

Public Trust as a Measure of Democratic Legitimacy: Electoral Governance in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Public trust is a critical indicator of democratic legitimacy because it directly shapes citizens' confidence in electoral institutions, constitutional governance, and democratic processes. This study examines public trust as a measure of democratic legitimacy in Indonesia using a normative juridical research method. Using both a statutory and a conceptual approach, the analysis focuses on primary legal materials, notably Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), as well as secondary legal materials, including legal literature, jurisprudence, and scholarly doctrine. The normative legal findings demonstrate that institutional transparency, statutory accountability, procedural electoral fairness, and robust guarantees of political rights are essential legal parameters that reinforce public trust and democratic legitimacy within Indonesia's constitutional framework. However, operational and socio-legal challenges, such as information manipulation, acute political polarization, and recurring electoral disputes, continue to test public confidence in the electoral system. The study concludes that enhancing legal certainty, strengthening institutional enforcement, and reforming electoral governance frameworks are indispensable imperatives for preserving democratic legitimacy, safeguarding citizens' constitutional rights, and sustaining democratic stability in Indonesia.

Keywords: *Democratic Legitimacy, Electoral Governance, Electoral Accountability, Political Participation, Public Trust.*

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1. | INTRODUCTION

Public trust is widely recognized as a fundamental requirement for democratic governance because it determines the legitimacy, stability, and effectiveness of political institutions. Democratic systems rely not only on elections but also on citizens' confidence that electoral processes are conducted fairly, transparently, and according to established legal standards. When trust in elections declines, citizens may question electoral outcomes, reduce political participation, and weaken support for democratic institutions. Consequently, maintaining public trust has become a central challenge for contemporary democracies. Elections serve as the primary mechanism through which citizens exercise political rights, select political representatives, influence public policy, and hold governments accountable. The legitimacy of democratic authority therefore depends significantly on confidence in electoral governance.

Stewart (2022) argues that trust in elections is one of the most important indicators of democratic health because citizens are more likely to accept electoral outcomes when electoral institutions are perceived as credible and impartial. Similarly, Kerr et al. (2024) emphasize that declining trust in elections has become a global concern affecting both established and developing democracies. Public trust is closely connected to democratic legitimacy, which reflects citizens' acceptance of political authority as lawful and consistent with democratic principles. Malcolm (2021) argues that democratic legitimacy is strengthened when political institutions demonstrate competence, accountability, and responsiveness to public expectations.

Electoral governance plays a crucial role in establishing public trust because it encompasses the legal, institutional, and administrative arrangements through which elections are organized, supervised, and evaluated. Effective electoral governance promotes transparency, accountability, participation, and procedural fairness throughout the electoral process. Kerr (2024) argues that electoral institutions contribute significantly to democratic legitimacy because they ensure credible elections. However, electoral governance now operates within increasingly complex political and technological environments characterized by digital communication, social media, misinformation, and political polarization. Brown et al. (2024) emphasize that institutional transparency and effective public communication are essential for maintaining trust in electoral processes under these conditions.

International human rights law also provides an important normative foundation for democratic governance. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) guarantees citizens the rights to participate in public affairs, vote and be elected in genuine periodic elections, and access public service on equal terms. These provisions establish internationally recognized standards for democratic participation and electoral legitimacy, making the ICCPR an important framework for evaluating public trust in electoral governance.

Indonesia has incorporated democratic electoral principles into its constitutional and legal framework. The 1945 Constitution recognizes popular sovereignty as the

foundation of governance, while Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections regulates electoral institutions, electoral procedures, voter participation, election supervision, and dispute resolution. The law seeks to ensure transparency, accountability, fairness, and democratic participation through comprehensive legal safeguards. Sarah and Suatmiati (2022) argue that Law No. 7 of 2017 provides a comprehensive framework for democratic elections in Indonesia, while Hidayat and Febriansyah (2024) emphasize that effective electoral governance strengthens democratic quality by improving accountability and institutional credibility.

