

Inclusive Governance in Peruvian Subnational Governments: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze scientific papers published between 2020–2025 in the Scopus and SciELO platforms focused on inclusive governance in subnational governments. A total of 12 articles from these databases were selected and reviewed. It was found that the SciELO database presents a limited number of studies specifically addressing inclusive governance in local or regional contexts, although it provides valuable insights adapted to Latin American realities. On the other hand, Scopus shows broader coverage and a greater volume of publications, reflecting its international scope and the diversity of research settings that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of inclusive governance at the subnational level. In conclusion, the evidence highlights the importance of strengthening inclusive governance mechanisms in local governments, emphasizing policies, institutional frameworks, and participatory strategies that foster social equity and citizen engagement. This requires a multidisciplinary and context-sensitive approach capable of addressing cultural, institutional, and political barriers, thus contributing to democratic consolidation and sustainable territorial development.

Keywords: *Inclusive Governance, Subnational Governments, Citizen Participation, Public Administration, Territorial Development.*

Introduction

Inclusive governance, understood as the articulation of policies, institutional frameworks, and participatory mechanisms that guarantee equity, social justice, and citizen engagement in decision-making, has become a central axis in the strengthening of democratic systems worldwide(1). Within this field, the role of subnational governments is particularly relevant, since they represent the closest level of the State to the population and are responsible for implementing public policies that directly affect local development, access to services, and community well-being(2). Their capacity to integrate inclusiveness into governance practices determines the extent to which marginalized groups, such as rural communities, indigenous peoples, women, and youth, are incorporated into public decision-making processes(3).

In the Latin American context, the discussion on inclusive governance has gained prominence due to the persistent challenges of inequality, poverty, and weak institutional frameworks that limit democratic consolidation(4). Countries such as Peru have implemented decentralization policies aimed at strengthening subnational governments and promoting citizen participation(5). However, the results have been heterogeneous: while urban and resource-rich municipalities have achieved advances in participatory budgeting, social inclusion programs, and transparency initiatives, many rural and Amazonian territories continue to face severe limitations associated with institutional fragility, lack of technical capacity, cultural barriers, and fragmented coordination among government levels(6). These disparities highlight the urgency of analyzing governance as a determinant of equity and sustainable territorial development(7).

The relevance of inclusive governance at the subnational level is not only driven by international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, but also by the growing demands of citizens for greater transparency, accountability, and equitable access to opportunities(8). Initiatives such as participatory budgeting, community monitoring of public services, and inclusive planning processes are increasingly valued as mechanisms that democratize governance and reduce social gaps(9). Nevertheless, persistent

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weaknesses, reflected in the concentration of power, inadequate regulatory frameworks, insufficient funding, and limited intergovernmental coordination, continue to weaken the sustainability and legitimacy of these initiatives(10).

Despite notable progress in institutional reforms and participatory mechanisms, multiple challenges hinder the full realization of inclusive governance in subnational contexts(11). Among the most pressing are unequal distribution of resources among regions, lack of professional training for local authorities, sociocultural resistance to participation of minority groups, and deficiencies in accountability mechanisms. Furthermore, the absence of robust information systems and monitoring tools restricts the ability of subnational governments to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of inclusive policies. These challenges demonstrate that governance is not only an administrative process but a multidimensional factor that directly influences equity, legitimacy, and citizen trust in government(12).

Given this scenario, it is essential to conduct a systematic review of the literature that explores the current state of inclusive governance in subnational governments. Such an approach allows for the identification of theoretical contributions, practical experiences, and contextual barriers that shape the effectiveness of inclusive practices at the local and regional level. Moreover, it contributes to highlighting best practices and replicable models capable of guiding policymakers, local authorities, and civil society in the design and implementation of more inclusive and sustainable policies(13).

