

Level Of Public Trust In The Economic Census And Its Impact On Increasing The Accuracy Of Decil Determination For Public Welfare

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Abstract

The 2026 Economic Census (SE) is a national data collection agenda that serves as the foundation for updating the National Single Social and Economic Data (DTSEN), which is used to classify community welfare levels into ten deciles. However, its implementation faces challenges of public resistance and low trust, which potentially compromise data accuracy and the precision of decile determination. This study aims to measure public trust in the 2026 Economic Census, identify its determining factors, and analyze its impact on the accuracy of welfare decile determination. Using a mixed-methods approach with surveys of 100 respondents across Kemandungan Tegal city and in-depth interviews with 20 key informants, the study finds that public trust levels range from low to moderate, with dominant factors being concerns about data confidentiality, taxation issues, and fear of losing access to social assistance. The analysis reveals a significant causal relationship between low trust and data inaccuracy, which in turn leads to decile misclassification and mis-targeting of social assistance programs. This study recommends strengthening inclusive public communication strategies, involving local leaders, and ensuring data management transparency to build public trust for achieving more targeted policies

Keywords

2026 Economic Census, public trust, data accuracy, welfare decile, social assistance, DTSEN, public policy.



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INTRODUCTION

The 2026 Economic Census (SE2026), organized by Statistics Indonesia (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), represents a major national statistical undertaking designed to provide comprehensive and up-to-date information on Indonesia's economic structure and business activities. Conducted nationwide from June 15 to August 31, 2026, the census serves as an important instrument for updating economic and socioeconomic information across Indonesian society. As a decennial census, SE2026 has strategic significance because the information collected can provide a comprehensive picture of economic activities, business characteristics, employment patterns, and the

development of economic sectors at the national and regional levels. Accurate statistical information is essential for supporting evidence-based planning and ensuring that government policies correspond to the actual socioeconomic conditions of communities (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2026; Groves et al., 2006).

The implementation of SE2026 is also closely connected to the strengthening of the Data Tunggal Sosial dan Ekonomi Nasional (DTSEN), which serves as an important national data infrastructure for identifying and classifying socioeconomic conditions. DTSEN integrates various types of information concerning demographic characteristics, education, employment, housing, health, asset ownership, and economic conditions. Through this integrated information system, households can be classified into ten welfare groups or deciles, ranging from decile 1, representing the lowest socioeconomic group, to decile 10, representing the highest group. The decile classification is important because it provides a statistical basis for identifying differences in household welfare and supporting the government in designing targeted development and social protection policies (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2026; World Bank, 2022).

The accuracy of welfare decile classification has direct implications for the distribution of government assistance and social protection programs. Various programs, including the Program Keluarga Harapan (PKH), Bantuan Pangan Non Tunai (BPNT), Program Indonesia Pintar (PIP), Penerima Bantuan Iuran Jaminan Kesehatan Nasional (PBI JKN), and Bantuan Langsung Tunai (BLT) Dana Desa, require reliable socioeconomic information to identify eligible beneficiaries. Errors in socioeconomic classification may produce inclusion errors, in which households that are not eligible receive assistance, or exclusion errors, in which eligible households fail to receive assistance. Therefore, the accuracy of socioeconomic data is not merely a technical statistical concern but also an important component of social justice and effective public administration (Devereux et al., 2017; Kidd & Wylde, 2011).

Nevertheless, the implementation of SE2026 may encounter various challenges at the community level. One of the most important challenges concerns public willingness to participate in census activities. Census officers conducting door-to-door enumeration may encounter residents who are reluctant to provide information, refuse to participate, or respond with suspicion and negative attitudes. Such resistance can be influenced by several factors, including limited understanding of the purpose of the census, concerns about personal data, fear that information may be related to taxation or government obligations, previous experiences with government programs, and low levels of institutional trust. Groves and Couper (1998) explain that

respondents' decisions to participate in surveys are influenced by social, psychological, and situational factors, including their perceptions of interviewers and the legitimacy of the survey organization.

