

## Political Consultant Style 2024 Regional Election Campaign Monitoring: Institutional Analysis and Governance of Bawaslu Badung

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### ABSTRACT

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This study examines the dual role of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) in overseeing the 2024 regional election (Pilkada) campaign, focusing on its shift from a purely enforcement-oriented approach toward a consultative-preventive supervisory style. Using a qualitative descriptive-explanatory design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using an interactive model supported by source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that campaign oversight in Badung operates through regulatory clarification, corrective guidance on activity design, rapid communication channels, and confirmation mechanisms prior to formal findings. This consultative-preventive mode enhances compliance and reduces administrative friction, contributing to greater preventive effectiveness. However, it simultaneously generates governance risks related to accountability and neutrality, particularly when consultation boundaries are not clearly standardized and consultation processes lack adequate documentation trails. The study proposes a regulatory political-consultant style model to conceptualize this adaptive supervisory practice—characterized by rule-based consultation, real-time coordination infrastructure, and discretion bounded by procedural safeguards. The article contributes to public administration and electoral governance studies by highlighting the trade-off between preventive effectiveness and legitimacy risks, and by emphasizing the need for institutional safeguards such as standardized consultation boundaries, equal access mechanisms, and auditable documentation systems.



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### Introduction

Regional head elections (Pilkada) are a crucial instrument in the consolidation of local democracy in Indonesia, serving not only as a mechanism for the circulation of political elites but also as an arena for democratic learning and the articulation of public interests. The quality of Pilkada is largely determined by the integrity of the electoral process throughout the election stages, particularly during the campaign phase, which is the most intense space for political interaction between candidates, campaign teams, voters, and election organizers and supervisors. Several studies have shown that the campaign phase is the most vulnerable to violations, ranging from misuse of state resources and political disinformation to clientelism and money politics, which can ultimately erode the legitimacy of local democracy (Aspinall & Barendschot, 2019; Mietzner, 2019). The 2024 simultaneous regional elections present greater complexity than previous periods because they will take place simultaneously in various regions with varying levels of political competition and are marked by increased intensity of digital media-based campaigns. This situation demands oversight that is not only oriented towards legal-formal rule enforcement, but also adaptive to evolving local political dynamics. In this context, the role of the General Elections Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) becomes highly strategic as an institution legally mandated to supervise, prevent, and take action against violations at every stage of the election. Normatively, Bawaslu is positioned as an independent and

neutral supervisory institution, tasked with ensuring that all stages of the regional elections run according to the principles of direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair elections as stipulated in Law Number 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections and Law Number 10 of 2016 concerning the Election of Governors, Regents, and Mayors. However, as noted by Fionna & Tomsa (2020), election supervisory institutions at the local level in practice often face political pressure, limited resources and institutional capacity, and demands to maintain the stability of the political process, so that supervision is never fully technocratic. The context of the 2024 regional elections in Bali Province and Badung Regency clearly represents this complexity. At the provincial level, the Bali gubernatorial election pits Wayan Koster - I Nyoman Giri Prasta (Koster - Giri) against Made Muliawan Arya - Putu Agus Suradnyana (Mulia - PAS) (Ratnadi, 2024). Meanwhile, at the regency level, the Badung regional election pits I Wayan Adi Arnawa - Bagus Alit Sucipta (Adi - Cipta) against I Wayan Suyasa - I Putu Alit Yandinata (Suyadinata) (Aryanta, 2024). The contest at these two levels of government takes place in a relatively tight competitive atmosphere and involves strong political networks, so that campaign activities are not only intense but also politically sensitive. In this situation, the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) is not only faced with the technical challenges of campaign supervision, but also with the need to manage the relationships, communications, and expectations of various political actors with different interests.

In the practice of monitoring the 2024 regional election campaign in Badung, a tendency towards an approach that is not solely repressive through enforcement of violations, but also preventive and consultative. The Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) developed an intensive communication pattern with candidate pairs and campaign teams through face-to-face meetings, coordination meetings with liaison officers (LOs), and the use of online communication media. Through this pattern, Bawaslu provided direction, regulatory clarification, and alternative solutions so that campaign activities could continue without violating legal provisions. Enforcement was positioned as a last resort if prevention and consultation efforts did not result in compliance. This approach tendency, as identified in the researcher's preliminary interview with the Head of the Badung Regency Bawaslu, I Wayan Semara Cipta, was understood as part of a strategy to prevent campaign violations and an effort to maintain a conducive election process at the local level, which in this study is referred to as a political consultant style of campaign supervision. This practice indicates a shift in the supervisory style from a pattern of rigid rule enforcement to a more dialogical and solution-oriented approach.

