

# Soldiers and Society:

## Explaining Public Trust in the TNI

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# BACKGROUND

- ▣ Scholars have long argued for the importance of public trust in institutions. Gamson (1968, p. 42) argues that trust functions as the “creator of collective power” which allows state institutions to make decisions without using a violent approach or having to continuously get the specific approval of citizens for every decision.
- ▣ In the short term, public trust in governments could be the outcome of a long socialization process. Mishler and Rose (1997) argue, trust must be earned; it is a public evaluation of institutions based on performance (Hirschman 1970).
- ▣ The military is no exception to this rule. In order for it to carry out its duties effectively, the military must gain high levels of public trust and confidence.





# BACKGROUND

- Public opinion polls have consistently shown that the TNI is the most trusted public or state institution in Indonesia.  
This is not unique to Indonesia. Studies show that the military is generally trusted more than other institutions in many countries in the world as is the case in some Arabic countries (Lotito 2018), Russia (Burda 1999) and post-Communist European countries (Mishler and Rose 1997).
- Although there has been a burst of scholarly and non-scholarly writings on this topic, little is known about why the military is more trusted than other institutions.
- Despite the media and activists' extensive anti-military campaigns, surprisingly the public trust in the military remains high.
- This article offers a systematic answer to fundamental questions about the sources and implications of public trust in the Indonesian military that have vexed scholars for many years.







# Why Is The Military More Trusted?

- ▣ Cross-national studies show signs of decline of public trust in social and political institutions in the last few decades.
- ▣ Interestingly, at a time when many institutions have experienced a decline in public trust, the military has been the notable exception to the general trend (Hill et al. 2013). What accounts for this divergence?
  - ▣ Among few studies trying to explain the persistence of the military as among the most positively evaluated public institutions, some political scientists have identified five major factors: the prestige of military service; threat perceptions; weak civilian politicians; level of human right abuses committed by the military; and military professionalism.



# The Prestige of Military Services

- The first factor focuses on the prestige of military services as potential determinants of public opinion toward the military.  
The literature defines prestige as a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon, in which the public conducts a comparative assessment on the social significance and necessity of the armed forces, their activities and status, and the actual position servicemen hold in society (Burda 1999: 5).
- Various elements associated with the prestige of military service include public interest in the military profession (Hodný 1998) and whether people associate military service with the honorable and courageous duty of protecting the motherland (Burda 1999: 6).
- The reputation of the military is often built by glorifying the past (Mietzner 2011). In Indonesia, such persistent military self-glorification leads the military leader and its personnel to subscribe to a belief of “sense of moral superiority as impartial guardians of the nation” (Croissant et al. 2010: 93).





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- ▣ In measuring this dimension, I asked respondents to indicate their level of support or agreement in response to the following three statements:
  1. TNI is conceived from the “womb” of the people so it is impossible for TNI to hurt the people’s feelings.
  2. I’m proud if the men and women of the Republic of Indonesia are willing to serve in the army.
  3. Military is the noblest profession because they dare to make the ultimate sacrifice of body and soul for the nation and motherland.
- ▣ The last two questions are adapted from Burda (1999) and Hodny (1998).
- ▣ The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the variables used to measure the index is 0.736, meaning that the variables have a high degree of internal consistency, and this suggests that the items in the test are highly correlated.
- ▣ The average score based on a scale from 1 – 5 is 3.784, which means that the army enjoys high prestige in Indonesian society.



# Threat Perceptions

- ▣ The second factor has emphasized a potential link between threat perceptions and popular support in the armed forces (Kernic 2009; Graf 2019).
- ▣ This argument is based on the underlying assumption that “people who feel threatened should support institutions and policies the very purpose of which is to protect them from these threats” (Graf 2019: 3).
- ▣ For instance, in countries where the threat to terrorism is increasing, citizens tend to support anti-terrorism policies (Huddy et al. 2005).
- ▣ Individual perceptions of threats are more related to subjective security than objective security. While the former relates to the feeling of safety either from real or imagined threats, the latter means being safe because it is protected from danger.
- ▣ Much of the literature on security claims that as the perceived threat rises, support for the military increases. The 2016 Arab Barometer, for instance, show that the rise of regional insecurity in the Middle East is followed by a spike in the level of trust in the military (Lotito 2018). The same holds true in Taiwan (Wang et al. 2021).
- ▣ As the perceived threat from China dominates media reports and social media conversations in the country, citizens are reassessing long-held negative views of their armed forces.



