

Administrative Burden and the Contestability Gap in Digital Welfare in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's Cek Bansos and Data Tunggal Sosial dan Ekonomi Nasional arrangement allowed citizens to view welfare information and request updates when recorded conditions appeared inaccurate. This study examined how the publicly documented correction route structured contestability when a welfare classification was disputed. A qualitative single case design was used with directed document analysis of twelve public materials issued between 2021 and 2026. Current institutional claims relied on the 2025 and 2026 regime, while earlier materials were used only to trace the history of citizen initiated correction. The analysis identified clear routes for status checking and data updating, but responsibility for verification, recalculation, complaints, and reconsideration remained divided across local government, social service actors, Ministry channels, and Statistics Indonesia. Public materials explained welfare deciles in general but provided less case specific information about why a household received a particular classification and who could authoritatively reconsider it. The study identified a contestability gap between available correction and a publicly intelligible route to authoritative reconsideration. Administrative burden helped explain why that institutional distance mattered without treating unequal access or discriminatory effects as empirical findings.



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INTRODUCTION

Welfare databases become most consequential when the recorded information is wrong, outdated, or difficult to challenge. Digital interfaces can make a benefit status easier to see while shifting part of the work of correction to the person whose record is disputed. Citizens may have to identify the relevant office, understand what information has been used, provide new evidence, and return after another institution has processed the update. Research on digital self service describes this movement of administrative work toward citizens as a feature of the contemporary welfare state (Madsen, Lindgren, & Melin, 2022). Brown (2025) and Meers (2026) reach a related conclusion from different welfare settings. Interface design and administrative procedure now shape access together.

Administrative burden describes the work citizens face when dealing with the state. Learning costs concern rules and responsibilities that are hard to understand. Compliance costs come from the steps needed to meet those requirements, while psychological costs concern experiences such as stress or stigma (Moynihan, Herd, & Harvey, 2015). These costs are well established across citizen state encounters (Halling & Baekgaard, 2024). They also matter for social equity because citizens do not have the same resources for dealing with bureaucracy (Nisar, 2018).

Digital systems change where those costs are produced. A problem can begin in an interface, but it can also arise from information sharing between agencies or from a division of responsibility that citizens cannot easily follow. Peeters and Widlak (2018) showed how information architecture can turn an incorrect record into a durable barrier. Their later study of infrastructure level bureaucracy shows

that exclusion may emerge from data arrangements behind ordinary citizen contact (Peeters & Widlak, 2023). Peeters (2023) consequently treats digital burden as more than a problem of digital skill. Organizational design remains part of the encounter. Hegemann and Ritz (2026) reach the same broad conclusion in their systematic review.

Contestability becomes important once a citizen has something concrete to dispute. Karusala et al. (2024) show that people in underserved settings often rely on intermediaries and workable public service procedures before a challenge becomes realistic. Yurrita et al. (2025) identify sense making, procedural support, and clear responsibility as central needs in consequential decision processes. Public administration research also warns against treating human presence as proof of meaningful oversight. What an official can review or change depends on organizational context (Sztandar-Sztanderska, 2026). Rizk and Lindgren (2025) make a related point about the changing decision space between public officials and digital systems.

Indonesia introduced the Data Tunggal Sosial dan Ekonomi Nasional, known as DTSEN, as an integrated source for social and economic data in 2025. Presidential Instruction No. 4 of 2025 requires public institutions to use and maintain integrated data, while Ministry of Social Affairs Regulation No. 3 of 2025 governs updating and welfare use. Cek Bansos allows a person to search using a national identification number and explains the general meaning of welfare deciles. It also states that a decile can be updated through local government, social service offices, or the application before Statistics Indonesia recalculates the decile periodically.

The study asks how the publicly documented Cek Bansos and DTSEN correction route structures contestability when a welfare classification is disputed. Public documents cannot establish how often corrections fail, whether one social group faces more difficulty than another, or whether a classification is discriminatory. They can show what the state tells citizens about correction, which institutions hold visible responsibilities, and where the public description of reconsideration becomes unclear. That narrower evidence is the basis of the article.

DTSEN provides genuine correctability without providing an equally clear public route to authoritative reconsideration. Citizens can view status information and submit updated data, but relevant functions remain divided across local government, social service actors, Ministry channels, and Statistics Indonesia. The contestability gap refers to that institutional distance. It lies between an available correction procedure and a publicly intelligible route through which a disputed classification can be understood and reconsidered by an actor with relevant authority. Administrative burden explains why the distance matters without converting it into proof of unequal access.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research uses a qualitative single case design based on directed document analysis. Document analysis is suitable when formal rules, public procedures, and institutional responsibilities are part of the phenomenon being studied (Bowen, 2009). Directed analysis allows an existing theoretical vocabulary to guide reading without treating documents as quantitative observations (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The bounded case is the public route through which a person can view, dispute, update, and seek reconsideration of welfare information within Cek Bansos and DTSEN. PKH and Sembako are mentioned only where official material shows why DTSEN classification matters for social assistance.

