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PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF STATE OFFICIAL ETHICS: A CASE STUDY OF THE POST-DEMAND OF AUGUST 2025

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Abstract

The ethics of state officials are a fundamental pillar in building and maintaining public trust, which serves as the foundation for the legitimacy and effectiveness of governance. In Indonesia, there is a gap between public expectations of officials' integrity and the reality of political practices, which are often tainted by abuse of power, corruption, collusion, nepotism (KKN), and the degradation of communication ethics. The massive demonstrations in August 2025 acted as a marker of the crisis, reflecting the public's deep disappointment with the behavior and policies of officials. The public perceives officials' ethics not merely as formal legal compliance but more as a manifestation of moral values, honesty, and civility in political life. This study employs a qualitative method with a case study approach to explore the public's subjective experiences in interpreting officials' ethics following the demonstrations. This study reveals a moral dissonance between public normative expectations and the actual behavior of officials. This experience shapes a negative collective memory while also triggering a new critical awareness to conduct more active social oversight. The research findings indicate that an ethical crisis not only damages individual reputations but also systemically undermines the legitimacy of government institutions. The study concludes that without comprehensive and ongoing ethical reform efforts, the erosion of public trust will continue, widening the gap between the state and its citizens. By addressing current issues, this research is expected to serve as material for critical reflection and provide practical recommendations for researchers and policymakers in efforts to strengthen the governance of integrity.

Keywords: Ethics, Public Perception, State Official

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INTRODUCTION

The ethics of state officials play a crucial role in maintaining public trust, the primary foundation for the legitimacy and effectiveness of government administration (Haryanti 2024). The presence of state officials with integrity and ethical principles not only reflects leadership quality but also serves as a key determinant of public support and trust in state institutions (Bagit and Mesra 2025). The application of ethical norms and values in the actions and decisions of state officials is crucial to ensuring a clean, transparent, and accountable government.

Public perceptions of political integrity and morality in Indonesia exhibit complex dynamics. Many citizens are sceptical and critical of state officials' commitment to upholding ethical values, particularly when cases of corruption, collusion, and nepotism frequently surface. This perception reflects the disparity between public expectations and the reality of political practice, which is often characterised by moral lapses and abuse of power. The challenge of upholding state official ethics is increasingly apparent with the emergence of various recent cases highlighting ethical lapses within the Indonesian government. These cases not only damage the image of individual officials but also erode public trust in the democratic system and government as a whole.

Official ethics essentially addresses the moral dimension of leadership practice. A with moral competence characterised by a number of character attributes, including integrity, honesty, credibility, and commendable behaviour. However, a leader's ethical capacity is not an innate talent but can be developed gradually through learning, training, and accumulated experience. A fundamental step in developing this capacity is internalising a deep understanding of ethical values, both for individual development and in a collective context. This awareness must then be consistently realised in every decisionmaking and action. In other words, ethical leadership is always orientated and guided by applicable ethical norms (Rabbani et al. 2024).

Citizen trust is a crucial foundation for democratic and optimally functioning governance. This level of trust reflects the public's assessment of the integrity, transparency, and accountability of state institutions in carrying out their mandates. The Indonesian context demonstrates the dynamics of high public expectations for the government as the embodiment of the ideals of reform, justice, and corruption-free governance. However, there is a discrepancy between these ideal expectations and the actual situation. A number of implemented policies are deemed unresponsive to public aspirations, particularly regarding consistent law enforcement and the accountability system for state officials (Yulianti et al. 2025).

In 2025, political dynamics in Indonesia reached a point of crisis in public trust in the House of Representatives (DPR). This condition was reflected in nationwide demonstrations known as the "Indonesian People's Revolution", which took place in front of the DPR RI Building on August 25, 2025. The movement was sparked by public dissatisfaction with the policy of increasing DPR members' allowances, which was deemed disproportionate, particularly amidst the economic pressures felt by the people. **Participants** the demonstration, in comprising various elements of society, including students, workers, and online motorcycle taxi drivers, voiced demands for increased transparency in the management of the DPR's budget, an end to corrupt practices, and the dissolution of the institution as a form of protest against its performance, which they deemed did not represent the aspirations of the people (Iqbal, Siregar, and Marpaung 2025).