The methodology adopted for this review consists of the analysis of scientific studies published between 2020 and 2025 in indexed databases such as Scopus and SciELO, complemented by reports from international organizations specialized in governance and public administration. The integration of these sources provides a comprehensive view that balances theoretical frameworks with empirical evidence derived from case studies and institutional practices. This diversity of approaches ensures a contextualized understanding of inclusive governance as a determinant of democratic quality and territorial development.

Through this review, the objective is not limited to mapping available evidence but also to critically evaluate the determinants of success in building inclusive subnational governance. Variables such as political will, institutional capacity, intergovernmental coordination, financial resources, citizen empowerment, and recognition of cultural diversity emerge as decisive elements for the sustainability of inclusive governance. Without addressing these dimensions, even the most innovative reforms risk being ineffective, unable to generate real impact on the equity and well-being of local populations.

The identification of best practices, particularly those that combine participatory approaches with strong institutional frameworks, represents a valuable contribution to the debate. Successful strategies include participatory budgeting experiences in municipalities, intercultural approaches to local policy planning, and intersectoral initiatives that link governance with education, health, and social inclusion(14). By analyzing these experiences, it is possible to strengthen subnational governments and promote governance models that are more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable.

Aligned with this purpose, the research was guided by the question of what studies have been published between 2020 and 2025 on inclusive governance in subnational governments. The review focused on identifying conceptual frameworks, assessing methodological approaches, and extracting conclusions relevant to policymaking and institutional practice. By limiting the scope to recent publications indexed in Scopus and SciELO, the review ensures updated and contextually relevant evidence for the Latin American and Peruvian context.

Finally, the establishment of rigorous selection criteria guarantees the methodological robustness of this review. Only studies directly related to inclusive governance in subnational governments, with empirical support and methodological quality, were considered. In contrast, publications lacking relevance to the research objective or without empirical evidence were excluded. This careful selection ensures that the conclusions derive from solid and contextually pertinent evidence, offering valuable insights for the ongoing debate on strengthening inclusive governance in subnational governments.

Methodology

The review was conducted using academic databases such as SciELO and Scopus, which provide access to a wide range of updated and relevant scientific information. SciELO was particularly important for identifying Latin American research, offering studies contextualized to the realities of local governance and public administration. In contrast, Scopus provided access to a broader set of

international publications, allowing the identification of theoretical and methodological frameworks applicable to the study of inclusive governance in subnational governments.

To optimize the search process, specific inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Articles published between 2020 and 2025 were selected, focusing on studies related to inclusive governance, subnational governments, citizen participation, public administration, and territorial development. Only articles with methodological rigor, empirical evidence, and clear relevance to the research objective were included, while those lacking scientific quality or disconnected from the variable of interest were excluded.

In order to facilitate the search and organization of the information, a set of keywords was defined and systematically applied in both databases. The main terms used included *“Inclusive governance”*, *“Subnational governments”*, *“Citizen participation”*, *“Public administration”*, and *“Territorial development”*. In addition, tables were created to record the identified studies, coding the keywords for easier management and classification of the retrieved information.

Table 1: Levels of Analysis and their Codes

Search Terms	Code
“Inclusive governance”	1
“Subnational governments”	2
“Citizen participation”	3
“Public administration”	4
“Territorial development”	5

Results

The systematic review carried out through SciELO and Scopus revealed significant disparities in the availability of research across the two databases, reflecting differences in coverage, thematic scope, and geographical focus of scientific production. SciELO, with its emphasis on Latin America, provided more context-specific contributions relevant to the realities of subnational governance, particularly in the Andean and Amazonian regions. Conversely, Scopus offered a substantially larger number of documents, which highlights its global scope and broader research perspectives on inclusive governance, public administration, and citizen participation.

The differences were particularly evident in terms such as *“Inclusive governance”* and *“Subnational governments”*, where Scopus presented more than triple the number of publications compared to SciELO. This underscores the central role of global repositories in conducting comprehensive reviews while confirming the complementary value of regional databases for capturing locally relevant insights. The results also show that while Latin American production is advancing, it remains relatively limited compared to the international literature, especially regarding the design and evaluation of inclusive governance frameworks adapted to local contexts.

