

Pancasila: The values of integrity and empathy in reconstructing the relationship between state officials and citizens in Indonesia

Vandyarman Mulya Priyanda * 

* Bekasi City Agency for National and Political Unity, Indonesia

vandyarman20001@mail.unpad.ac.id

Mainita 

Institut STIAM, Indonesia

mainita.hidayati@stiami.ac.id

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

The article examines the rising incidence of corruption and apathetic behaviour among public officials in Indonesia, indicating a moral crisis in state governance. This condition reflects the weak implementation of Pancasila's core values—particularly integrity and empathy—within bureaucratic practices and public leadership. The study aims to analyse the relevance of the values of integrity and empathy embedded in Pancasila's principles as a moral foundation for preventing corruption and for developing ethical public officials. This research uses a qualitative, descriptive-analytical approach, drawing on library research and content analysis of scholarly literature, official documents, and secondary data from credible sources. The analytical framework draws upon the theory of public integrity, empathic leadership, and ethical leadership theory. The findings indicate that the values of integrity and empathy in Pancasila serve a strategic function as catalysts for reconstructing the relationship between citizens and state administrators. Integrity promotes honesty, accountability, and fairness in decision-making, while empathy strengthens public officials' social and moral sensitivity to societal conditions. Implementing these values can reinforce the moral legitimacy of governance and foster greater public trust in state institutions.

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Introduction

In recent years, public discourse in Indonesia has increasingly focused on corruption and the perceived decline in ethical standards among public officials. Throughout 2025, media coverage—both in mainstream outlets and on social media—focused heavily on corruption and the lifestyles of certain public officials, reflecting a troubling lack of social sensitivity. The corruption cases uncovered during the year illustrate that the abuse of power remains a structural problem in Indonesia (Fitriana et al., 2023; Prihanto & Gunawan, 2020; Silitonga et al., 2023; Waluyo et al., 2022). The fictitious credit case involving Bank Jatim's Jakarta branch, revealed on 20 February 2025, allegedly caused state losses amounting to IDR 569.4 billion. Shortly thereafter, a corruption case at the Indonesian Eximbank (LPEI) resurfaced, with potential losses reaching IDR 11.7 trillion. A similar case emerged in the management of advertising funds at Bank BJB, with estimated state losses of IDR 100 billion. The peak of these



revelations was the crude oil governance corruption case involving Pertamina, with estimated state losses of up to IDR 193.7 trillion (Muhid et al., 2025).

These corruption phenomena have coincided with growing public scrutiny of hedonistic and apathetic lifestyles among political elites and public officials (Fitriani & Tesniyadi, 2023; Prabowo, 2014). While citizens continue to struggle under economic pressures, members of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) reportedly receive various allowances, resulting in total monthly incomes exceeding IDR 100 million (Madasari, 2025). Public statements and policy decisions on additional allowances further revealed a lack of social empathy and insensitivity to prevailing economic conditions.

These events triggered waves of protests across multiple regions. Large-scale demonstrations took place between 26 and 31 August 2025, causing damage to public facilities and casualties among civilians and government officials (BBC News Indonesia, 2025). These protests signal a deterioration of public trust in the moral integrity of state administrators and indicate an ethical crisis in national public life. According to data from the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), as reported by Indonesian Corruption Watch (ICW), between 2019 and 2023 there were 1,189 recorded corruption cases involving 2,896 suspects. The potential state financial losses during this period were estimated at IDR 47.18 trillion. Additional losses from bribery, illegal levies, and money laundering totalled more than IDR 700 billion combined (Indonesia Corruption Watch, 2025).

Several scholars anticipated these developments, arguing that democratic backsliding in Indonesia is marked by weakening accountability in public institutions and threats to the independence of law enforcement bodies (Hidayaturrahman et al., 2025; Warburton, 2022). One critical moment reflecting this decline was the weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) through regulatory revisions and political narratives that stigmatised the institution (Irsyad, 2025; Muttaqin & El Adzkiyaa, 2022; Putriyana & Rochaeti, 2021). This situation suggests that segments of the political elite increasingly normalise recurrent corrupt behaviour, thereby eroding moral values within the governmental system.

The data and phenomena outlined above demonstrate that anti-corruption efforts in Indonesia continue to face serious structural and cultural challenges (Effendi & Susanti, 2024; Fitriana et al., 2023; Tovalini & Hanoselina, 2024). This condition reflects a degradation of the moral values that constitute the foundation of national life as enshrined in Pancasila (Dewantara et al., 2021; Musolin, 2020). The principles of divinity, humanity, and social justice—which should guide state officials' conduct—appear undermined by corrupt practices and luxurious lifestyles that contradict public ethics (Sahrasad, 2017). Accordingly, this article elaborates on the relevance of Pancasila's values in understanding corrupt behaviour and the crisis of empathy among public officials, while re-examining the role of foundational national values in cultivating integrity and moral responsibility among state administrators.

This study departs from the assumption that values such as integrity and empathy—often associated with Pancasila—are neutral or purely individual attributes. Rather, these values are socially constructed and embedded within institutional arrangements, political interests, and cultural narratives. The concept of integrity, for instance, is frequently framed as a personal moral quality, yet in practice it is shaped by organisational norms, incentive systems, and power relations within the state apparatus. Similarly, empathy is often understood as an individual emotional capacity, while its institutionalisation in governance practices remains uneven and constrained by bureaucratic and political structures.

While Pancasila is widely recognised as the philosophical foundation of the Indonesian state, its role in governance is contested. Historically, Pancasila has been mobilised not only as an ethical guideline but also as a political instrument to legitimise state authority across different regimes. This raises an important question: does Pancasila function as an operational ethical framework in public administration, or does it primarily operate as a state-centred

discourse? Existing studies on corruption in Indonesia have predominantly approached the problem through structural, legal, and cultural lenses—examining fiscal decentralisation (Suprayitno & Pradiptyo, 2017), bureaucratic and cultural constraints (Effendi & Susanti, 2024; Tovalini & Hanoselina, 2024), and institutional-legal reform (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016)—while comparatively few have examined how Indonesia's own foundational value system, Pancasila, can be operationalised as a normative-ethical framework linking individual integrity and empathy to governance outcomes. This research's novelty lies in its effort to explicitly connect corrupt behaviour and the erosion of empathy to Pancasila's normative framework, moving the discussion beyond structural and cultural explanations toward a values-based account grounded in public integrity and empathic leadership theory. Therefore, this study holds significant academic relevance in the discourse on corruption and Pancasila.

