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Transformational leadership-trust conversion through digital transparency and communication: a systematic review

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review synthesizes how transformational and digital leadership are connected to public trust through organizational capability, digital transparency, dialogic communication, service performance, and procedural fairness, with Indonesia as the primary institutional context. Searches covered 2012-29 July 2026 across Google Scholar, GARUDA, publisher portals, Crossref/DOI records, and backward citations. Peer-reviewed public-sector studies with an explicit method and evidence for at least two focal constructs were eligible. Of 78 identified records, 31 were retained after screening and quality appraisal: 19 Indonesia-focused and 12 international or comparative studies. Screening, extraction, and coding were completed in two sequential passes by one reviewer using a structured evidence matrix and an MMAT-informed, design-sensitive appraisal; independent inter-rater agreement was therefore not calculated. Because designs, measures, and reported effects were not statistically comparable, narrative thematic synthesis was used instead of meta-analysis. The corpus provides stronger evidence for adjacent links than for a complete causal leadership-trust chain. Leadership is associated with internal capability and ethical climate, while trust is more consistently associated with usable and verifiable transparency, responsive communication, reliable services, and fair correction. Comparative evidence also shows that visibility, participation, or digitalization alone does not necessarily increase trust. The review proposes an evidence-informed conversion framework in which internal leadership conditions shape citizen-facing governance mechanisms that inform competence, integrity, and benevolence judgments under contextual boundary conditions.



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Introduction

Public trust supports policy compliance, participation, crisis cooperation, service use, and the legitimacy of administrative decisions. A useful baseline is the 2024 Edelman Trust Barometer, which reported that 73% of Indonesia's online general-population sample trusted government during fieldwork conducted in November 2023 (Edelman Trust Institute, 2024). This figure is not an official national time series and should not be treated as a definitive population parameter; nevertheless, it shows that aggregate trust can appear relatively high while citizens still encounter unequal service quality, fragmented responsibility, and inconsistent information across levels of government. The analytical problem is therefore not only how much trust exists, but how trust is produced, maintained, or lost through concrete governance experiences.

Indonesia provides a demanding setting for this question. Ministries, provincial and regency/city governments, villages, public utilities, vendors, and front-line agencies jointly shape outcomes, but citizens may be unable to identify which actor is responsible for success or failure. Decentralization enables adaptation and innovation while also creating wide variation in fiscal capacity, staffing, digital infrastructure, political incentives, and leadership continuity. Indonesian evidence links transparency, accountability, responsiveness, e-governance effectiveness, crisis response, and service quality to trust (Hartanto & Siregar, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2021a, 2021b; Fadrial et al., 2024; Pramiyanti et al., 2020; Taufiqurokhman et al., 2024).

Transformational leadership is selected as the upstream explanatory lens because its four behaviors - idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration - concern how leaders mobilize employees, evidence, coordination, and change inside public organizations. It is not treated as superior to all alternative theories. Procedural-justice theory explains why fair process shapes legitimacy; stewardship theory highlights prosocial and mission-oriented conduct; and new public governance emphasizes networks and co-production (Davis et al., 1997; Osborne, 2006; Tyler, 2006). This review integrates these downstream and contextual explanations by asking whether leadership is converted into citizen-observable governance rather than assuming that leader charisma directly produces trust.

The empirical bridge remains incomplete. Indonesian leadership studies predominantly measure employee discipline, innovation, digital transformation, or organizational performance, whereas trust studies more often measure transparency, e-government, communication, responsiveness, or service experience. Even the stronger Indonesian studies do not test the entire sequence from transformational leadership through internal capability and citizen-facing mechanisms to multidimensional trust in one model. The untested element is therefore not whether transformational behaviors can motivate public employees, but whether and under what conditions those behaviors become visible as competence, integrity, and benevolence to citizens.