This consultative approach to campaign oversight is both interesting and problematic. On the one hand, this approach has the potential to increase regulatory compliance and prevent violations, thereby strengthening oversight effectiveness. On the other hand, the intensity of consultative practices raises questions about the limits of neutrality, accountability, and independence of election oversight bodies. To date, the literature on Bawaslu and regional election oversight is still dominated by a normative-legal approach that positions Bawaslu within a single role as a "referee," with a primary focus on formal prevention, oversight, and enforcement functions. Several national studies, including Ma'arif et al. (2022), Falangi et al. (2023), Therasari et al. (2024), Safitry & Rahmatullah (2024), Saputra et al. (2024), Azis & Azhar (2024), Puadi et al. (2025), Wahyu & Adi (2025), Damanik & Siregar (2025), and Nugroho & Arundinasari (2025), despite examining diverse issues and contexts, generally assess Bawaslu's performance within a regulatory and procedural framework.

A similar pattern is also evident in international studies of election supervisory bodies, such as Agbevade's (2024) study of Ghana's Electoral Commission and Madueke & Enyiazu's (2025) study of Nigeria's INEC, which emphasize independence, institutional capacity, and formal governance. Despite their important contributions, these studies have not yet addressed how local election supervisory bodies develop dual adaptive and consultative roles in response to the dynamics of political contestation. This gap suggests that analysis of Bawaslu needs to go beyond a normative-legal approach and begin to consider how this institution builds legitimacy, negotiates role expectations, and adapts its role in campaign oversight practices. This study attempts to fill this gap by using a theoretical framework that combines Scott's (2013) institutional theory and Biddle's (1986) role theory, and enriched with Norris's (2023) political consultant style and Lipsky's (2010) street-level bureaucracy. Scott's institutional theory emphasizes that institutional legitimacy rests not only on formal rules and sanction mechanisms (the regulatory pillar), but also on values of appropriateness and social expectations (the normative pillar), and collective acceptance and trust in the institution's actions (the cognitive pillar). In the context of Bawaslu, compliance with campaign regulations is a crucial prerequisite, but institutional legitimacy also characterizes the extent to which oversight practices

are perceived as fair, neutral, and acceptable by the public and election participants. A consultative oversight approach can strengthen normative and cognitive legitimacy if understood as a proportional preventive measure, but it also has the potential to weaken it if perceived as too accommodating to candidate interests. Biddle's role theory provides a framework for understanding these dynamics through the concepts of role expectation, role performance, role conflict, and role adaptation (Biddle, 1986). The Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) faces dual expectations that are not always aligned. The public expects Bawaslu to act firmly and neutrally as a supervisor, while candidate pairs and campaign teams often expect direction, advice, and flexibility to ensure smooth campaign activities. The mismatch between these expectations gives rise to role conflict, which drives role adaptation through communication strategies and regulatory consultation. This adaptation cannot be understood solely as a deviation from normative roles, but rather as a response to the complexity of local politics that demands contextual oversight.

Norris's (2023) concept of political consultant style is used to explain consultative interaction patterns in campaign oversight. Norris views political consultants as actors who help clients navigate regulatory boundaries and communication strategies so that political goals can be achieved without violating rules. In this study, political consultant style is not interpreted as partisan involvement or support for a candidate's victory, but rather as a consultative-preventive supervisory style, where supervisors provide direction, advice, and solutions to prevent campaign violations. Thus, this concept is used as an analytical lens to interpret Bawaslu's consultation practices as part of a preventative strategy, rather than as a form of political partisanship. Lipsky's (2010) concept of street-level bureaucracy A which emphasizes that frontline bureaucrats have considerable discretion in implementing policies. Discretion arises from limited resources, the complexity of problems, and situational pressures faced in the field. In campaign oversight, Bawaslu supervisors act as street-level bureaucrats who must interpret regulations, respond to pressure from political actors, and make practical decisions in often ambiguous situations. The use of discretion through consultation and prevention demonstrates that oversight implementation is never entirely mechanistic but is heavily influenced by situational assessments and the local political context.