Despite these legal and institutional developments, significant challenges continue to affect public trust in elections. Misinformation, electoral disputes, political polarization, perceived electoral manipulation, and declining confidence in public institutions remain major concerns. Higashijima et al. (2024) argue that electoral manipulation and perceived irregularities may significantly reduce institutional trust and weaken democratic legitimacy. Likewise, González et al. (2024) demonstrate that perceptions of electoral fairness strongly influence citizens' attitudes toward democracy and political institutions. Transparency and accountability therefore remain essential requirements for maintaining public confidence in electoral governance. Papadopoulos (2023) emphasizes that accountability is a cornerstone of democratic governance because it ensures that institutions remain answerable to the public. Similarly, Pasquino and Pelizzo (2022) argue that accountability strengthens democratic culture by reinforcing confidence in public institutions.

Although previous studies have examined electoral integrity, political participation, and democratic governance, relatively few have specifically analyzed public trust as a measure of democratic legitimacy through the combined normative perspectives of Indonesian electoral law and international democratic standards. Existing research generally examines electoral administration or political participation separately, while the legal relationship between electoral governance, public trust, and democratic legitimacy remains insufficiently explored.

To address this gap, this study employs a normative juridical method using statutory and conceptual approaches to analyze Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and Article 25 of the ICCPR, supported by relevant legal literature and scholarly doctrines. The study addresses two research questions: (1) How do Law No. 7 of 2017 and Article 25 of the ICCPR normatively regulate electoral governance to establish public trust and democratic legitimacy in Indonesia? and (2) What are the normative implications of contemporary legal and institutional challenges for preserving democratic legitimacy and public trust within Indonesia's electoral framework? By answering these questions, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive legal understanding of how electoral governance frameworks strengthen democratic legitimacy and sustain public trust in Indonesia.

2. | RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a normative juridical research method to examine public trust as a measure of democratic legitimacy in Indonesia. Normative juridical research focuses on examining legal rules, statutory regulations, legal principles, and doctrinal frameworks relevant to the core issues of electoral governance and public trust. This approach is particularly suitable for analyzing how legal norms are structured and interpreted within domestic legislation and international standards. To conduct a comprehensive legal evaluation, this study utilizes two primary analytical approaches: the statutory approach and the conceptual approach. The statutory approach involves examining all laws and regulations related to electoral governance, with a specific focus on Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and international human rights norms such as Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The conceptual approach involves examining legal doctrines, principles of democratic legitimacy, institutional accountability, transparency, and public trust as articulated in legal scholarship and democratic governance literature.

The legal materials utilized in this research are categorized into primary and secondary legal materials. Primary legal materials comprise authoritative legal texts and statutory regulations, notably the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections, and relevant international legal instruments including the ICCPR. Secondary legal materials consist of legal literature, textbooks, scholarly journal articles, statutory commentaries, jurisprudence, and legal doctrines concerning electoral governance, political participation, and democratic legitimacy. The collected legal materials are analyzed using qualitative juridical analysis. This analytical process involves the systematic interpretation of statutory provisions, the evaluation of legal concepts, and the synthesis of doctrinal perspectives to answer the research questions concerning how electoral governance frameworks establish public trust and democratic legitimacy in Indonesia. Through rigorous legal reasoning and systematic interpretation, this method provides a solid doctrinal foundation for understanding the normative relationship between electoral laws and democratic stability.

3. | RESULTS

Normative Regulation of Electoral Governance and Public Trust under Law No. 7 of 2017 and ICCPR Article 25

The findings of this study demonstrate that public trust plays a significant role in shaping democratic legitimacy within electoral governance systems. The reviewed literature consistently indicates that citizens' confidence in electoral institutions influences perceptions of electoral fairness, political representation, accountability, and democratic stability. Electoral governance frameworks established through Law No. 7 of 2017 and supported by international standards contained in the ICCPR provide important legal foundations for strengthening public confidence in elections. The

findings further reveal that public trust functions not only as a consequence of effective electoral administration but also as an indicator of democratic legitimacy and institutional credibility. One of the principal findings concerns the relationship between public trust and democratic legitimacy. Democratic governments derive authority from elections that are perceived as credible, transparent, and representative. The literature demonstrates that citizens are more likely to accept political authority when they believe electoral processes are conducted fairly and impartially. Stewart (2022) argues that trust in elections serves as a critical measure of democratic health because public confidence directly affects the legitimacy of electoral outcomes. Similarly, Kerr et al. (2024) emphasize that declining trust in elections has emerged as a global challenge with significant implications for democratic governance. These findings indicate that public trust contributes directly to democratic legitimacy by strengthening acceptance of electoral institutions and political outcomes.

