

Populist narratives, digital media, and public perceptions of election fraud in the Indonesian presidential elections 2019 and 2024

Ferdinand Eskol Tiar Sirait^{1*)}, Irwansyah², Eriyanto³

Department of Communication Science, Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

Abstract

Persistent allegations of electoral fraud after Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 elections show that legitimacy is shaped not only by legal validation but also by competing public narratives. Although both elections were certified, post-election discourse remained marked by polarization, distrust, and manipulation claims. Existing studies have examined fraud perceptions, populism, misinformation, and digital politics separately, yet research on how fraud narratives evolved across consecutive Indonesian elections remains limited. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how populist fraud narratives were produced and circulated in both elections, and how survey institutions contributed to electoral legitimacy. Using qualitative descriptive content analysis based on library and document-based research, this study synthesizes academic literature, official documents, media reports, and survey publications. The findings reveal a transformation in fraud narratives. In 2019, they were explicit, personalized, and elite-centered, articulated by senior political and religious actors, and linked to offline mobilization. In 2024, they became decentralized, implicit, and digitally networked, circulating through short-form content, partisan online communities, and buzzer-like amplification. Across both elections, survey institutions functioned as epistemic actors by measuring public perceptions and countering claims of widespread illegitimacy, while exposing partisan asymmetries and winner's bias. This article contributes to debates on digital populism, electoral integrity, and democratic legitimacy by showing how election legitimacy is contested across legal-institutional, moral-populist, and empirical-survey arenas.

Keywords: populist narratives, digital media, public perceptions, election fraud, presidential elections

*)corresponding author

E-mail : ferdinand.eskol11@ui.ac.id

Introduction

The 2019 and 2024 Indonesian presidential elections were followed by intense public debates over electoral fraud, despite formal validation by electoral institutions and legal mechanisms. In both elections, official results did not automatically settle public contestation over electoral legitimacy. Allegations of fraud, manipulation, institutional bias, and elite intervention continued to circulate in political discourse, media coverage, and digital platforms. This suggests that the legitimacy of elections is not determined solely by legal certification or institutional procedures, but also by the public narratives through which citizens interpret fairness, trust, and political defeat.

The 2019 presidential election was marked by sharp polarization between supporters of Joko Widodo–Ma'ruf Amin and Prabowo Subianto–Sandiaga Uno. Allegations of structured, systematic, and massive fraud circulated widely and were amplified by political elites, religious figures, and social media networks. These

narratives contributed to post-election distrust and were followed by public mobilization, including demonstrations around the office of the Election Supervisory Body. Although the Constitutional Court ultimately confirmed the official result, skepticism toward the integrity of the election persisted in public debate. In 2024, similar allegations re-emerged in a different political configuration. The election involved three candidate pairs and a more fragmented digital environment, where claims of manipulation, state intervention, vote buying, and institutional partiality circulated through social media platforms, partisan networks, and short-form political content.

These developments are analytically important because perceptions of electoral fraud can shape democratic legitimacy even when fraud is not legally proven. Public belief in election integrity influences trust in political institutions, democratic satisfaction, and citizens' willingness to accept electoral outcomes (Linde & Ekman, 2003; Norris, 2014; Norris et al., 2019). In highly polarized elections, losing supporters may be more likely to perceive electoral procedures as unfair, particularly when political elites frame defeat as the result of manipulation rather than democratic competition (Bowler & Donovan, 1994; Daxecker et al., 2019). Thus, electoral fraud perception should not be understood merely as a response to objective irregularities, but as a politically and communicatively constructed phenomenon shaped by elite cues, partisan identity, misinformation, and public distrust.

Existing studies have examined electoral fraud perceptions in various political contexts. Beaulieu (2013) shows how political actors strategically use fraud allegations to mobilize supporters, while Robertson & Greene (2017) demonstrate how fraud narratives can be shaped by political and informational environments. Daxecker et al. (2019) further argue that attitudes, information exposure, and social networks influence citizens' perceptions of electoral fraud. Studies on digital media have also shown that social media can intensify political polarization, accelerate misinformation, and amplify emotionally charged political narratives (Castells, 2009a; Reuter & Szakonyi, 2013; Tang & Lee, 2018). In the Indonesian context, research has discussed polarization, identity politics, misinformation, and digital campaigning in recent elections (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Hanan, 2020; Sirait, 2020; Widjayanto et al., 2022). However, these studies have not sufficiently examined how electoral fraud narratives evolved across consecutive Indonesian presidential elections within a single comparative framework.

This article addresses that gap by comparing the production and circulation of electoral fraud narratives in Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. The central argument is that fraud narratives in 2019 were relatively explicit, personalized, and elite-centered, shaped by senior political figures, religious actors, and offline mobilization. By contrast, fraud narratives in 2024 became more decentralized, implicit, and digitally networked, circulating through platform-mediated interactions, partisan online communities, short-form content, and buzzer-like amplification. This transformation matters because it shows that electoral legitimacy is increasingly contested not only in courts and electoral institutions, but also in fragmented digital public spheres where populist narratives, survey data, and partisan interpretations compete to define what counts as a fair election.

