
Public Trust in Sidoarjo After The Corruption Case Gus Muhdlor is Facing in 2024

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Abstract

This corruption that ensnared Sidoarjo's regent, Gus Muhdlor, as 2024 drew a public trust crisis over local leadership. The issue is important because public trust is the foundation of local democratic legitimacy. The study aims to examine the effect that cases of corruption have on public trust and the political participation of Sidoarjo residents. A qualitative approach is used through in-depth interviews and analysis of social media commentary. Research shows an increasing skepticism of people's politics, but it does not yield to total apathy. Instead, active citizens form political discontent in digital space, signifying a shift in trust from leadership figures to community collectivity. In conclusion, though the leadership figure loses credibility, the political consciousness of people remains high. The study recommends more open public communication reform and digital space use as a platform for constructive participation in local democracy.

Keywords: *Public Trust, Political Corruption, Political Participation, Digital Public Space, Sidoarjo*

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INTRODUCTION

Corruption by public officials in Indonesia has long been a major concern because of its damaging effect on the legitimacy of democracy. One of the most striking and relevant examples is the case of corruption involving Ahmad Muhdlor Ali (Gus Muhdlor), regent of Sidoarjo, who was revealed just before the 2024 provincial election (pilkada). The time and scale of the scandal raises important questions about erosion of public trust and the potential for political participation disorder on the local level. The study investigated how such cases of corruption, which occurred in important and strategic regions in east Java, influenced the legitimacy of regional governments and broader democratic processes.

Gus muhdlor's case is important because sidoarjo is not only one of the most populous and economically dynamic districts in east Java, but is also a small political picture reflecting a broader trend in Indonesian democracy. With a history of leadership amid repeated corruption scandals, including three successive regents who faced sidoarjo's legal case, offered interesting cases to explore the relationship between institutional credibility, public trust, and political involvement. The fact that this scandal unraveled at the crucial moment of election reinforces its political consequences and makes it a critical research subject.

According to the Sidoarjo election commission's data (election commission), voter participation in the 2024 election registered at around 70.79%. The figure was good, but compared with the previous election there was a tendency to decline, which could indicate a growing political skepticism between voters. Sidoarjo, as a large economic and social potential in east Java, is dependent largely on the legitimacy of its regional leaders. The decline in public trust in the region impairs local democracy, as a crisis of public trust can undermine the political legitimacy of governments and lower citizen participation in the democratic process. Therefore, it is important to review the dynamics of trust and political participation in Sidoarjo, not only as a local case study but also to understand the challenges of local democracy in Indonesia more widely.

Previous studies have discussed corruption from many standpoints. Putra and Linda (2022) emphasized that corruption causes major economic damage and forms a "corrupt culture" in society. Setiawan and jesaja (2022) pointed out that corruption is perpetrated by government officials for personal gain. However, such studies are generally macro-quantitative, so they have not dug deep into society's subjective perceptions of certain cases of corruption. To illustrate, the study of local corruption in Probolinggo shows that the practice of corruption can trigger apatism and political cynicism, and lower public trust in the institutions of government. In other words, there is still a lack of understanding as to how the specific corruption scandal affects public trust and people's political attitudes at the local level.

To fill the void, the study USES a qualitative approach. Through deep interviews with Sidoarjo residents and commentary analyses on social media, the study covers comprehensive public perspectives and experiences. Qualitative methods are chosen because they enable researchers to capture shades of emotions, opinions, and social dynamics that are difficult to

quantify with quantitative data. This approach coincides with the Habermas public space concept, where social media serves as an arena of public discussion shaping political opinions. By unfurling the narrative qualitatively, the study seeks to expose the mechanisms for creating political skepticism and post-scandal public-trust dynamics. Another relevant aspect is revealed by Princes and Princes (2022) who claim that "corruption is an act of corruption by government officials to gain wealth and personal gain through the misuse of power." Further, they emphasize that "corruption is not only a legal matter but also a matter of morality and integrity that need to be taken seriously to create a better and more just government for society."