The findings further demonstrate that institutional credibility represents a major determinant of electoral trust. Citizens evaluate electoral institutions according to their ability to administer elections effectively, resolve disputes impartially, and ensure compliance with legal standards. Kerr (2024) argues that electoral commissions contribute significantly to democratic legitimacy through the consistent implementation of electoral procedures and governance standards. Consequently, institutional effectiveness and impartiality play important roles in shaping public confidence in elections. Political participation emerged as another significant factor influencing public trust. Elections provide opportunities for citizens to exercise political rights, express political preferences, and influence governmental authority. The literature indicates that participation strengthens democratic legitimacy because it reinforces the connection between citizens and political institutions. Stals et al. (2022) argue that political trust and political participation are closely interconnected, as confidence in institutions encourages greater democratic engagement. These findings suggest that participation contributes both to electoral legitimacy and public trust.

The study also highlights the importance of electoral rights recognized under the ICCPR. Article 25 establishes international standards concerning political participation, voting rights, and democratic representation. The findings indicate that these rights provide an important normative framework supporting public confidence in electoral processes. Electoral systems that protect participation rights and ensure equal treatment of voters are more likely to generate trust and legitimacy. Consequently, international human rights standards contribute to the development of electoral governance systems that promote democratic confidence. Another important finding concerns Indonesia's electoral governance framework. Law No. 7 of 2017 establishes comprehensive regulations governing election administration, electoral oversight, voter registration, and dispute resolution. The literature demonstrates that these provisions are intended to strengthen electoral integrity and public confidence in democratic institutions. Sarah and Suatmiati (2022) argue that the law provides a comprehensive legal basis for democratic elections, while Hidayat and Febriansyah (2024) emphasize the importance

of electoral governance in supporting accountability and democratic quality. These findings suggest that legal frameworks contribute significantly to public trust by establishing transparent and accountable electoral procedures.

The findings further reveal that transparency constitutes a central factor influencing public confidence in elections. Citizens are more likely to trust electoral institutions when information concerning electoral procedures, administration, and outcomes is accessible and understandable. Transparency enables public oversight and reduces uncertainty regarding electoral processes. Bastian et al. (2021) emphasize that accessible electoral information improves public confidence because citizens can independently evaluate electoral procedures and outcomes. Similarly, Willis et al. (2022) argue that transparent election data strengthen electoral credibility through increased accountability and public verification. These findings indicate that transparency supports public trust by promoting openness and institutional accountability. Accountability also emerged as a significant determinant of public confidence. Electoral institutions are expected to justify decisions, comply with legal standards, and remain responsive to public concerns. Papadopoulos (2023) argues that accountability strengthens democratic governance by ensuring that institutions remain answerable to citizens and oversight mechanisms. Likewise, Pasquino and Pelizzo (2022) emphasize that accountability contributes to democratic culture by reinforcing confidence in political institutions. These findings suggest that accountability functions as an essential mechanism for maintaining electoral trust and democratic legitimacy.

Normative Implications of Contemporary Legal and Institutional Challenges on Democratic Legitimacy and Public Trust

The literature additionally highlights several challenges affecting public trust in elections. Misinformation and disinformation represent major concerns because inaccurate information may distort public perceptions of electoral integrity. Ahmed et al. (2024) argue that online political engagement and exposure to misleading information may influence perceptions of electoral fairness and legitimacy. These findings indicate that information quality has become an increasingly important factor influencing public confidence in electoral governance. Electoral manipulation and perceptions of irregularities constitute another significant challenge. Higashijima et al. (2024) demonstrate that perceived electoral manipulation may reduce institutional trust and weaken confidence in democratic governance.

