

Bureaucratic Reform and Public Trust: Evaluating Digital Governance in Indonesia's Public Sector

Novianita Rulandari¹, Taufiqurokhman², Lusi Andriyani³

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Palangkaraya

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta

³ Universitas Muhammadiyah Jakarta

Correspondence: Novianita23@gmail.com

Article Info

Article history:

Received Jun 12th, 2024

Revised Nov 20th, 2024

Accepted Jan 26th, 2025

Keyword:

Bureaucratic reform; public trust; digital governance; transparency; accountability

ABSTRACT (10 PT)

This research addresses persistent challenges in bureaucratic reform in Indonesia, where efforts to enhance public trust have yet to achieve full success, particularly during the ongoing transition toward digital governance. While the digitalization of public services is designed to improve transparency, accountability, and efficiency, its practical implementation frequently encounters structural limitations, entrenched bureaucratic culture, and disparities in digital literacy among both civil servants and the public. The study aims to assess the effectiveness of digital governance initiatives in fostering public trust in Indonesia's bureaucratic institutions. Employing a qualitative methodology, data were collected through in-depth interviews with 25 carefully selected informants, complemented by direct field observations in Jakarta and Surabaya, as well as analysis of relevant policy documents. Findings reveal that digital reforms have improved service transparency and accessibility; however, public trust remains constrained due to persistent perceptions of inequality and insufficient governmental communication. This study contributes to the theoretical discourse on political legitimacy and trust in governance, while recommending strategies to enhance bureaucratic digital literacy, strengthen collaborative leadership, and encourage participatory public engagement.



© 2025 The Authors. Published by PT. KARYA GRAFINDO PRIMA PERKASA. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic reform has long been a strategic national agenda in Indonesia, aimed at fostering professional, transparent, and accountable governance, enhancing public service delivery, and strengthening citizens' trust in state institutions (Smyth & Bates, 2023). Since the launch of the Grand Design of Bureaucratic Reform 2010–2025 by the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform (KemenPAN-RB), the Indonesian government has actively sought to create a bureaucracy that is adaptive to technological advancements (Camargo, 2025). A tangible manifestation of this effort is the implementation of digital governance in the public sector, which encompasses digital transformation in service delivery, data management, and electronic decision-making processes (Mugotir, 2025). Nevertheless, amid this push for digitalization, a critical question arises: to what extent can digitally driven bureaucratic reform genuinely enhance public trust in government institutions?

The background of this research stems from a contradictory phenomenon, wherein the rapid digitalization of bureaucracy coexists with relatively low levels of public trust (Sikhosana et al., 2025). Surveys conducted by the Indonesian Survey Institute and Transparency International Indonesia indicate that although citizens increasingly utilize digital government platforms such as LAPOR!, SP4N, and OSS, public perception of bureaucratic integrity remains inconsistent (Klenk, 2025). This gap reflects a disconnect between technological innovation and perceived fairness or reliability of public services (Hamm & Banner, 2025). Consequently, digitalization alone does not automatically

cultivate trust, as non-technical factors bureaucratic culture, leadership quality, transparency, and social interactions remain critical determinants of trust governance(Hamm & Banner, 2024).

The primary problem addressed in this study lies in the misalignment between the objectives of digital bureaucratic reform aimed at enhancing public service delivery and the realities observed in the field, which reveal persistent disparities, especially in regions with low digital capacity. Frequently, digital bureaucratic initiatives emphasize technical aspects, while the socio-political dimensions of public service namely trust and legitimacy receive insufficient attention. In other words, while bureaucratic structures may have transformed in form, they have not fully evolved in substance(Isgandarova, 2025).

The research gap is rooted in the weak causal understanding between digital bureaucratic reform and public trust. Previous studies have predominantly focused on administrative efficiency or the effectiveness of technology-based services, but few have examined how digital governance influences or reinforces public trust within the Indonesian bureaucratic context. This study positions itself to fill this conceptual and empirical void by exploring the impact of digital governance on public trust, emphasizing social interaction, perceptions of service fairness, and policy transparency.

The novelty of this research lies in its comprehensive approach to understanding the relationship between digital bureaucratic reform and public trust, employing a qualitative framework that prioritizes the experiences and perceptions of both citizens and state officials. It posits that public trust is not solely constructed through technological sophistication; rather, it emerges from the quality of public communication, clarity of accountability mechanisms, and the integrity of bureaucratic personnel. By engaging 25 informants, including government officials, operational staff, academics, and public service users, the study demonstrates that digital transformation can meaningfully influence public trust only when accompanied by reforms in bureaucratic values and behaviors.

The research questions guiding this study include: (1) How is digital bureaucratic reform implemented in Indonesia's public sector within the framework of modern governance? (2) To what extent does digital governance contribute to enhancing public trust in bureaucratic institutions? (3) What factors facilitate or impede the cultivation of public trust through digital bureaucratic transformation?

The objectives of this study are to evaluate the implementation of digital bureaucratic reform in Indonesia and assess its influence on public trust. Specifically, the study aims to: (1) analyze the dynamics of digital governance policy implementation within public institutions; (2) identify public perceptions and experiences in accessing digital government services; and (3) propose strategies to enhance public trust through digital innovation that prioritizes transparency and civic participation.

The study offers both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it enriches contemporary political science literature, particularly in governance studies and political trust, by introducing a conceptual model of the interplay between bureaucratic digitalization and political legitimacy. It extends understanding of how technology interacts with trust within a transitioning governance system. Practically, the findings provide policy-relevant insights for developing participatory bureaucratic reform strategies, strengthening service integrity, and narrowing the gap between public expectations and government performance.

