

## **POSTMODERNISM AND THE CRISIS OF TRUST IN GOVERNMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF MICHEL FOUCAULT'S THOUGHT**

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### **Abstrak**

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis penyebab krisis kepercayaan terhadap pemerintah dari perspektif pascamodern dengan memanfaatkan teori Michel Foucault mengenai governmentalitas dan biopolitik. Fokus utama penelitian adalah mengkaji bagaimana relasi kuasa yang ditujukan melalui wacana kebijakan publik memengaruhi legitimasi pemerintah, khususnya pada masa krisis global. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis filsafat kritis terhadap karya-karya Foucault serta dilengkapi studi kasus kebijakan pandemi dan penggunaan teknologi pengawasan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa erosi kepercayaan publik tidak semata-mata disebabkan oleh kelemahan administratif, tetapi juga oleh praktik pengelolaan wacana kebijakan yang bersifat tidak transparan dan manipulatif. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, studi ini merekomendasikan*

*agar pemerintah menerapkan pendekatan kebijakan yang lebih terbuka, partisipatif, dan responsif guna meningkatkan keterlibatan publik dalam proses pengambilan keputusan. Upaya ini dipandang penting untuk memperkuat kembali legitimasi pemerintah yang semakin tergerus dalam konteks politik kontemporer.*

**Kata kunci:** postmodernisme, governmentalitas, biopolitik, krisis kepercayaan, kebijakan publik.

### **Abstract**

*This study seeks to examine the origins of the crisis of trust in government via a postmodern lens, utilizing Michel Foucault's theories of governmentality and biopolitics. The primary research issue investigates the influence of power, articulated through public policy discourse, on governmental legitimacy, especially in times of global crises. A qualitative methodology is employed, utilizing critical philosophical examination of Foucault's writings, alongside case studies on pandemic policy and the application of surveillance technology. The findings indicate that the erosion of public trust is attributable not only to administrative shortcomings but also to the opaque and manipulative management of policy discourse by governments. The report recommends that governments implement more transparent and participatory policy approaches to enhance public engagement in decision-making processes, reinforcing the legitimacy of the government, which has been compromised.*

**Keywords:** postmodernism, governmentality, biopolitics, crisis of trust, public policy.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Public trust in governmental institutions is a crucial determinant of political stability and the efficacy of public policy. In recent decades, there has been a notable decline in popular trust in governments worldwide. Global crises, such as the economic crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, have challenged governments' capacity to uphold legitimacy and confidence among the populace. Research demonstrates that socio-economic variables, like

unemployment rates and social inequality, diminish public faith in government (Foster & Frieden, 2017). Public confidence in government is now contingent not only on economic performance and administrative efficacy but also on the state's ability to formulate public policy narratives and manipulate public perception via media and communication technologies (Brzezinski et al., 2021; Drávucz & Kocollari, 2023; Foucault, 2021; Goldfinch et al., 2021).

Michel Foucault offers a critical theoretical perspective on this subject. According to Foucault, power not only represses but also generates knowledge, language, and norms that influence the comprehension of political and social realities by individuals and societies (Foucault, 1978). This insight is essential for understanding the crisis of trust, because the erosion of legitimacy is not only about failed policies but also about the failure of the state to sustain credible narratives that can be accepted by its citizens. Power, as Foucault (1980) argues, circulates through institutions, practices, and discourses. It is relational rather than absolute, and its legitimacy depends on the acceptance of those who are governed.

One of Foucault's central contributions is the concept of *governmentality*, which highlights the rationalities and techniques through which modern states govern populations. Governmentality does not rely solely on coercion but operates through subtle mechanisms such as statistics, expertise, and the normalization of behaviour. This framework helps us see that distrust in government is often linked to a breakdown in these governing rationalities, when citizens no longer perceive official discourses and techniques as aligned with their lived realities (Gautam, 2024). In this light, legitimacy depends less on raw power and more on the credibility of discourses that make governance appear rational, beneficial, and trustworthy.

Closely related is Foucault's notion of *biopolitics*, which refers to how modern states regulate life itself through policies on health, reproduction, security, and welfare (Foucault, 1995). This concept shows how governments regulate populations through health,

security, and social regulations (Scheel, 2020). Biopolitics exemplifies how governments attempt to secure legitimacy by framing their interventions as necessary for the protection and enhancement of life. However, the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated that biopolitical measures—such as lockdowns, vaccination initiatives, and digital surveillance—were frequently perceived by certain elements of the public not as protective but as coercive (Bannikov & Радина, 2023). This resistance exemplifies the duality of biopolitics: it aims to safeguard life while simultaneously posing a threat of invasive control, thereby undermining confidence.

