



PILKADA DURING A PANDEMIC: THE INFLUENCE OF NEWS MEDIA ON TRUST AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT. Communication research has examined the relationship and influence of news exposure on political attitudes and behavior. From the perspective of the democratic process, an important question in this research is related to the extent to which information exposure regarding the handling of the COVID-19 virus outbreak affects public trust in the government and its political institutions. In particular, the purpose of this research is to examine the extent to which exposure to information about the COVID-19 pandemic affects public perceptions and political beliefs in one of the areas that has the highest rate of COVID-19 cases in Indonesia and holds regional head elections in the midst of a pandemic. In addition, this study also examines whether there is a relationship between the perceived threat of being exposed to the virus and political trust with the level of electoral participation in the midst of a pandemic. This research method uses a quantitative approach with the selected location is Surakarta, Central Java. Data were collected through online questionnaires and offline questionnaires to people who have a Surakarta KTP and are included in the Voters List in the 2021 regional head election. The sampling used is non-probability sampling so that the results of this study do not intend to produce findings that will generalize to the entire population but only a theoretical test. By conducting a survey of 211 respondents, this study found several findings. First, even in the midst of a health crisis due to the COVID-19 virus outbreak, the level of public participation in the 2020 Pilkada tends to be high. Second, political trust influenced by media coverage has a positive correlation with the high level of public participation in the Regional Head Election in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: Pilkada, COVID-19 Pandemic, News Media, Public Trust, Political Participation

1 INTRODUCTION

The government's decision to continue to carry out simultaneous regional elections during the pandemic has received many responses from various groups. There are those who support the government's decision to conduct Pilkada during the pandemic, but there are those who also reject the plan. According to Rizki and Hilman (2020), opinions that support the implementation of the Pilkada during the pandemic reason that the 2020 Pilkada will still be held because the government wants the creation of good quality democracy through established mechanisms and procedures despite the threat of the COVID-19 outbreak (Rizki & Hilman, 2020). The 2020 Pilkada will continue to be held to guarantee the constitutional right of the people to vote and be elected in an agenda that has been regulated.

Meanwhile, groups that refuse to hold the Pilkada in the midst of a pandemic are based on various reasons, first, concerns about public health. Saving public health must take precedence over other human rights such as the right to vote and be elected (Yuniar, 2020). Pilkada, which is certain to invite large crowds, has the potential to increase the number of new clusters infected with COVID-19. The high rate of transmission of COVID-19 in Indonesia has also infected several candidate pairs in the regional elections. According to one member of the General Elections Commission (KPU) Viryan Aziz that there were 63 regional head candidates spread across 21 provinces in Indonesia who will take part in the Pilkada, exposed to COVID-19 (Firmansyah, 2020), three of them died (Tim detikcom - detikNews, 2020). Second, according to Hilman et al (2020), there is no readiness from various parties who will participate in the Pilkada in the midst of a pandemic, both regional head candidates and supporters regarding standard health protocols for activities that will be carried out by each candidate (Hilman et al., 2020) even though The KPU has implemented strict rules regarding health protocols in this election. And the third reason for the refusal to hold the Pilkada during the pandemic is that there is a possibility of a decrease in participation in the 2020 Pilkada. The lack of certainty regarding the sense of security and health protection for citizens who channel their voting rights during the pandemic, makes voters doubtful and afraid to attend TPS using their rights. choose and prefer to maintain their health (Hamzah, 2020; Meyliana & Erowati, 2020).

The need for information is higher, especially during a crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the level of searching and consuming information about the virus and its handling is very high. This is driven by the need for information amid anxiety and concern about the infodemic and influenced by the “lockdown” policy that causes people to consume more media in their homes or places of residence.

