

Abuse of Power in Local Politics: An Islamic Political Ethics Review of the Probolinggo Case

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ABSTRACT - This study examines the abuse of power in local politics in Probolinggo Regency through the perspective of Islamic political ethics, focusing on corruption in the appointment of local public officials and its implications for regional governance. A qualitative approach was employed using a literature study and document analysis. The study analyzed 20 documents published between 2020 and 2025, consisting of reports from the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission, national media reports, government documents, and relevant academic publications. Documents were identified through searches using the keywords “Probolinggo,” “public official appointment,” “corruption,” “bribery,” and “local politics” across official institutional websites, academic databases, and national media archives. Documents were selected based on their relevance to the case, publication period, source credibility, and substantive information concerning political and bureaucratic practices. The findings reveal concrete patterns of abuse, including the use of political influence in official appointments, financial transactions associated with positions, and the involvement of political and bureaucratic actors. These practices undermine merit-based selection, weaken accountability, and transform public office from an instrument of public service into a resource for political and economic interests. From the perspective of Islamic political ethics, such practices violate the principles of amanah (trustworthiness), justice, moral responsibility, and leadership integrity. The study concludes that corruption in local official appointments represents both a governance failure and an ethical failure in exercising public authority.

Keywords: Abuse of Power, Islamic Political Ethics, Local Political Corruption, Moral Responsibility

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Introduction

Corruption remains a fundamental problem in the administration of government in Indonesia, both at the national and local levels (Putra & Linda, 2022; Zaid et al., 2023). Corrupt practices not only cause state financial losses, but also weaken the quality of democracy, reduce public trust in governmental institutions, and disrupt the effectiveness of public services (Magakwe, 2024; Peter Adoko Obicci, 2025). In the context of local politics, corruption is often associated with the abuse of power by political elites and regional bureaucracies (Paranata, 2025; Tufail & Taieb, 2023). Power that should be exercised for the public interest is instead frequently used to maintain political influence, build patronage networks, and obtain personal or group benefits (Dávid-Barrett, 2023; Mugabe et al., 2025). This condition indicates that corruption cannot merely be understood as a legal violation but is also related to an ethical crisis in the practice of power.

The abuse of power in local politics essentially represents a deviation from the very function and purpose of power itself (Habibi & Nurmandi, 2021; Paniagua & Vogler, 2022). In political studies, power is understood as an instrument for regulating and managing public interests through the authority possessed by state officials (Bertelli & Busuioc, 2021; Mukhlis et al., 2025). However, in practice, such authority is often misused for the interests of particular individuals or groups. Abuse of power may take various forms, such as bribery, nepotism, political patronage, and the buying and selling of positions within government bureaucracy. This phenomenon demonstrates that the relationship between power and political interests often creates opportunities for corruption at the local level (Oluseye, 2024; Wu & Christensen, 2021).

In the development of local politics in Indonesia, corruption is also inseparable from patronage-based and transactional political relations. The high political costs involved in regional head elections encourage the emergence of reciprocal political practices after political actors gain power (Noak, 2024). Bureaucratic positions are subsequently treated as instruments for distributing political and economic interests. This situation causes bureaucratic processes to no longer be based on the principles of professionalism and meritocracy, but rather on political proximity and the economic capacity of certain individuals (Lubis et al., 2026; Randma-Liiv et al., 2022). As a result, regional governance becomes highly vulnerable to corrupt practices and abuse of authority.

On the other hand, Islamic political ethics views power as a trust that must be exercised responsibly for the welfare of society. From the Islamic perspective, leadership is not only related to administrative capability, but also to the moral integrity and ethical responsibility of a leader. Principles such as justice, honesty, trustworthiness, and social responsibility constitute the primary foundations in the exercise of power. Therefore, corruption and abuse of office are regarded as forms of betrayal of the public trust. In this regard, Islamic political ethics not only provides a normative framework concerning how power should be exercised, but also serves as a critical perspective in examining deviant political practices (Samin et al., 2025; Puspitasari et al., 2025).

