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Strengthening the Capacity of the Village Consultative Body (Bamuskal) in Village Head Elections Amid Digital Transformation: A Good Governance and Public Accountability Perspective

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ABSTRACT: Village head elections play a central role in strengthening local democracy by ensuring that leadership succession processes are conducted in a participatory, transparent, and accountable manner. In the Special Region of Yogyakarta, the Village Consultative Body (Bamuskal) serves as a representative institution responsible for channeling community aspirations, overseeing local governance, and safeguarding the integrity of village head elections. Despite its strategic role, Bamuskal continues to face institutional challenges related to technical competence, regulatory understanding, oversight effectiveness, and adaptation to digital governance practices. This study examines Bamuskal's capacity in village head elections and explores capacity-strengthening strategies from the perspectives of good governance and public accountability. A qualitative case study approach was employed in several kalurahan in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis and were analyzed using an interactive qualitative framework. The findings indicate that Bamuskal's capacity remains uneven across regulatory, operational, and human resource dimensions, limiting its ability to consistently promote transparency, participation, and accountability throughout the election process. The study further shows that strengthening institutional capacity requires not only continuous technical training and regulatory support but also the development of digital literacy, participatory oversight mechanisms, and institutional independence. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for improving the quality of village head elections and for fostering more democratic and accountable local governance in the era of digital transformation.

KEYWORDS: digital transformation; institutional capacity; local electoral governance; participatory oversight; rural governance

INTRODUCTION

Village head elections are an important part of local democracy at the kalurahan level. In the context of decentralization and regional autonomy, these elections are not only a mechanism for leadership succession. They also reflect how local governance is practiced through participation, transparency, and accountability. In the Special Region of Yogyakarta, villages are officially referred to as kalurahan, while the Village Consultative Body is known as Badan Permusyawaratan Kalurahan or Bamuskal. As a representative institution, Bamuskal has a strategic role in channeling community aspirations, supervising kalurahan governance, and helping ensure that village head elections follow the principles of good governance.

In practice, however, this role is not always easy to perform. Local representative institutions often face limitations in technical competence, regulatory understanding, organizational support, and independence in carrying out oversight functions. These limitations may weaken transparency and public accountability during election stages. They may also create space for conflicts of interest, procedural participation, and weak public legitimacy. For this reason, strengthening Bamuskal capacity is not merely an administrative matter. It is closely related to the quality of local democracy and the credibility of village head elections.

At the same time, local governance is gradually entering a more digital environment. Digital transformation has begun to influence public information, service delivery, and citizen participation, although its implementation at the village level remains uneven. Digital technology can help local governments provide wider access to information and open new channels for interaction between citizens and public institutions. However, this potential does not automatically produce better governance. In rural and village-level contexts, digital transformation is often constrained by infrastructure, digital literacy, organizational readiness, and institutional capacity (Busco et al., 2025; Nciweni et al., 2023; Ndzabela

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et al., 2025). Therefore, digital transformation in this study is understood as a changing governance context that Bamuskal needs to anticipate, not as a fully established practice in village head elections.

This changing context also includes the growing discussion of artificial intelligence in public administration. At the village level, AI is not yet a common practice and should not be treated as a direct answer to institutional problems. Its relevance in this study is limited and anticipatory. Previous studies suggest that AI-related awareness, data governance, and digital ethics can support institutional readiness before advanced technologies are widely adopted, especially when public institutions still face limited internal expertise and governance capacity (McBride et al., 2021; Sobrino-García, 2021). For Bamuskal, this means that capacity strengthening should remain grounded in basic institutional needs, especially regulatory understanding, oversight competence, independence, and public accountability, while also being aware of broader digital governance developments.

Digital participation also needs to be understood carefully. Digital media and online platforms may help citizens access election-related information, express aspirations, and monitor public processes. In village head elections, these tools could support openness when used to document election stages, disseminate information, and collect public feedback. However, their contribution depends on social and institutional conditions. Unequal access, weak digital skills, low trust, and data security concerns may limit the role of digital technology in strengthening local democracy (Hossain, 2021; Nkgapele, 2024; Touchton et al., 2023). Thus, digital participation should complement, not replace, institutional accountability and direct community engagement.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of this study. It illustrates the relationship between Bamuskal capacity strengthening, good governance principles, and public accountability in village head elections within the broader context of digital governance. The figure does not suggest that digital technology or artificial intelligence has been fully implemented in village head elections. Rather, digital governance and AI-related awareness are positioned as emerging contextual factors that may influence how local institutions adapt, communicate, and perform oversight functions. The main empirical focus of this study remains on institutional capacity, good governance, and public accountability.