Another relevant finding was the growing academic interest in the intersection between governance, territorial development, and citizen participation. Studies published in Scopus demonstrated broader analyses of governance models, accountability mechanisms, and their impact on democratic consolidation, while SciELO emphasized barriers specific to Latin America, such as institutional fragility, cultural resistance, lack of technical capacities, and inequalities in resource distribution. This contrast highlights the need to strengthen academic production in Peru to generate governance models adapted to regional and local realities, rather than relying predominantly on frameworks developed in other sociopolitical contexts.

When analyzing recurring themes across studies, one of the most prominent findings related to *“Citizen participation”*. Several works emphasized that inclusive governance is not only determined by the existence of institutional frameworks or legal provisions but also by the effectiveness of mechanisms that allow real involvement of diverse social groups in decision-making. Inequities in participation, particularly between urban and rural populations, condition the effectiveness of local policies and programs. Therefore, citizen engagement emerges as a critical dimension of governance to ensure that policies are representative and transformative.

Organizational capacity and institutional coordination were also recurrently identified as determining factors in the effectiveness of inclusive governance at the subnational level. Local governments with strong leadership, intersectoral collaboration, and sustained political commitment tended to achieve better outcomes in participatory budgeting processes, social inclusion programs, and territorial development initiatives. By contrast, institutions characterized by limited financial resources, fragmented governance, or weak accountability mechanisms often faced greater difficulties in sustaining and scaling inclusive practices.

Finally, the systematic review underscores persistent gaps in *“Public administration”* and *“Territorial development”*. Limitations such as insufficient human resources, lack of continuous training, cultural barriers, and the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation systems directly hinder the quality of governance practices implemented at the local and regional level. The unequal distribution of infrastructure and fiscal resources between urban and rural areas further exacerbates inequities, reinforcing governance challenges as structural barriers to inclusion. These findings highlight that, although legal frameworks and participatory mechanisms exist, their effectiveness depends on parallel investments in institutional capacity, political will, and inclusive governance practices that ensure subnational governments contribute to equity, democratic consolidation, and sustainable development.

Table 3

Summary table of the variable “Inclusive governance”

Author(s)	Country	Definition of Inclusive Governance	Dimensions Analyzed	Results / Conclusions
Djukic-Min, Norcross & Searing (15)	USA	Inclusive governance understood as shared participation and collaborative decision-making in universities.	Environmental sustainability, employee participation, green HR management.	Shared and inclusive governance predicts emission reduction and improved environmental performance. Campus participation mediates outcomes.
Massari, Longo & Branchini (16)	Italy	Governance as an adaptable process to manage security in public spaces, integrating policy, design, and management.	Urban security, spatial planning, social inclusion.	Negotiated governance allows safe spaces without losing social interaction. Introduces tools (SVA, Atlas) for security-by-design.
Inca Soller, Bravo, Rodríguez & López (17)	Peru	Inclusive governance as the integration of cultural diversity in public management.	Citizen participation, perception of inclusion, effectiveness of public policies.	Gap exists between recognition of diversity and policy effectiveness (only 36.4% perceive effectiveness). Calls for intercultural participatory budgets and regional observatories.