Twelve public materials issued between 2021 and 2026 form the corpus. Eight describe the current DTSEN regime or its operation. Two earlier Ministry materials provide background on citizen correction and complaint access. Two Ombudsman reports from 2026 provide external evidence on an uncompleted local update and misunderstanding about which institution determines a welfare decile. Every item is identified in Table 1. Selection was purposive and limited to material that directly addresses status information, updating, complaint handling, verification, institutional authority, or oversight.

Table 1 Public Documentary Corpus and Analytical Use

Institution	Material	Year	Analytical use
Government of Indonesia	Presidential Instruction No. 4 of 2025 on DTSEN	2025	Current legal basis and interagency mandate
Ministry of Social Affairs	Regulation No. 3 of 2025 on updating and use of DTSEN	2025	Current updating and welfare use rules
Ministry of National Development Planning	Regulation No. 7 of 2025 on data sharing for DTSEN	2025	Data sharing and institutional governance
Statistics Indonesia	Regulation No. 6 of 2025 on preparation and management of DTSEN	2025	BPS role in data processing and management
Ministry of Social Affairs	Cek Bansos public interface	2026	Status visibility, decile explanation, and update routes
Ministry of Social Affairs	Tindakanlanjuti Arahan Presiden Prabowo, Kemensos dan BPS Bahas Pemutakhiran Data DTSEN	2025	Governance of data updating
Ministry of Social Affairs	Pastikan Keakuratan DTSEN, Kemensos dan BPS Lakukan Ground Check	2025	Field verification and actor roles
Ministry of Social Affairs	Ground Checking DTSEN, Wamensos Agus Jabo Koordinasi Lintas Sektoral	2025	Bureaucratic and citizen update routes
Ministry of Social Affairs	Yuk cek menu Usul dan Sanggah di Aplikasi Cek Bansos	2021	Historical background on citizen correction
Ministry of Social Affairs	Kemensos Tingkatkan Layanan Kesejahteraan Sosial Masyarakat Melalui Pusat Kendali	2023	Complaint access and human contact
Ombudsman Republik Indonesia	Warga Adukan Layanan Perubahan Desil DTSEN ke Ombudsman Gorontalo	2026	External evidence of an uncompleted local update
Ombudsman Republik Indonesia	Ombudsman Babel Luruskan Informasi Keliru soal Penentu Desil DTSEN, Bukan Desa atau Dinas Sosial	2026	External evidence of role misunderstanding

Five analytical dimensions guided the reading. Decision visibility concerned whether recorded status could be seen. Explainability concerned whether public material made a household specific classification understandable. Correctability concerned routes for changing inaccurate data. Human review was recorded only where a human actor had a stated role relevant to reconsideration. Procedural burden covered the learning and compliance work visible in the route, including locating the responsible institution and moving information across administrative hand offs. Psychological costs were not treated as findings because the documents contain no evidence of citizen emotion or stigma. Table 2 sets out these dimensions.

Table 2 Analytical Dimensions Used in Document Reading

Dimension	Question used in reading	Visible documentary indicator	Interpretive use
Decision visibility	Can the citizen see the recorded status or classification	Status display, source information, benefit or decile information	Learning costs
Explainability	Does public material explain the household specific basis of the result	Individual reasons, decisive data, basis of classification	Learning costs and sense making
Correctability	Can inaccurate information be submitted for change	Update route, verification, resubmission, recalculation	Formal contestability and compliance costs
Human review	Is a human actor publicly identified with authority relevant to reconsideration	Review role, authority to revise, communication of disposition	Responsibility and meaningful contestability
Procedural burden	What work is visible before correction or review can occur	Institutional hand offs, sequential steps, documentation, waiting	Learning and compliance costs

Claims were checked across legal rules, Ministry guidance, the citizen interface, and Ombudsman material. Current authority follows the 2025 and 2026 regime when older material reflects the previous DTKS arrangement. Absence from public material is treated only as absence of public specification, not proof that an internal process does not exist. The design cannot measure citizen experience, failed correction rates, internal caseworker practice, or back end processing. Those limits determine the wording of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Status Visibility and Case Specific Explanation

Cek Bansos gives citizens direct visibility of recorded welfare information. The current interface uses the national identification number as the entry point, identifies DTSEN as the data source, and explains how the decile scale represents relative household welfare. It also links lower deciles with possible eligibility for programs such as PKH and Sembako. For a person who wants to know whether a welfare record exists and how the state has classified the household, this is a meaningful administrative improvement. The object that may later be disputed is no longer entirely hidden inside an agency database.

