

# ACCOUNTABILITY OF PUBLIC OFFICIALS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW: PREVENTING MALADMINISTRATION IN PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

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## Abstract

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*This study aims to analyze the accountability of public officials from the perspective of state administrative law as an effort to prevent maladministration in public services in Medan City, North Sumatra. Public accountability is important because public officials exercise administrative authority that directly affects citizens' rights, access to services, and trust in government institutions. This study uses a normative-empirical legal research method. The normative approach is applied by examining laws, regulations, legal principles, and doctrines related to public service accountability, while the empirical approach is used to understand the implementation of accountability in public service practices. The findings show that maladministration is often related to weak procedural compliance, limited transparency,*

*ineffective complaint handling, weak supervision, institutional constraints, and low public legal awareness. The study also finds that the principles of legality, transparency, equality, carefulness, responsiveness, and public interest are essential in strengthening administrative accountability. In conclusion, the prevention of maladministration in Medan City requires the strengthening of service standards, transparent procedures, effective complaint mechanisms, internal and external supervision, institutional capacity, digital public services, and public legal awareness. Public official accountability should not only function as a form of responsibility after violations occur, but also as a preventive legal mechanism to ensure fair, responsive, and accountable public services.*

**Keywords:** *Administrative law; Maladministration; Public accountability; Public officials; Public services*

## INTRODUCTION

Public accountability of public officials is a fundamental requirement in the implementation of state administrative law, especially in the delivery of public services at the local government level. In Medan City, North Sumatra, public services are closely related to citizens' daily needs, including population administration, licensing, health services, education services, social assistance, and other administrative services provided by government agencies. However, the implementation of public services still faces recurring problems such as delayed services, unclear procedures, weak information transparency, limited responsiveness to complaints, and unequal treatment of service users. These problems indicate that maladministration is not merely an individual administrative error, but also reflects weaknesses in bureaucratic accountability, supervision, and compliance with the principles of good governance.

The urgency of this issue can be seen from the continuing public complaints regarding alleged maladministration in North Sumatra. The Ombudsman Representative Office of North Sumatra reported that public complaints regarding alleged maladministration increased in the first semester of 2025, from 143 reports in the same period of the previous year to 179 reports, or around 25 percent. This condition shows that the relationship between public officials and citizens in public service delivery still requires stronger administrative control, ethical responsibility, and legal accountability

mechanisms. At the national level, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia also emphasizes that public service supervision is increasingly complex and requires stronger institutional capacity to prevent maladministration and protect citizens' rights.

Previous studies have shown that accountability is an essential element in improving the quality of public services and preventing maladministration. Research on public accountability and good governance explains that accountable public administration can influence the performance and service quality of public officials because officials are required to act transparently, responsibly, and in accordance with legal procedures (Sari & Rosdiana, 2021). Other studies also emphasize that good public service reflects good government management, particularly through transparency of service costs, simplification of procedures, one-stop services, and bureaucratic reform (Sudirman et al., 2023). In addition, research on maladministration prevention shows that digital administration and e-government can reduce direct contact between officers and service users, thereby minimizing opportunities for illegal charges, abuse of authority, and procedural manipulation (Amalia et al., 2020). These findings indicate that accountability must be understood not only as a post-factum responsibility after violations occur, but also as a preventive instrument to ensure that public officials perform their duties lawfully and fairly.

From the perspective of state administrative law, public officials are bound by legal norms that regulate authority, procedures, public service standards, and administrative responsibility. Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services affirms that the state is obliged to serve every citizen and resident in fulfilling their basic rights and needs through public service delivery. This law also requires public service providers to establish service standards, provide complaint mechanisms, and ensure legal certainty in service implementation. Furthermore, Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration provides the legal foundation for the exercise of governmental authority and is intended to improve good governance, prevent abuse of authority, and promote transparent and efficient bureaucracy. In addition, Law Number 37 of 2008 concerning the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia gives the Ombudsman authority to supervise public service delivery and handle reports of maladministration.

Although the regulatory framework has clearly regulated public service obligations and administrative accountability, maladministration in practice still occurs in various forms, such as abuse of authority, excessive delay, procedural irregularities, negligence, discrimination, and failure to provide proper service. This gap between legal norms and administrative practice becomes an important problem in Medan City, where public services are provided in a complex urban context with high population mobility, diverse community needs, and increasing public expectations toward transparent and responsive government. Therefore, the accountability of public officials must be examined not only in relation to formal compliance with regulations, but also in relation to how administrative law principles are implemented to prevent maladministration in public service delivery.

