

# DO MILLENNIALS TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS? A STUDY OF INDONESIA YOUTH POLITICAL TRUST

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**DO MILLENNIALS TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS? A STUDY OF INDONESIA YOUTH POLITICAL TRUST**

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**ABSTRACT:** The importance of trust in government plays a fundamental role for legitimacy and strengthening state-society relationship. It has been long known that the ability to govern people rest on weapon, food and trust especially in Confucian tradition. In the context of Indonesia, it is important to see the millennials' preference in government. Furthermore, such study may bring a better understanding on the level of political trust young people have. This information is paramount as Indonesia is stepping to the first phase of having the majority of working-age population, which will expectedly reach 189 million people in 2020 (World Bank, 2014). In other words, the vast majority of the Indonesian population are in productive age and their level of confidence toward government institution is an important map for the current government officials, especially in designing effective development policy. For that reason, this study addresses a research question: What is the level of confidence toward government institution that the millennials have? The data collection was conducted through online and offline survey and we limited respondents only for those attended in senior high school and college students. A total of 1584 respondents were collected from ten selected cities in Sulawesi, Sumatera, Java and West Nusa Tenggara islands. The data were analysed by descriptive statistics to map the level of political trust. The results show that although the majority of respondents trusted executive government bodies, a significant number are in the opposite. This is not the case for legislative bodies, where the majority of respondents chose "not trust". While the millennials were sceptical about what the media have reported, the millennials seemed to have more positive perception toward religious leaders.

**KEYWORDS:** Political trust, Millennials, Political participation, Youth, Indonesia.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Does political trust experience downward trend globally? To answer this question, a number of studies have been conducted across different contexts of regions. Specifically, the distinction made is to look at the current condition or level of political trust between advanced democratic countries and new democracies. For instance, a number of advanced industrial countries have recently experienced decline in political trust (Hetherington, 2005; Norris, 1999). The same cases also appear in new democratic countries (Catterberg & Moreno, 2006). These numbers of record indicate a serious unhealthy politics which may imply poor government performance, corruption and ineffective public services delivery which bring negative effects on people's live. In addition, society may encounter a significant challenge toward civic disengagement, which leads to political scepticism due to the fact that their participation in political process is merely consultative rather than engaging directly in decision making (Ansell & Gash, 2007).

It is quite normal that a certain term (e.g. political trust) has a number of different definitions and it is contested each other. For instance, Hetherington defines political trust as confidence people have in their government in the form of evaluative orientation toward their political system (Hetherington, 1998). Another definition stating that political trust is fundamentally relational and situational, meaning that it has a subject who trusts and an object who is trusted for relational reason, and a context of specific action or environment in which a party agrees to do that a specific action in specific context (Zmerli & van der Meer, 2017). Having considered several definitions, what we mean by political trust is the degree of trust people have toward their government and political institution that affects their nature of satisfaction or dissatisfaction on government which can create environmental context for the success of a government, as well as the reverse.

Several studies have been conducted in this area. For instance, high level of trust is likely to bring positive outcome in economic activity, especially in terms of reducing “transaction cost” (Fukuyama, 1996). In fact, cooperation between or among two or more parties who trust each other normally does not require a formal regulation or process which need a certain amount of time and material: negotiation process, lobbyist, lawyer and so forth. Tao et al., discover that political trust, which refers to institutional trust, augmented social trust in China and highlighted the effect of economic modernisation (Tao, Yang, Li, & Lu, 2014). Nonetheless, the finding could not be generalised due to the fact that there is a weak connection between social or generalised trust and reliance in political institution (Uslaner, 2018).

For some reasons, the landscape of political trust discourses has been dominated and focused mainly on western countries where democracy earlier took place as mode of politics. This, by contrast, causes less attention given to non-western political environment, in the context of new democracies. Therefore, this study aims to provide a discourse and empirical exploration about the current levels of political trust in Indonesia, particularly among Indonesian millennials. As a guideline, this research posts a research question: how is the current level of political trust among Indonesian millennials?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Where does political trust come from? This is a central question to be addressed when someone wants to closely look at how political trust is constructed, developed and maintained overtime. Of course, this is not an easy question since political trust are shaped by many complex and even complicated factors. Two of them are, for instance, culture and political system in a given society.

