

Original Research Article

Complaint Handling and Whistleblower Protection in Local Government Oversight: Evidence from Indonesia

Jon Fani Rolis^{1*}, Kridawati Sadhana¹, Dodot Sapto Adi¹¹Universitas Merdeka Malang

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Abstract: This qualitative study examines the implementation of complaint-handling and whistleblower-protection policy at the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency, Indonesia, as mandated by Regent Regulation Number 27 of 2024. Using a descriptive qualitative design grounded in George C. Edwards III's policy implementation model, data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observation, and documentation, then analyzed through data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing and verification, with credibility strengthened by source and method triangulation. Findings show that internal communication of the regulation is well institutionalized, whereas external outreach to remote communities remains fragmented and limited. Human and budgetary resources are nominally adequate but constrained by heavy auditor workloads and the absence of an integrated digital complaint system. Implementers display strong professional integrity and neutrality, yet show weak proactive follow-up in reporting case status to complainants. The rigid, hierarchical bureaucratic structure safeguards procedural legality but slows resolution speed. Persistent geographic barriers and lingering public doubt over identity confidentiality further hinder policy effectiveness. The study recommends developing an integrated digital reporting platform, intensifying grassroots oversight literacy campaigns, and simplifying disposition procedures through binding service-level agreements to strengthen public trust and whistleblower protection.

Keywords: Policy Implementation, Public Complaints, Whistleblower Protection, Regional Inspectorate, Public Trust.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The administration of public governance, both at the central and regional levels, unequivocally demands the existence of effective oversight mechanisms to ensure that public service delivery functions align with statutory mandates, operate efficiently, and maintain strict accountability. Oversight is not merely an administrative formality but an indispensable component of statecraft; without adequate and rigorous control mechanisms, deviations such as corruption, collusion, nepotism, severe inefficiency, and systemic weak accountability are highly prone to manifest and proliferate (Setiawan, 2024). As articulated by scholars in the field of public administration, oversight encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of efforts, actions, and strategic activities aimed at guaranteeing that regional government administration operates efficiently and effectively in strict accordance with the prevailing statutory regulations (Gafar *et al.*, 2022). In the contemporary era, marked by rapid globalization and

heightened public scrutiny, oversight has become increasingly paramount as various instances of maladministration and bureaucratic pathology persistently emerge across numerous public institutions. The fragility of both internal and external control mechanisms frequently creates expansive loopholes for the abuse of authority, unethical practices, and diminished apparatus accountability.

This overarching and detrimental condition ultimately contributes to an escalated public perception that public officials and the bureaucracy at large are inherently susceptible to corrupt behaviors. Without robust, transparent, and prevention-oriented oversight mechanisms embedded within the institutional framework, public trust in the government will continuously erode, thereby severely impeding the effectiveness of public services and obstructing the achievement of long-term sustainable developmental goals (Iswanto, 2025). Corruption, fundamentally,

represents the abuse of entrusted power or public office for personal or illicit collective gain, a practice diversely defined and analyzed by global experts. According to Klitgaard (1988), corruption reliably emerges when there is a monopoly of power combined with the presence of unrestrained discretion, operating in an environment devoid of minimal accountability. Concurrently, Rose-Ackerman (1999) emphasizes that corruption is an illegal behavior arising from complex interactions between public officials and private actors who systematically exploit institutional loopholes for mutual financial or political benefit. Johnston (2005) further characterizes corruption as the direct consequence of political and bureaucratic institutional weaknesses that fail to regulate and monitor official behavior effectively. Fundamentally, corruption must be understood as a deeply systemic phenomenon that not only causes catastrophic financial losses to the state but also severely damages public trust, weakens the structural integrity of governance, and obstructs sustainable economic and social development.

To contextualize the urgency of this issue within the national framework, the trajectory of Indonesia's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) over the last decade illustrates critical and concerning fluctuations. As depicted in Figure 1, the CPI data from 2010 to 2024 reveals a non-linear progression in the nation's fight against corruption. In 2010, the CPI stood at a relatively low score of 28, eventually experiencing a gradual ascent and peaking at 40 in 2019, marking a period of perceived reformative success. However, post-2019, the CPI experienced renewed volatility and a disconcerting downward trend, dropping to 34 in 2022 and 2023, before slightly recovering to 37 in 2024. This notable decline and subsequent stagnation reflect not only a tangible weakening in public sector integrity enforcement efforts but also directly implicate a declining level of public trust in the government and overarching law enforcement institutions (Transparency International Indonesia, 2025).

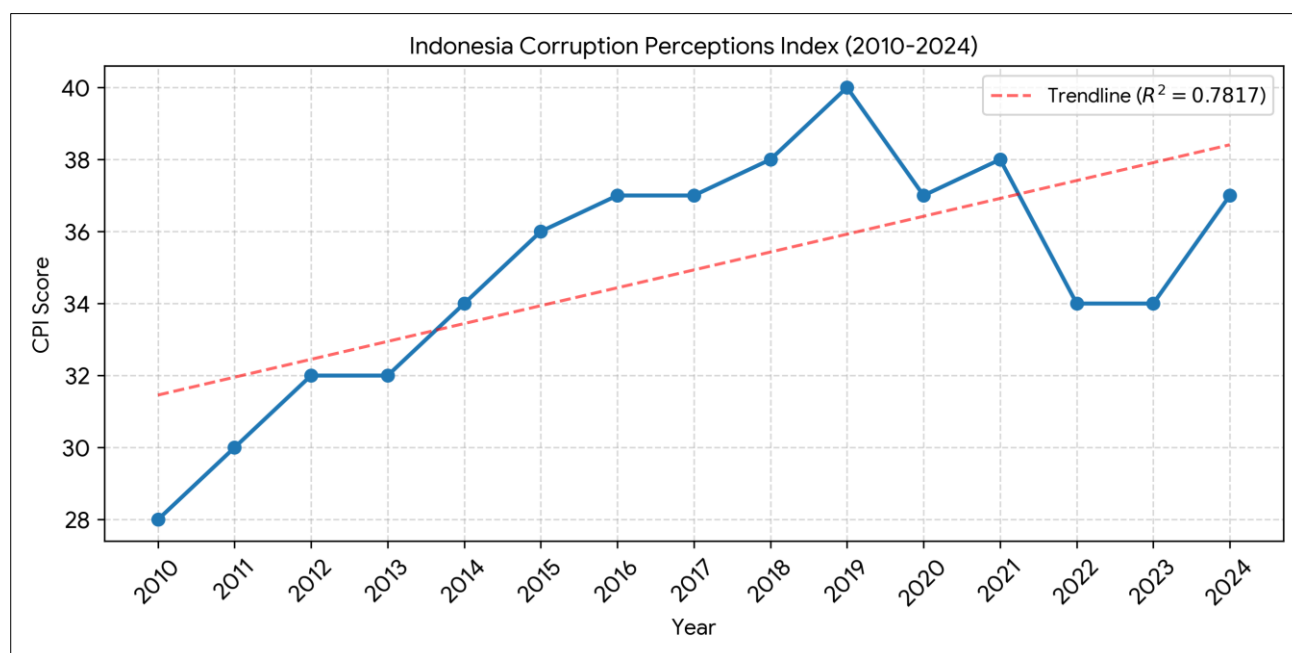


Figure 1: Indonesia Corruption Perceptions Index 2010-2024

Source: Processed Data (2026)

When the corruption perception index exhibits a negative or stagnant trend, the public tends to perceive corrupt practices as increasingly systemic and uncontrollable, generating a profound crisis of trust that drastically hinders the efficacy of public policy execution and diminishes governmental legitimacy in the eyes of the citizenry. Under such precarious circumstances, the establishment and optimization of a public complaint handling system become highly strategic. Such a mechanism serves as a vital form of participatory public oversight over governance administration, allowing citizens to actively engage in the monitoring of state apparatuses.