Foucault's examination of panopticism elucidates the interplay between trust and legitimacy. Panopticism derives from Jeremy Bentham's creation of the panopticon jail, where convicts could be perpetually monitored from a central watchtower without awareness of when they were under surveillance. Foucault (1995) expands this concept into a comprehensive metaphor for contemporary society, wherein surveillance operates as a nuanced yet omnipresent mechanism of discipline. In government, surveillance technologies function as a mechanism of panoptic control, making citizens observable and manageable. Throughout the epidemic, computerized contact-tracing applications and mobility limitations illustrated this novel panopticism, wherein individuals experienced continuous surveillance under the pretext of public health. Although these measures were deemed essential for communal safety, they simultaneously provoked apprehensions over privacy, autonomy, and governmental overreach, thereby exacerbating distrust.

This study uses a qualitative approach with critical philosophical analysis of Foucault's texts to understand how the concepts of governmentality, biopolitics, and micro-power can explain the crisis of trust in government. The notion of *micro-power* refers to the subtle and diffuse operations of power that function at the everyday level of social relations—within families, schools, workplaces, and communities—rather than being concentrated

solely in state institutions. Foucault (1995) emphasized that power is not simply imposed from above but circulates through these micro-level interactions, shaping behavior, norms, and subjectivities in ways that make individuals governable. In this sense, distrust in government is also linked to how these dispersed networks of power reproduce or resist dominant discourses in daily life. Discourse analysis will be employed to explore how public policies are constructed and accepted by society, as well as how alternative narratives can challenge state authority (Cann & Yates, 2021). To strengthen this analysis, this study adopts case studies, focusing on pandemic policies, digital surveillance, and populist strategies in post-truth politics.

In the literature review, various studies have discussed the crisis of government legitimacy in the context of post-truth and populism (Drávucz & Kocollari, 2023; Hameleers, 2020). Some studies highlight how social media influences the spread of misinformation and shapes skepticism toward government (Nicoli et al., 2022). However, most of these studies still focus on the political and communication aspects without considering how power operates in the production of discourse and political legitimacy. This study fills a gap in the literature by using Foucault's theoretical framework to understand how governments build or lose legitimacy in contemporary conditions.

The Foucauldian framework provides a distinct viewpoint on comprehending the function of biopolitics in public policy. Numerous research on biopolitics have examined the manner in which states govern the lives of their inhabitants via health and security programs (Randolph, 2021). This research will examine the influence of biopolitics on public trust and how opposition to biopolitics may signify a crisis in governmental legitimacy (Guimarães & Schramm, 2017).

This study will examine some critical concerns about the crisis of trust in government through a postmodernist lens. This research will examine, via the lens of Foucault's theories on governmentality and power discourse, the erosion of state legitimacy when societal

acceptance of public policy narratives is lacking. This project will examine the influence of biopolitics and surveillance on the legitimacy of public policy by emphasizing programs such as obligatory vaccinations and digital surveillance, which can either bolster or undermine public trust in government. This study will examine how the state may address the crisis of confidence by adopting a more democratic and transparent approach, employing tactics for regulating public policy debate, increasing openness, and engaging the public in policy-making processes to restore government legitimacy.

This research, informed by Foucault's theory, will elucidate how states may comprehend and address the crisis of trust in the postmodern era, and how governmental legitimacy can be reestablished through more inclusive communication tactics and policies. This study aims to enhance the scholarly discussion regarding the interplay between power, public policy, and public trust in the contemporary global landscape.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **1. Power, Discourse, and Government in Michel Foucault's Thought**

Michel Foucault's concepts of power and discourse have transformed our comprehension of social and political dynamics in contemporary society. Foucault refutes the traditional perspective that power is solely possessed by individuals or certain institutions. He contends that power should be understood as something that circulates and operates through a chain of relations, rather than as a possession held by specific individuals or institutions (Foucault, 1975). This view emphasizes that power is not only a tool of domination but also a mechanism that shapes knowledge and governs social norms (Reich & Turnbull, 2018). In other words, knowledge cannot be separated from power, as knowledge recognized within a society is always a product of the power relations that shape it.