The interface explains the decile system at a general level rather than a household specific one. It lists broad social and economic information that may matter, including work, education, housing, electricity, and assets. The reviewed public material does not provide a case specific statement showing which data produced a particular decile. That difference matters when the citizen believes the result is wrong. Knowing what a decile means is not the same as knowing why one household occupies it. Baekgaard, Döring, and Thomsen (2025) show that communication can shape administrative burden even when the underlying rule is unchanged. Bhargava and Manoli (2015) likewise show that information frictions can affect completion of benefit processes. In another Indonesian policy context, Kadir (2025a) similarly cautions that public data can shape official reasoning through the way information is selected and framed.

Limited case specific explanation creates a learning problem before correction begins. The citizen must work out what information may be inaccurate and what should be challenged. Christensen et al. (2020) show that cognitive resources affect the capacity to handle administrative demands, while Masood and Nisar (2021) describe the resources used to navigate bureaucracy as administrative capital. Contestability research reaches a compatible conclusion. Karusala et al. (2024) emphasize the role of supportive procedures and intermediaries, and Yurrita et al. (2025) identify sense making as a basic need before an effective challenge can occur. The DTSEN evidence supports only the institutional point that status is easier to see than the household specific basis of that status.

Correction Routes and Review Authority

Correction is expressly built into the current arrangement. Cek Bansos states that a decile can be updated through village or urban village government, local social service offices, or the application when recorded conditions do not match reality. Ministry guidance from 2025 also describes field verification involving PKH facilitators, local social service offices, and Statistics Indonesia. Facilitators can check beneficiary information and support updates, while Statistics Indonesia retains responsibility for the statistical processing used to determine or recalculate welfare ranking. The arrangement is not a

closed database in which an incorrect record is formally immutable. Citizens and local actors have recognized entry points for correction.

Correctability also has institutional history. The earlier Cek Bansos Usul Sanggah mechanism allowed public proposals and objections in response to inclusion and exclusion errors. The older material is not evidence of current authority, but it shows continuity in citizen supplied correction. This matters because the present case differs from the rigid information architecture described by Peeters and Widlak (2018), where an incorrect master record can dominate later encounters. In DTSEN, correction is a visible part of the design.

Authority is less concentrated than access to correction. Local government and social service actors can receive information and perform verification. Ministry channels can receive complaints and coordinate responses. Statistics Indonesia carries out data processing and decile calculation. An Ombudsman report from Bangka Belitung in August 2026 addressed public misunderstanding that village government or the local social service office determines the decile. Ombudsman clarified that local actors propose, verify, and validate information, while the decile is determined through the BPS process. A citizen may therefore reach a human actor without reaching the institution that controls the disputed classification.

A Gorontalo complaint shows a different point of friction. A resident reported that the village had not provided the requested update of DTSEN information, and the later examination found that the data had not been updated. One complaint cannot show how common this problem is. It does show that an available route can fail at an early administrative step. Correction may depend on another institution completing its part of the process, so the burden cannot be reduced to digital literacy or device access.

Organizational hand offs matter because citizens need to understand what each actor can do. Peeters (2020) argues that burden can originate in organizational arrangements without a deliberate policy of deterrence. Peeters, Renteria, and Cejudo (2023) also show how information capacity shapes implementation burden. In DTSEN, the public route distinguishes submission, verification, data processing, decile calculation, and complaint handling. Those tasks can be rationally divided inside government while remaining difficult to read from the citizen side. The arrangement therefore creates a plausible learning cost through role differentiation and a compliance cost when correction depends on sequential action across organizations. A related concern appears in Kadir's (2024) discussion of fragmented justice, where uneven institutional attention and case classification are treated as factors that reshape how public authority responds.

Human contact does not settle the problem. The Ministry Command Center and telephone service 171 provide a complaint channel, local officials participate in data updating, and PKH facilitators can assist with field verification. Ombudsman offers another human institution outside the service chain. Yet the reviewed materials do not place all relevant information and reconsideration authority in one public facing role. Sztandar-Sztanderska (2026) shows that meaningful human oversight depends on organizational and technical context. Rizk and Lindgren (2025) make a related point about the decision space shared by officials and digital systems. The issue in DTSEN is not the absence of people. It is whether the person reached by the citizen has authority over the disputed result.

Meaningful review is narrower than assistance. A staff member may explain where to submit information without being able to change the classification. A village operator may update data without controlling the later statistical calculation. Yurrita et al. (2025) treat responsibility attribution as part of meaningful contestability, and Karusala et al. (2024) show why intermediaries matter in public service challenges. Therefore DTSEN case extends the contestability problem to a hybrid data driven welfare setting that should not be reduced to automated decision making. Brown and Malbon (2026) provide a wider reason for taking such procedural structure seriously because administrative processes can filter the practical realization of public entitlements.