By integrating Scott's institutional theory, Biddle's role theory, and the concepts of political consultant style and street-level bureaucracy, this study positions campaign oversight as a dynamic institutional practice fraught with role negotiation. Unlike previous studies that position Bawaslu oversight within a relatively static normative-legal framework, this study offers novelty by demonstrating that campaign oversight is also carried out through the construction of a consultative role that is preventive and discretionary. This approach is understood not as a form of political partisanship, but rather as a supervisory strategy implemented by street-level bureaucrats in response to the complexity of electoral contestation at the local level. Through an empirical analysis of the campaign oversight practices of the 2024 Pilkada in Badung Regency, in the context of the competition between gubernatorial and regental candidates, this study aims to explain how the dual role of Bawaslu Badung Regency is constructed, negotiated, and implemented, as well as its implications for the effectiveness, accountability, and neutrality of campaign oversight governance. Thus, this research contributes theoretically to the enrichment of public administration and election studies, while practically offering reflections for the formulation of the boundaries of consultative supervision in order to strengthen the integrity of regional elections.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive-explanatory design to analyze the consultative-preventive supervisory practices of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) during the 2024 Pilkada campaign stage. Qualitative inquiry was selected to capture the meaning, interpretation, and institutional dynamics underlying the construction of Bawaslu's dual role (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

The research was conducted at Bawaslu Badung Regency during the 2024 regional election campaign period (September–October 2025). The site was purposively selected due to its observable tendency to implement an intensive consultative supervisory pattern.

Data consisted of primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured in-depth interviews, non-participant observation, and documentation. A total of ten informants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement and relevance to campaign oversight practices, including Bawaslu leadership, technical staff, sub-district Panwaslu members, liaison officers (LOs) of

candidate pairs, campaign team representatives, and academic experts. This selection strategy ensured variation of perspectives and strengthened analytical depth.

Secondary data were collected from official regulations, supervisory reports, coordination meeting records, campaign appeals, and relevant academic literature.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Analysis was conducted iteratively to identify patterns related to consultation mechanisms, discretionary practices, and governance implications.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study applied source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation compared information across informant categories, while technique triangulation examined consistency between interview data, observation findings, and documentary evidence. Extended observation was conducted to reduce subject reactivity and deepen contextual understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2024). These strategies enhance the robustness and auditability of the findings.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Result**

This research was conducted in Badung Regency, focusing on the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) as the primary locus of observation. The selection of the research location was based on Bawaslu's strategic position as a supervisory institution mandated to ensure the 2024 regional elections are conducted directly, publicly, freely, confidentially, honestly, and fairly through oversight mechanisms at every stage. In the context of the campaign, Bawaslu Badung not only carries out its oversight function in the narrow sense (discovering and taking action against violations), but also displays consultative practices positioned as part of a preventative strategy by providing guidance, input, and solutions to election participants. This preventative orientation appears consistent with the explanation of a key informant that consultation is positioned as a step to avoid potential violations, while enforcement is understood as a last resort when violations still occur (personal interview, September 15, 2025). Thus, oversight practices in Badung demonstrate a shift in working methods from a repressive emphasis to a more adaptive approach, while simultaneously opening up space for normative debate regarding the appropriate limits of supervisors' interactions with the parties being supervised.

This consultative approach does not exist as incidental communication but rather appears as a "working infrastructure" of oversight operated through both formal and informal channels. In the initial description of the research, consultative-style oversight was stated to take place not only in the campaign arena and Bawaslu offices, but also through various forms of rapid communication to support smooth coordination. One manifestation of this was the use of a dedicated WhatsApp group as a medium for consultation and coordination, indicating that oversight relations were not always mediated by rigid formal procedures, but rather by responsive mechanisms that moved according to field dynamics. Empirically, informants from the participant group also confirmed that communication took place through regular meetings, telephone calls, WhatsApp, and coordination groups involving Bawaslu and the KPU to respond to issues leading up to and during campaign activities.

Research informants were purposively selected based on their direct involvement and relevance to the 2024 Pilkada campaign monitoring process in Badung, while also ensuring a broad range of perspectives (Badung Regency Bawaslu leadership, technical implementation staff, Sub-district Panwaslu, candidate pair LOs, campaign teams, and academics). This strategy enabled the research to capture the phenomenon more holistically: from the perspectives of institutional decision-makers, field technical implementers, and those being monitored and assessing its impact. The diversity of informants also strengthened the depth of data and enabled effective source triangulation, as is the practice of qualitative research that emphasizes verification of findings through cross-actor and cross-position comparisons (Miles et al., 2014).

