

THE ROLE OF BUREAUCRATIC REFORM IN ENHANCING PUBLIC SERVICE QUALITY: EVIDENCE FROM EAST JAVA

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ABSTRACT

Bureaucratic reform is a strategic initiative to improve the quality of public services through transparency, efficiency, and accountability. This study aims to examine the role of bureaucratic reform in enhancing service delivery in East Java Province, with a focus on good governance, digital transformation, and institutional capacity. The research employs a qualitative descriptive method, utilizing literature review, policy analysis, and in-depth interviews with key stakeholders. The findings indicate a significant improvement in East Java's Bureaucratic Reform Index—from 80.56 in 2023 to 94.14 in 2024—and success in SPBE (Electronic-Based Government System) implementation, placing the province in the national top ten. Public service quality increased through better accessibility, efficiency, and digital innovation, which also contributed to poverty reduction—evidenced by a drop in the poverty rate to 9.56% in 2024. Despite these achievements, challenges persist, such as resistance to change and limited digital infrastructure.

Keywords: bureaucratic reform, governance, SPBE, digital transformation, accountability

INTRODUCTION

Public service is one of the fundamental elements in assessing the quality of a government's performance. Public bureaucracy is not only required to be accountable to various legal regulations but also to the values within society, prevailing political norms, professional standards, and the interests of citizens (Sunarya, 2018). However, in practice, bureaucracy in Indonesia still faces numerous structural and systemic problems, such as complex administrative procedures, low accountability, inefficient governance, and weak competence among public personnel.

These issues directly affect the low level of public satisfaction with the services provided. To address this, the Indonesian government has launched a bureaucratic reform program as a key strategy to build better governance. Bureaucratic reform is aimed at simplifying procedures, strengthening accountability, enhancing personnel capacity, and utilizing information and communication technology to support the implementation of an electronic-based government system (SPBE).

In line with the principles of good governance, bureaucratic reform seeks to realize a transparent, participatory, and results-oriented government. Various innovations in public service, such as the implementation of e-government (e-KTP, e-Driver's License, e-Tax), digital-based public complaint systems (SP4N-LAPOR), and the integration of licensing services through Online Single Submission (OSS), represent tangible forms of the ongoing bureaucratic transformation. SPBE is expected to reduce corruption, increase transparency, enhance user convenience, boost government revenue, and reduce costs (Arief, 2021).

East Java Province has emerged as one of the regions that demonstrates significant success in implementing bureaucratic reform. This is reflected in the improvement of the Bureaucratic Reform Index and the SPBE Index, placing the province among the best at the national level. Bureaucratic reform in East Java has also shown a positive impact in poverty alleviation efforts, expanding access to basic services, and improving the efficiency and transparency of public services.'

However, there is still a gap between the policy design and its actual implementation in many regions, including East Java. Studies show that digital initiatives often face barriers such as inadequate IT infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and bureaucratic resistance (Putri et al., 2022) & (Hadi & Riyanto, 2023). Moreover, the long-term sustainability of bureaucratic reform in Indonesia is still under scrutiny due to the fragmented coordination among institutions and lack of consistent monitoring . Therefore, it is necessary to conduct an in-depth study to understand the actual impact and sustainability of bureaucratic reform initiatives in practice (Rachmawati et al., 2023). Based on these issues, the research question formulated is: *How does bureaucratic reform contribute to the improvement of public service quality in East Java, and what challenges hinder its effectiveness?*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Bureaucratic reform is a strategic step toward realizing governance that is more effective, efficient, and responsive to the needs of society. In the context of improving the quality of public services, bureaucratic reform is supported by the following theories:

Bureaucracy Theory

According to (Weber, 1947) , bureaucracy theory is the fundamental basis of the ideal structure of a bureaucratic organization. These principles are designed to create efficiency, rationality, and order in the execution of organizational tasks, especially in the public sector or government.