The article makes three contributions. First, it provides a comparative analysis of fraud narratives across two consecutive Indonesian presidential elections. Second, it explains the shift from elite-centered and religiously inflected populist narratives in 2019 to more decentralized and digitally mediated narratives in 2024. Third, it examines the role of survey institutions as epistemic actors that produce empirical measures of

public perception and contribute to electoral legitimacy amid competing claims of fraud. Accordingly, this study is guided by three research questions: How were populist narratives of electoral fraud produced and circulated in Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections? How did the role of political actors and digital media differ across the two elections? How did survey institutions contribute to electoral legitimacy amid competing fraud narratives?

This study is built on three interrelated concepts: populist narratives, electoral fraud perception, and digital electoral legitimacy. The first concept, populist narratives, refers to political storytelling that divides society into morally opposed camps: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In electoral politics, this binary logic can transform political defeat into a narrative of betrayal, manipulation, or stolen sovereignty. When political actors frame electoral loss as evidence that "the people" have been cheated by corrupt institutions, fraud allegations become more than technical claims about irregularities. They become moral narratives that delegitimize electoral outcomes and mobilize collective resentment.

The second concept is electoral fraud perception. Fraud perception does not always arise from verified electoral manipulation. It may also be shaped by partisan attachment, elite cues, conspiracy beliefs, social networks, and exposure to political information (Daxecker et al., 2019; Fjelde & Höglund, 2016; Hyde & Marinov, 2014; Tucker, 2007). In polarized contexts, citizens may interpret the same electoral process differently depending on whether their preferred candidate wins or loses. This "winner-loser" divide is central to understanding why official validation does not necessarily produce broad public acceptance. Electoral legitimacy therefore depends not only on the integrity of procedures, but also on whether citizens perceive those procedures as fair and trustworthy.

The third concept concerns digital media and electoral legitimacy. Social media platforms do not simply transmit political messages; they shape the visibility, circulation, and emotional intensity of political narratives. Digital platforms can enable direct communication between political actors and supporters, but they can also facilitate misinformation, selective exposure, affective polarization, and rapid amplification of unverified claims (Castells, 2009b; Reuter & Szakonyi, 2013; Tang & Lee, 2018). In this context, fraud narratives may spread not because they are empirically proven, but because they resonate with partisan distrust, circulate repeatedly within like-minded communities, and are amplified through platform-based visibility mechanisms.

These three concepts provide the analytical framework for comparing the 2019 and 2024 Indonesian presidential elections. The study examines who produced fraud narratives, how these narratives circulated across political and digital spaces, which media infrastructures enabled their diffusion, and how survey institutions responded by producing empirical accounts of public perceptions. This approach allows the study to trace not only the content of fraud allegations, but also the actors, channels, and knowledge-producing institutions involved in shaping public interpretations of electoral integrity. Through this framework, electoral legitimacy is understood as a contested process involving legal-institutional validation, moral-populist claims, and empirical, survey-based constructions of public opinion.

Research Methods

This study employed qualitative descriptive content analysis based on library and document-based research to examine how populist narratives of electoral fraud were produced, circulated, and contested in Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. This approach was selected because the study focuses on political narratives, public discourse, institutional responses, and competing constructions of electoral legitimacy rather than on statistical hypothesis testing or causal measurement. The analysis followed the qualitative interactive model of Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The data were collected from four categories of secondary sources. First, academic literature was used to develop the conceptual framework on populism, electoral fraud perception, digital politics, misinformation, and electoral legitimacy. These sources were retrieved from databases such as Scopus, Google Scholar, and Sinta. Second, official documents from the General Election Commission, the Election Supervisory Body, and the Constitutional Court were used to establish the institutional and legal context of the 2019 and 2024 elections. Third, media reports from credible national news portals, including Kompas.com, Tempo.co, and Detik.com, were used to trace public statements, fraud allegations, political mobilization, and post-election discourse. Fourth, survey reports from recognized polling institutions, particularly Indikator Politik Indonesia and Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC), were used to examine public perceptions of electoral fairness and legitimacy.

Sources were included if they discussed Indonesia's 2019 or 2024 presidential elections and addressed at least one of the following themes: electoral fraud allegations, populist narratives, digital media, misinformation, survey institutions, or electoral legitimacy. Academic publications, official documents, credible media reports, and survey publications with identifiable methodology were prioritized. Sources were excluded if they consisted of unsupported opinions, anonymous claims, unverifiable social media posts, partisan propaganda without clear factual basis, or materials unrelated to the two presidential elections examined in this study.

The collected materials were coded thematically using six analytical categories: actor type, narrative type, media channel, narrative style, legitimacy claim, and public effect. Actor type included political elites, religious figures, public figures, campaign actors, buzzer-like networks, survey institutions, and electoral bodies. Narrative type referred to claims such as structured, systematic, and massive fraud, people power, state intervention, institutional bias, vote manipulation, and elite collusion. Media channel captured the arenas of circulation, including mainstream media, public speeches, WhatsApp, Twitter/X, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Narrative style identified whether fraud claims were explicit, implicit, symbolic, emotional, or confrontational. Legitimacy claim distinguished legal-procedural, moral-populist, and empirical-survey-based claims. Public effect referred to polarization, distrust, offline mobilization, digital contestation, acceptance, or rejection of electoral outcomes.