Comparable decentralized settings also produce mixed evidence that cautions against simple claims. Good-governance practices were positively associated with local-government trust in Ethiopia, and trust and transparency mediated decentralization-participation relationships in Ghana (Arkorful et al., 2021; Beshi & Kaur, 2020). By contrast, Norwegian participation initiatives had limited effects on trust, while actual participation was negatively associated with trust, suggesting protest-driven participation (Holum, 2023). In a large United States survey, leadership of local elected officials did not predict three forms of co-production, and local-government trust showed different associations across activities (Mulaphong, 2023). Digital-leadership research in Dutch municipalities similarly emphasizes ethical judgment, legitimacy, competencies, and organizational conditions rather than personal visibility alone (Branderhorst & Ruijter, 2025).

These studies identify the theoretical debate entered by this review: whether public trust is primarily a direct evaluation of leaders or an institutional judgment formed through performance, fairness, transparency, and interaction. The review extends trustee-attribute models, which organize trust around ability, integrity, and benevolence, by inserting an organizational conversion layer between internal leader behavior and citizen judgments (Grimmelikhuijsen & Knies, 2017; Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). It does not claim that transformational leadership refutes procedural justice or governance-quality explanations; rather, it specifies how leadership may enable or fail to enable them.

This review therefore aims to synthesize: (1) the direct and sequential evidence linking transformational or digital leadership to public trust; (2) the roles of organizational capability, ethical climate, digital transparency, dialogic communication, service performance, and procedural fairness; (3) rival and null findings that limit causal interpretation; and (4) the boundary conditions most relevant to Indonesia's multi-level governance system. Its contribution is an evidence-informed, testable conversion framework rather than a statistically validated mediation model.

Method

This study used a PRISMA 2020-aligned systematic literature review with qualitative thematic synthesis (Page et al., 2021). The documented initial update was completed on 17 July 2026, and a targeted editorial quality update was completed on 29 July 2026. Searches combined the source-manuscript bibliography with Google Scholar, GARUDA, Indonesian journal and publisher portals, international publisher databases, Crossref/DOI landing pages, and backward citation searching. Official journal pages and DOI records were prioritized for bibliographic verification.

Searches used English and Indonesian combinations of leadership terms ("transformational leadership," "digital leadership," "public leadership," "kepemimpinan transformasional," "kepemimpinan digital"), trust terms ("public trust," "trust in government," "kepercayaan publik"), and context or mechanism terms (Indonesia,

local government, village government, transparency, communication, e-government, SPBE, public service, performance, responsiveness, participation, fairness, and satisfaction). The full syntax and coding definitions are reproduced in Supplementary Appendix A.

An article was eligible when it: (1) was peer reviewed; (2) examined government, public administration, public services, a public utility, village government, or citizen-government relations; (3) reported an explicit design, data source, sample or case selection, and analytic procedure, or a reproducible review method; (4) examined at least two focal constructs or supplied a foundational mechanism needed to interpret the pathway; and (5) provided full text or sufficiently complete publisher metadata. Books and reports were used only for contextual or theoretical framing and were not counted in the 31-study corpus. Theses, news items, duplicates, private-sector-only studies, purely technical system studies, and papers with no relevant public-sector outcome or inadequate methodological reporting were excluded.

Table 1. Search strategy, eligibility, appraisal, and synthesis protocol

Component	Specification
Review type	PRISMA 2020-aligned systematic review with qualitative thematic synthesis.
Search period	Initial update completed 17 July 2026; targeted quality update completed 29 July 2026; corpus covers 2012-July 2026.
Sources	Source bibliography; Google Scholar; GARUDA; Indonesian/international publisher portals; Crossref/DOI records; backward citations.
Operational inclusion	Peer-reviewed public-sector article; explicit design, sample/case, and analysis; at least two focal constructs or a necessary foundational mechanism; full text or complete publisher metadata.
Exclusion	Duplicate; book/report counted only as background; thesis/news; private-sector-only; purely technical system paper; no relevant public outcome; inadequate methods/reporting.
Appraisal/coding	MMAT-informed five-domain appraisal; deductive and inductive coding in Excel; direct, sequential, contextual, and rival evidence categories.
Final corpus	31 journal articles: 19 Indonesia-focused and 12 international/comparative studies.