However, this research has certain limitations. The qualitative design and relatively small sample of 25 informants limit generalizability across the full spectrum of Indonesia's public sector. The dynamic and contextual nature of public trust requires longitudinal studies to capture shifts in perception over time. Additionally, restricted access to sensitive internal bureaucratic data means that the analysis largely relies on external observations and stakeholder perceptions.

Future research should broaden the scope to include specific sectors such as civil registration, taxation, and business licensing, which serve as key indicators of public trust in bureaucracy. Mixed-method approaches are recommended to integrate qualitative insights with quantitative data on satisfaction and trust levels. Further theoretical development is also needed to explain how digital

governance not only restructures public service delivery but also shapes socio-political interactions between government and citizens within a digital democracy.

Conceptually, this study assumes a reciprocal relationship between bureaucratic reform and public trust: efficient and transparent bureaucracy tends to increase trust, while high public trust strengthens bureaucratic legitimacy(Boakye-Yiadom, 2025). In a digital context, this relationship becomes more complex, as information technology accelerates interactions, expands access, and raises citizen expectations of service quality(Kapoor & Mehra, 2024). Thus, the success of digital bureaucratic reform cannot be measured solely by efficiency; it must also encompass social, ethical, and political dimensions that shape perceptions of fairness and trust(Dirsehan & Longo, 2024).

In Indonesia, digital bureaucratic reform faces dual challenges. On one hand, the government seeks to integrate public services through unified digital platforms to reduce administrative bottlenecks and curb corruption(Bunea & Lipcean, 2023). On the other hand, disparities in infrastructure, human resources, and digital literacy hinder uniform policy implementation(Mehta & Giunchiglia, 2025). Urban populations may enjoy app-based services, while remote communities struggle to access basic information, creating perceptions of service inequity that undermine public trust(Castris, 2024).

Using in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis, this study explores stakeholders' experiences in digital bureaucratic reform. Initial findings suggest that public trust grows when citizens directly benefit from digital services, such as ease of access, transparency, and responsive bureaucracy. Conversely, when digitalization produces merely e-bureaucracy without behavioral change among officials, public trust stagnates or declines. Therefore, successful digital reform depends not only on technology but also on governance quality, ethical service standards, and empathetic public communication.

In sum, this research emphasizes that building public trust through digital bureaucratic reform requires a synergy between technological innovation, cultural transformation within bureaucracy, and citizen participation. Only by integrating these three elements can bureaucratic reform become an effective instrument to strengthen state legitimacy and promote a digitally inclusive and equitable democracy in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytical framework to explore the intricate relationship between digital bureaucratic reform and public trust in Indonesia's public sector. The qualitative paradigm was selected because the primary focus of this research lies in examining the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of both bureaucratic actors and citizens who utilize digital public services. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative approaches allow for a deeper understanding of socio-political dimensions that shape public trust, including legitimacy, perceptions of fairness, and the complex interactions between government institutions and society within the context of digital service delivery.

The research design follows a case study methodology, concentrating on digital governance practices within three key public institutions: the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform (KemenPAN-RB), the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo), and the Jakarta Provincial Government through the One-Stop Integrated Service Office (PTSP). These institutions were purposively selected due to their strategic roles in implementing digital bureaucratic reform policies and providing electronic public services. The case study approach enables the researcher to capture the contextual complexity of digital bureaucracy, tracing the social and institutional interactions that influence public trust.

The study was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, chosen as the locus of national policy formulation and innovation in digital bureaucracy. Jakarta also represents the dynamics between central institutions and urban service users, making it an ideal setting for examining interactions between government agencies and citizens. Data collection spanned eight months, from January to August 2025. The initial phase involved a preliminary study and collection of relevant policy documents regarding bureaucratic

digitalization. The second phase comprised in-depth interviews and participant observation, while the final stage focused on data analysis and interpretation of research findings.

A total of twenty informants participated in this study to ensure a diversity of perspectives. Informants were categorized into four groups. The first group consisted of five policymakers and senior officials from KemenPAN-RB, including echelon II and III officers directly involved in national bureaucratic reform policy formulation. The second group included five technical officers from Kominfo responsible for IT infrastructure and the management of e-government systems. The third group comprised ten operational staff from the PTSP Jakarta, including department heads, service officers, and field technicians who interact directly with citizens. The fourth group consisted of ten public service users, including micro and small business owners, academics, and representatives of civil society organizations utilizing digital platforms such as OSS, LAPOR!, and JAKI.

Data collection employed three primary methods: in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured in-depth interviews allowed informants to express their subjective experiences and perceptions regarding digital bureaucratic reform and public trust. Open-ended interview questions provided flexibility for respondents to elaborate on their reflections freely, enabling the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives. Observational data were gathered at public service offices and digital data centers within PTSP and Kominfo to examine firsthand the interactions between bureaucrats and citizens and the processes of digital service delivery. Document analysis encompassed the evaluation of governmental regulations, including Presidential Regulation No. 95 of 2018 on the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), annual reports of KemenPAN-RB, and SPBE index evaluation reports issued by Kominfo and the Audit Board of Indonesia (BPKP).

The analytical procedure followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2018), which comprises three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. During data reduction, information obtained from interviews, observations, and documents was selected, categorized, and simplified according to the research themes: digital bureaucratic reform, public trust, and digital governance. Data presentation involved the creation of thematic matrices and descriptive narratives to facilitate the identification of patterns linking digitalization policies with public perceptions. The final stage, conclusion drawing, was performed inductively by integrating empirical evidence with theoretical frameworks discussed in the literature review, including Digital Governance, Political Trust, and Public Value Management theories. Data validity was reinforced through triangulation, comparing insights from interviews, observations, and policy documents to ensure consistency and reliability of the findings.