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- ▣ I asked respondents to indicate their level of support or agreement in response to the following four statements:
  1. The Chinese government's claim to the Natuna waters is a serious threat to Indonesia's sovereignty.
  2. Indonesia must not ignore threats from neighboring countries (such as Malaysia, Australia, etc.); besides we have already had a confrontation with Malaysia in the past.
  3. The threat of the rise of the PKI (Indonesian Communist Party) is real because they have rebelled against the state several times.
  4. There is foreign intervention and interference in separatist movements occurring in Papua or Maluku.
  
- ▣ This index presents high levels of internal consistency, with Cronbach alpha coefficients of 0.822 suggesting that the items that make up the perceived threat index are highly correlated.
  
- ▣ The average score is 3.720, suggesting that Indonesian voters typically perceive high levels of threats toward Indonesia.



# The Widespread Perception that Civilian Politicians are Weak

- ▣ The literature on civil-military relations stresses the importance of the public and the military to accept civilian supremacy (Mietzner 2011; Croissant et al. 2010).
- ▣ As Feaver (2003: 6) puts it, “the military can describe in some detail the nature of the threat posed by a particular enemy, but only the civilian can decide whether to feel threatened and, if so, whether to respond. The military assesses the risk, the civilian judges it.”
- ▣ If the majority of the population holds extremely negative views of civilian leaders and consider them to be weak, corrupt and incompetent, and at the same time believe that those who have served in the military are stronger, much more superior and competent even in their civilian roles, then it can have a corrosive impact on the establishment of civilian control.





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- ▣ Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement in response to the following four statements which I derived from Mietzner (2011) and Croissant and Kuehn (2009):
  1. There are many civilian politicians who put their own or group's interest before their country's national interest.
  2. Civilian officials at the central and regional levels who don't have military background are generally unable to deal with the nation's serious problems.
  3. Unlike those officials who have served in the military, most civilian leaders are less disciplined.
  4. Firm or strong leadership is rarely found in leaders or officials who come from a civilian background or have not served in the military.
- ▣ The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variables used to measure this index is 0.827.
- ▣ Unlike the relatively larger support for statements on military prestige and perceived threats, support for statements on perceived weak civilian politicians, although still substantial, was slightly lower with the average score of 3.375.





# Curb Negative Views Toward Allegation of Human Rights Abuses



- ▣ The rationale is perceptible: with the rise of democratic regimes in many parts of the world since the 1970s, the armed forces have in turn disengage themselves from domestic politics, which made the potential for human rights violations due to interactions between soldiers and citizens is reduced (Hill et al. 2013).
- ▣ The smaller the potential of human rights violations committed by the military due to social and political conflicts, the more public trust will increase.
- ▣ This issue on human rights violations is commonplace in the context of new democracies where the military is oftentimes scrutinized about their past human rights violations.
- ▣ The military itself in responding to public skepticism and allegation of its past human rights abuse oftentimes shifts attention by resorting to the narrative of foreign interference to discredit the military.
- ▣ Respondents were asked they agree that the issue of human rights violations involving the TNI was oftentimes fabricated by foreign elements to discredit the Indonesian army.



# Professionalization of Military Apparatus

- ▣ In a democratic setting, the military must generate genuine public trust by maintaining professionalism as a military force (Kasher 2003).
- ▣ Hence, trust in the armed forces is strongly influenced by how professional the military officers are in performing their duties.
- ▣ The main indicator for military professionalism is that military officers should be receptive to the idea of civilian supremacy in which they detach from involvement in domestic politics, maintain an apolitical culture, reduce or terminate military representation in civilian government bodies, and improve parliamentary oversight of the military.





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- ▣ Measured by agreement to the following item statements:
  1. Since the reformation era, the TNI has consistently been a professional army and has a neutral attitude and keeps a distance from daily politics
  2. The TNI is bound to be under the power of the President who is elected by the people and the TNI is always subject to the chain of command under him
  3. In normal or non-war situations or when there are no major riots that the police cannot handle, the army may not be directly involved in any security or order enforcement in society.
  4. Since the abolishment of ABRI's (Indonesian army's former acronym) dual function, the TNI has effectively ended their active roles inside the government and consequently had its political influence diminished.
  
- ▣ The average score regarding the frequency of support for military professionalism is 3.510.
  
- ▣ The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the variables used to measure this index is 0.761.





# Data and Methods

- ▣ Draw upon data from an original, nationally representative survey fielded from 17 – 21 September 2021.