An illustration by Listhaug & Jakobsen (2017) offers a comprehensive picture on what really affect political trust. They say “When mass opinion moves away from the political views of government elites - or when governments shift their policies further away from mass audiences - the political distance between mass and elite will increase. The size of political gaps between mass and elite is an important element in political representation, and we assume that political trust declines when gaps increase” (Listhaug & Jakobsen, 2017, p. 3). Another aspect could also be political performance. For instance, political trust will increase if government delivers public services and policies effectively as demanded by citizens. In other words, political trust will be strengthened or weakened by the capacity of political institution and government to work for and serve the public instead of ignoring or even manipulating their aspiration.

Political distance and lack of political or government performance will create distrust in government and, at large, in any political activities. This nuance makes opportunistic mode of politics, such as money politics, favourable for both politicians and voters. Furthermore, transactional politics or the government which is formed largely by money politics is likely to create incompetent political leaders and representatives in executive and legislative branch of government. As a result, policy gap or political distance, as Listhaug & Jakobsen contend, will take place and be sustained.

Several studies on trust have been under the discourse of social capital theory and social trust is definitely interrelated to political trust and becomes determinant factor for stability and robustness of democracy (Newton & Zmerli, 2011). For instance, deterioration of support for government institution and political leaders is driven by earlier stage of erosion of social trust (Dalton, 2004; Putnam, 2000, 2002). The notion shows us that social trust, a broader term from political trust, plays a crucial role when asking about to what extent or level do you trust the government or politicians to work and serve public interest rather than their self-interest?

### Deterioration of trust in government

A number of scholars have shown the reason of declining level of trust in government. For instance, pessimistic view of economic development, immoral behaviour linked to parliament and the increasing number of crime bring down the level of political trust in government (Chanley, Rudolph, & Rahn, 2000). The failure of government, particularly public sector, to perform is also the most prevalent reason why there is declining confidence in government (Van de Walle, Van Roosbroek, & Bouckaert, 2008). Antagonism and hostility towards political and social leaders, government institutions, regime and negative perception on political system are the driving force causing discontent and political alienation (Miller, 1974). This situation may lead to widespread dissatisfaction and people experiencing unfulfilled need and their demands will blame the government. The situation is increasingly becoming worse when the public watch increasing number of corruption cases committed by mostly political leaders or government/state actors.

Political cynicism or high distrust becomes a major expression when public demand is failed and unanswered by incapability of government to perform and produce expected outputs (Miller, 1974). Moreover, unethical

behaviour done by politicians and state/government actors such as corruption makes condition of trust in political institution even worse as these two (perception of corruption and trust in government) have a powerful mutual causality (Morris & Klesner, 2010). Thus stigmatisation occurs and the public have even more negative views toward political leaders, politicians and government. Regarding negative stigma, we cannot just blame people who have that view. People, whether at individual or group level, tend to create meaning or definition of something by observing and relating it to phenomena they witness. For instance, when people receive information about corruption cases that are dominantly committed by government actors and politicians, they in turn may develop negative views on politics.

Another reason for lack of trust in government is the increasing discontent toward government performance and policy or program which may also lead to political cynicism (Miller, 1974). Moreover, Thomason argues that formal institutional structure matters less while the point on how institutions work becomes fundamental for political trust (Thomassen, 2014). This could become an underlying principle why a country with the presence of effective political institution and government has high level of confidence from its citizens.