Key principles of Weberian bureaucracy include:

1. Division of Labor
 - a. Each task is specifically divided and clearly defined.
 - b. Each individual has specific responsibilities according to their expertise.
2. Hierarchy of Authority
 - a. The organization is structured hierarchically.
 - b. Each level has defined authority and responsibilities.
 - c. Subordinates are structurally accountable to superiors.
3. Formal Rules and Regulations
 - a. All activities follow formal and rational written rules.
 - b. Regulations ensure uniformity and legal certainty.
4. Impersonality
 - a. Decisions are made based on rules, not personal relationships.
 - b. No favoritism or nepotism is allowed.
5. Merit-Based Recruitment
 - a. Employees are selected based on technical qualifications and professional abilities.
 - b. Selection is objective and fair.
6. Career Orientation
 - a. Employees view bureaucracy as a long-term career.
 - b. Promotions are based on merit, experience, and tenure.
7. Written Documents
 - a. All decisions, rules, and activities are recorded and documented.
 - b. Documentation is essential for accountability and transparency.
8. This theory is highly relevant for large organizations and governments that need structured systems to manage complex tasks and broad responsibilities, while minimizing abuse of power.

Good Governance Theory

According to (United Nation Development Programme, 1997), good governance refers to how government should operate based on principles of transparency, accountability, participation, and a focus on public service.

Key principles of good governance:

1. Participation - Citizens have the right and opportunity to participate in decision-making.
2. Rule of Law – Laws are enforced fairly and consistently without discrimination.
3. Transparency – Decisions and processes are open, and information is accessible.
4. Responsiveness – Governments respond swiftly to public needs.
5. Consensus Oriented – Decision making considers various interests and perspectives.
6. Equity and Inclusiveness - Equal opportunities for participation and benefit for all.
7. Effectiveness and Efficiency - Government policies are results-driven and resource-efficient.
8. Accountability - Power holders are responsible for their actions and policies.
9. Visionary (Strategic Vision) - Leaders and society share a long-term development vision.

Good governance aims to improve public service quality, prevent corruption, build public trust, and promote equitable and sustainable development.

New Public Management (NPM) Theory

New Public Management (NPM) is an approach in public administration that gained popularity in the 1980s. NPM seeks to make the public sector more efficient and responsive by adopting business-like practices and market principles. (Hood, 1991), defined NPM as a set of management techniques aimed at improving efficiency, effectiveness, and service quality.

Key characteristics of NPM include:

1. Hands-on professional management - active and involved professional management.
2. Explicit standards and measures of performance – use of clear standards and performance measurements.
3. Greater emphasis on output controls – focus on outcomes and outputs rather than processes.
4. Shift to disaggregation of units in the public sector – breaking up large organizations into smaller and more autonomous units.
5. Shift to greater competition in public service provision – increasing competition in the provision of public services.
6. Stress on private sector styles of management practice – adopting private sector-style management practices.
7. Stress on greater discipline and parsimony in resource use – more prudent and disciplined management of resources.

In the context of bureaucratic reform, NPM encourages innovation in public services through the use of digital technology, e-government systems, and improving the competence of state apparatus in delivering faster and higher-quality services.

Public Service Theory

(Osborne, 1992) introduced the concept of entrepreneurial government, which transforms the rigid workings of bureaucracy into a more dynamic, efficient, and

responsive system toward the public. They stated that governments do not always have to "serve by themselves" but can act as steerers rather than rowers.

1. Catalytic Government - The government focuses more on guiding than directly providing services.
2. Community-Owned Government - The public is given greater roles and responsibilities in public service delivery.
3. Competitive Government - Competition is introduced to improve public service efficiency.
4. Mission-Driven Government - Focuses on outcomes and goals rather than mere administrative compliance.
5. Results-Oriented Government - Performance is measured by outputs and outcomes, not inputs.
6. Customer-Driven Government - The public is treated as customers who must be satisfied.
7. Enterprising Government - The government seeks new ways to create value and generate revenue.
8. Anticipatory Government - The government is proactive, preventing problems before they occur.
9. Decentralized Government - Decisions are made as close as possible to the citizens.
10. Market-Oriented Government - Utilizes market mechanisms (such as contracts, vouchers, and tenders) for efficiency.

Osborne and Gaebler emphasized that government must be innovative, adaptive, and responsive to change; society is positioned as customers who must be served well, not merely as policy objects; public services should be results-based rather than process-bound; and public administration must not be trapped in rigid and convoluted bureaucracy.

