



## THE ROLE OF PROTOCOL IN BUILDING THE IMAGE OF THE NORTH SULAWESI PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

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### Abstract (English)

*This study aims to analyze the role of protocol in building the image of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government, identify supporting and inhibiting factors, and formulate strategic efforts to enhance this role. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation involving protocol officers and related regional apparatus. The findings reveal that the protocol's role in organizing official government activities has been implemented relatively well through the arrangement of seating, ceremonial procedures, and formal honors, contributing to the development of a professional and authoritative government image. Supporting factors include human resource competence, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and inter-agency coordination and collaboration. Inhibiting factors consist of limited personnel and competencies, inadequate facilities, communication barriers, and dynamic changes in event agendas. Strategic efforts include enhancing human resource capacity, strengthening coordination systems, and optimizing technology use. The study concludes that protocol plays a strategic element in building local government image, requiring systematic and sustainable improvements.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The primary issue emerging within the North Sulawesi Provincial Government concerns the implementation of official government activities that have not fully reflected a professional, orderly, and authoritative government institutional image. In various official agendas involving regional leaders, government officials, vertical institutions, and the community, irregularities in event procedures, lack of coordination among regional apparatus, and inconsistencies in applying protocol regulations are still encountered. This condition potentially creates negative public perceptions and government guests regarding the quality of regional government governance.

In the context of modern public administration, local government image represents a strategic asset that significantly determines the level of public trust. The government is no longer assessed solely based on physical development outcomes or policies produced, but also on how the government conducts governance processes professionally, transparently, and ethically. Every official government activity serves as symbolic communication space that directly shapes public perception. Therefore, protocol implementation holds an important position as the representation of local government's face.

Public administration as a discipline views government as a public service organization required to provide the best services, including in the aspect of official activity management. According to Thoha (2016), public administration addresses not only policies and bureaucratic





structures but also apparatus behavior and work mechanisms reflecting professionalism, ethics, and government accountability values. In this regard, the protocol function becomes an integral part of the government administration system that maintains the dignity and legitimacy of government institutions.

Protocol, as regulated in Law Number 9 of 2010 concerning Protocol, encompasses seating arrangements, ceremonial procedures, and formal honors in every official state and government activity. Good protocol implementation creates order, event smoothness, and respect for positions and institutions. Conversely, weaknesses in protocol implementation can result in event chaos, reduced leader authority, and disturbed government image in the public eye.

In North Sulawesi Province, regional government dynamics involving various interests and government actors demand increasingly complex protocol roles. The regional government frequently organizes activities on local, national, and international scales, whether in state ceremonies, central official visits, inter-regional meetings, or community activities. Each activity positions the protocol section as the frontline determining first impressions and overall perceptions of the regional government.

However, field realities indicate that the protocol role has not been fully optimized as a strategic instrument for government image formation. There remain limitations in human resources, both in quantity and quality of protocol apparatus. Additionally, understanding of protocol regulations is not evenly distributed across all regional apparatus, causing coordination in official activity implementation to frequently encounter obstacles. This situation has implications for the suboptimal protocol function in supporting the North Sulawesi Provincial Government's image.

Government image is essentially a social construct formed from public experiences, perceptions, and assessments of government actions. According to Ardianto (2016), public institution image is formed through continuous communication processes between organizations and their publics, both directly and indirectly. In this context, official government activities managed by protocol become powerful non-verbal communication media in shaping public perception.

Orderly, courteous, and professional protocol implementation provides positive impressions about government seriousness in carrying out duties and functions. Conversely, minor errors in ceremonial procedures, seating arrangements, or formal honors can generate negative assessments with broad impacts, especially in the era of information openness and social media. Any mistake in official activities can quickly spread and create unfavorable public opinion toward the regional government.

From a public administration perspective, protocol apparatus are not merely technical activity implementers but strategic actors contributing to government management. The protocol role includes planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of official government activities. Therefore, protocol performance quality is strongly influenced by apparatus competence, leadership, work systems, and overall organizational support.

Based on this description, this research examines in depth **the role of protocol in building the image of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government.**



## Research Objectives

This study aims to: (1) analyze the role of protocol in building the image of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government; and (2) identify supporting and inhibiting factors in protocol implementation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Public Administration

Public administration is a field of study that continues to develop along with government dynamics and public demands for state governance quality. In the context of modern states, public administration is no longer understood merely as routine bureaucratic activities but as a system that manages public resources, formulates and implements policies, and provides services to communities effectively, efficiently, and fairly.

Conceptually, public administration is closely related to the government's role in regulating, managing, and serving public interests. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) state that public administration focuses on how public values are realized through collective government and citizen actions. This perspective emphasizes that public administration has strong normative dimensions, not merely technical and managerial aspects.