Corroborating this urgency, recent empirical data from the Ipsos Global Trustworthiness Index 2024 indicates a relatively high level of public distrust towards various government institutions globally and domestically. Politicians hold the highest level of distrust at 45%, followed closely by cabinet officials, ministries, regional governments, and the police, each standing at approximately 41% (Ipsos Global Advisor, 2024). This empirical reality compels the government to aggressively fortify the implementation of public policies, particularly within the domain of the public complaint handling system, as a tangible manifestation of responsive, transparent, and accountable public service (Lailin *et al.*, 2025). In the specific context of regional government

administration in Indonesia, the Regional Inspectorate unit, acting as the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP), occupies a highly strategic and central role. The Inspectorate is explicitly tasked with conducting internal audits, executing performance evaluations, monitoring developmental programs, following up meticulously on public complaints, ensuring the effective implementation of the Government Internal Control System (SPIP), and delivering actionable recommendations for bureaucratic improvement (Jasin, 2025; Lii *et al.*, 2025). Various technical guidelines issued for regional Inspectorates also mandate the establishment of Public Complaint Service Standards, which detail the mechanisms for receiving reports, conducting preliminary examinations, performing investigative audits, delivering recommendations, and ultimately publishing follow-up actions as a form of absolute transparency to the public.

West Kutai Regency, a vast and demographically diverse region located in East Kalimantan Province, continuously strives to elevate its institutional accountability through the deployment of an online aspiration and complaint service system managed by the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency. The formal implementation of this critical policy is robustly grounded in the Regent Regulation of West Kutai Number 27 of 2024 concerning Guidelines for Handling Complaints and Protecting Whistleblowers in the Regional Government Environment. Given its expansive administrative territory comprising 16 sub-districts and the presence of challenging geographic and infrastructural conditions, effective complaint handling poses a distinct and formidable test for the Regional Inspectorate in its mission to rebuild public legitimacy and trust. The successful execution of this policy is not merely a matter of administrative compliance but a foundational necessity for fostering a collaborative relationship between the local government and its constituents.

Based on the comprehensive background delineated above, this study aims to describe, dissect, and analyze the implementation of the complaint handling and whistleblower protection policy, specifically predicated on the Regent Regulation of West Kutai Number 27 of 2024 at the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency. The analytical framework is constructed around four pivotal dimensions: communication, resources, bureaucratic disposition, and bureaucratic structure. Furthermore, the study seeks to systematically identify and evaluate the supporting and inhibiting factors embedded within its execution, offering scholarly insights and practical recommendations for the enhancement of public sector accountability.

The conceptualization of accountability in public administration extends far beyond the mere execution of duties; it fundamentally involves the active justification of those duties before the public and relevant

oversight bodies. Accountability serves as the cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring that those entrusted with public power remain responsive to the needs and rights of the citizenry. The Regional Inspectorate, therefore, does not merely act as an auditor but as a vital conduit of accountability. By systematically addressing complaints, it transforms abstract democratic ideals into tangible bureaucratic realities. This transformation, however, is fraught with complex implementational challenges, ranging from resource constraints to deep-seated cultural resistance within the bureaucracy itself. Thus, a rigorous qualitative inquiry is paramount to unearth these dynamics.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Public Policy Implementation

Conceptually, public policy implementation is a highly dynamic and iterative process wherein policy implementers engage in specific, coordinated activities to achieve outcomes that correspond meticulously with the established policy goals or initial objectives (Nugroho, 2008). Implementation essentially serves as the critical bridge spanning the theoretical gap between policy formulation (the intended design) and actual societal impact (the tangible reality). The overarching success of any implementation endeavor can be systematically evaluated by examining the realization of outcomes—namely, determining whether the intended objectives have been achieved through the deployed policy actions—and by measuring the degree of acceptance by the designated target groups (Grindle, 1980; Agustino, 2008). According to the foundational theories of Smith (1973), policy implementation must be viewed as a complex process operating within the broader perspective of social and political change, where government policies are explicitly designed to introduce structural or behavioral improvements within the target group society.

Furthermore, the literature meticulously distinguishes between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches to implementation. The top-down approach focuses primarily on the extent to which the actions of frontline implementing officials align with the precise objectives set by central policymakers at the legislative or executive apex. This perspective inherently prioritizes hierarchical control, strict adherence to SOPs, and the seamless cascade of authoritative directives. Conversely, the bottom-up approach emphasizes the intricate network of actors operating at the local, street level and their myriad interactions in delivering services (Sabatier, 1986). It acknowledges that ground-level bureaucrats possess a profound degree of discretion and that their contextual understanding is paramount for policy adaptation. In the specific context of complaint handling mechanisms, a sophisticated synthesis of both approaches is invariably necessary. This entails requiring unequivocal directives and legal foundations from the top (such as Regent Regulations), while simultaneously relying heavily on the adaptive capacity, ethical

disposition, and continuous feedback generated by street-level APIP auditors and the local community at the bottom.

2.2 George C. Edwards III Implementation Model

Within the rigorous and extensive study of policy implementation, the theoretical model proposed by George C. Edwards III is widely recognized as a seminal framework for identifying four critical, interdependent variables that play a pivotal, synergistic role in dictating the trajectory and ultimate success of implementation efforts: communication, resources, disposition, and bureaucratic structure (Edwards III, 1980).

Firstly, Communication (Communication) mandates that policy directives, operational guidelines, and relevant legal information must be transmitted clearly, consistently, and distributed evenly among all internal implementers and the broader external public. Ambiguity, conflicting instructions, or mixed signals in communication can lead to severe distortion of the policy intent, resulting in fragmented, ineffective execution. The dimension of clarity ensures that implementers fully comprehend what is expected of them, while consistency ensures that these expectations do not rapidly vacillate, thereby preventing bureaucratic paralysis.