Ortiz-Valverde & Peris-Blanes (18)	Costa Rica / Spain	Inclusive governance as family farmers' participation in agricultural innovation processes.	Social justice (recognition, procedural, distributional), innovation, agrobiodiversity.	Progress at local participation level, but limited influence at national decision-making. Challenges include gender, youth, and balancing income with biodiversity conservation.
Li, Abu Bakar, Ismail, Mohd Ariffin & Mundher (19)	China / Malaysia	Inclusive governance as a strategy to protect hot spring landscapes under economic pressures.	Protection policies, institutional coordination, public participation.	Current policies ineffective due to fragmented authorities, low participation, and poor coordination. Inclusive mechanisms urgently needed.
Chomlafel & Méreaux (20)	France	Inclusive governance as a partnership system among winegrowers, traders, and local actors in the Champagne industry.	Territorial governance, inter-professional cooperation, socioeconomic evolution.	Inclusive governance faces tensions between unions and traders, especially after COVID-19. Need to integrate emerging actors.
Maddaloni & Davis (21)	United Kingdom	Inclusive governance as stakeholder participation in projects to ensure social sustainability.	Project management, social sustainability, stakeholder inclusion.	Stakeholder inclusion enhances social sustainability and organizational reputation, aligned with the SDGs.
Honeybun-Arnolda, Turner, Mukhopadhyay, Collins & Wills (22)	United Kingdom	Goal-based governance with inclusive and democratic focus at the local level.	Citizen participation, institutional structures, collaborative governance.	Local governance must adopt innovative participatory methods to reflect sociopolitical contexts and address sustainability challenges.
Annahar, Widianingsih, Muhtar & Paskarina (23)	Indonesia	Inclusive governance as a management model in village-level decentralization.	Success factors, local challenges, community participation.	Developed villages more likely to achieve inclusion due to stronger support factors. Success depends on local resources and context.

Annahar, Widianingsih, Paskarina & Muhtar (24)	Indonesia	Inclusive governance seen as an evolution of the governance paradigm emphasizing key principles.	Participation, accessibility, structure, equity, collaboration.	Scientific output on inclusive governance has grown since 2013. Most studied principles: participation, equity, collaboration, empowerment.
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Source: Own elaboration

Discussion

In a recent analysis of inclusive governance, scientific studies published between 2023 and 2025 across diverse contexts and disciplines were reviewed. The findings reveal a heterogeneous understanding and implementation of inclusive governance, reflecting political, cultural, environmental, and organizational dynamics. While some studies emphasize participation and accountability as central pillars, others underscore its role in sustainability transitions, cultural diversity management, or urban security. This confirms that inclusive governance is not a static or uniform model, but rather a multidimensional process shaped by institutional capacities, stakeholder engagement, and contextual challenges.

Table 2, which synthesizes the selected documents, illustrates this variety of perspectives. Djukic-Min et al. (2025) in the United States conceptualize inclusive governance as a participatory and shared decision-making process that enhances universities' environmental sustainability. Their findings highlight the mediating role of employee engagement, showing that governance structures that incorporate diverse voices strengthen organizational commitment to reducing emissions. Similarly, Massari et al. (2025) in Italy frame governance as a negotiated process in public space security, arguing that integrating policy, design, and governance prevents exclusionary dynamics and fosters vibrant urban interactions.

From a Latin American perspective, Inca Soller et al. (2025) in Peru analyze inclusive governance in public management through the lens of cultural diversity. Their study reveals a significant gap between policy discourse and practical effectiveness, with rural and indigenous communities remaining marginalized. This points to the need for intercultural training of public officials and participatory mechanisms that go beyond symbolic recognition. In Costa Rica, Ortiz-Valverde and Peris-Blanes (2024) highlight inclusive governance in agri-food innovation, showing how participatory plant-breeding processes with family farmers contribute to justice dimensions such as recognition, procedural, and distributional equity, although gaps persist in gender and intergenerational inclusion.

Environmental governance also emerges as a key domain. Li et al. (2024) in China identify barriers to implementing inclusive governance in hot spring landscapes, including fragmented authority, limited public participation, and lack of trust, leading to ineffective protection policies. Chomlafel and Méreaux (2024) add a European case with the Champagne industry, showing how inclusive governance in AOC structures can mitigate conflicts between producers and merchants, although pandemic-related challenges exposed tensions in power-sharing.