Utilized a double sampling method to produce a sample that enabled us to make inferences and generalizations about the national population. First, from the population of Indonesian voters in 34

- ▣ provinces, samples were drawn using multistage random sampling from the collection of INDIKATOR face-to-face survey samples from March 2018 to June 2021. Of these, I selected those who owned telephones or mobile phones, who constitute 71% of the population of the respondents.

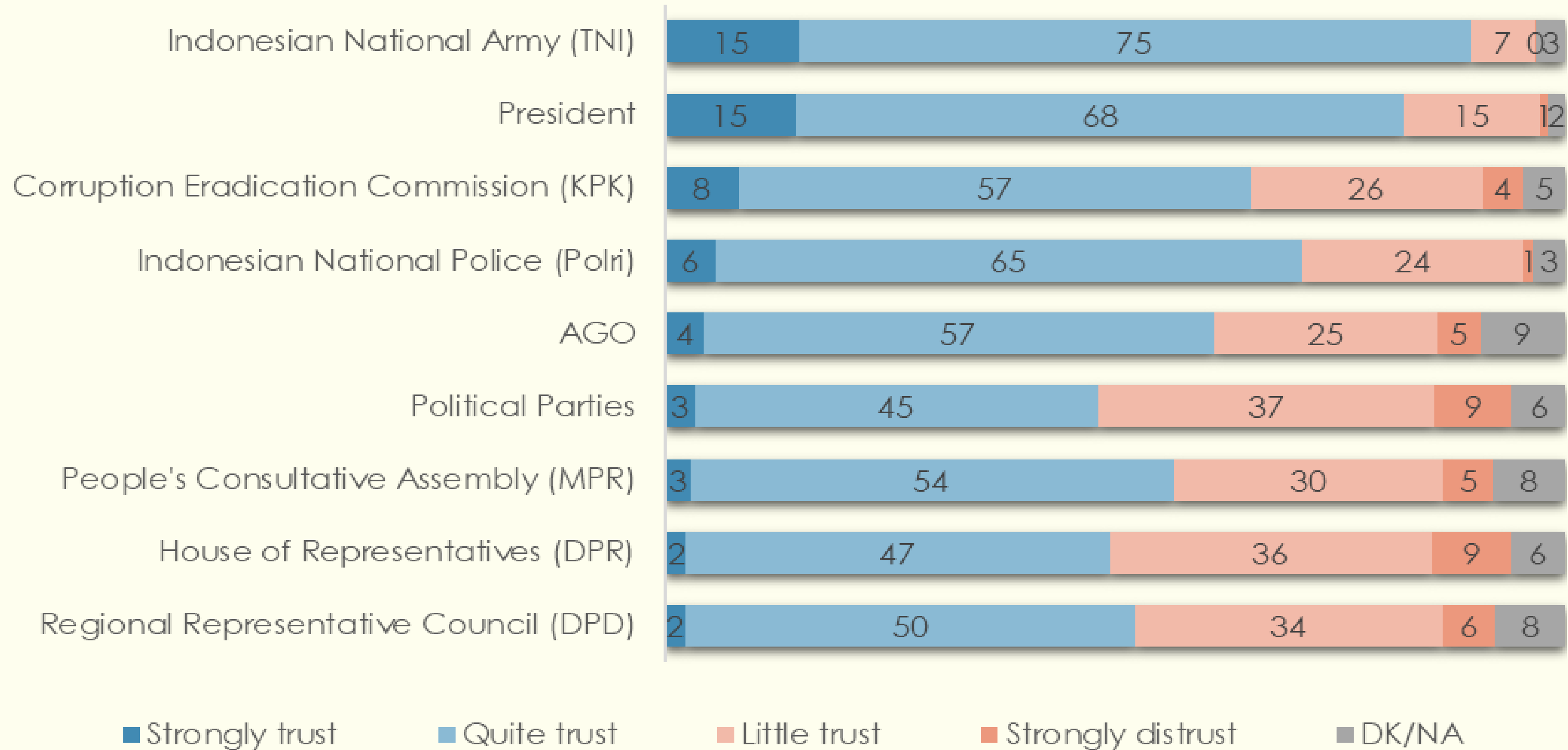
Second, as for random selection of the sample with phone numbers, it is carried out according to the stratified random sampling procedure: (1) the pooled random sample with phone numbers is selected

- ▣ from to form strata that have proportionate representation from all 34 provinces, rural and urban areas, and gender categories; and (2) respondents are randomly selected from each of stratum to be interviewed by phone.