In the context of governance, Foucault's thinking provides deep insight into how the state maintains legitimacy through the production of discourse. The government does not only control society through laws and administrative policies but also through the construction of discourse that determines how social reality is understood by citizens (Foucault, 1978). Foucault explains that discourse not only conveys and strengthens power but also has the capacity to weaken, expose, and even counteract it (Foucault, 1978). By using structured language in public policies and political communication, the state shapes the public's understanding of what is considered legitimate, true, and acceptable in social and political life (Hannaford, 2022).

However, Foucault also shows that discourse does not merely reflect reality but also creates it. Through this mechanism, the government can control the public's interpretation of an event or policy, thereby creating a dominant narrative that shapes collective consciousness (Frederiksen et al., 2015). In times of crisis, for example, the use of language in public policy plays a crucial role in determining whether a policy is accepted as a legitimate action or viewed as a form of repression (Tasnim, 2021).

The legitimacy of government is significantly contingent upon the construction and maintenance of political discourse. Foucault asserts that language in politics functions not merely as a means of communication but also as a mechanism of power capable of regulating societal thoughts and behaviors (Foucault, 1975). Foucault observes that power and knowledge are inseparably linked, since every power relation is accompanied by the creation of a corresponding field of knowledge (Foucault, 1995). In modern politics, this is seen in the state's utilization of mass media, political discourse, and public policies to influence public perception of the legitimacy of enacted policies (Hannaford, 2022).

The media plays a central role in mediating the relationship between the government and the public, both as a tool for the state to build legitimacy and as a platform that allows the emergence of opposing discourse (Massari, 2021). This phenomenon has become

more apparent in the digital era. Information can spread quickly, creating competing interpretations of public policies (Feng et al., 2024). When the government fails to control the dominant narrative, the legitimacy of policies can quickly be questioned and face resistance from the public.

For example, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, governments in various countries used the discourse of public health to justify lockdown and mandatory vaccination policies. However, in some countries, counter-narratives from groups skeptical of the government succeeded in creating resistance that hindered the effectiveness of these policies (Bannikov & Радина, 2023). This shows that power in politics is not solely in the hands of the state but is also dispersed through various social actors who form alternative discourses.

Moreover, the media can either build or challenge political legitimacy. The media does not merely reflect political reality but also contributes to creating it. Foucault (1980) reminds us that individuals are subjected to truths produced through power, and that power itself can only be exercised through the continual production of such truths. Thus, the media functions as a discursive arena where various social forces battle to define the meaning of a policy or political event (Foucault, 2021). For example, the use of journalistic data and statistical analysis in political reporting can either solidify the government's official narrative or challenge it by revealing different data (Hannaford, 2022).

In this context, it is important to understand that the media is not entirely neutral but often works within a broader network of power. Most media that have ties to certain economic or political interests are more likely to produce discourse that supports the state's legitimacy, while more independent media can serve as a tool of resistance against hegemonic power (Frederiksen et al., 2015).

For instance, in the case of populism, media is often used by populist leaders to build an "us versus them" image, where the elite is portrayed as corrupt and opposed to the people's interests (Evi & Ari, 2022). By utilizing social media and digital platforms, populist

leaders can challenge government authority and create counter-narratives that further exacerbate the crisis of trust in government.

Foucault provides a deep understanding of how power operates within social and political structures through discursive mechanisms. His thinking remains relevant in explaining how a state can maintain or lose legitimacy based on how it manages political discourse and public policy. This study shows that understanding the relationship between power, discourse, and political legitimacy is crucial in addressing the challenges faced by governments in the modern era.

## 2. Biopolitics and Population Control

Biopolitics, as conceptualized by Michel Foucault, is a form of modern governance that controls human life through mechanisms known as biopower. This power functions not only to protect and prolong life but also to regulate it through various health, security, and social policies aimed at creating a healthy and productive population (Foucault, 2020). Foucault (1978) in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, explains that for the first time in history biological life became directly tied to political existence. Human life was no longer seen as a purely natural fact emerging only in the face of death, but instead entered the realm of knowledge and became subject to mechanisms of power and intervention. In this perspective, biopolitics becomes the state's primary instrument for systematically guiding individual lives, making health and well-being part of a social control strategy (Hokowhitu et al., 2022).

Foucault asserts that biopower does not operate through direct coercion but through the formation of social norms that determine what is considered healthy, safe, or civilized. He states that biopolitics addresses the population as both a political and scientific issue, framing it simultaneously as a biological concern and a central problem of power (Foucault, 1978). For instance, mass vaccination policies, public health programs, and medical surveillance systems are not just steps to improve public welfare but also tools to

discipline the population to align with standards set by the state and global health institutions (Sanders, 2016). Through this approach, the state functions not only as a protector of life but also as an organizer of life, setting boundaries between those considered part of the healthy population and those deemed deviant or at risk.