The phenomenon examined in this study is not merely a domestic Indonesian concern but reflects a broader global discourse on how state or local ideologies can function as ethical instruments of governance in developing democracies. Across regions, governments and scholars have increasingly recognised that formal legal anti-corruption mechanisms alone are insufficient without grounding public ethics in culturally resonant value systems. This insight has animated several significant governance reform experiments worldwide that offer important comparative context for understanding Pancasila's role in Indonesia.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the Ubuntu philosophy—expressed through the Nguni aphorism "*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*" (a person is a person through other persons)—has increasingly been mobilised as a culturally rooted framework to combat systemic corruption and foster ethical public leadership. Ubuntu philosophy emphasises communal values, interconnectedness, and ethical leadership as a framework for combating systemic corruption, proposing that its principles of communal accountability, restorative justice, and transparency can mitigate corruption by aligning governance with indigenous values. Key elements of Ubuntu-based ethical leadership in the public sector include character development, efficiency, collectivism, and participative leadership, all embedded in a culturally resonant ethos aimed at overcoming Africa's moral governance crisis. Crucially, Ubuntu positions corruption not merely as individual moral failure but as a collective betrayal of community values, a framing that resonates with Pancasila's communitarian and spiritually grounded ethical orientation (Ngcetane-Vika & Pule, 2025; Sipondo, 2025).

In East Asia, Confucianism has historically shaped bureaucratic ethics and public conduct across China, Korea, Japan, and Singapore. Confucian tradition has significantly shaped Korean bureaucrats' and citizens' behavioural and attitudinal patterns, with Confucian values and ethics complementing public organisational behaviour and offering a pathway toward an impersonal ethical code in modern public governance. The Confucian emphasis on *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness), *li* (ritual propriety), and *zhi* (moral wisdom) provides a value-based framework for governance that prioritises moral cultivation of public officials — a principle structurally analogous to Pancasila's aspiration to cultivate *aparatur sipil negara* (civil servants) of moral integrity and social sensitivity.

Indonesia's Pancasila occupies a structurally parallel position to Ubuntu in Africa and Confucianism in East Asia: all three are indigenously rooted normative systems that function as ethical compasses for governance in developing democracies navigating the tensions between modernisation, pluralism, and institutional integrity. However, Pancasila stands apart through its explicit constitutional status and direct operationalisation across the Indonesian state apparatus—from educational curricula to bureaucratic reform programmes (Mukhlisin, 2020; Nurdianzah et al., 2024). Moreover, unlike Ubuntu and Confucianism, Pancasila explicitly integrates theistic moral accountability (*sila pertama*) as the ultimate ethical foundation, thereby rendering it a uniquely comprehensive framework for governance ethics in a multi-religious democratic society. This global comparison situates Pancasila within the broader

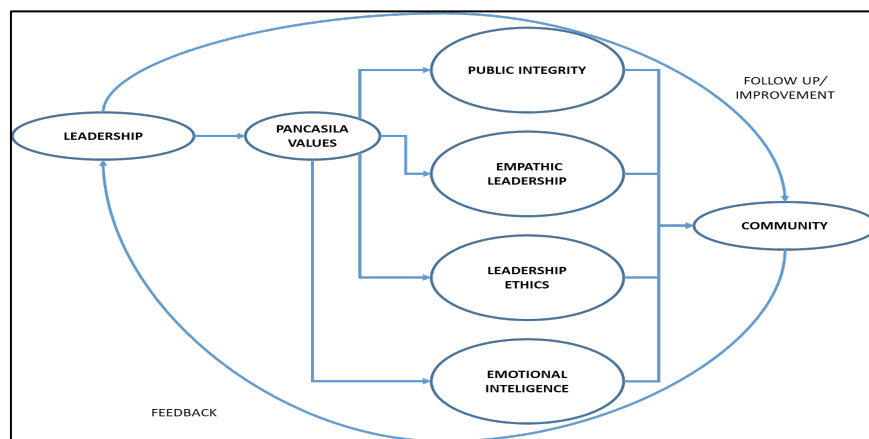
international inquiry into locally-rooted value systems as instruments of ethical governance transformation in emerging democracies (Dewantara et al., 2021; Nurdin, 2017).

This study's conceptual framework draws on three theoretical perspectives: public integrity (Huberts, 2018), empathic leadership (Goleman, 2006), and ethical leadership theory (Northouse, 2021). From a public ethics perspective, integrity is a fundamental foundation for leaders and state administrators. Huberts (2018) defines integrity as the alignment of values, actions, and decisions in public service, forming the basis of public officials' moral legitimacy. Etymologically, "integrity" derives from the Latin integer, meaning whole or undivided, signifying consistency between moral principles and conduct (Irawan, 2023). In public leadership, Goleman (2006) argues that empathy is a central component of emotional intelligence that distinguishes authoritarian leaders from humanistic ones. Northouse (2021) emphasises that integrity is a core pillar of ethical leadership because it fosters trust, fairness, and credibility in leader–citizen relationships. Empathy enables public officials to understand societal aspirations and formulate policies responsive to public needs. When officials lose empathic capacity, policies become detached from social realities and are more likely to provoke public resistance.

Furthermore, ethical leadership that prioritises integrity and moral values is critical to building and sustaining public trust in government. Several studies indicate that ethical leadership grounded in integrity and moral principles significantly strengthens public confidence in governmental institutions (Satia, 2024; Simarmata et al., 2025). A systematic literature review on empathy in leadership concludes that empathy substantially enhances leadership effectiveness by increasing leaders' sensitivity to the needs of individuals and groups, thereby reinforcing public trust and engagement in governance processes (Muss et al., 2025).