The comparison between the 2019 and 2024 elections was conducted through a structured cross-case strategy. Each election was treated as a case and analyzed using the same coding categories. The comparison focused on dominant actors, narrative styles, media channels, offline mobilization, the role of survey institutions, and patterns of legitimacy contestation. This strategy allowed the study to identify both continuity and transformation, particularly the shift from relatively centralized, elite-centered, and religiously inflected fraud narratives in 2019 to more decentralized, digitally mediated, and networked narratives in 2024.

To strengthen validity and reliability, the study applied source triangulation, cross-case comparison, and conceptual consistency. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing academic literature, official documents, media reports, and survey publications. Cross-case comparison ensured that the same analytical dimensions were applied to both elections. Conceptual consistency was maintained by linking interpretations to the core concepts of populist narratives, electoral fraud perception, digital media, and electoral legitimacy. Claims that could not be directly verified, particularly those concerning algorithmic amplification, buzzer coordination, and voter-level motivations, were treated cautiously as analytical interpretations rather than causal findings.

Results and Discussion

Populist Narratives of Political Actors and the Formation of Election Fraud Perceptions

The 2019 Indonesian presidential election provides an important case for understanding how perceptions of electoral fraud are shaped not only by disputes over vote counting, but also by broader struggles over political identity, religious legitimacy, and competing claims of representation. In this election, allegations of fraud were embedded in a highly polarized political environment, where electoral competition was increasingly framed through moral and identity-based narratives. Previous studies have shown that identity politics played a significant role in the 2019 Indonesian election, particularly in the presidential contest, even though its effects varied across electoral arenas (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Hanan, 2020). Religious considerations also influenced political preferences, as reflected in the role of Islamic organizations, ulama networks, and religious symbols in campaign discourse (A. R. Arifianto, 2019; Assyaukanie, 2019; Duile, 2021; Lestari, 2018). In such a context, fraud allegations did not circulate merely as technical complaints about electoral administration; they gained political resonance because they were attached to wider narratives of injustice, moral betrayal, and contested popular sovereignty.

The politicization of religion in the 2019 election was visible in the struggle for Muslim voters and in the symbolic competition over religious endorsement. The recommendation emerging from the *Ijtima' Ulama* that Prabowo Subianto should select a running mate from among prominent Islamic figures reflected an attempt to frame electoral competition not only in programmatic or partisan terms, but also as a contest over religious representation and moral authority. At the same time, this claim was contested by other Islamic actors who supported Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin. Support for Jokowi–Ma'ruf from ulama and pesantren networks functioned as an alternative claim of Islamic legitimacy, thereby weakening the notion that Muslim representation belonged exclusively to one electoral camp (A. Arifianto, 2021; Burhani, 2022; Hasyim, 2020). This competition over religious legitimacy is analytically important because populist fraud narratives tend to become more persuasive when electoral rivalry is already structured through binary claims of authentic representation. In such circumstances, political defeat can more easily be narrated as a betrayal of “the people” rather than as a legitimate democratic outcome.

This pattern corresponds to the ideational approach to populism, which conceptualizes populism as a political logic that divides society into two morally opposed groups: “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite” (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In the 2019 election, this populist logic was visible in the way

allegations of fraud were framed not simply as procedural irregularities, but as evidence that the will of the people had been obstructed by powerful political actors and institutions. The narrative of fraud therefore served a dual function. On the one hand, it expressed distrust toward electoral procedures and institutions. On the other hand, it provided a moral explanation for electoral defeat by portraying the losing side as the victim of systematic manipulation.

The formation of fraud perceptions in 2019 was also inseparable from the media environment in which these narratives circulated. Social media expanded opportunities for direct communication between politicians, religious figures, campaign actors, and supporters. At the same time, it accelerated the circulation of misinformation, partisan framing, and emotionally charged political content. Studies on Indonesia's 2019 election show that hoaxes and disinformation contributed to destructive propaganda, intensified political polarization, strengthened identity-based divisions, and weakened citizens' ability to critically evaluate political information (Sirait, 2020; Widjayanto et al., 2022). This pattern is consistent with broader research on digital political communication, which argues that social media environments are particularly conducive to populist communication because they privilege immediacy, repetition, virality, and affective appeals over procedural complexity and institutional verification (Castells, 2009a; Reuter et al., 2014). In a polarized election, fraud allegations do not always need to be legally proven to become socially credible; they may become persuasive when they resonate with pre-existing distrust and are repeatedly circulated within supportive networks.

Within this digital environment, public figures played an important mediating role. Their influence did not derive solely from formal campaign positions, but also from symbolic authority, social reach, and perceived moral credibility. Religious leaders, senior politicians, and nationally recognized opinion leaders helped interpret electoral developments for wider audiences. Some acted as amplifiers of suspicion, while others encouraged restraint, verification, and acceptance of the electoral process. This distinction is important because it shows that the relationship between social media and polarization was not automatic. Social media became politically consequential because influential actors used it, directly or indirectly, to translate electoral competition into emotionally persuasive narratives about fraud, victimhood, betrayal, and legitimacy.