Secondly, Resources (Resources) refer to the absolute adequacy of indispensable elements required to execute the policy effectively. Edwards III categorizes these resources into human resources (the quantity and qualitative competence of staff), critical information (data necessary to execute tasks), legal authority (the statutory power to compel compliance or conduct investigations), and physical or technological facilities (budgetary allocations, office space, digital systems). Without adequate resources, even the most eloquently communicated policy will fail to materialize, degenerating into mere administrative rhetoric.

Thirdly, Disposition (Disposition) relates intimately to the intrinsic cognitive commitment, responsiveness, honesty, and professional integrity of the policy implementers. This variable acknowledges that bureaucrats are not mere mechanical cogs but individuals with distinct preferences, values, and motivations. A positive disposition ensures that bureaucrats execute the policy with genuine enthusiasm and fidelity to the original programmatic goals, actively seeking solutions to emergent problems. Conversely, a negative disposition can inevitably lead to passive resistance, malicious compliance, or outright bureaucratic sabotage, severely derailing implementation efforts.

Finally, Bureaucratic Structure (Bureaucratic Structure) comprehensively encompasses the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and the fragmentation or hierarchical division of functional responsibilities (Wahab, 2001; Tochjan, 2006). A well-designed,

streamlined structure facilitates rapid policy execution by providing clear, standardized responses to routine situations (SOPs). However, excessive structural fragmentation—where responsibility is diffusely spread across multiple isolated agencies or redundant hierarchical layers—can induce severe inter-agency conflict, coordination failures, and paralyzing delays that utterly frustrate the policy's beneficiaries.

2.3 Public Oversight and Grievance Redress Mechanisms

Public oversight in a robust democratic governance framework can be analytically approached through two primary, complementary perspectives: internal oversight conducted by designated supervisory bodies embedded within the governmental organization itself, and external oversight performed actively by the public, civil society organizations, legislative institutions, or the independent media (Fadhli *et al.*, 2025; Dwiyanto & Supriadi, 2024). In the Republic of Indonesia, the strategic role of the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP), which includes the Inspectorate General at the ministerial tier and Regional Inspectorates at the local, regency tier, is critically important. APIP is explicitly tasked with detecting and preventing administrative and financial deviations, ensuring strict compliance with public law, and diligently following up on public grievances through rigorous, evidence-based investigations (Hariri & Stansyah, 2023).

A responsive, transparent, and well-structured grievance redress mechanism serves as an essential organizational corrective tool. It systematically provides a formal, secure, and accessible channel for citizens to report instances of severe maladministration, corruption, abuse of power, or generally substandard public service delivery (Hossain *et al.*, 2024; Harrison & Wielga, 2023). A robust mechanism not only functions to resolve individual disputes but also systematically generates critical aggregate data that progressive policymakers can utilize to actively identify systemic flaws, allocate resources efficiently, and enact preemptive structural reforms. Moreover, the stringent integration of absolute whistleblower protection within these mechanisms is paramount, as it directly and effectively mitigates the pervasive fear of retaliation whether social, physical, or professional thereby actively encouraging greater civic participation in sustained public oversight.

2.4 Dimensions of Public Trust

Public trust is highly essential for the underlying stability, legitimacy, and operational efficiency of any government, as it possesses the unique socio-political capacity to significantly lower the transaction costs of social, political, and economic activities, while simultaneously guaranteeing voluntary community compliance with government policies and regulations without the need for constant coercion (Kathi & Cooper, 2005; Van de Walle & Six, 2014). Prominent

scholars in public administration meticulously delineate the multifaceted dimensions of public trust into three distinct yet deeply interconnected realms: cognition, affection, and behavior (Dwiyanto, 2011).

The cognitive dimension refers explicitly to the rational knowledge, calculated expectations, and positive mental perceptions citizens hold about the government, derived from transparent interactions, open access to verifiable information, and consistent, predictable service delivery. The affective dimension involves the complex emotional attachment or sense of civic loyalty formed through inclusive, empathetic, and participative engagement, where citizens genuinely feel heard, respected, and valued by the state apparatus. Lastly, the behavioral dimension relates to the tangible, practical actions and overt evaluations of citizens regarding the conduct of the government and its officials, manifesting actively in compliance, civic engagement, voting

patterns, or conversely, in protests, tax evasion, and systemic non-compliance. It is universally acknowledged that trust is not a static, perpetual commodity automatically granted to the state; rather, it must be continuously managed, cautiously cultivated, and rigorously earned through highly reliable, unconditionally responsive, and deeply accountable institutional performance over time.

2.5 Review of Previous Studies

To establish a rigorous empirical foundation and highlight the distinct novelty of this qualitative research, a comprehensive, extensive review of previous relevant studies is absolutely imperative. Table 1 meticulously outlines several key contemporary studies that have previously examined complaint mechanisms, the widespread digitalization of public services, and the overarching theme of public oversight.

Table 1: Comprehensive Mapping of Previous Relevant Studies

Author(s) & Year	Title / Focus	Key Empirical Findings	Similarities & Methodological Differences
Wijayanto (2024)	Implementation of Digital-Based Public Complaint Service Systems in Municipal Governments	The deployment of a digital system dramatically increased complaint receipt effectiveness via fast, 24/7 access, but immediately faced debilitating obstacles regarding public digital literacy and the internal HR capacity to process complex digital data.	Similarity: Focuses on the overarching effectiveness of public complaint systems. Difference: This study specifically focuses on digital systems in highly urbanized city governments, while the current research thoroughly examines the Inspectorate's role in a geographically expansive, semi-rural regency.
Kristiawan, Hanani, & Kismartini (2024)	Implementation of the Whistleblowing System (WBS) Service at the Rembang Regency Inspectorate	The WBS operationalization was deemed suboptimal primarily due to exceptionally low community reporting rates, compounded by severe internal constraints in inter-agency communication, human resources, jurisdictional authority, and operational budget.	Similarity: Analyzes complaint mechanisms as a primary accountability instrument at the regency level. Difference: Focuses strictly on WBS implementation mechanics, whereas the current research heavily emphasizes the subsequent cultivation of public trust and policy alignment.
Lumempouw, Nangoi, & Kalangi (2021)	Analysis of APIP's Role in Preventing and Detecting Official Travel Fraud	The Regional Inspectorate effectively executed baseline assurance and consulting functions but was severely constrained by HR deficits, narrow timeframes, and restrictive budgetary limitations when conducting complex fraud detection.	Similarity: Strongly emphasizes the APIP/Inspectorate's critical role in enforcing accountability. Difference: Focuses narrowly on specific travel fraud, whereas the current research is comprehensively centered on general public complaints and maladministration.
MZ, Syafri, & Amalia (2024)	Effectiveness of Public Complaint Resolution Through the National LAPOR Application	The centralized LAPOR application effectively increased national complaint aggregation efficiency but faced massive, chronic constraints in localized HR capabilities, regional budget synchronization, and complex cross-agency coordination.	Similarity: Evaluates public complaints for systemic accountability. Difference: Focuses on a centralized, national macro-application at the ministerial level, whereas the current research delves into the localized micro-dynamics at the regional Inspectorate tier.
Shofi (2024)	The Role of the Inspectorate in	The Inspectorate executed rigorous guidance and systemic	Similarity: Assesses the Inspectorate's role in promoting transparency.