**Millennials and political engagement**

Indonesian millennials and political trust do not have a good record over the last 20 years since the end of authoritarian regime in 1998. This is not a surprising news as the role of youth had been regarded insignificant and even isolated for a long period under new order. It is clear that disengagement of young people from political process and civic life creates challenges to democracy and civil society (Oesterle, Johnson, & Mortimer, 2004). In fact, building up political trust among the Indonesian millennials, particularly confidence in government and political institution, is challenging and requires a serious attention and effort by the state and other stakeholders.

Despite the beginning of *reformasi*, an era where a totalitarian regime of Suharto ended, in which it has opened up more democratic ways of governing the state and the relationship between state and citizens, the young generation often have very negative views toward politicians and political parties. This of course will have significant impact on youth engagement to political and social activism.

**III. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study applies a quantitative approach with online survey. There are 1584 respondents participated in our online survey who are between 17 and 25 years old. In a certain situation, offline survey was organised (in one school) due to the school regulation, forbidding the students to use mobile phone during the school day. Data collection was conducted in ten different locations as follows (Banda Aceh, Binjai, Tebing Tinggi, Pematang Siantar, Padang, Makassar, Surakarta, Jogjakarta, Salatiga and Lombok). Those areas of study represent the highest population islands in Indonesia, namely Java, Sumatra, Sulawesi and Nusa Tenggara. The study applied descriptive statistics to analyse data to map the level of political trust among Indonesian millennials.

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results of data analyses**

In this section, the results of the dynamics of political trust among millennials will be presented and discussed. The respondents of our study are senior high school and university students. The details are discussed in the following.

**Political trust on law enforcement**

Trust in law enforcement plays a crucial role to shape people's confidence toward government institution. This is true since significant amount of freedom or autonomy people have is given to the state, particularly in the sake of creating and upholding law enforcement. For that reason, people would normally have doubts when there is violation of law enforcement, committed by public officials, and it is likely to lead to dissatisfaction in government.

If we look at the data presented below, the majority of young people trust in these three public institutions (court, police and judiciary). However, a significant number of people do not have confidence and it is almost half of the total respondents.

Table 1: Trust on law enforcement institutions

Institutions	Responses (%)		
	Trust	Not trust	No response
Court	49%	46%	5%
Police for security and public service	56%	39%	5%
Judiciary/Attorney	50%	45%	5%

For the court, 49% respondents trust that the court has performed its duties to enforce the law and order. In contrast, just under that figure (46%) have a low level of confidence on the current court's performance. Similar result can also be seen for police and judiciary. 56% of young people trust that the police have served and provided services that make people feel safe. Yet, 39% respondents are more sceptical and show low level of confidence in police institution. Although 50% of young people have positive attitude toward judiciary institution, 45% do not trust that this government institution performs their function properly. In this case, the millennials may show a high score for their interpersonal trust with their family; on the contrary, they have low level of confidence for leaders or political institutions (Tao et al., 2014).

**Trust in executive body**

As shown in the following table, there are two general trends that can be captured. Firstly, the number of young generations who trust in executive government is slightly higher than those who are the opposite. Secondly, however, if we look at the data closely, it is clearly seen that the level of trust in government varies at government levels (district, provincial and national). The figure shows that central government receives the highest (57%) and becomes the most trusted among the other two levels of government. The percentage goes down moderately to 56% and 51% for regional and local government level respectively. Only 5% of respondents choose no response in this question. Therefore, young generation may have greater confidence in central or national government compared with district and provincial levels of government. Our study indicates a different trend as Yani's (2015) study shows that trust in the local government is higher than in the national government. The high level of young people's trust in the national government is strongly related to the large network of young professionals and youth volunteers who support President Jokowi when he ran in the 2014 Presidential Election (Mietzner, 2014).

Table 2: Trust on executive branch of government

Institutions	Responses (%)		
	Trust	Not trust	No response
District government	51%	44%	5%
Provincial government	56%	39%	5%
Central government	57%	38%	5%

**Trust in legislative body**

The table 3 below demonstrates the level of trust in legislative branch of government. This is mostly related to how the millennials perceive the work and performance of members of parliament and political parties in dealing with social problems and public demands. For instance, one study on Indonesian political trust shows that the capacity of government institution to achieve social objectives and realise democratic and economic development becomes a determinant factor for the level of people's trustworthiness (Yani, 2015). In general, as we can see, the members of People's Representative Council from local to national level lack of credence perceived by the millennials.