The identification process yielded 78 records: 70 in the documented initial search and eight additional records in the editorial quality update. Two duplicates were removed, 76 titles and abstracts were screened, and 25 records were excluded. Fifty-one full texts or complete publisher records were assessed; 20 were excluded, including eight lower-quality records superseded by studies with stronger design reporting or internationally indexed venues. The final corpus contained 31 journal articles: 19 Indonesia-focused and 12 international or comparative studies.

Data were entered into a Microsoft Excel evidence matrix recording citation, setting, level of government, design, sample or case, measures, analytic approach, effect direction, directness of evidence, quality-appraisal notes, and implications. Appraisal was informed by MMAT design-sensitive criteria (Hong et al., 2018) and used five domains: clarity of purpose, fit between question and design, transparency of sampling/data collection, appropriateness of analysis, and alignment between evidence and conclusions. No composite numerical score was calculated because the corpus combined experiments, surveys, qualitative cases, bibliometric analyses, and systematic reviews. Studies with material reporting weaknesses were excluded or classified as moderate rather than high confidence.

Thematic coding combined deductive and inductive procedures. Deductive codes covered the four transformational-leadership dimensions and the trust judgments of competence, integrity, and benevolence. Inductive codes captured organizational capability, ethical climate, information quality, digital transparency, dialogic communication, service performance, procedural fairness, complaint resolution, responsibility attribution, digital inclusion, decentralization, privacy/cybersecurity, political context, and cultural values. A code was retained as a cross-study theme when it appeared in at least three studies or was supported by one strong mechanism study and corroborating evidence from another design or setting.

Three evidence categories were applied. Direct evidence required leadership and citizen/public trust to be measured in the same study and analytic model. Sequential-pathway evidence linked leadership to an internal or service outcome, or linked a citizen-facing mechanism to trust, without testing the complete chain. Contextual evidence identified conditions that altered interpretation or implementation. Screening, extraction, and coding were conducted by one reviewer in two sequential passes: an initial decision/coding pass and a consistency audit against the codebook and source metadata. Because no independent second reviewer was documented or available, Cohen's kappa and inter-coder reliability were not calculated. This limitation is stated explicitly and should be corrected through dual screening in a future update.

Meta-analysis was not undertaken because the studies did not estimate a common relationship using comparable constructs, designs, units of analysis, or effect measures. Many qualitative and review studies reported no effect size; quantitative studies variously measured trust, satisfaction, transparency, service quality, participation, and performance. Statistical heterogeneity could therefore not be estimated on a common effect-size scale. The synthesis reports directions and evidence roles rather than pooled magnitude, and it treats the proposed pathways as theoretical propositions, not causal mediation estimates.