Accountability theory

According to (Romzek & Dubnick, 1987), accountability is a relationship between an actor (individual or institution) and a party that has the authority to demand responsibility for actions and decisions taken. Accountability arises when someone must explain and be responsible for their performance to another party.

1. Hierarchical Accountability
 - a. Accountability to superiors within a structural hierarchy.
 - b. Emphasizes compliance with bureaucratic rules and procedures.
2. Legal Accountability
 - a. Accountability for adhering to laws and regulations.
 - b. Typically exercised through audits or legal oversight.
3. Political Accountability
 - a. Accountability to external parties such as the legislature, elected officials, or the public.
 - b. Relates to demands for transparency and public trust.
4. Professional Accountability
 - a. Accountability based on professional standards and ethics.
 - b. Based on technical competence and professional norms.

There is no single ideal form of accountability for every situation. In practice, the public sector often faces a combination of these four forms of accountability. The right

balance is needed to prevent public organizations from becoming either too rigid or too unregulated.

E-Government Theory

E-Government, according to (Layne & Lee, 2001) is one of the foundational theories that explains the stages of information technology implementation in government. This theory is highly influential in developing the concept of digital government.

1. Cataloguing
 - a. The government begins to provide information online through websites.
 - b. Focus on transparency and information access.
2. Example: A government website displaying agency profiles and service information.
3. Transaction
 - a. The government begins offering interactive services, such as online forms, tax payments, or registration.
 - b. Emphasizes efficiency and convenience in public services.
4. Vertical Integration
 - a. Integration between central and local governments.
 - b. Data and systems become connected across levels of government (national → provincial → municipal).
5. Horizontal Integration
 - a. Integration between agencies or institutions within the same level of government.
 - b. Aims to improve coordination and collaboration across agencies for more integrated public services.

The development of e-government must be carried out gradually and strategically, starting from the provision of information, followed by interaction, and eventually leading to an integrated and collaborative government system.

Bureaucratic reform plays a strategic role in efforts to improve the quality of public services by referring to various relevant theories, such as bureaucratic theory, good governance, New Public Management (NPM), public service theory, accountability, and e-government.

The effective implementation of reform principles is expected to establish a service system that is more efficient, transparent, accountable, and oriented toward public satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach and Type

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of bureaucratic reform and its impact on public service quality in East Java. This approach enables contextual exploration of governance practices and reform outcomes through direct engagement with stakeholders (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using the following techniques:

- Literature Review: Secondary data were gathered from books, journals, government documents, and academic publications relevant to bureaucratic reform (Zed, 2004).

- Policy Analysis: Analysis was conducted on national and regional regulations, reform evaluation reports, and digital transformation frameworks (Dunn, 2017).
- In-depth Interviews: Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with civil servants, policy experts, and public service users (Sugiyono, 2018).

Data Sources

- Primary Data: Collected directly from key informants through interviews.
- Secondary Data: Sourced from government reports, reform index assessments, SPBE evaluations, and academic studies (Moleong, 2007).

Data Analysis

The study applied **thematic analysis**, focusing on coding and identifying patterns from interview transcripts and document reviews. Triangulation was used to enhance data validity by comparing findings across multiple data sources.

Research Focus

The research focus refers to the boundaries or scope that become the main attention of a study to keep its implementation directed and prevent it from deviating into irrelevant matters (Sugiyono, 2018). The research focuses on the implementation of bureaucratic reform in East Java, particularly regarding:

- Transparency and accountability
- Efficiency of public service delivery
- Digital governance (SPBE)
- Challenges in reform sustainability

Research Location

The study was conducted within the East Java Provincial Government, selected due to its leading reform performance and consistent improvement in the Bureaucratic Reform Index and SPBE Index over recent years.

Research Objectives

This research seeks to analyze the actual impact of bureaucratic reform on public service quality and identify key challenges that may hinder its implementation and sustainability.

