

Discourse Analysis on the Issue of Flood Control Projects: The Philippine Context of Corruption

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Abstract

Perceptions of corruption widely influence how citizens interpret the credibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness of government institutions. Perceptions of corruption can affect citizens' levels of political trust, willingness to participate in civic processes, and their expectations regarding government accountability and transparency. This narrative discourse analysis explored the meaning-making processes through which Filipino voters construct, interpret, and negotiate their perceptions of corruption within the context of social support. There were 18 Filipino voters who were purposively sampled to be interviewed. Narratives from one-on-one interviews were analyzed to identify the underlying meanings, shared interpretations, and recurring patterns. The results revealed that Filipino voters' perceptions of flood control projects were shaped by the accessibility, timing, and credibility of information communicated through various social channels. Socially mediated information significantly influenced how voters interpreted the integrity of flood control initiatives. Online discussions, public reactions, and shared experiences served as important sources of meaning-making, where negative narratives and visible inconsistencies between official announcements and lived experiences strengthened perceptions of inefficiency, weak accountability, and possible corruption. Participants expressed concerns regarding the management of public funds, questioning whether government resources and tax contributions were being properly utilized when projects appeared ineffective, incomplete, or disconnected from community needs. When formal support mechanisms such as transparent communication and public engagement were insufficient, individuals relied on social networks to interpret governance issues. These networks became spaces where trust, skepticism, and perceptions of corruption were built up, influencing citizens' views of government accountability, institutional integrity, and public trust.

Keywords: corruption, flood control controversy, governance, public trust, social support theory

Introduction

The Philippines has recently become the center of significant public controversy, particularly in relation to persistent issues surrounding flood management and infrastructure resilience. Perceptions of corruption are difficult to measure because they are shaped not only by actual government performance but also by media influence, interpersonal communication, and broader socio-political narratives. Despite

this complexity, understanding these perceptions is essential, as they significantly affect social stability by shaping institutional legitimacy and influencing citizens' engagement in civic and political life.

This study contributes to the existing body of literature by re-examining the concept of trust through the lens of Social Support Theory, with a specific focus on how it is constructed and negotiated within the perceptions of Filipino voters. Understanding perceptions of corruption is essential because it provides critical insight into how citizens construct meaning around governance performance, institutional credibility, and public accountability (Namubiru, 2024).

Amidst the controversy, allegations of corruption and mismanagement in flood control funding surfaced, President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. cited irregularities involving more than a trillion pesos and identifying contractors allegedly involved in questionable projects. Further disclosures indicated that from July 2022 to May 2025, a total of 9,855 flood control projects worth approximately Php545.64 billion were implemented, with a significant portion concentrated among a small number of contractors (GMA Network News, 2025).

This issue posed a significant threat to governance integrity and public trust, as it emphasizes potential inefficiencies, misallocation of public funds, and systemic vulnerabilities in the implementation of critical infrastructure projects. Prevailing perceptions of corruption substantially weakens public confidence in government institutions, while simultaneously constraining investment flows and slowing broader economic expansion (Namubiru, 2024). Intensified polarization significantly diminishes trust in the national government (Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024), while diminished political trust can generate enabling conditions for the persistence of corruption (Nasrolahi et al., 2024). Perceived corruption intensifies distrust, producing a cyclical erosion of democratic confidence and engagement (Okafor et al., 2020).

In Social Support Theory, perception formation as a relational and communicative process in which emotional, informational, and practical exchanges within social networks shape psychological interpretation and social understanding (Suaib, 2024). Rather than being purely cognitive or individually designed, perceptions are mediated through social relationships that provide frames for understanding governance and corruption. Social interactions, whether through family, peers, community ties, or digital platforms, not only transmit information but actively construct cognitive and emotional frameworks that guide belief formation and judgment (Noviaty, 2026).

However, the integration of Social Support Theory and trust remains relatively underexplored in the literature, particularly within studies on political perception and corruption. Nonetheless, existing evidence from related fields suggests that social support can be a meaningful mechanism for trust formation. For instance, in commerce, social support operates through both informational and emotional dimensions, where the provision of reliable guidance, advice, and reassurance collectively strengthens users' perceived trust (Krishna & Aravind, 2025). This indicates that the trust-enhancing function of social support is already established in other domains, although its application to political and corruption-related contexts remains limited and underdeveloped.