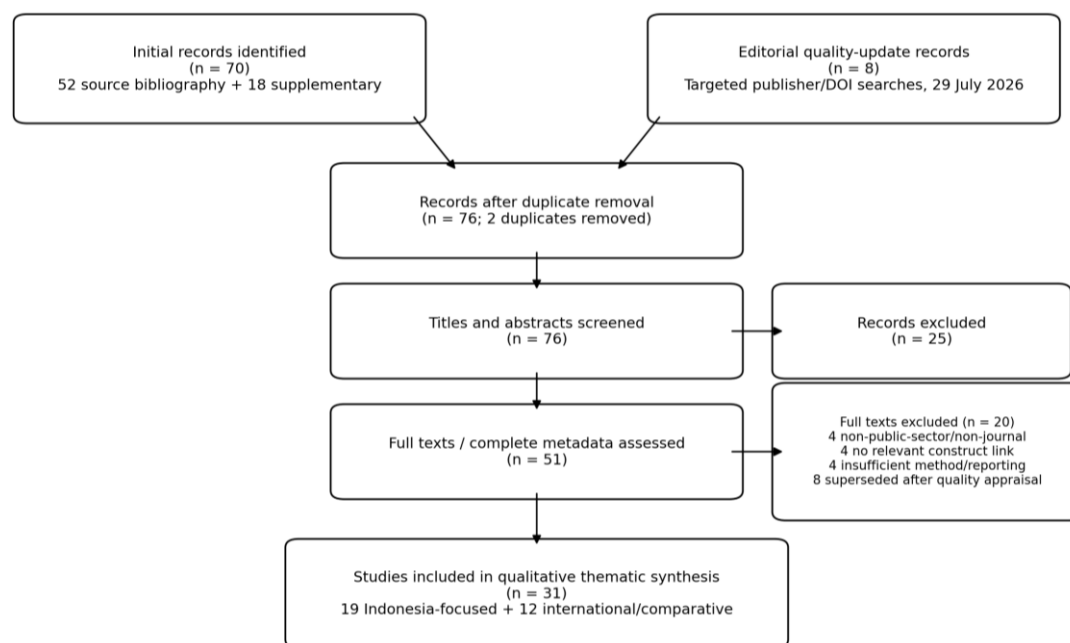


Figure 1. PRISMA-aligned identification, screening, appraisal, and inclusion process

Results and Discussions

The 31 included studies span 2012-July 2026 and comprise 19 Indonesia-focused studies and 12 international or comparative studies. The corpus includes cross-sectional surveys, experiments, qualitative cases, systematic and bibliometric reviews, design-science studies, and a meta-analysis. This diversity supports mechanism comparison but not statistical pooling. Table 2 therefore maps design, sample or case, measures, effect direction, evidence role, and appraisal so that causal claims can be judged study by study.

The clearest corpus-level result is an evidence imbalance: adjacent links are studied much more often than the complete leadership-trust sequence. Leadership studies commonly link transformational or digital leadership to motivation, coordination, innovation, information use, or organizational performance (Jensen et al., 2018; Moynihan et al., 2012; Murni & Irawati, 2025; Sartika, 2023; Wright et al., 2012). Trust studies commonly link governance quality, transparency, responsiveness, e-governance effectiveness, or service quality to public trust (Fadrial et al., 2024; Hartanto & Siregar, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2021b; Taufiqurokhman et al., 2024). The synthesis can therefore propose a sequential mechanism, but it cannot claim that the full mediation chain has already been statistically validated.

Organizational capability and ethical climate constitute the most plausible internal conversion layer. Transformational leadership can make mission and performance information meaningful, encourage learning, and improve coordination, but these outcomes depend on routines, competencies, internal controls, and continuity beyond one leader (Moynihan et al., 2012; Wright et al., 2012). Indonesian local cases show that vision and collaboration can support digital transformation and service innovation, while also revealing a succession risk when reform remains personalized (Annisa & Rianti, 2021; Murni & Irawati, 2025; Raharja et al., 2022; Sartika, 2023; Setyaningrum & Kriswibowo, 2022). These studies are coded as sequential-pathway evidence, not direct proof of citizen trust.

Digital transparency is conditional rather than automatically trust enhancing. An Indonesian experiment found that more transparent performance information increased reported trust, while crisis-communication research found that low perceived transparency weakened confidence in official information (Idris, 2020; Pramiyanti et al., 2020). Indonesian e-governance studies associate perceived transparency, accountability,

responsiveness, usefulness, and service quality with trust, including mediated pathways through perceived e-governance effectiveness or government response (Fadrial et al., 2024; Hartanto & Siregar, 2021; Hartanto et al., 2021b). International experimental and meta-analytic evidence finds a positive average association but substantial variation according to performance content, prior attitudes, and information design (Alessandro et al., 2021; Wang & Guan, 2023).

Four transparency qualities recur across the evidence: accessibility, intelligibility, verifiability, and actionability. Information must be findable and affordable to access; translated into plain-language explanation; linked to sources, time periods, responsible units, and corrections; and connected to questions, complaints, or remedial action. Transparency by design therefore differs from disclosure volume (Matheus et al., 2021). In Indonesia, formally open data can remain practically closed when connectivity, disability access, language, or digital literacy is ignored.