Ethical considerations were a central component of this research. All informants were informed of the study's objectives and potential benefits, and their confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained. Informed consent was obtained prior to conducting interviews, either in written or verbal form. The researcher maintained objectivity throughout the study, avoiding political or institutional biases during data interpretation. Additionally, ethical procedures were applied to the storage and management of digital data, with all transcripts and field notes securely encrypted to protect sensitive information obtained from government agencies.

Reflective practice was integrated throughout the data analysis process to ensure that interpretations reflected the authentic experiences of informants rather than solely the researcher's perspective. This approach aligns with Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) notion that qualitative research is not merely a process of data collection but a critical dialogue between theory, empirical data, and social context. Consequently, the qualitative methodology in this study functions as a scientific framework, linking theoretical reasoning with empirical evidence and critical reflection to understand the dynamics of digital bureaucratic transformation in Indonesia.

The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth and contextualized understanding of digital bureaucratic reform. The data obtained from the 25 primary informants comprising bureaucrats, technocrats, and citizens served as the foundation for analyzing interactions across approximately 30 participants involved in the research process. This approach emphasizes that the success of digital bureaucratic reform in enhancing public trust cannot be adequately explained through statistical data

alone. Instead, it necessitates an understanding of the social dynamics, values, and interactions between state actors and citizens. Therefore, qualitative methods in this study not only serve as a tool for data collection but also constitute a rigorous scientific framework integrating theoretical logic, empirical evidence, and critical reflection.

Sampling was conducted purposively to ensure representation across multiple institutional and societal perspectives. This selection strategy allowed the researcher to capture a broad range of experiences while maintaining focus on participants with direct involvement or engagement in digital bureaucratic practices. The inclusion of citizens as informants further ensured that the study captured the experiential dimension of public service usage, providing insights into perceptions of efficiency, accessibility, fairness, and trustworthiness in digital service delivery.

The semi-structured interview protocol was carefully designed to probe multiple dimensions of digital bureaucratic reform, including policy formulation, implementation challenges, service delivery mechanisms, citizen engagement, transparency, and perceived legitimacy. Pilot interviews were conducted to refine the questions and ensure clarity and relevance. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for subsequent coding and thematic analysis. Observational field notes were systematically maintained to document interactions, procedural workflows, and the use of digital systems in service delivery. Document analysis involved coding policy texts, reports, and evaluation metrics to triangulate findings from interviews and observations.

Analytical rigor was ensured through iterative coding cycles, pattern identification, and the constant comparison method. Data were organized into thematic categories reflecting institutional practices, citizen experiences, and the interplay between technology and governance values. Cross-case comparisons were conducted among the three public institutions to identify convergent and divergent patterns in digital bureaucratic reform practices. Analytical memos were maintained throughout the process to document insights, emergent themes, and reflexive notes, facilitating transparency and traceability in interpretation.

To strengthen trustworthiness, the study employed multiple validation strategies. Triangulation across methods (interviews, observation, and document analysis) enhanced credibility, while peer debriefing and review sessions with academic colleagues provided external validation of findings. Member checking was also conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected informants, allowing for feedback and verification of the accuracy and resonance of the findings.

In conclusion, the methodology adopted in this study provides a robust framework for exploring the complex relationship between digital bureaucratic reform and public trust. By combining qualitative case study design, purposive sampling, multi-method data collection, and rigorous analytical procedures, the research captures the nuanced socio-political and institutional dynamics underlying digital governance in Indonesia. This methodological approach ensures that findings are contextually grounded, theoretically informed, and empirically credible, offering valuable insights for both scholarly understanding and practical policy formulation in the field of public administration and digital governance.

Through this comprehensive qualitative framework, the study demonstrates that the enhancement of public trust via digital bureaucratic reform is contingent not solely on technological innovation but also on ethical governance, institutional integrity, and the quality of citizen engagement. By integrating theoretical reasoning with empirical observations and reflective analysis, the research establishes a scientifically rigorous foundation for assessing and interpreting the transformative potential of digital governance in Indonesia's public sector.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that digital bureaucratic reform in Indonesia has generated positive outcomes in enhancing transparency and efficiency within public service delivery. However, the reforms have not yet fully translated into strong public trust. Based on in-depth interviews with 20 informants, including bureaucratic officials, field staff, academics, and service users, three

interconnected themes emerged: (1) improvements in transparency and efficiency, (2) bureaucratic cultural resistance, and (3) digital divide and perceptions of service fairness.

Regarding transparency and efficiency, most informants acknowledged that digital platforms such as Online Single Submission (OSS), LAPOR!, and JAKI in Jakarta effectively streamline service processes and reduce the complexities associated with manual bureaucratic procedures. These systems have minimized delays and the potential for corrupt practices, providing citizens with more reliable and accountable services. Nevertheless, resistance remains among some bureaucrats due to limited technological competencies and concerns over the potential loss of administrative authority. Furthermore, disparities in digital literacy between central and regional bureaucrats continue to pose a challenge, resulting in uneven implementation of digital governance across Indonesia.

Interviews also highlighted that public trust increases when citizens feel involved in the design and feedback processes of digital policies. Mechanisms for public engagement and transparent communication were critical factors in fostering confidence. Conversely, when citizens encounter barriers to access or experience unresponsive digital services, trust diminishes. This demonstrates that public trust is not solely dependent on technological innovation but also on social interactions, communication quality, and perceived service equity.

