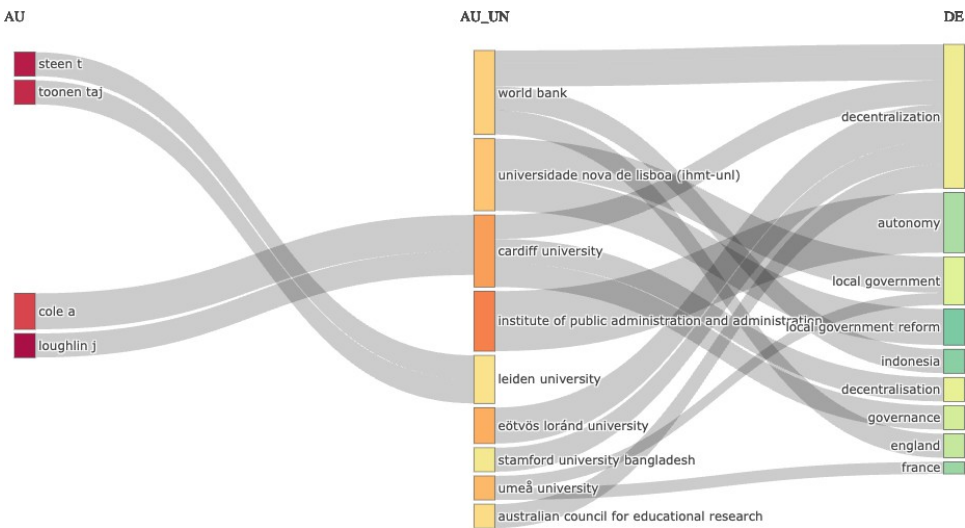


Figure 3: Three Field Plot of Authors- Affiliations – Keywords. Source: Authors analyses. 2024.

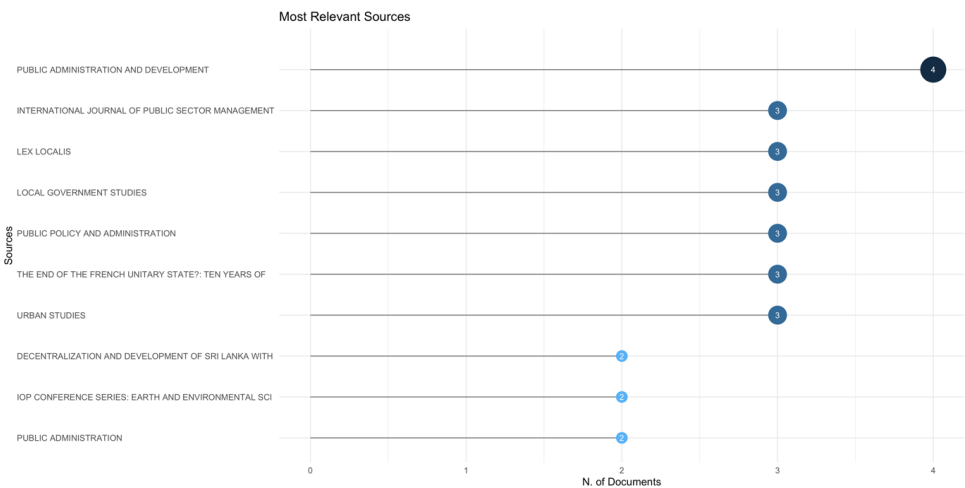


Figure 4: Most Relevant Sources. Source: Authors analyses. 2024.

Figure 4 shows the most relevant sources that have contributed to the research in decentralization within unitary states by mapping document publication over time on different academic journals and conferences. This bar chart shows the major venues that host influential research findings.

Clearly the first source at the top, “Public administration and development”, with four documents, underscores its role in leading discourses in decentralization. The

pioneering role of this journal consequently underlines a central interest in practical and theoretical advances of public administration and development as a critical platform for researchers.