In Indonesia, public administration is often associated with state governance and bureaucracy. Dwiyanto (2018) explains that public administration encompasses all state power implementation processes carried out by government apparatus to fulfill public needs and interests. Thus, public administration includes planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising policies and public services.

The development of public administration is also influenced by paradigm shifts in government management. The classical paradigm emphasizing hierarchy, rules, and procedures has shifted toward paradigms emphasizing performance, accountability, and result orientation. Osborne (2010) argues that modern public administration must adapt to complex and dynamic environments through innovation and cross-sector collaboration.

### Protocol Concept

Protocol and protocol management are inseparable parts of government administration, particularly in implementing official state and government activities. In public administration practice, protocol functions as a formal regulatory mechanism ensuring orderly relationships among officials, institutions, and communities in various official activities. The existence of protocol is not merely administrative but also carries strong symbolic meaning in representing government authority and legitimacy.

Normatively, the protocol concept in Indonesia is clearly regulated in Law Number 9 of 2010 concerning Protocol. The law defines protocol as a series of activities related to rules in state or official government ceremonies covering seating arrangements, ceremonial procedures, and formal honors. This regulation emphasizes that protocol is an important instrument in maintaining the honor and dignity of officials and state institutions.

From an international perspective, protocol is understood as part of diplomatic and governmental protocol that regulates formal relationships between countries and institutions. McCaffree and Innis (2012) state that protocol is a set of formal rules designed to ensure respect, equality, and order in official government relations. Although the context is often associated with international diplomacy, these principles are also relevant in regional government.



Protocol has structural and functional dimensions. Structurally, protocol is typically institutionalized in a special unit or section within government organizations. Functionally, protocol performs planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation roles for official activities. According to Dwiyanto (2018), administrative functions such as protocol must be viewed as strategic parts of government management, not merely support functions.

## **Government Image Concept**

Government image is an important concept in contemporary public administration studies because it directly relates to public perception, trust, and government legitimacy. In modern government administration, image is no longer viewed as a cosmetic aspect or mere result of public relations activities but as a comprehensive representation of government governance quality, apparatus behavior, and overall public institution performance.

Conceptually, image can be understood as the picture, impression, or perception formed in the public's mind about an organization based on ongoing experiences, information, and interactions. Ardianto (2016) explains that image results from public perception processes of reality displayed by organizations through actions, communication, and symbols used. In the government context, government image is formed from all observable and perceivable government activities by the community.

Government image is closely related to legitimacy concepts. Governments with positive images tend to more easily obtain support, trust, and compliance from the community. According to Frederickson (2016), government legitimacy is built not only through legal and political mechanisms but also through public perception of justice, competence, and ethics in government administration.

In the context of regional government, the image of local government plays a strategic role in building local community trust as well as attractiveness for investors and development partners. Nugroho (2020) states that good local government image will strengthen regional competitiveness and increase community participation in development. Therefore, local governments need to manage their image consciously and systematically.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Type and Approach**

This study employs qualitative research with a descriptive approach. The selection of this research type and approach is based on the research objectives, namely to understand and describe in depth the role of protocol in building the image of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government. The qualitative approach is considered appropriate because this research focuses on revealing meanings, processes, and social dynamics that occur in protocol practices within the regional government environment.

### **Research Location and Time**

This research was conducted at the North Sulawesi Provincial Government, with the main focus on the Protocol Section within the Regional Secretariat structure of North Sulawesi Province. The research location was selected based on the consideration that the Protocol Section has a strategic role in organizing official regional government activities and contributes directly to building the image of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government through the implementation of ceremonial procedures, seating arrangements, and formal honors.



## **Informants**

Informants in this study were selected purposively based on specific considerations relevant to the research objectives. The informants included: (1) officials and apparatus of the Protocol Section; (2) regional government officials; (3) related parties or guests of official activities; and (4) community members or media (when necessary).

## **Data Collection Techniques**

Data collection techniques included: (1) in-depth semi-structured interviews; (2) non-participatory observation; and (3) documentation of official documents, activity agendas, photographs, and relevant archives.