Based on the above background, the main problem of this research is how public official accountability is implemented from the perspective of state administrative law in preventing maladministration in public services in Medan City, North Sumatra. This research also examines the factors that hinder the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms and the legal-administrative efforts that can be strengthened to prevent maladministration. The purpose of this study is to analyze the accountability of public officials in public service delivery, examine the relevance of state administrative law principles in preventing maladministration, and formulate preventive efforts to strengthen transparent, responsive, fair, and legally accountable public services in Medan City.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a normative-empirical legal research method with a state administrative law approach. The normative approach is used to examine legal norms, regulations, principles of public administration, and legal doctrines related to the accountability of public officials and the prevention of maladministration. Meanwhile, the empirical approach is used to understand how these legal norms are implemented in public service practices in Medan City, North Sumatra. This method is considered appropriate because the issue of maladministration cannot be analyzed only from written legal provisions, but must also be examined through the actual implementation of public service accountability in government administration.

The focus of this study is the accountability of public officials in the perspective of state administrative law, particularly in relation to efforts to prevent maladministration in public services. The main aspects examined include the legal responsibility of public officials, the implementation of public service standards, transparency and responsiveness in service delivery, complaint-handling mechanisms, supervision by authorized institutions, and the application of good governance principles. In this study, maladministration is understood as improper administrative conduct, including delay, negligence, abuse of authority, procedural irregularities, discrimination, and failure to provide services in accordance with legal obligations.

The research location is Medan City, North Sumatra, Indonesia. Medan was selected as the research location because it is the capital city of North Sumatra Province and has a complex public service structure, high population mobility, and diverse administrative service needs. Public services in Medan include population administration, licensing, health services, education services, social assistance, and other government administrative services. This condition makes Medan relevant for examining the accountability of public officials and the prevention of maladministration in urban public service delivery.

The subjects of this study consist of public service users, public officials or administrative officers involved in public service delivery, and relevant supervisory institutions related to public service accountability. The data sources used in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained from observations and interviews with selected informants who have direct experience or knowledge of public service implementation in Medan City. Secondary data are obtained from laws and regulations, official documents, reports from public service supervisory institutions, books, journal articles, and other relevant legal materials. The main legal materials include Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services, Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration, and Law Number 37 of 2008 concerning the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia.

Data collection techniques are carried out through literature study, document study, observation, and interviews. Literature study is used to collect theories, concepts, and previous research findings related to public accountability, state administrative law, good governance, and maladministration prevention. Document study is conducted by reviewing laws and regulations, public service standards, institutional reports, and other official documents relevant to public service accountability. Observation is used to identify the practice of public service delivery and possible administrative problems in the field. Interviews are conducted with selected informants to obtain information regarding the implementation of accountability mechanisms, obstacles in public service delivery, complaint handling, and preventive efforts against maladministration.

The data analysis technique used in this study is qualitative descriptive analysis. The collected data are classified, reduced, interpreted, and analyzed based on the research focus. Normative legal data are analyzed by examining the consistency between legal provisions, state administrative law principles, and the actual practice of public service delivery. Empirical data are interpreted to identify patterns of accountability implementation, forms of maladministration, obstacles faced by public officials and service users, and preventive efforts that can be strengthened. The interpretation is carried out by connecting legal norms with field findings so that the study can provide a comprehensive explanation of public official accountability in preventing maladministration in public services in Medan City, North Sumatra.

## RESULTS

The results of this study show that the accountability of public officials is an important legal and administrative instrument in preventing maladministration in public services in Medan City, North Sumatra. Based on the analysis of legal norms, public service principles, and public administration practices, accountability is not only understood as the obligation of public officials to report and justify their actions, but also as a preventive mechanism to ensure that every administrative decision and public service action is carried out lawfully, transparently, fairly, and responsibly. In this context, public officials are required to exercise their authority in accordance with the principles of legality, public interest, proportionality, transparency, efficiency, and protection of citizens' rights.

The first finding indicates that maladministration in public services is closely related to weak procedural compliance. Public services that do not follow established standards may create

uncertainty for citizens and open opportunities for administrative irregularities. In several types of public services, such as population administration, licensing, health-related administration, and social service administration, citizens often face problems related to unclear service procedures, incomplete information, delays in completion, and inconsistent requirements. These conditions show that the existence of service standards alone is not sufficient if they are not implemented consistently by public officials. Therefore, procedural accountability becomes a key element in preventing maladministration.