The number of respondents who were successfully interviewed was 1,200 people. The sample from the

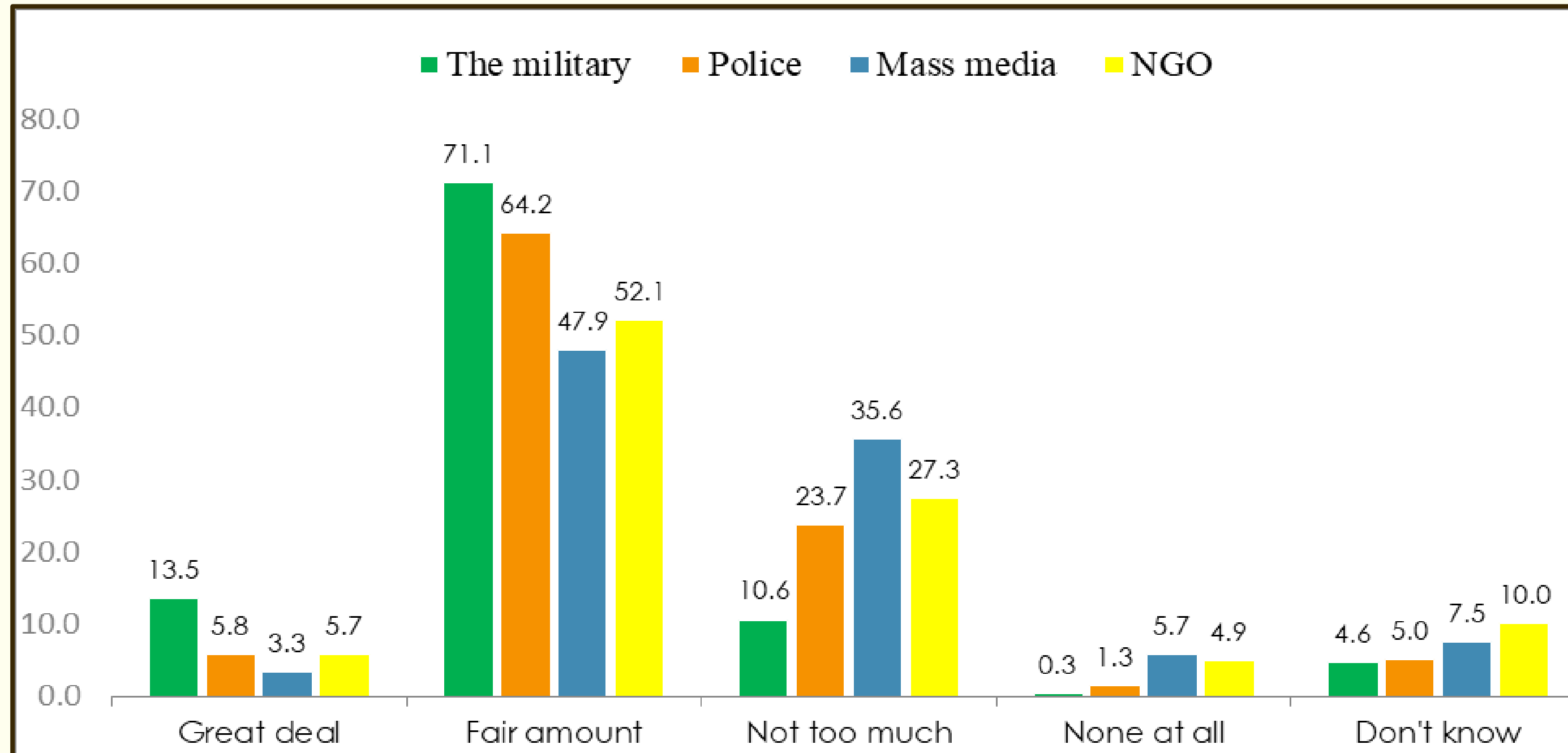
- ▣ survey was validated by comparing the composition of demography data with the population from Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics

# Figure 1: The level of trust in political institutions, September 2021 (%)



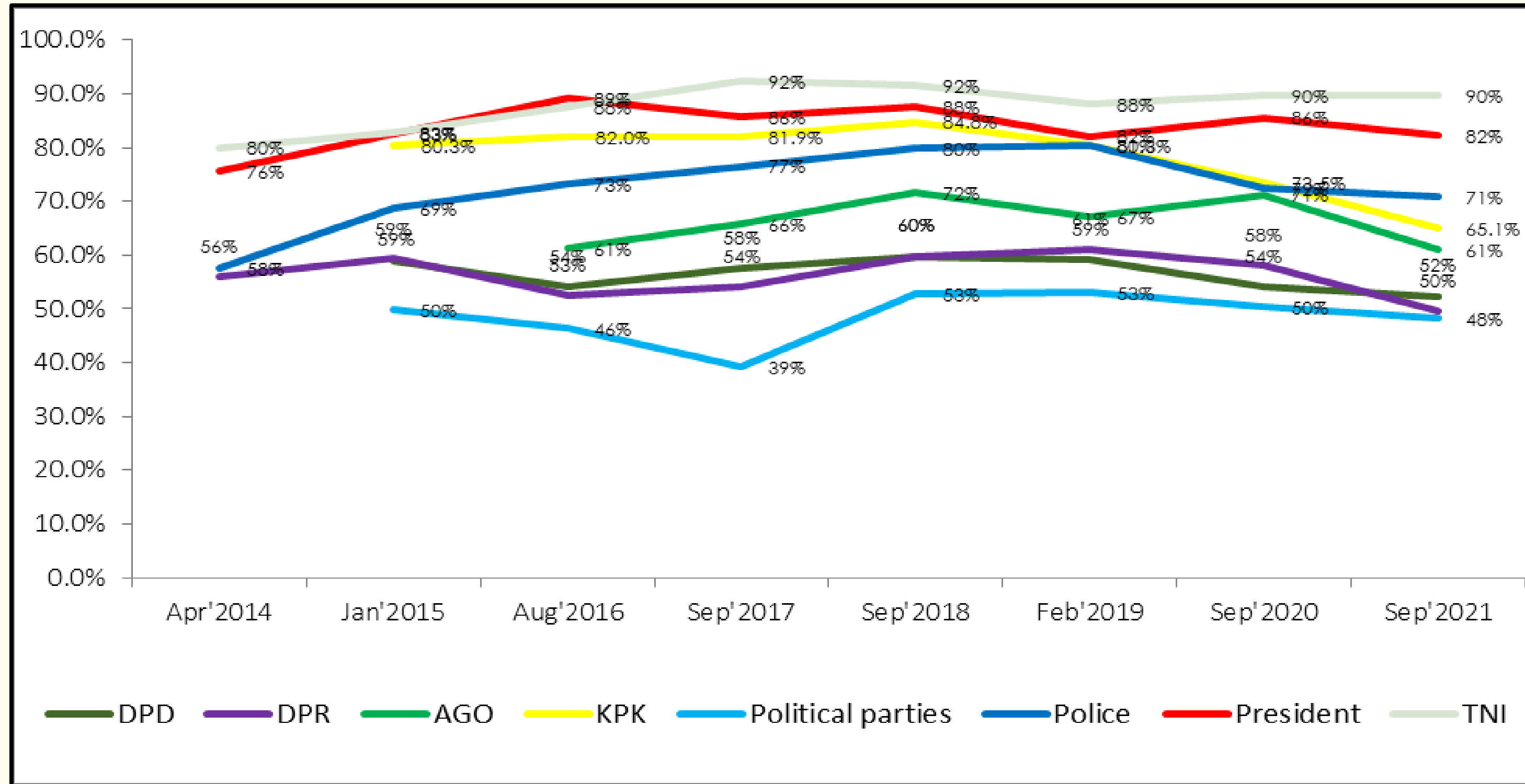


## Figure 2: % who say they have confidence in each to act in the best interests of the public, September 2021



The question previously used by the Pew Research Center

# Figure 3: Trend Data of Trust in Political and Social Institutions (%), 2014 – 2021





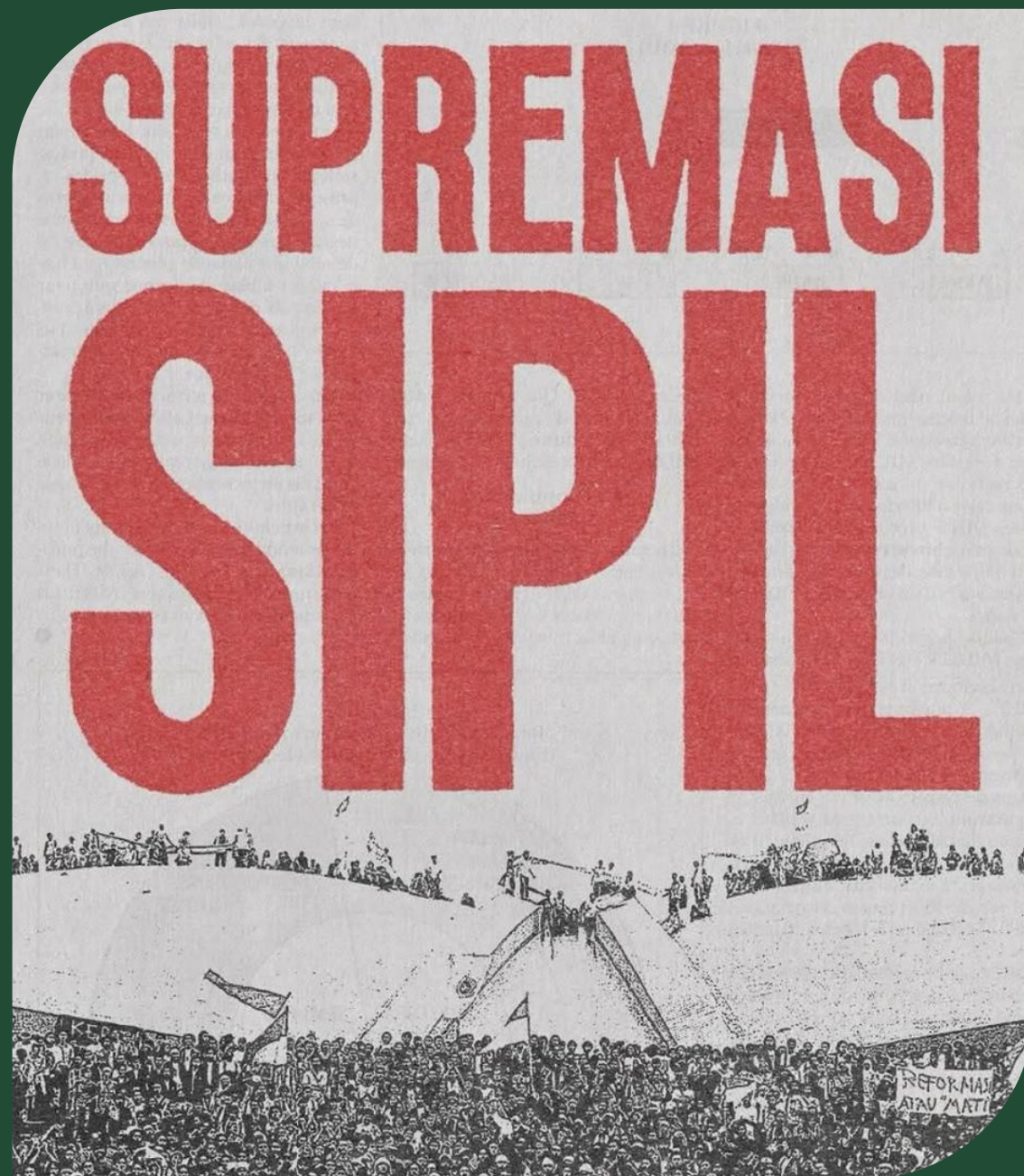
**Table 1: Linear Regression Analysis of Determinants of Public Trust in the TNI / Military and Confidence in the TNI to Act in the Best Interest of the Public**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Trust in the TNI</i>		<i>Confidence in the TNI</i>	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Constant	2.4972*** (0.143)	2.5253*** (0.239)	2.6766*** (0.145)	3.1867*** (0.242)
Prestige of military service	0.097*** (0.029)	0.0226 (0.037)	0.0714** (0.03)	0.0849** (0.038)
Threat perceptions	0.064** (0.029)	0.0991*** (0.035)	0.0134 (0.029)	0.0081 (0.036)
Allegation of human right abuses	-0.1058*** (0.025)	-0.1207*** (0.032)	-0.1195*** (0.025)	-0.178*** (0.032)
