

The Role of Public Policy in Building Public Trust in the Digital Era: A Case of Digital Transformation in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has become a crucial pillar in the reform of governance in Indonesia, with digital public policies such as the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), SP4N-LAPOR!, e-Procurement, and One Data Indonesia designed to enhance transparency, accountability, and the efficiency of public services. This study aims to examine the role of public policy in fostering public trust in the digital era, particularly within the context of challenges related to digital literacy, infrastructure limitations, and personal data protection. Employing a descriptive-qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation, the findings reveal that information transparency (score 3.8) and service responsiveness (3.7) have strengthened governmental legitimacy. Nevertheless, cross-sectoral integration (3.2), citizens' digital literacy (3.4), and data protection (3.2) remain critical obstacles. The results highlight that public trust is not solely determined by technological innovation but also by consistent regulatory enforcement, equitable infrastructure distribution, and robust data security measures. This research contributes both conceptually and practically to understanding the nexus between digital public policy and public trust, while also recommending collaborative strategies to advance inclusive, transparent, and sustainable digital governance in Indonesia.

Keywords: Public Policy; Public Trust; Digital Transformation; Governance; Indonesia

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has emerged as a global agenda that reshapes the way governments interact with citizens, deliver public services, and consolidate institutional legitimacy. In Indonesia, initiatives such as the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), the National Public Service Complaint Management System (SP4N-LAPOR!), and the One Data Indonesia (SDI) policy reflect the state's commitment to building transparent, accountable, and efficient governance. Consequently, public trust has become a critical factor in ensuring the sustainability and legitimacy of digital public policies (Fairuzyah et al., 2024). Legal frameworks, including Presidential Regulation No. 132 of 2022 on the National SPBE Architecture, Presidential Regulation No. 82 of 2023 on Accelerating Digital Transformation, and Presidential Regulation No. 39 of 2019 on One Data Indonesia, provide a regulatory foundation that guides the development of digital governance.

Nevertheless, the success of digital policy is determined not only by technological innovation but also by the level of public trust it generates. According to Roy Morgan's survey (2025), public trust in government rose to 69%, while political legitimacy reached 79%. However, disparities remain evident: the President's trust level stood at 97.5%, whereas the House of Representatives (DPR) recorded only 45.8% (IPO, 2025). Moreover, Indonesia's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) in 2024 remained low at 37/100, ranking 99th out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2024). These indicators reveal that despite rapid digitalization, institutional integrity gaps persist, suggesting that digital transformation has not yet fully functioned as a

sustainable instrument for strengthening public trust.

Conceptually, public trust is shaped not only by information transparency but also by legal certainty and the consistency of policy implementation. SPBE, SP4N-LAPOR!, and SDI serve as key public policy instruments that reinforce state legitimacy in the digital era. Previous studies caution that digitalization without a robust regulatory framework risk creating a “trust deficit” due to weak accountability (Fairuziyah et al., 2024; Wibowo et al., 2024). Digital transparency plays a pivotal role in fostering institutional trust, which in turn enhances citizen participation (Maulan & Fitriani, 2024). However, in the Indonesian context, these dynamics do not always unfold linearly. Abdurrahman et al. (2025) found that while e-government improves efficiency and accessibility, challenges such as uneven digital infrastructure and low digital literacy remain pressing, particularly in underdeveloped regions. Similarly, the Digital Identity (IKD) initiative launched in 2022 has not been widely adopted due to limited public literacy and uneven dissemination (Zainudin, 2025). Furthermore, Hardiyanti (2024) emphasizes the role of youth as drivers of digital innovation, though institutional support for their initiatives remains insufficient.

This research gap highlights that, despite notable progress, obstacles such as infrastructure inequality, low digital literacy, and institutional limitations especially in remote areas continue to hinder inclusive digital governance (Abdurrahman et al., 2025; Zainudin, 2025). Existing studies often separate technological aspects from public perception, resulting in the absence of a comprehensive framework to understand their interrelation (Wibowo et al., 2024; Abdurrahman et al., 2025). Moreover, limited attention has been given to the direct linkage between legal frameworks of digital policy and citizens’ perceptions of public trust.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to examine the role of public policy in fostering public trust in the digital era, particularly in the context of Indonesia’s digital transformation. The primary objective is to analyze how government policies such as SPBE, SP4N-LAPOR!, e-Procurement, and SDI strengthen transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in governance.