Dialogic public communication is a relational mechanism that complements transparency. Interactive channels can create a stronger sense of contact than static publication, but visibility alone is insufficient (Porumbescu, 2016). Indonesian crisis and local-government studies emphasize message consistency, response speed, participation, acknowledgement of uncertainty, and operational follow-through (Hartanto et al., 2021a; Pramiyanti et al., 2020; Virnandes et al., 2024). Leadership matters here by authorizing openness, coordinating communications with operational units, and permitting criticism to trigger correction rather than defensive publicity.

Service performance and procedural fairness provide the strongest citizen-observable bridge. E-government contributes to trust when it improves reliability, convenience, response, error correction, and problem solving rather than merely adding an application (Fadrial et al., 2024; Taufiqurokhman et al., 2024). Fairness concerns consistent rules, explained reasons, accessible complaints, equal treatment, and correction. These downstream experiences align with procedural-justice explanations and show why transformational leadership alone is insufficient: citizens evaluate the institution through outcomes and treatment, not solely through leader attributes.

Rival findings limit an overly positive model. Participation initiatives in Norway had little effect on trust, and higher actual participation was associated with lower trust, consistent with protest participation (Holum, 2023). Leadership of local elected officials did not predict three co-production outcomes in a large United States survey, while trust had activity-specific relationships (Mulaphong, 2023). These findings show that dialogue and participation are not universally beneficial and that direction may depend on prior dissatisfaction, issue salience, self-selection, and the difference between invited and contentious participation.

Decentralization and attribution complicate every pathway. Citizens may experience a service failure without knowing whether a ministry, regional agency, village, public utility, or vendor is responsible. Fragmented disclosure without ownership can reduce accountability. The comparative evidence on decentralization also indicates that trust and transparency may operate as mechanisms connecting institutional design to participation rather than as simple outcomes (Arkorful et al., 2021). Dashboards and complaint channels should therefore identify the responsible unit, expected resolution time, escalation route, and final outcome.

Boundary conditions can be ranked by consistency of evidence. First are administrative capacity and service performance, because they determine whether promises become reliable outcomes. Second are information and communication quality together with clear responsibility attribution. Third are digital inclusion, privacy, and cybersecurity, which determine whether digital access is safe and equitable. Fourth are decentralization, political polarization, and cultural interpretation, which alter attribution and acceptance across regions and groups. The latter conditions matter, but the present corpus supports them less consistently than capability, service experience, and information quality.

Trust is both an outcome and a possible input to participation, compliance, service use, and co-production, but these feedback effects are not uniform. The leadership task is therefore systemic: communication cannot compensate for slow or unfair services, and technical improvement may remain invisible without explanation and listening. The synthesis is best read as an evidence-informed set of propositions for future testing rather than a vote count proving a universal causal pathway.

Table 2. Design, sample, measures, effect direction, evidence role, and appraisal of included studies

