

The Citizen's Charter as a Governance Innovation for Transparent and Accountable Village Services

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Abstract: Transparency and accountability are fundamental elements in achieving good governance and citizen-oriented public services. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in enhancing transparency, accountability, and the quality of public services at the Lasiwala Village Office, Sidenreng Rappang Regency, Indonesia. The Citizen's Charter represents an innovative governance tool designed to promote open information, clarify service standards, and strengthen community participation. Adopting a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, this study analyzed data using NVivo 12 Plus software. The findings indicate that the principles of the Citizen's Charter, particularly transparency and efficiency, have begun to be integrated into village service delivery. However, several challenges remain, including limited human resources, insufficient socialization to citizens, and incomplete documentation of standard operating procedures (SOPs). The study highlights the need for capacity-building programs and the institutionalization of participatory mechanisms to sustain accountability in local governance. This research contributes to theoretical understanding of community-based accountability and offers a practical model for improving transparency and responsiveness in village-level public service systems.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing global emphasis on transparency and accountability has reshaped the way governments deliver public services. Citizens now expect open, participatory, and responsive institutions capable of ensuring fairness and reliability in administrative processes. Transparency not only provides access to information but also minimizes corruption and strengthens democratic legitimacy (Bertot, Jaeger, & Grimes, 2010). According to Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch (2012), open information enables the public to monitor government actions, while Saldanha et al. (2022) emphasize that transparent systems foster accountability by clarifying responsibilities and promoting public trust in digital and administrative environments.

The integration of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into governance has accelerated the transformation of public administration toward digital and participatory systems. However, the challenges of algorithmic opacity, bias, and limited user awareness remain evident in many developing countries. Janssen and Kuk (2016) argue that algorithmic governance often operates as an invisible process, producing outcomes that citizens cannot easily interpret. Similarly, Fink (2018) and Pasquale (2015) describe these digital systems as “black boxes,” where decision-making mechanisms are hidden from public scrutiny. Saldanha et al. (2022) highlights that without adequate transparency, digital governance risks weakening accountability and democratic oversight.

Accountability in governance extends beyond compliance to include moral and procedural obligations of officials to explain and justify their actions. Hood (2010) defines accountability as a relational mechanism that binds administrators to report and respond for their conduct. In the same sense, Meijer (2014) views transparency as a prerequisite for effective accountability, ensuring that actions can be monitored and evaluated. Mainwaring and Welna (2003) stress that responsiveness and enforcement are essential components of democratic accountability. As Saldanha et al. (2022) affirm, these principles remain crucial in maintaining the legitimacy of governance systems at both national and local levels.

Transparency and accountability are interdependent dimensions that create institutional openness and reinforce the quality of public services. Albu and Flyverbom (2016) explain that transparent communication between governments and citizens promotes mutual understanding and trust. Papenfuß and Schaefer (2015) demonstrate that accurate and timely information allows external actors to assess administrative performance. Meanwhile, König and Wenzelburger (2021) note that algorithmic decision-making introduces legitimacy gaps when information is inaccessible. In line with Saldanha et al. (2022), transparency enables accountability to function effectively, making it a cornerstone of ethical and trustworthy public administration.

Empirical research from Brazil illustrates how transparency frameworks in public digital services contribute to improving accountability and service quality. Matheus, Janssen, and Janowski (2021) found that the combination of technological design and institutional reform determines the success of digital transparency initiatives. However, Saldanha et al. (2022) reveal that many e-services still lack public communication and

evaluation mechanisms. Kroll (2015) further argues that citizens must understand the basis of automated decisions to ensure fairness, while Diakopoulos (2014) emphasizes the role of algorithmic accountability in preventing harmful or biased outcomes within public systems.

In Indonesia, the principles of the Citizen's Charter are aligned with international efforts to enhance participatory governance and local accountability. The Charter functions as a community-centered document that defines service standards, timelines, costs, and complaint mechanisms. According to Leite and Cappelli (2010), transparency in service systems requires both accessible data and procedural clarity. Similarly, Bandy (2021) notes that community involvement is vital in evaluating institutional behavior. Building on Almeida, Felipe, and Barcelos (2020), participatory approaches can strengthen information systems, while Saldanha et al. (2022) suggest that contextual adaptation is essential for ensuring sustainable public accountability.