A fundamental part of biopolitics is the state's responsibility in overseeing public health. Public health initiatives that govern lifestyle, nutrition, and exercise exemplify the functioning of biopower in promoting optimal individual contributions to society (Just, 2015). In numerous nations, health restrictions, including the regulation of food intake, stringent laws on addictive substances, and initiatives promoting healthy lifestyles, demonstrate a commitment to individual health as well as the state's objective of cultivating a more productive and regulated populace.

In addition to physical health, biopolitics includes social regulations that govern various facets of societal life, including reproductive rights, immigration policy, and educational systems. For instance, China's population control measures and pro-natalist initiatives in certain European nations illustrate how governments employ biopolitics to regulate demographic trends in accordance with their economic and political objectives (Rattu & Véron, 2015). In this setting, human decisions, such as procreation or lifestyle selection, transcend mere individual choices and integrate into the state's policy for population management.

Alongside health and social laws, digital monitoring technologies have emerged as a predominant biopolitical tool in contemporary society. Technologies like data-driven medical surveillance, facial recognition systems, and health-tracking applications exemplify a novel type of biopolitics, enabling the state to monitor and regulate individual behavior in nuanced yet extremely effective manners (Azmi et al., 2021). In emergencies, like the COVID-19 pandemic, the utilization of health data to restrict individual mobility exemplifies the evolution of biopolitics into a mechanism for extensive population control (Sanders, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic represents a pivotal juncture in the annals of biopolitics. Countries globally enacted a range of health policies grounded in biopower to manage the virus's dissemination. Measures such as lockdowns, mobility restrictions, compulsory vaccinations, and health passports exemplify the state's utilization of health as a tool for population control (Ristić & Marinković, 2019). Foucault (1980) anticipated this rationale by noting that any form of power concerned with governing life necessarily depends on continuous regulatory and corrective mechanisms.

The implementation of these policies sparked various reactions from society. On one hand, many viewed these measures as crucial steps to protect public health and reduce the spread of the virus. On the other hand, many considered them as an excessive form of control that limited individual freedoms (Azmi et al., 2021). This pandemic highlighted how the boundaries between health protection and social control became increasingly blurred, with measures originally designed to protect the population transforming into forms of strict and invasive discipline.

A concrete example is the use of data-driven contact-tracing apps implemented in various countries. These apps allow governments to monitor individuals' movements, track their interactions, and control access to public spaces. In Foucauldian terms, this represents a new form of panoptic surveillance. Foucault (1995) in *Discipline and Punish*, wrote that under disciplinary power the individual is placed in a position of constant visibility, being observed and turned into an object of information rather than an active subject of communication. In such conditions, individuals become subjects who are continuously monitored in their daily lives (Foucault, 2010; Guimarães & Schramm, 2017).

At this point, although biopolitics is often accepted as part of modern social life, resistance to it continues to rise, especially in the context of digital surveillance and health policies seen as limiting individual freedom. Anti-vaccination movements, protests against lockdowns, and opposition to digital identification systems indicate that not all individuals are willing to accept this form of control

(Randolph, 2021). As Mitchell Dean (2010) argues, governmentality and biopolitics are never absolute; they operate within “regimes of practices” that are always open to contestation and transformation.

From Foucault's perspective, resistance to biopolitics is a natural part of the power dynamics. Power is never absolute, and individuals or social groups always have the capacity to resist and negotiate the forms of power they face (Foucault, 2013). Foucault famously asserted that wherever power exists, forms of resistance will also inevitably emerge (Foucault, 1995). Therefore, a state that wishes to maintain its legitimacy within the context of biopolitics must balance control and freedom, ensuring that health and social policies are not only coercive but also transparent and participatory.

In an increasingly interconnected digital age, the primary problem for governments is the implementation of biopolitical policy while maintaining public trust. A state overly dependent on monitoring and stringent restrictions may encounter a legitimacy crisis, whereas a state that inadequately addresses public health may experience societal instability. This study underscores that biopolitics serves as both a mechanism of control and a continuous arena for debate and negotiation in contemporary society.