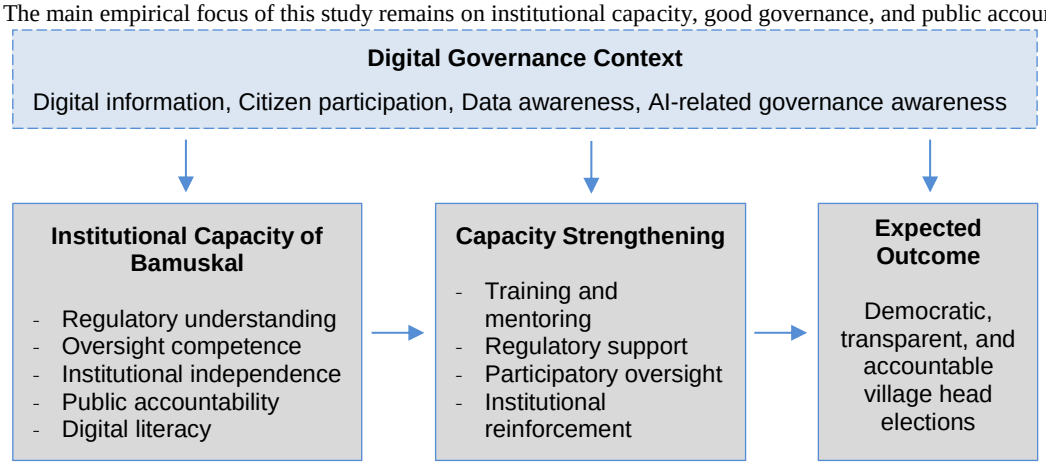


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Bamuskal Capacity Strengthening for Good Governance and Public Accountability in Village Head Elections within the Context of Digital Governance

Theoretically, good governance emphasizes transparency, accountability, participation, effectiveness, and the rule of law in public administration. The United Nations Development Programme identifies participation, transparency, responsiveness, equity, effectiveness, efficiency, and accountability as key principles of good governance (UNDP, 1997). Governance quality, however, is not only determined by formal rules. It also depends on institutional capacity to implement policies consistently and with integrity (OECD, 2016). Public accountability requires public actors to explain and justify their actions to the public. Bovens (2007) defines accountability as a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor is obliged to explain and justify conduct and may face consequences. In village head elections, Bamuskal is expected to function as part of the accountability mechanism that connects community interests with formal governance processes.

Institutional capacity is also central to understanding the effectiveness of Bamuskal. Grindle (2004) explains that institutional capacity includes an organization's ability to manage resources, perform tasks, and adapt to environmental changes. Capacity building should therefore include individual competence, organizational systems, regulatory support, and adaptive capacity. In the case of Bamuskal, this capacity includes regulatory comprehension, technical oversight skills, integrity, independence, and the ability to manage public information in a more open and accessible way. As local governance gradually becomes more influenced by digital communication, digital literacy becomes a relevant supporting capacity, although it should remain connected to the institution's primary oversight function (Hernández-Bonivento, 2024).

Previous studies have discussed the role of village representative bodies in local governance, particularly in oversight and legislative functions. However, studies that specifically examine the institutional capacity of Bamuskal in village head elections from the perspectives of good governance and public accountability remain limited. Research that places Bamuskal capacity within the broader context of digital governance is also still underdeveloped. Existing studies have not sufficiently integrated institutional, regulatory, human resource, implementation, and digital adaptation dimensions in analyzing the role of Bamuskal in local electoral governance.