The legal framework governing corruption in Indonesia is primarily established through Law Number 31 of 1999 concerning the Eradication of Corruption Crimes, which was subsequently amended by Law Number 20 of 2001. These provisions define corruption as unlawful conduct aimed at enriching oneself, another individual, or a corporation in a manner that causes or may cause losses to state finances or the national economy, while also addressing the abuse of authority by public officials who exploit their position, opportunities, or institutional power for

personal or group interests. The enactment of these laws reflects the Indonesian government's commitment to strengthening anti-corruption measures, legal accountability, transparency, and institutional oversight within public administration. However, despite the existence of a relatively comprehensive regulatory framework, corruption remains a persistent problem across various levels of government, including regional administration. The continued occurrence of such cases indicates that legal regulation alone is insufficient and must be supported by consistent law enforcement, stronger supervisory mechanisms, institutional integrity, transparent governance, and effective public accountability.

One case that illustrates the abuse of power in local politics occurred in Probolinggo Regency in 2021. The Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) named the Regent of Probolinggo and several other parties as suspects in an alleged bribery case related to the selection of acting village heads. During the investigation process, the KPK found evidence of money payments and certain forms of support being used as requirements for obtaining village head positions (Saskarayani & Puspawati, 2021; Hasibuan & Sitompul, 2024). The case subsequently developed into one of the most widely discussed cases involving the buying and selling of public offices, as it involved regional leaders, civil servants, and power relations within the regional government bureaucracy. Based on KPK data, 22 individuals were named as suspects in September 2021 in connection with the case.

The Probolinggo case demonstrates that public office is still perceived as a political commodity that can be exchanged through transactional mechanisms. This phenomenon reflects a crisis of leadership ethics in local political practices. Power is no longer exercised as a trust to serve the interests of society, but rather as a means to maintain political influence and obtain personal benefits. In this context, a purely legal approach appears insufficient to explain the root causes of local political corruption, as moral and ethical dimensions also influence the behavior of government officials.

Several previous studies have examined political corruption from ethical and socio-political perspectives. Mulkan et al (2023) demonstrate that corruption is associated with dishonesty, data manipulation, and abuse of authority for political interests, while (Rismawan & Albert E. Barona, 2025) highlight the effects of regional corruption on public trust and political participation. Meanwhile, Andika Dwi Putra et al (2024) discuss corruption from the perspective of Islamic political ethics, emphasizing justice, transparency, and accountability as ethical foundations of governance. Although these studies provide important insights, they focus respectively on ethical violations, socio-political consequences, and normative principles of Islamic governance, without specifically examining how Islamic political ethics can explain transactional practices and abuse of power in local bureaucratic appointments. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by analyzing the Probolinggo case through the principles of amanah (trustworthiness), justice, moral responsibility, and leadership integrity, with particular attention to the relationship between local political authority, bureaucratic practices, and corruption.

This research is important because local political corruption not only results in financial losses for the state, but also affects the legitimacy of government and the quality of public services. The study of Islamic political ethics in the context of abuse of power at the local level is expected to contribute academically to the development of local political studies and contemporary political ethics. The objective of this research is to analyze the practice of abuse of power in local politics in the Probolinggo case and to examine the case through the perspective of Islamic political ethic.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive-analytical design to examine the abuse of power in local politics from the perspective of Islamic political ethics. A qualitative approach was selected because the research seeks to develop an in-depth understanding of socio-political phenomena rather than to measure causal relationships statistically (Firmansyah & Ali, 2023). The study adopted a library research design combined with a case study approach, focusing specifically on the corruption case involving the buying and selling of public positions in Probolinggo Regency. This case was selected because it represents one of Indonesia's most prominent examples of abuse of power involving regional political elites and bureaucratic actors.

The study relied on 20 documentary sources published between 2020 and 2025, consisting of primary documentary sources and secondary documentary sources. The primary documentary sources comprised official Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) reports, relevant government regulations, legal documents, indictments, and judicial information concerning the Probolinggo corruption case. These sources were used to establish the chronology of the case, identify the actors involved, document the alleged bribery mechanisms, and determine the legal development of the case. National media reports published during the 2021–2025 period were treated as supplementary contextual sources rather than primary data and were used to cross-check reported events, public responses, and developments surrounding the case. Secondary documentary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy publications, and previous studies published between 2020 and 2025 concerning local political corruption, abuse of power, bureaucracy, public administration, and Islamic political ethics. The documents were selected based on their relevance to the Probolinggo case, source credibility, temporal relevance, and substantive contribution to either establishing empirical evidence or interpreting the case through the principles of amanah, justice, moral responsibility, and leadership integrity. All 20 documents were inventoried according to document type, publication year, source institution, and analytical purpose to ensure transparency and enable the research corpus to be audited.