Literature Review

Trust reflects the cooperative and collective orientation of society, whereas corruption represents self-interested behavior. Individuals who exhibit higher levels of trust toward others are generally expected to comply with laws and social norms. Empirical studies support this view, showing that higher levels of trust are associated with stronger anti-corruption outcomes (Gebrihet & Mwale, 2024; Kogler et al., 2023).

Gebrihet and Mwale (2024) examined how political polarization affects trust in government in Ethiopia. Their results show that higher levels of polarization reduce trust in the national government, while trust in local government is not significantly affected. Although government performance is positively associated with trust, it does not alter the relationship between polarization and trust in government, indicating that polarization has a direct and persistent effect.

Low levels of political trust can create conditions that allow corruption to flourish, as less engaged citizens may be less inclined to monitor or hold public officials accountable (Nasrolahi et al., 2024). In turn, when corruption is widely perceived to be prevalent, it further weakens political trust, which develops a continuing cycle of doubt and disengagement. This pattern emphasizes the fragility of democratic systems when trust declines and corruption is believed to be widespread and uncontrolled (Okafor et al., 2020).

Furthermore, greater exposure to media reports on corruption tends to heighten people's perception of its severity, particularly when such coverage is inaccurate or relies mainly on non-event-based sources such as reports, political speeches, and official statements. This kind of reporting can build the belief that corruption is deeply embedded in society and therefore difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate (Corrado et al., 2023).

Now, this study seeks to examine perceptions of corruption in the Philippines, particularly as shaped by social experiences and exposure to information from various social channels such as media, interpersonal communication, and online platforms. It aims to understand how these socially constructed perceptions influence citizens' views of government integrity, trust in public institutions, and their overall sense of accountability within the political system.

In Social Support Theory, individuals' well-being is shaped by the quality and availability of their social relationships and the support they receive from others. It emphasizes that human interaction is not only about communication and shared activities, but also about the exchange of emotional, informational, and practical assistance that helps individuals manage challenges and maintain psychological stability (Suaib, 2024). Psychological well-being is influenced both by internal dispositions and by external social environments, including the presence of meaningful relationships and supportive communities.

In the study of Noviaty (2026), social support within social networking platforms enhances users' intentions toward social commerce by creating more supportive and engaging online environments. Through both informational and emotional exchanges, consumers rely on their social networks for guidance and reassurance, which shapes their purchasing decisions and behaviors. This supportive communication strengthens trust in brands and ultimately encourages greater participation in social commerce activities.

Since perceptions are largely shaped through social relationships and interactions (Luo et al., 2024), the quality and availability of social support, such as discussions with family, peers, and community members, as well as information shared through media and social networks, may influence how citizens interpret issues of governance and corruption. In this sense, social interaction does not only transmit information but also provides emotional and cognitive frameworks that shape judgment and belief formation (Noviaty, 2026). Consequently, what individuals come to "know" or "believe" about public issues is often filtered through socially embedded narratives rather than purely objective information.

Extending the logic to the political and civic domain, similar mechanisms may operate wherein repeated exposure to socially endorsed interpretations of governance issues can either reinforce institutional trust or intensify skepticism, depending on the prevailing tone, credibility, and cohesion of the support networks involved. In this way, social support becomes not only a buffer for individual well-being, but also a structuring force in how collective attitudes toward authority, accountability, and corruption are formed and sustained.

Objectives

This study examined how social support, as a socially mediated mechanism of informational, emotional, and cognitive exchange, shapes individuals' interpretations of corruption and institutional trust. Below are the specific objectives of the study.

1. To explore how Filipino voters perceive and interpret the messages communicated about flood control projects.

2. To examine how these message patterns influence voters' perceptions of corruption in the planning and implementation of flood control projects.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed an exploratory research design to understand how Filipino voters perceive and interpret messages related to flood control projects and how these message patterns influence their perceptions of corruption in the country. Exploratory design allows for in-depth understanding of participants' perceptions and interpretations in a context where limited prior research exists (Coli et al., 2023).

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was applied to select the participants to be interviewed in this study. This sampling technique was appropriate because the study sought participants who possess relevant experiences and perspectives regarding flood control projects and public discourse on corruption (Chavez, 2025). The following criteria were established for participant selection: (1) a registered voter in the Philippines; (2) at least 18 years old; (3) has resided in the community for at least one year to ensure familiarity with local flood control initiatives and issues; (4) has encountered, viewed, or received information/messages related to flood control projects through media platforms, government announcements, or community discussions; (5) is willing to participate in an interview and share personal perceptions regarding flood control projects and corruption-related concerns; and (6) has sufficient ability to communicate and articulate experiences relevant to the research objectives. Out of 31 potential participants who responded to the requests posted online, only 18 were selected to be interviewed.