Ata (2022) in a study found that "Decentralization, while it is hoped to reduce corruption, is creating a corrupt alliance between the political and economic elites," which in turn "contributes to the poor quality of public service." The study presents a different new perspective from previous studies. While previous studies focused more on the general analysis of the causes and effects of corruption, as well as its prevention efforts, the study specifically discussed the direct effects of certain corruption on the perceptions and beliefs of governments and political institutions. In addition, the study has also highlighted how cases of corruption involving public figures can affect people's political participation, especially in the days leading up to elections. Taking advantage of in-depth survey and interview methods to gather data on changing attitudes of people, this study gives a deeper insight into local social and political dynamics.

In view of this, it is crucial to understand how Sidoarjo's society reacted to the corruption case, as well as the factors that influenced public trust. The study aims to identify the dynamics of people's beliefs and gives a deeper understanding of the relationship between political involvement, public trust, and corruption. Hopefully, the results of this study will provide recommendations for stakeholders on steps that can be taken to restore government reputation and increase public participation in the democratic process.

The study aims to review the effect of public opinion on the integrity of leaders who are influenced by the media and public communication. Furthermore, the study would also like to explore how society's collective experiences of corruption incidents can affect their beliefs and political behavior. With understanding the social and cultural context in Sidoarjo, it is hoped that this study will contribute significantly to efforts to restore public trust and promote active involvement in local democracy.

The results of this study are expected to benefit in a variety of ways. First, it aims to increase understanding about the impact corruption has on people's beliefs. Furthermore, discoveries obtained can be valuable input for local governments in formulating more transparent policies. The study also gave an idea of public hopes and concerns, which can help prospective leaders devise a campaign strategy that is more compatible with people's needs and aspirations. Finally, it is hoped that this study can strengthen the democratic process in Sidoarjo by encouraging active participation in elections.

METHODS

The study assessed public trust in Sidoarjo after the corruption case of Gus Muhdlor using qualitative methods and deep interviews leading up to the 2024 Elections. The desire to get a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints, opinions, emotions and public expectations of how the case might affect their belief in future political institutions and leaders causes a qualitative approach choice. In-depth interviews are chosen as the primary method of data collection because they enable researchers to examine the data thoroughly and develop a deeper understanding of the subjective experience of respondents. In this context, Jurgen Habermas's critical theory of public space became relevant, as the study attempted to explore how public space in Sidoarjo served as an arena where people could discuss and assess their belief in post-corruption political institutions. Through in-depth interviews, researchers can dig deeper into the social motivation, perceptions, and concerns of Sidoarjo's political system in 2024. In addition, interviews also provide an opportunity to understand how personal and collective experiences affect the level of public trust in leaders and government institutions.

A principal method used in this study is in-depth interviews. This technique is selected because it allows the respondents to be more open and detailed about their experiences and views. Through in-depth interviews, researchers can dig deeper into the social motivation, perceptions, and concerns of Sidoarjo's political system in 2024. In addition, interviews also provide an opportunity to understand how personal and collective experiences affect the level of public trust in leaders and government institutions. Interviews are conducted with various social categories, including local activists, voters, and public figures, in order to gain a richer perspective. To keep the structure of the interview focused but flexible, researchers use semi-structured interview guidelines. This guideline contained a set of open questions designed to encourage the respondents to express his thoughts honestly and deeply. With this approach, researchers can customize questions according to the context and dynamics of interviews without losing the direction of the study.

The entire interview process is designed to create a comfortable atmosphere for the respondents so that they can share their experiences and opinions more freely. At the analysis stage, the data retrieved from the interview will be transcribed and thematic to identify key patterns in the public's perception of the post corruption political beliefs. It is therefore hoped that the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of how Sidoarjo people respond to the current political dynamics. Jurgen Habermas' theory becomes the main conceptual framework in the study. Specifically, the Habermas concept of public space emphasizes the importance of an open, rational, and free arena of free discussion to establish public opinion. Thus, interview guides and data analysis are focused on exploring the extent to which the informant senses a rational, inclusive public discussion space, or even "crisis of rationality" communication barrier. According to Habermas, the crisis of rationality comes when public communication is more dominated by system interests (such as practical politics or market logic) than inter-public rational interaction.

