

Public Engagement and Oversight for Accountable Governance in Corruption Prevention Efforts in North Sulawesi Province

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Article Information

Article History:

Received: 30 May 2026

Revised: 5 June 2026

Accepted: 24 June 2026

Available online: 1 July 2026

Keywords:

Governance;

Public Accountability;

Engagement and Oversight;

Integrity Assessment Survey;

Corruption Prevention

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the condition of accountable regional governance in North Sulawesi Province, focusing specifically on the dimension of engagement and oversight by all employees and the public, one of the six key issues measured in the Integrity Assessment Survey. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach through semi-structured interviews with three key informants representing different levels of position, namely the Provincial Secretary, the Head of the Human Resources Development Agency, and a staff member of the North Sulawesi Provincial Social Affairs Office, supplemented by a review of secondary data on Integrity Assessment Survey scores for the 2023 to 2025 period. Data were analyzed thematically and interpreted through the lens of public accountability and good governance. Based on the three-zone categorization framework commonly used to interpret the Integrity Assessment Survey index scale, the engagement and oversight dimension score for North Sulawesi Province fell within the vulnerable-to-risk zone at 73.05 in 2023, remained in that zone with an increase to 76.10 in 2024, but declined to the at-risk zone at 72.61 in 2025. The findings show that formal complaint channels are available and reasonably actively used at the level of regional secretariat leadership, yet their dissemination has not evenly reached operational staff, while fear of retaliation and the absence of clear whistleblower protection mechanisms tend to make participation among lower-level employees passive. Public participation in overseeing public services also remains limited due to the perception that government responses to complaints are slow. This study recommends expanding the dissemination of complaint channels to all levels of the civil apparatus, strengthening whistleblower protection guarantees, and developing more responsive public feedback mechanisms as strategic steps to strengthen the accountability of regional governance in North Sulawesi Province.

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1. Introduction

Corruption remains a fundamental challenge in the administration of local government in Indonesia, not merely as a matter of legal violation but also as a reflection of weak institutional governance that should serve as a safeguard for clean government administration (Jawa et al., 2024; Kusuma, 2024; Supit, 2026). Local governments occupy a strategic position in the corruption prevention agenda because they function as the primary providers of public services and managers of public resources at the local level, so that the quality of their

governance directly affects public trust in the state (Adeti & Christiani, 2022). One principle underpinning accountable governance is openness of participatory space for employees and the public to take part in overseeing the conduct of government administration, since accountability without participation tends to stop at mere administrative compliance (Kusnaedi et al., 2025; Mewengkang & Warokka, 2026).

As an instrument for mapping the integrity conditions of government institutions, the Corruption Eradication Commission developed the Integrity Assessment Survey, which measures six key issues, one of which is engagement and oversight by all employees and the public. This dimension reflects the extent to which complaint channels, socialization efforts, and participatory space for employees and citizens are available and function in practice to support oversight of government administration (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, 2024). Integrity Assessment Survey scores are commonly interpreted through three zone categories: the red or at-risk zone for scores ranging from 0 to 72.9, the yellow or vulnerable-to-risk zone for the range of 73 to 77.9, and the green or well-maintained zone for the range of 78 to 100 (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, 2025).

Data on the engagement and oversight dimension for North Sulawesi Province between 2023 and 2025 reveal a pattern that warrants close attention when read through this categorization framework. The score stood at 73.05 in 2023, positioned at the lower threshold of the vulnerable-to-risk zone. It then rose to 76.10 in 2024, still within the vulnerable-to-risk zone but approaching the threshold of the well-maintained zone. In 2025, however, the score fell to 72.61, a decline that pushed this dimension's achievement out of the vulnerable-to-risk zone and into the at-risk zone. This shift in category from vulnerable-to-risk to at-risk within a relatively short period indicates that the progress achieved in 2024 had not yet been institutionalized consistently, leaving that achievement susceptible to regression once its supporting factors were not sustained.