The Contestability Gap

DTSEN combines an accessible correction architecture with a less consolidated route to authoritative reconsideration. Public material tells citizens where status can be checked and identifies several ways to submit updated information. It also describes local verification and BPS recalculation. What is less clear is the end to end route through which a citizen who still disputes the resulting classification can obtain a reasoned reconsideration from an actor with relevant authority. The contestability gap names this limited institutional distance. It is not the gap between redress and no

redress. It lies between having ways to correct information and having a publicly intelligible route from disagreement to authoritative reconsideration.

Administrative burden makes that distinction useful for public administration. Learning costs may arise when a citizen must work out whether the problem concerns local data entry, verification, statistical recalculation, or benefit administration. Compliance costs may arise when an update crosses more than one organizational step. Digital service research increasingly treats these burdens as products of technical and organizational conditions (Peeters, 2023). Hegemann and Ritz (2026) find the same pattern across the wider literature. DTSEN adds a specific location for that burden. It can occur after status becomes visible and after a correction route already exists.

The distributive concern remains an implication rather than a finding. Administrative burden research shows that uniform procedures may be harder to navigate for people with fewer cognitive, social, financial, or bureaucratic resources. Carey, Malbon, and Blackwell (2021) demonstrate uneven effective demands in welfare administration. Herd and Moynihan (2025) make a related concern central to the social safety net, while Brown and Malbon (2026) connect burden to the practical realization of rights and support. These studies justify asking whether fragmented correction may be differentially navigable. They do not allow this document study to claim that DTSEN has produced unequal access, discriminatory outcomes, or a measurable burden gap between groups.

More contact channels are not necessarily more contestability. Public facing design becomes more useful when a disputed status can be linked to understandable case information, the citizen can see what stage a correction has reached, and responsibility for the next decision is clear. These changes would not require abandoning local verification or centralized statistical processing. They concern continuity across functions that already exist. De Fine Licht and de Fine Licht (2020) argue that transparency is valuable when it makes public decision processes more intelligible and accountable. Better continuity between explanation, correction, and authority would narrow the contestability gap without requiring a more complex administrative model. A related argument appears in Kadir (2025b), who treats unchecked formal authority as a problem of institutional limits and accountability in another policy domain.

Table 3 Evidence Summary for the Contestability Argument

Administrative point	What public material specifies	Documented limitation	Bounded implication
Status checking	Cek Bansos displays welfare information and explains deciles in general	No household specific reason statement is visible in the reviewed interface	Status visibility exceeds case specific explanation
Data updating	Updates can be submitted through local government, social service offices, or the application	Later verification and BPS recalculation remain separate functions	Formal correction does not place all action in one institutional point
Institutional responsibility	Local actors verify information while BPS performs decile calculation	Ombudsman material records misunderstanding about who determines the decile	Role differentiation can increase learning costs
Complaint access	The Ministry Command Center and 171 provide a human complaint channel	A complaint contact is not necessarily the actor controlling the disputed classification	Human contact and review authority should be distinguished
Reconsideration	Human verification and data updating are publicly documented	The reviewed materials do not specify one end to end reasoned reconsideration route	The gap lies between available correction and publicly intelligible authoritative reconsideration

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's Cek Bansos and DTSEN arrangement contains real mechanisms for correction. Citizens can see welfare status information, submit updated data through more than one route, and encounter human actors at several points. Local verification and BPS recalculation also give the system a capacity to revise information rather than freeze an error indefinitely. The weakness identified in the public record appears later. Functions relevant to a disputed classification are divided among institutions, and the reviewed materials do not present one equally clear route from disagreement to a reasoned reconsideration by the actor that holds the relevant authority. The contestability gap captures that distance without describing the system as wholly opaque or uncorrectable. The evidence supports claims about institutional design, not population outcomes. It cannot establish how often corrections fail, how citizens experience the process, whether internal caseworkers use additional procedures, or whether disadvantaged groups face higher failure rates. Psychological burden and discriminatory effects remain outside the findings. This boundary is especially important because DTSEN is still developing

and public documents reveal only procedures that government makes visible to citizens and external observers.

Administrative burden remains useful within that boundary. It directs attention to the work required when a citizen has to understand a classification, locate the relevant authority, and move through correction steps that cross organizational lines. A digital welfare system can make status information accessible while leaving reconsideration harder to read than the initial interface. For public administration, the issue is not whether every function should be centralized. It is whether a person disputing an official welfare record can understand what happens next and which institution is responsible for the decision that follows.

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