Public resistance is particularly important because respondent cooperation directly influences the quality of statistical data. When respondents refuse to participate or provide incomplete or inaccurate information, the resulting data may contain nonresponse and measurement errors. Groves et al. (2006) argue that nonresponse can become a serious problem when individuals who refuse to participate differ systematically from those who provide information. Similarly, Bethlehem (2010) explains that nonresponse bias may occur when the characteristics of respondents and nonrespondents differ in ways that are relevant to the variables being measured. Consequently, the effectiveness of SE2026 cannot be assessed solely from the technical design of the census but must also consider the social relationship between census officers and the communities being enumerated.

The interaction between census officers and respondents is therefore a critical component of the data collection process. Dillman et al. (2014) emphasize that respondents' cooperation is influenced by perceived survey legitimacy, the burden associated with participation, the quality of communication, and the manner in which requests for information are presented. Tourangeau et al. (2013) similarly demonstrate that trust and perceptions of privacy are particularly important when respondents are asked to provide information concerning sensitive personal or economic circumstances. In this context, census officers must be able to explain clearly the objectives of SE2026, the importance of accurate information, and the procedures used to protect respondents' information.

From the perspective of total survey quality, resistance from the community may contribute to several forms of error, including coverage error, nonresponse error, measurement error, and processing error. Biemer (2010) emphasizes that total survey error consists of multiple interconnected sources of error throughout the data-production process. Therefore, improving the quality of SE2026 requires not only reliable instruments and competent census officers but also effective public communication and community engagement. Local government institutions, village officials, community leaders, and other trusted actors can play an important role in strengthening public understanding and encouraging citizens to cooperate with census activities.

Thus, community resistance toward SE2026 represents a significant phenomenon that deserves further academic attention. Such resistance should not simply be

understood as an individual refusal to participate but should be examined as a multidimensional phenomenon involving institutional trust, information, communication, privacy concerns, perceived benefits, and the relationship between citizens and government institutions. Understanding the causes, forms, and consequences of resistance can help BPS and other relevant institutions develop more effective communication strategies and fieldwork mechanisms. Ultimately, strengthening public participation in SE2026 is essential for producing accurate, comprehensive, and reliable socioeconomic data that can support the improvement of DTSEN, the appropriate classification of household welfare deciles, and the more effective distribution of government development and social protection programs.

METHODS

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to examine community resistance to the implementation of the 2026 Economic Census (SE2026) and its potential implications for the quality of socioeconomic data and welfare decile classification. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation involving census officers, community members, local government officials, and other relevant stakeholders who were directly involved in or affected by the SE2026 enumeration process. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their experience and relevance to the research objectives. The collected data were analyzed interactively through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, following the analytical framework proposed by Miles et al. (2014). Data credibility was strengthened through source and method triangulation by comparing information obtained from different participants and data collection techniques. The analysis focused on identifying the forms of community resistance, factors contributing to resistance, patterns of interaction between census officers and respondents, and the consequences of resistance for data completeness, accuracy, and reliability. The study also examined the role of communication, institutional trust, privacy concerns, public understanding, and community involvement in influencing respondents' willingness to participate in SE2026. Through this approach, the research sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the social and institutional dimensions underlying community resistance and to formulate implications for improving census implementation and the quality of national socioeconomic data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Low Public Trust: The Root Cause of Participation Problems

The findings indicate that public trust in the implementation of the 2026 Economic Census (SE2026) remains relatively low and represents one of the most important factors influencing community participation. The secondary data analysis from Litbang Kompas strengthens this finding, showing that from approximately 66.9 thousand social media conversations during the census period, 51.2% contained negative sentiments, while only 9.1% expressed positive sentiments. This pattern suggests that the challenge faced by census officers is not merely an operational problem involving respondents' availability but is closely related to the broader issue of institutional trust. Public trust is increasingly recognized as a fundamental component of effective governance because citizens are more willing to cooperate with public institutions when they perceive them as reliable, fair, responsive, transparent, and capable of protecting their interests (OECD, 2022). The OECD Trust Survey similarly demonstrates that perceptions of government reliability, responsiveness, integrity, fairness, and openness are strongly associated with citizens' confidence in public institutions. In the context of SE2026, this means that even technically well-designed census procedures may face resistance when citizens do not sufficiently trust the institution responsible for collecting their personal and economic information. Morelock (2021) also emphasizes that citizens' direct interactions with bureaucratic actors can influence their perceptions of government institutions, meaning that the behavior and communication style of census officers can become an important determinant of public trust.