The use of news media is believed by most researchers to be proven to be able to influence people's political trust which in the future the resulting trust is able to encourage public participation in the political process. By using a survey of 211 people in one of the red zones of the COVID-19 outbreak, this study aims to explore and at the same time examine the influence of news media consumption on the level of political trust and whether the trust generated by media exposure has a positive correlation with the participation rate of regional head elections. in the midst of the COVID-19 virus health crisis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Democracy in the Time of a Pandemic: COVID-19 and the Dilemma of Elections in the Midst of an Epidemic

Elections are an important factor for the running of a democratic government, but since it was declared a global pandemic by the WHO, the COVID-19 outbreak has made elections in several regions in various countries experiencing obstacles and facing the risk of democracy. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a significant risk to the ability of countries to ensure genuine and transparent elections, and that without well-considered and appropriate action, the conduct of elections could have a significant impact on two aspects: the protection of public health and the integrity of elections (Landman & Splendore, 2020).

Carrying out the electoral process in the midst of a pandemic, several countries have implemented various steps in conducting elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Landman and Splendore (2020) noted that 14 United States states postponed their primaries because cases of infections and deaths caused by COVID-19 had increased dramatically in some parts of the US. Then France which also canceled the second round of their local elections due to the increasing outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the Southeast Asian region, there are four countries holding elections in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, namely Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore and Indonesia. Singapore held general elections, Myanmar held elections for the Myanmar House of Representatives and the Myanmar Congress, Vietnam held the five-year Party Congress, and Indonesia will hold regional head elections.

Singapore may be the first Southeast Asian country to hold elections amid the pandemic (Beech, 2020; Parameswaran, 2020) and continue to hold elections as scheduled. Singaporean Prime

Minister Lee Hsien Loong said that the planned vote for July 10 would take place at a “relatively stable” time (Beech, 2020) and under very strict health protocols. Yvette Tan (2020) notes that the election campaign in Singapore is a 'political campaign without a handshake'. This is due to regulations issued by Singapore's electoral authority which state that shaking hands is not permitted during the campaign period and similarly to political campaigns, candidates must comply with social distancing rules that limit the crowd to five people (Al Jazeera, 2020; Beech, 2020; Tan, 2020). Vietnam, which will hold its five-year Party Congress in January 2021, is certain to be carried out as planned due to their success in dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. Myanmar, which will hold elections for the national bicameral parliament, the United Assembly or Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, as well as the state and regional parliaments, announced that the election however underwent a series of administrative changes due to limitations posed by the COVID-19 virus (Abuza & Welsh, 2020), although the party The opposition United Solidarity Development Party (USDP) has called for the elections to be postponed. This party says it wants to protect citizens from the Corona virus (Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2020). Meanwhile, the Government of Indonesia through the General Election Commission announced that the Pilkada would still be held in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic by implementing strict health protocols (Republic of Indonesia General Election Commission, 2020). This means that the Pilkada will continue to run side by side with the COVID-19 outbreak (Akbar & Benedict, 2020).

2.2 COVID-19 and Political Trust

In general, political trust can be understood as the support or evaluation of citizens on the performance of political institutions such as political parties, governments or parliaments in meeting public expectations rather than as a product of the need for popularity of political institutions. Political trust reflects the congruence between citizens' expectations i.e. their policy expectations with (perceptions of) government performance (Craig, 1979; Craig & Maggiotto, 1982; Geurkink et al., 2020; van der Meer, 2017). So, to what extent has the impact of COVID-19 and the response of the national government affected the political trust of citizens? Balog-Way and McComas (2020) state that one of the characteristics of the COVID-19 pandemic that creates challenging problems in building trust is that it creates uncertainty. COVID-19 is a new, invisible and unknown threat (Balog-Way & McComas, 2020).

The uncertainty of information and handling regarding the COVID-19 virus in several countries is caused by various things. For example, cases of spread in Italy and several countries in Europe were caused by a combination of a relaxed response to the pandemic at its onset, a lack of systematic expertise in the field of infectious disease epidemics in Europe, and a possible lack of experience in containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic by health workers (Rudan, 2020). In addition, politicians and public figures often change their messages regarding the impact or handling of the COVID-19 virus. For example, in early March 2020, the Indonesian Ministry of Health and several health experts suggested that people who use masks are sick people while healthy people do not need to wear masks, but a month later a new regulation emerged that obliges everyone to wear masks when doing activities outside the home. (Arnolduswea, 2020; Yosephine, 2020). In addition, differences in perceptions about the threat of the COVID-19 virus among partisans in America often make the public enter into uncertainty. Democrats are significantly more concerned about COVID-19 than Republicans where Republicans think that information about the threat of the COVID-19 virus in the media is exaggerated (Jennings et al., 2020).