This study seeks to analyze the implementation of the Citizen's Charter in improving transparency and accountability at the Lasiwala Village Office in Sidenreng Rappang Regency. By adapting the theoretical and empirical framework proposed by Saldanha et al. (2022), this research explores how participatory mechanisms and local institutional practices contribute to more transparent and accountable governance. The study aims to identify challenges, strengths, and implications for policy improvement. Ultimately, it contributes to the growing body of literature on citizen-centered accountability, supporting the advancement of open and responsive public service systems (Henman, 2020; Kordzadeh & Ghasemaghaei, 2021; Saldanha et al., 2022).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employs an exploratory qualitative design to examine the dynamics of transparency, accountability, and public participation in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter. The exploratory approach allows for a flexible and interpretive understanding of participants' lived experiences and the institutional context in which governance interactions occur. As Alam (2021) emphasizes, qualitative case studies provide the depth and contextual richness necessary to capture complex administrative and behavioral realities. Furthermore, the interpretative orientation of this research aligns with the theoretical premise that social meaning, rather than measurement, guides

inquiry in governance innovation. This perspective resonates with Bhattacharya (2014), who asserts that qualitative analysis aims to construct theory from empirical narratives, and with Hamed Hilal and Said Alabri (2013), who underline NVivo's value in ensuring methodological transparency in such interpretative studies.

The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for studying governance mechanisms in rural contexts, where relationships between citizens and officials are embedded in local social norms. The design reflects the principles adopted by Saldanha, Dias, and Guillaumon (2022), who advocate for inductive reasoning to analyze public transparency initiatives. Following these methodological principles, this study focuses on identifying how institutional actors internalize and operationalize the principles of the Citizen's Charter in everyday administrative practices. By grounding data collection in a real-world institutional setting, this design ensures that findings are contextually relevant and theoretically generative.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and document analysis, which together formed the empirical foundation of this study. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to allow participants the flexibility to express their views while maintaining thematic coherence with the research objectives. This method facilitates depth and comparability, consistent with best practices in qualitative governance research described by Hoover and Koerber (2011). Interview participants included the Village Head, Village Secretary, administrative staff, and community members directly involved in local service provision. As recommended by Edwards-Jones (2014), all interviews were audio-recorded with prior informed consent and transcribed verbatim for coding and analysis.

Document analysis was used as a supplementary data source to validate findings and ensure triangulation. Official documents, including public service manuals, local policy guidelines, and citizen feedback reports, were examined to complement interview insights. The integration of interview and document data strengthens reliability and enhances interpretative accuracy through methodological triangulation. This approach is consistent with the recommendations of Salahudin, Nurmandi, and Loilatu (2020), who emphasize combining multiple qualitative sources to achieve data saturation and empirical rigor. As Alam (2021) highlights, triangulated data collection ensures that the

conclusions drawn are robust, context-sensitive, and representative of institutional realities.

Data Analysis and Visualization

Data analysis employed thematic analysis using NVivo 12 Plus software to identify, code, and synthesize emerging themes from interview transcripts and documents. The process followed a structured yet iterative path that included verbatim transcription, open coding, axial coding, and thematic integration. This analytical structure supports the interpretative depth necessary for public governance studies, as outlined by Allsop et al. (2022). The use of NVivo facilitates methodological transparency by allowing the researcher to systematically link raw data to coded categories, providing a clear audit trail from evidence to interpretation. The software also enables efficient data management and visualization, enhancing the analytical rigor and reproducibility of qualitative inquiry (Bazeley, 2021).

Thematic coding was guided by the principle that meaning is constructed through contextual relationships rather than frequency alone. This approach follows Bhattacharya (2014), who asserts that coding should be theory-driven and reflective of underlying social mechanisms. NVivo's coding and visualization tools, such as Tree Maps, Word Clouds, and Network Models, were utilized to explore relational dynamics between transparency, accountability, and participation. These visualizations facilitate the identification of key governance themes and actor networks, consistent with the practices advocated by Feng and Behar-Horenstein (2019). Moreover, NVivo's visualization functions enhance interpretative validity by enabling researchers to cross-reference patterns across interviews and documents, a process supported by Mortelmans (2025).

To ensure analytical credibility, triangulation and member checking were integrated into the analytic workflow. Findings were periodically reviewed by participants and expert peers to confirm accuracy and interpretive soundness, aligning with Wong (2008) and Dalkin et al. (2021). This process of validation strengthens trustworthiness and reduces researcher bias. By combining thematic rigor, digital visualization, and systematic validation, this study ensures that the analytical outcomes reflect both empirical evidence and theoretical integrity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Public Services at Citizen's Charter Based Village Offices

The implementation of the Citizen's Charter at the Lasiwala Village Office marks a transformative step toward open, accountable, and citizen-centered governance. The research results demonstrate that service officers have begun disseminating crucial information such as service types, costs, and processing durations—through notice boards, community meetings, and digital channels. These practices strengthen the transparency mechanism by allowing citizens to access accurate data about administrative procedures. Such practices align with the argument of Saldanha, Dias, and Guillaumon (2022) that transparency serves as both a cultural foundation and a managerial tool to sustain accountability in public institutions.

