



# The Role of Government Accountability in Upholding the Rule of Law and Substantive Democracy in Indonesia

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## Abstract

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Article 1 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia affirms that Indonesia is a state based on law, which requires all aspects of governance and public life to comply with legal principles. Within the context of democracy, the rule of law demands government accountability that is transparent, accountable, and responsive to the interests of the people. This study analyzes the concept of government accountability in the Indonesian legal system with a particular focus on the application of good governance principles. By employing a literature review of sources published and available, the study reveals that the effectiveness of democracy is closely linked to the quality of accountability and the supremacy of law, both of which prevent abuse of power and ensure political, social, and economic stability. When accountability is limited to mere formality, it results in public distrust, weakened democratic legitimacy, and higher corruption risks. Conversely, transparency, accountability, and adherence to the rule of law strengthen substantive democracy and enhance public trust.

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## 1. Introduction

Article 1 paragraph (3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945 (*Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia/UUD NRI 1945*) asserts that Indonesia is a rule-of-law state. This principle positions law as the primary foundation for state administration while simultaneously affirming that all government actions must be based on applicable legal rules. In the context of democracy, the existence of a rule-of-law state is not merely a normative rule, but also a prerequisite for realizing a transparent, accountable, and just system of government. A democratic rule-of-law state must guarantee the protection of human rights, uphold the principle of equality before the law, and ensure the existence of government accountability mechanisms.

In contemporary political development, government accountability becomes a central issue in maintaining the quality of democracy. The government is not only required to carry out administrative obligations but also to account for every policy and action to the public. This aligns with the concept of good governance which emphasizes the importance of transparency, accountability, effectiveness, and the supremacy of law. According to Ishiyama,<sup>1</sup> quality democracy will not be realized without government governance that enforces these principles. Thus, the sustainability of substantive democracy heavily depends on the extent to which the state can present real and effective accountability mechanisms.

In practice, government accountability in Indonesia often faces serious challenges, ranging from weak law enforcement, corruption practices, to a low level

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<sup>1</sup> John Ishiyama. "Is democracy necessary for good governance?." *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 6 (2019): 2188-2208.

of public trust in state institutions. Arsad,<sup>2</sup> asserts that the success of realizing good governance is not enough merely through regulatory formulation, but also requires consistent law enforcement and the strengthening of participatory democracy. This means that government accountability must not stop at formal documents but must be realized in the form of actual policies and actions that reflect the interests of the people.

Furthermore, within the framework of a democratic rule-of-law state, supremacy of law functions not only as a tool to limit power but also as an instrument to ensure the protection of citizens' rights. Mansoor<sup>3</sup> emphasize that strong law enforcement plays a vital role in strengthening democratic governance, because only with effective legal mechanisms can government accountability be executed consistently. Thus, the supremacy of law serves a dual function: as a protector of citizens' rights and as a guarantor of the political system's integrity.

Public participation also becomes a fundamental element in strengthening government accountability. Healthy democracy requires the active involvement of citizens in monitoring the course of government, both through formal mechanisms like the People's Representative Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah/DPR*) and through the direct participation of civil society. Saputra et al.<sup>4</sup> underscore the importance of meaningful participation as a manifestation of the people's

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<sup>2</sup> R Arsad. *Realizing good governance in governance through law enforcement and democracy*. *Central European Management Journal*, 31 (2), (2023):1249–1253.

<sup>3</sup> Mahnaz Mansoor. "Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19." *Government information quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2021): 101597.

<sup>4</sup> Rian Saputra, M. Zaid, and Devi Triasari. "Executability of the Constitutional Court's formal testing decision: Indonesia's Omnibus Law review." *Journal of Law, Environmental and Justice* 1, no. 3 (2023): 244-258.

sovereignty in a democratic rule-of-law state. Through this participation, the government is encouraged to be more transparent, responsive, and accountable in every policy undertaken.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of re-examining the meaning of government accountability in the context of Indonesia's rule-of-law state and democracy. Many cases indicate that government accountability tends to be understood as mere administrative formality, without actual implementation in public policy.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, public trust declines, political stability is disturbed, and the quality of democracy weakens. By employing a literature review approach to current literature, this research aims to analyze how the concept of government accountability can be effectively implemented within the framework of a democratic rule-of-law state and how the principles of good governance can strengthen governmental legitimacy.