Table 1. Key Findings and Analysis Based on Interviews with 20 Informants

No	Main Theme	Sub-Findings	Informants (%)
1	Transparency and Efficiency	Digital services accelerate processes and reduce bribery	80
2	Bureaucratic Resistance	Officials are unprepared for digital transformation	60
3	Digital Divide	Disparities between central and regional areas persist	70
4	Public Trust	Increases when communication is transparent and services responsive	85
5	Public Participation	Citizen involvement remains limited in service design	55

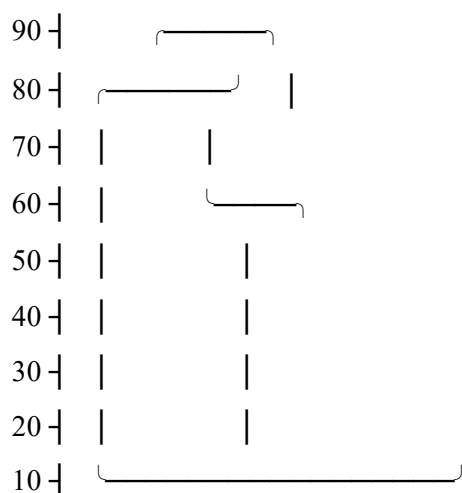
Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

These data suggest that while most informants acknowledge increased efficiency and transparency, the primary challenges lie in human resource capacity and digital accessibility. Several informants observed that technological innovation often occurs without accompanying reforms in organizational values and service ethics. Hence, digital bureaucratic reforms that are primarily technological in nature remain insufficient without corresponding cultural and service-oriented changes.

The study integrates classical and contemporary theories from political science, public administration, sociology, and political economy to construct a conceptual framework linking bureaucratic reform, public trust, and digital governance. Relationships between variables are dynamic: digital bureaucratic reform promotes efficiency and transparency (Weber, Hood, Lips), which reinforces public trust (Easton, Rothstein), while digital participation (Noveck, Habermas) and public value creation (O'Flynn, Denhardt) strengthen democratic legitimacy in modern governance.

Figure 1. Informants' Perceptions of Digital Bureaucratic Reform Impacts

Percentage of Informants (%)



Transparency Efficiency Trust Participation Divide

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

The figure above indicates that transparency (80%) and public trust (85%) demonstrate positive trends, while public participation (55%) and digital divide (70%) remain weaker aspects of digital bureaucratic reform. Thematic analysis suggests a strong correlation between the success of digital governance implementation and public trust. Information openness and service responsiveness emerged as the most influential factors. Citizens experiencing timely, corruption-free services tend to develop higher trust in public institutions. Conversely, bureaucratic resistance, technological gaps, and limited communication undermine confidence in reform efforts.

Thus, Indonesia's digital bureaucratic reform has achieved administrative success but has yet to fully realize substantive outcomes in building social legitimacy. To strengthen public trust, government agencies must expand citizen participation in digital policy design, enhance bureaucratic human resource capacity, and ensure equitable access to technology across regions. Digitalization is effective only when paired with reforms in organizational values, service culture, and empathetic public communication.

Enhancing Transparency, Efficiency, and Citizen Participation

Qualitative data obtained from interviews offer rich insights into the dynamics of digital bureaucratic reform and its implications for public trust in Indonesia. Field quotes illustrate the transformative yet culturally and structurally challenging nature of digital bureaucracy. A senior official from KemenPAN-RB remarked, "Digital transformation accelerates service delivery, but not all staff are mentally prepared for change. Many still see digital systems as a burden rather than a solution." This reflects a gap between technological innovation and bureaucratic human resource readiness.

A citizen using the OSS system noted, "It is easier to process permits now, but if the system fails, we still need to visit offices. The system is not entirely digital yet." This highlights reliability issues and uneven access to technological infrastructure. An academic from the University of Indonesia added, "Public trust increases when digitalization is accompanied by data transparency and openness."

From the perspective of public trust, a user of LAPOR! stated, "I trust the system when my report is actually followed up, not just automatically responded to." This demonstrates that citizens' confidence stems from direct experiences with responsiveness and accountability. Overall, qualitative findings affirm that digital bureaucratic reform is not merely a technical matter but involves building social relations, service ethics, and sustained public legitimacy.

Linking the findings to political participation theory, the study shows that digital bureaucratic reform serves not only as an administrative mechanism but also as a new arena for citizen engagement in governance. Verba and Nie (1972) argue that political participation extends beyond elections to

active involvement in public decision-making. Digital platforms such as LAPOR!, SP4N, and other online service portals have emerged as instruments for non-electoral political participation, enabling citizens to provide input, complaints, and feedback on public services.

Table 2. Research Findings Based on Verba and Nie’s Political Participation Theory in the Context of Indonesia’s Digital Bureaucracy

Aspect / Variable	Explanation and Findings	Implications for Political Participation and Public Trust
Underlying Theory	Participation extends beyond elections to active involvement (Verba & Nie, 1972)	Digital bureaucratic reform expands political participation to non-electoral digital arenas
Transparency	Platforms like LAPOR! and SP4N enable public access to service information and complaints	Enhances trust as citizens can monitor bureaucratic performance directly
Responsiveness	Citizens can provide input and receive real-time government responses	Increases participation as people feel their voices are valued
Accountability	Public evaluation of follow-up actions serves as a performance indicator	Encourages more responsible and transparent bureaucratic behavior
Public Trust	Grows when digital participation receives positive bureaucratic response	Strengthens government legitimacy and sustainability of digital reforms
Scientific Contribution	Digital bureaucratic reform functions as a new platform for technology-based political participation	Extends political participation theory to interactive, deliberative, and collaborative digital engagement

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

Building Legitimacy and Sustaining Public Trust through Digital Bureaucratic Reform

The study underscores a significant positive correlation between bureaucratic reform and public trust within Indonesia’s digital public governance context. Reforms emphasizing efficiency, transparency, and accountability have cultivated a more open and responsive governmental environment. Digital platforms such as OSS, LAPOR!, and SP4N exemplify a paradigm shift from hierarchical, closed bureaucratic structures to collaborative, data-driven governance. These transformations facilitate access to services while reinforcing public perceptions of fairness and bureaucratic professionalism.