Table 3: Trust on legislative branch of government

Institutions	Responses (%)		
	Trust	Not trust	No response
Local legislative assembly	45%	50%	5%
Regional legislative assembly	46%	49%	5%
National house of representatives	43%	52%	5%

In contrast to the executive government presented previously, legislative assembly received low level of trust from the millennials. The majority of the respondents chose “not trust” when they were asked this question: Do you believe that members of the Indonesian House of Representatives (from local to national level) have carried out their duties well and acted as your representatives? Starting from local parliament, 50% respondents show lack of trust compared to 45% who still believe that their representatives in the local parliament have served their interest. The same trend can also be seen for both legislative assembly at regional (provincial) and national level. The percentage of respondents who do not trust their representatives in provincial parliament is 49% where less than 3% of the figure have faith to them. Finally, more than half of respondents (52%) have no confidence toward members of Indonesian house of representatives.

**Trust in political parties**

The following table presents how the millennials think of political parties in Indonesia, particularly their level of trust. It is obvious that more young people seem to have doubt about political parties than those who trust them. When they were asked the question “Do you trust that political parties strive, work and serve your or public interest?”. The result shows 54% do not trust that political parties have done so, while only 41% believe that political parties have worked for public interest.

Table 4: Trust on political parties

Institutions	Responses (%)		
	Trust	Not trust	No response
Political parties	40%	54%	6%

The survey results for political parties illustrate the same image with the responses for members of people’s representative council. Lack of trust for both political party institutions and members of parliament by the young generation is simply explainable due to the fact that all the members of people’s representative council must be a member of a political party. Furthermore, the linearity of low level of trust in political parties and members of parliament has to do with Indonesia’s electoral system which is harnessing patronage, clientelist electoral politics and stimulating vote-buying activities (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). Looking back to the New Order, political patronage mostly took place inside elite groups and involved very few actors. After Suharto stepped down, *reformasi* started to adopt more democratic values in government and politics despite still having patronage circulated among political parties and legislative institution. This patronage could be found in the form of vote buying at congresses or in regional legislature. At the latest change, despite the fact that *reformasi* has not ended patronage in Indonesia electoral system, the locus of patronage has changed and now have even been widespread, targeting directly to ordinary voters (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019).

**Trust in mainstream media and religious leaders**

When it comes to media, the millennials have negative perception and the majority, 55%, do not really believe that the media has reported news appropriately. A study by Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook shows that the transformation of media landscape (from very limited access to abundance sources of information through online) and the emersion of post-truth phenomena (Lewandowsky, Ecker, & Cook, 2017) have, to some extent, facilitated widespread misinformation and fake news which have negative impact on society. Additionally, degradation in social capital, increasing inequality, and decline trust in science and the death of expertise (Nichols, 2017) have contributed to the increasingly suspicious feeling toward the media and news as well.

By contrast, when they were asked the question “Do you believe religious leaders can solve social problems?”, the answers are more positive (57% of the millennials trust that religious leaders play fundamental role when it comes to addressing social problems). Indonesia which is populated by the largest Muslim communities in the world and often regarded as community believers has been developed and shaped by the role of religiosity. Religious leaders are often regarded as charismatic leaders and this condition has placed them in special position within the society. In Islam, the leaders are called “*kyai*”. Their leadership, for instance, in Islamic boarding school is very dominant and almost all *kyai* are positioned as the main actors in the communities. This can be seen in how a *kyai* develops a strategic role as a non-formal leader in society through intensive communication and relationship with the community (Siregar, 2013).