**Table 1. Characteristics of Research Informants**

No.	Informant	Informant Category	Role in the Campaign Monitoring Process	Linkage to Research
1.	I Wayan Semara Cipta (Chairman of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency)	Key informants	Designing a monitoring strategy, opening a consultation room, and carrying out confirmation before the findings	Explaining the construction of dual roles & institutional logic of supervision - consultation
2	Rachmat Tamara (Member of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency)	Key informants	Implementing supervision & coaching and providing regulatory direction to participants	Strengthening findings on consultative practices & formal role boundaries
3	I Wayan Joni Pargawa, S.SOS (LO of the Suyadinata & Mulia-PAS Candidate Pair)	Key informant	Liaison between candidate pairs – Bawaslu and as recipient of directions/procedures for campaign rules so as not to violate	Describes participants' experiences regarding the consultative style of the Badung Regency Bawaslu
4	I Made Putra Wijaya, ST (LO Candidate Candidate Adi-Cipta & Koster-Giri)	Key informant	Liaison between candidate pairs – Bawaslu and as recipient of directions/procedures for campaign rules so as not to violate	Describes participants' experiences regarding the consultative style of the Badung Regency Bawaslu
5	I Nyoman Karyana (Suyadinata & Mulia-PAS Candidate Candidate Campaign Team)	Additional informants	Campaign implementers, recipients of warnings/education, and coordination with LO	Confirming field consultation practices and campaign team responses
6	Ir. I Made Ponda Wirawan, ST (Adi-Cipta & Koster-Giri Candidate Campaign Team)	Additional informants	Campaign implementers, recipients of warnings/education, and coordination with LO	Confirming field consultation practices and campaign team responses
7	Anak Agung Ngurah Tresna Adnyana, SH, MH (Technical Implementation Staff of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency)	Additional informants	Technical staff for supervision, education/prevention, and provision of administrative & information support	Strengthening the details of implementing the political consultant style in the field
8	I Putu Wiyadnyana (Member of the Kuta District Election Supervisory Committee)	Additional informants	Sub-district level supervision, vertical coordination, and discretion in field norms	Demonstrates field practice (discretion) & perception of neutrality
9	Dr. Kadek Dwita Apriani, S.Sos., M.Si. (Academic)	Expert informant	Conceptual analysis of the phenomenon of dual roles & political consultant style	A theoretical assessment of the institutional and governance implications of oversight
10	Dr. Ni Wayan Widhiasthini, S.Sos., M.Si. (Academic)	Expert informant	Normative assessment & institutional risks and highlight the issue of neutrality	Conceptual critique/validation of role shift risk and innovation design

The table above shows that the data was obtained from informants who not only "know" about campaign monitoring from a distance, but also directly participate in decision-making, implementation, and the recipients of monitoring interventions (directions, corrections, and reprimands). This composition is important because the phenomenon of the supervisor's consultative role is often "relational": its meaning changes depending on who experiences it, the context, and the channel through which the interaction takes place. To ensure the credibility of the findings, this study uses source triangulation and technical triangulation. Source triangulation was used to examine the consistency of information patterns across informant categories, while technical triangulation was used to assess the alignment between interview narratives, observations, and documentation accompanying the research process.

**Table 2. 2of Source Triangulation**

Theme/Findings	Key Informant (Bawaslu)	Key Informant (LO)	Additional Informant (Team/Technical/Panwascam)	Expert Informant (Academic)	Conclusion of Source Triangulation
Consultation as a prevention strategy	Consultation as a preventive measure and last resort option	Bawaslu proactively provides direction before violations occur	Input to separate activities to avoid violations and prevention in the field	Acceptable if within the limits of the rules and risky if involved in designing strategies	Consistency: consultation as prevention and the distinction between "explaining" vs "designing"
Implications for effectiveness	Leading to compliance and prevention	Coordination facilitates adjustment of activities	Prevention is considered to help suppress violations.	Need clear indicators for effectiveness testing	The majority consider it effective and still need indicators so that it does not stop at perception.
Implications for accountability	Maintained via procedures, regulations, and documentation	Clarity of "do's and don'ts"	Consistency of treatment and coordination of the decision chain	SOPs and record keeping are needed so that consultations don't become a dark space.	Accountability is strengthened when SOPs, documentation, and transparency are implemented.
Implications for neutrality	Claims of fairness and equality, despite emotional closeness to LO	Professional despite close communication	Equal access to consultation	Criticism: "designing" weakens neutrality/dignity	The claims of professional equivalence are strong, but there are strong warnings about the limits of consultation.

After testing the consistency of the findings through source triangulation, this study also strengthened the validity of the data through extended observation. This strategy was used to ensure that the data collected did not stop at superficial information easily produced in formal interview situations, but rather reflected ongoing supervisory practices as institutional routines and daily working relationships. In the context of this research, extended observation was important because consultative supervisory patterns often operate through informal mechanisms (e.g., rapid communication, pre-activity coordination, and addressing gray areas) that cannot always be captured in a single meeting. Through adequate engagement at the research site, researchers built rapport with informants, enabling them to convey more honest and in-depth information, while also helping to mitigate behavioral distortions due to the effects of subject reactivity (Creswell, JW, & Poth, 2024) . Furthermore, continued observation also helped researchers gain

a deeper understanding of the institutional cultural context and local political dynamics, which is essential for interpreting the findings responsibly (Miles et al., 2014) .