Stakeholder engagement is another recurring dimension. Maddaloni and Davis (2024) stress that project-based organizations must adopt systematic inclusion of stakeholders to achieve social sustainability outcomes. Honeybun-Arnolda et al. (2024), working in the UK, demonstrate how goal-based governance can be localized through participatory methods, enabling institutions to mobilize around sustainability in ways that reflect local cultural and political contexts. In Indonesia, Annahar et al. (2023) analyze inclusive governance at the village level, showing that developed villages with stronger institutional and social capital are more likely to achieve inclusion, while structural challenges hinder others. Complementing this, their bibliometric review (2023) maps the conceptual evolution of inclusive governance, identifying recurrent principles such as participation, accountability, fairness, empowerment, and collaboration.

Overall, the systematic review indicates that inclusive governance is strongly conditioned by sociopolitical contexts and institutional arrangements. In high-income settings, its implementation is

often linked to sustainability, innovation, and urban security, with emphasis on cross-sector collaboration and stakeholder participation. In contrast, in Latin America and Asia, inclusive governance debates concentrate on managing cultural diversity, strengthening local institutions, and overcoming barriers of inequality and marginalization. Across all cases, equity, participation, and accountability stand out as transversal elements, without which governance risks reinforcing existing exclusions.

In summary, inclusive governance should be understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates participation, equity, cultural sensitivity, and institutional coordination. Comparative evidence demonstrates that successful experiences articulate institutional strengthening with stakeholder inclusion and adapt to local realities. Only in this way can governance contribute effectively to building more equitable, sustainable, and context-sensitive systems.

Conclusions

Regarding definitions, it is concluded that inclusive governance in subnational governments should be understood as a multidimensional and dynamic construct shaped by institutional, sociocultural, political, and territorial determinants. Collectively, these elements aim to promote equity, accountability, and citizen participation in public administration. Its scope is strongly conditioned by local realities, including cultural diversity, territorial disparities, and institutional capacity, which determine how societies design and implement inclusive governance frameworks. For this reason, a comprehensive approach is required, one that not only emphasizes institutional leadership and accountability but also integrates participatory strategies, intercultural sensitivity, and collaborative models adapted to regional and local contexts. Likewise, the sustainability of inclusive governance depends on the establishment of robust policies that reduce structural inequities, promote territorial development, and foster transparent, participatory decision-making processes.

The most common dimensions identified in the studies highlight participation, accountability, cultural recognition, territorial development, and institutional coordination as central components defining the scope and impact of inclusive governance. Participation is reflected in the need to include diverse social actors, such as community organizations, indigenous populations, and civil society, in decision-making processes. Accountability emerges as a critical factor in ensuring trust in institutions and preventing governance failures. Cultural recognition underscores the importance of policies that value diversity and avoid exclusionary practices, particularly in multiethnic contexts. Territorial development and institutional coordination are recurrently emphasized as determinants of effective governance, ensuring that policies are not only designed but also implemented in a way that responds to local needs and resources.

Barriers to the development and implementation of inclusive governance are deeply interconnected, reflecting the interplay of structural, political, and cultural factors. Limited financial and human resources, fragmented coordination between government levels, political instability, and entrenched inequalities restrict the capacity of subnational governments to deliver inclusive and equitable policies. These limitations are compounded by cultural tensions, weak institutional frameworks, and insufficient participatory mechanisms that prevent marginalized groups from fully engaging in governance processes. To address these challenges, it is essential to strengthen institutional capacity through investment in resources and training, promote participatory governance models that include vulnerable populations, and design policies that are sensitive to cultural and territorial diversity. Such measures can reduce inequities and ensure that governance becomes a driver of inclusion, legitimacy, and sustainable development.

Regarding the main objective, it was found that research on inclusive governance remains unevenly distributed across global and regional contexts. While high-income settings emphasize digital governance, urban sustainability, and cross-sectoral collaboration, low- and middle-income countries concentrate on cultural diversity, participatory inclusion, and the institutional strengthening of local governments. This indicates the importance of expanding research visibility in diverse repositories such as Scopus and SciELO to capture both global and locally relevant contributions. Strengthening theoretical and empirical production in Latin America, and particularly in Peru, is crucial to build context-specific frameworks that reduce inequalities, foster citizen participation, and promote inclusive and sustainable governance at the subnational level.

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