Prior research on the integrity of regional governance in North Sulawesi has examined organizational silence as a barrier to early corruption detection within the enforcement and early-detection dimension, explaining how organizational culture makes employees reluctant to voice suspected misconduct (Supit & Mantiri, 2026). That study made an important contribution to understanding the enforcement dimension, but it did not specifically examine how the engagement and oversight dimension, which involves complaint channels, socialization, and participation of employees and the public, is experienced across different levels of position, from leadership down to implementing staff. A systematic review of anti-corruption policy in Indonesia likewise shows that the success of local-level anti-corruption efforts is largely determined by a combination of institutional reform, capacity strengthening, and community participation, yet literature that specifically traces cross-level experiences on this participatory dimension remains limited within the context of provincial government (Paranata, 2025). Other studies have focused more on the normative evaluation of anti-corruption policy (Sutangsa, 2023) or on the institutional role of anti-corruption bodies in general, without tracing the experiences of actors on the ground (Setiawan, 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of experiences across different levels of position, from regional secretariat leadership down to implementing staff, specifically on the engagement and oversight dimension, while also giving attention to the public participation aspect that forms an inseparable part of this dimension. Building on this background, the study is formulated to address the condition of complaint channels, socialization, and the participation of employees and the public in overseeing government administration in North Sulawesi Province, and how such conditions can be interpreted within the framework of efforts to strengthen accountability and prevent corruption. This study aims to analyze these conditions based on the actual experiences of civil servants in the field and to formulate

relevant policy implications, while also contributing academically to the development of public administration studies on the participatory dimension of regional governance.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of how bureaucratic actors interpret and experience the practice of engagement and oversight in government administration, rather than to test statistical relationships among variables. The research was conducted at the Office of the Provincial Secretariat of North Sulawesi, with field data collected in October 2025 through semi-structured interviews. Informants were selected purposively to capture variation in experience across levels of position: the Provincial Secretary, representing the leadership of the regional secretariat; the Head of the Human Resources Development Agency, representing the leadership of a technical regional agency; and a senior staff member of the Social Affairs Office, representing implementing staff working directly in the field.

The interview instrument focused on the complaint channel and its effectiveness, the reach of socialization efforts, fear of retaliation risk, and public participation in overseeing public services. Primary data from the interviews were supplemented with secondary data in the form of North Sulawesi's Integrity Assessment Survey scores for the 2023 to 2025 period, published by the Corruption Eradication Commission (Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi, 2024, 2025). Data were analyzed using thematic techniques, comprising transcription, open coding, and the construction of an interpretive narrative that links field findings with the framework of public accountability and good governance. The trustworthiness of the data was strengthened through source triangulation, comparing the accounts of the three informants across different levels of position and cross-checking them against the quantitative data from the Integrity Assessment Survey.

3. Result and Discussion

Dynamics and Index Categories of the Integrity Assessment Survey on the Engagement and Oversight Dimension

When read through the three-zone categorization framework, the performance of North Sulawesi Province on the engagement and oversight dimension shows an unstable pattern over the past three years. The score of 73.05 in 2023 placed the province at the lower threshold of the vulnerable-to-risk zone, only slightly above the boundary with the at-risk zone. The rise to 76.10 in 2024 brought this achievement closer to the threshold of the well-maintained zone, indicating an improvement in perceptions of stakeholder involvement and the effectiveness of oversight mechanisms. That improvement, however, could not be sustained. The decline to 72.61 in 2025 pushed this dimension back into the at-risk zone, a category signifying an increasing risk of irregularities in the engagement and oversight aspect. Such a comparatively sharp change in score over a short period suggests that integrity performance on this dimension remains heavily influenced by the dynamics of oversight implementation and by the quality of relations among government, civil servants, and the public.

This pattern of rising and then falling below the initial-year achievement displays characteristics different from the enforcement and early-detection dimension in the same province, which shows a more consistently declining trend. This difference in pattern suggests that issues within the engagement and oversight dimension are more fluctuating and sensitive to changes in organizational conditions and in the environment of public service delivery. In other words, changes in this dimension are likely driven by operational factors such as the intensity of socialization, the effectiveness of internal communication, the level of responsiveness to complaints, and the extent of public involvement in the oversight process.

This indicates that an improved score in a given period does not necessarily reflect sustained strengthening of the system unless it is supported by consistent institutional practice.