Figure 1.

A Conceptual Framework for Reconstructing Public Official–Citizen Relations in Indonesia



Source: Adapted from Goleman (2006), Huberts (2018), Irawan (2023), and Northouse (2021)

This study pursues three primary objectives. First, it seeks to explain the problem of the relationship between public officials and the Indonesian people after the large-scale demonstrations that occurred in several regions of Indonesia in August 2025. Second, it aims to reconstruct the relationship between public officials and citizens through an analysis grounded in the theoretical frameworks employed in this research. Third, it intends to enrich academic discourse on patterns of power relations between public authorities and citizens within the context of Pancasila and Indonesian socio-political identity.

This study also offers two principal theoretical contributions to public administration ethics and leadership scholarship in emerging democracies. First, it repositions integrity and empathy as moral-institutional variables rather than purely personal or psychological attributes, demonstrating that both values carry structural dimensions that shape power

relations, policy quality, and public trust in state institutions. Second, it integrates Pancasila into contemporary public administration ethics as an operational source of value—not merely a normative state ideology—capable of shaping bureaucratic behaviour, service orientation, and justice-oriented leadership, thereby enriching global scholarship with a locally grounded, contextually embedded perspective. Relatedly, the study extends public leadership theory by treating empathy as a social mechanism that strengthens policy legitimacy and narrows the psychological distance between the state and society, while highlighting the dialectical relationship between individual morality, bureaucratic organisational culture, and society's collective character. Crises of integrity and empathy, in this sense, do not originate solely from individual officials but emerge from the interaction of institutional structures, social values, and political practice.

The concept of integrity itself is not value-neutral. It is socially and politically constructed, shaped by institutional norms, cultural expectations, and power relations. In the Indonesian context, integrity is often framed within the ideological boundaries of Pancasila, raising the question of whether it reflects universal ethical standards or context-specific political interpretations. This research provides a conceptual contribution by linking public leadership ethics, national ideological values, and governance practices within an integrated analytical framework. This contribution is expected to serve as a foundation for developing a locally grounded model of public administration ethics relevant to emerging democratic states.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a descriptive–analytical method, as articulated by Creswell (2009) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011). This approach was selected because the research seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of the meaning of Pancasila's values within the context of religiosity, integrity, and empathy among public officials, dimensions that are inherently normative, ethical, and contextual. The study is not oriented toward quantitative measurement; rather, it emphasises interpreting meaning, values, and ethical practices in the lived realities of governmental leadership.

A qualitative approach enables the researcher to explore the subjective perspectives, experiences, and moral reflections of key actors involved in governance and social life. Accordingly, this research examines the degradation of integrity and empathy among public officials as a social and ethical issue closely linked to implementing Pancasila's values in public leadership practices.

This study uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and documentation. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to give informants space to articulate their views, experiences, and moral reflections freely while remaining aligned with the research focus. The informants were drawn from three principal groups—public officials, academics, and community leaders—because these groups represent structural, normative, and societal perspectives on integrity, empathy, and the implementation of Pancasila's values. Details of the primary data are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.

Primary Research Data (Informants Identified by Initials)

Research Focus/Objectives	Research Subjects	Informants	Interview Date	Data Collection Instruments
Public leadership within the context of religious values, integrity, and ethics	Public officials	- Ir. CHD (Former Director of a State-Owned Enterprise/ BUMN); - Drs. HWI., M.Si (Echelon II Official, Bekasi	19–21 January 2026	In-depth interviews and documentation

Research Focus/Objectives	Research Subjects	Informants	Interview Date	Data Collection Instruments
Pancasila from the perspective of religious values, integrity, ethics, intelligence, and public leadership in relation to citizens/society	Academic/Public official	City Government); - HSL, ST., M.Si (Echelon III Official, Bekasi City Government) - Dr. DDJ., M.A. (Former Indonesian Ambassador/Academic at Universitas Padjadjaran/Member of the Expert Council of BPIP)	28 January 2026	In-depth interviews and documentation
	Academic/Public official	- Dr. ESI (Community Leader in East Jakarta/ Former Echelon II Official, DKI Jakarta Provincial Government)	28 January 2026	In-depth interviews and documentation
Public perceptions of the behaviour of public officials	Community leader	- KAS (Community Leader in Bulak Macan Permai, Harapan Jaya, Bekasi City)	30 January 2026	In-depth interviews and documentation

Informants were selected purposively based on their capacity, experience, and involvement in issues related to public leadership, Pancasila values, and the relationship between public officials and society. The selection of DKI Jakarta and Bekasi City as the geographical contexts for this study was deliberate and methodologically grounded on three principal justifications.

First, both regions represent Indonesia's most complex and politically significant urban governance environments. DKI Jakarta is the national capital and the centre of political power, policy formulation, and bureaucratic authority. Bekasi City is one of the most populous municipalities in West Java, home to approximately 2.53 million inhabitants and a critical node in the greater JABODETABEK (Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi) metropolitan area. Together, these two sites concentrate a substantial share of Indonesia's civil service workforce and political elite, making them particularly generative contexts for examining the lived realities of integrity and empathy — or their absence — in governance.

Second, the informants recruited from both sites occupy structurally distinct positions within the governance hierarchy—ranging from senior leadership in state-owned enterprises and echelon II and III government officials in Bekasi City to a former Indonesian Ambassador and a former echelon II official of the DKI Jakarta Provincial Government—thereby enabling a cross-level and cross-institutional analysis of how Pancasila's values are internalised and enacted across different layers of the public sector.

Third, the large-scale demonstrations that erupted across multiple regions of Indonesia in late August 2025—which serve as a key empirical reference for this study—were particularly intense in Jakarta and its surrounding metropolitan area, including Bekasi, where public dissatisfaction with official conduct was expressed most acutely. This contextual relevance further reinforces the suitability of these two sites as research locations.