Thus, this research is not only theoretically relevant but also has significant practical implications. The results of the study are expected to contribute to the formulation of public policies that are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to community aspirations. Ultimately, strengthening government accountability will be an important foundation for realizing substantive democracy and the sustainability of a just rule-of-law state in Indonesia.

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<sup>5</sup> Gedion Onyango. "Organizational disciplinary actions as socio-political processes in public organizations." *Public Organization Review* 19, no. 2 (2019): 227-248.

## 2. Literature Review

The literature review focusing on the themes of government accountability, the rule-of-law state, democracy, and the principles of good governance shows a close link between the quality of government administration and the consolidation of democracy. Government accountability is viewed as an essential aspect of the rule-of-law concept because it functions to prevent the abuse of authority, strengthen political legitimacy, and foster public trust in state institutions.

Ishiyama<sup>6</sup> asserts that democracy is insufficient if judged only by formal procedures such as elections but must also be accompanied by government governance that prioritizes the principles of accountability and law enforcement. Without the integration of these principles, democracy only results in formal legitimacy without substance, thereby risking the emergence of a public crisis of confidence in the government.

In the Indonesian context, the main challenge to realizing good governance practices lies in the still weak consistency of law enforcement and the low level of transparency in state administration. Arsad<sup>7</sup> highlights that the success of implementing good governance heavily relies on the synergy between law enforcement, active community involvement, and the existence of effective oversight mechanisms. Without the integration of these three elements, government accountability tends to stop at administrative documents without substantive

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<sup>6</sup> John Ishiyama. "Is democracy necessary for good governance?." *Social Science Quarterly* 100, no. 6 (2019): 2188-2208.

<sup>7</sup> R Arsad. *Realizing good governance in governance through law enforcement and democracy*. *Central European Management Journal*, 31 (2), (2023):1249–1253.

meaning. The research conducted by Mansoor<sup>8</sup> demonstrates that the supremacy of law has two main functions. First, it acts as an instrument to protect human rights. Second, it is an important means of ensuring government accountability. Consistent supremacy of law not only guarantees certainty for citizens but also directly limits the scope for the abuse of authority by those in power.

Furthermore, within the framework of participatory democracy, the involvement of the people becomes an element inseparable from strengthening accountability. Saputra et al.<sup>9</sup> emphasize that meaningful participation is a concrete form of the realization of people's sovereignty in a democratic rule-of-law state. Through inclusive and substantial participation, the government will be encouraged to be more transparent, responsive, and accommodating in every decision-making process that impacts the community.

Thus, current literature confirms that government accountability is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving substantive democracy. Three main pillars, namely the rule of law, transparency, and public participation, form mutually reinforcing foundations in building governmental legitimacy while ensuring the effectiveness of state administration. The integration of these three aspects not only supports the sustainability of democracy but also serves as an instrument to prevent a crisis of public confidence and strengthen the quality of the just rule-of-law state.

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<sup>8</sup> Mahnaz Mansoor. "Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19." *Government information quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2021): 1015-97.

<sup>9</sup> Rian Saputra, M. Zaid, and Devi Triasari. "Executability of the Constitutional Court's formal testing decision: Indonesia's Omnibus Law review." *Journal of Law, Environmental and Justice* 1, no. 3 (2023): 244-258.

### **3. Method**

This research uses the library research method, which focuses on reviewing academic literature, scientific journals, and legal documents relevant to the issue of government accountability in the rule-of-law state and democracy. Library research was chosen because the problem being examined is conceptual and normative, allowing deep understanding to be obtained through the analysis of theories and previous research findings. This method allows researchers to identify the gap between existing legal principles and the practice of government administration, as well as to assess the extent to which the principles of good governance are applied in the Indonesian context.

The main sources of the research include published scientific articles that discuss the correlation between the rule of law, government accountability, democracy, and good governance. This period was selected based on the need to obtain a contextual and up-to-date understanding of the dynamics of government governance in the contemporary democratic era. The selected articles were obtained through the Google Scholar database using keywords such as rule of law, government accountability, democracy, and good governance.

The research process was carried out in several stages. First, the researcher performed a search for relevant literature according to the keywords, then filtered the search results based on the year of publication, relevance, and connection to the research topic. Second, the selected literature was analyzed to identify main themes such as the supremacy of law, transparency, accountability, community participation, and the implications of weak government accountability. Third, the findings from

various literature sources were compared and synthesized to produce a comprehensive understanding.