After gaining in-depth data through extended observation, this study applied triangulation as a formal verification mechanism to ensure that the findings are not singular and can be tested from multiple perspectives (Denzin, NK, & Lincoln, 2017) . Triangulation is not simply defined as "collecting more data," but rather as a way to assess the robustness of findings when compared across sources and data collection techniques. In qualitative research, this step is relevant because the validity of findings is determined not only by the number of sources but also by the consistency of information patterns when confirmed through interviews, observations, and documentation. (Sugiyono, 2016) . Thus, technical triangulation is presented to show that the findings regarding consultation channels, prevention practices, and discretion are not merely narrative claims, but have empirical traces that can be traced and retested.

**Table 3. 3of Technique Triangulation**

Theme/Findings	Interview	Observation	Documentation	Conclusion of Triangulation Method
Consultation channels & intensity (LO, face to face, telephone, Whatsapp )	Revealed by key informants/LO/campaign team	Emotional closeness is seen during coordination and communication.	Whatsapp group and meeting activity reports/photos	Narrative and empirical evidence reinforce each other
Preventive & educational consultation (last resort action)	LO/team emphasizes direction before violation	It appears in the preventive practices before the activity	Meeting invitation letter, supervisory activity report, and campaign appeal letter from Bawaslu Badung	Reinforcing that prevention is the dominant pattern
Discretion/confirmation prior to findings	The Head of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) stated that the confirmation and the Sub-district Election Supervisory Agency (Panwaslu) members emphasized the discretion of the field context.	Seen in coordination	Supervision activity report	Strengthening discretionary practices as a case resolution mechanism

After mapping the informant base and conducting credibility tests, field findings revealed that the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu)'s role in campaign oversight operates on two concurrent levels. First, oversight operates as regulatory control by setting boundaries for participants regarding "do's and don'ts." At the participant level, this approach is perceived as a mechanism that increases regulatory certainty, as participants acknowledge their limited understanding of regulatory details and position Bawaslu as the party that bridges the gap in their knowledge of these rules. One of the Lo (Local Election Supervisory Agency) stated that Bawaslu is "bound by the rules" and functions to clarify boundaries that cannot be crossed, thus, consultation is considered "very functional" for campaign compliance. This statement demonstrates that consultation is not automatically interpreted as partisanship; it can be understood as providing regulatory certainty, especially in the context of a fast-paced campaign that is prone to missteps.

Second, oversight appears to operate as a preventative strategy, employing intensive communication to reduce the risk of violations before they occur. This pattern is evident when the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu) corrects activity designs to separate potentially violative elements from campaign activities. At the sub-district level, for example, I Putu Wiyadnyana, a member of the Kuta District Election Supervisory Committee (Panwaslu), described a case of a campaign event accompanied by free health checks and the distribution of gift packages. In this case, the Badung Regency Bawaslu advised the campaign to conclude first, followed by the health checks, and the campaign team complied with this directive. This

practice demonstrates the effectiveness of prevention in an operational sense, where supervisors do not wait for violations to occur before taking action, but instead intervene in the format of activities to ensure they remain within the regulatory framework. However, at the same time, this pattern implicitly expands the scope for supervisory discretion, as supervisors assess the "reasonable limits" of separating activities in situations that often fall within the gray area of campaign practices.

A more sensitive but academically important finding emerged in the "confirmation before finding" mechanism. The Head of the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), I Wayan Semara Cipta, explained that before determining an alleged violation as an official finding, Bawaslu first confirms with relevant parties to ensure clarity and prevent misunderstandings. In one case, it was stated that objections from a particular candidate pair were a factor in Bawaslu's decision not to follow up on the alleged violation, while in another case, the candidate pair did not object when the alleged violation was processed into a finding because it was deemed to meet the elements (personal interview, October 9, 2025). Consequently, this mechanism can be interpreted in two ways: on the one hand, it demonstrates procedural prudence (due process) and an effort to reduce conflict. On the other hand, it reveals governance vulnerabilities when the oversight process interacts with political pressure from candidates. At this point, "consultation" and "confirmation" are no longer merely technical actions but rather become arenas for bargaining over legitimacy that demand firmer boundaries and accountability standards.