The next closest area includes several journals, each with three documents: “International Journal of Public Sector Management,” “Lex Localis,” “Local Government Studies,” “Public Policy and Administration, and “The End of French Unitary State? Ten Years of Urban Studies.” In this way, these journals will be very different from one another, cutting across perspectives and methodological approaches; therefore, the study of decentralization will be interdisciplinary in nature. This compounds into “International Journal of Public Sector Management” and “Public Policy and Administration”, hence placing the research study on a very strong setting in the field of studies on public sector efficiency and policy analysis, which are important components of decentralization studies.

This chart also identifies sources with two documents each: “Decentralization and Development of Sri Lanka with OF Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science” and “Public Administration.” Although these sources have less quantity of documents, they are still important to add specific regional or thematic nuances into the research landscape. For example, the emphasis on Sri Lanka lends case studies and contextual understanding in a unique political and social environment for decentralization.

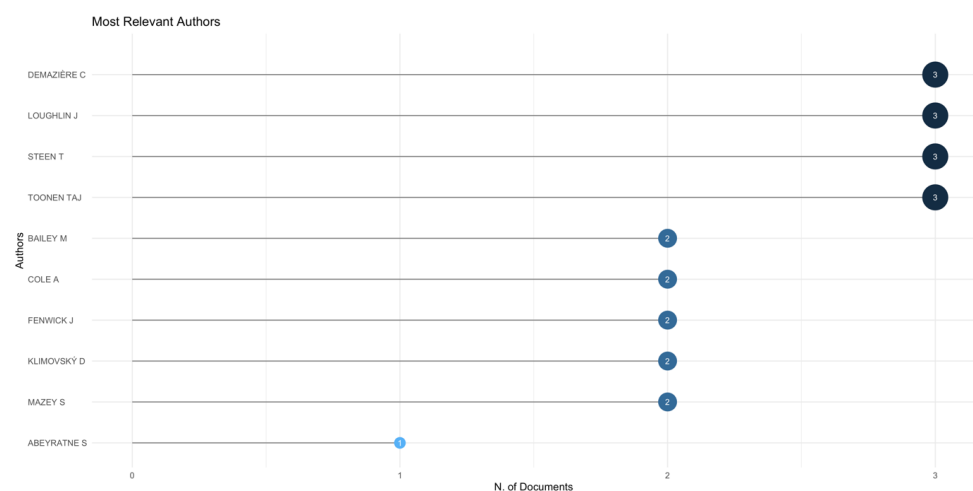


Figure 5: Most Relevant Authors. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024.*

The Bar chart of the top active authors who contributed to research about decentralization in unitary states by the number of documents published is shown in Figure 5. This graph clearly shows who the major researchers are who have influenced such a field of study.

First in this regard, 'DRAMEURE C.', 'LOGANUA F.', 'STEET J.', and 'TOHREN TAU' have contributed three documents each. Thus, these positions indicate that they have worked considerably on this topic and are major contributors to the discourse regarding decentralization. Their repeated occurrence makes one assume that they are key players whose works have provided core theories, empirical studies, and fundamental overviews, thereby sketching present research directions and controversies.

Next come a number of single authors who, second to these top contributors, have each contributed two documents: 'BAILEY M.', 'COLA A.', 'FENWICK J.', 'KIMBOSO J.', 'MOZY S.', and 'ANTHUN R.'. Although fewer in number compared with the leading authors, the former are making repeated contributions indicative of a continuing interest in decentralization topics and likely explores various dimensions of decentralization, building up depth and breadth for the field through focused studies.

That these authors can be reckoned for a good number of publications reflects a trait of collaboration and developing interest in any research into decentralization. The appearance of numerous authors with two to three publications attests to the vibrancy of the academic community with different perspectives that go on to contribute towards a holistic understanding of decentralization in unitary states. This analysis unpacks the role these authors play in forwarding knowledge and in informing policy and practice in decentralization. It points out one of the potential avenues for future collaborations and new leading edges that might materialize as this field further grows and evolves.