## **Data Analysis Technique**

Data analysis followed the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

## **Data Validity**

Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time, as well as member checks and referential adequacy.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

#### **Role of Protocol in Organizing Official Government Activities**

The research findings indicate that the protocol section plays a dominant and strategic role in organizing official regional government activities. The three main elements of protocol—seating arrangements, ceremonial procedures, and formal honors—serve as primary indicators in assessing the quality of official activity implementation. The Head of the Protocol Section stated:

"The role of the Protocol Section is very important in ensuring every official government activity runs orderly and according to regulations. We are responsible for arranging seating based on position hierarchy so that no errors occur in official placement. Additionally, we arrange ceremonial procedures systematically from opening to closing so that the activity flow runs smoothly without procedural errors. In terms of formal honors, we ensure every official or honorary guest receives treatment according to applicable regulations." (Interview, January 12, 2026)

A protocol staff member added:

"In implementing official activities, we as protocol staff have quite detailed technical tasks. We prepare seating arrangements according to the list of attending officials and ensure no position errors occur. For ceremonial procedures, we follow the prepared event rundown but must also be ready to face sudden changes in the field. Formal honors are also a main concern, especially when welcoming important guests or high-ranking officials." (Interview, January 13, 2026)

#### **Contribution of Protocol to Local Government Image Formation**

The findings demonstrate that the protocol section's contribution to forming the North Sulawesi Provincial Government's image is highly significant. Protocol serves as symbolic communication media reflecting professionalism, authority, and government governance quality. The Head of a Regional Apparatus stated:

"In our view, the protocol's contribution to regional government image is very real. Every official activity managed well will provide positive impressions to the community and invited guests. Protocol plays a role in ensuring activities run smoothly, orderly, and according to regulations, thus reflecting government professionalism." (Interview, January 15, 2026)



## Supporting Factors

Supporting factors identified include: (1) human resource competence and experience; (2) leadership support; (3) availability of facilities and infrastructure; (4) technology utilization; and (5) effective coordination and inter-agency cooperation.

## Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors include: (1) limited quantity and competence of apparatus; (2) facility limitations and suboptimal equipment conditions; (3) communication barriers and inter-agency coordination issues; and (4) dynamic and sudden changes in activity agendas.

## Discussion

The discussion confirms that protocol implementation in North Sulawesi Province has been relatively well implemented, aligning with public administration principles emphasizing order, professionalism, and service quality (Dwiyanto, 2018). The three protocol functions—seating arrangements, ceremonial procedures, and formal honors—serve as foundational elements creating smooth, dignified official activities representing regional government authority.

However, suboptimal conditions in several areas indicate gaps between normative expectations and empirical practices. These gaps need addressing through systematic capacity building, facility improvements, and strengthened coordination mechanisms. Protocol's contribution to government image formation is highly significant, as every official activity serves as an arena for forming public perception through symbolic communication, consistent with Grunig and Hunt's (2010) public relations theory.

Supporting factors including competent human resources, leadership, facilities, technology, and coordination are key to successful protocol implementation. Conversely, identified inhibiting factors demonstrate that protocol role optimization depends not only on technical aspects but also on policy support, resources, and sustainable innovation.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

First, the protocol's role in organizing official activities of the North Sulawesi Provincial Government has generally been implemented well, demonstrating significant contributions to creating orderly, structured, and professional activities. However, inconsistencies in field implementation are still found, particularly in dynamic situations involving multiple parties.

Second, protocol's contribution to local government image formation is evident through its ability to create professional, orderly, and authoritative impressions in every official activity. Well-managed official activities serve as effective symbolic communication media in building positive public perceptions of the regional government.

Third, supporting factors include human resources, facilities and infrastructure, and inter-agency coordination and cooperation. These factors are interconnected and contribute to improving protocol implementation quality.

Fourth, inhibiting factors include limited human resources, facility constraints, coordination and communication barriers, and high dynamics of activity changes. These factors affect the effectiveness and quality of official activity implementation.

Fifth, strategic efforts to enhance the protocol role have been undertaken through resource optimization, coordination improvement, and technology utilization, but remain adaptive and not yet fully systematic.



## Recommendations

First, the North Sulawesi Provincial Government needs to improve the quality and quantity of human resources in the Protocol Section through apparatus addition and sustainable competency development training.

Second, improvement and modernization of facilities and infrastructure supporting protocol implementation are needed, including developing integrated technology-based systems for activity agenda management, communication, and documentation.

Third, strengthening inter-agency coordination and communication through more structured and systematic mechanisms is necessary, such as regular coordination meetings, integrated digital communication systems, and shared understanding before activity implementation.

Fourth, a more flexible and adaptive activity planning system should be developed, considering the possibility of sudden agenda changes. Alternative scenarios (contingency plans) should be prepared for every official activity.

Fifth, the Regional Government needs to strengthen protocol policies and institutions as strategic parts of public administration, providing budget support, organizational capacity improvement, and strengthening the protocol role in government structure.

Sixth, future researchers are advised to develop this study using quantitative or mixed methods approaches and expand research objects to other regional government levels for more comprehensive comparisons regarding the protocol's role in building government image.

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