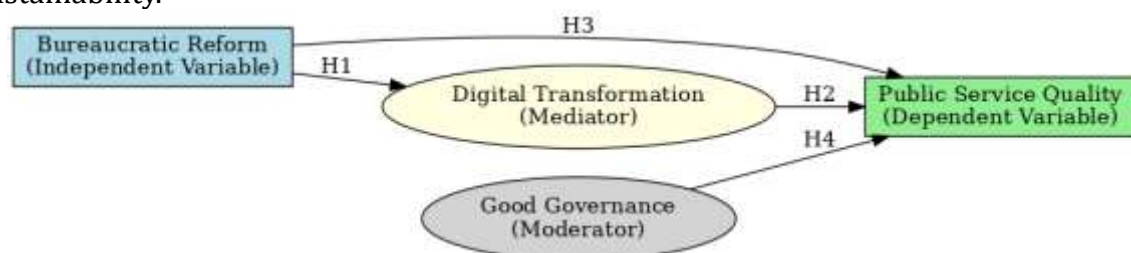


Figure 1. Initial Research Model
Source: author's research (2025)

This model is used as a guide to explore the relationship between bureaucratic reform, digital transformation, good governance, and the quality of public services in the context of the East Java Provincial Government.

- **H1:** Bureaucratic Reform has a positive and significant effect on Digital Transformation in public administration. (*Reformasi birokrasi mendorong percepatan transformasi digital dalam pelayanan publik.*)

- **H2:** Digital Transformation positively affects the Quality of Public Services. *(Transformasi digital meningkatkan kualitas layanan publik, khususnya dalam aspek efisiensi dan aksesibilitas.)*
- **H3:** Bureaucratic Reform has a direct positive effect on Public Service Quality. *(Reformasi birokrasi berkontribusi langsung terhadap perbaikan layanan publik melalui penyederhanaan prosedur dan peningkatan akuntabilitas.)*
- **H4:** Good Governance moderates the relationship between Bureaucratic Reform and Public Service Quality. *(Prinsip-prinsip tata kelola yang baik memperkuat dampak reformasi birokrasi terhadap layanan publik.)*

RESULT

This study employed thematic analysis to interpret qualitative data derived from interview transcripts, policy documents, and secondary data. The findings are structured into five key themes that reflect the current landscape and impact of bureaucratic reform in East Java:

1. Strengthened Institutional Performance through Reform

The Bureaucratic Reform Index (BRI) in East Java increased markedly from 80.56 in 2023 to 94.14 in 2024. This sharp increase of 13.58 points represents the highest year-to-year improvement in the province’s reform history, especially when compared to the more gradual progress of previous years. For instance, between 2016 and 2023, the index only rose from 69.54 to 80.56, making the leap in 2024 a notable breakthrough in reform implementation.

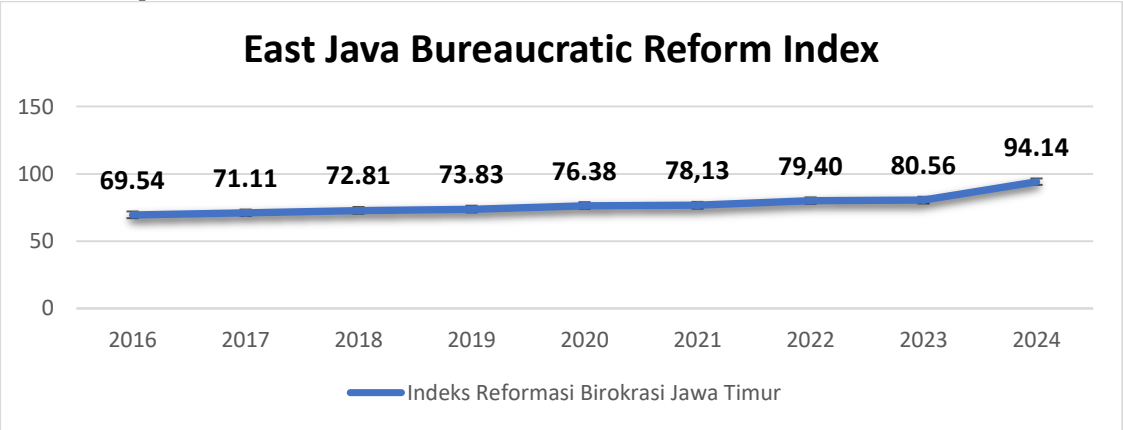


Figure 2. for the full historical trend
Source: author's research (2025)