Author(s) & Year	Title / Focus	Key Empirical Findings	Similarities & Methodological Differences
	Guiding and Supervising Village Fund Management	supervision of massive village funds highly effectively by utilizing the innovative "Nongki" (informal consultation) program to bypass rigid bureaucracy.	Difference: Focuses specifically on village fund auditing, whereas the current research focuses holistically on public complaint handling frameworks.
Hossain <i>et al.</i> , (2024)	A Comprehensive Review of Grievance Redress Mechanisms in the Global South	The long-term effectiveness of complaint mechanisms relies heavily not on technological platforms, but on sustained political support, robust institutional strength, and severe penalties for retaliation.	Similarity: Validates the importance of formal, protected complaint systems. Difference: Conducts a massive global context literature review, whereas the current research is a highly specific, localized empirical case study in West Kutai.
Ali <i>et al.</i> , (2023)	Revitalizing Public Trust through Efficient Complaint Management in Developing Nations	Effective, transparent public complaint management directly increases perceived service quality and significantly, measurably boosts public trust in transitioning democracies.	Similarity: Explicitly links complaint resolution efficacy to public trust metrics. Difference: Conducted in Malaysia regarding the national PCB, whereas the current research investigates a local Indonesian APIP setting.
Harrison & Wielga (2023)	Evaluating Grievance Mechanisms in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives	Complaint mechanisms succeed only in highly specific, well-resourced contexts and profoundly struggle to ensure effective, tangible remedies for victims without exceedingly strong, enforceable legal frameworks.	Similarity: Analyzes system effectiveness for ultimate accountability. Difference: Focuses heavily on international human rights and corporate MSIs, entirely distinct from local government bureaucratic structures.

As meticulously delineated in Table 1, while a substantial volume of numerous academic studies have previously explored the digitalization of broad complaint systems and the fundamental role of APIP, there remains a highly noticeable and critical gap in qualitative research that explicitly links the operational implementation of complaint policies—specifically utilizing the robust Edwards III framework—directly to the complex cultivation of public trust. This is particularly true within geographically expansive, infrastructurally challenged, and culturally unique regions like West Kutai Regency, where social proximity greatly complicates whistleblower anonymity. This study aims to resolutely fill that specific academic gap by providing a holistic, deeply localized analysis of policy execution and whistleblower protection.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this research is systematically designed to map the intricate logical relationships between the variables under investigation. At its core, the study posits that the Regent Regulation of West Kutai Number 27 of 2024 serves as the primary policy input. This policy is subsequently processed through the bureaucratic machinery of the Regional Inspectorate. The efficiency and fidelity of this processing are evaluated using the four definitive pillars of George C. Edwards III's implementation theory: (1) Communication assessing how policy directives are transmitted internally among auditors and externally to

the public; (2) Resources evaluating the adequacy of human capital, financial budgets, and technological infrastructure to support investigations; (3) Disposition analyzing the cognitive commitment, neutrality, and proactive responsiveness of the APIP personnel; and (4) Bureaucratic Structure scrutinizing the clarity of SOPs, jurisdictional boundaries, and the impact of hierarchical disposition workflows on response agility.

The interplay of these four variables directly dictates the operational outcomes of the complaint handling process namely, the speed, accuracy, and fairness of receipt, verification, investigation, and follow-up, as well as the absolute efficacy of whistleblower protection protocols. Ultimately, the framework hypothesizes that a successful, transparent, and highly protective implementation process will directly act as a powerful catalyst in rebuilding and solidifying Public Trust (Public Trust) toward the regional government. Conversely, failures in these variables will exacerbate public cynicism. Furthermore, the framework intentionally leaves room to identify emergent supporting factors (enablers) and inhibiting factors (barriers) that are deeply embedded in the unique socio-cultural and geographic context of West Kutai Regency, thereby providing a comprehensive, holistic lens for qualitative inquiry.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This comprehensive study utilized a rigorously structured descriptive qualitative research design. According to leading methodologists in the social sciences, the fundamental objective of descriptive qualitative research is to create a systematic, highly detailed, factual, and profoundly accurate description, depiction, or nuanced illustration concerning the empirical facts, inherent properties, and complex, dynamic relationships among the specific phenomena being investigated within their completely natural, unaltered setting (Nazir, 1998; Sugiyono, 2021). Through the meticulous deployment of this qualitative method, the researcher aimed to directly observe, record, and illustrate exactly how the implementation of the complex complaint handling and whistleblower protection policy is executed in real-time, day-to-day bureaucratic operations. Furthermore, this specific design facilitates a deep, empathetic evaluation of the lived realities and subjective experiences of the diverse actors involved—both the government bureaucrats

tasked with enforcement and the citizens seeking redress—enabling the researcher to accurately identify, categorize, and contextualize the nuanced supporting and inhibiting factors prevailing in the field.

3.2 Population, Sample, and Informants

The geographical and institutional locus of the qualitative research was strictly and deliberately defined as the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency, strategically located in East Kalimantan Province. The selection of primary research informants was conducted utilizing a highly targeted purposive sampling technique. This non-probability sampling method was deliberately chosen over random sampling based on the critical methodological consideration that the selected informants must possess direct, profound operational knowledge, extensive practical experience, and active, continuous involvement in the formulation or technical execution of the complaint handling policy (Moleong, 2019). Table 2 provides a highly detailed, comprehensive breakdown of the selected informants and the specific, targeted focus of the strategic information they provided to the study.

Table 2: Comprehensive Profile of Research Informants

No.	Informant Role / Position	Specific Focus of Extracted Information
1	Regional Inspector of West Kutai Regency (Top Executive)	Strategic, macro-level insights on general complaint policies, overall institutional implementation of Regent Regulation 27/2024, internal oversight frameworks, leadership commitment, and overarching strategies for rebuilding public trust.
2	Inspectorate Secretary (Administrative Head)	Intricate details regarding inter-agency administrative coordination, logistical planning, HR and resource support, budget allocations, and the overarching technical management of the complaint system.
3	Assistant Inspectors / Urban (Middle Management)	Operational insights on the technical execution of complaint handling, coordination of complex field investigation processes, formulation of follow-up actions, and highly localized implementation constraints.
4	Functional Auditors / P2UPD (Field Implementers)	Micro-level specifics on report verification mechanisms, execution of rigorous investigative audits, evidence gathering techniques, standard operating procedures, and the practical, day-to-day application of whistleblower protection protocols.
5	Complaint System Admin (Frontline Staff)	Granular operational details of the initial report receipt processes, digital and manual data entry, system administration, disposition logging, and initial front-line interactions with nervous complainants.
6	Related Civil Servants / OPD (Reported Entities)	Understanding of the new complaint regulations, systemic responsiveness to Inspectorate clarification requests, defensive postures, and policy execution dynamics within their respective organizational units.
7	Community Members / Complainants (Service Users)	Raw, first-hand, highly subjective experiences in submitting sensitive reports, perceptions of government response times, evaluations of procedural transparency, fears of retaliation, and personal assessments of trust levels.
8	Community Leaders / NGOs (External Observers)	Broader societal assessments regarding the overall effectiveness of complaint handling, the public accountability of the regional government, systemic socio-cultural barriers to reporting, and the prevailing public perception of the Inspectorate.