Based on this gap, this study aims to analyze the capacity of Bamuskal in village head elections and identify factors that support its effectiveness in promoting good governance and public accountability. This study also seeks to formulate contextual and applicable strategies for strengthening Bamuskal in accordance with the characteristics of kalurahan governance in the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The contribution of this study lies in its effort to explain Bamuskal capacity not only as a matter of formal authority, but also as a practical issue involving regulatory

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understanding, oversight competence, institutional independence, and public accountability. By placing these issues within the broader context of digital governance, this study offers a more contextual reading of village head elections without overstating the current use of advanced technologies at the village level.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Study Area

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine the institutional capacity of Bamuskal in village head elections. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth understanding of institutional practices, governance processes, and social interactions within their specific context (Abdillah et al., 2025). The research was conducted in Kapanewon Sewon, Bantul Regency, Special Region of Yogyakarta, from January to May 2026. The study focused on four kalurahan, namely Panggungharjo, Timbulharjo, Pendowoharjo, and Bangunharjo. These locations were selected purposively based on their relevance to the implementation or preparation of village head elections and their suitability for examining the role of Bamuskal in local electoral governance.

Research Focus and Data Sources

The study focused on four interrelated aspects: Bamuskal's institutional capacity, its role throughout the stages of village head elections, the application of good governance and public accountability principles, and efforts to strengthen institutional capacity. Data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants, while secondary data were collected from official documents, including regional regulations, regent regulations, election reports, meeting minutes, and other documents related to village head elections.

Informants and Sampling Technique

Informants were selected using purposive sampling by considering their involvement in the election process and their knowledge of Bamuskal's functions and responsibilities. A total of 21 informants participated in the study, comprising Bamuskal members from the four selected kalurahan, village head election committee members, kalurahan government officials, and community leaders. The inclusion of these actors was intended to capture multiple perspectives regarding the governance and oversight of village head elections.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Interviews were used to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and views regarding Bamuskal's role in village head elections. Observation was undertaken to understand institutional interactions and governance practices related to the election process. Document analysis complemented the primary data by examining regulatory frameworks, administrative records, and other supporting documents relevant to Bamuskal and village head elections.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles et al. (2014), which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, organizing, and focusing information relevant to the research objectives. Data display was carried out through descriptive narratives and analytical matrices to identify patterns and relationships across cases. Conclusions were drawn iteratively throughout the analysis process and continuously verified against the collected data. The stages of this analytical process are presented in Figure 2.

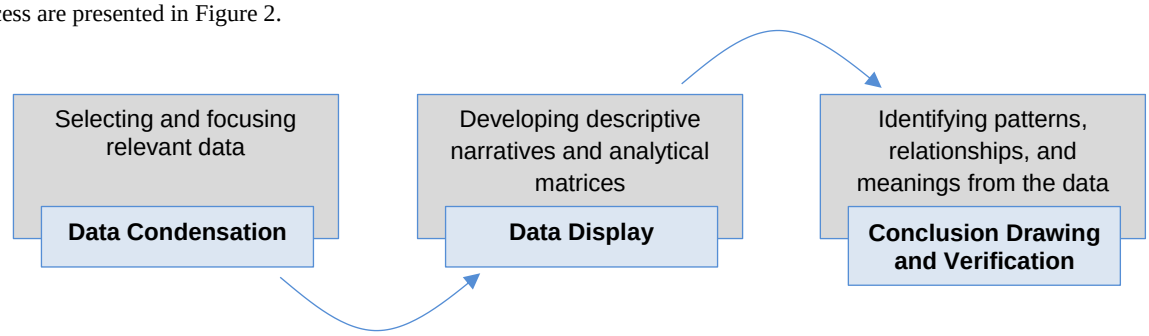


Figure 2. Stages of Data Analysis

Validity and Trustworthiness

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study applied triangulation techniques. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from different categories of informants and across the four kalurahan. Method triangulation was undertaken by comparing evidence derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Time triangulation was applied by collecting and reviewing information at different stages of the research period to assess data consistency. The analysis was informed by perspectives on institutional capacity, good governance, and public accountability, while digital governance was considered as a contextual dimension in discussing future institutional capacity development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that Bamuskal's institutional capacity in village head elections remains uneven and has not yet fully supported transparent, participatory, and accountable electoral governance. This condition appears in several interrelated dimensions, namely human resource capacity, regulatory understanding, operational support, public accountability, institutional independence, and the ability to adapt to a changing digital governance context. These findings indicate that the effectiveness of Bamuskal is not determined only by its formal position within kalurahan

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governance. It is also shaped by practical competence, access to information, coordination among actors, and the ability to translate formal rules into effective oversight practices. This section presents the findings and discusses them in relation to institutional capacity, good governance, public accountability, collaborative governance, and digital governance perspectives.

