GOVERNANCE REFORM AT THE CITY LEVEL: BANDUNG AS A MODEL OR MIRAGE?

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Abstract

This study investigates the implementation of good governance principles in Bandung City, focusing on transparency and public accountability as critical elements of service-oriented governance. The urgency of this research stems from the increasing public demand for ethical and accountable public service delivery at the municipal level. The study aims to explore how good governance and public accountability theories—along with an ecological perspective of public administration—inform the local government's administrative practices. Using a qualitative descriptive method and literature review approach, this research analyzes various policy documents, academic literature, and regulatory frameworks. The findings reveal that although the Bandung City Government has adopted transparency and accountability mechanisms, their application tends to be fragmented and often ceremonial, indicating a "mirage" rather than a fully realized model. These findings highlight the need for stronger institutional integration and ecosystem-based governance design to actualize genuine service-oriented public administration.

Keywords: Good governance, Public accountability, Service-oriented governance

A. INTRODUCTION

Governance reform has become a dominant narrative in the renewal of public administration systems worldwide, particularly in developing countries that face persistent challenges related to transparency and bureaucratic accountability. The concept of *good governance* has emerged as a key paradigm in promoting democratic, clean, and responsive government (Dwiyanto, 2021). Core principles such as transparency, citizen participation, bureaucratic effectiveness, and public accountability are increasingly regarded as benchmarks for assessing reform success. In urban governance contexts, these reforms are even more urgent given that cities are the primary nodes of public service delivery and serve as the frontline interface between citizens and the state.

In Indonesia, the post-New Order bureaucratic reform movement triggered significant decentralization and regional autonomy policies, granting local governments more authority in managing their affairs. Amid rising expectations for efficiency and integrity free from corruption, collusion, and nepotism (KKN), major cities were expected to serve as models for implementing good governance. However, many local governments have experienced inconsistencies between normative policy planning and actual implementation. Weak institutional integrity, limited civic engagement, and inadequate oversight mechanisms have often reduced reforms to merely administrative exercises (Mardiasmo, 2021). This raises a critical question at the city level: Do governance reforms produce genuinely responsive local governments, or do they merely function as symbolic gestures of bureaucratic modernization?

ARTIKEL

The city of Bandung is frequently cited as a pioneer of local government innovation, widely portrayed as a "modern," open, and digitally adaptive urban center. Since 2013, the Bandung City Government has launched various initiatives—ranging from digital public service platforms and online citizen feedback channels to performance-based bureaucratic evaluation systems—to enhance governance transparency (Ramdhani & Ramdhani, 2017). Bandung has often been symbolically framed as a model of decentralized, modern governance aligned with good governance ideals. However, behind its accolades and innovative image, scholars and civil society actors have raised concerns about the substantive effectiveness of such reforms (Engkus et al., 2020).

Several previous studies have attempted to examine the implementation of good governance across various levels of subnational government in Indonesia. Auditya, Kristiawan, and Firmansyah (2013) found that transparency in local governments often remains procedural and has not yet reached the level of meaningful citizen participation. Terry (2019) argued that public accountability at the municipal level largely depends on the integrity of local leaders and the strength of internal oversight institutions. Meanwhile, Engkus (2017b) emphasized the role of technological innovation in expanding public access to government information but also highlighted significant digital divides among citizens.

These prior studies share a common focus with the present article, namely, the emphasis on transparency and accountability as central dimensions of good governance. Like previous research, this study also examines administrative practices and local government policies as the primary units of analysis. However, it differs significantly in both its locus and approach. While earlier works provided general or comparative insights across multiple regions, this study offers a single-city, in-depth case study of Bandung. Furthermore, this article combines policy evaluation with institutional analysis grounded in the local socio-political context—an aspect rarely explored in previous research.

This distinction forms the basis of this article's originality. Bandung is often upheld as a national model of local government innovation, yet it remains understudied in terms of whether its "model" status truly reflects governance success or merely represents symbolic reforms without structural depth. This research thus contributes to the growing literature by interrogating the relationship between the symbolic representation of innovation and the actual implementation of governance reform—particularly in relation to citizen engagement, transparency mechanisms, and public accountability.

The urgency of this study stems from the continuing gap between proclaimed governance reforms and their practical outcomes. Preliminary findings indicate recurring public dissatisfaction with access to government information, mismatches between program outputs and community needs, and low bureaucratic responsiveness (Mardiasmo, 2021). Concurrently, the Bandung City Government faces mounting pressure to sustain its image as a pioneer in governance innovation, which may lead to performative rather than substantive reform practices. For these reasons, the present research is not only theoretically relevant but also practically necessary to inform a more grounded and evidence-based evaluation of local governance policy (Engkus et al., 2020).