In terms of implications, the research findings suggest that oversight effectiveness tends to be perceived as increasing because consultation facilitates activity adjustments and minimizes technical errors. One Election Supervisory Agency (LO) even assessed the quality of Badung Regency Bawaslu's oversight as highly effective because good communication and deliberation forums through the LO helped to reach agreement on what should and should not be done within the regulatory framework. In addition to effectiveness, accountability is also considered to be maintained to the extent that consultation is understood as an explanation of regulations and accompanied by clarification procedures. Meanwhile, in terms of neutrality, the findings indicate claims of equal access to consultation. A campaign team member stated that "everyone is equal, there is no A or B," indicating that, from the participants' perspective, the consultative relationship is not always interpreted as bias. However, the research findings also contain strong criticism from academics who reject the institutional terminology of "political consultant" and emphasize that Bawaslu's identity must remain as a supervisor. This criticism is important because it indicates that the primary issue is not only factual neutrality (equal treatment) but also perceptual neutrality and the symbolic limits of the supervisory role in local democracy. Overall, the research findings confirm that the 2024 Pilkada campaign monitoring practices in Badung Regency exhibit a "consultative-preventive" tendency that operates through intensified communication (including digital channels) and procedural discretion (pre-confirmation of findings). These findings provide the foundation for a more critical discussion of how these role constructions are formed and their implications for the effectiveness, accountability, and neutrality of campaign monitoring governance. This discussion will be analyzed in the following sections through the lens of institutional and role theory, as well as the concepts of political consultant style and street-level bureaucracy (Biddle, 1986; Lipsky, 2010; Norris, 2023; Scott, 2013).

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the oversight of the 2024 Pilkada campaign in Badung Regency has moved beyond the classic logic of "detection-enforcement" to a more consultative-preventive governance practice. This shift is not simply a variation in communication style, but rather indicates a change in regulatory mode: Bawaslu acts not only as a "gatekeeper" that assesses violations after they occur, but also as a compliance broker that directs campaign actors to stay within the regulatory corridor through consultation, clarification, and correction of activity designs. From a public administration perspective, this change in mode indicates a shift from a coercive oversight approach to a more risk-responsive oversight approach, but it also has non-trivial governance consequences: effectiveness may increase, but accountability and neutrality require stronger "institutional fences" to prevent the consultative space from turning into a difficult-to-audit negotiation space (Lipsky, 2010).

Read through Institutional Theory (Scott, 2013), Bawaslu's consultative practices can be understood as a form of institutional work to maintain legitimacy in complex local political situations. Scott places legitimacy on three pillars: regulatory (legal compliance), normative (propriety and integrity values), and cognitive (public acceptance of the reasonableness of institutional actions) (Scott, 2013). This study shows

that preventive consultation is a strategy to strengthen the cognitive pillar, Bawaslu is perceived as present, responsive, and useful for compliance, as well as to secure the regulatory pillar by preventing violations from the start. However, at the same point, this practice has the potential to disrupt the normative pillar if the closeness of communication is perceived as a loss of symbolic distance from the supervisor. This is where institutional tensions occur: strengthening legitimacy through "functional proximity" can produce legitimacy vulnerabilities through "social proximity" that trigger public suspicion. The author sees that this dilemma is not merely a matter of the actor's/individual's intentions, but rather a matter of governance design: without adequate consultation boundary standards and documentation trails, the normative-cognitive pillars easily become conflicted even though the regulative pillars appear safe.

The same tension can also be explained by Role Theory. (Biddle, 1986) through the concept of role sets and conflicting expectations. Bawaslu exists within a web of mutually suppressive expectations: the public demands decisiveness and distance, while campaign participants demand swift technical certainty, and the local political context demands stability to prevent escalating conflict. In such situations, institutions tend to engage in practical role adaptation: increasing consultation channels, increasing clarification, and using a solution-oriented approach to reduce the risk of violations (Biddle, 1986). However, this role adaptation has consequences: the greater the consultative space, the higher the potential for role ambiguity, the boundary between "explaining rules" can blur into "regulating action," and the boundary between "prevention" can be read as "defense." From a public administration perspective, this is a classic symptom of mandate tension: the mandate of prevention and the mandate of enforcement exist within the same organizational body, but are executed through the same social interactions, making it prone to giving rise to perceptions of role conflict if there are no adequate separation and recording mechanisms.