Regarding the number of informants, this study applies the principle of theoretical saturation as the primary criterion for determining sample adequacy in qualitative research. Data saturation is not achieved through a predetermined number of participants, but when additional interviews no longer yield new themes, perspectives, or substantive contradictions beyond those already identified (Creswell, 2009; Guest et al., 2006). In this study, saturation was reached after five in-depth interviews, as the fifth informant's account confirmed—rather than expanded—the thematic patterns identified in the previous four interviews.

Moreover, the five informants were purposively selected to ensure maximum variation across structurally significant social positions: a former director of a state-owned enterprise, an echelon II government official, an echelon III official, a former diplomat and academic, and a community leader—each representing distinct perspectives on the dynamics of public integrity and empathy. This deliberate diversity ensures the findings reflect a range of governance experiences and viewpoints rather than a homogeneous perspective, enhancing the credibility and transferability of the qualitative analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Secondary data were obtained through library research from three sources. The first was scholarly literature on integrity, empathy, public leadership, and Pancasila, including books, journal articles, and research reports. The second was official documents, including reports by the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK), publications by Indonesia Corruption Watch (ICW), and regulations on ethics in public office. The third was credible media coverage of corruption and public officials' conduct. The data were examined through content analysis in three stages: data reduction to isolate information relevant to integrity, empathy, and Pancasila; thematic categorisation according to the five principles of Pancasila; and interpretation linking the findings to theories of public ethics and leadership. The analysis was conducted iteratively and reflectively. Interview data were treated not as mere illustration but as interpretive material revealing how actors construct and negotiate the meanings of integrity and empathy. This allowed the study to connect individual agency with structural conditions such as institutional constraints and power relations. Triangulation across interviews, literature, and official documents strengthened credibility.

Results and Discussion

Corrupt behaviour and apathetic attitudes exhibited by certain public officials in Indonesia reflect moral deviation and an ethical crisis in the exercise of power. Abusing authority for personal or group interests weakens public officials' moral integrity (Madasari, 2025). This phenomenon reinforces the urgency of reaffirming the foundational values of national life as enshrined in Pancasila, rather than reducing them to mere political rhetoric (Riyadi, 2020).

Based on this study's findings, at least three root causes explain the emergence of public dissatisfaction that culminated in large-scale demonstrations across various regions in late August 2025. *First*, globalisation and modernisation have contributed to a shift in political elites' behaviour toward excessive materialism and consumerism. Several studies indicate that modernisation changes social value structures, including a shift from traditional values to secular-rational and post-materialist orientations. However, modernity also generates cultural paradoxes, such as an increasing dependence on consumption and material needs as sources of life's meaning (Cleveland et al., 2022; Inglehart & Welzel, 2010).

According to one research informant, the cost of self-actualisation as a public official is considerable, particularly for those in the inner circles of power. Centres of power often impose expectations that compel officials to fulfil various demands associated with their office. As the informant explained,

“As a public official, the fulfilment of material needs is inevitable. At times, officials must carry out many directives from superiors even though they are not covered by the state budget. Therefore, an official's ability to innovate in

addressing such demands becomes essential. However, some individuals perceive this ‘innovation’ as a means of material gain.” (Informant 2)

The informant’s statement above indicates that the high social costs borne by public officials are one of the underlying drivers of “innovation” in managing public budgets. These social costs are often accommodated through “innovative” uses of public funds, aimed at aligning officials’ social behaviour with prevailing socio-cultural expectations, including secular-rational and post-materialist orientations. This phenomenon reflects what can be described as a cultural paradox in public officials’ social interactions.

Second, the widening social justice gap between citizens and state administrators has reinforced public perceptions of inequality. The public perceives such disparities as arising from limited access to resources, economic opportunities, and meaningful participation in policymaking processes (Askar et al., 2024; Rasya & Triadi, 2024; Umar et al., 2025). Several studies further indicate that social inequality remains a serious issue in Indonesia. Significant income disparities and public perceptions of inequality generate a sense of injustice that shapes the relationship between citizens and the state (Muhtadi & Warburton, 2020; Stoetzer et al., 2025).

Moreover, tangible disparities between public officials and ordinary citizens—both in income and access to power—contribute to the widespread perception that the political system disproportionately benefits certain groups rather than most citizens. Consequently, the inequality gap is not merely objective in nature but is also subjectively perceived by the public as a fundamental form of social injustice (Bariyah, 2022; Chi & Kwon, 2016). This argument is consistent with the view expressed by one of the academic informants consulted in this study. According to the informant,

“Inequality and disparity have been longstanding problems in Indonesia. A small segment of society enjoys high access to resources, while the majority faces significant limitations in access. In my view, this condition has created a widening distance between the people and those in power in this Republic.” (Informant 4)

“At present, there is an erosion of public trust in public officials, caused by social inequality between society and state administrators.” (Informant 5)

The informant’s statement above indicates that the gap between the public and government officials has eroded trust in government. This mistrust, in turn, has led to a growing socio-political divide between citizens and public officials.

Third, public policies oriented toward oligarchic interests have further weakened public trust in state institutions (Winters, 2011). Policy formulation is often driven by political oligarchies and a so-called “shadow government,” shifting the focus of public policy from the broader public interest to the interests of specific elites (Parinduri et al., 2025). Oligarchic influence permeates political institutions and legislative processes in Indonesia, reducing transparency, accountability, and public confidence in state institutions (Layyina et al., 2024). This perspective was also confirmed by one informant in this study. According to the informant,

“This country seems to belong only to a particular group... just look at it—those who hold power and public office are the same individuals time and again. From father to child... from the child to the next generation... it continues in that pattern...” (Informant 6)

This informant’s view suggests that segments of the public perceive the state as being controlled and operated in the interests of a select elite. Nepotism appears to have become entrenched in the appointment of public officials. Oligarchic structures persist across generations, with certain families acting as custodians of power and vested interests.