The first major source of negative sentiment identified in this study is taxation anxiety. Approximately 71.3% of negative sentiments were associated with fears that census information could be used to increase taxation, while 68.1% of negative discussions connected the census closely with tax-related matters. This concern is particularly relevant among business owners and self-employed respondents because questions concerning turnover, income, assets, and business activities may be interpreted as information that could have direct financial consequences. Such perceptions can create defensive behavior, including refusal to provide information, underreporting of income, or providing incomplete responses. The problem is not necessarily caused by the actual purpose of the census but by respondents' interpretation of how the information might subsequently be used. Research on public trust and government data practices shows that citizens' confidence is strongly influenced by whether they believe government institutions use personal data legitimately and safely (OECD, 2022). In addition, Agahari et al. (2022) demonstrate that concerns about control, risk, and mistrust are important factors affecting willingness to share data. Therefore, taxation anxiety should be understood as a communication and trust problem rather than simply as a misunderstanding among respondents.

The second major source of negative sentiment concerns perceptions of corruption and the integrity of public officials. The analysis indicates that 74.6% of the highest negative sentiments emerged from comparisons between economic data collection and public perceptions of officials' wealth transparency and corruption enforcement. Some members of the public question why the government appears highly intensive in collecting economic information from ordinary citizens while corruption among public officials is perceived as insufficiently addressed. This comparison can weaken institutional legitimacy because citizens evaluate government institutions not only according to their technical performance but also according to perceptions of fairness and integrity. The OECD (2024) confirms that perceptions of government integrity and responsiveness remain important determinants of public trust, while citizens are more likely to trust institutions when they believe that government decisions are fair, transparent, and responsive to public concerns. Consequently, resistance to SE2026 may reflect broader dissatisfaction with public institutions rather than opposition to statistical activities themselves.

The third factor is a broader crisis of institutional trust intensified by the digital information environment. In an era characterized by frequent reports of data breaches, cybercrime, misinformation, and unauthorized use of personal information, citizens have become increasingly cautious about providing sensitive information. Research on data-sharing behavior shows that privacy concerns and perceived risks can significantly influence willingness to share information with institutions (Kalkman et al., 2022). Similarly, Maulina et al. (2020) demonstrate that perceptions of social media credibility can influence how individuals process information and form beliefs, highlighting the importance of information environments in shaping public perceptions. Negative information circulating through social media can therefore amplify existing doubts about government programs. When misinformation is repeatedly encountered, citizens may accept it as credible, particularly when it confirms pre-existing concerns. Thomas et al. (2021), for example, found evidence that online media-literacy interventions can improve people's ability to identify misinformation in Indonesia. This finding indicates that improving public understanding and media literacy should form part of broader strategies for strengthening trust in government data initiatives.

Several determinants identified in the field further explain differences in public trust. Knowledge of the objectives of the census has a positive relationship with participation because citizens who understand the social and economic benefits of statistical information tend to perceive census participation as a contribution to a public good. Perceptions of BPS credibility also appear to influence participation positively. When respondents view BPS as a professional, independent, and statistically competent institution, they are more likely to provide information voluntarily. Positive experiences with census officers constitute another important factor. Persuasive communication, patience, politeness, and the involvement of respected community figures such as neighborhood leaders and religious leaders can reduce suspicion and create a more comfortable interaction. Conversely, exposure to negative information and hoaxes through social media can reduce confidence. These findings are

consistent with OECD (2024), which recommends evidence-based communication, transparent explanation of government decisions, and a healthier information ecosystem as important strategies for strengthening institutional trust. Thus, trust should be treated as a central operational variable in census implementation rather than as an external social factor.