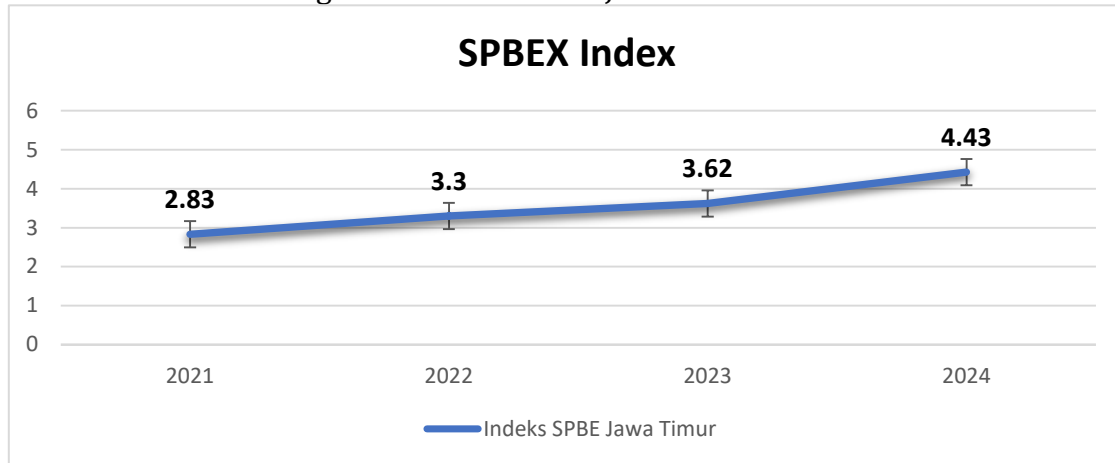
According to an official letter from the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform—Letter No. B/43/RB.04/2025 (KemenPAN-RB, 2025), —this gain constitutes the highest single-year increase on record. Furthermore, more than 75% of the 24 evaluated indicators scored above 80%, reflecting the consistent internalization of core reform principles, including accountability, performance orientation, and procedural efficiency.

These improvements are supported by qualitative data. Interviews with officials from Bappeda and the Inspectorate highlight strong leadership commitment and increased bureaucratic discipline. One informant noted:
“Leadership support has been critical in ensuring that reform is implemented consistently across agencies, with performance targets clearly monitored and followed up.”

2. Advancements in Digital Transformation (SPBE)

This theme is closely related to the multi-stage maturity model of e-Government development, as proposed by (Layne & Lee, 2001), which outlines the evolution from cataloguing information to full integration and transformation of services. East Java's progress reflects a shift toward higher stages of this model, particularly in the integration and transactional phases. East Java also showed steady growth in its SPBE Index over the last five years, with a notable increase from 2.83 in 2021 to 4.43 in 2024.

Figure 3. Trend of East Java's SPBE Index



Source: author's research (2025)

This rise is illustrated in Figure 2, which presents the year-by-year improvement and reflects the expanding digital transformation in the province. Recent studies also reinforce these observations (Nugroho & Permata, 2023), found that digital bureaucracy in local governments significantly improves efficiency and service quality, provided systems are well-integrated and supported by capable personnel. This aligns with the goals of e-Government implementation as outlined in (Layne & Lee, 2001), model.

3. Public Welfare Outcomes – Poverty Reduction

Thematic bureaucratic reform focusing on poverty alleviation has demonstrated concrete outcomes. The poverty rate in East Java declined from 13.00% in 2020 to 9.56% in 2024. A regional development expert interviewed in this study noted: "The integration of digital social assistance programs with reform policies has shortened bureaucratic chains and improved aid targeting." The reform allowed for more accurate population data, as demonstrated by the integration of the DTKS (Data Terpadu Kesejahteraan Sosial) system, which improved targeting for social assistance programs and reduced duplication of beneficiaries (BPS, 2024) and facilitated timely disbursement of government aid.