### **3. Crisis of Legitimacy and Distrust in Government**

In recent decades, the crisis of government legitimacy has emerged as a significant concern in global political discourse. Distrust of government institutions has been growing, fueled by policies perceived as prioritizing control over solutions, alongside the increasing prevalence of misinformation that makes it difficult for the public to distinguish between reality and political constructs (Hokowhitu et al., 2022). The European Social Survey revealed that public trust in political institutions in Europe declined sharply during the Eurozone debt crisis and the subsequent immigration crisis, as many citizens perceived government policies as ineffective or overly restrictive. In Indonesia, public skepticism increased during the implementation of pandemic-related policies, including

large-scale social restrictions (PSBB/PPKM) and mandatory vaccination, fueled by inconsistent communication and the spread of misinformation on social media (Fajar & Harjanto, 2022; Permanasari & Permatasari, 2023). This suggests that the erosion of legitimacy is not limited to one location but signifies a global trend as governments grapple with aligning effective policymaking with public trust.

Distrust in government does not emerge in a vacuum. According to Michel Foucault, power in modern governance not only functions to protect society but also to regulate, discipline, and manage the population (Foucault, 1980). He emphasizes that power should not be understood as something that can simply be possessed or transferred; rather, it operates through countless points within society, emerging in dynamic and unequal relationships (Foucault, 1980). The concept of biopower that Foucault developed shows how the state not only creates policies for the public's interest but also shapes social norms and ensures compliance with the established system. However, when these policies lack transparency and sufficient public participation, society begins to view them as tools of control that limit individual freedoms rather than efforts for protection.

For instance, in the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, many health policies designed to reduce the virus's spread instead triggered public resistance. Although policies like lockdowns, mandatory vaccinations, and social restrictions aimed to protect society, the lack of clarity in policy communication and the emergence of counter-narratives caused much of the public to feel controlled rather than protected (Permanasari & Permatasari, 2023). Foucault reminds us that power can only be effective if it conceals a large part of its workings, and its success depends on the extent to which its mechanisms remain hidden (Foucault, 1995). This was evident, for example, in Indonesia, resistance also emerged during the implementation of large-scale social restrictions (PSBB and later PPKM), where inconsistent communication and corruption scandals related to COVID-19 social assistance further eroded public trust

(Aspinall et al., 2022). In this context, policies that were intended to build trust instead became a cause of distrust in the government.

In addition to the perception of repressive policies, the crisis of government legitimacy is also exacerbated by the phenomenon of simulacra introduced by Jean Baudrillard. From Baudrillard's perspective, modern society lives in a hyperreality, where the boundary between reality and representation becomes increasingly blurred (Zhang, 2024). "We live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard, 1994). In a political context, this hyperreality operates through social media and digital propaganda, creating narratives that are more powerful than facts.

Social media plays a crucial role in shaping the political reality consumed by the public. Social media algorithms allow certain information to receive more exposure than others, often without considering the objective truth of that information (Daherman & Wulandari, 2024). In this context, the government is not only competing with traditional media in building legitimacy but also with digital actors who have specific political interests.

This issue is particularly pronounced in political campaigns and elections, as digital advertisements and manipulative tactics are employed to influence public impressions of politicians or specific policies (Daherman et al., 2024). In certain instances, the information disseminated to the public on the government is increasingly derived from its framing and perception via digital media, rather than empirical facts. Baudrillard (1994) provocatively argues that in the postmodern condition, representation is no longer about imitation, duplication, or parody, but about the creation of new realities through signs and simulations. It involves replacing the symbols of the real with the real itself. Consequently, public faith in governmental institutions continues to diminish as individuals increasingly find it challenging to distinguish between objective and manipulative information.

The primary effect of simulacra in politics is the proliferation of hoaxes and misinformation, which intensifies the crisis of

governmental legitimacy. Political and health hoaxes proliferating on social media have transformed societal perceptions of governmental policy, frequently resulting in detrimental consequences (Permanasari & Permatasari, 2023).

The most notable instance of this phenomena occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, where contradictory narratives on health policies fostered societal divisions. Certain factions propagate conspiracy theories regarding vaccination, alleging governmental collusion with pharmaceutical corporations to manipulate the populace (Yunus & Rezki, 2022). Such narratives not only compromised the efficacy of health initiatives but also eroded the government's legitimacy in managing the issue.

The impact of hoaxes and misinformation is significant, especially when the public struggles to distinguish valid information from falsehoods. Several studies indicate that governments in various countries have faced great difficulty combating health-related hoaxes, which ultimately led to public non-compliance with health protocols (Amelita et al., 2024). This proves Foucault's point that "discourses are not once and for all subservient to power... they are elements for the subjugation and for the resistance" (Foucault, 1995). Without public trust, even the best policies will fail in their implementation.