. Consequences for Data Quality and Welfare-Decile Accuracy

Low public trust has two immediate consequences for respondent behavior: refusal to participate and inaccurate reporting. Both behaviors have substantial implications for the quality of the National Single Social and Economic Data (DTSEN), particularly because DTSEN is intended to support the identification of socioeconomic conditions and the targeting of government programs. Current BPS information confirms that DTSEN integrates socioeconomic indicators and continues to undergo updating and field verification to improve targeting accuracy. Consequently, data quality at the initial collection stage remains fundamental to the reliability of subsequent classification and policy decisions. If respondents refuse to participate, important households may be missing from the database. If respondents participate but intentionally provide inaccurate information, the database may contain systematic measurement errors. The resulting problem is therefore not simply incomplete data but potentially biased socioeconomic classification.

The importance of this issue is demonstrated by the continuing need for field verification. BPS reported in 2026 that the updated DTSEN incorporated demographic updates and field-verification results and that the process improved welfare classification and reduced inclusion errors. This confirms that administrative and integrated databases cannot automatically be assumed to represent current socioeconomic realities without continuous verification. Field findings concerning inappropriate beneficiaries, including individuals who should not qualify for social assistance, further illustrate the consequences of outdated or inaccurate records. Similar problems have previously been identified in Indonesia's social-assistance databases, where verification has revealed duplicate records and beneficiaries who were no longer eligible. The government has consequently emphasized the need for continuous updating to reduce both inclusion and exclusion errors (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Pembangunan Manusia dan Kebudayaan, 2020).

Implications for Welfare-Decile Classification

The most visible consequence of inaccurate socioeconomic data is the potential misclassification of households into inappropriate welfare deciles. The first consequence is the exclusion of genuinely poor households from social assistance. Field observations indicate that some households previously categorized in deciles 1 or 2 may subsequently appear in higher deciles, such as decile 6, causing them to lose access to social assistance, scholarships, food assistance, or other welfare programs. Such changes may occur because socioeconomic status

is dynamic, but they can also reflect inaccurate or outdated information. BPS explicitly recognizes that household welfare can change rapidly and therefore requires continuous data updating and ground checks. This distinction is important because a change in decile should not automatically be interpreted as an improvement in welfare; it may also reflect changes in measurement, administrative records, or data verification.

The second consequence is the continued inclusion of economically capable households among beneficiaries. This constitutes an inclusion error and can generate perceptions of unfairness among citizens who are genuinely vulnerable but excluded from assistance. Inclusion errors can reduce the efficiency of social protection expenditure while simultaneously generating social jealousy at the community level. Research on social protection emphasizes that targeting systems face persistent challenges in balancing inclusion and exclusion, particularly where socioeconomic conditions are dynamic and information is incomplete (Woldegiorgis, 2022). The third consequence is declining public confidence in the entire data system. When households who identify themselves as casual laborers, small farmers, or informal workers are classified into relatively high welfare deciles, they may perceive the system as disconnected from their actual living conditions. This creates a feedback effect: inaccurate classification reduces trust, declining trust encourages resistance to future data collection, and reduced participation can subsequently worsen data quality.

Theoretical Implications: Trust Deficit and Data Validity

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the importance of public trust and social capital in data-driven governance. A census is not simply a technical statistical activity; it is also a social interaction between the state and citizens. When institutional trust declines, voluntary cooperation becomes more difficult. OECD (2022) demonstrates that trust is strongly associated with perceptions of government reliability, integrity, responsiveness, and openness. In the SE2026 context, the trust deficit therefore affects not only participation rates but also the validity of information supplied by respondents. Distrustful respondents may adopt defensive strategies, either refusing to provide information or deliberately modifying their answers. This creates a vicious cycle in which low trust produces poor data, poor data produces inappropriate policy outcomes, inappropriate outcomes reinforce public dissatisfaction, and dissatisfaction further reduces institutional trust. This argument is also consistent with the broader literature on data governance, which emphasizes that public acceptance of data-driven government depends on transparency, accountability, privacy protection, and perceived legitimacy (Agahari et al., 2022; OECD, 2024).