Instrumentation

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews using an interview guide aligned with the objectives of the study. Open-ended questions allowed participants to share detailed experiences, opinions, and reflections regarding the information they encountered. Follow-up questions were used to clarify responses and gain deeper insights into how message patterns shaped their understanding of project implementation and accountability. The interview guide questions are presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Guide questions asked during the one-on-one interviews

Objectives	Interview question
To explore how Filipino voters perceive and interpret the messages communicated about flood control projects.	1. How do you usually receive information or messages about flood control projects in your area?
	2. Can you describe your understanding or interpretation of the messages regarding these projects?
	3. How do the sources or channels of these messages affect the way you perceive flood control initiatives?
To examine how these message patterns influence voters' perceptions of corruption in the planning and implementation of flood control projects.	1. How do the messages you receive about flood control projects shape your perception of transparency or corruption?
	2. Can you share an example of a message that made you question or trust the integrity of a flood control project?
	3. How do repeated or conflicting messages influence your overall opinion about the implementation of these projects?

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted through one-on-one interviews with the selected participants. Interviews were scheduled at convenient times and locations for the participants, ensuring privacy and minimizing interruptions. Each interview was audio-recorded with participant consent to ensure accurate data capture. Field notes were also maintained to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations. The duration of each interview ranged from 30 to 45 minutes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using Narrative Discourse Analysis, which focuses on how participants construct and organize their stories to make sense of their experiences (Elsner, 2024). The analysis involved examining interview transcripts to identify narrative structures, key events, and patterns in how participants described and interpreted messages about flood control projects. Attention was given to how stories were sequenced, the meanings embedded in participants' accounts, and how they positioned themselves and others within their narratives. The analysis also explored how these narratives reflected participants' perceptions of transparency, governance, and corruption. Through this process, individual accounts were synthesized into broader narrative patterns that represent shared meanings and interpretations.

Results

Objective 1. To explore how Filipino voters perceive and interpret the messages communicated about flood control projects.

Question 1. How do you usually receive information or messages about flood control projects in your area?

Meaning 1: Digitally mediated in terms of accessing information

Participants generally rely on social media, particularly Facebook, as their primary source of information on flood control projects, mainly because it provides fast and accessible updates from local government online pages, government agencies, and community groups. While official pages are commonly used for announcements and project updates, respondents also cross-check information through comments, local news pages, and online community discussions due to concerns about delayed or incomplete government postings.

Excerpt 1 – “I usually check official Facebook pages of our LGU and local agencies to get updates about flood control projects.”

Excerpt 2 – “My relatives abroad also remind us online when they see online news or articles about projects near our home. They're sometimes even more updated than we are.”

Meaning 2: Limited access when projects already starts

Participants perceive limited transparency and weak participatory communication in flood control projects, as they often learn about implementation only after construction has already begun and affects their daily lives. They also express a sense of lack of feedback and closure after consultations, suggesting that their input is not visibly acknowledged or reflected in final decisions.

Excerpt 1 – “Most of the time, we still only find out about a project when construction has already started and is affecting our daily routines.”

Excerpt 2 – “Sometimes we receive online surveys or see announcements about public announcement when the projects already start, but not everyone gets the chance to participate.”

Question 2. Can you describe your understanding or interpretation of the messages regarding these projects?

Meaning 1: Reactive experience due to disruption

Participants construct their understanding of flood control projects through a reactive experience of disruption, where awareness emerges only when the projects already interfere with daily life. This delayed exposure produces feelings of being uninformed and excluded, which in turn cause frustration and a sense of powerlessness. Such conditions shape perceptions of local governance, as the absence of timely communication is interpreted as limited transparency and weak accountability, potentially undermining trust and encouraging skepticism or misinformation.

Excerpt 1 – “We are primarily aware of flood control projects only when they cause immediate disruption, such as traffic diversions, flooded roads, or construction noise.”

Excerpt 2 – “When residents are warned in advance, they feel respected and included, can plan around inconveniences, and may even act as advocates within their communities.”

Meaning 2: Trust gap because of informal communication

Participants believe that informal communication with their friends, neighbors, and relatives produces a vulnerability to misinformation and distorted understanding, as information is not always verified or consistent. When official updates are delayed or incomplete, participants perceive that public opinion becomes more easily shaped by rumors rather than factual reporting, which can heighten confusion and anxiety.