This condition underscores the need for profound reflection on the values of integrity, ethics, and national morality. Strong integrity requires alignment among values, beliefs, and

actions. In public administration, integrity cannot be reduced to mere compliance with legal provisions; it must be understood as an internal moral commitment that guides public officials in every decision-making process and social interaction (Huberts, 2018; Six & Lawton, 2013). When public officials internalise integrity, they can act consistently between what they believe and what they do, fostering moral legitimacy and strengthening public trust. For public officials, integrity must therefore be embedded as an ethical compass in all decision-making and social engagement processes (Ramadian, 2024).

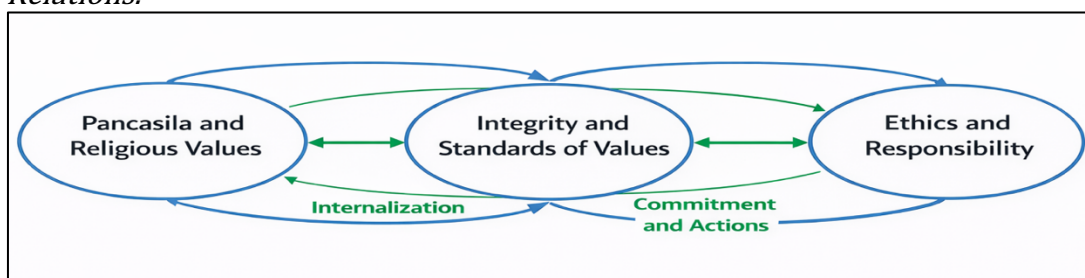
Furthermore, numerous studies indicate that religious values play a significant role in shaping both personal and social integrity, particularly through the internalisation of principles such as honesty, responsibility, and justice (Parboteeah et al., 2008). From a public ethics perspective, religion serves as a moral source that reinforces public officials' commitment to integrity while providing a normative foundation for the responsible exercise of power. Accordingly, public officials' integrity may be understood as the convergence of ethical values, religious convictions, and leadership practices oriented toward the public good.

"...as a public official, integrity and ethics are essential. Integrity and ethics emanate from the spiritual condition of the public official. Although spiritual values do not always directly correlate with the integrity of public officials, I am convinced that a public official must possess strong spirituality..." (Informant 1)

Integrity requires alignment between ethical values, beliefs, and actions. It must be internalised as an ethical compass that guides every decision-making process and public conduct (Ramadian, 2024).

Figure 2.

The Relationship of Pancasila as a Foundational Value in Constructing Social and Institutional Relations.



Source: (Goleman, 2006; Huberts, 2018; Northouse, 2021; Parboteeah et al., 2008; Six & Lawton, 2013), author's elaboration.

Several studies suggest that one underlying cause of Indonesia's high corruption is the weak internalisation of integrity values and moral principles, which are easily compromised by situational pressures and social relationships (Silitonga et al., 2023). Relational embeddedness and systemic structures that facilitate corrupt behaviour further contribute to corruption's persistence in Indonesia. Lambsdorff and Teksoz (2004) explain that corruption more frequently occurs within pre-existing social relationships—such as hierarchical ties, peer networks, or kinship relations—thereby fostering organised and structured patterns of corrupt practices (Rose-Ackerman & Palifka, 2016).

"Frankly... this behaviour still exists. Relationships, political directives, and kinship ties often become justifications—quote and unquote—for such actions." (Informant 2)

Beyond corruption, the crisis of empathy among public officials has also become a significant factor contributing to tensions between state administrators and society. Increases in taxes and official allowances amid citizens' economic hardship reflect a moral gap between government authorities and the people they represent (Antara, 2025; Morgeson et al., 2010). Empathy is not merely an emotional disposition; rather, it constitutes a social competence that must be internalised in the conduct of public officials. Integrating empathy into public

policymaking fosters social justice and strengthens reciprocal relations between the state and its citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Rothstein & Teorell, 2008; Van de Walle & Bouckaert, 2003).

From this perspective, public integrity is not solely an individual matter but also a structural and organisational-cultural issue. Likewise, empathy extends beyond emotional sensitivity and must be institutionalised as a social competence within public office. Therefore, reconstructing the values of empathy and integrity grounded in Pancasila constitutes an urgent moral foundation for restoring public trust in government.

Pancasila and Integrity from the Perspective of Corruption Prevention

The findings of this study suggest that corruption in Indonesia cannot be adequately understood merely as the result of individual moral failings. Although integrity is often viewed as a personal ethical trait, empirical evidence shows it is deeply embedded in institutional structures, organisational culture, and power relations. The informants' accounts reveal that public officials often operate within a system that imposes informal expectations, hierarchical pressures, and resource constraints, which in turn shape their decision-making.

This explanation shows that public integrity has become a structural and organisational-cultural issue in Indonesia. Integrity, which should serve as the moral foundation of public office, is increasingly eroded by pragmatic behaviour and a materialistic orientation toward power. Maulidi et al. (2025) found that organisational culture and power distance within the public bureaucracy contribute to unethical behaviour, including a tendency to sacrifice integrity for personal or group interests, thereby facilitating corrupt practices within government structures.

Bureaucratic reform to prevent corruption will remain insufficient if pragmatic organisational cultures and the materialistic orientations of public officials are not addressed. Strong institutional structures must be accompanied by a culture that actively supports integrity and accountability (Yustia & Arifin, 2023). As one informant stated,

"We speak of reform or change... no matter how well-designed the reform system may be, if it is not aligned with the mindset of public officials, the reform will not function effectively. There have been many examples of system improvements and innovations, yet they have not reduced the number of corruption and fraud cases in the public sector." (Informant 3)

Therefore, it is imperative to undertake a form of national moral reflection (muhasabah) concerning the integrity of state administrators. Corruption prevention cannot rely solely on legal instruments or institutional reforms; it must also involve internalising Pancasila's values as the moral and ideological foundation of national life (Hapsari, 2020; Mukhlisin, 2020; Riyadi, 2020).