One of the most visible examples was Amien Rais. In the period surrounding the official announcement of the election result, Amien Rais publicly invoked the idea of "people power" as a response to alleged fraud and suggested that mass mobilization could be justified if the Prabowo–Sandi camp could demonstrate evidence of structured, systematic, and massive violations (Arum et al., 2020; Stepan & Künkler, 2007). Although the term "people power" later attracted criticism and was reframed by some actors as a movement of popular sovereignty, its political effect was significant. It transformed technical allegations of electoral malpractice into a populist narrative of dispossession, implying that the election was not merely disputed but morally stolen from the people. Figure 1 illustrates how this narrative entered public discourse through media coverage and became attached to post-election mobilization.

Political

Amien Rais Threatens People Power Again if the 2019 Presidential Election Is Fraudulent

Amien Rais did not explain further the people power action plan that he had repeatedly mentioned.

April 1, 2019 17:20 PM WIB



Chairman of the Advisory Board of the PAN Party, Amien Rais, while attending the dawn prayer and the 313 Whitening the KPU rally by the Indonesian People's Forum at the Sunda Kelapa Grand Mosque in Menteng, Central Jakarta, Sunday, March 31, 2019 /TEMPO-TAUFIQ SIDDIQ

TEMPO.CO, Jakarta - Member of the Advisory Board of the Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno National Winning Body, **Amien Rais**, has again issued a threat to mobilize the masses to take to the streets and carry out a *people power* action if fraud is proven in the 2019 presidential election.

"If we have evidence of systematic and massive fraud, I will mobilize the masses to take to the streets, say Monas, and hold a people power," said Amien at the Ayana Midplaza Hotel, Jakarta, Monday, April 1, 2019.

Read: [Amien Rais Threatens People Power If Fraud Occurs in the Presidential Election](#)

The term *people power* was thrown out by Amien since yesterday, Sunday, March 31, 2019 during the 313 action in front of the General Elections Commission office, Jakarta. The 313 action was held to demand that the KPU carry out the April 17, 2019 general election honestly and fairly.

Figure 1. News about Amien Rais calling for the People Power Movement
Source: Siddiq (2019)

The significance of Figure 1 lies not merely in documenting a political statement, but in showing how fraud allegations were publicly framed as a question of popular sovereignty. Through this framing, allegations of electoral malpractice were translated into a broader populist claim that the people's will had been obstructed by powerful political actors and institutions. This illustrates how elite signaling can transform technical disputes into moralized narratives of electoral illegitimacy.

The significance of this case lies in the role of elite signaling. Public figures do not merely reflect existing distrust; they may also provide interpretive frames that enable supporters to view electoral defeat as illegitimate. This mechanism is consistent with studies showing that motivated reasoning and conspiracy-oriented beliefs can make losing supporters more receptive to fraud claims that protect their prior political commitments (Daxecker et al., 2019; Uscinski et al., 2016). It also reflects a broader pattern in which populist actors pre-frame electoral arenas as corrupt or biased, thereby preparing supporters to reject unfavorable outcomes (Moffitt, 2016; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In this sense, the 2019 Jakarta protests should not be understood only as spontaneous reactions to the official vote count, but also as the outcome of a discursive process in which fraud allegations had already been moralized and collectivized.

At the same time, not all influential public figures reinforced suspicion. Actors associated with Jokowi–Ma'ruf also used public communication and social media, but often in a different register. Rather than framing the election as a struggle against moral dispossession, they emphasized calm, verification, and social restraint. Yusuf Mansur, for instance, publicly expressed support for Jokowi–Ma'ruf while also urging Muslims to maintain peace despite political differences. The Jokowi–Ma'ruf campaign team also responded to fraud allegations by questioning the accuracy of opposition claims and comparing them with available vote-counting data. Figure 2 illustrates this counter-narrative strategy, in which fraud allegations were challenged through data comparison and public verification.

Jokowi's camp reveals four irregularities in Prabowo's election fraud data.

The incumbent presidential candidate Jokowi's camp responded to the facts of the 2019 presidential election fraud according to Prabowo's camp.

May 16, 2019 | 12:22 WIB



Jokowi-Ma'ruf National Campaign Team spokesperson, Arya Simlingga, clarified accusations that his camp was afraid of the 2019 presidential election candidate debate. TEMPO/Dewi Nurita

TEMPO.CO, Jakarta - The camp of incumbent presidential candidate Joko Widodo or Jokowi responded to the facts of fraud in the 2019 presidential election according to the Prabowo-Sandi National Winning Body (BPN) which were revealed at a symposium at the Grand Sahid Hotel, Jakarta, Tuesday, May 14, 2019. According to the Jokowi-Ma'ruf TKN Spokesperson, Arya Simlingga, the data presented by Prabowo's camp was completely invalid.

Also read: [BPN 02 Exposes Election Fraud, Jokowi's Camp: Revealing Their Own Disgrace](#)
Arya highlighted at least four points. *First*, the inconsistent and changing victory claim data. Initially, Prabowo's camp claimed a 62 percent victory, then at the symposium two days ago, they claimed a 54.24 percent victory.