Excerpt 1 – “I rely heavily on relatives, neighbors, or even friends abroad for updates about flood control projects, showing a clear trust gap in official communication channels.”

Excerpt 2 – “When government communication is delayed or incomplete, public perception can be shaped more by rumors than facts.”

Meaning 2: Show respect to the people

Participants have strong desire to be recognized not only as recipients of information, but as active stakeholders in decisions that directly affect their daily lives. Their call for early notifications and meaningful participation presents an expectation for more inclusive and participatory governance, where citizens are given the opportunity to understand, respond to, and engage with public infrastructure projects before implementation.

Excerpt 1 – “We are clearly interested in early notifications and having a voice in decisions that affect their daily lives.”

Excerpt 2 – “When we are informed about the purpose, timeline, and expected impacts of flood control projects, they feel respected and more willing to cooperate despite temporary inconvenience.”

Question 3. How do the sources or channels of these messages affect the way you perceive flood control initiatives?

Meaning 1: Social contagion

When posts are accompanied by complaints or negative comments, participants tend to interpret the project as poorly managed, while positive official updates generate optimism and trust. Participants construct their understanding of flood control projects through a highly social and emotion-driven process of interpretation, where perceptions are shaped less by direct verification and more by the reactions and sentiments of others online. Facebook functions not only as an information source but also as a space where social proof strongly influences judgment, meaning that the perceived credibility of a project depends on how other users respond, comment, or share content.

Excerpt 1 – “Most of what I know comes from Facebook posts and shared videos. If people are complaining in the comments, I assume the project is poorly managed.”

Excerpt 2 – “I don’t usually verify if the information is true. I judge based on how many people react or share it.”

Meaning 2: Distrust in official online sources

Participants construct their understanding of flood control projects through a strong reliance on local, lived experiences shared within the community, instead of the official online announcements. Information from neighbors, drivers, and other residents is perceived as more trustworthy because it is grounded in everyday observation and repeated encounters with actual conditions, such as traffic disruptions or persistent flooding. When multiple community members report similar experiences, it strengthens collective validation and reinforces the credibility of that information.

Excerpt 1 – “I trust neighbors and local drivers more than any announcement online. If they say the project causes traffic or doesn’t fix flooding, I believe it.”

Excerpt 2 – “I feel more confident in my perception when multiple people in the community share the same experience. It feels real and grounded.”

Objective 2. To examine how these message patterns influence voters’ perceptions of corruption in the planning and implementation of flood control projects.

Question 1. How do the messages you receive about flood control projects shape your perception of transparency or corruption?

Meaning 1: Disgusted about how public funds are handled

The narratives suggest that inconsistent and overly promotional messages about flood control projects contribute to feelings of dissatisfaction and moral discomfort regarding the use of public funds. Participants often interpret visible but incomplete projects, with celebratory announcements, as signs that resources may not be used appropriately. This perception is strengthened when expected benefits, such as reduced flooding, are not immediately experienced by the community. Consequently, respondents develop a sense of distrust and emotional disapproval toward how government spending is managed.

Excerpt 1 – “They keep posting achievements online, but we still experience flooding, so it feels like money is just being wasted.”

Excerpt 2 – “Sometimes the project looks unfinished, but they already celebrate it like it’s done and perfect.”

Excerpt 3 – “It’s frustrating because we don’t see real improvement even if they say a lot of money was spent.”

Meaning 2: Weak accountability

Participants perceive the communication patterns surrounding flood control projects as reflecting weak accountability among responsible authorities. This is evident when there is a lack of follow-up information, absence of explanations for delays, or no clear feedback after public consultations. Such gaps in communication lead respondents to feel that officials are not being held responsible for project outcomes or public concerns.

Excerpt 1 – “After we give our opinions, we don’t hear anything again, so it feels like they don’t really listen.”

Excerpt 2 – “They don’t explain why the project is delayed, so we’re left wondering what is really happening.”

Excerpt 3 – “There’s no update after consultations, so it feels like nothing we said mattered.”

Question 2. Can you share an example of a message that made you question or trust the integrity of a flood control project?

Meaning 1: Leaning towards distrust

Participants interpret certain messages about flood control projects as insufficiently transparent or overly promotional, which leads them to question the credibility of the information being presented. When updates are vague, delayed, or inconsistent with actual community experiences, respondents begin to doubt the honesty of official communication. As a result, distrust becomes the dominant orientation in how participants evaluate the integrity of flood control initiatives.