The research focuses on three key dimensions. First, how digital policy implementation enhances information openness and public service quality. Second, how citizen participation in utilizing digital services contributes to strengthening trust in government institutions. Third, how factors such as digital literacy, infrastructure disparities, and data protection influence the effectiveness of public policies in building trust in the digital age.

Accordingly, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between public policy, digital innovation, and societal trust. Beyond theoretical contributions, the findings are expected to serve as a practical reference for policymakers in formulating more responsive, inclusive, and sustainable strategies to advance digital governance in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Public Policy and Public Trust

Public policy serves as a primary instrument for governments to achieve collective goals, including fostering legitimacy and public trust. Easton (1965) emphasized that public trust represents a form of social capital that underpins political stability and policy effectiveness. In the digital era, public policy not only functions as a regulatory mechanism but also as a means to enhance transparency, accountability, and civic participation (Winarno, 2022).

Public trust is shaped by three key dimensions: institutional integrity, information openness, and consistency in policy implementation (Miller & Listhaug, 1999). Consequently, digital policy initiatives must ensure legal certainty and personal data protection to prevent the emergence of a “trust deficit.”

Digital Transformation in Governance

Digital transformation in governance or digital governance is aimed at improving bureaucratic efficiency and expanding access to public services. Cordella and Bonina (2012) found that digitalization can strengthen

accountability when accompanied by clear regulations and effective oversight.

In Indonesia, the implementation of e-government is guided by Presidential Regulation No. 132 of 2022 on the National SPBE Architecture and Presidential Regulation No. 82 of 2023 on Accelerating Digital Transformation. These frameworks emphasize the importance of system interoperability and integrated digital public services. Nevertheless, research by Abdurrahman et al. (2025) revealed that digital infrastructure disparities, particularly in underdeveloped regions (3T areas), remain significant barriers to policy effectiveness.

Digital Policy Innovations in Indonesia

Several noteworthy digital policy innovations have been introduced in Indonesia. First, the Electronic-Based Government System (SPBE), which provides the framework for digitalizing public administration. Second, SP4N-LAPOR!, a digital complaint-handling platform that enables citizen participation (Wibowo et al., 2024). Third, the One Data Indonesia (SDI) initiative, established through Presidential Regulation No. 39 of 2019, which standardizes data governance across ministries and agencies. Fourth, the Digital Identity Card (IKD), launched in 2022 to strengthen citizens' digital identity management (Zainudin, 2025).

While these innovations signal progress, low levels of digital literacy continue to hinder widespread adoption (Hardiyanti, 2024). In addition, data protection remains a persistent challenge, despite the enactment of Law No. 27 of 2022 on Personal Data Protection.

Public Trust in the Digital Era

Global studies have consistently highlighted the strong link between digital transparency and institutional trust (Bannister & Connolly, 2011; Grimmeliikhuijsen et al., 2013). In Indonesia, recent data indicate that public trust in government has reached 69%, while political legitimacy stands at 79% (Roy Morgan, 2025). However, significant disparities exist: trust in the President stands at 97.5%, whereas trust in Parliament is only 45.8% (IPO, 2025). These gaps suggest that digitalization alone does not automatically foster public trust. Instead, it requires consistent regulatory frameworks, effective implementation, and active citizen engagement. Thus, digital policy must serve as a bridge between technological innovation and public perceptions of governance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive-analytical design. The research sites include selected central and local government institutions, such as the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PANRB), urban local governments, and remote or underdeveloped regions for comparative purposes. The research participants consist of public officials, civil servants, policy practitioners, and citizens as users of digital public services. The data sources comprise both primary and secondary materials. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, while secondary data were obtained from policy documents (e.g., Presidential Regulations on SPBE and the National Medium-Term Development Plan/RPJMN), Bappenas reports, the UN E-Government Survey 2024, Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) reports, and relevant academic publications. Data collection techniques involved semi-structured interviews, analysis of regulatory documents and evaluation reports, and participatory observation in digital policy forums. The data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, and interpretation to uncover patterns linking digital policy implementation with levels of public trust. Research validity was ensured through source and method triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Policy and Public Trust

The findings indicate that digital public policies in Indonesia directly contribute to enhancing public trust, particularly in terms of service transparency through initiatives such as SP4N-LAPOR!. However, concerns remain regarding personal data protection and the consistency of policy implementation across different regions. These results align with Grimmeliikhuijsen & Meijer (2014), who argue that policy transparency strengthens

governmental legitimacy. Similarly, Bouckaert & Van de Walle (2003) emphasize that public trust grows when policies are accompanied by accountability measures.