Pancasila provides a normative framework for acting with integrity and responsibility in public office. These values may be elaborated as follows:

The First Principle: Belief in the One and Only God. Public integrity is not constructed solely through legal mechanisms and administrative accountability but also through the spiritual and moral convictions that underlie public officials' conduct. The literature demonstrates that religion, spirituality, and faith may significantly influence ethical values and administrative behaviour, thereby shaping the moral character that underpins integrity and accountability in public service. A comprehensive literature review concludes that religion, spirituality, and faith constitute important factors influencing moral values in public administration globally and may motivate more ethical conduct (Ongaro & Tantardini, 2024). Other empirical studies further affirm that bureaucratic integrity and ethics are essential foundations for building public trust in government, as trust depends not only on formal rules but also on the moral values guiding officials' behaviour (Fauzi et al., 2022). In the Indonesian

context, the implementation of Pancasila's values—particularly the principle of Belief in the One and Only God—has been identified as a crucial factor in cultivating public officials who are morally responsible, ethically grounded, and accountable to both society and God.

The Second Principle: Just and Civilised Humanity. The value of humanity requires state administrators to treat all citizens fairly and with dignity, free from discrimination and conflicts of interest (Silitonga et al., 2023; Suprayitno & Pradiptyo, 2017). According to Huberts (2018), public integrity is not limited to personal honesty; it also encompasses the capacity to uphold justice and safeguard the public interest in every policy decision. Furthermore, principles of administrative ethics play a crucial role in strengthening public integrity, as they translate moral values—such as justice, responsibility, and service to the community—into everyday bureaucratic practice (Pamungkas, 2025).

The Third Principle: The Unity of Indonesia. Integrity may be understood as impartiality toward particular groups whose preferential treatment risks generating social and political fragmentation. Corruption practices oriented toward specific groups—commonly manifested in clientelism—not only undermine fairness in the distribution of public resources but also erode public trust in government, thereby weakening the sense of national unity that constitutes the core of the Third Principle of Pancasila, the Unity of Indonesia. Empirical studies demonstrate that patron–client relationships within political and bureaucratic practices can serve as mechanisms that reinforce public corruption, whereby public officials or political elites exchange resources for political support from specific groups or individuals. Such practices diminish accountability, weaken state institutions, and exacerbate social inequality, ultimately threatening national cohesion (Aboksawi et al., 2024).

Other research further confirms that clientelistic practices in politics undermine state capacity and democratic institutions more broadly, as clientelism prioritises exchanging selective benefits for political support or patronage rather than developing universal and inclusive public policies (Ramadhan & Oley, 2019). Comparative studies also indicate that systemic clientelism negatively affects governance quality, democratic consolidation, and state capacity—which, in the Indonesian context, may weaken national unity (Bardhan, 2022).

Accordingly, public officials must serve as exemplars in upholding the value of national unity by avoiding policy orientations that disproportionately benefit particular groups. They must ensure that public policies are universal, equitable, and conducive to strengthening social cohesion in support of Indonesia's unity.

The Fourth Principle: Democracy Guided by the Inner Wisdom in Deliberation/Representation. This principle reflects the moral and constitutional responsibility of legislative institutions to channel the people's aspirations through mechanisms that are fair, transparent, and accountable. In a healthy democratic system, members of the legislature represent the people's voice and must demonstrate public integrity by honestly and responsibly representing their constituents' interests. Empirical research in Indonesia indicates that effective and accountable representation of public aspirations remains a central challenge in legislative practice (Hermanto, 2023). Legislative integrity may thus be assessed by the extent to which legislators convey and advocate for their constituents' aspirations in a proper and principled manner (M. et al., 2025). Former Vice President Jusuf Kalla also emphasised that the large-scale demonstrations in several regions of Indonesia in 2025 reflected public disappointment with the conduct of certain representatives who failed to uphold integrity (Ulya & Darmajati, 2025).

The Fifth Principle: Social Justice for All the People of Indonesia. Corruption fundamentally constitutes a violation of social justice, as it diverts public resources from their intended purpose—namely, the welfare of the people—toward personal or group interests. Such practices obstruct equitable development and weaken the provision of essential public services that citizens are entitled to receive fairly. Corruption produces systemic consequences

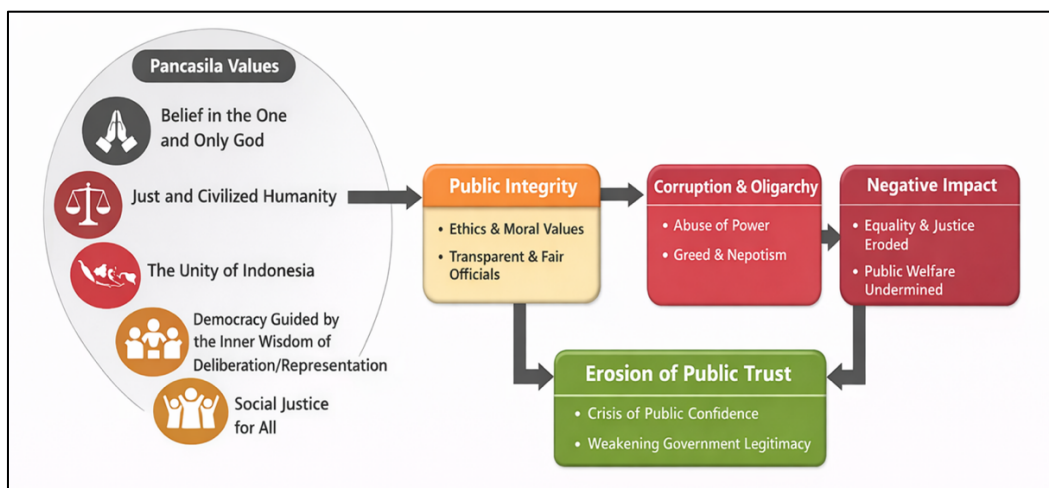
for economic development and societal welfare, exacerbates social inequality, and undermines vital public services such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure (Rudiyansah & Rezki, 2025). At its core, integrity is inseparable from justice, and the primary duty of state administrators is to realise fairness and public welfare within society (Khoiron, 2017; Soesatyo et al., 2023). Accordingly, public officials are obliged to ensure that public policies promote the well-being of all citizens without exception.