Table 2 shows that the eight informants collectively span the full hierarchy of the complaint-handling process, from top executive leadership down to community complainants, ensuring that both the internal bureaucratic perspective and the external public perspective are represented. This layered composition

allows the study to triangulate perceptions of communication, resource adequacy, disposition, and bureaucratic structure across actors with different institutional positions and interests.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

In qualitative research, the researcher themselves uniquely acts as the primary, most vital instrument for data collection. Primary data consisted predominantly of spoken words, detailed narratives, and directly observed actions from the diverse informants, which were meticulously extracted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and continuous non-participant observation. Secondary data, which served crucially to corroborate, verify, and triangulate the primary empirical findings, were systematically obtained

via extensive, rigorous documentation studies. This included the exhaustive analysis of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for complaint handling, official follow-up audit reports, formal organizational structures, the exact legal text of Regent Regulation Number 27 of 2024, regional government statistical archives, and other supporting academic literature. Table 3 illustrates the comprehensive, multi-pronged data collection strategy employed to ensure absolute data saturation and analytical depth.

Table 3: Comprehensive Data Collection Strategy and Primary Sources

Technique	Specific Data Collected	Primary Sources / Locus
In-depth Interview (Semi-structured, recorded)	Deeply nuanced information regarding exact policy execution dynamics, internal and external communication flows, resource adequacy perceptions, bureaucratic disposition and empathy, structural efficiency, and the subsequent, highly subjective impact on public trust.	All selected informants (Internal APIP leadership, mid-level auditors, frontline administrative staff, and External Public/complainants). Conducted in private settings to ensure psychological safety.
Non-Participant Observation	Physical conditions of the complaint service environment, daily apparatus activities and workflows, adequacy of acoustic and visual privacy facilities, actual system usage, and real-time, unscripted coordination among staff when handling crises.	The physical environment of the Regional Inspectorate Office of West Kutai Regency, specifically the public service desks, administration rooms, and waiting areas.
Documentation Study	Official regulatory texts, fully documented SOPs, physical and digital follow-up reports, archival photos of socialization activities, executive meeting minutes, and detailed administrative disposition logs tracing the lifecycle of a complaint.	Official Inspectorate archives, locked filing cabinets, regional government publications, and internal, secure administrative databases.

Table 3 shows that the three techniques were deliberately combined so that each compensates for the limitations of the others: interviews capture subjective perceptions and lived experience, observation verifies these accounts against actual field conditions, and documentation anchors both against the formal administrative record. This triangulated design underpins the credibility and dependability of the qualitative findings reported in the following sections.

To ensure the interviews were methodologically structured yet sufficiently flexible to capture unexpected nuances, a highly comprehensive instrument grid (Kisi-Kisi Instrumen) was meticulously developed mapping the core research focus to highly specific, measurable indicators. This mapping, detailed extensively in the study's protocols, ensured that inquiries rigorously covered all critical aspects of the Edwards III model—specifically Communication clarity and consistency, HR and facility resources, apparatus commitment and integrity, and SOP functionality—as well as the precise identification of localized supporting and inhibiting factors.

Specifically, the instrument grid utilized in this research broke down the variables as follows: For 'Communication', interview questions were designed to

extract data on the transmission process (how regulations are distributed), clarity (whether the language of the regulation is understood by auditors and the public), and consistency (whether the messages change over time). For 'Resources', questions probed the adequacy of staff numbers, the specific competencies of auditors regarding forensic accounting or investigation, the sufficiency of the operational budget for travel to remote sub-districts, and the availability of secure digital platforms. For 'Disposition', the researcher asked complainants about their perception of the officers' empathy and neutrality, while asking officers about their personal commitment to resolving cases despite political pressures. For 'Bureaucratic Structure', the focus was on tracing the exact lifecycle of a report from the moment it is handed to the front desk, mapping every signature required before an investigation can commence, and assessing the fragmentation of these responsibilities.

3.4 Data Analysis Techniques and Validity

The massive volume of amassed qualitative data (transcripts, field notes, and documents) were rigorously analyzed utilizing the interactive, cyclical qualitative data analysis model pioneered by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014). This rigorous analytical process comprises three main, highly concurrent stages that are continuously iterated throughout the research

lifecycle: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

First, Data Condensation involves the meticulous process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the raw, unstructured data that appear in written-up field notes or interview transcripts. Irrelevant data was ruthlessly discarded, while vital thematic elements corresponding to Edwards III's theory were highlighted and coded. Second, Data Display involves organizing the condensed data into highly structured matrices, charts, and expansive thematic networks for pattern recognition. This allowed the researcher to visually compare the statements of the Inspector General against the statements of a frustrated complainant, highlighting systemic discrepancies. Third, Conclusion Drawing/Verification involves formulating initial, tentative findings and continually, obsessively testing them against the raw data for absolute validity. Conclusions were not finalized until data saturation was unequivocally reached.

To ensure the absolute scientific rigor, trustworthiness, and academic defensibility of the qualitative findings, data validity was comprehensively tested through four established, gold-standard criteria. Credibility (internal validity) was achieved through extensive source triangulation (cross-verifying claims between APIP, OPDs, and complainants) and method triangulation (comparing interview statements against hard documentary evidence and direct observation). Transferability (external validity) was facilitated by providing incredibly 'thick, rich descriptions' of the West Kutai context, allowing future researchers or policymakers to accurately assess the exact applicability of these findings to other regional settings. Dependability (reliability) was ensured through a meticulous audit trail of the entire research process, documenting every methodological decision. Finally, Confirmability (objectivity) was maintained by ensuring findings were deeply rooted in the raw data rather than researcher bias, actively verified through rigorous peer debriefing sessions with senior academics (Usman & Akbar, 2022).

4. RESULT

4.1 General Description of the Research Location

The West Kutai Regency Government operates as an autonomous regional entity legally established under Law No. 47 of 1999, featuring a highly expansive, topographically challenging, and resource-rich administrative territory spanning exactly 16 distinct sub-districts. The absolute epicenter of governmental administration and bureaucratic power is strategically located in the central Sendawar area. The geographical conditions of the regency, which are heavily dominated by rugged terrestrial areas, dense, often impenetrable forests, and expansive, twisting river basins with widely dispersed, isolated community settlements, present a uniquely formidable logistical challenge in equalizing public service delivery and ensuring universal, equitable

access to official government complaint channels. Infrastructure deficits significantly amplify these challenges.