"How can the data fluctuate so drastically? That alone shows their data is unclear," said Jokowi-Ma'ruf TKN spokesperson Arya Simlingga at the Cemara Command Post in Jakarta on Thursday, May 16, 2019.

Figure 2. Jokowi reveals discrepancies in Prabowo's version of fraudulent data

Source: Nurita (2019)

Figure 2 is analytically relevant because it shows that the post-election contest was not only a struggle between official results and opposition allegations, but also a contest between competing claims of evidence. While opposition-linked actors framed fraud allegations through a moral-populist language of dispossession, actors associated with the winning camp attempted to reframe the debate through procedural verification and data-based correction. This contrast helps explain why public figures in 2019 should be understood not merely as campaign supporters, but as narrative actors who shaped whether citizens interpreted the election through suspicion, verification, or acceptance.

These responses functioned as counter-narratives that sought to sustain procedural trust and discourage escalation. If Amien Rais and opposition-linked actors mobilized a populist grammar of dispossession, figures aligned with the winning camp sought to normalize acceptance of institutional procedures and electoral plurality. The contest over fraud perception in 2019 therefore involved not only claims of illegitimacy but also efforts to restore trust in formal procedures, official counting, and institutional mechanisms of dispute resolution. Table 1 summarizes the main actors, narrative roles, platforms, and likely effects on fraud perception in the 2019 presidential election.

The broader implication is that perceptions of election fraud in the 2019 Indonesian presidential election were produced through the interaction of three main forces. First, identity-based contestation, especially over religion and Muslim representation, created a symbolic environment in which electoral rivalry could be moralized. Second, social media infrastructures enabled the rapid reproduction of narratives that blurred the boundary between information, opinion, and mobilizing rhetoric. Third, public figures acted as opinion leaders who translated political conflict into emotionally meaningful interpretations for wider audiences. Fraud perception was therefore not merely a reaction to the final vote count, but a socially constructed outcome of polarized electoral competition in which political legitimacy was contested across institutional, religious, and digital arenas.

Table 1. Public Figures, Narrative Roles, and Their Effects on Fraud Perception in the 2019 Indonesian Presidential Election

Public figure / actor	Main narrative role	Dominant platform / arena	Likely effect on public perception
Amien Rais	Framed alleged fraud as a popular sovereignty issue; invoked "people power"	News media, speeches, protest discourse, social media reproduction	Strengthened suspicion, moralized defeat, and encouraged contentious rejection
Religious figures in pro-Prabowo networks	Reinforced identity-based and anti-elite narratives	WhatsApp, Telegram, religious gatherings, campaign networks	Deepened moral polarization and linked fraud claims to religious legitimacy
Yusuf Mansur	Encouraged peaceful support for Jokowi–Ma'ruf and social harmony	Instagram and public religious messaging	Reduced escalation and supported acceptance of difference
Jokowi–Ma'ruf campaign team	Countered fraud allegations through data comparison and verification claims	Twitter, Instagram, campaign communication	Helped normalize procedural acceptance and trust in official counting
General Elections Commission	Provided official electoral result and formal institutional closure	Official electoral process and public announcements	Offered legal-administrative legitimacy, though contested by oppositional narratives

Source: processed by author, 2026

Taken together, these findings show that populist narratives in the 2019 election were relatively explicit, personalized, and elite-centered. Senior political figures and religious actors played a central role in framing fraud allegations as a question of popular sovereignty and moral legitimacy. At the same time, counter-narratives from the winning camp and electoral institutions sought to restore procedural trust through verification, official results, and legal-administrative closure. This pattern distinguishes the 2019 election from the more decentralized and digitally networked fraud narratives that became more visible in the 2024 presidential election.

The Transformation of the Role of Political Figures and Digital Media in the 2024 Election Fraud Narrative

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election marked an important transformation in the relationship between political figures, digital media, and the circulation of electoral fraud narratives. Compared with the 2019 election, in which senior political elites and religious figures played a more visible role in articulating fraud allegations, the 2024 election displayed a more fragmented and networked pattern of narrative production. Political figures remained important as symbolic references and sources of political cues, but they were no longer the only central actors shaping public perceptions. Fraud-related narratives circulated through a wider digital ecosystem involving supporters, partisan online communities, anonymous accounts, content creators, and buzzer-like amplification networks.

This transformation does not mean that political elites became irrelevant. Rather, their role shifted from being the dominant producers of explicit fraud narratives to becoming reference points within a broader communicative environment. In 2024, allegations of fraud were often articulated indirectly through claims of state intervention, unequal access to power, institutional bias, vote buying, and manipulation of electoral administration. These claims circulated across social media platforms and were frequently reproduced in symbolic, emotional, and fragmented forms. Unlike the 2019 election, where fraud allegations were often expressed through direct and confrontational language, the 2024 narratives tended to operate through insinuation, visual framing, short-form content, and repeated circulation within partisan digital spaces.