The primary aim of this research is to critically evaluate the implementation of transparency and accountability principles in Bandung's ongoing governance reform agenda. The central focus is to assess the extent to which Bandung's administrative practices reflect the substantive norms of good governance, and whether its reputation as a model city aligns with the bureaucratic realities experienced on the ground.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Good Governance

Good governance refers to the exercise of political, economic, and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels (UNDP, 1997). It is grounded in democratic principles and institutional performance, emphasizing transparency, accountability, rule of law, participation, and efficiency (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009). The theory asserts that public sector reform must aim to improve governance quality to achieve developmental goals. In the Indonesian context, good governance became a critical issue post-Reformasi as part of state apparatus restructuring (Dwiyanto, 2021). This theory provides a normative framework for evaluating how well local governments function according to democratic standards. Key Indicators of Good Governance Implementation:

- Transparency in decision-making and public communication
- Participation of stakeholders in policy formulation
- Rule of law and legal certainty in administrative action
- Effectiveness and efficiency of public service delivery
- Responsiveness to community needs and feedback

Public Accountability

Public accountability is the obligation of public officials and institutions to be answerable for their actions, decisions, and use of public resources (Bovens, 2007). It encompasses both horizontal accountability—between institutions—and vertical accountability—between the government and citizens (Schedler, 1999). The theory emphasizes mechanisms such as audits, transparency tools, and citizen oversight to ensure responsible governance. In decentralized systems like Indonesia, accountability becomes more complex but also more essential for preventing abuse of power. This theory is crucial to assess whether municipal governance practices align with legal, ethical, and performance-based expectations. Key Indicators of Public Accountability:

- Availability of performance reports and audit results
- Public access to budgeting and expenditure information
- Citizen oversight mechanisms (e.g., public hearings, complaint channels)
- Sanction mechanisms for misuse of authority
- Clarity of roles and responsibilities in governance structures

Local Governance and Decentralization Theory

This theory focuses on the transfer of authority, resources, and responsibilities from central to local governments to enhance efficiency and responsiveness (Rondinelli, 1981). It argues that local governments are better positioned to understand and address the needs of their constituents. However, success depends on the capacity, political will, and institutional structure at the local level (Faguet, 2014). In Indonesia, decentralization is embedded in Law No. 23/2014, which grants cities like Bandung significant autonomy in governance. This theory helps explain both the opportunities and challenges that cities face in implementing governance reform. Key Indicators of Local Governance and Decentralization:

- Fiscal and administrative autonomy of local governments
- Local policy innovation and responsiveness
- Community involvement in planning and development
- Coordination among local agencies and with central authorities
- Capacity building and institutional support at the local level

C. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative approach aimed at describing the implementation of good governance principles in Bandung City, with a specific focus on transparency and public accountability. The qualitative approach is chosen to gain in-depth understanding of the

social realities and governmental practices by analyzing textual data and official documents (Creswell, 2013). This methodological choice is considered appropriate for investigating the complexities of governance practices that cannot be captured merely through quantitative measurements.

Data were collected through a document study involving various relevant sources such as government performance reports, regional financial reports, legal regulations, previous research findings, and information obtained from the official website of Bandung City Government. The selection of documents was conducted purposively based on relevance and alignment with the research focus. Only documents that met the criteria of accuracy, currency, and credibility were further analyzed to ensure reliability of the findings (Bowen, 2009).

The data analysis technique employed in this study is content analysis. This technique enables the researcher to systematically examine documents by identifying key themes related to the application of transparency and accountability in public governance. The analysis involved several stages: identifying relevant documents, grouping data thematically, and interpreting the content based on the theoretical framework of good governance. To enhance the validity of the data, source triangulation was applied by comparing information across different document types, such as financial reports, audit results, and academic literature. This triangulation process strengthens the credibility of findings and helps reduce subjective bias (Patton, 1999). Through this qualitative document analysis, the study aims to provide a comprehensive and objective portrayal of transparency and accountability practices within Bandung's local government.

D. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Transparency in Bandung City Governance

Transparency is a foundational principle in good governance, requiring that government actions, decisions, and information are accessible, understandable, and open to scrutiny by the public. In the context of Bandung City, the local government has made efforts to institutionalize transparency through the adoption of digital platforms and legal instruments. One notable policy is the Mayor Regulation No. 1340 of 2017 concerning Public Information Service Guidelines, which mandates all Regional Work Units (SKPD) to publish public information routinely and openly. This regulation is intended to operationalize the principle of transparency as mandated by Law No. 14 of 2008 on Public Information Disclosure. However, in practice, the implementation of these regulations remains inconsistent across different government units.