1. Institutional Capacity of Bamuskal in Village Head Elections

The first important finding concerns Bamuskal's institutional capacity in carrying out its role during village head elections. From the human resource dimension, some Bamuskal members still have limited understanding of technical regulations related to election stages, oversight mechanisms, and procedures for handling potential disputes. This limitation affects their confidence and ability to perform supervisory functions effectively. In several cases, Bamuskal's role tends to remain administrative rather than substantive because members do not always have adequate technical knowledge to assess whether each stage of the election has been implemented properly.

This finding confirms that capacity strengthening cannot be reduced to the existence of formal authority. Bamuskal may have a formal mandate to oversee kalurahan governance, but this mandate needs to be supported by practical knowledge, procedural clarity, and institutional confidence. Grindle (2004) explains that institutional capacity includes the ability of an organization to manage resources, perform tasks, and adapt to changing environments. In the case of Bamuskal, this means that formal authority must be accompanied by regulatory comprehension, operational support, and the ability to communicate public information transparently.

From the regulatory dimension, the findings indicate that the availability of regional regulations and technical guidelines does not automatically guarantee effective implementation. Although formal rules exist, Bamuskal members still face difficulties in understanding and applying them in a systematic manner. This condition reflects an implementation gap between normative regulation and practical governance. The issue becomes more complex when local regulations and technical procedures are not sufficiently operational or are not fully understood by local actors. As a result, Bamuskal's capacity to supervise the election process depends not only on the presence of regulations, but also on how far those regulations are communicated, internalized, and supported through technical guidance.

The operational dimension also affects Bamuskal's performance. Limited facilities, budgetary support, and coordination among actors influence the institution's ability to oversee village head elections. In practice, oversight requires access to information, administrative support, documentation, and clear communication with election committees and kalurahan government officials. When these supporting conditions are weak, Bamuskal's role can become less effective. This finding is consistent with studies showing that institutional capacity in local governance is increasingly related to the ability to manage information, communicate openly, and adapt to digital governance demands, although digital tools should remain supporting instruments rather than automatic solutions (Alexander & Fernandez, 2020; Hernández-Bonivento, 2024; Y. Seo, 2024).

2. Implementation of Good Governance Principles in Village Head Elections

The second finding relates to the implementation of good governance principles in village head elections. The study found that transparency, participation, and accountability have not been fully internalized across all stages of the election process. This shows that good governance still functions more as a normative reference than as a consistently practiced principle in local electoral governance. The UNDP (1997) places transparency, participation, responsiveness, effectiveness, and accountability as core principles of good governance. However, the findings of this study show that these principles require institutional capacity before they can become concrete practices at the kalurahan level.

Transparency

In terms of transparency, information related to candidate selection, screening procedures, assessment criteria, and evaluation results has not always been presented in a communicative and accessible manner. Information is often available administratively, but it is not always delivered in a way that enables citizens to understand the process clearly. This suggests that transparency should not be interpreted merely as the availability of documents. It also requires understandable communication, timely information, and accessible channels through which citizens can follow the election process.

The empirical findings support the argument that transparency depends on both institutional willingness and communication capacity. Digital media may support transparency by helping local institutions disseminate information more widely. However, the findings also suggest that digital technology cannot replace institutional commitment to openness. Online information systems or digital documentation will only strengthen transparency when they are supported by clear procedures, credible actors, and public trust. This is in line with studies showing that digital platforms and online public information systems can strengthen transparency only when local institutions have adequate governance capacity (Elayah, 2025; Safarov, 2023). In this study, the main issue is not the absence of technology alone, but the limited ability of local institutions to communicate election information in a more public-oriented way.