This fluctuation provides an important entry point for qualitative inquiry, since quantitative data alone cannot explain why the 2024 improvement failed to continue, nor the factors that caused the score to decline again into the at-risk zone the following year. The index figure only describes the final condition, without revealing the process, experiences, or constraints faced by actors within the organization. A deeper understanding therefore requires exploring the experiences of civil servants across various levels of position, including how they interpret oversight, participation, and reporting mechanisms. The following section presents these qualitative findings to explain the mechanisms underlying the dynamics of score change on the engagement and oversight dimension.

Availability of Complaint Channels and the Socialization Gap Across Levels of Position

The interview results show that channels for reporting suspected corruption and gratification within the North Sulawesi Provincial Government are essentially already in place, although they remain dominated by conventional mechanisms, with the digitalization process only recently initiated. The Provincial Secretary explained that complaints can be submitted through several channels, either directly to the Governor, through correspondence, or through the Inspectorate, with the volume of complaints ranging from ten to twenty reports, dominated by issues of regional budget management and complaints regarding leadership attitudes perceived as lacking transparency. This account indicates that the formal reporting mechanism is already used fairly actively at the level of regional secretariat leadership.

A different picture emerges at the level below. The Head of the Human Resources Development Agency stated that a complaint mechanism does exist, but its socialization remains limited to officials and has not evenly reached the entire civil apparatus, without being accompanied by any formal employee or public satisfaction survey. At the implementing level, the Social Affairs Office staff member recounted that knowledge of the complaint channel was mostly obtained through information passed down by superiors rather than through formal socialization, so that although access to lodge complaints is available, knowledge of the mechanism and how to use it remains uneven.

These findings reveal a structural gap between the availability of formal channels at the leadership level and the reach of socialization at the technical implementing level. This pattern is consistent with the argument that accountability, transparency, and oversight fundamentally reinforce one another in shaping public service performance free of irregularities, such that the absence of any one element weakens the effectiveness of the others (Kushartiningasih & Riharjo, 2021; Mewengkang & Warokka, 2026). A systematic review of anti-corruption policy in Indonesia further confirms that external oversight mechanisms, including professional audits, are generally more effective in curbing the misuse of public funds, whereas citizen-participation-based oversight produces mixed results that depend heavily on the incentives and protection mechanisms available to whistleblowers (Paranata, 2025). Without socialization that reaches every layer of the organization, complaint channels risk being effectively used only by officials who have direct access to leadership, while implementing-level employees tend not to make optimal use of them even when they are aware of indications of wrongdoing around them. This condition also aligns with findings on the effectiveness of whistleblowing systems, which affirm that a complaint channel will only have a tangible impact on fraud detection if it is accompanied by the active role of whistleblowers who feel safe and confident that their reports will be followed up seriously (Wahyuningtiyas & Pramudyastuti, 2022). The fluctuating pattern in North Sulawesi's engagement and oversight index can be interpreted as a reflection of this condition: the rise in 2024 likely reflects the initial results of socialization

directed at officials, while the decline in 2025 indicates that these efforts had not yet succeeded in cultivating a reporting culture that extends broadly to implementing staff.

Fear of Retaliation and Public Participation in Overseeing Public Services

Fear of retaliation constitutes a significant barrier to building a participatory oversight culture within public service settings. Beyond the issue of socialization, the Social Affairs Office staff member admitted to never having been directly involved in reporting suspected irregularities because the whistleblower protection mechanism was not clearly understood. This occurred despite the employee's awareness of certain indications of wrongdoing, including alleged additional charges for funeral services that should have been provided free of charge. This reluctance to report shows that awareness of a violation does not automatically translate into reporting action when employees still feel unsafe. Concern over possible retaliation, whether in the form of social pressure, career obstacles, or unfair treatment in the workplace, can lead employees to choose silence rather than take on a risk perceived as detrimental to themselves.

This situation illustrates that the effectiveness of a whistleblowing mechanism is determined not only by the existence of a reporting channel but also by the level of employee trust in the protection provided by the organization. Employees will be more willing to come forward with information when there are guarantees of identity confidentiality, clear procedures for handling reports, and support from direct supervisors. Without such assurances, reporting channels tend to remain merely formal and are not optimally utilized. As a result, various indications of wrongdoing known to employees risk going undetected at an early stage. Over the long term, this condition can reinforce a culture of silence within the organization, rendering internal oversight less effective and leaving the door open for irregularities in public service delivery.