The increasing distrust in government not only affects the effectiveness of policies but also threatens the stability of the democratic system itself. In situations where the public no longer trusts the official information provided by the state, they tend to seek alternatives in the form of populism or opposition movements that challenge the status quo.

In various political studies, the crisis of legitimacy is often linked to the growing support for populist leaders, who exploit this distrust to strengthen their influence (Daherman & Wulandari, 2024). Populist leaders often use anti-government and anti-elite rhetoric to gain support, creating the impression that they are the only hope for society, which feels neglected by state institutions.

The consequence of this phenomenon is the emergence of sharper political polarization, where society becomes divided into opposing camps with no clear points of convergence. When the state fails to rebuild public trust, democracy faces a serious threat, as society is more likely to trust populist figures or alternative narratives that are not necessarily based on facts.

#### **4. Impact of the Crisis of Trust on Democracy and Public Policy**

The crisis of trust in government not only impacts the legitimacy of public policies but also threatens the stability of democracy. This distrust stems from the perception that the government prioritizes political interests over the well-being of the public, which ultimately weakens public participation in the democratic process. Michel Foucault demonstrated that modern mechanisms of power often not only control individuals' actions but also shape the way they think and understand political realities (Foucault, 1978). Foucault (1978) argued that power is accepted not merely because it represses, but because it also permeates social life by generating knowledge, producing discourse, and even creating forms of pleasure. In this context, when the state fails to maintain transparency and accountability, the public begins to view democracy as a system that has lost its meaning, leading to a decline in political participation, an increase in populism, and shifts in public policy.

A key consequence of this confidence issue is the reduction in political engagement in elections and deliberative democracy. Individuals who perceive their voices as ineffective in shaping the political process are less likely to participate in elections, policy debates, or other democratic activities (Puansah, 2024). Democracy increasingly evolves into an elitist system, where a select group of persons with access to wealth and power make political decisions, resulting in greater alienation of the general population from the political process.

Foucault (1980) cautioned that the state should not be seen as a fixed entity, but rather as the shifting outcome of multiple and overlapping governmentalities. Foucault posited that the state should not be perceived as a singular, cohesive, or static entity; instead, it is a contingent result of intersecting governmental rationalities—legal, administrative, economic, and biopolitical—that perpetually influence and redefine the exercise of power. The state's legitimacy consequently hinges on the credibility and acceptance of these rationales by its citizens. When citizens view these rationalities as catering to restricted elite interests or as instruments of control rather than safeguarding, their trust diminishes, resulting in disengagement and opposition. The current crisis of political involvement signifies not only apathy but also a profound fracture in the governmental principles that sustain the state's existence.

Additionally, the relationship between money politics and a transactional culture further worsens this crisis. When voters perceive politics as an arena dominated by economic and political elite interests, they tend to become apathetic and distrustful that democracy can truly represent the people's interests (Tryatmoko, 2023). In Foucault's view, power operates through institutions and social mechanisms that shape compliance, but when trust in these institutions is lost, the legitimacy of the political system also collapses (Foucault, 2023).

Concrete cases from Indonesia illustrate this erosion of legitimacy. The Omnibus Law on Job Creation (2020) was promoted as a breakthrough for economic growth and job creation. However, the lack of transparency and the absence of genuine public participation in its formulation sparked massive protests across the country. The public perceived the law as serving elite interests rather than protecting workers' rights, turning what was framed as a developmental policy into a trigger of distrust in the state (Mahy, 2022; Warburton, 2020). Similarly, the revisions to the Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) Law in 2019—officially justified as institutional reform—were widely seen as efforts to weaken anti-

corruption mechanisms. This perception deepened public skepticism about whether government policies genuinely serve collective welfare (Mietzner, 2020; Transparency International, 2020). Even more striking was the COVID-19 social assistance corruption scandal, where funds intended for the poor were misappropriated by political elites. Instead of reinforcing public trust during a crisis, this case exposed governance failures that amplified cynicism toward the state (Aspinall & Warburton, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

As a result, a widening gap emerges between society and the government, where the state continues to function with policies made by technocrats and political elites but without adequate public support and participation. Consequently, the policies implemented often lack social legitimacy and are difficult to execute effectively. This disconnection not only undermines the effectiveness of governance but also fuels public cynicism and resistance, which can manifest in protests, non-compliance, or the rise of populist movements. Over time, such conditions weaken the foundations of democratic accountability, leaving the state vulnerable to further crises of legitimacy.