Within the overarching, complex structure of the regional government bureaucracy, the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency is officially and legally mandated to act as the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP). In this highly sensitive capacity, the Inspectorate assumes the critical, non-negotiable responsibility of conducting comprehensive internal oversight, performing both routine financial and highly sensitive investigative audits, executing rigorous performance evaluations of other agencies, monitoring complex developmental programs, and, most crucially for this study, diligently following up on all public complaints regarding alleged maladministration, budget misappropriation, or corruption. The institutional structure is hierarchically led by a Regional Inspector, who functions as the chief executive of oversight, supported by a Secretary managing administrative logistics, several regional Assistant Inspectors (Irban) divided by specific oversight territories to manage geographic spread, and a highly trained cadre of functional auditor officials (P2UPD) who execute the ground-level investigations. The recent promulgation of the Regent Regulation of West Kutai Number 27 of 2024 has provided a much-needed, highly comprehensive legal foundation and strict operational guideline for this unit to systematically process public grievances, ensure the strict protection of whistleblower identities, and establish formidable preventive measures against retaliatory actions from powerful reported parties.

4.2 Policy Implementation Analysis (Based on the Edwards III Model)

The profound analysis of the extensive field findings is systematically and theoretically structured around the four indispensable dimensions of policy implementation proposed by George C. Edwards III, alongside a highly detailed examination of the technical, chronological processes from initial complaint receipt to ultimate whistleblower protection.

A. Communication (Communication)

The qualitative research findings unequivocally indicate that the transmission of vital information related to Regent Regulation Number 27 of 2024 within the internal environment of the Inspectorate has proceeded highly effectively through formal structural channels. Internal communication is routinely and systematically facilitated via scheduled coordination meetings, explicit leadership directives, and official, traceable document dispositions. The Regional Inspector of West Kutai Regency provided highly detailed insight into this rigorous internal socialization process:

"Regent Regulation Number 27 of 2024 has been comprehensively and repeatedly communicated to all ranks within the Inspectorate, especially and specifically to

those employees directly associated with the receipt, substantive review, and field investigation of complaints. This regulation serves as our fundamental, non-negotiable baseline, ensuring that every public report is not handled arbitrarily or subjectively, but must follow strict, verifiable, and legally sound procedures.”

Furthermore, Assistant Inspectors confirmed that internal memorandums frequently reinforce these SOPs, minimizing procedural deviations among auditors. However, a stark, deeply concerning contrast is observed in the realm of external communication. Public outreach to the broader community remains highly fragmented, grossly underfunded, and systematically uneven. Many residents, particularly those residing in distant, infrastructurally isolated sub-districts, remain entirely unaware of the correct reporting procedures, the necessary evidentiary requirements, or even the basic existence of secure reporting channels. A prominent community leader revealed the severe extent of this knowledge gap, highlighting a critical failure in public empowerment:

“In the remote villages, a highly significant portion of the community still does not know where or how to properly report if they discover alleged administrative deviations or blatant misuse of village funds. Furthermore, the community lacks a fundamental understanding of the jurisdictional differences between complaints that fall under the Inspectorate's specific authority and those that must be submitted to other institutions, such as the regional police or the national ombudsman. Because of this confusion, many valid complaints simply die out, unreported.”

B. Resources (Resources)

In general, macro terms, the basic resources required to execute the policy—such as certified functional auditors, administrative apparatus, basic office facilities, and baseline operational budgets are technically available. However, a much deeper, granular analysis reveals significant qualitative and quantitative constraints that severely hamper operational agility. Foremost among these critical constraints is the exceedingly high, often unmanageable workload placed upon the existing cadre of auditors. These specialized personnel are not exclusively dedicated to complaint handling; they are concurrently assigned to conduct mandatory, time-consuming regular compliance audits, review massive regional budget documents, and perform continuous, year-round performance monitoring across all regional apparatus organizations (OPD). The Regional Inspector candidly explained this severe resource tension:

“The Inspectorate absolutely possesses auditors and supervisory officials inherently capable of handling complex public reports.

However, the glaring issue is that these exact same officers are also mandated by national law to execute regular audits, complex compliance reviews, evaluations, monitoring, and myriad other statutory supervisory duties. Consequently, meticulous time management and the strict, often ruthless determination of case priorities become highly critical, which inevitably and regrettably leads to delays in processing complex public complaints.”

Further debilitating resource limitations manifest prominently in the technological and infrastructural domains. There is a palpable, critical lack of a fully integrated, modern digital complaint management system that allows for automated tracking, secure digital document storage, and algorithmic triage. Instead, reliance on manual logs and disparate spreadsheets persists, increasing the risk of data loss or human error. Moreover, the physical reporting room conditions at the Inspectorate office do not maximally guarantee absolute acoustic or visual privacy for complainants, which can severely deter individuals from sharing highly sensitive information regarding powerful local figures.

C. Disposition (Implementer's Attitude)

The disposition, or deeply ingrained professional attitude, of the bureaucratic apparatus in responding to public reports demonstrates a highly commendable level of professional commitment, ethical integrity, and operational objectivity. Front-line officers are trained to attempt to provide clear, patient explanations and maintain a strictly neutral, non-judgmental stance when receiving initial reports, steadfastly refusing to prematurely judge the validity of a claim without rigorous evidentiary support. Nevertheless, the research identified a significant, systemic deficiency in the level of proactive responsiveness post-receipt. Operating under a highly reactive bureaucratic culture, officers rarely, if ever, proactively update complainants on the evolving status of their reports unless explicitly prompted by the complainant. A highly frustrated complainant noted this glaring procedural gap:

“When I first arrived at the office, my highly sensitive report was received very well, and the front desk officer politely and professionally explained the additional supporting documents that needed to be completed. I felt heard. However, weeks after the final report was formally submitted and stamped, I received absolutely no updates. I was left in the dark. I had to proactively call repeatedly and eventually visit the office independently just to find out if the investigation had even commenced. This lack of communication breeds suspicion.”

D. Bureaucratic Structure (Bureaucratic Structure)

The complaint handling workflow within the Inspectorate strictly adheres to highly formalized, rigid Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs). The administrative sequence is linear and inflexible: formal receipt of the complaint, manual recording in the master ledger, physical disposition by executive leadership, substantive technical review by a designated Assistant Inspector, and finally, clarification or field investigation by assigned auditors. This absolute clarity in the bureaucratic structure profoundly supports the legal accountability of the apparatus's actions, ensuring that no rogue investigation occurs without the explicit issuance of an official assignment letter (Surat Tugas). However, this lengthy, deeply hierarchical bureaucracy inherently possesses the potential to drastically slow down response times, particularly if physical disposition files are delayed at the leadership desk due to other pressing executive duties or travel. The Inspectorate Secretary articulated this structural reality, acknowledging the trade-off between control and speed:

"All incoming reports are first meticulously recorded by the central administration section to ensure a verifiable paper trail. They are then physically forwarded to the top leadership for comprehensive review and official disposition. Only following that executive decision does the designated unit or Urban conduct a substantive, legal review to determine the validity and jurisdiction of the report before any field action is authorized. It takes time, but it ensures we act within our legal mandate."