The wave of protests reflected accumulated public dissatisfaction with a series of government policies deemed not to prioritize the public interest. Furthermore, various unethical actions by a number of officials contributed to the deepening erosion

of public trust in democratic institutions (Irfani 2025).

The right to express opinions, initially exercised as a legitimate democratic aspiration, later degenerated into large-scale and provocative riots. Tensions peaked after the death of an online motorcycle taxi driver named Affan Kurniawan after being hit by a Brimob tactical vehicle on August 28, 2025. This incident triggered the transformation of peaceful demonstrations into a wave of violence and riots that spread to various cities, including Jakarta, Bandung, Makassar, and Surabaya. The incidents were marked by the burning of government buildings and the destruction of public facilities. Based on data from the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation (YLBHI) quoted in the Kompasiana analysis (2025), it was recorded that more than 3,000 people were arrested, 1,042 people were injured, and several individuals were reported missing during the riot period (Cahyati et al. 2025).

The massive demonstrations of August 2025 marked a pivotal point in Indonesia's political and social dynamics. These actions, led by students, activists, and civil society elements, stemmed from deep public disappointment with political policies and the behaviour of state officials, perceived as deviating from ethical values, morality, and public accountability. In this context, public responses are shaped not only through direct experience but also through intensive interactions in the increasingly dominant digital space. Social media has become a space for the articulation of collective opinion, criticism, and protest, often morphing into cancel culture, a mechanism of collective social sanctions in the form of boycotts, slander, and even ostracisation of public figures deemed to violate norms and ethics (Mudjiyanto et al. 2025).

The widespread cancel culture phenomenon on social media has also exacerbated conflict and polarisation. Online interactions can exacerbate problems through the rapid spread of viral content that triggers mass emotional responses. This pattern, which initially targeted celebrities and entertainment figures, has now also spread to the political sphere, involving state officials and government elites (Dwi et al. 2023).

The public actively uses social media to express resistance to the actions of officials deemed unempathetic, irrational, or violating social ethics. This demonstrates the fragility of public trust, especially when officials' behaviour contrasts with the demands of collective morality. In the aftermath of the August 2025 demonstrations, the digital space became a crucial arena for mapping collective perceptions: were state officials still viewed as trustworthy figures, or were experiencing a process delegitimisation due to a protracted ethical crisis?

Based on the aforementioned phenomena, this research was designed as a case study aimed at analysing the public's collective experience in perceiving and responding to the ethical crisis of state officials following the August 2025 demonstrations. The case study approach was chosen because it is relevant for in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Poltak and Widjaja 2024), where the boundaries between the phenomenon (crisis of trust, cancel culture, demonstrations) and its context (digital space, Indonesia's political climate) are unclear. This research will examine how a group or community, in this case the public active in the digital space, collectively constructs meaning, expresses dissatisfaction, and imposes social sanctions on officials deemed to have violated ethics. This study focuses on the collective social dynamics that shape public perceptions of the integrity and accountability of officials amid demands for democracy and transparency in the digital age (Rabbani et al. 2024). Thus, this research seeks to uncover the relationship between power, digital media, and the formation of collective public perceptions in the context of a political ethics crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. This design was chosen because it aligns with the research objective, namely to deeply understand the meaning, subjective experiences, and public perspectives regarding the ethics of state officials following the August 2025 demonstrations within the context of a specific and limited case. A qualitative approach allows for a contextual and holistic exploration of complex social realities, where data is not reduced to numbers but analysed to gain comprehensive understanding (Inayah, Habsy, and Nursalim 2025).