Even when electoral procedures comply with legal standards, public suspicion regarding fairness can negatively affect perceptions of legitimacy. These findings suggest that maintaining public trust requires both procedural integrity and effective public communication. Political polarization and electoral disputes also affect public confidence. Highly polarized political environments may encourage citizens to question electoral outcomes and distrust electoral institutions. The literature indicates that effective dispute-resolution mechanisms and transparent governance practices are essential for preserving confidence in electoral systems. Electoral institutions therefore

play a critical role in maintaining trust during periods of political competition and uncertainty.

The findings further demonstrate that democratic legitimacy is influenced by perceptions of electoral fairness. González et al. (2024) argue that citizens' evaluations of electoral fairness significantly affect attitudes toward democracy and political institutions. Electoral systems perceived as fair are more likely to generate trust, acceptance of electoral outcomes, and support for democratic governance. Consequently, fairness represents a key element connecting electoral governance to democratic legitimacy. The evidence reviewed in this study demonstrates that public trust contributes significantly to democratic legitimacy in Indonesia. Through transparent electoral administration, accountability mechanisms, political participation, and the protection of electoral rights, electoral governance strengthens confidence in democratic institutions. Although challenges associated with misinformation, political polarization, electoral disputes, and perceptions of manipulation remain significant, both Law No. 7 of 2017 and the ICCPR provide important legal foundations for promoting trust, legitimacy, and democratic governance.

4. | DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that public trust constitutes a fundamental indicator of democratic legitimacy within electoral governance systems. Democratic institutions rely not only on legal authority but also on citizens' confidence that political processes are conducted fairly, transparently, and consistently with democratic principles. The normative evaluation indicates that public trust influences citizens' acceptance of electoral outcomes, participation in democratic processes, and overall confidence in political institutions. These findings support the argument that public trust functions as both an outcome of effective electoral governance and a measure of democratic legitimacy. One of the most significant findings concerns the relationship between public trust and democratic legitimacy. Democratic legitimacy depends upon citizens' recognition that political authority has been acquired through lawful and representative electoral processes. Elections provide the primary mechanism through which democratic governments obtain public authorization to govern. When citizens trust electoral institutions and procedures, they are more likely to regard political authority as legitimate and accept electoral outcomes (Norris, 2025). The findings therefore suggest that public trust serves as an essential foundation for democratic stability and institutional effectiveness.

The study also highlights the importance of electoral governance in shaping public confidence. Electoral governance encompasses the legal, institutional, and administrative arrangements that regulate elections and protect electoral rights. The findings indicate that transparent electoral administration, effective oversight, and impartial institutional performance contribute significantly to public trust. Electoral institutions therefore perform not only administrative functions but also legitimacy-building functions by demonstrating commitment to democratic principles and

electoral fairness. Another important implication concerns the role of Law No. 7 of 2017 in supporting democratic legitimacy. The law establishes comprehensive procedures governing electoral administration, supervision, participation, and dispute resolution. Through these provisions, the legal framework seeks to ensure that elections are conducted fairly and transparently. The findings suggest that electoral laws contribute to public trust when they provide clear standards, effective accountability mechanisms, and meaningful opportunities for citizen participation. Consequently, legal certainty and institutional accountability remain important components of electoral legitimacy.

The normative analysis further demonstrates the relevance of international democratic standards contained within the ICCPR. Article 25 recognizes political participation and electoral rights as fundamental democratic freedoms (Butt, 2024). The findings indicate that these international standards complement domestic electoral regulations by reinforcing principles of equal participation, representation, and democratic accountability. The relationship between Law No. 7 of 2017 and the ICCPR illustrates how national and international legal frameworks collectively support democratic legitimacy and public confidence in elections. Political participation emerged as another important factor influencing public trust. Citizens who actively engage in electoral processes are more likely to perceive democratic institutions as responsive and representative. Participation strengthens democratic legitimacy because it creates direct connections between citizens and political decision-making processes (Oser et al., 2022). The findings therefore support the view that public trust and political participation reinforce one another. Higher levels of participation may strengthen institutional confidence, while greater trust may encourage continued civic engagement (Stewart, 2022; Kerr et al., 2024).

