

Law, Ethics, and Politics: Dynamics of Public Opinion on the Legality of Jokowi's Bachelor's Degree from the Perspective of Legal Science

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the dynamics of public opinion on the legality of President Jokowi's bachelor's degree from a legal, ethical, and political perspective. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method, examining legal documents, online news, and academic studies from 2019–2024. The results of the study show that legally, President Jokowi's diploma has been declared valid by the court and related educational institutions. However, public perception is still influenced by narratives on social media that are not based on legal evidence. From an ethical perspective, legal leadership is still required to be transparent and ethical so as not to lose moral legitimacy. The discussion also shows the importance of legal literacy and fair public communication in responding to political issues that contain the potential for disinformation. These findings conclude that synergy between law, ethics, and politics is needed to strengthen public trust in state institutions and legitimate leaders.

Keywords: *Legality, Public Opinion, Political Ethics, Disinformation, Jokowi's Bachelor's Degree*

Introduction

The controversy over the validity of President Joko Widodo's (Jokowi) diploma has become a polemic that has emerged in the public sphere for the past few years. This polemic not only touches on the personal aspects of a public figure, but also tests the integrity of the legal, educational, and ethical systems in a democratic country. The issue that drags the names of universities, public officials, and even judicial institutions reflects the tension between public claims and the applicable legal evidence system. According to Lubis (2022), in a state of law, every accusation must be proven legally and convincingly in court, not just based on media opinion or narrative. This dynamic shows an imbalance in understanding between the legal dimension and public perception which tends to be

emotional or political. The law demands formal proof, while the public is often influenced by opinions and information circulating without verification. Meanwhile, Susanti (2023) noted that the debate over Jokowi's diploma reflects the failure of the public's legal literacy in distinguishing between assumptions and evidence. People who are not familiar with legal principles, such as the presumption of legality and the presumption of innocence, are easily swept up in the flow of accusations without a strong basis.

When this issue entered the court realm, as in the lawsuit against Gadjah Mada University and the General Election Commission, the Court stated that the documents in question were in accordance and no forgery was found (Central Jakarta District Court Decision,



2022). However, the public response remained divided, indicating that legal decisions do not necessarily resolve the social and political tensions that arise. This shows that the law is not the only instrument that works in society, but also goes hand in hand with ethical perceptions and political legitimacy.

According to Marzuki (2017), positive law is not always able to overcome a crisis of trust if public institutions do not have adequate social credibility. In this context, Jokowi's formal legality does not immediately stop public speculation due to a crisis of trust in the education and government systems. This polemic opens up a wider discussion space about how the law faces the challenges of identity politics and increasing public distrust.

From the perspective of political ethics, questions regarding the morality of leadership are also discussed. According to Magnis-Suseno (2018), political leaders must not only be legal in law, but must also be personally ethical. When a leader is accused, even though it has not been proven, there is a moral delegitimization that is difficult to restore by formal legal decisions. Therefore, it is important for political actors and state institutions to build transparency and accountability so that the public obtains clear information.

This polemic also shows that in a democratic society, the information that is spread is not always controlled by state institutions. The role of social media as a medium for disseminating information also worsens the atmosphere. As explained by Nasution (2020), social media tends to strengthen the polarization of opinion, not resolving conflicts through rational discussion. The post-truth phenomenon has replaced facts with emotions, which complicates clarification efforts by official institutions.

Furthermore, this polemic has an impact on public perception of higher education institutions in Indonesia. When the credibility of a university is doubted only because of political ties, then academic reputation becomes a victim of national political tensions. According to Rahardjo (2021), the academic world should be free from political pressure and function as a fortress of knowledge that maintains the integrity of data and documents.

As part of the reflection on the role of law in democracy, this case is important material in learning legal science because it shows the relationship between formal legality, public trust, and politics. In a democratic system, legal validity remains important, but it must be accompanied by the formation of sustainable trust through participatory mechanisms and transparency of information.

Several previous studies have discussed legal and political issues in the context of national leadership. A study by Harahap (2019) emphasized the importance of the integrity of administrative documents for prospective leaders in maintaining the credibility of the election. This study concluded that transparency of educational documents is key to preventing disinformation and political delegitimization. On the other hand, Widodo (2021) in his study of public perception of political elites found that public perception is greatly influenced by information circulating on social media and tends to ignore formal legal processes.

Research by Siregar (2022) also shows that the legal process for political cases often does not resolve public distrust, because people trust public opinion more than court decisions. This strengthens the assumption that the role of legal communication and public education are important in building a rational perception of a legal event.



Although there have been various studies that highlight the relationship between law and public perception in a political context, not many have specifically analyzed the dynamics of the legality of President Jokowi's diploma from an integrated legal, ethical, and political perspective. Most studies are still sectoral, focusing on formal legal aspects or on social media analysis, but have not yet united the two in a single multidisciplinary study framework.

In addition, there has been no in-depth research on how the public interprets the legality of educational documents in relations of power and leadership ethics. In fact, public understanding of the legality of documents is very important in forming the political and social legitimacy of a leader. This is a gap that needs to be filled in contemporary legal studies.