The analysis in this research is qualitative, as its main focus is to describe and understand the meaning of government accountability within the framework of a democratic rule-of-law state. The researcher interprets the secondary data using a normative juridical and political approach, so the results of the study are not only descriptive but also analytical and critical. This approach allows the researcher to assess the effectiveness of existing government accountability mechanisms and to provide theoretical recommendations for strengthening the implementation of good governance principles.

With the library research method, this study is expected to provide an academic contribution in the form of a clear conceptual framework regarding the importance of government accountability in a democratic rule-of-law state. This method also supports the research objective of explaining how accountability can be effectively executed through a combination of the supremacy of law, public participation, and transparency, so that substantive democracy can be realized sustainably in Indonesia.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Government Accountability within the Rule-of-Law Framework**

Government accountability is one of the fundamental pillars in the implementation of a rule-of-law state. In the Indonesian context, this principle gains a firm juridical basis as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (3) of the UUD NRI 1945,

which affirms that Indonesia is a rule-of-law state. Consequently, every action by state administrators must be subject to law and fall within the framework of measurable accountability mechanisms. If the principle of accountability is neglected, democracy only stops at the procedural aspect of elections alone without providing a real guarantee for the people's welfare.

Wang et al.<sup>10</sup> emphasize that democracy is not automatically capable of producing good government governance. Democracy that is not supported by consistent law enforcement and accountability practices risks being trapped in patterns of oligarchy and political patronage. In such a situation, democracy loses its substance because it only presents electoral formality. Therefore, the supremacy of law is present as an important instrument to ensure that power is exercised transparently, justly, and with full responsibility.

Furthermore, Arsad<sup>11</sup> asserts that the success of good governance heavily depends on the consistency of law enforcement, public information openness, community participation, and effective oversight mechanisms. These principles become the foundation for the government to be able to carry out its functions accountably. However, in practice, Indonesia still faces serious challenges, including the rampant acts of corruption, weak bureaucratic integrity, and low compliance with regulations. This condition indicates that although the legal framework is available, implementation in the field still faces structural and cultural obstacles.

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<sup>10</sup> Yi-ting Wang, Valeriya Mechkova, and Frida Andersson. "Does democracy enhance health? New empirical evidence 1900–2012." *Political research quarterly* 72, no. 3 (2019): 554-569.

<sup>11</sup> R Arsad. *Realizing good governance in governance through law enforcement and democracy*. *Central European Management Journal*, 31 (2), (2023):1249–1253.

The research by Mansoor<sup>12</sup> affirms that law enforcement in Indonesia has a central role in strengthening democratic consolidation. One manifestation of this is seen in electoral regulations that must be executed transparently, fairly, and accountably. With this mechanism, the rule of law not only functions as an instrument for protecting citizens' rights but also forms the legitimacy of government rooted in public trust. This legitimacy is an important basis for the sustainability of substantive democracy. Meanwhile, Saputra et al.<sup>13</sup> highlight the importance of meaningful participation as a crucial indicator of government accountability. Public participation that is inclusive and substantial not only strengthens democratic legitimacy but also guarantees that the government remains responsive to the needs of the community. With this participation, the community has room to influence the direction of policy so that government decisions are not one-sided.

From the results of this literature review, it can be concluded that government accountability within the framework of the Indonesian rule-of-law state requires three main pillars. First, consistent law enforcement so that every action by state administrators is always within the corridor of clear legal rules. Second, active public participation as a manifestation of the people's sovereignty as well as a means of oversight over the course of government. Third, policy transparency which ensures the public gains access to information so that government governance can be openly

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<sup>12</sup> Mahnaz Mansoor. "Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19." *Government information quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2021): 1015-97.

<sup>13</sup> Rian Saputra, M. Zaid, and Devi Triasari. "Executability of the Constitutional Court's formal testing decision: Indonesia's Omnibus Law review." *Journal of Law, Environmental and Justice* 1, no. 3 (2023): 244-258.

evaluated. The integration of these three pillars is key to building an accountable, responsive system of government, as well as capable of strengthening political legitimacy. Without consistent law enforcement, meaningful community participation, and real policy transparency, democracy in Indonesia is potentially trapped in procedural formality. Thus, government accountability is not only important as a legal mechanism but also as a foundation for realizing substantive democracy and a just rule-of-law state.