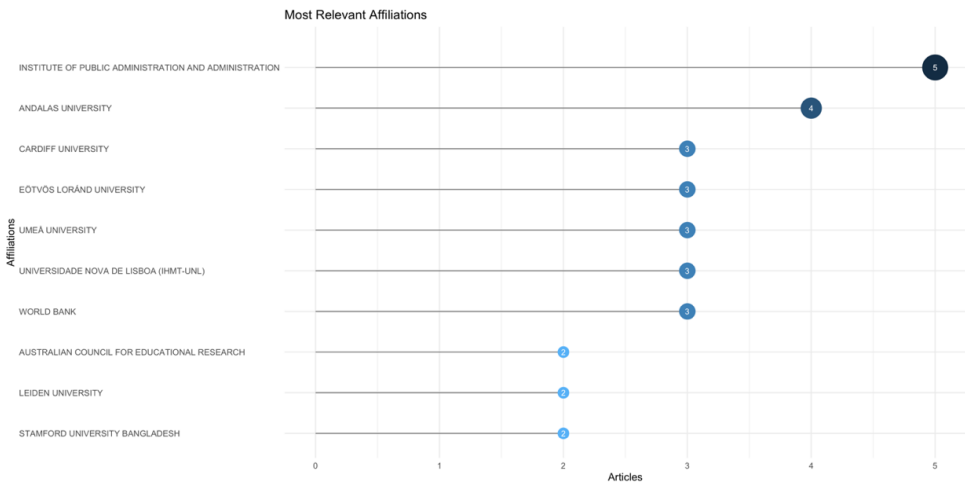


Figure 6: Most Relevant Affiliations. Source: Authors analyses. 2024.

Figure 6 is a bar chart showing the most relevant affiliations contributing to the decentralization in unitary states research theme, as reflected by the number of published articles. It is possible to notice the main academic and research institutions which act as engines for the advancement of this field.

At the top stands the “Institute of Public Administration and Administration” with five publications, hence the highest affiliation influence. This high ranking illustrates that the institute indeed played a very significant role in the decentralization debate, which would likely be driven by large programs of research and a prime emphasis on reforms within public administration.

“Andalus University” is followed by four articles, showing a serious research focus on it and active engagement in the study of decentralization processes, resulting in a substantial output that could identify it as one of the important actors in regional and probably global discourses relating to decentralization. The rest, three each, are “Cardiff University,” “Eötvös Loránd University,” “Umea University,” and

“Universidade Nova de Lisboa NOVA”. Geographically, the cited universities spread vastly, thus attesting to the international interest and efforts of collaboration in decentralization research. For instance, Cardiff University is very eminent in providing extensive research on governance and public policy, related to the study of decentralization.

The other sources are from institutions such as the “World Bank,” “Australian Council for Educational Research,” “Leiden University,” and “Stamford University Bangladesh,” each contributing two articles. In this way, including the World Bank increases the international organizations’ weight in driving policy-related research and providing empirical data that supports decentralization efforts all around the globe. Equally, having a variety of different universities spanning across all continents indicates wide-ranging academic engagement in the subject of decentralization.

This scatter plot of publications across multiple affiliations underlines the very interdisciplinary and international collaboration imperative in knowledge decentralization. It shows how the different institutions contribute specially to the distinctive perspectives that have greatly enriched the academic conversation as a way of fostering a broader understanding of decentralization in unitary states.

Figure 7 contains a map of country collaborating, describing in graphical form the geographical distribution and frequency of the scientific production created by decentralization in unitary states. This map underlines countries actively contributing to this