The uniqueness of this article lies in its holistic approach that combines normative legal studies with ethical and political analysis in one analytical framework. This allows for a more complete understanding of how formal legality interacts with moral perceptions and public opinion in the context of democracy.

This article also offers a critical perspective on the limitations of formal law in responding to the crisis of public trust, especially when the issues discussed touch on the symbolic realm of national leadership. In this way, this discourse can broaden law students' understanding of the limits and potential of law in socio-political reality.

Social reality in society shows that most people still have difficulty distinguishing between accusations and legal evidence. This can be seen from the large number of public opinions that conclude mistakes without waiting for the results of the legal process. This reality is a major challenge for legal learning to strengthen public literacy about the

principles and correct legal processes.

On the other hand, the increasingly polarizing political reality of Indonesia makes issues such as Jokowi's diploma used as a tool for political delegitimization, not just as an instrument of justice or administrative clarification. This reflects how legal issues can be drawn into the vortex of broader political conflict, and shows the urgency of building legal awareness that is not easily politicized.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method as the basis for data collection. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the aim of understanding in depth how law, ethics, and politics intersect in the context of public opinion on the legality of state documents. According to Creswell (2013), a qualitative approach is very effective in exploring complex social and political phenomena through interpretation of meaning, not quantification of numbers.

The data in this study were obtained through a literature review of law books, scientific journals, laws and regulations, court decision documents, and news from relevant online media. Literature studies allow researchers to examine existing scientific debates and identify argumentative gaps that can be developed. As explained by Zed (2004), literature studies aim to identify ideas, concepts, and arguments that have developed and then develop new syntheses.

Data analysis was carried out descriptively-analytically, by examining documents and written sources through the content analysis process. This method allows researchers to explore the messages contained in the text, both explicit and implicit, in the context of law



and ethics. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis is very effective for understanding public discourse and social representation in mass media and legal documents.

To ensure the validity of the data, source triangulation was carried out, namely by comparing information from academic journals, official legal documents, and independent media reports. This step is important to filter out possible biases, especially because this issue is political and potentially influenced by certain interests. Sugiyono (2016) emphasized that triangulation is important in qualitative research so that the researcher's interpretation is not one-sided.

This study focuses on the public narrative and legal process surrounding the legality of President Jokowi's diploma by comparing valid legal documents and public opinion that develops on social media. Data were obtained and analyzed from 2019 to 2024. Researchers also traced various relevant court decisions, including lawsuits against Gadjah Mada University and the KPU, to test the consistency of the legality and social acceptance of these legal decisions.

Result and Discussion

A. Result

1. Legality and Validity of Educational Documents

The first finding shows that legally, President Jokowi's undergraduate degree has been declared valid by the authorized institution. Based on official documents from Gadjah Mada University (UGM) and clarification from the Ministry of Education, no evidence of document forgery was found (Kemdikbud, 2022). The court's decision also strengthened this legality by stating that the document in

question was authentic and in accordance with administrative procedures.

An analysis of the decision of the Central Jakarta District Court (2022) showed that the plaintiff was unable to prove forgery, while the defendant was able to show authentic documentary evidence. The court considered that the accusations were not based on legal facts, but rather on assumptions and narratives that developed on social media. This confirms that the legal system still upholds the principle of reverse burden of proof, where the plaintiff is required to prove his accusations.

Although the document is legally valid, tensions remain in the public sphere due to the public perception that has been formed. Several groups remain adamant in voicing doubts, even after legal evidence has been presented. This phenomenon indicates a gap between legal truth and public trust, which according to Rahardjo (2009) occurs when the public loses trust in state institutions.

Furthermore, President Jokowi's legal position remains constitutionally strong. The General Elections Commission (KPU) in the previous election has strictly verified administrative documents. In the Indonesian legal system, a diploma is one of the administrative requirements that is verified with official documents and statements from educational institutions. There are no legal loopholes that can invalidate the legitimacy of leadership based on this argument.

2. Public Opinion and Information Dissemination on Social Media

The second finding relates to how public opinion is formed and developed through social media. The narrative about the forgery of Jokowi's diploma has mostly developed through



alternative media and platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter. As shown by Nasution (2020), social media allows the development of alternative narratives that are not always based on factual data.

Many social media accounts spread information without verification, some even edit documents to create the impression that there are discrepancies in Jokowi's diploma. This is reinforced by social media algorithms that amplify viral content without considering the validity of the information (Pratama, 2021). The echo chamber phenomenon strengthens the belief of certain communities in the narratives they already believe in.

The public's tendency to believe in conspiracy narratives is also influenced by low levels of legal literacy. Some people do not understand that proof of document forgery must be carried out by official institutions through judicial mechanisms, not just by comparing photos or spreading opinions. According to Soekanto (2013), the lack of legal literacy is the main cause of the gap between law and public perception.