Military professionalism	0.0646 (0.034)	0.0941** (0.041)	0.1083*** (0.034)	0.0913** (0.042)
Weak civilian politicians	0.0382 (0.029)	0.076** (0.034)	0.0226 (0.03)	0.0095 (0.035)
<i>Demographics</i>				
Male		-0.0059 (0.047)		0.0354 (0.047)
Islam		-0.1681** (0.069)		-0.1527** (0.07)
Javanese		0.0679 (0.052)		-0.0327 (0.053)
Rural		-0.0104 (0.049)		0.0329 (0.05)
Income		-0.0052 (0.008)		-0.0082 (0.008)
<i>Political Partisanship</i>				
Jokowi voters		0.1108** (0.05)		-0.1061** (0.05)
<i>Socialization</i>				
Education		-0.0067 (0.011)		-0.0026 (0.011)
Mainstream media		0.0268 (0.033)		-0.0314 (0.033)
Social media usage		0.0014 (0.056)		0.1547*** (0.057)
<i>Democratic Support</i>				
Democratic preference		-0.0257 (0.051)		-0.0204 (0.052)
Democratic satisfaction		0.0163 (0.035)		0.0239 (0.036)
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>0.055</i>	<i>0.084</i>	<i>0.049</i>	<i>0.081</i>
<i>n</i>	<i>660</i>	<i>466</i>	<i>657</i>	<i>466</i>

Notes: \*\*Significant, p-value <5 per cent; \*\*\*Significant, p-value <1 per cent; B Coefficient (Std. Error).