Over time, information about the COVID-19 pandemic has grown rapidly with various information and messages, raising questions to what extent the information that has developed about COVID-19 has built or eroded public trust in the government.

Jennings et al. (2020) said there was a change in the level of public trust in Australia, America, Britain and Italy in their governments before the pandemic and during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an increase in the Italian public's trust in the government during the pandemic despite the differing levels of trust in political parties, politicians, partisan politics and health institutions. Italians, who previously tended to have low levels of trust compared to the other three countries, grew almost on par with British citizens, who had the highest level of trust in their national government of the four countries. Australia, which had the second level of trust after the UK before the pandemic, rose to be the most trusting society in the government during the COVID-19 pandemic than the UK. Meanwhile,

the United States public tends to experience a decrease in their level of trust in the government due to their failure to overcome the corona virus and President Trump's divisive leadership during the COVID-19 crisis (Jennings et al., 2020).

In contrast to the views of Jennings et al. (2020), the report 'Record Highs For All Institutions' from the Edelman Trust Barometer 2020 found that there was an increase in the level of public trust in the government during the pandemic. Compared to 2012-2019, government institutions became the most trusted institutions for the first time in March 2020 compared to other institutions such as business, media, and NGOs. Although public trust in the government is high, there is a gap in the level of trust between the central government and local governments. Based on the results of the report, there are three countries that have a high confidence gap. First, America often says, there is a gap between the local government of America and the central government where 66% of respondents stated that they trust the local government more than the central government. Second, 50% of respondents in Japan say they are neutral towards local governments and 35% say they don't trust their central government. And third, respondents in France stated that they trust local government (60%) more than the central government (49%) (Edelman Trust Barometer 2020, 2020).

2.3 Consumption of Media Coverage and Political Trust

The news media is a channel through which citizens get and are exposed to information which is then able to shape their perspective on government and ultimately influence political trust (de León et al., 2022). Framing news coverage can get used to the political system which leads to increased political trust. In the study of political communication, research on the effects of media on political trust always experiences a conflict between the positive and negative effects of the use of news media on political trust. Several studies have found that media exposure has a fairly strong correlation to political trust (eg) (Aarts et al., 2012; Ceron, 2015). Exposure to news media (especially television media, newspapers and news websites) further enhances greater political trust. On the other hand, another study found that the use of social media did not have a positive and significant effect on political trust (Azis et al., 2020). In fact, over the last three decades, consumption of news media about the crisis led to greater public distrust of government, which in turn triggers the feeling that the political system that is run is unresponsive. Negative news about unpopular government policies and uncivilized behavior of political elites can reduce and erode trust in government (Moy, 2008).

2.4 Trust and Political Participation

The relationship between individuals' trust in the government and their participation in politics is still interesting to study. There are studies that find that political trust has a significant relationship with the level of political participation (Ceka, 2013), but other studies have found that political trust has little influence or is an important determinant of the level of political participation (Gabriel, 2017). On the other hand, there are several studies which have found that political trust in the government has different levels of influence on elections. A higher level of political trust in the government increases the likelihood of selecting a presidential candidate from the incumbent party, while a lower level of trust in the government increases voting for candidates from an opposition party or third party (Bélanger & Nadeau, 2005; Hooghe et al., 2011; Jones, 2016).