The elaboration of Pancasila's values above demonstrates that Pancasila is not merely a normative state ideology, but rather a framework of public ethics that must be internalised both in individual conduct and in the organisational culture of the bureaucracy. From the perspective of ethical leadership, integrity cannot be reduced to political rhetoric; it must be understood as a moral consciousness that shapes governance practices that are fair, responsive, and oriented toward the public interest.

Northouse (2021) emphasises that integrity constitutes the primary foundation of credible leadership, as it fosters trust, legitimacy, and the quality of relationships between leaders and society. Accordingly, internalising Pancasila's values plays a crucial role in cultivating a bureaucracy that is just, accountable, and trusted by the public.

Figure 3.

The Interrelationship between Pancasila and Integrity in the Context of Corruption Prevention



Source: (Aboksawi et al., 2024; Bardhan, 2022; Fauzi et al., 2022; Hapsari, 2020; Huberts, 2018; Maulidi et al., 2025; Northouse, 2021; Ongaro & Tantardini, 2024; Pamungkas, 2025; Ramadhan & Oley, 2019; Yustia & Arifin, 2023), author's elaboration

Pancasila and Empathy in State Administration

Beyond the crisis of integrity, the recent public demonstrations also reflect widespread disappointment with the perceived lack of empathy among certain state officials. Public statements and actions that appear insensitive to citizens' suffering illustrate a gradual erosion of humanitarian values in political and governmental praxis (Vandito, 2025). This phenomenon directly contradicts the principle embodied in the second precept of Pancasila, Just and Civilised Humanity.

In public leadership, empathy is not merely an emotional capacity but a social competence that enables officials to understand the lived realities of those they represent (Goleman, 2006). Empathy should therefore be conceptualised not simply as an emotional skill, but as a fundamental public value essential for fostering responsive, just, and humane governance. Integrating empathy into public administration is crucial, as it enhances communication between government and citizens and strengthens the legitimacy of administrative decisions (Beck & Ranchordás, 2025).

Several empirical studies demonstrate that empathetic leadership significantly influences governmental organisational performance. Leaders who exhibit empathy are better able to adapt policies and actions to diverse social conditions. Moreover, empathy is a core dimension of emotional intelligence that strengthens public officials' affective commitment, which in turn improves service quality and reinforces public trust in state institutions (Naritasari et al., 2023; Triyono & Tjahjono, 2023).

Theoretically, this discussion positions empathy not merely as an individual psychological trait, but as a normative and institutional dimension of public governance grounded in Pancasila's ethical philosophy. By linking the second principle of Pancasila with contemporary theories of ethical leadership and emotional intelligence, this study advances an integrative framework in which empathy mediates between moral values and administrative performance. In this framework, Pancasila provides the foundational moral ontology, empathy operates as the socio-emotional mechanism of value internalisation, and public integrity emerges as the behavioural manifestation within governance practices.

This perspective contributes to the public administration literature by extending the discourse on integrity beyond legality and anti-corruption compliance toward a more human-centred governance paradigm. It suggests that sustainable public trust is built not only on procedural accountability, but also on relational legitimacy—constructed through empathetic engagement between state officials and citizens. Accordingly, embedding empathy as a public value enriches the conceptualisation of integrity by incorporating affective and relational dimensions into the study of governance ethics.

Public officials who demonstrate empathy strive to align their policies and conduct with the social realities of the communities they serve. As a public value, empathy manifests in three interrelated attitudes.

The first and most fundamental is the capacity to understand citizens' feelings. It requires officials to place themselves in the position of the people and grasp the economic, social, and psychological challenges they face. This orientation reflects servant leadership, which makes the community's interests the primary concern of leadership (Northouse, 2021) and expects leaders to be highly attentive to the needs and well-being of those they serve (Eva et al., 2019; van Dierendonck, 2011). As a dimension of emotional intelligence, empathy also enables leaders to understand social realities more fully and improves the quality of leader–public relationships (Miao et al., 2017). Empathetic officials are therefore responsive to citizens' socio-economic conditions, so that public policies genuinely reflect societal needs and aspirations.

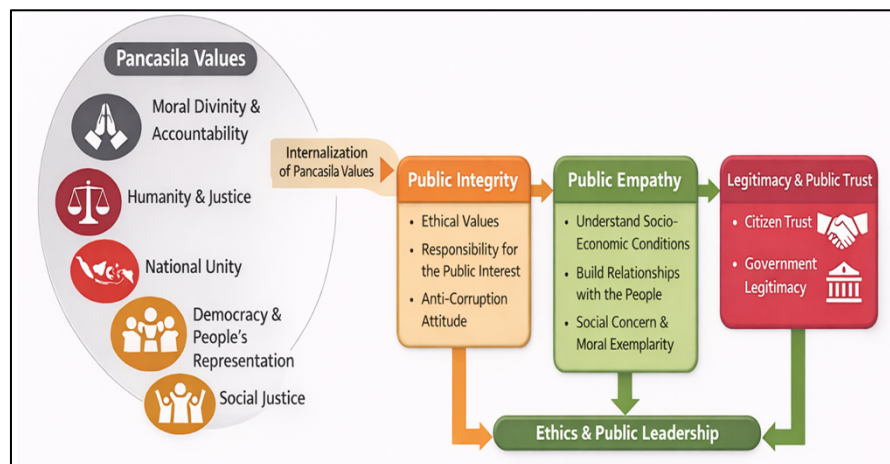
This understanding is expressed in the second attitude: the capacity to build healthy social relationships. Such relationships rest on openness to criticism and a willingness to engage citizens in constructive dialogue. Direct engagement and open communication enhance policy legitimacy and improve state–society relations (Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014). Responsiveness to public participation also strengthens citizens' trust in government institutions (Yang & Pandey, 2011). Conversely, reactive or provocative attitudes reduce transparency, widen the social distance between officials and the people, and erode public trust (Porumbescu, 2017). Empathetic dialogue is thus a core competency of ethical and responsive public leadership.