Country Scientific Production

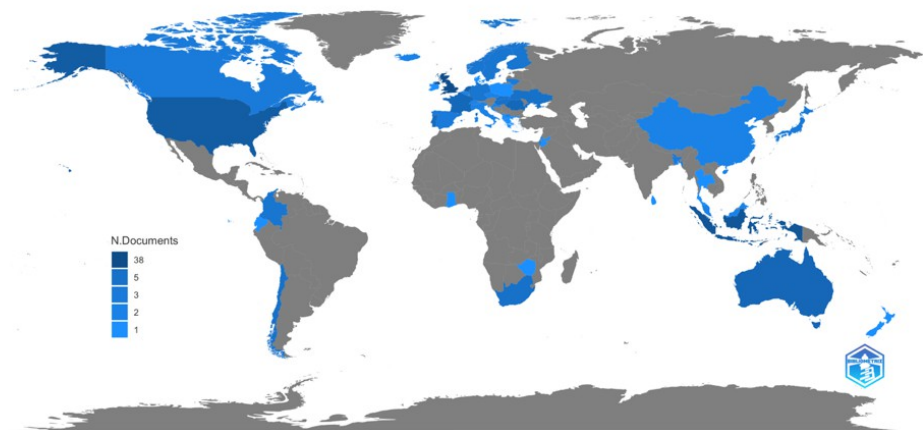


Figure 7: Country Collaboration Map. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024*

field of research, showing interest from all over the world with collaboration across different regions.

The most frequent is the United Kingdom, contributing about 38 documents. This large output margins the leading role of the UK in studies on decentralization as an evidence of a great academic environment, coupled with strong institutional support for governance studies. This may be indicative of the UK’s long-term interest in the process of decentralization, dating from its past experiences and current processes within its political framework.

Documents from Indonesia made up 23, thus following, which represents strong scholarly activity and interest in decentralization. This could be understood in the light of diverse and complex administrative structures of a country wrestling with its own decentralization policies and reforms. The USA has a contribution of 16 documents, showing the highly active participation and influence of the country on worldwide research in decentralization. Such interest from the USA may be because of the research capabilities and interest in comparative governance studies present within its academic institutions.

It is in The Netherlands where one finds a very strong presence, probably because of the well-established research institutions and a strong interest in public administration and policy reforms. The areas that contributed to the list include Australia, with 9 documents, suggesting that active participation ensued, most likely from having gone through similar regional governance and decentralization experiences. It shows that France and Romania have contributed 8 documents each, proving their academic interest in this research topic and involvement. Then there is Portugal with 7 documents and

Chile and Hungary, a case of both countries, having given 5 documents just completing the list. The latter includes a diversity of countries involved in decentralization studies.

The geographical distribution of this scientific production reflects the interdisciplinarity and internationality of decentralization research. The map is useful for underlining collaborative efforts and shared interests among countries. It provides both an overview and a comparative view of decentralization processes worldwide. In particular, as shown in the figure, it puts the role of decentralization research into a global perspective with leading contributions from a variety of countries. The high frequency of documents from the UK, Indonesia, and the USA points out the leading roles, while contributions from other countries like the Netherlands, Australia, France, and Romania indicate the wide international engagement. Such wide participation enriches academic discourse and thus strengthens worldwide exchange in ideas and findings on the study of decentralization within unitary states.

Table 2 presents an overview of the most cited works in research on decentralization in unitary states, which have produced key works and exercise academic influence. For another major part, it includes important metrics about how cited these documents are, given by the total number of citations, the number of citations a year, and normalized citations, as key components of a general impression about the relevance these documents are able to give rise to. Leading the citation list is the paper “An Empirical Typology of Local Government Systems in Eastern Europe” by Swianiewicz [21] with a total of 125 citations. It is very high number of citations and its very high normalized citation score of 5.40 make this a very influential paper toward understanding the local government systems within Eastern Europe. It is indicative of a baseline paper for this area of study. Others, there is also Blunt, Turner, and Lindroth [22] discussed the evolution of patronage systems in post-Soeharto Indonesia and have hence been critical of the associated changes in politics and administration of the country, often cited 62 times, controlling an average of 2.70. Hendriks and Tops’ “Local Public Management Reforms in the Netherlands: Fads, Fashions, and Winds of Change” (2003) is common with 59 citations. This paper Interrogated trends and transforming dynamics of public management reforms in Dutch governance; the normalized citation rate is 2.15.

Table 2 summarizes and provides a snapshot of works that have had an impact on the subject of decentralization; it reflects some key works that have somehow made their mark and influenced the very knowledge and research carried out. The total number of citations, number of citations per year, and number of normalized citations denote the

TABLE 2: Most Cited Documents.