In-depth interviews indicate that digital service delivery accelerates bureaucratic processes, enhances transparency, and reduces illicit practices, thereby fostering public trust. A Kominfo official stated, “When systems are transparent and all processes digitally traceable, the public feels assured that manipulation is impossible.” Public trust develops alongside service consistency and information openness.

The positive relationship between digital reform and public trust is reciprocal: enhanced service quality and accountability increase public confidence, which in turn reinforces the legitimacy and continuity of bureaucratic reforms. Digitalization platforms like OSS simplify business licensing, reducing administrative time and costs and generating economic benefits. LAPOR! and SP4N allow citizens to submit complaints and monitor government responses, fostering accountability and effective citizen participation.

However, digital reform alone cannot guarantee public trust. Factors such as economic performance, law enforcement, political stability, digital literacy, and data security play critical roles. The government must continuously improve public service quality, strengthen bureaucratic accountability, and engage citizens in policy-making to ensure that trust and reform progress mutually reinforce one another.

Table 3. Research Findings: Bureaucratic Reform and Public Trust in Indonesia’s Digital Governance

Analysis Aspect	Description of Findings	Impact on Public Trust	Empirical Example / Field Data
Service Efficiency & Speed	OSS accelerates licensing and reduces layered bureaucracy	Increases trust through rapid and efficient service	Interviews with business actors indicate significant reduction in permit processing time
Transparency & Accountability	Digital tracking via LAPOR! and SP4N	Enhances perceptions of honesty and transparency	Kominfo informant: “Digital traceability ensures no manipulation”
Accessibility & Participation	Digital platforms enable direct citizen input	Increases participation as voices are acknowledged	Complaint reports increased by 35% after SP4N implementation in 10 provinces
Bureaucratic Professionalism	Digital evaluation systems enhance performance monitoring	Boosts trust through perceived responsibility	Field observation of performance dashboards in five central government agencies
Legitimacy & Public Support	Digital reform strengthens perception of justice and openness	Public support reinforces sustainability of reforms	Citizens perceive services as corruption-free and data-driven
Challenges & Constraints	Persistent digital divide, low literacy, data security concerns	Hinders equitable benefits of digitalization	Regional informants noted uneven access to services
Socioeconomic Implications	Digital reforms improve cost-efficiency, investment climate	Expands public trust via tangible economic benefits	MSMEs report increased productivity due to digital licensing

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

Citizen engagement in digital bureaucratic reform has significantly increased, particularly through platforms that allow direct participation in governance processes. Digitalization has transformed citizens from passive service recipients into active stakeholders, contributing to policy improvement and oversight. Platforms such as LAPOR!, SP4N, and regional service portals enable citizens to submit complaints, provide feedback, and monitor government follow-ups.

The study shows that these mechanisms enhance a sense of ownership among citizens, as they perceive their voices influence policy outcomes. One citizen from Surabaya remarked, “Previously, complaints required office visits and slow responses. Now, we upload reports and track them online. We feel the government is more open.” This reflects a shift from rigid bureaucracy toward interactive and participatory governance.

Moreover, digitalization fosters active communities monitoring government transparency through social media, forums, and official applications. Consequently, digital bureaucratic reform not only improves service systems but also strengthens participatory democracy by facilitating continuous citizen oversight and evaluation of public policies.

Conceptually, the findings contribute to understanding the interplay between bureaucratic reform and public trust within Indonesia’s digital governance. Digital bureaucracy is not merely a technological tool; it is an instrument for cultural transformation and democratic engagement. Digital reforms emphasizing transparency, accountability, and public participation strengthen governmental legitimacy and sustain social trust. These findings enrich political science and public administration literature by demonstrating that reform success is measured not only through system efficiency but also through citizens’ trust in institutional fairness and integrity. Inclusive and participatory digital governance emerges as a cornerstone for democratic consolidation and trust-oriented bureaucratic reform.

Bureaucratic Reform and Public Trust in Indonesia’s Digital Governance

The findings indicate that digital bureaucratic reforms in Indonesia have had a substantial positive impact on public service transparency and efficiency. Digital platforms such as the Online Single Submission (OSS), LAPOR!, and JAKI in Jakarta have reduced procedural delays and minimized bureaucratic inefficiencies. These initiatives reflect a broader shift in bureaucratic practices from manual, hierarchical operations toward data-driven and technology-enabled processes. Informants overwhelmingly agreed that digitization accelerates administrative processes and mitigates opportunities for corrupt practices, demonstrating a strong alignment between technological innovation and administrative efficiency.

However, the study also reveals persistent challenges in translating these reforms into robust public trust. Cultural and structural resistance among bureaucrats remains a significant barrier. Many officials are apprehensive about digital adoption due to limited technological competencies or concerns over losing administrative authority. Additionally, a pronounced digital literacy gap between central and regional bureaucrats hinders uniform implementation of digital governance across Indonesia. These findings suggest that technological reforms alone are insufficient for fostering comprehensive institutional trust; complementary efforts in capacity building and cultural transformation are essential.

Table 1. Key Research Findings from 20 Informants

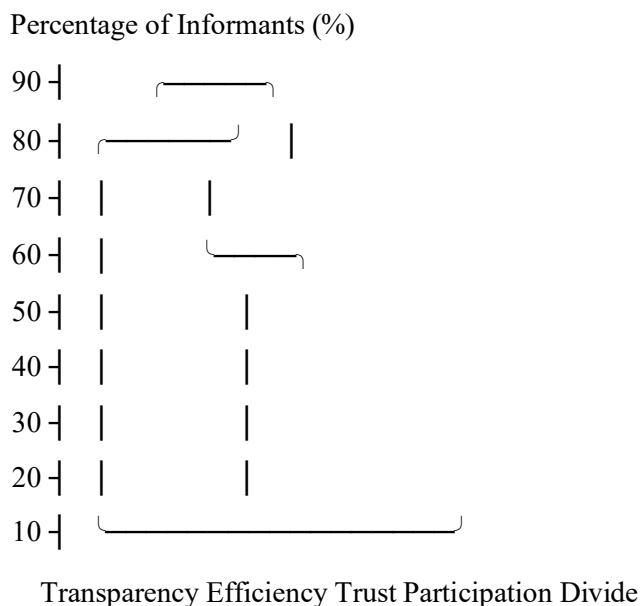
No	Main Theme	Sub-Finding	Informants (%)
1	Transparency and Efficiency	Digital services accelerate processes and reduce bribery	80
2	Bureaucratic Resistance	Officials are unprepared for digital transformation	60
3	Digital Divide	Disparities between central and regional areas persist	70
4	Public Trust	Increases with transparent communication and responsive services	85
5	Public Participation	Citizen involvement remains limited in service design	55