Data were collected through systematic document analysis. The collection process was conducted in several stages (De Leo et al., 2023). First, relevant documents were identified through official institutional publications, academic databases, and reputable national news sources. Second, documents were screened according to their relevance to the research objectives, publication credibility, and completeness of information. Third, selected documents were organized and categorized based on major analytical themes, including patterns of abuse of power, mechanisms of political corruption, bureaucratic involvement, and ethical principles in Islamic political thought. This procedure ensured that only reliable and relevant documentary evidence was included in the analysis.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach through structured document analysis. Documents were identified from official institutional websites, national media archives, and academic databases using the keywords Probolinggo, public official appointment, corruption, bribery, local politics, and Islamic political ethics, covering publications from 2020 to 2025. Documents were included when they were relevant to the Probolinggo corruption case, provided substantive information on political or bureaucratic practices, or supported the analysis of Islamic political ethics, while duplicates and irrelevant or insufficiently documented sources were excluded. After screening and deduplication, 20 documents were retained as the final corpus.

The analysis involved four stages: data reduction, thematic categorization based on amanah (trustworthiness), justice, moral responsibility, and leadership integrity, interpretation of the relationship between empirical evidence and Islamic political ethics, and synthesis of findings. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing official, legal, academic, and media documents to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

To enhance the credibility of the findings, this study applied source triangulation by comparing information obtained from official KPK reports, legal documents, academic publications, and reputable national media coverage. Cross-checking these multiple documentary sources reduced potential bias and strengthened the validity of the interpretations regarding the abuse of power and its ethical implications in the Probolinggo case

Result and Discussion

Overview of the Corruption Case Involving the Buying and Selling of Public Positions in Probolinggo Regency

The corruption case involving the buying and selling of public positions in Probolinggo Regency became one of the most widely discussed cases of abuse of power in local politics in Indonesia. The case emerged after the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) conducted a sting operation on August 30, 2021, against the then Regent of Probolinggo, Puput Tantriana Sari, along with several other parties allegedly involved in bribery practices related to the appointment of acting village heads within the Government of Probolinggo Regency. Following the investigation, the KPK named 22 individuals as suspects, consisting of regional leaders, a member of the Indonesian House of Representatives, civil servants, district heads, and candidates for acting village head positions.

Islamic political ethics views political authority as a trust that must be exercised through justice, integrity, and responsibility for public welfare. Al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, and Ibn Taymiyyah emphasize justice, moral leadership, and the protection of society as fundamental requirements of governance. These principles are reinforced by *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah*, which positions public welfare and the prevention of harm as essential objectives of governance. Contemporary Islamic governance literature further connects these values with accountability, transparency, and ethical leadership. Accordingly, this study uses amanah, justice, moral responsibility, and integrity as analytical dimensions for examining the exercise of political and bureaucratic power in the Probolinggo case.

According to the official explanation provided by the KPK, the case was related to the appointment process for village head positions in Probolinggo Regency in 2021. Approximately 252 village heads from 24 districts had reached the end of their terms of office, requiring the regional government to appoint acting village heads drawn from the ranks of civil servants (Jack et al., 2021; Siegel, 2022). However, the appointment process allegedly did not proceed objectively or professionally. Civil servants seeking acting village head positions reportedly had to obtain approval from certain influential parties within the regional government.

During its 2021 investigation, the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) uncovered a bribery scheme related to the appointment of acting village heads in Probolinggo Regency. According to the KPK Annual Report 2021, civil servants proposed as acting village heads were required to provide IDR 20 million, while an additional contribution of IDR 5 million was associated with the rental of village treasury land. The KPK reported that these payments were

connected to the appointment process and involved candidates seeking acting village head positions. During the investigation, the KPK secured IDR 362.5 million in cash and documents related to the case. These facts are documented in the KPK Annual Report 2021, which records the chronology and evidence obtained in the Probolinggo case. The KPK also subsequently described the case as involving the alleged sale of village-head positions, with the appointment process influenced by financial payments and political authority. These documented practices indicate that the appointment mechanism was affected by transactional interests rather than solely by administrative and merit-based considerations.