Political Consultant Style Concept (Norris, 2023) provides a sharper reading tool to explain how consultation works. The characteristics found, such as rapid response, intensive communication, the provision of alternative solutions, and risk management of violations, bear similarities to the working logic of political consultants as strategic problem solvers (Farrell & Webb, 2000; Norris, 2023). However, this study reveals a paradox of scientific value: the style commonly associated with external campaign actors (consultants working for candidates) is actually reproduced by the supervisory institution that should be the "referees." Classical literature positions political consultants as actors close to candidates and working for electoral interests (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999; Sussman, 2005). Therefore, the novelty of this study cannot be simply stated as "Bawaslu using a consultant style," but needs to be conceptually locked: what is occurring is a regulatory political-consultant style, namely a consultative style that resembles a consultant, but its orientation is regulatory compliance, not victory. The term "regulatory political consultant style" in this study is not intended as a new theory, but rather as an analytical formulation to explain the adaptation of the political consultant style concept in the context of regulatory oversight. Here, the author emphasizes a critical distinction: electoral consultants optimize the chances of winning, while "regulative consultants" optimize the chances of compliance. This distinction is crucial so that Norris's concept is not used merely metaphorically but becomes an analytical category that can be retested. A sharper analytical knife emerges when the findings of "confirmation before finding" and the resolution of "grey norms" through discretion are read through Street-Level Bureaucracy. (Lipsky, 2010). In Lipsky's logic, discretion is not an anomaly, but rather a way for organizations to cope with regulatory complexity, limited evidence, and time pressures at the implementation level (Lipsky, 2010). In this study, discretion appears as a mitigation mechanism: clarification is provided before a formal decision to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings or disputes. From a governance perspective, this kind of discretion can be read as a field version of due process: procedural caution that has the potential to improve decision quality. However, the author also sees a dark side: discretion that is not institutionalized through documentation standards is vulnerable to becoming a "flexible" space to political pressure. This means that confirmation can function as a safeguard for accountability, but it can also become an entry point for soft pressure, not because the actor lacks integrity, but because the accountability design does not yet force all consultative processes to have an auditable trail.

The implications for effectiveness need to be read critically to avoid perceptual claims. Positively, preventive consultations reduce compliance costs: participants gain early certainty about the rules, allowing activities to be adjusted before violations occur. This aligns with findings from prevention research in various regions that emphasize the importance of preventive strategies (Ma'arif et al., 2022; Saputra et al., 2024; Wahyu & Adi, 2025). However, these studies generally portray prevention as patrols, outreach, or public education (Saputra et al., 2024; Wahyu & Adi, 2025), whereas this study demonstrates that

prevention works through relational consultation mechanisms and real-time corrections to activity design. This is where the authors assess a distinct effectiveness advantage: prevention does not simply take the form of one-way counseling, but rather a form of problem-solving compliance that directly closes gaps for violations at the practical level. However, the effectiveness of this model is conditional: it is effective if access to consultation is equal, the response is standardized quickly, and there are clear boundaries, otherwise, effectiveness can turn into participant dependence on supervisor "instructions" and undermine independent compliance learning.

In the accountability dimension, this research reveals a more acute dilemma. On the one hand, procedural accountability can be strengthened because clarification/confirmation minimizes decision-making errors and reduces conflict (Lipsky, 2010). On the other hand, informal consultation channels, particularly digital channels and personal communication, create a potential accountability gap if there is no recording system. In public administration, accountability is not only about "compliance with the rules" but also about "traceability." Therefore, effective consultation requires a minimal set of accountability tools: a concise consultation log, minutes of coordination meetings, and archiving regulatory references used to provide guidance. Without these, consultation risks being perceived as a non-transparent negotiation space, even when the intention is to prevent violations. Critically, the author assesses that at this point, there is a potential for institutional decoupling: field practice moves rapidly, but formal accountability tools lag behind, so legitimacy can be eroded not because of poor results, but because the process is difficult to prove.

The neutrality dimension is the most crucial point in this study's findings because it is where the consequences of a consultative oversight pattern become most problematic from a governance perspective. Several studies on Bawaslu generally emphasize institutional independence and local political challenges as prerequisites for oversight integrity (Fionna & Tomsa, 2020; Puadi et al., 2025). However, this study reveals a more "micro" risk in practice: not only the potential for external intervention, but also the potential for the supervisory role to blur when consultative relationships become intensive and repeated, making the dividing line between "explaining the rules" and "participating in direct actions" vulnerable to debate. Here, neutrality is not simply understood as equal treatment according to the rules, but also as the institution's ability to maintain its position as an arbiter that is not drawn into the operational logic of campaign participants.

Expert informant criticism emphasizes this vulnerability. Expert informants reject the concept of Bawaslu as a "political consultant" because, according to them, the supervisor's dignity must remain that of a supervisor. When a supervisor reaches the stage of providing direction that regulates the participants' steps, he or she has the potential to become a party that "intervenes" and "judges," so that neutrality, both normatively and in public perception, can be weakened (Scott, 2013). This criticism is important because it shows that the main issue is not simply the presence or absence of communication, but the limits of consultation: consultation can be justified as long as it is in the realm of clarifying norms and preventing violations, but becomes problematic when it moves into the realm of strategic direction or structuring actions that should be the responsibility of participants. Thus, the findings of this study emphasize the existence of a governance trade-off: a consultative approach can strengthen campaign compliance and order, but at the same time requires firm institutional fences (SOPs for consultation boundaries, channel standardization, and documentation trails) so that the supervisor's neutrality is not eroded by the intensity of the consultative relationship (Biddle, 1986; Lipsky, 2010).