The crisis of trust in government has also created space for populism to thrive. In situations where society feels unrepresented by the existing political system, populist leaders emerge offering simplistic rhetoric and instant solutions that often oppose more data and science-based technocratic approaches (Meidiawaty & Israhadi, 2024). Populism often claims to represent the "people's voice" in opposition to the political elites who are viewed as corrupt and unresponsive to the public's needs. In the context of the 2024 Indonesian elections, religion-based populism has become a primary strategy used by several political parties to attract public support (Insani et al., 2024). However, while populism may increase political engagement in the short term, it also has the potential to undermine the deliberative democratic process, as it relies more on sentiment and emotion than on fact-based, rational discourse (Suartina & Lan, 2023).

From Foucault's perspective, populism can be understood as a form of resistance to dominant power. He explained that power relations are embedded throughout the entire fabric of social networks, shaping interactions and structures at every level of society (Foucault, 1982). Thus, marginalized groups seek ways to redefine the power relations in society (Foucault, 2013). However, the main challenge with populism is that it often focuses more on criticizing the status quo than on offering concrete and sustainable policy solutions. Nikolas Rose (1999) underscores that governmentality always involves struggles over "who can speak truth" about society, and populism is one such struggle.

One of the main dilemmas in modern politics is the tension between technocratic approaches and political populism. Technocratic policies emphasize the use of science, data, and rational analysis in decision-making. In Foucault's theory, technocracy can be understood as part of governmentality, where the state attempts to manage the population through measurable, knowledge-based mechanisms (Pratama & Ari, 2021). However, one of the main criticisms of technocratic policies is that they are often too elitist and disconnected from the real-life experiences of society, making it difficult to garner broad public support.

Conversely, political populism is primarily focused on emotional appeal and communal identity, frequently overlooking the intricacies of public issues. Populism captivates popular interest by presenting a more straightforward and direct story (Harijanti et al., 2023). This approach risks formulating policies that lack factual foundation and prioritize rhetoric over actual implementation. In a global environment, the juxtaposition of technocratic policies and populism reveals distinct advantages and challenges inherent to each approach. Technocracy has greater stability but is typically characterized by elitism, whereas populism is more inclusive yet frequently lacks a basis in pragmatic ideas.

The difficulty for governments is to achieve equilibrium between these two methodologies, ensuring that the policies adopted are data-driven while also garnering widespread public

endorsement. I contend that the government must improve transparency, bolster public involvement in the policymaking process, and achieve equilibrium between a technocratic approach and responsiveness to public desires. In the absence of this, the crisis of trust would persist, undermining democracy and impeding the efficacy of public policy over the long run.

### **5. How Can the Government Rebuild Trust?**

The erosion of faith in government has emerged as a worldwide issue that jeopardizes the stability of democracy and the efficacy of public initiatives. Public discontent with governmental institutions, viewed as prioritizing political interests over the populace's well-being, has resulted in heightened distrust regarding the current political system. Jürgen Habermas proposes a resolution via the concept of deliberative democracy, highlighting the significance of openness, public engagement, and a more accountable governing model (Mahmood, 2016). By adopting this strategy, the government can restore trust by allowing greater public involvement in the decision-making process, fostering a sense of inclusion in the policies enacted.

In this context, Michel Foucault offers significant insights into the more democratic exercise of power. Foucault posits that power is not concentrated within a select few elites; rather, it is disseminated throughout social networks and can be negotiated by individuals and organizations within society (Foucault, 2020). According to him, "Power is ubiquitous; not due to its encompassing nature, but because it originates from multiple sources" (Foucault, 1978: 93). Consequently, restoring public trust entails not only policy reform but also establishing a framework that enhances citizens' access to information, debate, and active engagement in the governmental process.

One of the most effective ways to rebuild trust is by increasing transparency in decision-making processes. A lack of transparency is often a primary reason why the public feels skeptical about the

government, as they are unaware of how policies are formulated and who truly benefits from them (Mahmood, 2016). Foucault's theory of governmentality provides a critical lens here: transparency can function as a practice that allows citizens to understand power structures and to participate more effectively. He noted that critique does not simply involve declaring that existing conditions are wrong, but rather examining the underlying assumptions, familiar notions, and unexamined modes of thought on which accepted practices are built (Foucault, 1995). Opening access to policy information, ensuring that political decisions are based on clear data, and explaining the reasoning behind the policies adopted can prevent negative speculation and enhance legitimacy.