#### **4.2. Impact of Implementation and Obstacles to Accountability**

The implementation of the principle of government accountability in Indonesia still faces various serious obstacles, both originating from structural and cultural factors. One of the fundamental problems lies in the weak integrity of the bureaucracy which should be the spearhead of implementing government governance. The rampant practice of corruption further worsens the situation, as it directly erodes public trust in state institutions. Hartanto et al.<sup>14</sup> through measuring the government effectiveness index, affirm that the weakness of the bureaucracy in internalizing the principles of good governance has implications for the declining quality of democracy and the weakening of governmental legitimacy.

On the other hand, research conducted by Jia et al.<sup>15</sup> shows that inconsistency in law enforcement causes the principle of accountability to often be reduced to

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<sup>14</sup> Dadang Hartanto, Juhriyansyah Dalle, A. Akrim, and Hastin Umi Anisah. "Perceived effectiveness of e-governance as an underlying mechanism between good governance and public trust: a case of Indonesia." *Digital Policy, Regulation And Governance* 23, no. 6 (2021): 598-616.

<sup>15</sup> Nan Jia, Kenneth G. Huang, and Cyndi Man Zhang. "Public governance, corporate governance, and firm innovation: An examination of state-owned enterprises." *Academy of Management Journal* 62, no. 1 (2019): 220-247.

mere administrative formality. One example can be seen in government accountability reports that are prepared only to fulfill legal obligations, without being followed by real implementation in bureaucratic practice. This condition creates a gap between written normative regulations and the reality of their implementation in the field. Consequently, accountability loses its substantial meaning and only stops at the level of legal documents. Furthermore, Mansoor,<sup>16</sup> emphasize that the non-optimal execution of electoral regulations is one of the factors that potentially damages public trust in democratic institutions. Various practices of fraud, such as money politics and weak oversight in the conduct of elections, pose a serious threat to government accountability. Elections, which should be instruments of democracy, risk injuring the principle of the rule of law when existing regulations are not executed strictly and consistently.

Rafiqi,<sup>17</sup> adds that without meaningful public participation, the mechanism of government accountability is difficult to realize. Participation that is only symbolic or formal merely gives the impression that the community is involved, even though it is unable to give a significant influence in the process of policy formulation and decision-making. This finding affirms that substantive democracy demands the active involvement of civil society, not just administrative involvement. Active participation allows the community to exercise a control function over the government so that the resulting policies truly side with public interest.

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<sup>16</sup> Mahnaz Mansoor. "Citizens' trust in government as a function of good governance and government agency's provision of quality information on social media during COVID-19." *Government information quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2021): 1015-97.

<sup>17</sup> Ilham Dwi Rafiqi. "Legal Ideals Pancasila in the Development of a National Environmental Legal System." *Audito Comparative Law Journal (ACLJ)* 4, no. 3 (2023): 134-146.

Meanwhile, Sofyani et al.<sup>18</sup> research indicates that transparency and accountability are two fundamental aspects that determine the level of public trust in the government. If the government fails to fulfill the principle of transparency, the public will lose confidence, which ultimately weakens political legitimacy while threatening state stability. Thus, transparency is not just an administrative demand but becomes the main foundation for maintaining a healthy relationship between the state and its citizens. From all these research findings, it can be concluded that the main obstacles in efforts to realize government accountability in Indonesia lie in three core issues. First, the weak implementation of the rule of law principle which prevents the supremacy of law from running optimally.

Second, the low quality of the bureaucracy, characterized by the continued strength of the culture of corruption and the minimum integrity of officials. Third, the limited space for meaningful public participation, leading the accountability mechanism to lose substance. To overcome these obstacles, systemic reform measures are needed, encompassing the strengthening of regulations, the consistency of law enforcement, and the empowerment of civil society to have a greater role in oversight. With the synergy of these three aspects, it is hoped that the principle of government accountability can be implemented more tangibly so that substantive democracy and a just rule-of-law state truly materialize in Indonesia.

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<sup>18</sup> Hafiez Sofyani, Hosam Alden Riyadh, and Heru Fahlevi. "Improving service quality, accountability and transparency of local government: The intervening role of information technology governance." *Cogent Business & Management* 7, no. 1 (2020): 1735690.