These findings demonstrate that the appointment process was governed by patronage and financial transactions rather than competence and bureaucratic professionalism. Public office was treated as a political and economic commodity, reflecting the systematic misuse of political authority within the regional bureaucracy (Matinja, Ladi et al., 2025; Syam & Afdal, 2025). Consequently, the Probolinggo case illustrates that the abuse of power extended beyond legal violations to represent a broader ethical crisis in local governance, where transactional practices became institutionalized and undermined the principles of integrity, meritocracy, and public accountability.



Figure 1. Flowchart Mechanism of Ethical Violations in Regional Job Appointments

Source: Processed by the author based on KPK data, national media reports, and research analysis findings, 2026

Figure 1 illustrates the process of local political power abuse, beginning with the involvement of regional heads and bureaucratic elites in controlling authority over public appointments. This control influences the selection process for acting village heads, creating opportunities for transactional practices and the buying and selling of positions. Such practices represent an abuse of local political power and contradict the principles of Islamic political ethics, particularly trustworthiness, justice, moral responsibility, and integrity. When these principles are not upheld, the quality of regional governance is weakened because appointments are no longer fully oriented toward public interests and bureaucratic professionalism. This condition may ultimately reduce public trust in regional government, establishing a causal sequence linking the control of authority, transactional appointments, ethical violations, weakened governance, and declining public trust.

The Probolinggo case serves as an example of how abuse of power can occur in local politics through control over the government bureaucracy. Public positions, which should be utilized for public service, were instead exploited as instruments for the exchange of political and economic interests. As a result, the principles of professionalism and meritocracy within the bureaucracy were weakened, while public trust in the regional government declined. The case demonstrates violations of the principles of Islamic political ethics, particularly those related to trustworthiness, justice, moral responsibility, and leadership integrity in the exercise of public power

Integration of Islamic Political Ethics in the Case of Abuse of Power in Local Politics in Probolinggo Regency

Trustworthiness in the Perspective of Islamic Political Ethics

The principle of Amanah (trustworthiness) in Islamic political ethics views public power as a moral responsibility that must be exercised for the benefit of society rather than for personal, political, or economic interests. As an ethical obligation, trustworthiness requires public officials to use their authority with integrity, accountability, and a commitment to public welfare. Any misuse of public office for private gain therefore constitutes a fundamental violation of the public trust and the ethical principles of Islamic governance.

The Probolinggo case demonstrates a serious erosion of this principle. The 2021 investigation by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) revealed a structured bribery scheme involving regional leaders and civil servants in the appointment of acting village heads, with public positions allegedly exchanged through financial payments and ongoing economic commitments. Reports from national media further indicated that village head appointments were treated as economic assets rather than public mandates, reflecting a shift from merit-based governance to a transactional system driven by political and financial interests (Ntshangase et al., 2024; Lestari et al., 2025). These findings suggest that the abuse of power was institutionalized through networks of patronage within the regional bureaucracy rather than being limited to isolated individual misconduct.

From the perspective of Islamic political ethics, these practices represent a structural violation of Amanah at both the individual and institutional levels. Public authority was no longer exercised as a trust for serving society but became an instrument for political patronage and economic gain, undermining bureaucratic integrity and public confidence in government. Consequently, the Probolinggo case demonstrates that the erosion of trustworthiness is not merely a legal issue but a systemic ethical crisis, underscoring the importance of restoring Amanah as the foundation of transparent, accountable, and integrity-based local governance.

Justice in the Distribution of Local Political Power

The principle of justice ('Adl) in Islamic political ethics emphasizes that the exercise and distribution of public authority must be grounded in objectivity, competence, integrity, and the broader public interest. Justice requires that access to public positions and state resources be governed by transparent, accountable, and merit-based mechanisms rather than personal relationships, political affiliation, patronage, or other forms of partiality. Within this perspective, public office is understood as a trust (amanah) that carries responsibility toward society, requiring

decision-makers to place collective interests above individual or group interests. Recruitment, appointment, and promotion within public institutions should therefore be based on clearly defined qualifications, demonstrated competence, integrity, and the capacity to fulfill public responsibilities effectively.