Data collected from interviews and social media comments is transcribed word-for-word. After transcription, thematic analysis is used to identify patterns, recurring themes, and underlying meanings. Analysis begins with a careful reading of the transcript to acquaint researchers with the content. The initial code was then made by identifying meaningful units related to public trust, political participation, leadership disappointment, satire, and expression of resistance. These codes are then grouped into broader categories to form such themes as "political fatigue," "digital skepticism," "symbolic protests," and "collective agencies." The iterative process of encoding and developing themes is guided by constant comparison, where they are cross-examined with other transcripts to ensure consistency and credibility.

To maintain analytic accuracy, reflexivity is applied throughout the process. The researcher kept reflective notes to explain personal bias and to ascertain the interpretations based on the participants' actual words and context. Additionally, data triangulation was achieved by comparing the findings of the interview with patterns observable in ticktock comments, allowing a more comprehensive understanding of how oral and digital narratives build public conversations about corruption. In this way, this study not only describes individual opinions but also captures broader social sentiments that indicate a shift in trust in dynamic and digital civic engagement in Sidoarjo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study USES a qualitative approach to review how public trust in Sidoarjo formed after the corruption case involving Gus Muhdlor. The selection of this approach was based on a desire to understand deeply how people affected the case, how they felt about political institutions, and their hope for future leadership. A qualitative approach allows researchers to explore a respondent's viewpoint more flexibly, to capture emotions, opinions, and social dynamics that may not be quantitatively expressed. A principal method used in this study is in-depth interviews. This technique is selected because it allows the respondents to be more open and detailed about their experiences and views. Through in-depth interviews, researchers can dig deeper into the social motivation, perceptions, and concerns of Sidoarjo's political system in 2024. In addition, interviews also provide an opportunity to understand how personal and collective experiences affect the level of public trust in leaders and government institutions.

Based on data obtained from various sources, cases of corruption involving the Sidoarjo regent, including recent cases involving Gus Muhdlor, have had a significant impact on Sidoarjo's public trust. Analysis of social media commentary and interviews showed symptoms of political skepticism and opportunism that were beginning to take root in society. As reported by Jatim times, Sidoarjo has been experiencing a rather disturbing phenomenon in which for a quarter of a century, it has always been led by a regent who is involved in corruption. This phenomenon is much more interesting for analysis since it has occurred since the simultaneous direct performance of the GDP from 2005 to 2020 pilkada. From observations of comments on social media, it seems clear that

In Sidoarjo, public sentiment regarding regional leadership is often marked by a tone of sarcasm and skepticism. Many wargamers utilize sharp-witted satire to voice their distrust in the local leaders, and their remarks resonate well with the community, garnering plenty of likes and responses. One particularly thought-provoking comment noted, "Sidoarjo Ben is run by the community eewe ae mas," reflecting the belief among residents that true governance lies in grassroots efforts rather than in the hands of officials. This atmosphere of critical commentary reveals a vibrant community that is unafraid to challenge authority through humor and collective expression.

What is more, however, is a comment that says, "*Westalah, mending Darjo iku ben diatur arek' dewe ae*" (*Sudahlah, biarkan Sidoarjo diatur oleh anak-anak sendiri saja*). The comment got 2,435 likes, showing that the idea of the collective independence of Sidoarjo people was apparently very much frosted by many. It's not just an Internet prank, but an expression of fatigue and dissatisfaction with existing leadership. More than that, another comment that says, "*Feeling sampe 5 th kedepan Sidoarjo jek auto pilot*" (*Feeling sampai 5 tahun ke depan Sidoarjo masih autopilot*) caught up with 2,210 likes. The high number of likes suggests that many people feel related to the narration that Sidoarjo seems to be walking on his own without a clear direction. The term autopilot here is not just a joke, but an allusion to the state of government that is thought to be of no significant change. Moreover, in the last three leadership periods, three Sidoarjo regents were briefly ensnared by a legal case while in office. This further reinforces the public's perception that municipal leadership is just a ceremonial act without any tangible effect on public welfare.