On the other hand, the engagement and oversight dimension within the Integrity Assessment Survey framework also positions the public as an external overseer of public service administration. The Provincial Secretary acknowledged that the public tends to feel insufficiently heard because the government's response to complaints is slow. This perception can reduce public interest in using the available complaint channels, even though such channels have formally been opened. When complaints are not followed up quickly and transparently, public trust in the oversight system weakens as well. Strengthening whistleblower protection, fostering an organizational culture that supports openness, and ensuring a swift and accountable government response are therefore important factors for enabling optimal participation by both employees and the public in supporting oversight of public services.

Interpreting the Index Dynamics through the Lens of Public Accountability and Good Governance

Taken together, the three findings discussed above, namely the socialization gap across levels, fear of retaliation at the implementing level, and the perception of slow responses to public complaints, converge on a single underlying issue: the uneven distribution of information, protection guarantees, and responsiveness across the ranks of the bureaucracy as well as between government and the public. These findings reinforce the argument within good governance literature that the principles of accountability, transparency, and participation cannot merely exist as formal policy but must be realized evenly across all layers of the organization and in its relations with citizens if they are to genuinely function as effective instruments of corruption prevention (Kusnaedi et al., 2025; Sedarmayanti & Aziz, 2020).

The fluctuation in North Sulawesi's engagement and oversight score, moving from the vulnerable-to-risk zone toward the threshold of the well-maintained zone before eventually falling into the at-risk zone, can thus be interpreted as an indicator that progress on this

participatory dimension remains fragile and has not yet been institutionalized on a sustained basis. Research on digital governance and political stability confirms that the effectiveness of anti-corruption policy is strongly influenced by the extent to which oversight mechanisms consistently reach every level of government, rather than only the highest tier of policymaking (Zhao et al., 2025; Supit, 2026), an argument that is relevant to conditions in North Sulawesi, where the availability of complaint channels at the leadership level has not been matched by an equivalent reach at the implementing level or among the broader public.

This study complements earlier research on organizational silence as a barrier to early corruption detection in several local governments in North Sulawesi (Supit & Mantiri, 2026) by showing that issues within the engagement and oversight dimension have a distinct character, resting more on the socialization gap and the absence of clear protection guarantees than solely on an organizational culture that silences employee voice. Strengthening accountable regional governance in North Sulawesi Province on this dimension therefore requires three complementary steps: expanding the socialization of complaint channels to reach all civil servants without exception, strengthening clear and reliable whistleblower protection guarantees, and developing a more responsive feedback mechanism for public complaints, consistent with the conclusion of the systematic review that the success of anti-corruption policy at the local level depends on institutional reform, capacity strengthening, and community participation moving forward together (Paranata, 2025).

4. Conclusion

This study shows that the engagement and oversight dimension of North Sulawesi Province's Integrity Assessment Survey experienced significant dynamics during the 2023 to 2025 period, moving from the vulnerable-to-risk zone with a score of 73.05 in 2023, rising while remaining in the vulnerable-to-risk zone with a score of 76.10 in 2024, before finally falling into the at-risk zone with a score of 72.61 in 2025. This dynamic is consistent with the qualitative findings that complaint channels are already available and actively used at the level of regional secretariat leadership, but their socialization has not evenly reached implementing staff, while fear of retaliation risk and unclear whistleblower protection mechanisms tend to make participation among lower-level employees passive. Public participation in overseeing public services also remains limited due to the perception that the government's response to complaints is slow.

These findings affirm that strengthening accountable regional governance on the engagement and oversight dimension requires an approach that consistently reaches every level of the bureaucracy as well as its relations with the public. The Government of North Sulawesi Province is advised to accelerate digitalization and expand the socialization of complaint channels to reach the entire civil apparatus, strengthen whistleblower protection guarantees formally and reliably, and develop a more responsive feedback mechanism for public complaints. Future research is recommended to extend the scope of informants to district and municipal governments within North Sulawesi Province, and to develop a conceptual framework on employee and public participation that can be tested more systematically in other regional government contexts in Indonesia.

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