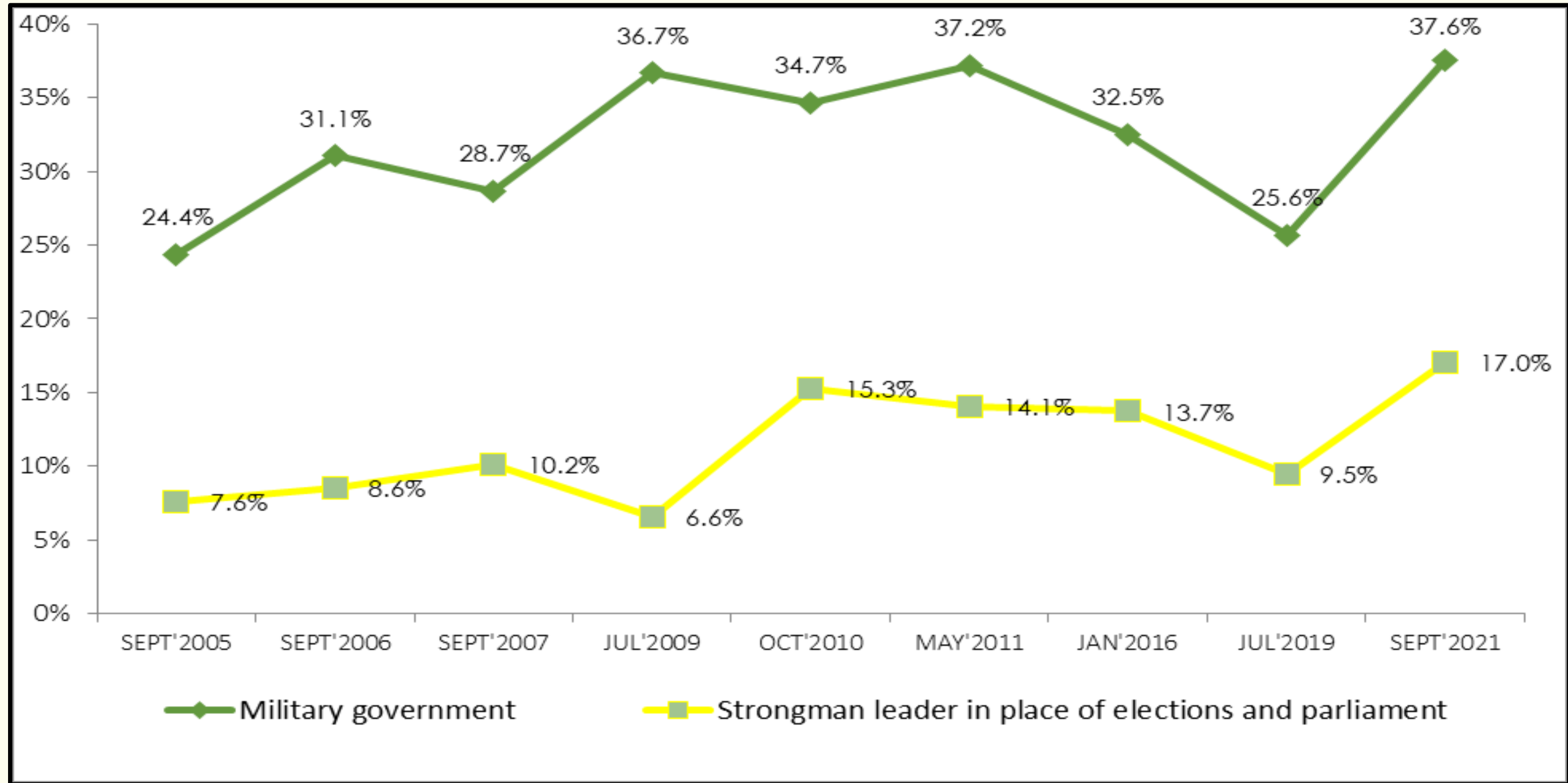
# What are the consequences of high levels of trust in the TNI for democracy?