In the Indonesian context, public trust remains uneven due to disparities in service quality across regions, highlighting the importance of consistent policy enforcement at all levels of government. To illustrate these findings, the study presents an analytical table based on stakeholder perceptions of digital public policy implementation in Indonesia. Table 1 displays the average scores across five key dimensions: transparency, accountability, public digital literacy, data security, and public trust.

Table 1. Analysis of Digital Public Policy Dimensions on Public Trust

Dimension	Average Score	Interpretation
Transparency	4.2	High
Accountability	3.8	Fairly High
Public Digital Literacy	3.4	Moderate
Data Security	3.1	Low–Moderate
Public Trust	3.6	Moderate–Fairly High

Source: Processed by the authors, 2025

The table illustrates that transparency stands out as the primary strength of Indonesia’s digital public policy, while data security and public digital literacy remain the weakest aspects requiring urgent attention. Public trust can be further enhanced if the government succeeds in balancing information openness with robust data protection, while simultaneously improving citizens’ digital literacy capacity.

Digital Transformation in Public Governance

The study reveals that digital transformation through SPBE (Electronic-Based Government System) and e-Procurement has accelerated public service delivery and improved bureaucratic efficiency. Urban regions are able to leverage these technologies more effectively, whereas remote and disadvantaged areas continue to face challenges related to infrastructure and digital literacy. These findings are consistent with Fountain’s (2001) argument that digitalization strengthens the relationship between governments and citizens through faster access. Bannister & Connolly (2012) further emphasize that the legitimacy of policies is a crucial determinant of digital transformation success.

In the Indonesian case, transformation still encounters the problem of a digital divide, which supports Nugroho’s (2020) conclusion that equitable digital literacy development must be reinforced to ensure that the benefits of technology-based public services are accessible to all segments of society. The analytical results are presented in Table 2, which outlines stakeholder perceptions of digital transformation in governance.

Table 2. Analysis of Digital Transformation in Public Governance

Key Indicator	Average Score	Interpretation	Implications for Governance
Accessibility of digital services	3.7	Fairly High	Government digital services are becoming more inclusive, though challenges persist in remote areas (3T regions).
Quality of IT infrastructure	3.5	Moderate	Basic infrastructure is available but unevenly distributed across regions.
Public digital literacy	3.4	Moderate	Some citizens are adaptive, but gaps in digital literacy remain.

Key Indicator	Average Score	Interpretation	Implications for Governance
Bureaucratic process efficiency	3.8	Fairly High	Digitalization accelerates processes but is not fully optimized due to human resource limitations.
Cross-sectoral service integration	3.2	Low–Moderate	Inter-agency systems remain only partially connected (SPBE still fragmented).

Source: Processed by the authors, 2025

The table indicates that digital service accessibility (3.7) and bureaucratic efficiency (3.8) are already at a fairly high level, suggesting that digital transformation positively contributes to the acceleration of public service delivery (Mergel et al., 2019). However, public digital literacy (3.4) and IT infrastructure (3.5) remain at a moderate level, reflecting the persistence of a digital divide that could hinder service adoption (Kominfo, 2023). The most significant challenge lies in cross-sectoral integration (3.2), as systems such as SPBE, SP4N-LAPOR!, and Satu Data Indonesia have not been fully interconnected, resulting in fragmented digital policies (Wirtz & Müller, 2019). Thus, while the trajectory of digital transformation is positive, its success still requires a collaborative strategy to strengthen digital literacy, expand infrastructure equity, and improve cross-sectoral integration.

Digital Policy Innovation in Indonesia

The findings reveal that programs such as SP4N-LAPOR! and One Data Indonesia have facilitated public access to information and provided channels for submitting aspirations. However, limited participation in regions with low digital literacy and the lack of platform integration remain significant challenges. This finding supports Janssen et al. (2018), who emphasized that the acceptance of digital services is influenced by perceived risks and benefits. Similarly, Budiati (2021) highlighted that the success of SPBE largely depends on bureaucratic commitment. Therefore, digital policy innovation in Indonesia still requires supporting regulations and stronger interagency integration to enhance its effectiveness, as summarized in Table 3 below, which presents key innovations implemented to support modern governance.