Document Title	Authors, Year	Source	Citations	TC per Year	Normalized TC
An Empirical Typology of Local Government Systems in Eastern Europe	(Swianiewicz, 2014)	Local Government Studies, 40(2), pp. 292–311	125	11,36	5,40
'Yours in struggle for Majimbo'. Nationalism and the party politics of decolonization in Kenya, 1955-64	(Anderson, 2005)	Journal of Contemporary History, 40(3)	94	4,70	2,17
The Strictures of Inheritance: THE DUTCH ECONOMY IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	(Van Zanden & Van Riel, 2021)	The Strictures of Inheritance, pp. 1–386	79	19,75	5,48
A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology	(Duranti, 2007)	A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology, pp. 1–625	63	3,50	2,33
Patronage's progress in post-soeharto Indonesia	(Blunt et al., 2012)	Public Administration and Development, 32(1), pp. 64–81	62	4,77	2,70
Local public management reforms in the Netherlands: Fads, fashions and winds of change	(Hendriks & Tops, 2003)	Public Administration, 81(2), pp. 301–323	59	2,68	2,15
Territorial administration and political control: Decentralization in France	(Thoenig, 2005)	Public Administration, 83(3), pp. 685–708	47	2,35	1,08
The growth and decentralisation of the modern democratic state	(SHARPE, 1988)	European Journal of Political Research, 16(4), pp. 365–380	47	1,27	1,00
The Role of Politics in Regional	(Gradus, 1983)	Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 73(3), pp. 388–403	44	1,05	1,63
Inequality: The Israeli Case					
The role of law and legal institutions in determining the sustainability of integrated coastal management projects in Indonesia	(Patlis, 2005)	Ocean and Coastal Management, 48(3-6 SPEC. ISS.), pp. 450–467	40	2,00	0,92

Source: Authors analyses. 2024

sustained importance and associated significance of these studies to general academic discourses on decentralization.

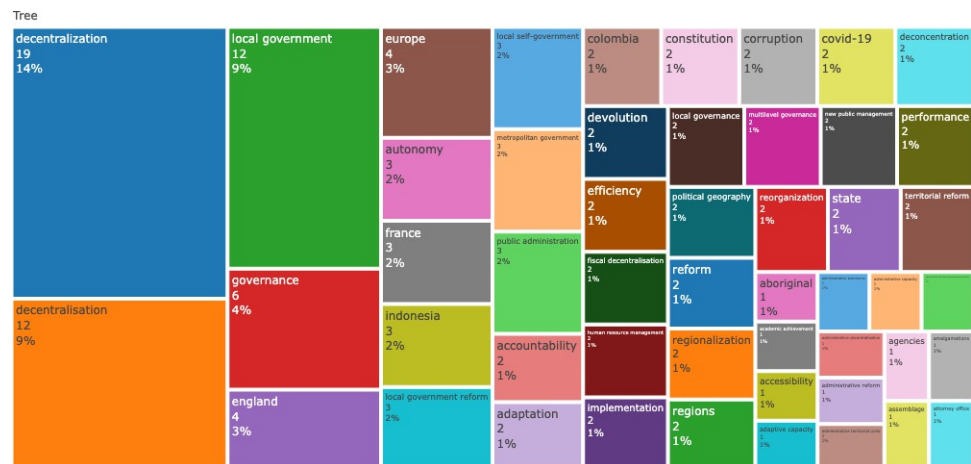


Figure 8: Three-Map of Most Frequent Keywords. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024*

Figure 8 is a treemap visualization that identifies the most common keywords in the research into decentralization within unitary states and states their corresponding percentages. This visualization thus puts a spotlight on the thematic concentrations of the scholarly literature in a way that offers insights into major topics dominating and their relative importance by occurrences and percentage of total keywords.

The most frequent keyword appearing is “decentralization,” which appears 19 times and accounts for 14% of all keywords. Such prevalence underlines that, in essence, research dwells on the processes, implications, and outcomes entailed by decentralization within different contexts. The second most frequent keyword is “decentralisation” with 12 occurrences, accounting for 9% of the corpus; this has been due to its standardization in British English and by the international character of the research, as it captured studies coming from those regions.