Study	Context, design, and sample	Measures and effect direction	Evidence role and appraisal
Hartanto et al. (2021a)	Indonesia; COVID-19 survey; sample reported in article	Governance antecedents and perceived religious values -> trust; positive/mediated	Direct trust evidence; High
Hartanto & Siregar (2021)	Two Indonesian cities; cross-sectional survey, n=330; PLS-SEM	Transparency, accountability, responsiveness -> trust; government response mediated positive links	Direct trust evidence; High
Hartanto et al. (2021b)	Two Indonesian cities; cross-sectional survey, n=355; SmartPLS	Good-governance perceptions -> e-governance effectiveness -> local-government trust; positive direct/indirect	Direct trust evidence; High
Pramiyanti et al. (2020)	Indonesia; mixed-method survey, n=500	Perceived crisis-information transparency and confidence/trust; lower transparency associated with lower confidence	Direct trust evidence; High
Idris (2020)	Indonesia; 2 x 2 experiment, n=57	Performance-information transparency -> reported trust; positive direction	Direct trust evidence; Moderate
Annisa & Rianti (2021)	West Sumatra; qualitative local-government case	Transformative leadership -> mobilization and village achievement; citizen trust not measured	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Setyaningrum & Kriswibowo (2022)	Gresik; qualitative village case	Transformational leadership -> participation and tourism/service development; trust not measured	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Raharja et al. (2022)	Public utility, Batusangkar; qualitative case	Transformational leadership -> capability/performance; trust inferred from service/commitment handling	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Sartika (2023)	Sumedang; qualitative case with NVivo	Digital leadership, shared vision, collaboration -> SPBE transformation; continuity risk	Sequential/context evidence; Moderate
Novianto (2023)	Indonesia-oriented systematic review	Digital-transformation models -> organizational/institutional capability; no common trust effect	Context/mechanism evidence; Moderate
Nuryadin et al. (2023)	Public-sector systematic review	Digital leadership -> efficiency, transparency, accessibility, service quality; heterogeneous evidence	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Ibrahim et al. (2023)	Bibliometric review; e-government and trust	Maps governance quality, risk, adoption, and citizen experience; no pooled effect	Context evidence; Moderate
Fardiah et al. (2024)	West Java; SPBE/public-relations case	SPBE performance -> access, transparency, participation; trust not directly estimated	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Fadrial et al. (2024)	Indonesian local government; empirical quantitative study	E-government quality/usefulness/governance experience -> public trust; positive direction	Direct trust evidence; High
Taufiqurokhman et al. (2024)	Indonesia; quantitative e-service study	E-service quality -> public trust and satisfaction; positive direction	Direct trust evidence; High
Virnandes et al. (2024)	Indonesian civil-service agency; semi-structured interviews	Leadership, capability, governance, transparency -> trust-generating digital transformation	Sequential/direct qualitative evidence; High
Murni & Irawati (2025)	Cirebon BKPSDM; qualitative case	Role modelling, support, stimulation -> discipline, culture, innovation; trust not measured	Sequential evidence; Moderate
Nathaniel et al. (2026)	Comprehensive e-government trust review	Technology, governance, risk, information, citizen experience -> trust determinants	Context/direct synthesis; Moderate

Study	Context, design, and sample	Measures and effect direction	Evidence role and appraisal
Taufiqurokhman et al. (2026)	Indonesia; local-government digital-leadership study	Digital leadership -> trust and participation; reported positive direction	Direct trust evidence; Moderate
Moynihan et al. (2012)	International public managers; quantitative field study	Transformational leadership -> performance-information use; positive	Sequential evidence; High
Wright et al. (2012)	Public organizations; quantitative field study	Transformational leadership -> mission valence/motivation; positive	Sequential evidence; High
Porumbescu (2016)	Seoul; citizen survey	Social-media and website use -> trust; channel-specific relationships	Direct trust evidence; High
Jensen et al. (2018)	Public managers; field evidence	Face-to-face dialogue -> credibility/clarity of transformational vision; positive	Sequential evidence; High
Beshi & Kaur (2020)	Ethiopian local government; empirical survey	Transparency, accountability, responsiveness and participation -> trust; positive	Direct trust evidence; High
Alessandro et al. (2021)	Survey experiment	Transparency/performance information -> trust; effects depend on performance content	Direct/rival evidence; High
Matheus et al. (2021)	Design science and cases	Transparency-by-design principles; usability/data quality/interoperability	Mechanism evidence; High
Arkorful et al. (2021)	Ghana; survey, n=561; SEM	Decentralization -> participation, mediated by trust and transparency; positive mediation	Direct/context evidence; High
Holum (2023)	Norwegian municipalities; survey/administrative data	Participation initiatives -> trust (limited); actual participation -> trust (negative)	Rival/null evidence; High
Mulaphong (2023)	United States; survey, n=20,271	Local elected leadership -> three co-production outcomes (not predictive); trust effects mixed	Rival/null evidence; High
Wang & Guan (2023)	Meta-analysis, 49 studies / 436 effects	Transparency -> citizen trust; positive mean with substantial heterogeneity	Direct synthesis; High
Branderhorst & Ruijer (2025)	Netherlands; empirical city-manager study	Digital leadership -> value-based vision, legitimacy, ethics, political involvement, competencies	Sequential/context evidence; High