Table 1. *Poverty Rate in East Java (2020–2024)*

Year	Poverty Rate (%)
2020	13.00
2021	11.40
2022	10.38
2023	9.79
2024	9.56

Source: author's research (2025)

According to (Hartono & Dewi, 2023), effective bureaucratic reform initiatives must address service inequality by integrating digital platforms with inclusive access strategies, especially in rural and underdeveloped areas.

4. Structural and Operational Challenges

Despite the evident progress, several implementation challenges were consistently mentioned by informants:

- Resistance to change: Civil servants in certain units perceived reform as burdensome rather than transformative.
- Digital divide: Areas with limited internet infrastructure could not fully benefit from digital services.
- Human resource limitations: Lack of IT skills among staff affected the usability and sustainability of digital platforms.
- Fragmented coordination: Weak horizontal communication across agencies led to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts.

These issues suggest that reform effectiveness is contingent not only on formal policy frameworks but also on the presence of adaptive leadership and institutional capacity, as emphasized in the implementation literature of New Public Management and governance theory (Hood, 1991) & (Osborne, 1992), not only on policy design but also on adaptive leadership and investment in human capital and infrastructure.

A recent study by (Wicaksono & Rahayu, 2022), highlights that one of the biggest challenges in regional bureaucratic reform is the uneven capacity of human resources in utilizing digital tools, which often leads to suboptimal service delivery.

5. Integration with Reform Theory

The findings substantiate theoretical constructs used in this study:

- Weberian bureaucracy is reflected in enhanced procedural order.
- Good governance is seen in increased transparency and participation via digital tools.
- New Public Management is echoed in the shift to outcome-based service evaluation.
- E-Government theory is manifested in SPBE's move toward horizontal integration.

In summary, bureaucratic reform in East Java has yielded tangible results in institutional strengthening, digital service improvement, and public welfare. Nonetheless, sustained progress will require strategic solutions to human resource gaps, infrastructure disparities, and cross-agency coordination.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study confirm that bureaucratic reform in East Java has had a significant impact on improving the quality of public services. Thematic analysis highlights that reforms not only enhanced institutional performance and digital transformation but also contributed to poverty alleviation. These outcomes align with existing theoretical frameworks and empirical studies.

The substantial increase in the Bureaucratic Reform Index and the high performance across key indicators demonstrates that East Java has moved beyond compliance-oriented reform toward a more result-oriented governance model. This supports the assertions of New Public Management (Hood, 1991), which emphasizes performance, output, and accountability. The involvement of reform task forces and leadership monitoring reinforces Weberian principles of order and structure, now modernized with digital tools.

The digital transformation of public services, as evidenced by improvements in the SPBE Index and the adoption of platforms like SP4N-LAPOR and DTKS, reflects the maturity stages of e-Government development (Layne & Lee, 2001). These findings are consistent with (Nugroho & Permata, 2023), who argue that digital bureaucracy improves service delivery when supported by systemic integration and competent personnel.

Reform outcomes related to poverty reduction illustrate the practical effects of thematic bureaucratic reform. Improved targeting of assistance and simplified administrative processes allowed vulnerable groups better access to social services. This resonates with good governance theory, particularly regarding responsiveness, equity, and effectiveness (United Nation Development Programme, 1997).

Nevertheless, persistent challenges such as resistance to change, the digital divide, and coordination issues reveal the limitations of structural reforms when not matched with cultural or cognitive shifts. As (Christensen & Legerid, 2007), noted, successful reform requires more than formal redesign—it demands capacity-building, commitment, and shared institutional vision.

Thus, while East Java's bureaucratic reform has demonstrated strong progress, the sustainability of these gains depends on addressing human capital development, fostering adaptive leadership, and strengthening inter-agency coordination.

CONCLUSION

Bureaucratic reform in East Java has effectively enhanced public service quality through procedural simplification, institutional strengthening, and digital innovation. These reforms have not only improved transparency and efficiency but also contributed to poverty reduction through better targeting and accelerated aid distribution.

The study concludes that the integration of reform policies with digital transformation is a key driver of improved governance outcomes. However, the persistence of structural and human resource challenges underscores the need for ongoing leadership support, investment in infrastructure, and enhanced coordination mechanisms.

Future reform initiatives should prioritize inclusive digital access, continuous civil servant training, and institutional collaboration to sustain and scale the gains achieved.

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