From these comments, it may be concluded that most wargamers feel a distrust of local leaders and rather believe in the collective capacities of their own communities. Dominating sarcasm is not just a complaint but a subtle form of protest delivered in a milder way, but it still contains critical criticism of the political and governmental realities of Sidoarjo. From the perspective of public space theory (offentlichkeit) Jurgen Habermas, the phenomenon in Sidoarjo reflects the distortion of political communication hinting rational and equal public discussion. Habermas describes public space as an arena where people can openly discuss social and political issues, without the pressure or manipulation of power. However, as corruption cases involving regional leaders continue to unfold, public space is distorting the legitimacy crisis. Public confidence in government was declining, and the critical narrative that should have pushed the change was shifting into a mass skepticism that further undermined hopes of improvement. An interview with af (47), a merchant at the Sidoarjo prohibition market, showed how people became politically exhausted through repeated corruption in their area.

When asked what he thought about leadership in Sidoarjo, he simply laughed and said, "I am no longer surprised to hear news of corruption. It's the same every now and then. What matters to me is that markets remain crowded, commerce, and families can eat." This statement illustrates that for some societies, corruption is no longer a shock or a fit of anger; it is regarded as an acceptable "inevitability." Rather than reacting to protests or changing demands, many citizens chose to focus on their daily lives, feeling that they had no power to influence the course of government. This behavior coincides with what Habermas calls the sphere of the public

sphere, where public space loses its function as a container of critical discussion and turns into an arena of collective apatism.

On the other hand, sn's mother (35), a teacher at one of Sidoarjo's high schools, expressed concern about the long-term effects of corruption, especially for the younger generation. In conversation, he raises his concerns about how scandals involving public officials might influence his students' thinking about politics. "I'm afraid our young people are becoming increasingly apathetic. They should look to their leaders for role models, but in reality, they've heard many corruption cases involving them. In fact, many of them will use their voting rights for the first time in 2024," he said.

Subconcerns are in line with the concept of the rationality crisis proposed by Jurgen Habermas. In a situation like this, political systems fail to perform their functions rationally, only to foster mistrust and contradiction in society. For the young generation just beginning to understand politics, this reality can be a crushing blow. Instead of looking at politics as a room for change and participation, they might think of it as a manipulation and cheating arena. If left unchecked, this condition can further widen the gap between society and young people, especially in the political world, hindering an awareness of democracy that should have grown early on.

Interestingly, though the skepticism of regional leadership is high enough, the data show that people's enthusiasm for the 2024 election remains strong. This is corroborated by Dr. Sufy's statement, which states that in East Java, more than 80% of people already know that on November 27, there will be an election of regional chiefs, both for governors and mayors. The figures show that while many citizens are disillusioned with the many cases of corruption involving deputies, their political consciousness has not quickly faded. In fact, a high level of knowledge about the schedule of the election may be an indication that people still have a concern for the democratic process, though skeptical. This fact can be read as a paradox in the local political landscape; on the one hand, there is distrust of leadership figures, but on the other, there is a collective awareness that elections remain an important mechanism in determining the course of local governance. The question is whether this consciousness will actually be translated into active participation in the sound booth, or it ends up in a skeptical attitude that culminates in golput.