Table 3. Cross-theme synthesis, rival evidence, and governance implications

Theme	Mechanism	Evidence pattern	Governance implication
Leadership conditions	Vision, ethical role modelling, stimulation, empowerment	Positive internal outcomes are common; direct citizen-trust tests are scarce	Assess leaders through institutional capability, ethics, evidence use, and continuity.
Organizational conversion	Skills, coordination, learning, internal control	Recurring sequential link; not a validated mediator across the full corpus	Build cross-unit ownership, documented processes, and professional capability.
Digital transparency	Accessible, intelligible, verifiable, actionable information	Positive average relationship but heterogeneous and performance dependent	Design disclosure around citizen questions, responsibility, and remedy.
Dialogic communication	Listening, response, consistency, acknowledgement, follow-through	Interactive channels help only when linked to operational action	Integrate communications, PPID, SPBE, complaints, and service units.
Service performance and fairness	Reliability, quality, equal treatment, reasons, correction	Most consistent citizen-observable bridge to trust	Measure waiting time, resolution, error correction, accessibility, and fairness.
Rival evidence	Protest participation, self-selection, symbolic visibility	Participation and visible leadership sometimes show null or negative relationships	Do not use engagement volume or leader visibility as trust proxies.
Public trust	Competence, integrity, benevolence	Multidimensional outcome and possible input to behavior	Measure trust by dimension, service, and responsible level of government.

Theme	Mechanism	Evidence pattern	Governance implication
Boundary conditions	Capacity, attribution, inclusion, privacy, decentralization, politics, culture	Strongest evidence for capacity/service and information quality; others less consistent	Prioritize capability and responsibility before contextual tailoring.

Integrated Framework and Practical Implications

Figure 2 presents an evidence-informed leadership-trust conversion framework. Transformational and digital leadership are positioned as internal conditions that may shape organizational capability and ethical climate. These conditions may improve digital transparency, dialogic communication, responsibility attribution, and complaint resolution; citizens then use service reliability and procedural fairness to judge governmental competence, integrity, and benevolence. Solid arrows summarize recurring adjacent links in the corpus and do not represent path coefficients or a single validated mediation model.