The practical implications of these findings can be directed towards firm governance recommendations without negating the benefits of prevention. If preventive consultation is recognized as a monitoring strategy, then it needs to be institutionalized: the boundaries of consultation must be explicit (clarifying rules and mitigating violations, not designing campaign strategies), access must be equal for all participants, and every important consultation must have a minimal documentation trail for auditability. In public administration terms, the solution is not to reject consultation, but to build accountable responsiveness: responsiveness without losing accountability and symbolic distance. Thus, consultative practices do not depend on individual improvisation, but rather become an institutional design consistent with regulatory, normative, and cognitive pillars (Scott, 2013).

As an academic note, a limitation of this study is that some claims of effectiveness and neutrality are still based on actors' experiences. Therefore, further research could add more systematic indicators (e.g., recurring patterns of findings, consistency of actions across cases, or audit trails of consultation).

Furthermore, the regulatory political-consultant style model needs to be tested across regions to determine whether it is a phenomenon unique to Badung Regency or a more general pattern in campaign oversight in Indonesia. Nevertheless, the strength of this article lies in its interlocking theoretical and empirical arguments: institutional theory explains the legitimacy dilemma, role theory explains conflicting expectations, Norris's concept explains the consultative style, and Lipsky's explains implementation discretion, which together present campaign oversight as a complex governance practice, not simply rule enforcement (Biddle, 1986; Lipsky, 2010; Norris, 2023; Scott, 2013).

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the Badung Regency Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu)'s role in overseeing the 2024 regional election campaign does not operate solely as a "rule enforcer" awaiting violations before taking action. Rather, it is a dual role combining oversight with a consultative-preventive approach. This practice is evident through the provision of regulatory clarifications, guidance on organizing activities, and the provision of solutions to ensure campaign activities continue without deviating from the rules. Thus, the "political consultant style" does not emerge as an incidental additional activity, but rather becomes a supervisory work mode that operates through intensive communication and rapid response, including through formal and informal coordination channels. Conceptually, these findings indicate that the supervisory role at the local level operates within a space of role adaptation and functional negotiation, influenced by the need to maintain orderly campaign stages while maintaining institutional legitimacy.

Furthermore, this study found that this shift in dual roles produces ambivalent governance consequences. On the one hand, a consultative-preventive approach strengthens the effectiveness of prevention because participant compliance is built through problem-solving mechanisms before violations occur, thereby reducing friction and reducing the potential for technical-administrative violations. On the other hand, the intensity of the consultative relationship has the potential to create accountability and neutrality risks when the boundaries of consultation are unclear, and the consultation trail is not well documented. Expert informant criticism emphasized that consultation can be justified only for clarifying norms and preventing violations but becomes problematic when it moves towards directing actions that resemble strategic planning, as it has the potential to obscure the supervisor's position as a "referee" and undermine the institution's sense of neutrality. In other words, the practice of a political consultant style improves prevention performance but requires institutional safeguards to prevent it from becoming a space vulnerable to debate. The novelty of this research lies in the proposed regulatory political-consultant style conceptual model, a type of campaign oversight that resembles the working style of political consultants (responsive, intensive, problem-solving), but is oriented towards regulatory compliance, rather than the electoral interests of candidates. This model is characterized by (i) rule-based preventive consultation, (ii) the use of a rapid communication infrastructure that connects observers and participants in real time, and (iii) discretion bound through clarification/confirmation mechanisms before formal decisions.

The contribution of this model is to demonstrate the governance trade-offs more precisely: prevention effectiveness increases as compliance is built through consultation, but accountability and neutrality risks increase when consultation is not standardized and lacks adequate accountability tracks. Based on these findings, a practical implication that can be proposed is the need to institutionalize a consultative approach so that the benefits of prevention are not compensated for by legitimate vulnerabilities. Bawaslu needs to explicitly define the boundaries of consultation (clarification of norms and mitigation of violations, not strategic direction), ensure equal access to consultation for all participants, and establish a minimum recording mechanism (consultation logs, minutes of coordination meetings, regulatory reference archives) to close accountability gaps. Academically, these findings open up further research to examine whether the regulatory political-consultant style model is a phenomenon unique to the Badung context or a broader pattern of campaign oversight in other regions with different political configurations and institutional capacities.

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