Participation

In terms of participation, community involvement in village head elections remains largely procedural. Citizens are usually involved during voting, but their role in planning, monitoring, and evaluating the election process is still limited. This condition is consistent with recent work emphasizing that participation in the digital era should not be limited to formal electoral involvement, but should also include broader public engagement in democratic processes (Muhammad et al., 2025). This shows that participation has not yet become a fully substantive practice. In a democratic local governance system, participation should not only be understood as voter turnout. It should also include opportunities for citizens to access information, monitor procedures, express concerns, and evaluate whether the election process is fair and accountable.

Digital participation may create additional channels for community involvement, such as online information sharing, public consultation, or complaint reporting. Yet its effectiveness depends on digital literacy, equal access, public trust, and the ability of institutions to respond to citizen input (H. Seo & Myeong, 2022; Wardani et al., 2025). These studies help explain why digital participation cannot be separated from local institutional capacity. In the context of kalurahan governance, face-to-face deliberation, community meetings, and informal local communication remain important because they are closely connected to local trust and social legitimacy. Thus, digital participation should complement direct public engagement rather than replace it.

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Accountability

Accountability is another dimension that remains weak. The findings show that accountability mechanisms, particularly in relation to election committee reporting and financial accountability, have not operated optimally. Bamuskal has not fully been able to ensure transparent reporting and open evaluation mechanisms. This condition weakens public accountability because citizens cannot easily assess whether the process has been conducted properly.

From the perspective of public accountability, oversight institutions should be able to request explanations, assess actions, and ensure follow-up when irregularities occur. Bovens (2007) defines accountability as a relationship between an actor and a forum in which the actor is required to explain and justify conduct, while the forum may question and evaluate that conduct. In this study, Bamuskal is expected to act as part of the local accountability forum. However, its ability to perform this function remains constrained by institutional position, political dynamics, and limited technical capacity. This finding shows that accountability is not only a matter of reporting documents. It also requires authority, courage, institutional support, and a clear mechanism for corrective action.

3. Bamuskal as a Local Accountability Forum

The third finding concerns Bamuskal's role as an accountability forum. Ideally, Bamuskal should connect the kalurahan government, the election committee, and the community. However, the findings indicate that this role has not always been accepted smoothly by other actors. In some cases, Bamuskal is perceived as a rival rather than a partner in governance. This perception affects the willingness of election committees or local officials to provide information openly. The problem is not only technical, but also relational. Oversight requires trust, institutional clarity, and shared understanding among actors. When Bamuskal's position is politically sensitive or poorly understood, its ability to demand accountability becomes weaker.

This condition can be understood through Bovens' accountability framework, which emphasizes the relationship between an actor and a forum. Accountability requires actors to explain and justify their conduct, while the forum has the authority to question, assess, and impose consequences when needed (Bovens, 2007; Bovens et al., 2014). In the case of village head elections, Bamuskal should function as a local accountability forum. However, the findings suggest that its forum role is not yet strong enough, either institutionally or politically. The functions of answerability and enforcement remain limited. Bamuskal can ask for information, but it does not always have sufficient authority, support, or independence to ensure follow-up.

Local socio-political dynamics also influence Bamuskal's independence. Personal relationships among actors, local political interests, and potential conflicts of interest may affect how oversight is conducted. This shows that accountability is not only a matter of formal institutional design. It is also shaped by social relations, power dynamics, and the courage of local institutions to act objectively. In collaborative settings, accountability can be strengthened through shared governance arrangements, but it may also create new accountability challenges when roles and responsibilities are unclear (Sánchez-Soriano et al., 2024; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). This insight is relevant to Bamuskal because its oversight role depends on both institutional authority and the willingness of other actors to engage in accountable governance.

4. Strategies for Strengthening Bamuskal Capacity

The fourth finding relates to strategies for strengthening Bamuskal capacity. Based on the empirical findings and theoretical analysis, capacity strengthening needs to be conducted through an integrated and sustainable approach. The proposed strategies are not derived from theory alone. They are formulated from the main capacity problems identified in the field and interpreted through institutional capacity, good governance, public accountability, collaborative governance, and digital governance perspectives.

Human Resource Development

First, human resource capacity should be improved through technical training and continuous mentoring. Training should focus on election regulations, oversight techniques, public accountability, and good governance principles. It should also include basic digital literacy, particularly in relation to information management and public communication. This does not mean that Bamuskal must immediately adopt advanced technologies. Rather, it means that Bamuskal needs sufficient capacity to understand and use available tools responsibly in supporting its oversight function.