4.3 Verification, Clarification, and Whistleblower Protection

The highly technical process of report verification is conducted meticulously, objectively, and with a high degree of professional skepticism. Auditors

are explicitly trained not to rely solely on the allegations contained in the initial public report; rather, they operate under the strict presumption of innocence and actively gather secondary documentary evidence, request formal, written clarifications from the reported regional apparatus, and conduct discreet witness interviews. Regarding the highly critical issue of identity confidentiality and whistleblower protection, the Inspectorate normatively and strictly keeps the complainant's identity secret within all official documents, redacting names and identifying details from investigative reports. Nonetheless, the pervasive, undeniable culture of social proximity and the tightly-knit nature of communities in the West Kutai region continue to generate profound psychological anxiety among the public. A complainant admitted their ongoing, deep-seated apprehension despite official assurances:

"The receiving officer assured me repeatedly, looking me in the eye, that my identity would be kept strictly confidential and permanently scrubbed from the investigation files. However, I remain deeply, constantly worried because the work environment in the local government and the social circles in the regions are highly intertwined; literally everyone knows everyone else. It is incredibly easy for someone to guess exactly who reported a specific issue based on the context of the leaked data alone."

4.4 Summary of Policy Implementation Conditions

To concisely encapsulate the extensive, highly nuanced findings derived from the qualitative data, field observations, and in-depth interviews, Table 4 presents a highly detailed, analytical summary of the operational conditions of policy implementation, meticulously categorized across the main theoretical indicators of the Edwards III model.

Table 4: Comprehensive Summary of Policy Implementation Conditions

Theoretical Indicator	Primary Empirical Findings (West Kutai Context)	Overall Implementation Status & Evaluation
Communication (Internal & External)	Policy information (Regent Reg 27/2024) is successfully and consistently transmitted internally among APIP staff via meetings and memos; however, external public socialization remains highly uneven, fragmented, severely underfunded, and heavily reliant on informal, unstructured networks rather than proactive government campaigns.	Highly effective internally, but critically deficient externally. Requires massive, strategic external expansion.
Resources (Human, Budget, Tech)	Qualified, certified auditors and basic operational budgets are technically available, but personnel face conflicting, high-volume workloads across multiple statutory duties. Furthermore, the digitalization of the complaint tracking system is significantly limited, relying on outdated manual logs and spreadsheets.	Adequate baseline existence, yet functionally suboptimal for rapid, modern crisis response.
Disposition (Apparatus Attitude)	Apparatus commitment, ethical neutrality, and objectivity during initial public interactions are highly commendable and professional. However, proactive, continuous follow-up communication to update complainants on report status is systematically lacking due to a reactive bureaucratic culture.	Excellent initial disposition, but requires mandated, systemic proactivity and empathy post-receipt.

Theoretical Indicator	Primary Empirical Findings (West Kutai Context)	Overall Implementation Status & Evaluation
Bureaucratic Structure (SOPs & Hierarchy)	Task workflows, SOPs, and jurisdictional boundaries are legally clear and well-documented; however, the rigid, highly hierarchical disposition procedures inherently create administrative bottlenecks, severely delaying investigation launch times.	Structurally implemented with high accountability, but urgently requires process simplification and SLA adoption.
Whistleblower Protection (Security)	Confidentiality principles are applied diligently in formal administrative documents (redaction), but public psychological concerns persist heavily due to inescapable socio-cultural dynamics (close-knit communities) and the absolute lack of physical protection guarantees.	Fairly good administratively, but practically demands tangible psychological and physical security guarantees.

Table 4 shows a consistent pattern across all four Edwards III indicators: each dimension is structurally or administratively in place, yet none has been operationalized to a degree that would decisively strengthen public trust. Internal communication, baseline resources, apparatus integrity, and legal accountability are all rated favorably, while their externally facing counterparts—public outreach, digital infrastructure, proactive status updates, and process speed—are consistently identified as the weaker link.

4.5 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The practical, day-to-day execution of the complaint-handling policy is absolutely not occurring in a vacuum; it is heavily and constantly influenced by a complex constellation of distinct internal and external variables. Identifying, categorizing, and analyzing these factors is crucial for future policy recalibration and strategic planning. Table 5 categorizes these critical supporting (enabling) and inhibiting (barrier) factors observed extensively in the field.

Table 5: Critical Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Complaint Handling

Supporting Factors (Enablers of Success)	Inhibiting Factors (Barriers to Efficacy)
1. A clear, highly comprehensive legal framework explicitly provided by Regent Regulation No. 27/2024, removing legal ambiguities. 2. Unwavering commitment and strong political will from the Inspectorate top leadership to objectively process all valid claims. 3. Availability of highly competent, certified functional auditors specifically trained in complex investigative techniques. 4. Strong, legally backed institutional authority empowering APIP to subpoena data, classified documents, and personnel for audits. 5. Established, formal, and functional coordination pathways with other regional government agencies (OPD) and law enforcement.	1. Grossly uneven and insufficient public socialization, resulting in low legal literacy, particularly in remote, marginalized sub-districts. 2. Severely limited human resources facing concurrent, high-priority audit workloads, leading to inevitable task saturation and burnout. 3. Critical, systemic lack of integrated digital infrastructure for real-time tracking, resulting in massive manual administrative inefficiencies. 4. Rigid, multi-layered hierarchical bureaucracy inherently causing administrative bottlenecks and significantly delaying rapid investigative response. 5. Persistent, deep-rooted, and highly rational public fear regarding identity exposure, social retaliation, and a total lack of physical protection.

Table 5 indicates that the supporting factors are largely institutional and top-down in nature—legal grounding, leadership commitment, technical competence, and formal authority—whereas the inhibiting factors are predominantly operational and bottom-up, rooted in capacity gaps, infrastructure deficits, and community-level fear. This asymmetry suggests that strengthening implementation requires targeted investment in front-line capacity and public-facing infrastructure rather than further institutional or regulatory reinforcement.

5. DISCUSSION

The highly comprehensive, multidimensional analysis of the implementation of the complaint handling and whistleblower protection policy at the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai reveals profound, complex dynamics that closely align with, and practically

validate, George C. Edwards III's seminal conceptual framework of policy implementation. By meticulously dissecting the empirical findings through this robust theoretical lens, several critical insights emerge regarding the intricate intersection of bureaucratic capability, legal frameworks, and the fragile cultivation of public trust.

