



Measuring Public Trust in Military Engagement during Civil Emergencies: Insights from Disaster-Prone Communities in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Public trust plays a critical role in shaping the effectiveness of civil emergency response, particularly in contexts where military actors are actively involved. In disaster-prone countries such as Indonesia, the military serves as a key operational force in emergency management, yet its involvement raises important questions regarding legitimacy, accountability, and public perception. This study examines the determinants and dynamics of public trust in military engagement during civil emergencies. Employing a mixed qualitative approach that integrates a systematic literature review with contextual analysis of disaster-prone regions in Indonesia, this research develops a conceptual framework linking trust, institutional legitimacy, and civil-military coordination. The findings indicate that public trust is shaped by perceived effectiveness, transparency, community engagement, and alignment with humanitarian values. While military involvement enhances operational efficiency, trust remains contingent upon the balance between authority and accountability. The study contributes to the literature by offering an integrative framework for understanding public trust in civil-military contexts and provides policy-relevant insights for strengthening disaster governance in high-risk environments.

Keywords: Public Trust, Civil-Military Relations, Disaster Response, Legitimacy, Indonesia, Emergency Management

INTRODUCTION

The increasing frequency and intensity of disasters have transformed the landscape of emergency governance worldwide. In disaster-prone countries, the complexity of emergency response requires the involvement of multiple actors, including government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and military institutions. Indonesia, as one of the most disaster-prone countries globally, exemplifies this complexity due to its geographical location within the Pacific Ring of Fire and its exposure to earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, and volcanic eruptions (United Nations, 2015).

Within this context, the military plays a crucial role in civil emergency response. Its logistical capacity, hierarchical command structure, and rapid deployment capabilities make it an indispensable actor in disaster management. However, the involvement of military forces in civilian contexts raises critical questions regarding public trust, legitimacy, and the boundaries of civil-military relations. While the military can enhance operational efficiency, its presence may also generate concerns about authority, transparency, and accountability.

Public trust is a fundamental component of effective governance, particularly in crisis situations. Trust influences how communities respond to emergency interventions, comply with directives, and engage with response actors. In the context of civil-military cooperation, trust becomes even more complex, as it is shaped not only by performance but also by perceptions of institutional roles and values. Existing studies



suggest that trust in institutions is influenced by perceived competence, fairness, and alignment with societal expectations (Boin & McConnell, 2007).

Despite its importance, public trust in military engagement during civil emergencies remains underexplored, particularly in developing countries. Much of the existing literature focuses on operational effectiveness or institutional coordination, with limited attention to the social dimensions of trust and perception. This gap is significant, as trust directly affects the legitimacy and sustainability of disaster response efforts.

This study addresses this gap by examining public trust in military engagement within disaster-prone communities in Indonesia. It seeks to answer how trust is constructed, what factors influence it, and how it shapes the effectiveness of civil-military cooperation. To achieve this, the study proposes a conceptual framework that integrates trust, legitimacy, and coordination within a unified analytical model. By combining theoretical insights with contextual analysis, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of public trust in disaster governance. It also provides practical implications for improving civil-military collaboration in emergency response.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design supported by a systematic literature review and contextual analysis. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of complex social and institutional dynamics that shape public trust in military engagement during civil emergencies (Creswell, 2014). The literature review draws on peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus, as well as reports from international organizations. The selection criteria include relevance to key themes such as public trust, civil-military relations, disaster response, and governance. This ensures a comprehensive theoretical foundation.

The analytical framework is developed based on three core dimensions: perceived effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and social engagement. These dimensions are derived from existing literature on trust and governance and are used to analyze how public trust is constructed in disaster contexts. The empirical focus is on Indonesia, particularly disaster-prone regions where military involvement in emergency response is frequent. Secondary data sources, including academic studies, policy reports, and documented disaster response experiences, are analyzed to identify patterns and key themes (Lassa, 2018). Data analysis is conducted using thematic analysis, which enables the identification of recurring patterns and relationships across sources (Bryman, 2016). The findings are then interpreted through the proposed conceptual framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Public trust in military engagement during civil emergencies emerges as a multidimensional and dynamic construct shaped by the interaction of institutional performance, social perception, and contextual experience. The findings of this study reveal that trust is not merely a function of operational effectiveness but is deeply embedded in broader socio-political and cultural contexts. Understanding this complexity is essential for strengthening civil-military cooperation in disaster-prone environments such as Indonesia.

One of the most prominent determinants of public trust is perceived effectiveness. Communities tend to trust military actors when they demonstrate the ability to respond quickly, provide tangible assistance, and manage crises efficiently. The military's capacity for rapid deployment, logistical coordination, and resource mobilization contributes significantly to this perception. In Indonesia, the military has consistently played a central role in disaster response, particularly in large-scale emergencies where civilian institutions face capacity constraints (Lassa, 2018). This operational reliability reinforces public confidence and positions the military as a dependable actor in times of crisis.