Another high ranking keyword is “local government,” occurring 12 times and thus being 9 percent of all tagged words in the titles, of obvious importance as decentralization and the ways in which it impacts on the functioning and reform of local government structures go together. By this token, this word contributes to a great deal of literature about how decentralization contributes to local governance and administration. As such, the term “governance” itself comes up as six occurrences, accounting for 4% of all keywords in relation to mechanisms, quality, and impacts of governance in decentralized systems. This very likely extended into research around the transparency, efficiency, and accountability of decentralized governance frameworks.

The geographical keywords “England” and “Europe” both appear four times, thus 3%, indicating smaller studies of particular regions. These terms provisionally indicate that a significant proportion of the literature reviews decentralization with respect to the English and European administrative and political systems. Other essential keywords include “autonomy,” “France,” “Indonesia,” “reform of local government,” “self-government at the local level,” “metropolitan government,” and “administration in the public sector,” which all appear three times, hence each accounting for 2%. They indicate an entire spectrum of research interest—from autonomy in decentralized units to country-specific case studies and various types of local government and administrative reforms.

Keywords such as “accountability,” “adaptation,” “Colombia,” “constitution,” “corruption,” “COVID-19,” “deconcentration,” “devolution,” “efficiency,” “fiscal decentralization,” “political geography,” “reform,” “regionalization,” “state,” and “territorial reform” appear only twice, thus accounting for about 1% each. These terms indicate that researchers are interested not only in the narrow dimensions of decentralization but also in its broader implications, like the legal frameworks for such a change, corruption-related problems, and regional adaptations.

The treemap of the most frequent keywords gives an unequivocal view of decentralization research thematic priorities. On the one hand, the strongest-core terms, like “decentralization” and “local government,” mirror the basic content. At the same time, through the emergence of the various keywords regionally differentiated, it exposes the amplitude of scope and international relevance. This analysis will help in understanding the main areas of interest and the multidimensionality of decentralization studies, guiding further research directions and policy considerations.

a) Trend Topics and Evolution in Decentralization in Unitary State Research

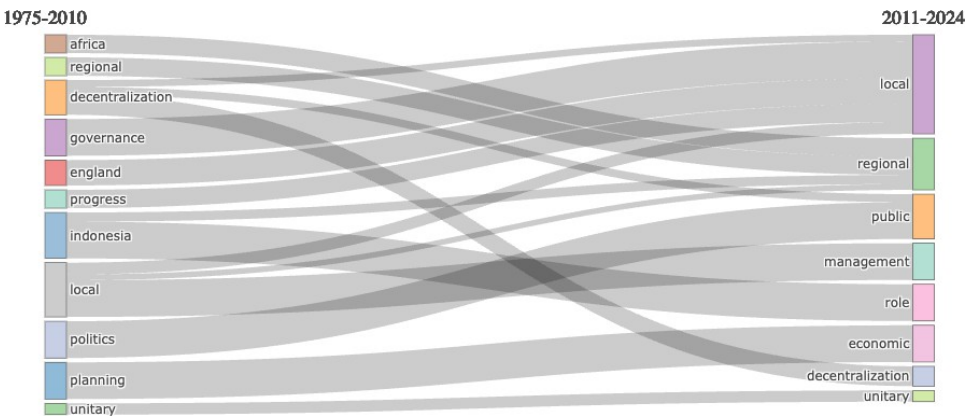


Figure 9: Thematic Evolution of research. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024.*

Figure 9 presents a Sankey diagram of the thematic evolution of research into decentralization within unitary states from 1975 to 2010 and 2011-2024. It provides flow description about the turnover of the core themes of research portraying the turns that were taken towards new areas.

From 1975 to 2010, the major themes were about “Africa,” “regional,” “decentraliza-
tion,” “governance,” “England,” “progress,” “Indonesia,” “local,” “politics,” “planning,”
and “unitary.” These themes point toward the formation stages of research revolving
around core concepts of decentralization, regional governance, and country-specific
studies—with more focus on Africa and Indonesia. This also includes themes like “poli-
tics” and “planning,” which further expedite the political processes and strategic plan-
ning aspects related to decentralization.