An example of a successful transparency model can be seen in South Central Timor, Indonesia, where the local government actively implemented the principles of transparency and public involvement in policy formulation. By involving the public at every stage of policy-making, the local government successfully built stronger trust and improved the effectiveness of the programs implemented. In this context, the public not only wants to be informed but also wants to be directly involved in policies that affect their lives (Wright & McLaughlin, 2021). Public participation in policy formulation not only enhances the legitimacy of the policy but also helps the government understand the real needs of the people (Wright & McLaughlin, 2021)

In Habermas' deliberative democracy model, public participation is not just about voting in elections but about creating dialogue spaces where citizens can meaningfully express their aspirations (Mahmood, 2016). One effective way to achieve this is through public discussion forums, policy consultations, and digital participation mechanisms, where the public can directly provide feedback on policies being drafted.

Public participation in environmental policy across various Scandinavian nations demonstrates that when citizens are afforded the chance to engage in policy formulation, they are often more amenable to the policies and may actively contribute to their

execution (Bachmann et al., 2015). This achievement is mostly attributable to the establishment of deliberative processes, including public hearings, citizen panels, and collaborative forums, which enable many stakeholders—such as local communities, NGOs, and scientific experts—to impact the formulation and implementation of policies. Through transparent and inclusive decision-making procedures, governments in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have mitigated public cynicism and cultivated a sense of collective ownership for environmental programs (Bäckstrand et al., 2010).

Participatory processes enhance the legitimacy of policies and augment their long-term efficacy, as citizens are more inclined to adhere to and endorse measures they contributed to developing. Community engagement in renewable energy initiatives and sustainable forestry management has improved policy results while concurrently fostering social trust. This model might so exemplify for other nations confronting trust issues that participatory governance is not only symbolic but can directly enhance democratic resilience and policy efficacy. In environments such as Indonesia, where skepticism towards government programs frequently stems from inadequate consultation and authoritarian decision-making, implementing participatory procedures could facilitate the reconciliation between the state and society, thereby restoring legitimacy by collaboration rather than compulsion.

However, trust in government also depends on how well the policies made truly reflect the interests and needs of the public. One of the main criticisms of the technocratic approach is that policies are often designed based on data analysis and administrative efficiency but overlook the everyday lived experiences of the public (Pratama & Ari, 2021). He remarked that every society constructs its own “regime of truth,” establishing the kinds of discourse it accepts and legitimizes as true (Foucault, 1980). To address this issue, the government needs to adopt a more flexible and adaptive policy model, where policies can be tested, reviewed, and adjusted based on feedback from the public.

One promising approach is co-creation policy, in which governments and citizens jointly design solutions to social and economic challenges. Modern governmentality must increasingly work through “technologies of agency,” enabling citizens not only to be governed but also to govern themselves through participatory mechanisms. Public trust is not something that can be gained through political rhetoric alone, but must be built through concrete actions that demonstrate the government is working for the benefit of the people. If the government can accommodate the aspirations of the public in public policies and build a more transparent system, the process of rebuilding trust can proceed more quickly and sustainably.

## CONCLUSION

This article addresses the origins of the crisis of trust in government, demonstrating that the erosion of legitimacy is attributable not only to administrative failures or corruption but also to the manner in which power is used in public policy discourse. Contemporary governments dominate society not solely via legislation and regulations but also through the manipulation of speech that influences public perceptions. When this language is ambiguous or deceptive, the crisis of trust intensifies, illustrating society's growing skepticism towards official institutions.

This study's fundamental premise examines biopolitics and micro-power, emphasizing the operation of power at both the macro level via the state and the micro level through social networks. Biopolitics enables the state to regulate individual lives via health, security, and digital monitoring measures, potentially inciting rebellion if excessively intrusive. Conversely, micro-power demonstrates that political control may be obscured inside social frameworks and public policies, discreetly influencing governmental legitimacy. This indicates that public distrust transcends mere administrative concerns and is intrinsically linked to the exercise of power in daily life.

An in-depth analysis of this situation indicates the necessity for a novel public policy approach that is more participative and transparent. Deliberative democracy and transparency serve as mechanisms to restore governmental legitimacy by facilitating public participation in decision-making and fostering open discussion between the government and citizens. Moreover, prioritizing the use of technology to enhance governmental transparency and accountability is essential for the state to reconcile control with liberty in a progressively intricate political landscape. Additional research is required to investigate how government may enhance its democratic processes in the digital era.

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