The shift in public space from the physical world to the digital world is another interesting phenomenon. Today, people in Sidoarjo talk more about politics on social media than they do in marketplaces, coffee shops, or live forums. This is seen from comments appearing in the study, which suggests that warganets are actively using digital platforms to voice their views. One quite striking remark was "*Gaono sg iso dipilih*". This comment pointed to a crisis of political representation in which the public felt that the candidate did not represent their interests. Based on the findings that have been made, it can be concluded that the recent corruption that ensnared Gus Muhdlor and the regent has developed a wave of political skepticism in Sidoarjo society. However, this skepticism does not necessarily lead to total

apathy. On the contrary, society has become increasingly active in talking about the politics of their locality, especially through social media.

Transforming public space from the physical to the digital sphere allows people to more freely express political opinions without time and space. Circulating comments indicate that people not only complain but also try to form a collective understanding of their political situation. The much-talked-about "auto pilot" phenomenon, for example, reflects not only an insinuation of local leadership but also a conviction that communities can survive and live their lives without a credible presence of leaders. In other words, despite the disillusionment with leadership figures, society continues to believe in their collective capacity to maintain social and economic stability. From the perspective of Habermas' public space theory, this phenomenon can be understood as a form of resistance to the distortion of political communication. Society not only becomes an object in a politically controlled discourse by the elite, but also actively builds its own more autonomous discussion space.

Utilizing digital platforms, they create more dynamic public spaces, where critics of the political system can be presented more openly without having to pass through the institutional pathways often dominated by elite interests. As pilkada 2024, this dynamic potentially increases the quality of democracy in Sidoarjo. While distrust of the candidates was still strong, the political consciousness remained high, evidenced by the extensive discussions on social media about the elections. The key challenge, however, is whether this political expression in the digital space will actually affect voter behavior in the real world. Whether an active society criticized social media would continue to use their vote to promote change, or choose golput as a form of protest. The answer to this statement will determine the political direction of Sidoarjo forward, while also testing the extent to which digital public space can become a catalyst for real political change.

Findings suggest a shift in public trust from leadership figures to community collectivity. Comments like "*Westalah, mending Darjo iku ben di atur arek' dewe ae*" are a reflection of the belief that people are better able to manage themselves than they are of the political elite. Many of the likes of sarcastic comments on social media point to a digital consensus, where frustration is converted into a Shared narrative shaping public opinion. This phenomenon indicates that social media is now a new public space that serves as a channel for formal political expression. The af quote shows a collective collective collective, where society chooses not to anymore jump to outright protest against corruption because it's too often been disappointed. This is in accordance with Habermas's conception of the public sphere, where public space loses its role as a rational and equal discussion arena. Instead, sn's quote reflects the Shared reality crisis, which is the loss of confidence that politics is being run rationally for the public's benefit. Concerns about young generation apatism reflect the ongoing risks of the crisis.

Yet, a keen political awareness despite skepticism demonstrates an important paradox. People still see elections as the main instrument of democracy, though some consider the golput as a form of protest. Golput in this context was not merely a sign of indifference but an expression of discontent with candidates or political systems. This agrees with literature's

findings indicating that political participation is not only in the polls but also is possible through criticism and symbolic action. The shift in public space into digital domains became the most striking phenomenon. Social media allowed political discussion to develop spontaneously, egalitarian, and not to be tied to the power structure. The metaphor "auto pilot" is a powerful symbol depicting the public perception that governments go about unchecked.

In Habermas' perspective, this can be seen as a form of resistance to the distortion of political communication, where the public seeks to revive the political discourse of elite dominance by creating an alternative discussion room. The transformation of public space has huge implications for local democracy. On the one hand, social media facilitates freedom of expression and builds up collective consciousness, but on the other hand, a challenge arises when such expressions are not followed by real participation in the sound booth. The main question is whether the energy of criticism in the digital world can be converted into real electoral force, or stop at nothing but sarcastic comments that do not impact policy change. The practical implication of these findings is the importance of building more open and honest public communication.