Transparency also plays a critical role in maintaining public confidence. Citizens require access to reliable information concerning electoral procedures, institutional decisions, and election outcomes in order to evaluate the credibility of electoral processes. The findings indicate that transparent electoral governance reduces uncertainty and increases confidence in democratic institutions. Transparency further enables public oversight, which contributes to perceptions of fairness and accountability. As a result, transparency remains an essential requirement for strengthening democratic legitimacy. The study additionally demonstrates the importance of accountability within electoral governance. Electoral institutions must remain answerable for their decisions and actions to maintain public confidence. Accountability mechanisms provide safeguards against misconduct while encouraging adherence to legal and democratic standards. The findings suggest that accountability strengthens electoral legitimacy because citizens are more likely to trust institutions that operate under effective oversight and public scrutiny. Consequently, accountability contributes directly to both public trust and democratic governance.

Despite these positive legal protections, several challenges continue to affect public confidence in elections. Misinformation and disinformation have become increasingly influential within contemporary political environments. The rapid dissemination of inaccurate information may distort perceptions of electoral fairness and undermine confidence in democratic institutions. The findings indicate that electoral governance frameworks must address information-related challenges while preserving democratic freedoms and political participation. Political polarization represents another challenge affecting public trust. Highly polarized environments may encourage competing political groups to question electoral outcomes and challenge the credibility of electoral institutions. Such conditions can weaken confidence in democratic governance even when electoral procedures comply with legal standards. The findings therefore suggest that maintaining public trust requires not only effective electoral administration but also institutional capacity to manage political tensions and preserve perceptions of impartiality.

Electoral disputes and allegations of manipulation further illustrate the fragility of public confidence. Citizens often evaluate democratic legitimacy through perceptions of fairness rather than solely through legal compliance. Consequently, electoral institutions must ensure both procedural integrity and public confidence in electoral processes. Effective communication, transparent decision-making, and impartial dispute resolution are therefore essential for maintaining trust in democratic institutions. The study demonstrates that public trust serves as a critical measure of democratic legitimacy in Indonesia. Electoral governance contributes to trust through transparency, accountability, political participation, and protection of electoral rights. The findings further indicate that Law No. 7 of 2017 and the ICCPR provide important legal foundations supporting public confidence and democratic governance. Nevertheless, challenges associated with misinformation, political polarization, and electoral disputes require continuous institutional improvement. Strengthening public trust therefore remains essential for maintaining democratic legitimacy, electoral credibility, and democratic stability in Indonesia.

5. | CONCLUSION

This study examined public trust as a measure of democratic legitimacy in Indonesia through a normative juridical research method. Utilizing statutory and conceptual approaches, the analysis focused on Law No. 7 of 2017 on General Elections and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) as the principal legal frameworks governing electoral governance, political participation, transparency, accountability, and electoral rights. Addressing the first research question, the findings demonstrate that Law No. 7 of 2017 and the ICCPR normatively establish a robust legal foundation for electoral governance that strengthens public trust and democratic legitimacy. Citizens are more likely to accept electoral outcomes, participate in democratic processes, and support political institutions when elections are conducted in accordance with transparent, accountable, and fair legal standards.

Consequently, electoral governance functions not only as a statutory administrative mechanism but also as a fundamental pillar for building confidence in democratic institutions.

Addressing the second research question, the normative implications reveal that contemporary legal and institutional challenges such as misinformation, political polarization, electoral disputes, and perceptions of electoral manipulation continue to test public confidence in the electoral framework. Overcoming these vulnerabilities requires rigorous statutory enforcement, robust legal certainty, and enhanced institutional responsiveness. The study concludes that public trust constitutes an essential indicator of democratic legitimacy in Indonesia. Strengthening electoral governance through improved statutory clarity, institutional accountability, enhanced transparency, and the active protection of electoral rights remains indispensable for maintaining public confidence, safeguarding constitutional rights, and ensuring the long-term stability of democratic governance.

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

Data Disclosure Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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