Excerpt 1 – “They always post updates, but it doesn’t match what we are actually experiencing in our area.”

Excerpt 2 – “The information feels incomplete, so I can’t really trust what they are saying.”

Excerpt 3 – “Sometimes they make it look like everything is fine, but in reality, nothing has changed here.”

Meaning 2: Questions regarding paying taxes

Messages about flood control projects trigger reflections on the value and purpose of their tax contributions. When projects appear incomplete, ineffective, or poorly communicated, respondents begin to question whether their taxes are being used appropriately. This sense of uncertainty leads to doubts about fairness and accountability in public fund allocation.

Excerpt 1 – “We pay taxes, but sometimes it feels like we’re not seeing any real results from these projects.”

Excerpt 2 – “If the project is still unfinished, I can’t help but ask where our tax money is going.”

Excerpt 3 – “It makes me wonder if our contributions are really being used properly for these flood control works.”

Excerpt 4 – “We keep paying, but the flooding problem is still there, so what is our tax actually for?”

Question 3. How do repeated or conflicting messages influence your overall opinion about the implementation of these projects?

Meaning 1: Too inefficient

Participants interpret the messages they receive about flood control projects as indicators of inefficiency in planning and implementation. This perception emerges when updates are delayed, unclear, or only surface after problems such as traffic congestion or flooding have already occurred. Such communication patterns lead respondents to believe that project execution is poorly coordinated and lacks proper foresight. As a result, inefficiency becomes a dominant lens through which they evaluate the overall performance of public infrastructure governance.

Excerpt 1 – “We only hear about the project when traffic is already bad, so it feels like they don’t plan it properly.”

Excerpt 2 – “If they really planned it well, they should inform us earlier, not when we’re already stuck in the road.”

Excerpt 3 – “It looks like they don’t coordinate the work properly because everything becomes chaotic once construction starts.”

Meaning 2: Flaunty lifestyle from politicians and their families

Participants connect messages about flood control projects with visible displays of wealth or luxury among politicians and their families, which shapes their interpretation of integrity. When such lifestyles are perceived as inconsistent with public service, respondents begin to associate infrastructure projects with possible misuse of funds.

Excerpt 1 – “They talk about projects, but then we see them and their families living very luxurious lives.”

Excerpt 2 – “It makes you wonder how they can afford such a lifestyle if the budget is really used properly.”

Excerpt 3 – “Sometimes it feels like the money for projects ends up supporting their personal comfort instead.”

Discussion

The study explored the narratives of some Filipino voters about the issue on flood control projects and how this affects their perception about corruption. Narratives from the participants revealed that although information is available in some instances, there is dominance of reactive, fragmented, and socially mediated information systems. This communication gap leads to feelings of exclusion and weak participation, as citizens frequently learn about projects only when construction has already begun or when disruptions occur.

In an African study from Gebrihet (2024), an increase in perceived corruption among local government officials is associated with a higher likelihood of residents expressing complete distrust in local government institutions. Likewise, similar patterns have been observed in other governance contexts, where heightened perceptions of corruption weaken institutional legitimacy and reduce citizens' confidence in public authorities. This decline in trust often extends beyond individual officials, affecting overall perceptions of government effectiveness and fairness in service delivery.

Now, there was a strong emphasis of social media in this study, especially when viewing other people's opinions about corruption. Social media platforms, due to their wide reach and real-time communication, significantly influence how public opinion is formed and how much trust citizens place in their political leaders (Jimoh et al., 2025). In this context, online spaces do not only serve as information channels but also as arenas where perceptions are continuously shaped through comments, reactions, and shared narratives. For example, when users encounter repeated negative discussions or viral posts about corruption, these narratives can amplify skepticism and reduce trust in public officials, even in the absence of direct evidence.

Variations in corruption attitudes can be explained through social support theory, which posits that government initiatives aimed at improving citizens' well-being significantly shape how corruption is perceived (Corrado et al., 2023). In this study, it was noted that when people cannot clearly see or directly experience the benefits of government projects, their perceptions of fairness and transparency tend to weaken, leading to increased suspicion of fund mismanagement or corruption.