Both capacities culminate in the third attitude, authentic social concern, the most tangible form of empathy in public leadership. It reflects the servant leadership principles of humility, commitment to public service, and moral exemplarity (Liden et al., 2008). It also aligns with ethical leadership theory, which positions leaders as moral role models whose conduct serves as an ethical reference point for society (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Authentic concern therefore demands consistency between an official's moral values, public commitments, and concrete actions in serving the community.

Accordingly, empathy is a critical element of public leadership ethics, as it serves as a moral boundary guiding officials' attitudes and communication in the public sphere. Public administration scholarship indicates that integrating empathy into governance practices can strengthen political legitimacy and enhance public trust in state institutions (Beck & Ranchordás, 2025; Porumbescu, 2017).

Figure 4.

The Interrelationship Between Pancasila and Empathy in State Administration



Source: (Beck & Ranchordás, 2025; Brown & Treviño, 2006; Eva et al., 2019; Liden et al., 2008; Porumbescu, 2017; Yang & Pandey, 2011), adapted by the author.

Reflection on and Contemplation of the State's Condition

The preceding analysis of Pancasila, integrity, ethics, and public empathy invites several interrelated reflections. Together they reveal a consistent tension between the normative ideals of governance and the structural conditions in which those ideals operate.

At the most fundamental level, integrity must be understood beyond individual morality. The findings show integrity to be a socially and institutionally mediated construct rather than an autonomous personal capacity. This view is consistent with public-integrity scholarship linking ethical behaviour to institutional design, accountability mechanisms, and incentive structures. The persistence of corruption thus reflects not merely weak moral commitment but also systemic conditions, such as patronage, kinship ties, and political affiliations, that enable and at times normalise unethical practice. Moral appeals and ethics training alone are therefore insufficient; efforts to promote integrity must also confront the structural conditions and power relations that shape behaviour within public institutions.

A similar complexity surrounds the role of Pancasila itself. Although it offers a normative ethical reference, its interpretation varies across institutional and political contexts. It can equally operate as a state discourse that defines how ethical values are articulated and communicated. Because successive political regimes have mobilised Pancasila in different ways, its invocation in anti-corruption discourse may signal either genuine ethical commitment or the symbolic legitimisation of state authority. Pancasila is better examined as a dynamic and contested construct whose meaning is continuously negotiated in political, institutional, and social arenas, rather than as an uncontested moral foundation.

The same structural limits apply to empathy when viewed through the political economy of governance. Informants stress the importance of empathy, yet they also acknowledge bureaucratic rigidity, political pressures, and institutional priorities that privilege efficiency over responsiveness. Empathy is therefore not merely an individual competency; it is shaped, and at times constrained, by organisational environments. Unless the oligarchic structures and unequal access to resources and power that fuel public dissatisfaction are addressed, empathy risks becoming symbolic or performative rather than a substantive means of improving state-society relations. Value-based approaches grounded in integrity and empathy thus remain

necessary but insufficient without parallel reforms in institutional design, accountability, and power structures.

These reflections converge on the need to bridge structure and agency in governance ethics. Integrity and empathy are commonly treated as individual attributes, but the findings demonstrate that both are embedded in broader institutional and socio-political contexts. This challenges the tendency to individualise ethical responsibility in public administration. Reconstructing the relationship between state officials and citizens therefore requires more than moral exhortation. It calls for an integrated approach that strengthens individual ethical capacity while transforming the structural conditions that enable or constrain ethical conduct, with reform pursued simultaneously at the societal and state-administrative levels (Kenan et al., 2022; Persson et al., 2013). Such simultaneity matters because social norms and public trust stand in a reciprocal relationship with leadership behaviour and institutional quality (Rothstein & Uslaner, 2005).

This study acknowledges several limitations that bear on the transferability of its findings. It was conducted within two specific urban governance contexts—DKI Jakarta and Bekasi City—both located within the Greater Jakarta metropolitan area (Jabodetabek), which is characterised by relatively high institutional capacity, political salience, and media visibility compared with other regions of Indonesia; the findings may therefore not generalise directly to rural areas, outer islands, or regions with lower administrative capacity. The five informants, though purposively selected for structural diversity, were drawn primarily from formal governance and intellectual elites—senior officials, a former diplomat, and an academic—so that frontline civil servants, ordinary citizens, civil society organisations, and anti-corruption activists were not directly represented, introducing a degree of institutional and elite bias. Finally, the cross-sectional design captured attitudes and perceptions at a specific historical moment, namely the period following the August 2025 demonstrations, and may therefore not fully capture longer-term transformations in governance ethics, institutional trust, or public perception across subsequent political cycles.

Future research is encouraged to build on these contributions in three directions. Geographically, comparative studies in non-metropolitan regions would enrich understanding of how Pancasila's integrity and empathy values are operationalised under diverse institutional and socio-cultural conditions, ideally supported by broader community-based and subaltern perspectives. Methodologically, mixed-methods designs combining qualitative depth with large-scale surveys could quantitatively validate the patterns identified here and enable more robust generalisation. Theoretically, scholars may examine how Pancasila-based governance ethics performs relative to Ubuntu-inspired reforms in Africa and Confucian-based public administration in East Asia in terms of measurable anti-corruption and public-trust outcomes—a cross-regional comparison that would strengthen Pancasila's international relevance as a model of value-based governance in developing democracies.

Conclusion

This study affirms that the Pancasila values of integrity and empathy are moral-institutional determinants of the relationship between society and state administrators. They shape political legitimacy, policy quality, and public trust. Integrity fosters honesty, accountability, and social justice, while empathy makes policies responsive to citizens' lived realities and narrows the distance between state and society. Positioning Pancasila as both a normative framework and an instrument of bureaucratic transformation, the study recommends four measures. First, embed integrity and empathy in the national curriculum through experiential and reflective civic education. Second, officials should be trained in emotional intelligence and policy empathy, supported by ethics-based performance indicators. Third, multi-actor collaboration among government, religious leaders, academics, civil society, the media, and the private sector should be strengthened. Fourth, establish an integrity and empathy index for public services.

Competing interests

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest to disclose.

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