Local governments should more actively respond to social media critics to restore public trust. Meanwhile, prospective leaders must be able to convince the public that they are not just new faces with old patterns, but they are bringing a vision that matches people's aspirations. Ultimately, the results of this study contributed to both local democracy and the study of political corruption in Indonesia. The case of Gus Muhdlor provides a clear example of how corruption can trigger a crisis of trust, but it also provides opportunities for communities to find new forms of political participation in digital space. By strengthening the quality of public discussion, in both the real and the digital world, it is hoped that public trust can be restored and political participation in Sidoarjo will grow in a healthier direction.

The results of this study not only illustrate the socio-political condition in Sidoarjo but also contribute significantly to a theoretical understanding of how public trust is affected by cases of corruption at the local level. The findings of sarcasm on social media, the phenomenon "auto pilot," and the wacko shift from leadership figures to community collections provide empirical evidence of the transformation of public space in the digital age. In the framework of the Habermas theory, it enfolds the understanding of how the public space, which should be a rational discussion arena, can be distorted by a legitimization crisis, but also how the public tries to restore the narrative through social media.

Practically, the study suggests that both local governments and prospective leaders need to anticipate increasingly critical political changes in society. Transparency and public involvement through digital communication channels should be strengthened, not only as a formality, but as part of a strategy to build trust. Governments also need to acknowledge social media as a real public space, where public opinion is formed and grows. Inability to respond to criticism on the platform only broadened the distance between the government and the people. In addition, increasing digital literacy and citizen politics is becoming essential so that digital

public discussion not only be dominated by sarcasm but also create a positive narrative that drives policy change.

Furthermore, the study also allows for further studies of links between digital public space, political skepticism, and electoral participation. The paradox of high political awareness with low trust in leaders highlights the importance of exploring new strategies to mobilise constructive citizen participation. The result can be a reference to similar studies in other areas, as well as a recommendation basis for local election organisations and governments to devise more effective public communication policies. Thus, the study is relevant not only to understand the context of Sidoarjo but also to contribute to national discourse on strengthening local democracy in the midst of a crisis of public trust.

CONCLUSION

The study found that the corruption case involving Gus Muhdlor has triggered a public trust crisis for regional leadership in Sidoarjo. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of social media commentary, it was revealed that people were increasingly skeptical of leadership figures, but at the same time, remained politically conscious. The phenomenon of sarcasm and social media criticism, such as the "*Westalah, mending Darjo iku ben diatur arek' dewe ae*," and the metaphor "auto pilot," indicates a shift in trust from formal leaders to community collectivity. The findings suggest a paradox: a decrease in confidence in public officials does not completely impair political participation but rather encourages alternative discourses in digital public space.

From a theoretical perspective, it provides insight into the dynamics of public trust amid political corruption, especially at the level of local government. In the framework of the habermas public space theory, the phenomenon in Sidoarjo demonstrates how political communication is distorted by a repeated corruption scandal, but also how the public responded by creating a new arena of discussion through social media. This provides an important insight for the study of local democracy in Indonesia, that political skepticism does not always mean apathy, but may be an incentive to build a new form of more critical and collective participation.

The practical implications of this research are particularly relevant to local governments, prospective leaders, and election organizers. First, governments need to establish more transparent, consistent, and responsive public communication to criticism. This can be done by holding regular online dialogue forums, regularly uploading performance reports, and providing open explanations of sensitive issues, such as addressing corruption cases. Second, more structured political literacy programs, such as training for youth political discussions, tweeting about voter rights, and education about the importance of active participation in the election. Third, a digital platform should be used not only as a campaign medium but also as a constructive dialogue room. Governments and prospective leaders can build interactive communication channels, such as live question-and-answer sessions on social media, public

polls, and moderated online discussion forums, so that criticism can be accommodated as real input.

With this conclusion, the study asserted that restoring public trust in Sidoarjo could not be done simply by replacing leadership figures. Still, it would require reforms in political communication and strengthening of public Spaces. Transparency, civic engagement, and the wise use of digital media are key to creating healthier local democracies. It is also hoped to be a reference to further studies of public trust, political participation, and digital public space dynamics in other areas that face similar challenges.

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