However, effectiveness alone is insufficient to sustain long-term trust. Trust is also influenced by perceptions of institutional legitimacy, which encompasses transparency, accountability, and adherence to humanitarian principles. Legitimacy reflects whether the actions of military actors are perceived as

appropriate, justified, and aligned with societal values. In situations where military involvement is seen as exceeding its mandate or lacking transparency, trust may be undermined despite high operational performance.

The dual role of the military as both a security institution and a humanitarian actor creates inherent tensions in public perception. On one hand, the military is associated with discipline, authority, and efficiency. On the other hand, its involvement in civilian affairs may raise concerns about militarization and the erosion of democratic norms. These perceptions are particularly relevant in societies with historical experiences of military dominance in governance.

In Indonesia, public perception of the military has evolved significantly over time. Reforms aimed at strengthening democratic governance and redefining civil-military relations have contributed to a more positive image of the military in humanitarian contexts. The military is increasingly viewed as a supportive partner rather than a dominant authority. This shift has enhanced its legitimacy and contributed to higher levels of public trust.

Social engagement represents another critical dimension of trust. The extent to which military actors interact with local communities, communicate transparently, and involve stakeholders in decision-making processes significantly influences trust levels. Community engagement fosters a sense of inclusion and ownership, which enhances the legitimacy of interventions. When communities feel heard and respected, they are more likely to cooperate with response efforts and trust the actors involved.

The findings suggest that communication plays a pivotal role in shaping public perception. Clear, consistent, and culturally sensitive communication helps to reduce uncertainty and build confidence. In contrast, lack of information or inconsistent messaging can lead to confusion, mistrust, and resistance. Effective communication strategies are therefore essential for maintaining trust during emergencies.

Another important factor influencing trust is prior experience. Communities that have previously experienced effective military assistance are more likely to trust future interventions. Conversely, negative experiences can have long-lasting effects on trust, even if subsequent interventions are effective. This highlights the cumulative nature of trust and the importance of maintaining consistent standards of performance and conduct.

The interaction between trust and legitimacy is particularly significant in shaping civil-military dynamics. Trust enhances the acceptance of military involvement, while legitimacy provides the normative foundation for trust. When both elements are present, civil-military cooperation is more likely to be effective and sustainable. However, imbalances between them can create challenges. For example, high effectiveness without legitimacy may lead to short-term compliance but long-term skepticism.

Institutional coordination also plays a crucial role in influencing public trust. Effective collaboration between military and civilian actors ensures coherent and coordinated responses, which enhances overall performance. Fragmented or conflicting actions, on the other hand, can undermine trust and reduce the effectiveness of interventions. In Indonesia, efforts to strengthen coordination between the military and civilian disaster management agencies have contributed to improved outcomes.

The findings also highlight the importance of accountability mechanisms in maintaining trust. Accountability ensures that actions are subject to oversight and that responsibilities are clearly defined. In the context of military involvement, accountability mechanisms help to address concerns about authority and potential misuse of power. Transparent reporting, independent monitoring, and clear lines of responsibility are essential components of accountability.

The conceptual framework developed in this study integrates these dimensions into a coherent model of public trust in civil-military engagement. Trust is conceptualized as an outcome of interactions between perceived effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and social engagement. These dimensions are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, creating a dynamic system that evolves over time.

The Indonesian case demonstrates that trust is not static but continuously shaped by experiences, perceptions, and institutional practices. Building and maintaining trust requires sustained efforts across

multiple dimensions, including improving operational performance, strengthening governance frameworks, and enhancing community engagement.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest that strategies aimed at strengthening public trust should adopt a holistic approach. Focusing solely on operational efficiency is insufficient; equal attention must be given to transparency, communication, and community involvement. Policies that promote participatory approaches and strengthen accountability mechanisms are particularly important.

Overall, the integration of military actors into civil emergency response offers significant benefits but also requires careful management of social and institutional dynamics. Public trust serves as a critical bridge between operational effectiveness and societal acceptance, making it a central factor in the success of disaster response efforts.

CONCLUSION

Public trust is a fundamental determinant of effective civil emergency response, particularly in contexts involving military engagement. This study demonstrates that trust is shaped by a combination of perceived effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and social engagement. While the military's operational capabilities contribute to trust, its legitimacy depends on transparency, accountability, and alignment with societal values. The case of Indonesia highlights the importance of balancing efficiency with ethical and institutional considerations. Strengthening public trust requires integrated strategies that address both technical and social dimensions of disaster governance. This study contributes to the literature by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding public trust in civil-military contexts. Future research should focus on empirical validation and comparative analysis across different countries to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

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