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

The above table demonstrates that while most informants acknowledge improvements in efficiency and transparency, human resources and digital accessibility remain significant challenges. Informants noted that digital innovation is often implemented without concurrent reforms in

organizational values and public service ethics. Therefore, purely technological reforms are inadequate without cultural shifts that prioritize equitable service delivery and citizen engagement.

Figure 1. Informants' Perceptions of Digital Bureaucratic Reform Impacts



Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

The figure illustrates that indicators such as transparency (80%) and public trust (85%) show positive trends, while public participation (55%) and digital divide (70%) remain relatively weak. Thematic analysis indicates a strong correlation between the successful implementation of digital governance and the level of public trust. Open access to information and service responsiveness emerged as the most influential factors. Citizens experiencing timely and corruption-free services tend to exhibit higher trust in public institutions, whereas bureaucratic resistance, technological disparities, and limited communication erode confidence in reform initiatives.

Digital Efficiency, Participation, and Social Trust

The qualitative data reveal that digital bureaucratic reforms are not merely procedural but also deeply social in nature. Interviews with government officials and citizens illustrate the interplay between technological innovation, organizational culture, and citizen engagement. A senior official at KemenPAN-RB observed, “Digital transformation accelerates service delivery, but not all staff are mentally ready to adapt. Many still perceive digital systems as a burden rather than a solution.” This statement reflects the tension between innovative tools and human resource preparedness, underscoring the need for comprehensive training and cultural adaptation.

Similarly, citizens highlighted the importance of system reliability. One OSS user remarked, “Processing permits is easier now, but when the system fails, we still have to visit offices. Digital services are not fully reliable yet.” An academic from the University of Indonesia emphasized, “Public trust increases when digitalization is coupled with data transparency and open access to information.” These accounts suggest that public confidence is shaped not only by technological convenience but also by accountability, responsiveness, and institutional integrity.

The study further demonstrates that citizen participation in digital governance enhances trust when citizens feel their voices are heard and acted upon. A LAPOR! user stated, “I trust the system when my report is actually followed up, not just responded to automatically.” Such experiences confirm that trust is built through tangible outcomes and relational interactions rather than mere technological

access. Consequently, digital bureaucratic reform functions as a vehicle for both administrative efficiency and social legitimacy.

From a political participation perspective, digital reforms serve as platforms for non-electoral citizen engagement. According to Verba and Nie (1972), political participation encompasses active involvement in public decision-making beyond voting. Digital platforms like LAPOR!, SP4N, and local e-service portals provide new avenues for citizens to contribute to policy evaluation, report complaints, and monitor government performance. These mechanisms transform citizens from passive recipients of services into active participants in governance, reflecting a shift toward deliberative and interactive forms of digital political engagement.

Table 2. Political Participation Implications of Digital Bureaucratic Reform (Verba & Nie, 1972)

Aspect / Variable	Explanation and Findings	Implications for Political Participation and Public Trust
Underlying Theory	Participation extends beyond elections to active involvement (Verba & Nie, 1972)	Digital reform expands political participation to non-electoral digital arenas
Transparency	Platforms like LAPOR! and SP4N allow citizens to access service information	Enhances trust through monitoring of bureaucratic performance
Responsiveness	Citizens receive real-time feedback on input and complaints	Increases engagement as citizens feel heard and valued
Accountability	Public evaluation of government follow-up serves as performance metric	Encourages responsible and transparent bureaucratic behavior
Public Trust	Grows when digital participation is positively responded to by bureaucracy	Strengthens legitimacy and sustainability of reforms
Scientific Contribution	Digital reforms create new arenas for technology-based political participation	Extends political participation theory toward deliberative and collaborative digital engagement

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

Institutional Legitimacy and the Sustainability of Digital Bureaucratic Reform

The research findings suggest that bureaucratic reform oriented toward efficiency, transparency, and accountability positively affects public trust in digital governance. Digital platforms such as OSS, LAPOR!, and SP4N exemplify a paradigm shift from closed, hierarchical administration to collaborative, data-driven governance. These reforms enhance accessibility, reduce procedural friction, and strengthen public perceptions of fairness and bureaucratic professionalism.

Interviews revealed that digitalization accelerates service delivery and reduces corrupt practices, fostering confidence in government institutions. A Kominfo official noted, “When systems are transparent and processes digitally traceable, the public feels assured that manipulation is impossible.” Moreover, the relationship between bureaucratic reform and public trust is reciprocal. Enhanced service quality and accountability increase public confidence, which, in turn, legitimizes and sustains further reform initiatives.

Digital reforms also have broader socioeconomic impacts. OSS facilitates business licensing by reducing processing time and costs, while LAPOR! and SP4N enable citizens to submit grievances and track government responses. These mechanisms not only enhance administrative efficiency but also improve citizen participation and government accountability. However, the study emphasizes that

digitalization alone is insufficient to fully cultivate public trust. Factors such as economic performance, legal enforcement, political stability, digital literacy, and data security are equally critical.