This shift is consistent with broader changes in digital political communication. Social media platforms increasingly function not merely as channels of political communication, but as arenas where political meanings are produced, contested, and amplified. However, this study does not claim to technically measure platform algorithms or prove direct algorithmic causality. Rather, it treats platform-mediated visibility as part of the broader digital environment in which emotionally charged and partisan content can circulate rapidly. In this sense, the role of platforms should be understood as enabling and accelerating narrative circulation, rather than as a singular causal factor determining public belief.

The Prabowo–Gibran ticket, for instance, developed a nationalist-populist style emphasizing stability, continuity, state strength, and decisive leadership. This narrative was often packaged in affective and visual forms, particularly through short-form videos and symbolic representations of leadership. Rather than relying primarily on long ideological arguments, this style worked through personalization, emotional familiarity, and repeated digital visibility. In this context, political branding became closely connected to the broader logic of platform-based communication, in which visual simplicity and emotional resonance are central to audience engagement.

The Ganjar–Mahfud ticket emphasized closeness to the people, integrity, and continuity of a people-oriented agenda. Its populist appeal tended to rely on normative claims about public service, anti-corruption, and proximity to ordinary citizens. However, this narrative had to compete in a fragmented digital space where messages could be reinterpreted, challenged, or weakened by opposing networks. The Anies–Muhaimin ticket, meanwhile, positioned itself more explicitly through a language of change, social justice, and political correction. This narrative resonated with segments of voters who were critical of the incumbent political order, but it was also vulnerable to negative framing related to identity politics and ideological polarization.

Fraud narratives in 2024 therefore emerged not only from formal statements by political figures, but also from the cumulative circulation of partial information, insinuations, hashtags, memes, short videos, and commentary within digital communities. Accusations of “interference of power,” institutional partiality, or unequal electoral competition often operated as implicit fraud narratives. They did not always directly claim that vote counts had been manipulated, but they invited audiences to question whether the electoral process had been fair. This pattern suggests that fraud perception in 2024 was shaped less by a single centralized narrative and more by dispersed discursive signals that accumulated across platforms.

The role of buzzer-like networks should also be interpreted cautiously. The 2024 election showed indications of organized or semi-organized amplification practices, especially through repetitive messaging, hashtags, memes, and short-form political

content. However, without social network analysis or direct investigation of coordination structures, this study does not claim to prove the full organizational architecture of these networks. Instead, the term “buzzer-like amplification” is used to describe observable patterns of repeated and coordinated-looking message circulation in digital political discourse. Such patterns contributed to the persistence of fraud-related narratives by maintaining supporter attention and sustaining post-election dissatisfaction.

Similarly, the use of advanced digital technologies, including AI-generated content and deepfake-like manipulation, should be positioned as part of the broader information environment rather than as a directly measured causal factor in this study. The 2024 election took place within a digital landscape increasingly shaped by synthetic media, political entertainment, and visual manipulation. These developments increased the difficulty of distinguishing information, propaganda, satire, and political spectacle. Nevertheless, the main analytical claim of this article is not that AI or deepfakes directly caused fraud perceptions, but that the broader digital environment made political narratives more visual, affective, fragmented, and harder to verify.

Compared with 2019, fraud narratives in 2024 also appeared to have a more limited capacity to generate large-scale offline mobilization. Calls for action, including demands for people power or a revote, did appear in digital spaces, but they did not develop into mass mobilization on the same scale as the 2019 post-election protests. This suggests that the primary function of fraud narratives in 2024 was less to trigger immediate physical mobilization and more to sustain discursive pressure, express dissatisfaction, and contest the legitimacy of the electoral process in digital public spheres. Table 2 presents a comparative synthesis of the main differences between fraud narratives in the 2019 and 2024 presidential elections.

Table 2. Comparison of Populist Narratives, Digital Media, and Fraud Perceptions in the 2019 and 2024 Presidential Elections

Analytical Dimension	2019 Presidential Election	2024 Presidential Election
Dominant narrative actors	Senior political elites and religious figures	Political elites, supporters, partisan online communities, anonymous accounts, and buzzer-like networks
Narrative style	Explicit, direct, confrontational, and moralized	Implicit, symbolic, fragmented, and affective
Main fraud framing	Structured, systematic, and massive fraud; popular sovereignty; people power	State intervention, institutional bias, unequal competition, vote buying, and manipulation of power
Main circulation channels	Public speeches, mainstream media, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter	TikTok, Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube, short-form videos, memes, and hashtags
Role of political figures	Central and personalized sources of fraud narratives	Symbolic references within wider digital narrative networks
Mobilization pattern	Stronger connection between online discourse and offline protest	More concentrated in digital contestation and post-election discursive pressure
Legitimacy contest	Official results and legal procedures versus moralized rejection	Formal validation versus fragmented digital distrust and partisan interpretation
Role of survey institutions	Provided empirical counterpoints to fraud narratives	Became important references for measuring fairness perception and partisan asymmetry

Source: processed by author, 2026

The comparison shows that the transformation from 2019 to 2024 was not a simple shift from offline to online politics. Rather, it involved a change in the structure of narrative authority. In 2019, public figures and religious actors played a more centralized role in moralizing electoral defeat and mobilizing suspicion. In 2024, fraud narratives were more dispersed, circulating through multiple digital actors and formats. Political figures still mattered, but their statements were embedded within a broader ecosystem of platform-mediated communication, partisan amplification, and symbolic content.