The second finding shows that transparency in public service delivery still needs to be strengthened. Transparency is reflected in the availability of clear information regarding service requirements, processing time, fees, responsible officers, and complaint channels. When this information is not easily accessible, citizens may become dependent on informal explanations from officers, which can increase the risk of unequal treatment, illegal fees, and abuse of authority. In Medan City, transparency is particularly important because public services are provided to a large and diverse population with different levels of legal awareness and administrative literacy. Public officials must therefore ensure that service information is available, understandable, and consistently applied.

The third finding reveals that accountability is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of complaint-handling mechanisms. Public complaints are an important source of evaluation because they show whether services have been delivered in accordance with legal obligations and public expectations. However, complaint mechanisms are often ineffective when citizens do not know where to report, when reports are not followed up properly, or when there is no clear explanation regarding the resolution of complaints. This condition can weaken public trust in government institutions. Therefore, complaint handling must be placed as part of administrative accountability, not merely as a formal administrative facility.

The fourth finding indicates that supervision plays a central role in preventing maladministration. Internal supervision is needed to ensure that public officials comply with service standards, ethical obligations, and administrative procedures. External supervision, particularly through institutions such as the Ombudsman, is also important to provide an independent control mechanism over public service delivery. The existence of supervision can encourage public officials to act more carefully, prevent abuse of authority, and improve the quality of administrative decisions. However, supervision will not be effective if recommendations are not followed up or if public institutions do not build a culture of accountability within their administrative structure.

The fifth finding shows that maladministration may occur not only because of individual misconduct, but also because of institutional weaknesses. These weaknesses include limited human resources, lack of training, weak coordination between agencies, inadequate digital service systems, and bureaucratic culture that still prioritizes formality over service orientation. In some cases, public officials may understand the legal rules but face institutional constraints that make service delivery slow and inefficient. Therefore, preventing maladministration requires both individual accountability and institutional reform.

The sixth finding indicates that the principles of state administrative law provide a strong foundation for preventing maladministration. The principle of legality requires public officials to act based on valid authority and applicable regulations. The principle of legal certainty requires service procedures to be clear and predictable. The principle of equality requires citizens to receive fair and non-discriminatory treatment. The principle of carefulness requires officials to examine facts and documents properly before making administrative decisions. The principle of openness requires government institutions to provide access to information and allow public participation. These principles must be applied in daily public service practices, not only stated in formal regulations.

The seventh finding shows that digitalization can support accountability and reduce maladministration if implemented properly. Digital public services can reduce direct physical contact between citizens and officers, record service processes more transparently, and make it easier to monitor the progress of applications. However, digitalization also creates new challenges, such as unequal digital literacy, limited access to technology, system errors, and the need for data protection. Therefore, digital public services must be accompanied by clear procedures, assistance for citizens who need help, and strong supervision to ensure that technology supports justice and accessibility.

The eighth finding shows that public legal awareness also affects the prevention of maladministration. Citizens who understand service standards, their rights as service users, and

available complaint mechanisms are more likely to question irregular procedures and report improper administrative conduct. On the other hand, citizens with limited legal and administrative knowledge may accept delays, unclear requirements, or unfair treatment as normal bureaucratic practices. Therefore, public education regarding service rights and complaint mechanisms is necessary to strengthen community participation in preventing maladministration.

Overall, the findings show that accountability of public officials in Medan City must be strengthened through procedural compliance, transparency, effective complaint handling, internal and external supervision, institutional capacity building, digital service improvement, and public legal awareness. The prevention of maladministration cannot rely solely on sanctions after violations occur. It must be developed through preventive administrative mechanisms that ensure public officials work according to law, ethics, and public service standards. Thus, accountability in state administrative law functions not only as a form of responsibility, but also as a practical instrument to create fair, responsive, and trustworthy public services in Medan City, North Sumatra.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the accountability of public officials is a central element in preventing maladministration in public services in Medan City, North Sumatra. This finding is consistent with the concept of state administrative law, which places public officials as holders of public authority who must act based on law, public interest, and the principles of good governance. Accountability in this context is not only a moral obligation, but also a legal responsibility attached to every administrative action, decision, and service provided to the community. Therefore, when public officials fail to provide services in accordance with legal standards, such failure may be interpreted as an indication of weak administrative accountability.