The case study method occupies a strategic position in research due to its significant contributions, both theoretically and practically. Through this approach, researchers can conduct an intensive exploration of a phenomenon by examining one or a small number of units of analysis. This depth of exploration allows for a comprehensive understanding and uncovers dimensions often overlooked by other research methods. Methodologically, the case study approach is rooted in the principle of in-depth investigation of a single case or several purposefully selected cases, allowing for a detailed mapping of the context and complexity of the phenomenon. These characteristics make it an appropriate tool for uncovering the processes and reasons behind an event, in other words, answering the "how" and "why" questions (Poltak and Widjaja 2024).

The data analysis method applied is descriptive-interpretive analysis within a case study framework. The analysis process follows the following steps: data reduction, which involves organising and focusing raw data into initial themes relevant to the case under study; data presentation, which

involves factually and systematically describing the phenomenon within the framework of the observed case; and conclusion drawing and verification, which involves interpreting the descriptions to uncover deeper meanings, patterns, and implications of public experiences related to the case. Through this analysis, researchers seek to comprehensively understand the thought patterns, emotions, and expressions of the research subjects within the context of the specific case study (Tumangkeng and Maramis 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Context of the August 2025 Demonstration Crisis

The demonstrations that began on August 25, 2025, escalated into open conflict between August 29 and 31. Initially sparked by the controversy surrounding the increase in allowances for members of the House of Representatives (DPR), tensions escalated following the death of Affan Kurniawan, an online motorcycle taxi driver, after being hit by a police vehicle. The riots spread to several metropolitan areas, including Jakarta, Surabaya, and Makassar, resulting in the destruction of public infrastructure and the private property of officials (Kathyrn 2025).

Sociological analysis shows that public protests against legislative policies are the result of a long-standing political legitimacy deficit. The issue of increased allowances for members of parliament was merely a catalyst, while the underlying structural causes are deepening economic inequality and public perceptions politicians' lavish lifestyles at odds with the everyday realities of the people. The concept of relative deprivation in social theory states that collective frustration arises when people feel hindered in achieving their aspirations or rights, particularly when there is a significant disparity between the living standards of the elite and the general public (Siagian 2025).

This situation further was complicated by the public's belief that the House of Representatives prioritised elite interests over the voices of the people. In response, student movements, labourers, and civil society organisations converged around a single core demand: a review of policies deemed elitist. These mass protests ultimately transformed into a symbolic expression of rejection of public policies deemed unjust (Wahyudi 2025).

The conflict reached its peak on August 30, 2025, marked by the blocking of main roads and a series of scattered physical encounters between protesters and security forces. The deployment of large numbers of security forces had the potential to further inflame tensions. As a result, critical public discourse shifted from mere rejection of DPR policies to more fundamental questions about the credibility of state institutions. The wave of protests culminated the following day, on August 31, 2025, with thousands of people concentrating around the parliament building. The phrase "arrogant elites, abandoned people" became a central narrative dominating discourse, both in physical and online spaces. This phenomenon indicates that the core of the problem has transcended the policy dimension alone and is more accurately described as a failure of political communication between those in authority and citizens (Karmini and Ibrahim 2025).

Public protests expressed through demonstrations serve as a corrective mechanism in social interactions with legislative institutions. These actions are not solely focused on rejecting the substance of a policy but also serve to expose various systemic problems, such as the failure of political communication, limited information transparency, and the lack of channels for public participation in lawmaking. These expressions of criticism indicate an urgent demand for a more transparent, accountable, and multi-stakeholder legislative process,

thus being more responsive to public aspirations. Therefore, demonstrations can be interpreted as a means of democracy that reaffirms the public's control function in overseeing government performance (Kaharuddin et al. 2025).

Thus, the roots of the crisis can be traced to the convergence of three main factors: first, the launch of controversial public policies; second, the failure of the representative council's representation and communication functions; and third, the authorities' ineffective timing and approach in managing public aspirations and protests.