Moving into the 2011-2024 period, themes have evolved, and within that, moved
from being central to being peripheral, or have just emerged as such. Some of the key
themes observed in this period are “local,” “regional,” “public,” “management

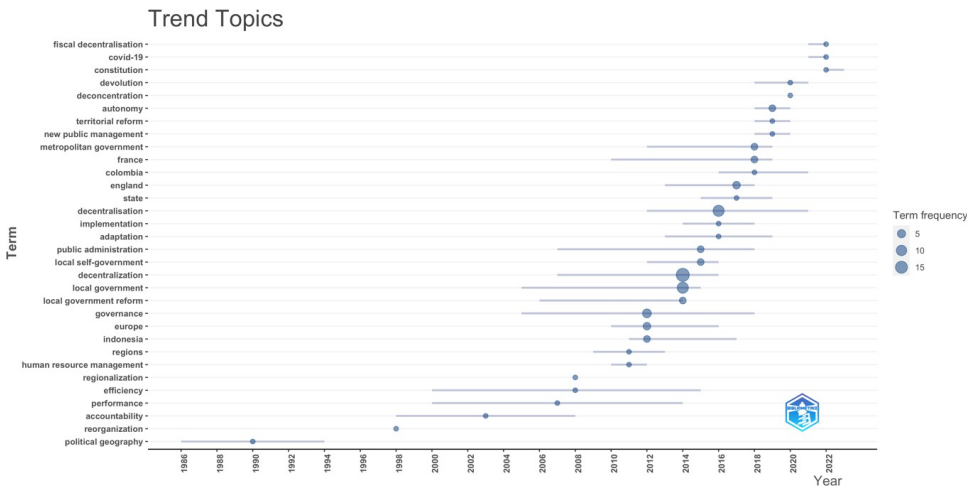


Figure 10: Trend Topics. *Source: Authors analyses. 2024.*

Figure 10. A detailed timeline for topics trending in research with regard to decen-
tralization within unitary states, from the early 1980s until 2023. The diagram gives
an overview of the chronology regarding the ascendance of the various topics; the
size of the circles indicates the term frequency. In the early years, throughout the
1980s and 1990s, research was relatively thin and focused on broad topics such as
“fiscal decentralization,” “unitary,” “governance,” and “local government.” Foundational
themes like these set the stage for later, more specialized inquiries. The modest
frequency of these terms suggests that decentralization research was in its nascent
stages during this period. The period since the 2000s is marked by increased research

activities. “Decentralization,” “Local Government,” and “Public Administration” gained more presence, indicating growing academic interest in understanding the implications and processes for decentralizing governance structures. The rise of “New Public Management” during this period implies interest in the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration reforms associated with decentralization.

In 2010, there is a remarkable diversification of topics, although with an increased frequency. It is at this moment that more concrete terms appear, with a more applied character: “metropolitan governance,” “territorial reforms,” “devolution,” “accountability,” “performance,” “regionalization,” and “public policy.” This time also corresponds to the enlarged Advisors Circles, which underlines their increased importance and intensification of investigations. The discussions thus tend to focus on the practical outcomes and challenges of decentralization, relating clearly to the effectiveness of regional governance, impact on public services, and accountability or performance measures roles. Very clearly, during the past years from 2015 up to 2023, many terms such as “regionalization,” “performance,” “efficiency,” and “governance” were very prominent. This clustering reflects that the field has become mature, and research is now focused increasingly on subtle features of decentralization processes in which nuances explore ways to optimize governance and public administration. It is, however, the prominence of the term “COVID-19” in the later years that showed acute interest in how decentralization frameworks responded to and were impacted by the global pandemic. fig 10: Some trend topics diagram that visualized the evolution and maturation of decentralization research. From foundational studies in the 1980s and 1990s to the more detailed and diverse work since, it makes a case for great expansion. This paper will focus on a move from the general explorations of theory to specific, outcome-oriented research and reflect on how decentralization has been increasingly more complex and important in modern times within the context of governance studies. The review gives readers insight into the entire dynamic research landscape respect to directions of future investigations and points out focal areas of interest as well as emerging trends in this field.