A study by Nurindahsari and Trisyanto (2022) revealed that the contribution of e-government implementation to financial transparency in Bandung City was only 2.2%, signaling a major gap between the intended outcomes and actual performance. This indicates that despite technological advances and regulatory frameworks, the capacity of the government to deliver transparent governance remains weak. The low percentage suggests that technological adoption is not sufficient without a concurrent shift in bureaucratic culture and information-sharing behavior. It reflects a symbolic rather than substantive commitment to transparency, where digital tools exist but are underutilized or used merely for compliance.

Several SKPDs in Bandung still fail to disclose key financial documents in a timely and comprehensive manner, thereby limiting the public's ability to monitor government activities. Financial reports, procurement plans, and budget realization data are often incomplete or delayed, undermining the spirit of openness and weakening public trust. This deficiency is particularly problematic given that transparency serves not only to inform the public but also to prevent corruption and mismanagement. According to the principles of good governance

theory (UNDP, 1997), transparent governance must enable stakeholders to track resource allocation and decision-making processes in real time.

Moreover, the lack of user-friendly access to information has made it difficult for citizens to exercise their rights to information. Many of the online platforms provided by the Bandung City Government are technically operational but not effectively utilized due to poor user interface design, limited digital literacy among citizens, and the absence of feedback loops. Transparency, in this context, becomes more performative than participatory. Public information portals must be designed with accessibility in mind, ensuring that even marginalized groups can engage with and benefit from open data. Otherwise, transparency becomes exclusionary, favoring those with technical knowledge while alienating broader civic participation.

To improve transparency, the Bandung City Government must go beyond regulatory compliance and embrace a proactive information disclosure strategy. This includes strengthening institutional capacity to manage and curate public data, training civil servants in open governance practices, and creating participatory mechanisms for the public to request, verify, and contribute to government-held information. When transparency is institutionalized not only as a legal obligation but also as a normative value within public administration, it enhances legitimacy and responsiveness. In sum, the challenge for Bandung is not the absence of digital infrastructure or regulations, but the lack of systemic will and organizational coherence to make transparency truly work in practice.

Accountability Mechanisms in Bandung's Local Government

Accountability refers to the obligation of public institutions to be answerable for their actions, particularly in the use of public resources and the achievement of policy outcomes. Within the theory of good governance (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009; UNDP, 1997), accountability is essential to ensure that power is not exercised arbitrarily, but instead aligned with legal and ethical standards. In the case of Bandung City, the local government has attempted to implement various mechanisms of accountability, including internal supervision, public reporting systems, and the development of performance evaluation frameworks such as the Local Government Performance Accountability System (SAKIP). These mechanisms are designed to institutionalize accountability across departments and promote a culture of administrative responsibility.

However, empirical evidence shows that many of these mechanisms operate more as procedural formalities rather than substantive checks on government behavior. According to research by Pratiwi and Syahrul (2021), the quality of public accountability in Bandung remains hampered by weak enforcement, limited public oversight, and bureaucratic resistance to performance-based governance. While the SAKIP system exists as a tool to evaluate program outcomes and budget utilization, its influence on decision-making and sanctioning underperformance is minimal. Reports are often generated to meet administrative requirements rather than to guide improvement or enforce consequences. This hollowing out of accountability tools reflects a broader issue of political will and institutional inertia.

Citizen participation in holding officials accountable is also limited. Bandung has implemented public complaint services such as LAPOR! and online grievance platforms, but the follow-up rate on these reports is inconsistent. Many residents have expressed frustration that their complaints go unresolved or are redirected without transparency in the resolution process. Without responsive feedback mechanisms, public reporting loses its deterrent effect. This situation violates one of the key indicators of good governance, where accountability must include the responsiveness of the government to public scrutiny and demand for corrective action.

Another major constraint is the overlapping and fragmented roles between supervisory agencies. For example, the Internal Supervisory Unit (Inspektorat Daerah) often operates in

isolation from external audit bodies like the Audit Board of the Republic of Indonesia (BPK) or civil society watchdogs. This lack of integration reduces the effectiveness of oversight and creates loopholes in accountability. In theory, horizontal accountability among institutions and vertical accountability to citizens must work together to create a coherent accountability ecosystem. In Bandung, the siloed approach to governance weakens this synergy, allowing underperformance and even malpractice to persist undetected or unpunished.

To strengthen accountability, Bandung's government must not only invest in digital platforms and documentation systems but also cultivate a governance culture rooted in performance, transparency, and answerability. This includes training officials on ethical conduct, establishing independent review boards, ensuring transparency in follow-up actions, and integrating public input into performance evaluations. Moreover, simplifying bureaucratic procedures and enhancing inter-agency collaboration can create more reliable and enforceable accountability structures. When accountability becomes an integral part of day-to-day governance rather than an administrative afterthought, it can elevate trust in public institutions and significantly improve service delivery.