Human resource development should also be designed as a continuous process. One-time training is often insufficient because election regulations, administrative procedures, and governance challenges may change over time. Mentoring, peer learning among kalurahan, and practical simulations of election oversight can help Bamuskal members translate formal knowledge into actual practice. This is consistent with the idea that capacity development should strengthen not only individual skills, but also institutional ability to respond to governance challenges over time (Grindle, 2004; OECD, 2016). In this study, the need for training emerges directly from the finding that some Bamuskal members still face difficulties in understanding technical regulations and oversight procedures.

Regulatory Strengthening

Second, regulations and technical guidelines need to be strengthened. Formal rules should be translated into operational guidance that can be understood by Bamuskal members and other local actors. Clearer guidance is important to reduce interpretation gaps and prevent inconsistent practices. Regulatory strengthening should also clarify the role of Bamuskal in each stage of the election process, including access to information, reporting mechanisms, and procedures for responding to irregularities. Without clear technical guidance, Bamuskal may continue to face uncertainty in performing its oversight role.

Regulatory strengthening is also needed to reduce dependency on personal interpretation. When rules are unclear, the quality of oversight may depend too much on the experience or confidence of individual Bamuskal members. Clearer operational guidelines can help create a more predictable and accountable process. They can also reduce tension between Bamuskal, election committees, and kalurahan officials because each actor understands their role and responsibility more clearly. This finding supports OECD's (2016) view that governance quality is not determined only by formal rules, but also by institutional capacity to implement those rules consistently and with integrity.

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Participatory Oversight

Third, participatory oversight should be developed by involving citizens more meaningfully in monitoring and evaluation. Community involvement can strengthen the legitimacy of village head elections because it allows citizens to become part of the accountability process. Participatory oversight does not have to rely only on digital platforms. It can also be built through public forums, community meetings, complaint channels, and open documentation. However, in a digital governance context, online media and digital documentation may support wider access when they are used carefully and inclusively.

This approach is consistent with collaborative governance, which emphasizes interaction among public institutions, non-state actors, and citizens in addressing public problems (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). The empirical findings show that public involvement in village head elections is still largely procedural. Therefore, participatory oversight is proposed as a way to move participation from voting-centered involvement toward broader public monitoring. Studies on digital participation and participatory platforms also show that technology can expand civic involvement when it is supported by institutional responsiveness and clear governance arrangements (Borge et al., 2023; Menéndez-Blanco & Bjørn, 2022). In this study, participatory oversight is not treated as a purely digital mechanism. It is understood as a governance practice that can combine direct community engagement with appropriate information channels.

Institutional Independence and Information Management

Fourth, Bamuskal's institutional independence should be strengthened. Independence is needed so that oversight can be conducted objectively and professionally. This requires clearer institutional boundaries, protection from local political intervention, and stronger recognition of Bamuskal's oversight function. In addition, information management should be improved to support transparency and accountability. Digital documentation, public information media, or simple reporting systems may help strengthen openness, but only when they are accompanied by institutional readiness and clear control mechanisms.

The findings show that Bamuskal's oversight role may be weakened by local socio-political relations and the perception that Bamuskal is a rival rather than a governance partner. This is why independence and information management need to be addressed together. Reliable information management can support oversight, while institutional independence helps ensure that the information is used objectively. This is consistent with recent studies showing that technology-supported analysis requires not only technical adoption, but also institutional awareness, data interpretation capacity, and ethical sensitivity in using technology responsibly (Utami et al., 2025). In a similar direction, studies on AI procurement and public-sector digital readiness show that internal expertise and data governance capacity are important prerequisites before advanced technologies can be used effectively (McBride et al., 2021). Therefore, digital governance should be treated as part of institutional strengthening, not as a substitute for it.

Institutional independence also needs cultural support. In local governance, formal authority can be weakened when social pressure, personal relations, or political interests influence institutional behavior. Bamuskal therefore needs both formal protection and internal integrity. The ability to maintain a professional distance from competing interests is important to ensure that oversight is not captured by local political dynamics. This is especially relevant in village head elections, where personal networks and community relations often shape the political environment.