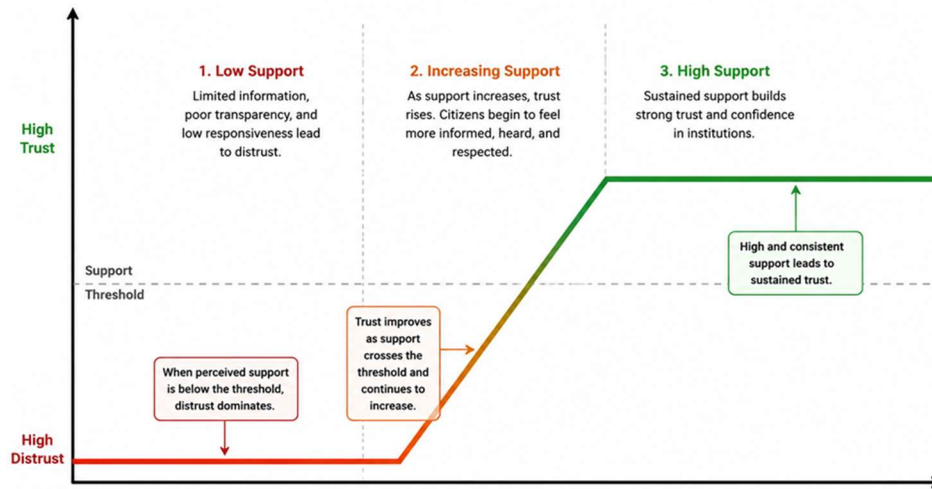


Figure 1. Perception of corruption based on social support theory

In social support theory, individuals' psychological well-being is strongly influenced by the support they receive from their social environment. This support may be emotional, informational, or practical, and is often gained through social interactions such as community engagement and group activities (Suaib, 2024). As presented in **Figure 1**, when official communication is weak or delayed, individuals increasingly depend on informal social networks for support, which can lead to misinformation, negative emotions, and collective distrust. In this context, social support is becoming a channel for collective interpretation and meaning-making, where shared experiences and opinions often carry more weight than verified information. As individuals continuously validate their understanding through peers, family, and online communities, perceptions become socially strengthened, even if they are not factually accurate.

In commerce, the effect of support systems is partly transmitted through the development of trust, potentially influencing individuals' intention to make purchases online (Noviaty, 2024). Similarly, social support mechanisms may influence how citizens construct their understanding of corruption and evaluate the credibility of government institutions. Information shared through social networks, community discussions, and media platforms may shape citizens' perceptions by either developing confidence or increasing skepticism toward public officials and institutions. Thus, trust serves as a crucial mechanism that connects social experiences and information exchanges with broader perceptions of accountability, transparency, and corruption.

Based on the narratives on corruption, it appears that the government fails to provide open and transparent information to the public. This perceived lack of openness creates information gaps that lead citizens to rely on informal sources and personal interpretations to make sense of government actions. Although corruption does occur in some government contexts, the lack of transparency and timely communication can intensify public suspicion and make corruption appear more widespread than it may actually be.

Perception of corruption is an important aspect of understanding social coherence, as it reflects how citizens evaluate fairness, trustworthiness, and legitimacy within public institutions. It was established in this study that corruption perceptions are often shaped not only by actual governance practices but also by communication patterns, social narratives, and everyday experiences. Repeated exposure to low support such as inconsistent information, lack of feedback, or visible inequalities can emphasize negative interpretations of government actions. Over time, these perceptions may influence

civic engagement, reduce compliance with public programs, and affect the overall stability of social relationships within the community.

Conclusion

Public understanding is largely formed through reactive, fragmented, and socially mediated information systems, where citizens often receive updates only after disruptions occur. This delayed and inconsistent communication contributes to feelings of exclusion, weak participation, and uncertainty regarding government actions.

Perceptions of corruption can be strongly influenced by communication quality, social interpretation, and information accessibility. Social media also shaped public opinion, where reactions, comments, and viral content often amplify skepticism and distrust toward public officials. Informal social networks such as neighbors, relatives, and community members serve as alternative sources of validation, especially when official communication is perceived as insufficient or delayed. When official communication is weak, citizens rely more heavily on informal networks, which can lead to misinformation, emotional reinforcement, and collective distrust. Conversely, clear, timely, and participatory communication strengthens perceived support, enhances trust, and improves public confidence in governance.

Perceptions of corruption in flood control projects are socially constructed through channels such as governance, communication, media influence, and community interaction. These perceptions have important implications for social coherence, as they shape trust in institutions, civic engagement, and the perceived legitimacy of public resource allocation.

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