2. Public Perception of the Ethics of State Officials in Depth

The ethics of state officials are the moral foundation that determines the quality of public trust in the government. In the digital age, where every official statement spreads rapidly through mass media and social media, miscommunication can trigger a widespread crisis of trust (Agustin, Trijayanto, and Syayekti 2025).

Ethics serves as a fundamental pillar in building and maintaining public trust in the government. In the context of governance, ethics goes beyond its function as a set of formal rules and serves as an operational foundation that fosters citizen confidence. A consistent commitment by state institutions to ethical principles will create a sense of security, respect, and confidence that the public interest is a top priority in the policy process. In efforts to transform and improve the quality of public services, the application of ethics is a crucial prerequisite. Various service dysfunctions, such as characterised by conflicts of interest, corrupt practices, and bureaucratic inefficiency, are often rooted in an inadequate governance system. This problem stems not solely from the moral dimension of individual officials but more substantially from an institutional environment that has not yet systemically internalised ethical values. Conceptually, ethics in governance can be understood as a reflective framework and normative guidelines that guide actions toward what should be done to achieve the common good and procedural truth (Latifah, Wardani, and Hayat 2025).

Following the large-scale demonstrations that occurred in August 2025, public perception of the ethics of state officials underwent a fundamental shift. Analysis of the evolving narrative, as presented by Fikri (2025), reveals a shift in public cognition. The data shows that the public no longer views ethics as a formality but rather as a prerequisite for political legitimacy. This awareness emerged in response to the accumulation of cases of abuse of authority and controversial official communication, which in this analysis is identified as a disparity between expectations and reality. The public critically developed the understanding that electability must be balanced with a measurable moral track record, a demand that became a central theme in banners and calls during the demonstrations.

Affective data comes from two primary sources. First, from visual semiotics, based on Figure 1, which shows a large crowd in front of the House of Representatives (DPR) Building. According to Prasetyo and Bustomi (2025), this spatial configuration and crowd size represent collective disappointment that has reached saturation point. Officials' vulgar and simplistic communication styles trigger public emotional responses of anger and a sense of betrayal. Condescending remarks are not only considered inappropriate but also perceived as a disregard for empathy and a sign of prioritising short-term political interests. This combination of visual data and literature findings confirms a correlation between unethical official communication and the formation of collective wounds and the erosion of trust (Latifah et al. 2025).

Empirical data on public behaviour after the demonstrations demonstrate concrete manifestations of cognitive and affective perceptions. The analysis identifies two forms of resistance behaviour: physical, through mass demonstrations (as seen in Figure 1), and digital, through cancel culture practices, boycotts, and the widespread dissemination of criticism on social media. These behaviours serve as alternative social mechanisms implemented independently by the public. Findings by Latifah et al. (2025) indicate that these digital social sanctions were triggered by the perception that formal oversight channels were considered ineffective. Therefore, this conative dimension is not simply an emotional outburst but rather a political strategy by citizens to pressure officials to be more accountable.

Based on data analysis of the three dimensions above, it can be concluded that public perception after August 2025 reflects an ethics-based legitimacy crisis. Figure 1 provides visual empirical evidence of the scale of disappointment, while findings from Fikri (2025) and Latifah et al. (2025) provide an analytical framework for understanding the nature of and how this crisis occurred. Public perception is formed through a cycle: cognitive disparities, awareness of accumulation of negative emotions, and then collective resistance behaviour. This cycle marks the transformation of society from passive observers to active observers who use digital literacy to demand ethical reform. Without significant improvements to political morality and communication ethics, the data suggests that the trust gap between the state and citizens will become increasingly difficult to bridge, threatening the long-term stability of governance.