- The high level of trust and confidence in the TNI raises serious questions about whether there is notable impact on democracy in Indonesia.
- Although nominal public support for democracy is still ostensibly high, a deeper look by several academic studies reveal that the wider public in general does not subscribe to democratic norms and values (Aspinall et al 2020; Fossati et al 2021 ).
- Furthermore, we should be concerned that the high level of public trust in the TNI will give further political leverage for the military in the midst of the democratic backsliding trend as reflected in the declining democracy index in Indonesia over the past decade.
- Note that despite undergoing more than two decades of reform, civilian supremacy over the military is not stable enough in Indonesia to become a foregone conclusion (Mietzner 2011).



# Figure 4: Trend on Support toward the Military Government and Strongman Leader 2005 – 2021 (%)



**Table 2: Determinants of Support for Military Government and Strongman Leaders**

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Military Government</i>		<i>Strongman Leader</i>	
	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>	<i>Model 1</i>	<i>Model 2</i>
Constant	2.1097*** (0.207)	1.9803*** (0.342)	1626*** (0.207)	1.0344*** (0.338)
Prestige of military service	0.1374*** (0.042)	0.1961*** (0.052)	0.075* (0.043)	0.1069** (0.052)
Threat perceptions	-0.1246*** (0.042)	-0.1028** (0.051)	-0.141*** (0.043)	-0.0289 (0.051)
Allegation of human right abuses	-0.0408 (0.036)	0.0101 (0.046)	0.016 (0.036)	0.0952** (0.045)
Military professionalism	-0.0047 (0.049)	-0.0122 (0.059)	0.136*** (0.05)	0.1706*** (0.058)
Weak civilian politicians	0.105** (0.042)	0.0849 (0.05)	0.032 (0.043)	0.0075 (0.049)
<i>Demographics</i>				
Male		-0.0686 (0.067)		-0.0404 (0.067)
Islam		-0.005 (0.098)		-0.0497 (0.096)
Javanese		0.0263 (0.075)		-0.1143 (0.075)
Rural		-0.0547 (0.07)		-0.045 (0.07)
Income		-0.0088 (0.011)		-0.021 (0.011)
<i>Political Partisanship</i>				
Jokowi voters		-0.1261 (0.071)		0.1214 (0.07)
<i>Socialization</i>				
Education		-0.0454*** (0.016)		0.0049 (0.016)
Mainstream media		0.1606*** (0.046)		0.1508*** (0.046)
Social media usage		-0.1504** (0.083)		-0.1187 (0.081)
<i>Democratic Support</i>				
Democratic preference		-0.1059 (0.076)		-0.3145*** (0.073)
Democratic satisfaction		-0.0149 (0.05)		-0.0499 (0.05)
<i>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>0.031</i>	<i>0.085</i>	<i>0.023</i>	<i>0.109</i>
<i>n</i>	<i>609</i>	<i>437</i>	<i>611</i>	<i>448</i>

*Notes:* \*\*Significant, p-value <5 per cent; \*\*\*Significant, p-value <1 per cent; B Coefficient (Std. Error).



# CONCLUSION

- **Among the five factors that were analyzed as its potential determinants based on past and recent academic literature, two of them consistently and significantly explain the level of public trust in the TNI and public confidence that the TNI acts in the best interests of the people.**
- **First, the more respondents disagree with the statements of alleged human rights violations as foreign interference or foreign concoction, the more they will trust the TNI. The reverse is also true.**
- **Second, a professional military is also found to be a significant predictor of public trust and confidence that the TNI is at the forefront of representing the interests of the people. The most obvious indicator of the professionalism of the military is their strict discipline in resisting being embroiled in domestic politics.**

# CONCLUSION

- **Although military professionalism in established democracies has become a tradition, many new democracies such as Indonesia have not yet fully accomplished its democratic mission to disentangle the military's role in politics or civilian affairs.**
- **The civilian authorities are oftentimes haphazardly inconsistent in designating the military's role within a democratic political structure or system. Recently, there have been strong indications of an increase in the active role of the military outside of its traditional role in defense issues.**
- **The more involved the military are in civilian affairs, the greater the potential for a decline in public confidence in the institution.**



The background of the image is a camouflage pattern in shades of green, brown, and grey. A white rectangular box with rounded corners is centered horizontally and vertically, containing the text "THANK YOU" in a bold, dark brown, sans-serif font.

**THANK YOU**