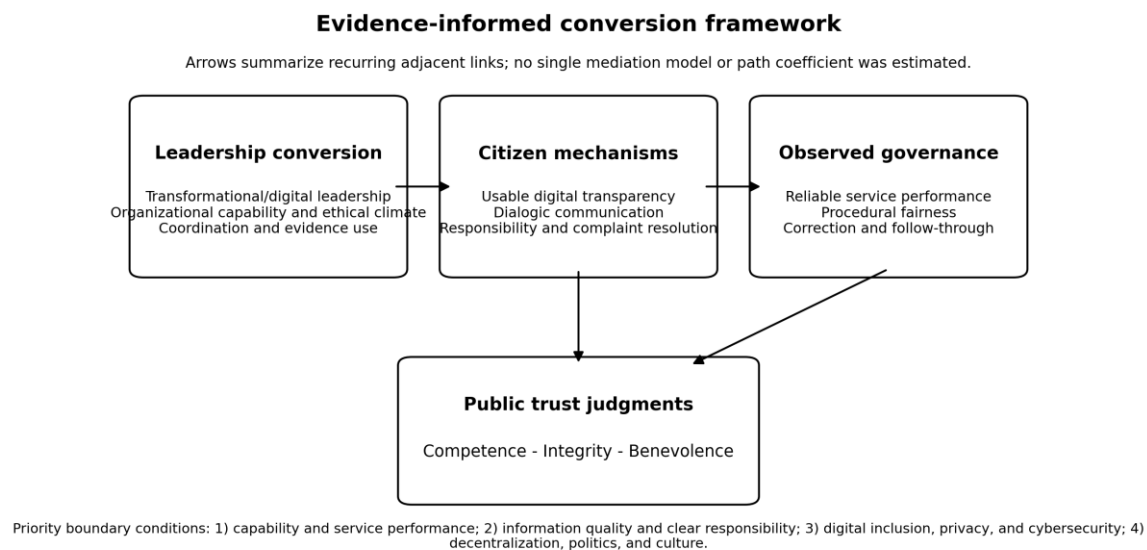


Figure 2. Evidence-informed leadership-trust conversion framework

The framework advances beyond classic trustee-attribute models by specifying how perceived ability, integrity, and benevolence may be generated through organizational processes in multi-level public administration (Mayer et al., 1995; Schoorman et al., 2007). It also connects transformational leadership to procedural justice and new public governance: leadership is upstream, fairness is a citizen-facing evaluation mechanism, and networks shape responsibility and implementation. Its novelty lies in the conversion problem - the institutional steps required before internal leadership can become an external trust judgment.

For practice, six priorities follow. Leadership development should integrate ethics, evidence use, digital governance, communication, service design, and succession planning. Transparency should answer citizen questions and connect indicators with responsible units, commitments, limitations, and corrective action. Communication units, PPID functions, SPBE teams, inspectorates, and operational services should form one accountability chain. Digital reform should retain assisted and non-digital access. Innovations should be institutionalized through rules, documented architecture, budgets, interoperable processes, and career-based capabilities. Trust measurement should distinguish competence, integrity, and benevolence and link attitudes to specific services and responsible government levels.

Future Research Agenda

Future research should test the complete conversion framework with longitudinal and multilevel designs that connect leader behavior, employee experience, service-unit performance, citizen encounters, and trust in the responsible institution. A pre-registered structural model could estimate whether organizational capability, transparency, communication, service performance, and fairness mediate leadership-trust relationships and whether decentralization or digital inclusion moderates them.

Field and quasi-experiments should compare transparency formats, response times, explanations, apology and correction strategies, responsibility labels, and hybrid digital-offline services. Negative cases are essential: highly visible leaders, participatory initiatives, or advanced platforms may fail when performance, fairness, information quality, privacy, or attribution is weak.

Future systematic updates should search subscription databases through reproducible exports and use two independent reviewers for screening, appraisal, and coding. Agreement statistics should be reported before reconciliation. Research on automated and artificial-intelligence-enabled public services should additionally test explainability, human review, data correction, proportional data collection, cybersecurity, and perceived fairness.

Conclusions

This systematic review concludes that the literature supports an indirect, institutionally converted relationship more strongly than a direct leader-to-trust effect. Transformational and digital leadership are associated with internal capability, ethical climate, coordination, and innovation; public trust is more consistently associated with transparent and responsive governance, reliable service performance, fair treatment, and visible correction. Because these links are usually examined in separate studies, the full conversion sequence remains a proposition rather than a statistically validated mediation model. Digital transparency and public communication are conditional mechanisms. They strengthen trust when information is accessible, intelligible, verifiable, inclusive, and tied to a responsible action owner. They can weaken trust when disclosure is confusing, systems fail, data practices are unclear, or digital access is unequal. Participation and visibility also have mixed effects, particularly when engagement is protest driven or disconnected from decision consequences. The theoretical contribution is to extend ability-integrity-benevolence models by identifying the organizational conversion processes through which internal leadership may become citizen-facing evidence. The most strongly supported priorities are: first, administrative capability and service performance; second, information and communication quality with clear responsibility; third, digital inclusion, privacy, and cybersecurity; and fourth, decentralization, political, and cultural conditions. This ordering gives practitioners an actionable sequence rather than an undifferentiated list of moderators. For Indonesian government, sustainable trust requires institutionalization across leadership transitions and levels of government. Communication must be integrated with operational responsibility, innovations must be embedded in procedures and competencies, and performance measurement must focus on outcomes and fairness that citizens experience. The credible transformational leader is therefore not merely the most visible leader, but the one who builds transparent, responsive, fair, and capable systems that continue to function after the individual leaves office.

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