Figure 1. A number of people in front of the DPR Building during the August 2025 demonstration



Source: Prasetyo & Bustomi 2025

3. Public Subjective Experience in Observing and Assessing Official Behaviour

The large-scale demonstrations in August 2025 became a crucial point for exploring the construction of public perceptions of state officials. Analysis of data from social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram during the demonstration period and the week afterward (using a random sample of 10,000 posts with keywords related to officials, the House of Representatives (DPR), and demonstrations) revealed clear empirical patterns. First, there was a temporal correlation between statements by specific officials and spikes in sentiment. For negative example, statement attributed to Ahmad Sahroni describing the demonstrations as "unclear movements" triggered a 320% increase in negative conversation volume in the following 24 hours, according to social listening tool analysis. Second, qualitative content analysis of 500 random tweets showed that criticism was not only emotional (such as using words like "disappointed" or "angry") but also cognitive-normative. Sixty-eight percent of tweets contained explicit comparisons between officials' actions and norms such as "justice" (42%), "empathy" (31%), and "constitutional responsibility" (27%). These data confirm that public assessments are systematic, referring to the prevailing ethical framework (Fahmi 2025).

Research conducted by Rafsanjani, Fikri Akbar, and Allifiansyah (2025) adds a digital social dimension to the formation of public perception. Through a phenomenological

analysis of TikTok content during the August 25, 2025, demonstrations, they found that the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) phenomenon was a powerful trigger for public emotional engagement. Empirical data shows 10 viral videos with over 100,000 views and around 500 user comments, most of which expressed empathy, anger, and solidarity with victims of police violence. Hashtags such #JusticeForAffan, #DemoOjol, and #OjolBergerak became digital symbols of a collective sense of justice. This phenomenon demonstrates that public perception of official ethics is shaped not only by mainstream media but also by "participatory media", where the public becomes an active actor in assessing and pressuring officials. FOMO encourages individuals to participate in digital conversations to remain socially relevant, while simultaneously strengthening collective moral pressure on state officials.

People's subjective experiences are not formed in a vacuum but through social interactions. Following the demonstrations, conversations about officials' behaviour spread widely in community forums, coffee shops, and even on social media. In the digital space, the public not only expressed personal opinions but also shared visual documentation, such as videos and photos of officials' actions during the demonstrations. This collective narrative reinforced the perception that officials were defensive and less open to criticism. Through the process of public communication, individual experiences ultimately transformed into collective ones that became embedded in social memory. This phenomenon also demonstrates how the digital space plays a role in reconstructing the meaning of officials' ethics in the eyes of the public (Damayanti, Su'un, and Muslim 2025).

Public assessment of official policies has a concrete empirical basis in economic inequality data. The new policy, replacing official housing allowances with a housing allowance of IDR 50 million per month, plus position and communication allowances, has drawn increasingly sharp criticism due to its contrast with the average worker's wage of only IDR 3 million. Media discourse analysis found that 93% of opinion articles in 10 leading online media outlets discussing this policy included this comparison as the primary evidence of injustice (Noerdin 2025). This quantified gap serves as an empirical foundation for public assessments that officials live in a different reality and are insensitive to the plight of the majority of the people.

The subjective experiences of the following the August 2025 public demonstrations significantly impacted public mindsets and attitudes in assessing the ethics of state officials. The emotional crisis of disappointment and anger that emerged after witnessing officials' responses to the demonstrations did not stop at a momentary level but developed into the primary basis for forming a collective perception of the collapse of ethical standards in leadership. For the majority of the public, officials' behavior, perceived as defensive, lacking empathy, and even demeaning to the aspirations of the people, is clear evidence that public ethics is no longer a top priority in political decisionmaking. This creates a psychological distance between the public and state officials, where public trust is increasingly eroded and replaced by deep cynicism and skepticism.

In addition to eroding legitimacy, the public's subjective experiences also give rise to symptoms of political apathy. Some people feel that expressing their aspirations will not bring about meaningful change because officials do not genuinely listen to the people. As a result, they are reluctant to engage in formal political activities, whether in the form of election participation, public dialogue, or policy consultation forums. This apathy is dangerous because it can reduce the quality of democratic participation and weaken the collective spirit in fighting for social justice. However, on the other hand, some

community groups are becoming increasingly active in conducting oversight, particularly through digital spaces. These two responses demonstrate the complexity of the impact of subjective experiences: on the one hand, they reduce trust and participation, on the other, they strengthen public resistance (Damayanti et al. 2025).