The concept of 'Adl also extends beyond the formal principle of equality before the law by emphasizing substantive fairness in access to public authority and state resources. Equal treatment does not necessarily mean that every individual receives identical opportunities or outcomes, but rather that institutional processes provide fair and non-discriminatory opportunities for qualified individuals to participate in public administration and benefit from state resources. In this context, justice requires public positions to be entrusted to individuals who possess the appropriate competence and integrity, while the allocation of public resources should respond to legitimate social needs and the public interest. The implementation of 'Adl consequently provides an ethical foundation for limiting favoritism, political intervention, and discriminatory practices in public administration while strengthening meritocracy, institutional trust, and the legitimacy of government decisions.

The Probolinggo case demonstrates a clear violation of this principle. The 2021 investigation by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) revealed that the appointment of acting village heads was shaped by bribery and financial transactions instead of merit-based selection, allowing political and economic considerations to replace competence as the primary criterion for public office. This transactional system created structural inequality by limiting opportunities for qualified candidates lacking financial resources or political connections, while reinforcing broader patronage practices within the regional bureaucracy.

From the perspective of Islamic political ethics, these practices constitute both procedural and substantive injustice because they undermine transparency, accountability, and the equitable distribution of public authority. Officials appointed through transactional mechanisms are more likely to prioritize political and economic returns over public service, thereby weakening governance quality and increasing the risk of corruption and abuse of power. Consequently, the Probolinggo case illustrates that the erosion of justice reflects a systemic ethical failure, highlighting the importance of restoring meritocracy, fairness, and public welfare as the foundation of local political governance (Lestari & Nurdiansyah B, 2024; Wahid & Nurdiansyah, 2025).

Moral Responsibility in the Exercise of Power

In Islamic political ethics, moral responsibility is a fundamental obligation of every holder of public office, extending beyond legal and administrative accountability to encompass ethical responsibility for decisions affecting the public interest (Firdaus & Aziz, 2026; Khoiriyah & Muzakki, 2025). Power is regarded as a trust that must be exercised to promote public welfare, making any misuse of authority that harms society a serious ethical violation. Accordingly, leaders are expected not only to avoid corruption but also to ensure that governance is conducted fairly, transparently, and in accordance with moral principles.

The Probolinggo case demonstrates a substantial decline in moral responsibility among public officials. The 2021 investigation by the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) uncovered bribery in the appointment of acting village heads involving regional leaders and civil servants, while national media reports revealed systematic position trading through financial

transactions and ongoing economic commitments. These findings indicate that public authority was exercised to secure political and economic benefits rather than to serve the public interest, reflecting a fundamental departure from the ethical principles of Islamic political leadership (Abdillah et al., 2023; Fuadi, 2024).

The findings further suggest that weak moral responsibility became institutionalized within the regional bureaucracy through patronage networks and ineffective oversight, creating greater opportunities for corruption and the abuse of power. This ethical deterioration undermined public trust and weakened the moral legitimacy of local government, demonstrating that the crisis extended beyond structural and legal deficiencies to encompass a broader failure of ethical governance. Therefore, strengthening moral responsibility grounded in Islamic political ethics is essential for promoting transparent, accountable, and integrity-based local governance.

Leadership Integrity and the Ethical Crisis of Local Politics

Leadership integrity within the framework of Islamic political ethics refers to the consistent alignment between moral principles, verbal commitments, and concrete actions in the exercise of public authority. It is not limited merely to compliance with formal legal rules, but also requires leaders to embody fundamental ethical values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), honesty, justice, responsibility, and a strong commitment to serving the public interest. From this perspective, political leadership is understood as a moral responsibility in which every decision, policy, and bureaucratic action should be directed toward achieving the common good and protecting society from the misuse of power. Integrity therefore functions as an essential ethical foundation for ensuring that public authority is exercised responsibly, transparently, and fairly. It also plays a significant role in preventing corruption, abuse of office, conflicts of interest, and other forms of unethical conduct within government institutions. By maintaining consistency between ethical values and administrative practices, leaders can strengthen institutional legitimacy, promote accountable governance, and preserve public trust in government.

