



**TECHNIUM**  
SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL

**Vol. 82/2026**  
**A New Decade for Social Changes**



**PLUS**  
**COMMUNICATION P**



International  
Communication & PR

## Digitalization and Transparency in Efforts to Prevent and Eradicate Corruption

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**Abstract.** This study aims to examine and analyze whether digitalization systems can create transparency and prevent corrupt behavior, particularly within local government institutions at the regency and municipal levels in North Sulawesi. It also seeks to analyze the factors that hinder the transition of government management from a reactive to a proactive model, as well as to examine the role of the government in facilitating this transition toward digitalization as part of efforts to prevent corruption. The method employed in this study is normative legal research combined with field research, including surveys and interviews conducted at regency and municipal government offices that serve as the research objects. The approaches used in this study include the statute approach, analytical approach, and conceptual approach. Through these approaches, the study first examines how laws have been applied in efforts to prevent corrupt behavior, and subsequently evaluates the appropriateness of the concepts of corruption prevention and eradication. Furthermore, it analyzes whether the aspect of transparency is reflected in policies aimed at preventing and combating corruption. The findings of this study indicate that the governmental management systems in several regencies and municipalities in North Sulawesi have adopted digital technology, and that the digitalization process has had a positive and significant impact. It has contributed to the creation of transparency and has exerted a psychological effect across all levels of government management, from village/urban village administration to regional government institutions. With digital-based management systems, civil servants (ASN) are able to access data internally, thereby making digitalization an effective and transparent monitoring instrument that can reduce the intention to engage in corrupt behavior. However, human resources remain one of the main factors hindering the acceleration of the transition from reactive to proactive digital-based management.

**Keywords.** Digitalization, Transparency, Corruption Prevention, Corruption Eradication, Government Management

### A. Introduction

The issue of corruption in Indonesia over the past decades, particularly since the establishment of the Corruption Eradication Commission (*Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi—KPK*), indicates that corruption rates or indices have fluctuated. Various state or government policies related to the prevention and eradication of corruption have been implemented, ranging from regulatory measures to the socialization of negative values associated with corrupt behavior [1]. For example, the concept of “honesty canteens” was introduced in schools with the expectation of fostering attitudes of honesty and integrity [2], [3]. However, when analyzed,

it can be observed that during the implementation of this program, based on age demographics, some current corruption offenders, such as those involved in cases at PT Pertamina, likely had exposure to the concept of honesty canteens during their school years. This indicates that various government policies implemented thus far have not addressed the problem of corruption in a fundamental and comprehensive manner. This is largely because anti-corruption efforts have focused primarily on visible and known cases, while hidden and systematically planned corruption schemes are not thoroughly investigated to their root causes. Corruption cases in PT Pertamina and other sectors demonstrate that anti-corruption efforts in Indonesia have not yet achieved systemic success and still resemble a reactive, “firefighting” approach. Like an iceberg beneath the ocean surface, only a small portion is visible above water, while the much larger hidden part below the surface has the potential to cause significant damage, such as grounding and fracturing a ship.

A fundamental question arises as to whether all anti-corruption policies and movements implemented thus far have ever been comprehensively evaluated by the government, regardless of changes in political regimes. Based on information gathered from various sources and references, the government’s efforts in preventing and eradicating corruption have largely relied on regulatory or legislative approaches. However, regulations alone cannot serve as the sole solution or strategy for preventing and combating corruption. This is because corruption is closely related to human nature, character, and dimensions, where individuals possess the capability and intelligence to devise various modes of misconduct driven by malicious intent for personal or collective gain. In principle, legal provisions generally contain commands, prohibitions, and sanctions; nevertheless, they are unable to address other dimensions, such as organizational governance systems, both in terms of hardware and software, that are capable of fostering transparency. Transparent management will, in turn, produce effective and objective implementation of rules and policies, thereby creating an ideal synergy within the system.

Crime is not a hereditary phenomenon (innate or inherited at birth), nor is it a biological inheritance. Criminal acts can be committed by anyone, both men and women, across different levels of education. Crime can be carried out consciously, meaning it is thought out, planned, and directed toward a specific intent. Arief (2011) states that crime is an abstract concept, which cannot be physically perceived but can be observed through its consequences [4]. According to Priyono (2025), the study of corruption is not characterized by “closure,” but rather by an openness that broadens the understanding that corruption extends beyond mere legal violations, abuse of power, or misappropriation of public funds [5]. Gambetta (as cited in Priyono, 2025) argues that corruption always involves three parties: the trustor, the fiduciary, and the corruptor. The mandate relationship between the trustor and the fiduciary constitutes a necessary condition for corruption, while the involvement of a third party may or may not occur. Corruption is characterized as a “parasite on mandate relationships.” The greater the number of mandate-based relationships, the higher the potential for corruption; conversely, in the absence of such relationships, corruption does not occur. Forms of mandate abuse vary and often evolve alongside other practices such as fraud, theft, intimidation, or collusion.