Overall, the 2024 election illustrates how electoral fraud perception can be shaped by fragmented digital publics. Fraud narratives did not necessarily depend on explicit claims of vote-count manipulation. They could emerge through repeated insinuations about power, institutional neutrality, unequal access to state resources, and the fairness of competition. This finding reinforces the article's broader argument that electoral legitimacy in contemporary Indonesia is contested not only through formal legal procedures, but also through moral-populist claims, digital communication networks, and competing interpretations of public evidence.

Survey Institutions, Electoral Legitimacy, and the Contestation of Fraud Perceptions

Survey institutions played an important role in shaping the public understanding of electoral legitimacy in Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections. Their role was not limited to collecting public opinion data; they also contributed to the public construction of electoral legitimacy by providing empirical measures of how citizens perceived electoral fairness, institutional trust, and post-election disputes. In a polarized political environment, survey findings became one of the main sources of evidence used to assess whether fraud narratives reflected majority public sentiment or were concentrated within particular partisan constituencies.

In the 2019 presidential election, survey findings revealed a gap between the intensity of fraud narratives in the public sphere and the broader distribution of public perceptions. Saiful Mujani Research and Consulting (SMRC) reported that approximately 69% of respondents considered the 2019 election honest and fair, while around 28% viewed it as less than or not honest. These findings suggest that although fraud allegations were prominent in post-election discourse, particularly through opposition statements and social media circulation, they were not necessarily internalized by the majority of citizens as a collective interpretation of the election. In this sense, survey data functioned as an empirical counterpoint to populist claims that framed fraud perceptions as representing "the people" as a whole.

Survey findings in 2019 therefore contributed to electoral legitimacy in two ways. First, they provided an empirical benchmark for assessing the societal reach of fraud narratives. By showing that skepticism was not evenly distributed across the electorate, surveys helped distinguish between majority perceptions and politically mobilized claims of illegitimacy. Second, surveys became reference points for media, policymakers, and political actors in interpreting post-election tensions. However, their legitimizing role was not uncontested. In highly polarized contexts, survey institutions themselves may be delegitimized by groups that perceive polling organizations as aligned with political or elite interests. For citizens already convinced that the election was fraudulent, survey findings could be interpreted not as neutral evidence, but as part of the broader institutional order being contested.

A similar but more complex pattern appeared in the 2024 presidential election. Survey results from Indikator Politik Indonesia showed that a majority of respondents assessed the election as honest and fair. Indikator’s February 2024 survey recorded that 79.3% of respondents perceived the election as jujur dan adil. At the aggregate level, this finding suggests that fraud narratives circulating in digital spaces did not translate into majority-level rejection of electoral legitimacy. However, disaggregated data by presidential vote choice reveal sharper partisan differences in perceptions of electoral fairness.

Table 3. Perceptions of Electoral Fairness by Presidential Vote Choice

Voter Base	Perceive the Election as Free and Fair	Perceive the Election as Less Than / Not Free and Fair
Prabowo–Gibran	95.3%	4.7%
Anies–Muhaimin	38.3%	58.7%
Ganjar–Mahfud	94.3%*	5.3%

Note: The relatively high level of perceived electoral fairness among Ganjar–Mahfud voters should be interpreted cautiously. One possible explanation is variation between elite-level criticism and voter-level acceptance of the result, but this inference requires further empirical testing.

Source: Indikator Politik Indonesia, 2024

As shown in Table 3, perceptions of electoral fairness in 2024 were strongly differentiated by candidate preference. Prabowo–Gibran voters overwhelmingly perceived the election as fair, while a majority of Anies–Muhaimin voters viewed it as less than or not fair. This pattern is consistent with the logic of winner’s bias, in which supporters of the winning candidate are more likely to view electoral procedures as legitimate, while supporters of losing candidates are more likely to express distrust toward the process. The case of Ganjar–Mahfud voters requires more careful interpretation. Although several political actors associated with this camp expressed criticism of the electoral process, Indikator’s survey showed high levels of perceived fairness among its voters. This pattern may indicate a gap between elite discourse and voter-level perception, post-election adjustment among voters, or variation in how different voter groups interpreted fairness. However, because this study does not conduct voter-level survey modeling, this interpretation should be treated as an analytical possibility rather than a definitive explanation.

These findings demonstrate that electoral legitimacy is not assessed uniformly across society. Public perceptions of fairness are filtered through partisan attachment, candidate preference, political trust, and emotional proximity to electoral outcomes. Survey institutions are therefore important because they make these differences empirically visible. Rather than treating fraud claims as homogeneous public sentiment, survey data show how skepticism toward electoral integrity may be concentrated among particular political constituencies. This role is especially significant in polarized elections, where competing actors often claim to speak on behalf of “the people” without demonstrating the actual distribution of public opinion.