## 5. Discussion

The research results affirm that government accountability is a vital component in maintaining the quality of democracy as well as the sustainability of the rule-of-law state in Indonesia. Within the framework of good governance, accountability, transparency, and the supremacy of law are positioned as important instruments to ensure power is exercised appropriately and is not misused by those in authority. Jia et al.<sup>19</sup> show that without consistent law enforcement, government accountability only ends up as administrative formality. This condition causes the principle of accountability to be unable to meet public needs substantially. In other words, there is still a gap between the formulated legal norms and the reality of implementation at the bureaucratic level and in political practice.

The discourse on government accountability cannot be separated from the aspect of community participation. Rafiqi<sup>20</sup> asserts that meaningful participation is a concrete manifestation of people's sovereignty in a democratic rule-of-law state. However, in practice, this participation is often constrained by limited access to information, the still low capacity of civil society, and the dominance of political elites in the policy formulation process. These obstacles imply a weak community involvement in monitoring the course of government. Consequently, the principle of accountability, which should be a tool for public control, becomes weak and unable to perform its function optimally.

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<sup>19</sup> Nan Jia, Kenneth G. Huang, and Cyndi Man Zhang. "Public governance, corporate governance, and firm innovation: An examination of state-owned enterprises." *Academy of Management Journal* 62, no. 1 (2019): 220-247.

<sup>20</sup> Ilham Dwi Rafiqi. "Legal Ideals Pancasila in the Development of a National Environmental Legal System." *Audito Comparative Law Journal (ACLJ)* 4, no. 3 (2023): 134-146.

Hartanto et al.<sup>21</sup> through a study on government effectiveness in Indonesia, reveal that bureaucratic weakness and the minimum government commitment to the principle of transparency have a significant impact on the decline of public trust. Yet, public trust is the foundation that supports the legitimacy of democracy. When this trust weakens or even collapses, political and social stability can be disturbed. Therefore, building government accountability is not only understood as an administrative matter or a legal obligation but is also a political strategy to strengthen the legitimacy of democratic governance. Based on all the literature findings, it can be concluded that government accountability in Indonesia still faces quite complex challenges. The main obstacles relate to the weak consistency of law enforcement, minimal substantial public participation, and a bureaucracy that has not fully implemented the principle of transparency.

Nevertheless, the opportunities for improvement remain wide open through regulatory reform, strengthening law enforcement mechanisms, empowering civil society, and forming an independent and credible oversight system. The combination of the rule of law, active public participation, and policy transparency can be the key to strengthening government accountability in Indonesia. With the integration of these three pillars, the principles of good governance can be realized tangibly, thus not only supporting governmental effectiveness but also increasing democratic legitimacy.<sup>22</sup> Ultimately, the success of implementing government

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<sup>21</sup> Dadang Hartanto, Juhriyansyah Dalle, A. Akrim, and Hastin Umi Anisah. "Perceived effectiveness of e-governance as an underlying mechanism between good governance and public trust: a case of Indonesia." *Digital Policy, Regulation And Governance* 23, no. 6 (2021): 598-616.

<sup>22</sup> N. P., K. B. Mekha Hariram, Vipinraj Suganthan, and K. Sudhakar. "Sustainalism: An integrated socio-economic-environmental model to address sustainable development and sustainability." *Sustainability* 15, no. 13 (2023): 10682.

accountability will determine the quality of substantive democracy as well as guarantee the sustainability of a just rule-of-law state in Indonesia.

## **6. Conclusion**

This research affirms that government accountability is the main foundation for maintaining the sustainability of the rule-of-law state and democracy in Indonesia. This principle is not only a normative obligation but also a fundamental need to ensure the creation of transparent, accountable, and responsive government governance to the aspirations of the people. Without real accountability, democracy will only stop at the procedural level, while its substance weakens due to the loss of public trust and the occurrence of the abuse of power. The literature review shows that the implementation of government accountability in Indonesia still faces significant challenges, especially related to the weak consistency of law enforcement, the low level of meaningful public participation, and the dominance of political interests in the decision-making process.

Consequently, the principles of good governance are often understood only as administrative formality without being implemented effectively in public policy. Nevertheless, opportunities for improvement remain open through the strengthening of the rule of law, civil society empowerment, and bureaucratic reform that emphasizes transparency and accountability. With these steps, government accountability can truly be realized as an instrument to strengthen substantive democracy and increase governmental legitimacy. Ultimately, the success of realizing a democratic rule-of-law state lies in the shared commitment among the government,

the community, and legal institutions to consistently and sustainably uphold the principle of accountability.

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