Transparency is not only an administrative reform but also a cultural shift that builds public trust in governance. The Lasiwala Village Head and Secretary have shown strong leadership in promoting open communication, providing clarity on decision-making, and publishing service timelines. These efforts align with the findings of Matheus, Janssen, and Janowski (2021), who suggest that leadership-driven transparency fosters mutual understanding between government officers and citizens. Yet, as Grimmelikhuijsen and Welch (2012) argue, transparency remains fragile without institutionalization; it requires permanent mechanisms that guarantee information continuity beyond leadership changes.

Furthermore, the institutionalization of the Citizen's Charter reinforces community participation and accountability. Citizens now play a more active role in monitoring service quality by observing bulletin board updates, verifying transaction times, and submitting informal feedback. This involvement echoes the principles proposed by Albu and Flyverbom (2016), who claim that transparency becomes meaningful only when citizens can interpret and use the information to influence policy outcomes. Nonetheless, the findings also reveal limited citizen feedback mechanisms and insufficient digital literacy, which can undermine sustained transparency and weaken participatory monitoring.

To strengthen these early achievements, the Lasiwala Village Office must adopt an integrated transparency system that combines traditional and digital platforms. As Henman (2020) emphasizes, open information must be supported by digital literacy and institutional adaptation to avoid selective access and inequality. Thus, the

implementation of the Citizen's Charter at the Lasiwala Village Office reflects progress toward participatory governance, yet its sustainability depends on the institutional embedding of transparent practices and inclusive communication systems that empower all citizens.

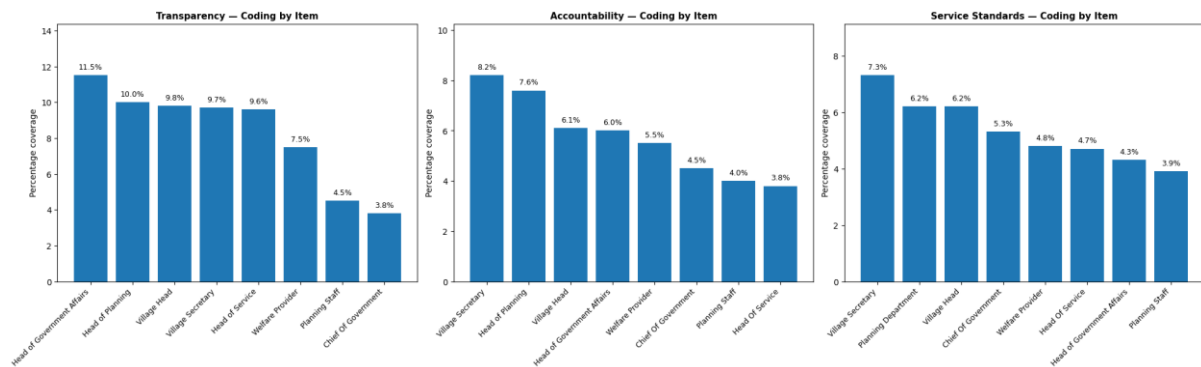


Figure 1. Public Services at Citizen's Charter Based Lasiwala Village Office

Source: Data processed using NVivo 12 Plus (2024)

The Influence of Citizen's Charter on the Quality of Public Services

The Citizen's Charter has exerted a measurable influence on improving the quality of public services in Lasiwala Village by formalizing clear service standards and enhancing citizen awareness. The Charter ensures that information on service procedures, duration, and costs is visible and verifiable, fostering greater administrative predictability. These mechanisms transform citizens from passive recipients into active monitors of governance performance. As Mainwaring and Welna (2003) emphasize, measurable standards enhance accountability and nurture trust by reducing discretion in bureaucratic decisions. The Citizen's Charter, therefore, becomes a moral contract between citizens and the government, balancing rights, duties, and administrative responsibilities.

The research identifies that transparency and accountability jointly contribute to the improvement of service quality. Through open information disclosure, citizens can now understand how services are processed and whom to contact when issues arise. This finding supports Papenfuß and Schaefer (2015), who argue that transparent procedures enhance legitimacy and citizen satisfaction. Interview data reveal that local officers perceive transparency not merely as a rule but as a value guiding administrative behavior. However, challenges remain in ensuring uniform implementation, as some departments still lack consistent reporting formats and documentation, limiting the ability to evaluate performance comprehensively.