The first focus of this study concerns the legal accountability of public officials. The results show that public officials must be accountable for the use of authority in public service delivery. This is in line with the principle of legality in state administrative law, which requires every government action to have a valid legal basis. Law Number 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration emphasizes that government officials must exercise authority properly and are prohibited from abusing authority. In practice, this means that officials in Medan City must ensure that every administrative service, such as licensing, population administration, and social service administration, is carried out based on clear procedures and lawful authority. When officials act beyond their authority, delay services without valid reasons, or apply different treatment to citizens, such conduct may constitute maladministration.

The second focus is the implementation of public service standards. The findings show that maladministration often occurs when service procedures, requirements, time limits, and costs are not applied consistently. This condition is contrary to Law Number 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services, which requires public service providers to establish and implement service standards. Theoretically, service standards function as a legal and administrative guideline to ensure certainty, equality, and predictability in public services. However, the results show that the existence of service standards does not automatically prevent maladministration if public officials do not apply them consistently. Therefore, public service standards must not only be formally available, but must also be actively implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

The third focus is transparency in public services. The findings indicate that limited transparency may create opportunities for maladministration, especially in the form of unclear procedures, informal payments, and unequal access to information. This finding supports the theory of good governance, which places transparency as one of the main principles of accountable public administration. Transparency allows citizens to know their rights, understand service procedures, and monitor whether officials are working according to the rules. In Medan City, where public service users come from diverse social, educational, and economic backgrounds, transparency becomes very important. Clear information regarding requirements, fees, processing time, and complaint channels must be provided in accessible language and through both offline and digital media.

The fourth focus is responsiveness and complaint handling. The results show that complaint mechanisms are essential to prevent and correct maladministration. Public complaints are not only expressions of dissatisfaction, but also important indicators of service failure. This is relevant to Law

Number 37 of 2008 concerning the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, which gives the Ombudsman authority to supervise public service delivery and handle reports of maladministration. From the perspective of administrative law, complaint handling is part of the protection of citizens' rights against improper government actions. However, the findings also show that complaint mechanisms may become ineffective if reports are not followed up, if citizens do not receive clear responses, or if institutions treat complaints only as administrative formalities. Therefore, every complaint must be recorded, verified, followed up, and used as material for service improvement.

The fifth focus is supervision. The findings show that both internal and external supervision are needed to prevent maladministration. Internal supervision is carried out within government institutions to ensure that public officials comply with service standards and administrative procedures. External supervision is carried out by independent institutions, including the Ombudsman, to ensure that citizens have access to neutral complaint resolution. This is consistent with the theory of checks and balances in public administration, where supervision functions to limit the possibility of abuse of authority. In the context of Medan City, supervision must be strengthened because public services involve many agencies and a large number of citizens. Weak supervision may cause procedural violations to be repeated and accepted as normal bureaucratic practice.

The sixth focus is institutional capacity. The results show that maladministration is not always caused by intentional misconduct by individual officials. It may also be caused by institutional weaknesses, such as limited human resources, inadequate training, weak coordination, poor digital infrastructure, and bureaucratic culture that is not service-oriented. This finding is important because it shows that accountability must be understood at both individual and institutional levels. Individual accountability requires public officials to act professionally and responsibly, while institutional accountability requires government agencies to provide adequate systems, clear procedures, training, and supervision. Without institutional support, public officials may face difficulties in providing fast, fair, and effective services.

The seventh focus is digitalization of public services. The findings show that digitalization can support accountability by making service processes more traceable, reducing direct contact between officers and service users, and improving access to information. This is consistent with the concept of modern public administration, which views digital governance as a tool to improve efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness. However, digitalization is not a complete solution if it is not supported by digital literacy, reliable systems, and assistance for citizens who have difficulty accessing online services. In Medan City, digital public services must be designed inclusively so that they do not create new forms of administrative exclusion for elderly citizens, low-income communities, or citizens with limited access to technology.

The eighth focus is public legal awareness. The findings show that citizens' understanding of their rights as service users affects the prevention of maladministration. Citizens who understand service standards and complaint mechanisms are more likely to identify irregularities and demand accountability from public officials. This supports the idea that public participation is an important part of good governance. State administrative law does not only regulate the relationship between government institutions, but also protects citizens from arbitrary administrative actions. Therefore, public education regarding service rights, complaint procedures, and legal protection mechanisms must be strengthened in Medan City.