5.1 Communication

In terms of Communication, the top-down transmission of the policy within the APIP structure has functioned admirably. The internal dissemination of Regent Regulation 27/2024 has successfully yielded a shared, legally sound procedural perception among auditors and administrative staff, ensuring that internal operations adhere strictly to legality and established SOPs. However, critical, systemic bottlenecks occur in the vital dissemination of this information to the ultimate

target group—the broader public. The uneven, underfunded socialization efforts mean that the very citizens the policy aims to empower remain blissfully unaware of their fundamental rights and the secure mechanisms available to them. This condition starkly mirrors and corroborates the empirical findings of Wijayanto (2024) and Kristiawan *et al.*, (2024), both of which assert unequivocally that the mere structural availability of digital or physical complaint channels does not automatically equate to elevated public participation if public literacy and proactive, aggressive socialization efforts remain abysmally low. Without aggressive outreach, the policy risks becoming a hollow administrative artifact rather than a potent tool for democratic accountability.

5.2 Resources

Regarding Resources, the Inspectorate confronts a classic, debilitating bureaucratic dilemma: severe allocation fragmentation due to the heavy, mandatory routine workload of its highly skilled personnel. While the absolute baseline budget and human capital exist on paper, auditors are stretched incredibly thin across mandatory compliance audits, budget reviews, and specialized, time-consuming investigations. Furthermore, the minimal adoption of integrated, modern complaint technologies severely restricts the organizational capability for real-time case tracking, algorithmic triage, and macro data analysis. This specific finding heavily corroborates the extensive research conducted by Anggraini and Irawan (2024) and Making (2025), which urgently highlights the absolute necessity of utilizing advanced information systems—akin to the national SP4N-LAPOR system—to facilitate seamless document management, minimize manual administrative redundancies, and provide instantaneous, automated status updates to anxious users.

5.3 Disposition

Pertaining to Disposition, the Inspectorate apparatus has demonstrated a highly laudable degree of professional integrity, ethical neutrality, and a steadfast commitment to objective fact-finding during the initial, crucial phases of complaint receipt and verification. They refuse to be swayed by initial hysteria. Nevertheless, the overarching public service orientation remains somewhat rigid, deeply bureaucratic, and strictly reactive. Complainants are frequently left in a agonizingly passive state of uncertainty, forced to navigate the complex bureaucracy independently to seek basic updates on the progress of their grievances. As emphatically stated by Yanti, Supratiwi, and Retno (2023) in their comprehensive study on rapid response systems in Jakarta, the continuous, proactive transparency of the report resolution status is exceptionally crucial. Trust is absolutely not built merely at the point of intake; it is actively nurtured and sustained through consistent, proactive, and empathetic communication throughout the entire lifecycle of the investigation.

5.4 Bureaucratic Structure

The Bureaucratic Structure within the Inspectorate, characterized by steep hierarchical approvals and rigid SOPs, successfully guarantees the strict legal accountability of all investigative actions. Absolutely no auditor operates without a formal, executive mandate. However, this exact same structure simultaneously, and inevitably, sacrifices necessary service agility. A physical disposition file that must traverse multiple executive desks before an assignment letter is officially issued causes an initial, often critical, stagnation in the complaint handling process, losing precious momentum. This structural rigidity is highly relevant to the critical study by Rajab (2025), which dictates that modern cross-sectoral organizational design must master the delicate balance between strict legal accountability and operational efficiency to transform public reports into concrete solutions swiftly.

5.5 Whistleblower Protection

On the highly sensitive, paramount dimension of Whistleblower Protection, identity confidentiality (anonymity) is currently only guaranteed at the administrative and documentary tier (via redaction). The unique socio-cultural environment of the West Kutai region, characterized by incredibly close kinship ties, unavoidable social proximity, and highly interconnected bureaucratic networks, renders mere administrative confidentiality grossly insufficient. Complainants require absolute protection from psychological pressure, social ostracization, or indirect professional threats, which the Inspectorate cannot currently guarantee physically. This finding underscores the absolute necessity for the development of more comprehensive, holistic security protocols that go far beyond simply redacting names from documents, aligning perfectly with the global recommendations put forth by Hossain *et al.*, (2024) and Badawi & Prawitno (2022).

Overall, examining these complex, interwoven dynamics collectively, it is overwhelmingly evident that public trust towards the Regional Inspectorate of West Kutai Regency is currently situated in a highly delicate, precarious transitional phase. The public has begun to cautiously, tentatively view the Inspectorate as an official, viable corrective instrument. However, absolute confidence and systemic, unshakeable trust have yet to fully materialize, hindered primarily by the paralyzing uncertainties surrounding handling durations, the systemic lack of proactive communication, and the limited transparency regarding final investigative outcomes and tangible bureaucratic reforms.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the rigorous, highly detailed analysis of the implementation of the Regent Regulation of West Kutai Number 27 of 2024 concerning Guidelines for Handling Complaints and Protecting Whistleblowers, it can be definitively and empirically concluded that, administratively and procedurally, the policy has been

successfully operationalized within the Regional Inspectorate environment. However, its practical, day-to-day execution remains highly suboptimal in its fundamental capacity to instantaneously transform public complaints into a powerful catalyst for robust public trust. Internal communication has been effectively institutionalized, whereas vital outreach to remote communities is severely lacking. Human resources and basic budgets are technically adequate but are continuously, severely impeded by extensive, conflicting workloads and a critical, debilitating deficiency in modern digital infrastructure. The disposition of the apparatus reflects high integrity, though it must urgently be balanced with mandated, systemic proactivity in communicating report statuses. Furthermore, the highly hierarchical bureaucratic structure ensures strict examination legality but operates at the direct, unavoidable expense of resolution speed.

The primary supporting factors driving the policy include the exceptionally strong political will of the Inspectorate leadership, a definitive, comprehensive legal framework, and functional, established internal coordination among regional apparatuses. Conversely, the major inhibiting factors encompass the vast, unforgiving geographic expanse of West Kutai (which immensely complicates direct reporting accessibility), a community culture that still harbors profound, rational doubts regarding true identity confidentiality, and a predominantly manual, antiquated administrative tracking system that is prone to bottlenecks.

Drawing directly from these extensive empirical findings, several highly strategic recommendations are proposed for immediate institutional consideration and execution. First, the Inspectorate must absolutely prioritize the development, funding, and deployment of a fully integrated digital complaint system or a centralized e-government platform that enables real-time, automated, and totally anonymous tracking of complaint statuses by the public. Second, massive public oversight literacy campaigns must be aggressively intensified down to the sub-district and village levels, strategically leveraging indigenous, religious, and community leaders to build grassroots awareness and trust. Third, a structural, radical simplification of the complaint disposition bureaucracy is urgently required; this must include the immediate establishment of strict, legally binding Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for standard handling times across different categories of complaints to provide absolute certainty for whistleblowers. Implementing these recommendations will definitively transition the Inspectorate from a reactive, sluggish administrative body to a highly proactive, trusted champion of public accountability.

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