The Charter also acts as a catalyst for ethical reform within village administration. Officers increasingly associate accountability with moral responsibility rather than simple compliance. As Hood (2010) observes, accountability in governance should embody both procedural and ethical dimensions, ensuring that public servants justify their actions to the community. In the Lasiwala context, officials demonstrate moral awareness by openly explaining service delays and acknowledging administrative shortcomings. However, the lack of a structured complaint mechanism reduces the potential for institutional learning, a challenge that mirrors Saldanha et al. (2022), who found similar limitations in Brazilian local e-governance programs.

Beyond transparency and ethics, the Charter contributes to tangible service improvements. Citizens reported faster processing times, clearer communication, and more professional interactions. The presence of explicit service commitments has minimized confusion and enhanced public confidence in administrative procedures. These changes reflect Matheus et al. (2021), who describe transparency-based reform as a cyclical process where continuous feedback enhances institutional performance. Nevertheless, Fink (2018) warns that reform driven by information disclosure alone may remain symbolic if not supported by technological integration and community participation. Thus, while progress is evident, continuous evaluation is essential to maintain reform momentum.

The Lasiwala experience demonstrates that the Citizen's Charter also encourages innovation in public communication. Social media platforms and local digital networks now serve as tools for information sharing and citizen engagement. This transformation echoes Henman's (2020) argument that digital governance must combine technological accessibility with human oversight to preserve inclusivity. Yet, incomplete infrastructure and inconsistent updates hinder broader citizen involvement. Without consistent digital systems, transparency risks becoming unequal, benefiting only those with internet access and digital literacy. Therefore, further investments in community education and infrastructure are needed to realize the Charter's full potential in improving public service quality.

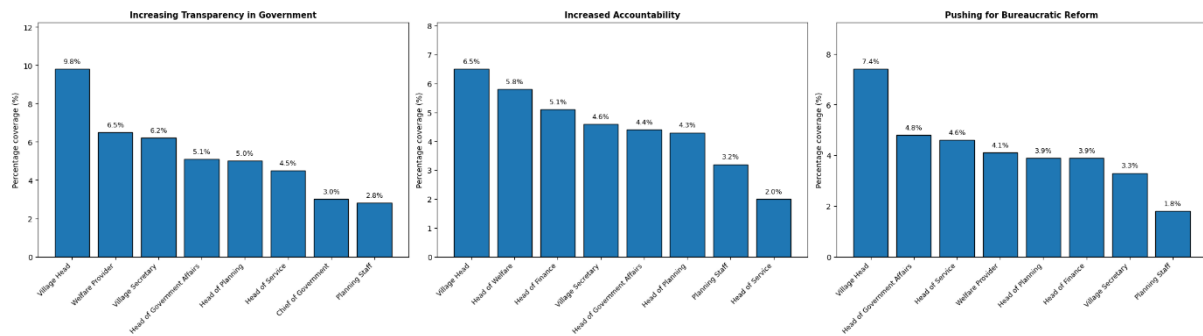


Figure 2. The Influence of Citizen's Charter on the Quality of Public Services at the Lasiwala Village Office

Source: Data processed using NVivo 12 Plus (2025)

Success Indicators Quality of Public Services

The implementation of the Citizen's Charter at the Lasiwala Village Office produced measurable improvements in three main indicators of service success: accessibility, responsiveness, and satisfaction. Service accessibility has improved as citizens can now obtain information through multiple platforms-official notice boards, WhatsApp groups, and village websites. This accessibility ensures that information is not monopolized by specific actors but distributed equitably across community members. Zuiderwijk, Chen, and Salem (2021) affirm that accessibility is the cornerstone of fair governance, enabling citizens to make informed decisions about their rights. However, this accessibility must evolve into interactive communication that allows citizens to question and co-design policies.

Service responsiveness, as the second indicator, reflects administrative agility and staff commitment. Interviews reveal that the implementation of clear Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and monitoring systems has improved response times and reduced redundancy in service delivery. These developments correspond with Rainie and Anderson's (2017) feedback-responsiveness model, where quick administrative actions strengthen public trust. Citizens in Lasiwala now perceive local governance as more approachable and empathetic. Nevertheless, incomplete digitization and limited human resources sometimes delay complex requests. To sustain responsiveness, continuous staff training and the adoption of feedback-based performance evaluations are essential.

The third indicator, citizen satisfaction, captures the overall impact of transparency and accountability on governance legitimacy. The study found that citizens increasingly describe services as fair, transparent, and reliable. This perception validates Zarsky's (2016) theory that procedural openness reduces uncertainty and reinforces public trust.