The discussion also shows that the prevention of maladministration must be carried out through preventive rather than merely repressive measures. Sanctions are important when violations occur, but prevention is more effective in improving public service quality. Preventive efforts include improving service standards, increasing transparency, strengthening complaint systems, conducting regular supervision, training public officials, improving digital services, and educating citizens. These efforts are consistent with the purpose of state administrative law, namely to ensure that government authority is exercised lawfully, fairly, carefully, and in the public interest.

Overall, the findings confirm that public official accountability in Medan City must be strengthened through the integration of legal norms, administrative procedures, institutional supervision, and public participation. The implementation of Law Number 25 of 2009, Law Number 30 of 2014, and Law Number 37 of 2008 provides a strong legal foundation for preventing maladministration. However, the effectiveness of these regulations depends on the commitment of public officials and government institutions to apply them in daily public service practices. Therefore,

accountability should not be understood only as a formal obligation, but as a practical mechanism to ensure that public services are transparent, responsive, fair, and legally accountable.

## CONCLUSION

Public official accountability in the perspective of state administrative law is a fundamental mechanism for ensuring that governmental authority is exercised lawfully, responsibly, and in accordance with the principles of good governance. Accountability does not only refer to the obligation of public officials to justify their actions after an administrative error occurs, but also functions as a preventive legal instrument to control the use of authority, protect citizens' rights, and maintain public trust in government administration.

The prevention of maladministration requires the consistent implementation of legality, transparency, equality, carefulness, responsiveness, and public interest principles in public service delivery. These principles provide the normative foundation for public officials to act within legal boundaries, apply service procedures consistently, provide clear information, respond to public complaints, and avoid abuse of authority. Therefore, maladministration can be minimized when administrative actions are guided by clear legal norms, ethical responsibility, and institutional supervision.

From the perspective of public service governance, maladministration is not only caused by individual misconduct, but also by weak administrative systems, limited institutional capacity, ineffective supervision, and low public participation. This means that public accountability must be developed at both individual and institutional levels. Public officials must be professionally responsible for their administrative actions, while government institutions must provide transparent procedures, effective complaint mechanisms, adequate resources, and a service-oriented bureaucratic culture.

In conclusion, strengthening public official accountability in Medan City, North Sumatra, is an important effort to prevent maladministration and improve the quality of public services. Accountability must be understood as an integrated legal-administrative concept that connects authority, responsibility, supervision, transparency, and public participation. Through this approach, public services can become more fair, responsive, transparent, and legally accountable.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Theoretically, future studies should further develop the concept of public official accountability by integrating state administrative law, good governance theory, and public service management. This integration is important because maladministration is not only a legal issue, but also an administrative and institutional governance problem. Further research may also compare accountability practices in different cities or provinces to obtain a broader understanding of how administrative law principles are implemented in various local government contexts.

Practically, the Medan City Government needs to strengthen the implementation of public service standards in all service units. Service requirements, procedures, costs, processing time, responsible officers, and complaint channels should be clearly published and consistently applied. This recommendation is important to reduce uncertainty, prevent unequal treatment, and ensure that citizens receive services based on legal certainty and fairness.

Public service institutions should also improve complaint-handling mechanisms. Complaints from citizens must be treated as part of administrative accountability and service evaluation, not merely as formal reports. Each complaint should be recorded, verified, followed up, and communicated transparently to the complainant. An effective complaint system can strengthen public trust and provide early detection of maladministration.

Internal and external supervision should be strengthened to ensure that public officials comply with legal norms and service standards. Internal supervision must be carried out regularly by government institutions, while external supervision by independent bodies, including the Ombudsman, should be supported through institutional cooperation and follow-up of recommendations. Strong supervision can prevent abuse of authority, delay, negligence, and procedural irregularities.

The development of digital public services should be continued as an effort to improve transparency, efficiency, and accountability. However, digitalization must be inclusive and accompanied by public assistance, especially for citizens with limited digital literacy or limited access to technology. Digital systems should not only accelerate services, but also create traceable administrative processes that can be monitored and evaluated.

Finally, public legal awareness should be improved through education and socialization regarding citizens' rights in public services, service standards, and complaint mechanisms. Citizens who understand their rights are more capable of participating in the prevention of maladministration. Therefore, cooperation between local government, educational institutions, civil society, and supervisory institutions is needed to build a more accountable and service-oriented public administration system in Medan City.

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