The public's subjective experiences following the demonstrations have given rise to increasingly strong demands for ethical reform (Fithriyatirrizqoh and Zhanaty 2024). The public recognizes that weaknesses in maintaining official ethics cannot be resolved simply through spontaneous criticism but require systemic change. These demands include reforming the code of ethics for state officials, strengthening internal and external oversight systems, and the need for political education that emphasizes moral values and integrity. The public believes that ethical reform is essential for restoring public trust, strengthening democracy, and ensuring that state officials truly fulfill their role as public servants (Putra and Loweleba 2024).

CONCLUSION

Public perception of the ethics of state 2025 officials following the August demonstrations underwent a profound, multidimensional transformation. The crisis of public trust was not merely a fleeting response to policies deemed elitist but had evolved into a systematic assessment of officials' moral legitimacy and integrity. The public no longer viewed ethics as mere formal compliance but rather as a fundamental prerequisite for political legitimacy and government accountability. The August 2025 served as a catalytic demonstrations momentum, accelerating the shift from passive dissatisfaction to active resistance, both through physical action and social sanctions in digital spaces such as cancel culture and boycotts.

This research reveals that people's subjective experiences have formed a

negative collective memory that erodes trust and widens the psychological distance between the state and citizens. The moral dissonance between normative public expectations and actual official behaviour, such as communication perceived as arrogant, unequal policies, and insensitivity to socio-economic conditions, has triggered mutually reinforcing cognitive, affective, and conative responses. The digital space serves as a medium for reconstructing the meaning of ethics, where the public becomes an active actor in real-time monitoring, the formation of collective narratives, and the emphasis on official accountability.

This research makes a novel contribution by utilising a current and underevent—the August researched demonstrations—as an empirical context for analysing the ethical crisis of state officials. By focusing on a specific socio-political moment, this research uncovers the dynamics of public perception that emerge in real time and are reflected in the digital space. This research combines a qualitative case study approach with data analysis from social media, a primary source of people's subjective experiences, enabling a more holistic exploration of how perceptions are formed and collectively internalised in the digital era.

Furthermore, this study expands the discourse on cancel culture, typically studied in the realm of celebrity or pop culture, to the context of the politics and ethics of state officials. The findings demonstrate that cancel culture functions as an alternative social control mechanism and a citizen political strategy to demand accountability when formal oversight channels are deemed ineffective. This research also identifies that officials' communications in the digital space not only affect individual image but also systemically impact institutional legitimacy. Speech deemed unethical can trigger a widespread erosion of trust and accelerate political delegitimisation.

The results map the public perception cycle, consisting of cognitive awareness of disparities, the accumulation of negative emotions, and collective resistance behaviour. This framework provides a dynamic perspective for understanding how an ethical crisis can develop into a crisis of government legitimacy. Thus, this research not only documents the public response to the ethical crisis but also offers an analytical perspective on how digital space and memory collective shape democratic demands for governance with integrity.

Without systemic, comprehensive,

and sustainable ethical reform encompassing

aspects of morality, public communication, and oversight mechanisms, the crisis of trust has the potential to undermine the stability of democracy and governance in Indonesia. With increasingly strong digital political literacy, the public is now able to monitor officials in real time, shape collective narratives, and pressure them to be more careful in their actions and statements. This suggests that public perception following the demonstrations is not only tinged with disappointment but also provides new energy for demanding systemic ethical reform. Without significant improvements in political morality, ethical public communication, and strengthened oversight mechanisms, the crisis of public trust in state officials will and potentially undermine persist government legitimacy. Therefore, ethical reform of state officials is not merely a moral necessity but a primary prerequisite for maintaining democratic stability and the continuation of sound governance.

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