3.3. Discussion

The analysis of the development of decentralization in the unitary state over the past 49 years (1975: 2024) shows a complex and evolving landscape of research, with thematic priority changes, growth in scholarly engagement, and diverse international

contributions. From this perspective, this discussion synopses the bibliometric data, thematic evolution, and topic trends so as to allow one to have a coherent idea of the course, that which led to the field's present state. Steady output, increasing with a growth rate over the years of 2.87%, reflects the consistent and interest-generating trend in decentralization. In return, the spread of publications during the early years of the study, from 1975 to 1990, was rather sporadic, reflecting that this area of research is still in an early stage. The increase in high jump in publications came from the mid-1990s, though there was a visible turn in attitudinal change perhaps impelled by global political changes, waves of democratization processes, and far-flung administrative reforms in different nations. The peak in research activity is shown around 2016 with ten articles published, which implies a time in which scholarship was intensively focused, probably fuelled by huge decentralization reforms and policy experiments in many parts of the globe. Thematic evolution, as presented in the Sankey diagram, points toward the dynamism of decentralization research. Initially, very broad themes like "governance," "politics," and "local government" dominated the discourse. They reflect foundational inquiries into the basic principles of decentralization and what these might entail. The concern has evolved, progressing toward more specialized topics like "public management," "regionalization," and "economic decentralization.". Imported from the dashboard of Elsevier at the end of 2012, this shift in collaboration reflects maturity of the field: the consolidation of the sub-areas of researchers and applications of the decentralization. The leading contributors and institutions are obviously showing a highly cross-collaborative and cross-disciplined domain towards this kind of research. Leading authors such as 'Steet J.' and major institutions like Cardiff University, and the World Bank, have been influential in shaping this discourse with important theoretical and empirical contributions. Specifically the diversity in geographical location of research ranges from the UK, Indonesia, and the USA depicting at once the global relevance of the studies on decentralization and the diversity of context in which decentralization processes are examined.

Trend topics provide an expressive storyline of the changing priorities in decentralization research. In fact, the attention toward fiscal decentralization, governance, and local government in the early stages provided the stepping stone for further research in more sophisticated areas, but only recently has the influence shifted to the investigation into resilience and adaptability of decentralized systems in situations of crisis, such as that posited by terms like "COVID-19" and similar definers. The essential focus on greater "accountability," "efficiency," and "public policy" in the devolution

process throughout the past years does imply a critical assessment of the results of decentralization in general, with scholars closely watching the efficacy and impact of decentralized governance in relation to public service delivery and administrative performance. This is commensurate with, and indeed a response to, the general world-wide trend toward evidence-based policy development and performance measurement within public administration.

Several implications for the future of decentralization research are suggested by these and other findings emanating from this bibliometric analysis. The continued and sustained growth and thematic diversifications suggest that the field is healthy and expanding, but this is at once a signal for the need for continuation with interdisciplinary and cross-regional studies to capture the full complexity of decentralization processes. In the future, further comparative studies can throw more light by making comparisons of different models of decentralization and their respective outcomes in other unitary states. Besides, research carried out on decentralization can be integrated with today's reigning issues related to digital governance, environmental sustainability, global health crises, and challenges of the times so that the role of decentralized systems is vividly substantial for the changing needs of tomorrow. Informed by this strong foundation over the last 49 years, researchers would surely be in a position to delve into these dimensions of decentralization to make contributions that ensure more effectiveness and responsiveness in governance frameworks across the globe.

4. Conclusion

From roots in theoretical argumentation to a more detailed and outcome-oriented field of study, the research on decentralization within unitary states has undergone tremendous evolution. It thus shows the dynamism and interdisciplinarity of the research area with its steady increase in publications, diversification of themes, and international collaboration in the scholarly arena. It will be centrally important for the further centralization of issues of decentralized research application in meeting complex 21st-century challenges in governance as the field progresses, focusing on comparative studies and studies that locate an aspect within specific contexts, including more emerging global issues.

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