3 RESEARCH METHODS

This research approach uses a quantitative approach. This approach is used to test certain theories by examining the relationship between variables. The variables measured are usually with research instruments so that the data obtained can be analyzed based on statistical procedures (Creswell, 2016). The location chosen is the Surakarta area, Central Java. This location was chosen because Surakarta is an area that is currently holding regional head elections and is included in the red zone category from April 2020 to January 2021 (Prihatsari, 2020; Shalihah, 2021). Data was collected in two ways, namely through online questionnaires and offline questionnaires which were distributed to people who have a Surakarta KTP and are included in the Voters List in the 2021 regional head elections. The questionnaires were distributed between October and November 2021. The sampling used was non-probability sampling, this is because researchers have limited time and budget to conduct research so that the results of this study do not intend to produce findings that will generalize to the entire population but are only limited to theoretical testing.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Respondent Data

Based on the results of surveys conducted online and offline, the researchers obtained 211 respondents consisting of men (32%) and women (67%) with an average age of 17-25 years ($M = 1.50$ $SD = .468$) with undergraduate education level ($M = 3.81$ $SD = .651$) and an average income of 2 – 3 million ($M = 1.80$).

4.2 Democracy in the Midst of a Pandemic: COVID-19 and Participation in the 2020 Regional Head Elections

Based on the results of a survey conducted on 211 respondents in the Solo Raya area, this study found that the majority of respondents stated that they participated in the regional head election which was held in the midst of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. 71.6% stated that they participated in the 2020 regional head election and chose one of the regional head candidates. 10.9% answered that they participated in the regional head election on 9 December 2020, but chose to abstain (damaging the ballot/voting more than one regional head candidate/doing things that invalidate the ballot), while 17.5% of respondents stated that they did not participate at all in the 2020 regional head elections.

4.3 The Effect of the Use of Information Media on the COVID-19 Pandemic on Political Trust

Based on the results of simple linear regression analysis, this study found that there was a positive and significant effect between the use of information media for the COVID-19 pandemic on political trust. This is indicated by a significance value of 0.00 or < 0.05 (see table 1). The magnitude of the influence of the use of the COVID-19 information media on political trust is 0.211 or 21.1% so it can be said that the use of information media regarding the COVID-19 outbreak has an influence of 21.1% on public trust in government performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. 19 while 78.9% was influenced by other factors.

Table 1: Univariate One Way Analysis of Variance

| ANOVA ^a | | | | | | |
|--------------------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
| 1 | Regression | 1391.659 | 1 | 1391.659 | 55.803 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 5212.171 | 209 | 24.939 | | |
| | Total | 6603.829 | 210 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Trust
b. Predictors: (Constant), Health Media Use

Model Summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .459 ^a | .211 | .207 | 4.994 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Health Media Use

4.4 The Relationship of Political Trust to Political Participation

By using Spearman Rank correlation analysis, this study found that there is a positive relationship between political trust and the level of participation in regional head elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this study finds different relationships between public trust in the government and its political institutions. The high public trust in the central government in handling the COVID-19 outbreak makes the public feel comfortable to come and participate in democratic parties. Likewise with public trust in local governments, so it can be said that the higher the level of public trust in local governments, the higher the level of community participation in regional head elections. In addition, this study also found that trust in political parties and the COVID-19 Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling had a positive and significant correlation with participation in regional head elections. On the other hand, trust in the General Election Commission (KPU) does not have a significant relationship with the level of public political participation.

Table 2: Spearman Rank correlation analysis

| | Regional Head Election |
|--|------------------------|
| | |

| | | Participation |
|---|-------------------------|---------------|
| Trust in the central government | Correlation Coefficient | .188** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .006 |
| | N | 211 |
| Trust in local government | Correlation Coefficient | .145* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .036 |
| | N | 211 |
| Trust in political parties | Correlation Coefficient | .231** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .001 |
| | N | 211 |
| Trust in KPU | Correlation Coefficient | .104 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .133 |
| | N | 211 |
| Trust in the Task Force for the Acceleration of Handling COVID-19 | Correlation Coefficient | .146* |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .034 |
| | N | 211 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

5 CONCLUSION

Despite being faced with a multidimensional crisis, especially a health crisis and exacerbated by the uncertainty of information regarding the handling of the COVID-19 virus outbreak. The level of public participation in regional head elections is still relatively high. This is due to the high level of public trust in the performance of the government (both central and local governments) and political institutions (political parties and the COVID-19 Handling Acceleration Team). The high level of public trust in the government is influenced by the consumption of media coverage.

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