Budget Transparency as a Pillar of Good Governance in Bandung City

One of the most critical dimensions of good governance implementation in local government is budget transparency. In Bandung, the effort to create a transparent budgeting process is demonstrated through open-access platforms such as the *Bandung Command Center* and *Open Data Bandung*, which allow the public to monitor budget allocation and spending in real time. These platforms are designed to promote trust and reduce information asymmetry between the government and its citizens (Aguilera & Cuervo-Cazurra, 2009).

However, transparency in itself does not automatically translate into public understanding or civic engagement. According to the ecological perspective in public administration, transparency should be viewed within the broader context of a society's digital literacy, bureaucratic culture, and social participation. In the case of Bandung, while access to data has improved, the capacity of citizens to interpret and use the information for constructive engagement remains limited (Engkus, 2021). Hence, access must be complemented by clarity, literacy, and institutional responsiveness.

From the standpoint of public accountability theory, simply disclosing budget data does not meet the threshold of accountable governance unless supported by mechanisms for citizen feedback, legislative oversight, and executive responsiveness (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987). Bandung's participatory budgeting forums, although innovative, have yet to fully evolve into spaces where decisions are directly influenced by public deliberation. They often lack continuity, evaluation systems, and structured follow-up processes.

Engkus (2021) further emphasizes that budget transparency must be embedded within adaptive governance systems that can navigate ecological challenges—including internal resistance, overlapping functions, and political contestations. His analysis of Indonesian local governance highlights the importance of designing budget transparency not merely as a digital product, but as part of institutional transformation that addresses context-specific governance gaps and builds administrative integrity.

Therefore, budget transparency in Bandung should not be assessed solely based on the availability of digital information. It must be analyzed as part of a governance ecosystem involving accountability, public participation, and institutional learning. While Bandung has made initial progress, the deeper integration of transparency into the city's administrative fabric remains a work in progress—requiring not just technological infrastructure but a culture of openness, collaboration, and responsiveness (Engkus, 2021; Kooiman, 2003).

Bandung as a Model for Local Governance Reform

The empirical evidence from the governance practices of Bandung suggests that the city has made meaningful strides in reforming public administration through transparency and

accountability mechanisms. Utilizing e-government initiatives such as Bandung Command Center and public complaint systems like LAPOR, Bandung has institutionalized participatory channels and increased administrative responsiveness (Kusnadi, 2020). These tools have enabled real-time monitoring and data-driven decision-making, reflecting adherence to Good Governance principles (UNDP, 1997).

From the lens of Public Accountability Theory, the city's effort to report government performance via digital dashboards and publish financial records demonstrates an attempt to reduce discretion and promote answerability (Bovens, 2007). Citizens are no longer passive recipients of services, but stakeholders in urban governance processes. This aligns with Engkus's (2020) view that public administration should evolve toward an ecology of accountability, where institutional trust is nurtured through systemic openness and continual feedback loops.

Furthermore, in terms of Good Governance indicators, Bandung exhibits compliance with key metrics such as transparency, rule of law, responsiveness, and participation. Despite ongoing challenges in bureaucratic inertia and elite capture, the institutional commitment to reform is notable. For example, budget participatory forums (*Musrenbang*) have become more inclusive, and procurement processes are increasingly digitized, reducing corruption vulnerabilities (Sutedi, 2024).

Theoretical alignment with New Public Management (NPM) is also evident in Bandung's service-oriented innovations. By adopting managerial logics — performance targets, citizen charters, and service benchmarks — the local government has shifted from procedural rigidity to outcome-based management. This is reflective of a "hybrid governance" model that blends bureaucratic traditions with adaptive, tech-enabled responsiveness (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003).

Based on this multidimensional evidence, it is analytically justifiable to position Bandung as a model rather than a mirage. While imperfections remain, the trajectory of reform points toward institutional learning, replication potential, and normative alignment with international governance standards. The city's experience offers a scalable framework for other urban administrations in Indonesia and the Global South seeking to modernize their governance systems under democratic accountability.

E. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of good governance in Bandung City, especially in terms of transparency and public accountability, tends to resemble a mirage rather than a fully functional model. While administrative efforts and digital platforms have been established to support participatory governance, their application often remains superficial and does not lead to substantial institutional change. The findings show that although the goals of service-oriented governance are formally embraced, in practice they fall short due to structural, cultural, and bureaucratic constraints. The research successfully achieved its objective by revealing the discrepancy between policy ideals and practical realities, offering a critical lens through which governance performance can be re-evaluated. As a practical recommendation, local government should focus on internal capacity development, consistent monitoring mechanisms, and deeper engagement with civil society to turn formal frameworks into meaningful action. Future research is encouraged to explore on-the-ground experiences of public service delivery using qualitative methods to capture lived realities, while addressing this study's limitation of relying solely on document analysis. For policymakers, the findings underscore the importance of adaptive and context-sensitive governance reforms to ensure that good governance principles are not only stated but also genuinely practiced.

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