Survey institutions also became relevant after the Constitutional Court’s final ruling on the 2024 presidential election dispute. Indikator recorded that 71.8% of respondents believed that the Constitutional Court had made a fair decision in rejecting the presidential election lawsuits. This finding suggests that legal-formal resolution contributed to stabilizing public perceptions, even though ethical and procedural controversies continued to be debated in public discourse. However, the relationship between judicial decisions and public trust should not be overstated. The survey does

not prove that the Court's decision directly caused a recovery of trust; rather, it indicates that a majority of respondents accepted or regarded the ruling as fair after the dispute process had concluded.

Survey institutions functioned as epistemic actors in the construction of electoral legitimacy. They produced empirical representations of public perception that could be used to assess the scope and intensity of fraud narratives. Their findings offered a data-based counterpoint to generalized claims of illegitimacy, particularly when political actors framed fraud allegations as though they reflected broader public opinion. However, the role of surveys remained limited and contested. In fragmented digital environments, empirical findings may struggle to compete with emotionally resonant narratives, viral content, and partisan interpretations. Survey data can measure public sentiment, but they do not automatically determine which narratives dominate public discourse.

The role of survey institutions in the 2019 and 2024 elections therefore illustrates a broader tension in contemporary electoral democracy. Legal procedures may validate election results, while survey data may show majority acceptance of electoral fairness. Nevertheless, populist fraud narratives can continue to circulate among specific constituencies, particularly when they resonate with political disappointment, distrust, or identity-based polarization. Electoral legitimacy is thus produced through the interaction of three arenas: legal-institutional validation, moral-populist contestation, and empirical-survey-based representation of public opinion.

Overall, survey institutions contributed to electoral legitimacy by measuring public perceptions, identifying partisan asymmetries, and offering empirical counterpoints to fraud narratives. However, their effectiveness depended on public trust in polling institutions and on the ability of empirical evidence to circulate within a fragmented information environment. These findings reinforce the article's central argument that election legitimacy in contemporary Indonesia is not secured solely through official results or judicial rulings, but is continuously contested through narratives, data, and competing claims about what the public believes.

Conclusion

This study shows that perceptions of electoral fraud in Indonesia's 2019 and 2024 presidential elections were not merely spontaneous reactions to electoral outcomes. They were shaped through the production, circulation, and contestation of populist narratives within changing political and digital communication environments. In 2019, fraud narratives were relatively explicit, personalized, and elite-centered. They were strongly connected to identity-based and religious mobilization, and were amplified through public speeches, social media, and post-election protest discourse. Senior political figures and religious actors functioned as central narrative brokers who helped frame electoral defeat as a question of popular sovereignty, moral injustice, and institutional distrust.

In 2024, the circulation of fraud narratives became more decentralized, fragmented, and digitally mediated. Political figures remained important, but more as symbolic references within broader online discourse than as the sole producers of fraud narratives. Allegations of fraud were often expressed indirectly through claims of state intervention, institutional bias, and unequal access to resources, vote buying, and manipulation of power. Unlike in 2019, these claims circulated more through short-form content, partisan online communities, hashtags, memes, and buzzer-like amplification. This study does not claim to directly measure algorithmic effects, buzzer

coordination, or AI-based manipulation. Rather, it shows that the 2024 election took place in a digital environment where political narratives became more visual, affective, fragmented, and difficult to verify. Compared with 2019, fraud narratives in 2024 appeared less effective in generating large-scale offline mobilization, but more visible as instruments of discursive pressure in digital public spheres.

The findings also show that survey institutions played an important but contested role in shaping electoral legitimacy. In both elections, survey results provided empirical benchmarks for assessing whether fraud narratives reflected majority public sentiment or were concentrated within particular partisan constituencies. Survey institutions therefore functioned as epistemic actors that helped translate public perception into data-based claims about electoral fairness. However, their authority was not absolute. In polarized contexts, survey findings could be accepted as evidence by some groups while being rejected by others as products of elite or partisan engineering. The 2024 data further indicate that perceptions of electoral fairness were strongly differentiated by candidate preference, illustrating the relevance of winner's bias in public evaluations of electoral integrity.

Overall, this article contributes to debates on populism, electoral integrity, digital politics, and democratic legitimacy by showing that election legitimacy is contested across three interconnected arenas: legal-institutional validation, moral-populist narration, and empirical-survey-based representation of public opinion. Formal electoral certification and judicial dispute resolution may stabilize majority acceptance, but they do not automatically eliminate distrust among politically disappointed or digitally mobilized constituencies. In contemporary electoral democracies, legitimacy depends not only on procedural integrity, but also on the capacity of institutions, media, and knowledge-producing actors to respond to fragmented information environments.

This study has several limitations. It relies on qualitative document-based analysis and does not conduct voter-level survey modeling, interviews, or computational social media network analysis. Therefore, claims about digital amplification, buzzer-like networks, and platform-mediated visibility should be understood as interpretive findings based on documented discourse and secondary sources, rather than as direct causal measurements. Future research could extend this study by using social media data, network analysis, survey experiments, or voter-level statistical models to examine how fraud narratives travel across platforms and how different voter groups interpret electoral legitimacy. Strengthening democratic legitimacy in Indonesia requires not only fair electoral procedures and credible dispute-resolution mechanisms, but also stronger information resilience, political literacy, and public trust in epistemic institutions.

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