From the data presented in Table 5, young people have a higher level of trust in religious leaders than members of the People's Representative Council (DPR). This respondent's percentage equals to the level of youth confidence in the national government, which is 57%. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily justify these millennials are in favour of an Islamic government. If we look at through history, since its independence Indonesia has firmly formulated its concept of secularism as a principle of state with religious faith (Makin, 2017). One of the proofs of secularism can be found in the political aspect, for example during the election period. Although the influence of religion is still very strong in most societies in Indonesia, the majority of the population prefers to support parties with a secular-nationalist direction rather than parties with an Islamic orientation, such as Islamic parties (Baswedan, 2004; Mujani & Liddle, 2009).

Table 5: Trust on mainstream media and religious leaders

Institutions	Responses (%)		
	Trust	Not trust	No response
Mainstream media	40%	55%	5%
Religious leaders	57%	38%	5%

The majority of respondents which have more positive perception on religious leaders could give us better understanding of the existence of religious institutions and its role, specifically in shaping social and political trust of Indonesian millennials. This information can be considered when dealing with the challenges facing the media. One strategic measure could be engaging more progressive, religious leaders in campaigning anti hoax and fake news and encouraging the development of critical attitudes of the youth.

**Discussion of results**

Based on the data presented earlier, although positive response given by young generation on law enforcement is generally higher than those who do not, nearly half of the respondents say “not trust” that those law enforcement bodies have worked according to the public's expectation. It is reasonable to say that the performance of those government institutions mentioned earlier is determinant. Public trust, for instance, can strengthen legitimacy of police in society and their work effectiveness (Lyons, 2002; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Public support for police will create cooperative action from people and willingness to help police in which it is economically efficient because of no additional expenditure necessary. In fact, if the performance of these institutions goes the opposite, public would not be satisfied and their level of trust will be affected. Therefore, the capacity of state policy, court and judiciary to uphold justice, laws and provide basic citizen security is fundamental (Goldsmith, 2005).

The attitude of the young generation towards political parties shows a low confidence level. This could link and has led to the result of showing declining trust in legislative government bodies (see Table 3) where all of the members of parliament (district, provincial and national level) must come from political party. One reason has to do with the electoral system which governs the dynamics between political parties and people. For instance, we all know that money politics is against our democratic objectives and it will degrade the quality of democratic and accountability relationship between party members/candidates and voters. Nevertheless, such bad practice always takes place during electoral competition. In 1999 and 2004, clientelist operations evolved inside the political party where candidates who would run for legislative election were heavily dependent on party chairman (at this point, money politics and transaction are determinant factors). Hence, the locus of such patronage has shifted in 2014 election, where it links voters and candidates directly. This setting has, on the one hand, created more democratic accountability as the candidates develop a closer relationship with their constituent. On the other hand, that change caused a massive, widespread vote buying, increasing the expense

of campaigns (Aspinall & Berenschot, 2019). As a result, the millennials may find this common practice of vote buying and money politics in legislative or even in executive elections in opposite to their expectation in politics and thus has contributed to their mistrust attitudes toward political parties and members of parliament.

Increasing suspicious and disbelief in media can cause negative development on the youth and their social and political engagement. This is true as the role of media education contended by Masterman (Masterman, 1997) is to facilitate and improve citizenship and social change. The situation is increasingly challenging as the post-trust world and fake news emerged and circulated massively in media, particularly in online and social media. As we know, nowadays, the youth mostly prefer to use online media to gain information. Therefore, the state should pay serious attention to this matter.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

A high level of political trust is a vital element for ensuring legitimacy of government as well as social harmony, economic and democratic advancement. With a high level of political and social trust, it will stimulate the creation of active citizenship which may lead effective public policy and delivery of public services. We know that the regeneration in politics and every aspect of life is certain. However, the future challenges maybe hard to answer if the young people have low confidence level toward government and political institutions. Therefore, regarding the demographic bonus, positive impact on economic, political and social aspects would be possible unless all the stakeholders work together to enhance the level of political and social trust of our young generation.

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