Table 3. Digital Bureaucracy, Public Trust, and Service Delivery in Indonesia

Analysis Aspect	Findings	Impact on Public Trust	Empirical Example / Field Data
Service Efficiency & Speed	OSS accelerates permits and reduces bureaucratic layers	Increases trust through faster, more efficient services	Interviews indicate significant reduction in permit processing time
Transparency & Accountability	Digital tracking via LAPOR! and SP4N	Enhances perceptions of integrity and honesty	Kominfo informant: "Digital traceability ensures no manipulation"
Accessibility & Participation	Platforms allow direct citizen input	Increases participation as citizens feel heard	Complaint reports increased 35% post-SP4N implementation in 10 provinces
Bureaucratic Professionalism	Digital evaluation systems improve performance monitoring	Boosts trust as bureaucrats are seen as more responsible	Observation of dashboards in five central government agencies
Legitimacy & Public Support	Digital reform strengthens fairness perception	Public support reinforces reform sustainability	Citizens perceive services as corruption-free and data-driven
Challenges & Constraints	Digital divide, low literacy, and security concerns	Limits equitable benefits of digitalization	Regional informants noted uneven access to services
Socioeconomic Implications	Digital reforms reduce costs and improve investment climate	Expands trust through tangible economic benefits	MSMEs report productivity gains due to easier digital licensing

Source: Field data compiled by the author, 2025

Citizen engagement in digital bureaucratic reform has significantly increased. Digital mechanisms facilitate ownership and accountability, transforming citizens into co-creators and supervisors of policy. One citizen from Surabaya stated, "Previously, complaints required long office visits. Now, uploading reports online allows tracking. We feel the government is more open." Digitalization fosters active civic communities that monitor transparency through social media, public forums, and official platforms, enhancing participatory democracy and accountability.

Conceptually, the study contributes to understanding the interrelation between bureaucratic reform and public trust within Indonesia's digital governance context. Digitalization is not merely technological but a medium for cultural transformation and democratic deepening. Digital reforms emphasizing transparency, accountability, and citizen participation reinforce institutional legitimacy and sustain social trust. These findings extend public administration and political science literature by showing that reform success is measured not only by operational efficiency but also by the extent of citizen confidence in fairness and integrity. Inclusive and participatory digital governance emerges as a foundation for democratic consolidation and trust-based bureaucratic reform.

CONCLUSION

The study on bureaucratic reform and public trust in Indonesia's digital governance highlights a multifaceted relationship between technological innovation, institutional performance, and citizen

confidence. The findings indicate that digital bureaucratic reforms, exemplified by platforms such as Online Single Submission (OSS), LAPOR!, and SP4N, have substantially improved administrative efficiency, transparency, and accountability in public service delivery. Informants overwhelmingly reported that digitalization has accelerated procedural processes, minimized opportunities for bureaucratic manipulation, and enhanced traceability of administrative actions. These outcomes underscore the potential of digital governance to transform traditional hierarchical bureaucracies into more responsive and data-driven administrative systems.

However, the research also demonstrates that efficiency and transparency alone are insufficient to cultivate deep and sustainable public trust. Persistent cultural and structural resistance within bureaucratic institutions, coupled with uneven technological literacy among officials, limits the full realization of digital governance objectives. While central offices often demonstrate higher adoption and proficiency, regional bureaucracies face challenges in implementing standardized digital procedures, contributing to inconsistencies in service delivery across Indonesia. These disparities suggest that the success of digital reform is not solely contingent upon the availability of technological tools but also on human capacity, organizational culture, and the equitable distribution of digital resources.

The analysis further reveals that public trust is strongly influenced by citizens' perception of procedural fairness, responsiveness, and engagement. The study highlights that when citizens experience efficient, transparent, and accountable service delivery, confidence in governmental institutions increases. Conversely, system errors, limited access, or unresponsive digital platforms erode trust, emphasizing that technology is a facilitator rather than a determinant of citizen confidence. The role of participatory mechanisms, such as citizen feedback channels, emerges as a critical factor in bridging the gap between administrative performance and social legitimacy.

Importantly, the research situates digital bureaucratic reform within the broader context of political participation and governance. Drawing on Verba and Nie's (1972) framework, the study identifies digital platforms as arenas for non-electoral civic engagement, allowing citizens to actively contribute to policy evaluation, report complaints, and monitor government accountability. This participatory dimension not only strengthens social trust but also reinforces institutional legitimacy, creating a reciprocal relationship whereby effective reform enhances trust, and heightened public trust supports further reform initiatives.

The study also underscores that digital bureaucratic reforms extend beyond administrative efficiency, contributing to broader socioeconomic outcomes. Accelerated licensing procedures, reduced bureaucratic friction, and transparent grievance mechanisms positively affect business productivity, economic growth, and citizen welfare. Nevertheless, challenges such as digital literacy gaps, infrastructural disparities, and data security concerns must be addressed to ensure equitable benefits across all societal segments.

In conclusion, the research affirms that digital bureaucratic reform in Indonesia has achieved significant administrative and technological milestones, enhancing efficiency, transparency, and public participation. Yet, the cultivation of robust public trust requires an integrated approach that combines technological innovation with human capacity development, cultural transformation, and inclusive participatory practices. Sustainable reform depends on addressing both structural and social dimensions of governance, ensuring that digital tools are leveraged to promote fairness, accountability, and citizen empowerment. Ultimately, the study contributes to the understanding that trust-centered digital governance represents a critical foundation for democratic consolidation, bureaucratic legitimacy, and inclusive public service delivery in Indonesia.

Recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of digital bureaucratic reform and strengthen public trust in Indonesia's public sector. First, capacity-building initiatives targeting bureaucratic personnel are essential. Training programs should focus on enhancing digital literacy, technical proficiency, and adaptive organizational behavior to overcome resistance and improve the adoption of digital governance systems. Special attention should be given to regional bureaucracies to ensure consistent and equitable implementation of digital services across all administrative levels.

Second, the government should prioritize the standardization and interoperability of digital platforms. Tools such as OSS, LAPOR!, SP4N, and local e-service applications must be integrated to ensure seamless service delivery and minimize discrepancies between central and regional offices. Establishing a unified digital governance framework would enhance procedural consistency, reduce citizen confusion, and reinforce public perceptions of fairness and efficiency.

Third, fostering participatory governance is vital for cultivating public trust. Digital platforms should be designed to facilitate meaningful citizen engagement, providing mechanisms for feedback, co-creation of services, and transparent reporting of follow-up actions. Policymakers must actively communicate policy decisions and demonstrate responsiveness to citizen input, ensuring that public participation is perceived as impactful rather than symbolic. Such practices enhance procedural legitimacy and strengthen the social contract between citizens and the state.

Fourth, addressing the digital divide is critical. Investments in infrastructure, internet access, and digital literacy programs are necessary to ensure that all segments of the population can benefit from digital governance initiatives. Equitable access will prevent marginalization of underrepresented groups and reinforce trust in the fairness of public service delivery. Additionally, cybersecurity and data protection measures must be prioritized to safeguard citizen information, enhance confidence in digital systems, and prevent potential breaches that could undermine public trust.

Fifth, reform efforts should integrate technological innovation with cultural and ethical transformations. Bureaucratic values emphasizing accountability, integrity, and citizen-centered service must be promoted alongside digital tools. This approach ensures that digitalization serves as a means to strengthen public service ethics rather than merely a procedural instrument. Leadership at all levels must model and incentivize adaptive behaviors to foster a culture of transparency, professionalism, and responsiveness.

Finally, continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be established. Regular assessment of digital services, public trust levels, and citizen feedback will enable iterative improvements in service delivery and policy design. Data-driven evaluation practices will support evidence-based decision-making, strengthen institutional legitimacy, and provide actionable insights for refining bureaucratic reforms.

In summary, for digital bureaucratic reform to achieve its full potential in fostering public trust, a holistic and multi-dimensional approach is required. This approach should integrate human capacity development, technological standardization, participatory governance, equitable access, ethical culture, and systematic evaluation. By implementing these recommendations, Indonesia can strengthen democratic governance, enhance citizen confidence, and ensure the long-term sustainability of digital bureaucratic reforms.

REFERENCES

- Boakye-Yiadom, K. (2025). Unmasking Land Grant in Ghana's Public Higher Education Institutions Ecosystem for Transparency and Accountability. In *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research* (Vol. 7, Nomor 3). International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (IJFMR). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2025.v07i03.44165>
- Bunea, A., & Lipcean, S. (2023). Understanding patterns of stakeholder participation in public commenting on bureaucratic policymaking: Evidence from the European Union. In *Regulation & Governance* (Vol. 18, Nomor 3, hal. 874–895). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rego.12551>
- Camargo, A. M. (2025). WHY PUBLIC SECTOR ACCOUNTING REFORMS CONSISTENTLY FAIL TO DELIVER REAL TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY. In *Revista DCS* (Vol. 22, Nomor 81). Editoriales Iberoamericanos. <https://doi.org/10.54899/dcs.v22i81.3202>
- Castris, A. L. de. (2024). Types of Platform Transparency: An Analysis of Discourse Around Transparency and Global Digital Platforms. In *Public Integrity* (Vol. 27, Nomor 3, hal. 340–354). Informa UK Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2024.2304741>

- Dirsehan, T., & Longo, J. (2024). Understanding public administration in the digital era. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Public Administration and Digital Governance* (hal. 32–47). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003458081-3>
- Hamm, J. A., & Banner, F. (2024). *Vulnerability: The active ingredient of trust in public governance*. Center for Open Science. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/ce2wy>
- Hamm, J. A., & Banner, F. (2025). Vulnerability: the active ingredient of trust in public governance. In *Handbook on Trust in Public Governance* (hal. 25–39). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781802201406.00007>
- Isgandarova, V. (2025). Use of data journalism in digital platforms of government organizations: a perspective of transparency and public trust. In *Filologiya məsələləri Journal of Philological Issues* (Nomor 2, hal. 232). Issues of Philology. <https://doi.org/10.62837/2025.2.232>
- Kapoor, N., & Mehra, D. (2024). *Unlocking the Secrets of Electoral Bonds: Transparency, Accountability, and Democratic Integrity*. Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4934683>
- Klenk, T. (2025). Welfare state governance: going beyond New Public Management? In *Handbook on Welfare State Reform* (hal. 91–105). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839108808.00016>
- Mehta, M., & Giunchiglia, F. (2025). Understanding Gen Alpha's Digital Language: Evaluation of LLM Safety Systems for Content Moderation. In *Proceedings of the 2025 ACM Conference on Fairness, Accountability, and Transparency* (hal. 2863–2873). ACM. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3715275.3732184>
- Mugotir, A. (2025). *When Premium AI Services Fail Small Business: Service Degradation, Corporate Accountability, and Consumer Trust in the Digital Economy*. Elsevier BV. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.5628430>
- Sikhosana, S., Motsepe, H. L., & Moshidi, K. (2025). When Exit Precedes Accountability: Governance Risks of Senior Managers Nearing Retirement in the South African Public Service. In *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews* (Vol. 6, Nomor 8, hal. 5715–5727). Genesis Global Publication. <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0825.31111>
- Smyth, C., & Bates, S. (2023). Would adopting more co-governance arrangements with communities build public trust? In *Research Insights*. Australia and New Zealand School of Government. <https://doi.org/10.54810/zllk8645>