Table 3. Digital Policy Innovations in Indonesia

Digital Innovation	Strengths	Main Challenges
SP4N-LAPOR!	Fast and transparent grievance channel	Low participation in low-literacy regions
One Data Indonesia	Integrated, easily accessible data	Interagency integration not yet optimal
e-Procurement	Procurement transparency	Still prone to technical misuse

Source: Processed research data, 2025

Based on the table above, overall findings indicate that digital policy innovations have strengthened the principles of transparency and accountability in governance. However, their successful implementation remains highly dependent on the readiness of digital infrastructure, the improvement of public digital literacy, and stronger cross-sector coordination.

Public Trust in the Digital Era

The findings indicate that public trust has increased in digital services perceived as responsive and transparent. Nevertheless, concerns regarding data privacy and unequal digital access continue to foster skepticism. This result aligns with Mayer et al. (1995), who stressed that trust arises from institutional integrity, competence, and benevolence. In the digital context, West (2005) further noted that e-government can only build trust when accompanied by robust data security systems. This is also reinforced by Wirtz & Birkmeyer (2015), who argue

that digital trust constitutes the foundation of legitimacy in modern governance. Table 4 presents the analysis of public trust levels in the digital era based on several governance indicators.

Table 4. Analysis of Public Trust in the Digital Era

Public Trust Indicator	Mean Score	Interpretation
Information Transparency	3.8	High – public information disclosure is increasingly guaranteed
Government Accountability	3.6	Fairly high – accountability mechanisms function, though unevenly distributed
Digital Public Participation	3.4	Moderate – participation still affected by digital literacy gaps
Personal Data Protection	3.2	Moderate – regulations exist, but implementation remains suboptimal
Service Responsiveness	3.7	High – digital services are faster compared to conventional services

Source: Processed research data, 2025

Based on the above analysis, public trust in the digital era has relatively improved through high levels of information transparency and service responsiveness. However, limited accountability, low levels of digital participation, and weak personal data protection remain key challenges that must be addressed to reinforce the legitimacy of digital governance in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

This study affirms that digital public policy in Indonesia plays a strategic role in building public trust in the digital era. The implementation of initiatives such as SPBE, SP4N-LAPOR!, e-Procurement, and One Data Indonesia has demonstrated progress in enhancing transparency, bureaucratic efficiency, and the accessibility of public services. The findings indicate that information transparency (score 3.8) and service responsiveness (3.7) are the main strengths driving the increase in governmental legitimacy.

Nevertheless, several significant challenges remain, particularly regarding the lack of cross-sectoral integration (3.2), limited digital literacy (3.4), and insufficient personal data protection (3.2). These conditions suggest that although the trajectory of digital transformation is positive, the sustainability of public trust is determined not only by technology but also by the consistency of regulatory implementation, equitable infrastructure distribution, and reliable data security. Accordingly, public trust in the digital era tends to grow but has yet to become fully robust due to infrastructure disparities and weak accountability across various levels of government.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, this study proposes several strategic measures for advancing digital governance and strengthening public trust. First, the government must reinforce cross-sectoral digital system integration so that platforms such as SPBE, SP4N-LAPOR!, e-Procurement, and One Data Indonesia operate in synergy rather than isolation. Greater integration will reduce policy fragmentation and ensure that data flows are more consistent, reliable, and transparent across ministries and agencies. Second, improving public digital literacy should be a national priority. Education and training programs aimed at both citizens and civil servants are needed to build awareness, enhance the ability to use digital services, and encourage equitable participation in governance processes. Third, ensuring the equitable distribution of information technology infrastructure is crucial, particularly in underdeveloped and remote regions, to minimize the widening digital divide between urban and rural populations. Fourth, personal data protection must be reinforced through consistent regulatory enforcement, clearer guidelines, and the adoption of robust cybersecurity standards. Strengthening this dimension is essential not only for safeguarding citizens but also for building long-term public trust in digital government initiatives.

Finally, sustained collaboration between the government, private sector, and civil society is critical. Such collaboration can help ensure that digital transformation is not only efficient and innovative but also inclusive, transparent, and accountable, thereby positioning digital governance as a driver of democratic resilience and sustainable development.

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