Moreover, satisfaction in Lasiwala is influenced by interpersonal respect between citizens and service officers. Kizilcec (2016) emphasizes that respectful interaction reinforces institutional credibility and strengthens the emotional dimension of trust. Nonetheless, satisfaction levels may fluctuate without regular public consultation, showing that service evaluation should become a continuous process rather than a periodic administrative task.

From an institutional perspective, these success indicators highlight the interdependence between procedural systems and community participation. The study affirms that information disclosure alone cannot guarantee quality unless supported by reflexive governance that responds to citizen input. According to Albu and Flyverbom (2016), reflexive transparency ensures that feedback transforms into organizational learning. Therefore, to maintain high-quality services, the Lasiwala Village Office should establish participatory evaluation mechanisms where citizens can contribute to defining service priorities, complaint systems, and improvement agendas.

Finally, the interplay of accessibility, responsiveness, and satisfaction illustrates that the Citizen's Charter functions as both a normative and operational framework for good governance. Each indicator represents not only an administrative achievement but also a manifestation of democratic accountability. The findings confirm Meijer's (2014) and Henman's (2020) arguments that sustainable transparency requires synergy between digital tools, ethical governance, and citizen participation. By institutionalizing feedback systems, enhancing digital infrastructure, and nurturing civic education, the Lasiwala Village Office can transform these success indicators into a long-term governance culture rooted in openness, equity, and public trust.

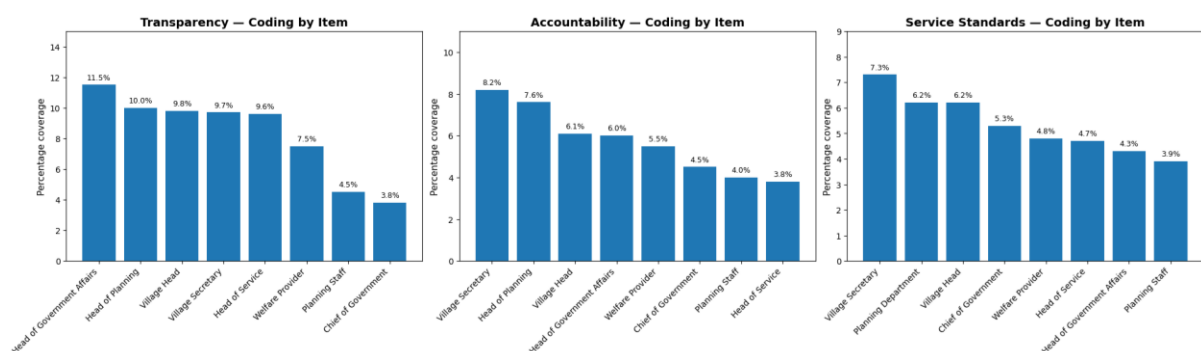


Figure 3. Success Indicators Quality of Public Services at the Lasiwala Village Office

Source: Data processed using NVivo 12 Plus (2025)

CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the Citizen's Charter at the Lasiwala Village Office as a framework for promoting transparency, accountability, and improved service quality in local governance. The findings indicate that the Charter has begun to institutionalize key principles of good governance through clearer procedures, open information dissemination, and stronger community engagement. Although its implementation remains partial and evolving, the study confirms that such initiatives can transform administrative behavior, encourage participatory oversight, and enhance citizens' confidence in local institutions. The results provide empirical evidence that structural transparency and citizen participation can coexist as complementary dimensions of sustainable service reform.

The implications of these findings extend beyond administrative improvement. The Citizen's Charter demonstrates that accountability mechanisms embedded in local government structures can function as catalysts for both ethical governance and institutional innovation. By redefining relationships between citizens and officials, it creates a foundation for trust-based interaction and shared responsibility. The research underscores that transparency should not be treated as a procedural formality but as an enduring cultural value that shapes everyday decision-making. This perspective highlights the Charter's potential to strengthen democratic legitimacy by ensuring that governance processes remain both visible and answerable to the public they serve.

Looking forward, this study offers valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to embed participatory accountability within decentralized governance systems. Future efforts should focus on digital integration, capacity building, and continuous citizen education to maintain transparency as an evolving practice rather than a static goal. The Citizen's Charter model holds promise for replication across other village administrations, where context-sensitive adaptation can generate more inclusive and effective public service ecosystems. Ultimately, the experience of Lasiwala illustrates that transparency and accountability are not endpoints of reform, but ongoing commitments essential to sustaining ethical, adaptive, and community-centered governance.

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