Hoefnagels (1994), as cited in Kenedi (2017), proposes three strategies for crime prevention, which are outlined as follows: (a) *Criminal application* (the application of criminal law). For example, by applying Article 354 of the Criminal Code with the maximum penalty of eight years, both in prosecution and judicial decisions. (b) *Preventive without punishment* (prevention without penal sanctions). For instance, imposing maximum penalties on offenders indirectly provides preventive effects on the public, even for those who are not subjected to

punishment, or functions as a form of *shock therapy* for society. (c) *Influencing views of society on crime and punishment* (the role of mass media in shaping public perceptions of crime and punishment). For example, by socializing a law through providing an overview of the offense and its corresponding legal sanctions [6].

In the context of crime prevention through the application of criminal law, Barda Nawawi Arief (2011) explains that the prevention and control of crime through penal measures constitute *penal law policy* or *penal law enforcement policy*, the functionalization and operationalization of which are carried out through several stages, namely formulation (legislative policy), application (judicial policy), and execution (executive/administrative policy) [4]. It is at this stage that formulation policy becomes evident.

The prevention and eradication of corruption in Indonesia have been pursued by the state or government through various policies, both political and legal in nature. However, over time and with successive changes in political regimes, each regime tends to have different priorities and orientations in its policies. Each ruling regime places varying levels of emphasis on corruption prevention and eradication. The absence of a consistent roadmap and policy continuity, despite regime changes, has resulted in shifting policies and changing priorities in corruption prevention and eradication [7]–[9].

Nevertheless, with the advancement of contemporary technology, particularly digital systems, efforts to prevent and eradicate corruption can become more effective and easier to detect or trace. This is because digital systems enable every unit and individual within an organization to easily access information or data across organizational structures, work units, or divisions. Through digitalization within an organization, openness of access can be more readily achieved [10], [11]. Therefore, digital transformation in the public sector, especially within government institutions, has become increasingly urgent as a new organizational culture. By adopting digital technology, a model of governance that is open, inclusive, and data-driven can be established [12], [13].

One of the key weaknesses in the prevention and eradication of corruption in Indonesia is the lack of information transparency, in the sense of limited or restricted access to information or data across units or divisions within an organization [14]. According to the Corruption Perception Index (CPI) in 2016, Indonesia was ranked 90th out of 176 countries. This ranking reflects fluctuations over time, as in 1996 Indonesia was ranked 45th out of 54 countries, while in 2006 it was ranked 130th out of 163 countries. These rankings indicate that corruption in Indonesia remains relatively high [15].

Furthermore, based on the Corruption Perception Index of 12 cities in Indonesia conducted by Transparency International Indonesia in 2017, one of the cities in North Sulawesi examined in this study, namely Manado, recorded an index score of 62.8, where 0 indicates highly corrupt and 100 indicates very clean [16]. Although Manado serves as a benchmark for performance systems across various aspects of organizational governance and public service delivery, the corruption perception index remains relatively high.

Based on observations and recurring phenomena that often become public complaints in government service delivery, frequently highlighted in the media and occurring within the Provincial Government of North Sulawesi, along with the relatively high corruption perception index of Manado, this study was conducted.

## **B. Method**

The method employed in this study is normative legal research, also known as library-based legal research. According to Soerjono Soekanto and Sri Mamudji (2003), normative legal

research or library research is conducted by examining secondary data or library materials, complemented by field research through surveys and interviews conducted at government offices in regency and municipal capitals as the objects of study. Normative legal research examines law as a set of norms or rules that are in force [17].

These applicable legal norms consist of written legal norms established by legislative institutions, such as the Constitution, codifications, statutes, government regulations, presidential regulations, and others. Therefore, the normative juridical method is used when the study focuses on the juridical aspects as well as the value content of a legal rule [17].

The approach employed in this study is the statute approach, which involves examining all laws and regulations related to the issue under investigation [17]. Through this approach, the analysis focuses on how statutory regulations have been applied in preventing and eradicating corruption, whether they have been effective, and the extent to which the concepts of corruption prevention and eradication are appropriate in terms of policy as well as institutional hardware and software. Furthermore, these approaches are used to assess whether the aspect of transparency is reflected in every policy aimed at preventing and eradicating corruption.

### **C. Result and discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that all regency and municipal government offices in North Sulawesi have generally utilized digital technology (internet/computers) as a means of governance management systems. In particular, cities such as Manado, Bitung, Tomohon, Kotamobagu, and Tondano have implemented digital systems down to the village or urban village level. Based on field observations, the researcher initially assumed that the availability of digital technology at the village level would result in a sufficiently effective and ideal governance system in efforts to prevent and eradicate corruption.