Table 1. Strategies for Strengthening Bamuskal Capacity in Village Head Elections in the Digital Transformation Era

Capacity Dimension	Main Problem	Strengthening Strategy	Governance Orientation
Human resources	Limited understanding of election regulations and technical procedures	Technical training and continuous mentoring	Good governance
Institutional digital literacy	Limited capacity to adapt to technology and manage public information	Digital literacy training and public information management	Digital governance
Transparency	Election information is not yet communicative and openly accessible	Development of information media and digital documentation	Public transparency
Community participation	Public involvement remains procedural	Participatory oversight and public communication	Collaborative governance
Accountability	Reporting and evaluation mechanisms are not yet optimal	Open monitoring and reporting systems	Public accountability
Institutional regulation	Technical guidelines are not fully synchronized and operational	Regulatory harmonization and strengthened technical guidelines	Institutional strengthening
Institutional independence	Potential conflicts of interest and local political intervention	Clarification of functions and protection of Bamuskal independence	Local democracy

Source: *Processed data, 2026.*

Table 1 is developed from the empirical findings of this study and supported by relevant governance literature. It links the main capacity problems identified in the field with practical strengthening strategies and their governance orientations. The table shows that strengthening Bamuskal capacity requires more than technical training. It also involves transparency, participatory oversight, accountability mechanisms, regulatory harmonization, institutional independence, and digital literacy. These dimensions are interconnected. Weak regulatory understanding

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may affect oversight competence. Weak independence may reduce accountability. Limited digital literacy may restrict the ability to manage information openly. Therefore, capacity strengthening should be designed as an integrated process rather than a set of separate activities.

The logic of Table 1 is consistent with institutional capacity and collaborative governance perspectives. Institutional capacity explains why Bamuskal needs skills, systems, and operational support to perform its formal role (Grindle, 2004; OECD, 2016). Collaborative governance explains why oversight needs interaction among Bamuskal, election committees, kalurahan government, and citizens rather than relying on one actor alone ((Ansell & Gash, 2008; Sørensen & Torfing, 2021). Public accountability explains why reporting, monitoring, and evaluation must be made clearer and more open to the community (Bovens, 2007). Thus, Table 1 should be read as a synthesis of field findings and theoretical interpretation, not merely as a normative list of recommendations.

The relationship among these dimensions is presented in Figure 3. The figure positions Bamuskal capacity strengthening as a multidimensional process that connects human resource capacity, regulatory strengthening, institutional independence, digital literacy, information transparency, and participatory oversight. These dimensions are directed toward the implementation of good governance principles, particularly transparency, participation, and accountability, and ultimately toward strengthening local democracy at the kalurahan level.