This phenomenon indicates that in the digital era, legal truth must compete with viral truth. Therefore, the role of the state, academics, and mainstream media is needed to provide consistent legal education. Without it, public opinion will continue to be controlled by biased information that is not based on valid data.

3. Political Ethics and Leadership Legitimacy

The latest findings show that even though the legality of the diploma has been confirmed, there is still an erosion of moral legitimacy in public discourse. This issue has damaged Jokowi's leadership image, especially among

people who have ideological suspicions about the government. As stated by Magnis-Suseno (2018), the legitimacy of a leader is not only measured by formal legality, but also by the moral perception of the community.

Ethics in political leadership demand transparency and openness to the public. Although it is not legally obligatory to answer every accusation in the media, ethically a leader still needs to provide clarification to maintain public trust. When clarification is not done openly, the space for speculation will continue to grow (Haryatmoko, 2016).

The moral legitimacy of a leader is an important asset in maintaining socio-political stability. If a leader is not considered ethical, then institutional authority can be weakened, even though it remains legally valid. This finding strengthens the assumption that law, politics, and ethics are three pillars that are interrelated in forming public trust in a head of state.

Finally, the crisis of trust that emerged due to the diploma issue shows that it is not enough to rely solely on formal legal power. There must be proactive steps involving political communication, public education, and institutional transparency so that the trust that was previously disturbed can be restored. Otherwise, the legality will continue to be questioned by opinions driven by political dissatisfaction.

B. Discussion

1. Legality of Documents and Positive Legal Principles

In the Indonesian legal system, the principle of legality is the main basis for assessing the validity of a state document. President Jokowi's diploma has been verified by official institutions, including Gadjah Mada University



and the General Election Commission. According to Marzuki (2005), legality in positive law requires formal evidence that can be verified by an authoritative institution. Therefore, as long as it is not proven otherwise through the legal process, the document remains legally valid.

The application of the principle of presumption of legality is important in this case. This principle states that every state document is considered valid until proven otherwise through a court mechanism. This principle is reinforced by the Decision of the Central Jakarta District Court (2022) which rejected the lawsuit due to insufficient evidence of forgery. In Hans Kelsen's theory (1961), law is normative and cannot be revoked based solely on subjective opinion or perception.

However, legal legitimacy is not the only indicator that determines public acceptance. When formal validity is not accompanied by public understanding, the potential for social resistance remains high. This shows the importance of legal literacy in society so that there is no gap between court decisions and public opinion (Rahardjo, 2009).

2. Public Opinion and Disinformation in the Digital Era

Public opinion on the Jokowi diploma case is greatly influenced by the dynamics of communication on social media. The rapid spread of information, often without verification, leads to the formation of collective perceptions that are not necessarily in line with legal facts. According to McCombs & Shaw (1972) in the agenda-setting theory, the media has the ability to shape public perceptions about issues that are considered important, including politicized legal issues.

Disinformation is a major challenge in maintaining legal integrity in the digital era. Pratama (2021) explains that social media algorithms often amplify sensational and provocative content, not factual content. This causes public perception to be built on emotional narratives, not based on law. This phenomenon is also related to post-truth politics where objective facts are defeated by personal opinions and beliefs (D'Ancona, 2017).

As a result, the public space is filled with speculation that cannot be answered by legal decisions alone. Legal education and transparency from state institutions are crucial to neutralize erroneous opinions. Without it, public opinion will continue to be a tool of political delegitimization that undermines the foundations of the rule of law (Nasution, 2020).

3. Leadership Ethics and Political Morality

Political ethics in leadership assume that leaders are not only legally legitimate, but also morally trustworthy. The accusations against the authenticity of Jokowi's diploma, although legally unproven, still raise moral doubts among some people. According to Magnis-Suseno (2018), leadership ethics involve the responsibility to answer public doubts through open and honest communication.

Ethical leadership is able to create social legitimacy that goes beyond mere formal legality. In Weber's theory (1968), rational-legal legitimacy must be balanced with charismatic and traditional legitimacy, so that leadership does not lose the moral support of the community. If a leader is considered to be avoiding transparency, then he risks losing trust even though he has not violated the law.

Therefore, clarification of sensitive issues such as the legality of diplomas must be seen not only



as a legal requirement, but also as political ethics. The state must learn to build legal communication that is restorative, not defensive, so that the public feels involved in the law enforcement process. Ethics, law, and politics must move synergistically to strengthen public trust in democracy (Haryatmoko, 2016).

Conclusion

This study shows that President Jokowi's undergraduate degree has been legally declared valid based on clarification from educational institutions and court decisions that rejected the lawsuit due to insufficient evidence. However, public opinion remains divided due to the dominance of alternative narratives on social media that spread information without legal basis. This shows a gap between legal facts and public perception influenced by digital disinformation.

Ethically, although there is no legal obligation to respond to every accusation, the presence of a leader in responding to public suspicions is part of a moral responsibility. Therefore, a formal legal approach needs to be complemented by an accountable communication strategy so that trust in state institutions and their leaders can be maintained amidst political pressure and uncontrolled information.

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