However, this assumption cannot be fully justified. Empirical evidence shows that in several government offices that have adopted digitalized governance systems, corruption cases were still present in 2025. Moreover, the aspect of transparency in public service delivery in several regency and municipal capitals still exhibits paradoxical conditions, resulting in a lack of public satisfaction with the services provided [18].

From these empirical findings within the government institutions examined in this study, several aspects are identified and analyzed as contributing factors to corrupt behavior. These factors are examined through multiple dimensions using the legal system theory approach, particularly the legal system theory proposed by Lawrence M. Friedman (1975), as cited in Pahlevi (2022), which states that as part of a social system, the legal system consists of three main components [7]:

a. *Legal structure* refers to the framework, the enduring components, and the elements that provide form and boundaries to the overall institutions of law enforcement. In Indonesia, the legal structure includes institutions or law enforcement actors such as lawyers, police officers, prosecutors, and judges.

b. *Legal substance* refers to the rules, norms, and actual patterns of human behavior within the system, including the products generated by individuals within the legal system, such as decisions they issue or new regulations they formulate.

c. *Legal culture* refers to the mindset, system, and social forces that determine how the law is used, avoided, or misused by society.

Friedman's legal system theory is employed to examine issues related to law enforcement, particularly those associated with legal actors and legal culture. In the context of corruption prevention and eradication in Indonesia, the government has implemented various

policies, strategies, and regulations to address the issue. Nevertheless, corrupt practices continue to persist. Although it cannot be denied that these policies have, at certain points, reduced corruption rates at the national level, a recurring problem lies in the changes of political regimes, where each new administration tends to adopt different priorities and approaches compared to its predecessor in combating corruption.

This condition reflects a lack of consistency in government efforts to eradicate corruption. Under the current administration, corruption has once again become a priority program of the President, and its impact has begun to emerge. It is expected that such policies will remain consistent and not be limited solely to repressive measures based on political authority. Instead, greater emphasis should also be placed on preventive measures through regulatory systems capable of generating a sense of reluctance, or even fear, to deter corrupt behavior. Such regulations should function as an effective *shock therapy* for all elements and components of the nation, from society at large to government institutions.

Friedman's legal system theory can be used as an analytical framework to examine the problem of corruption in Indonesia, particularly in the context of this study. First, there are policies and regulations concerning corruption which, from a substantive perspective, can be considered sufficiently adequate. This is referred to by Friedman as *legal substance*. Legal substance encompasses rules, norms, and actual patterns of human behavior within the system, including the products generated by individuals within the legal system. These legal substances are designed to regulate specific matters in order to ensure order in their implementation or management. However, in practice, a well-formulated rule cannot guarantee, with absolute certainty, the prevention of individual behavior, even when the content of the rule meets ideal standards, is implementable in concrete terms, and is capable of delivering proportional justice based on the nature of a case.

Why can a rule not be guaranteed to be fully implemented? This is because a rule cannot operate independently, as it is inherently abstract. The manifestation or realization of a rule in concrete situations largely depends on the individuals operating within a particular structure of the system. In this regard, Friedman emphasizes the importance of the legal structure within the system, which he refers to as *legal structure*, defined as the framework, the enduring components, and the elements that provide form and boundaries to the overall legal institutions. In Indonesia, this legal structure includes actors such as lawyers, police officers, prosecutors, and judges.

The legal structure plays a crucial role in law enforcement. Law enforcement officials are ordinary individuals; however, they hold positions and attributes that must be upheld as they represent public trust. One of the underlying causes of corruption lies in the legal structure itself, particularly when legal actors lack integrity and are susceptible to bribery or being "bought" due to a fragile moral foundation. Therefore, even if legal rules are well-formulated, they will not be effectively enforced if legal officials or actors within the legal system lack strong moral values, integrity, and commitment to the principles of truth and justice.

The third aspect concerns the role of society within the legal system, which is equally significant. Society, as an entity within both macro and micro social communities, forms perceptions of law that shape a system of social forces. These perceptions determine whether the law is applied, avoided, or misused. Thus, the effectiveness of law is highly dependent on the mindset of society.

According to Soerjono Soekanto (2011), there are several factors that determine the effectiveness of law within society [19]:

- a. The legal factor itself.

- b. The law enforcement factor, namely the parties involved in both the formulation and implementation of the law.
- c. The facilities or infrastructure factor that supports law enforcement.
- d. The societal factor, namely the environment in which the law is applied or enforced.
- e. The cultural factor, defined as the product of human creativity, intention, and social interaction within society.