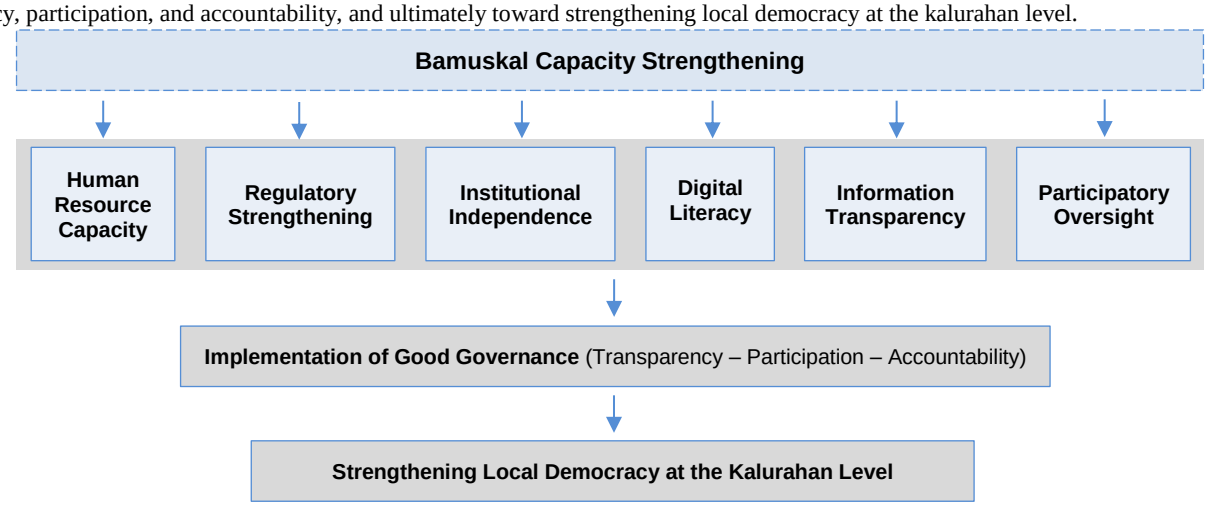


Figure 3. Model of Bamuskal Capacity Strengthening in Village Head Elections in the Digital Transformation Era

Figure 3 presents the proposed model of Bamuskal capacity strengthening. The model is derived from the empirical patterns found in this study and informed by institutional capacity, good governance, public accountability, collaborative governance, and digital governance perspectives. It should be read as an analytical model for capacity strengthening, not as evidence that digital transformation has been fully implemented in village head elections. The model emphasizes that strengthening Bamuskal is not only about improving institutional capacity in a narrow sense. It also requires strengthening the governance environment in which Bamuskal performs its role.

Transparency, participation, and accountability cannot be achieved if Bamuskal lacks regulatory understanding, independence, and operational support. At the same time, digital literacy becomes increasingly relevant because local governance is gradually influenced by public information systems, digital communication, and citizen participation channels. However, digital governance in this model remains contextual. It supports the need for better information management and responsible use of technology, but it does not replace the core institutional requirements of oversight competence, regulatory clarity, and accountability.

5. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study confirms that institutional capacity is a key factor in bridging the gap between good governance norms and local implementation. Good governance principles may remain abstract if local institutions do not have the capacity to apply them in concrete administrative and political settings. Governance quality is therefore not only determined by the existence of formal rules, but also by institutional capacity to implement those rules consistently and with integrity (OECD, 2016; UNDP, 1997). Public accountability also depends not only on institutional design, but also on the ability of actors to demand explanations, evaluate actions, and maintain independence in a complex local political environment.

The findings also support the conceptual position presented earlier in Figure 1. Bamuskal capacity strengthening should be understood within a broader governance context, including digital governance, but the empirical core remains institutional capacity, good governance, and public accountability. This means that digital governance is not treated as a separate object of investigation. It is a contextual factor that helps explain why Bamuskal capacity strengthening needs to include public information management, digital literacy, and responsible communication practices. In this sense, awareness of digital governance and AI-related issues is relevant for institutional readiness, especially because public institutions often need governance capacity, internal expertise, and data awareness before adopting more advanced technologies (Hernández-Bonivento, 2024; McBride et al., 2021).

Practically, the findings suggest that local governments need to give more attention to Bamuskal as a strategic actor in local democracy. Strengthening Bamuskal should include technical training, clearer regulations, better information systems, participatory oversight mechanisms, and protection of institutional independence. These efforts are important to ensure that village head elections are not only procedurally valid, but also substantively democratic, transparent, and accountable. In the future, capacity strengthening should also consider the gradual development of digital governance, especially in relation to public information, citizen participation, and responsible use of technology in local public administration.

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CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The findings show that Bamuskal's capacity in village head elections remains limited in terms of human resources, regulatory understanding, operational support, and oversight functions. These limitations affect the consistent implementation of good governance principles, particularly transparency, participation, and public accountability. The study also shows that institutional capacity strengthening is no longer only related to administrative and regulatory aspects, but also to the ability of local institutions to respond to digital governance developments. Theoretically, this study confirms that institutional capacity is a key factor in bridging the gap between good governance norms and local implementation. Weak Bamuskal capacity also affects public accountability, especially in the aspects of answerability and enforcement. In contemporary local governance, institutional strengthening needs to include openness of information, public communication, and digital literacy to support more transparent and accountable local democracy. Therefore, strengthening Bamuskal capacity is a strategic requirement for democratic, transparent, and accountable village head elections. Capacity strengthening should include technical competence development, clearer operational regulations, participatory oversight mechanisms, institutional independence, digital literacy, and public information management. These efforts can help Bamuskal perform more effectively as a key actor in strengthening kalurahan governance that is transparent, accountable, and oriented toward public interests.

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