The findings also indicate that welfare should not be understood exclusively through statistical rankings. Although deciles provide an important administrative mechanism for categorizing households, socioeconomic welfare involves multidimensional conditions that may not always be completely captured by income, assets, employment, housing, or other quantitative indicators. BPS itself identifies multiple dimensions in the construction of welfare

classifications, including demographic characteristics, education, employment, housing, sanitation, health, disability, assets, and business ownership. Therefore, quantitative classification should be complemented by contextual verification at the local level. A household's economic vulnerability may be influenced by temporary unemployment, health expenditures, family dependency, informal employment, debt, or other circumstances that are difficult to capture through administrative data alone.

E. Strategic Recommendations

Based on these findings, the first strategic recommendation is to strengthen persuasive public communication. Government institutions and BPS should explain the objectives, procedures, benefits, and confidentiality mechanisms of SE2026 in simple and locally understandable language. Communication should clearly distinguish statistical data collection from taxation and should explain how census information is processed and protected. The OECD (2024) emphasizes that governments can strengthen trust by communicating the evidence underlying their decisions, making information verifiable, and explaining how data are used. Communication should therefore begin before census officers arrive at households and should utilize multiple channels, including village meetings, social media, local radio, community groups, and religious or neighborhood forums.

Second, community leaders should be actively involved in the census process. Neighborhood heads, village officials, religious leaders, and respected community figures can function as intermediaries who reduce psychological distance between census officers and respondents. Their involvement can reassure citizens that the activity is legitimate and socially beneficial. At the same time, census officers require stronger interpersonal communication training, particularly in patience, active listening, conflict management, and responding to questions concerning privacy and taxation. Third, data updating must be conducted continuously rather than only during major census activities. Current BPS policy already emphasizes ground checks and inter-institutional cooperation to improve DTSEN accuracy. Local governments should therefore be given meaningful opportunities to propose corrections based on verified community conditions, while final classification remains subject to standardized statistical procedures. Finally, the government should improve transparency concerning welfare-decile methodology. Citizens should have accessible mechanisms to understand their classification, request clarification, report inaccuracies, and submit evidence for verification. BPS's 2026 emphasis on data updating and field verification demonstrates that socioeconomic classification is inherently dynamic and requires continuous correction. A participatory verification mechanism, including village-to-village and household-level validation when necessary, can therefore help reconcile statistical models with real socioeconomic conditions. Ultimately, rebuilding public trust should become an integral component of improving SE2026 and DTSEN, because accurate data cannot be achieved solely

through sophisticated statistical systems without the active cooperation, confidence, and honesty of the citizens whose lives the data are intended to represent.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the implementation of the 2026 Economic Census (SE2026) and the dynamics of public trust, this study concludes that public trust in SE2026 ranges from low to moderate, with significant variations between urban and rural areas. The primary factors underlying low levels of trust are concerns regarding data confidentiality, taxation issues, and fears about the potential implications of census information for household welfare-decile status and access to social assistance. Public trust is influenced by several interrelated factors, including knowledge of the objectives of the census, perceptions of the credibility and integrity of Statistics Indonesia (BPS), experiences of interacting with census officers, exposure to negative information on social media, concerns about taxation, and fear of losing social assistance. The findings further indicate that the level of public trust has a significant causal relationship with census data accuracy, as individuals with low levels of trust tend to be less willing to provide complete and honest information, potentially generating systematic bias in aggregated socioeconomic data. Census data accuracy is therefore an essential prerequisite for ensuring the validity of welfare-decile classification because inaccurate or incomplete information can result in the misclassification of households, causing social assistance programs to become poorly targeted and potentially excluding vulnerable households that are most in need of government support.

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