The next issue concerns whether digitalization systems are capable of creating transparency, considering that almost all government institutions in regency and municipal capitals have been equipped with digital devices, such as computers and internet access. In particular, the mayoral offices in Manado, Tomohon, Tondano, Bitung, and Kotamobagu have implemented digital systems down to the village or urban village level. These offices are also supported by adequate human resources. However, in several regency and municipal government offices that serve as the objects of this study, although digital technology has been adopted, skilled personnel are not evenly distributed. In general, skilled human resources remain concentrated in regency capitals or mayoral offices, resulting in a lack of overall transparency. This is particularly problematic given that government institutions function as public service providers.

To achieve optimal outcomes in the implementation of digitalization within the public sector, several stages of digital transformation are required within the framework of digital governance transformation. According to Gartner, as cited by Mubasyier Fatah (2025), there are five stages of transformation: (1) *E-government*. At this level, the focus is on shifting services online to enhance user convenience and reduce costs. Government organizations deliver services through online channels to achieve basic efficiency goals; however, data and its usage remain siloed and highly limited. (2) *Open government*. This level does not necessarily follow sequentially from the previous stage. *E-government* and open government initiatives often coexist with different leadership structures and priorities. Open government typically takes the form of public programs aimed at promoting transparency, citizen engagement, and a data-driven economy. (3) *Data-centric government*. At this stage, the focus shifts from merely collecting data on citizens' needs to proactively exploring new possibilities inherent in the strategic use of data. Key performance indicators at this level include the extent of data openness and the number of applications built on open data. (4) *Fully transformed government*. At this stage, government organizations, institutions, or departments fully commit to a data-centric approach to improve governance. Data flows seamlessly across organizational boundaries, leading to more efficient interactions and improved public service delivery. (5) *Smart government*. At this level, data-driven digital innovation processes are fully embedded across the entire government system. These innovation processes become predictable and repeatable, even in the face of disruptions or unexpected events that require rapid responses [20].

Furthermore, Gartner emphasizes that the advancement of information and communication technologies, the proliferation of the internet, and the increasing use of digital technologies continue to drive public service sectors within government, both at the central and local levels, to shift their service models from reactive to proactive approaches. The findings of Gartner's study are consistent with the results of this research conducted on government institutions, which indicate that these institutions have adopted digital technologies. However, the available data have not been fully integrated across all levels, particularly at the village or urban village level. Empirical evidence shows that inconsistencies in data still occur between different villages or urban villages, as well as between these units and central regional or municipal offices.

As noted by Gartner, at the first level of digital transformation, the objective is to shift services online in order to enhance user convenience and reduce costs. However, the findings of this study reveal that several government offices examined have not yet optimally achieved even this initial level of transformation. Consequently, their governance systems in delivering public services have not yet demonstrated adequate levels of transparency, efficiency, or public satisfaction.

Nevertheless, the transition from a reactive to a proactive system has begun to emerge. This is evident from the researcher's interviews with officials and operational staff, who have continuously made efforts to gradually adjust the transition process toward a data-driven organizational and management system. Both theoretically and empirically, the transition toward a digital-based organizational system inevitably encounters various challenges. According to Gartner, these challenges are often attributed to financial constraints and limited investment in the public sector.

From the above description and analysis, the research question, whether digitalization systems can create transparency, has been addressed. In principle, this can be achieved, as digital systems are capable of presenting data online and making it accessible to all relevant stakeholders. However, since government institutions are public institutions and service providers, the public has the right to access such information in order to assess government performance.

The primary challenge in the field lies in human resource (HR) capacity. As an exception, the mayoral offices of Manado, Bitung, Tomohon, Tondano, and Kotamobagu have been able to extend digitalization down to the village level, largely because their geographical areas are relatively smaller and closer to the administrative centers. As a result, their digital systems are more developed compared to other regencies or municipalities that are geographically larger and extend to archipelagic regions. In such areas, challenges typically include limitations in human resources, infrastructure, electricity, financial capacity, and network or signal disruptions in certain locations, all of which hinder optimal access to information.

#### **D. Conclusion**

The persistence of corruption can be attributed to the fact that its mitigation has largely relied on policy or regulatory approaches alone. One of the underlying causes of corruption is the lack of synergy within the legal system, particularly among its components, as emphasized by Friedman. Furthermore, the weakness of law enforcement is largely due to deficiencies within the legal structure itself, where certain law enforcement officials abuse their authority as a result of low integrity and a fragile moral foundation. Consequently, corrupt practices continue to persist.

Government policy in combating and preventing corruption involves transitioning from conventional management systems to digital-based management systems. This is because digital governance and organizational management can enhance transparency while simultaneously serving as an effective control mechanism across all levels of organizational management. As public institutions that serve societal interests, government entities need to implement five stages of digital transformation, namely: *e-government*, open government, data-centric government, fully transformed government, and smart government.

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