The Probolinggo case reveals a significant deterioration of leadership integrity. According to the Indonesian Corruption Eradication Commission (KPK) investigation in 2021, regional leaders and several civil servants were allegedly involved in bribery related to the appointment of acting village heads, with public positions reportedly exchanged through financial transactions. Reports from national media further indicated that these appointments were influenced by informal agreements rather than merit-based administrative procedures, demonstrating that transactional interests had replaced ethical considerations in public decision-making (Longo et al., 2025; Mamshae, 2025). From the perspective of Islamic political ethics, these practices reflect a serious deviation from the principles of integrity, as political authority was exercised for personal and economic gain rather than public welfare.

The findings further suggest that weakened leadership integrity was not limited to individual misconduct but had become embedded within the regional bureaucratic system through ineffective internal oversight and widespread transactional practices. This institutionalized erosion of integrity undermined public confidence in local government and weakened the legitimacy of political leadership. Consequently, the Probolinggo case illustrates that strengthening leadership integrity based on the principles of *Amanah*, justice, and moral responsibility is essential for preventing the abuse of power and promoting transparent, accountable, and ethical local governance.

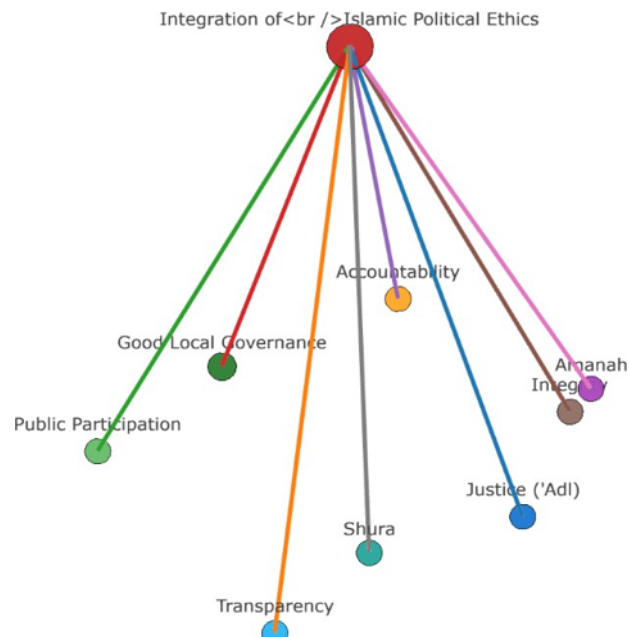


Figure 2. Governance model of Islamic Political Ethics
Source data processes by Nvivo with the authors 2026

Figure 2 depicts the Wheel Governance Model, which places the Integration of Islamic Political Ethics at the core or center of transformation in efforts to address abuse of power in local politics in Probolinggo Regency. The main theme is positioned at the top and is directly linked to all supporting dimensions, indicating that the application of Islamic political ethics is both a normative and strategic foundation in building political governance with greater integrity. The relationships formed through connecting lines indicate that each dimension does not stand alone but rather is a complementary part in realizing a regional government system oriented towards moral values, justice, and the public interest. This model also shows that the success of the integration of Islamic political ethics depends on the ability of each dimension to interact synergistically in the governance process (Abdurrahman, 2025; Luhuringbudi et al., 2025; Marwa & Mustika, 2024).

The dimensions surrounding the core of the model represent the key findings of this study, emphasizing that the integration of Islamic political ethics requires strengthening the principles of Justice ('Adl), Amanah, Integrity, Transparency, Accountability, Shura, and Public Participation to prevent the abuse of power in local politics. These interconnected principles establish a comprehensive ethical governance framework that promotes fairness, responsible leadership, participatory decision-making, and public oversight while reinforcing institutional integrity. Their integration ultimately leads to Good Local Governance, demonstrating that effective governance depends not only on formal regulations and administrative mechanisms but also on the internalization of ethical values by political actors and public officials (Andersson & Ekelund, 2022; Souza & Rossoni, 2025; Suteki et al., 2025). Consequently, the model illustrates that Islamic political ethics serves as both a normative foundation and an institutional framework for fostering transparent, accountable, ethical, and public-oriented local governance while strengthening public trust and minimizing opportunities for the abuse of power.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the abuse of power in local politics in Probolinggo Regency extends beyond a legal issue and reflects a broader ethical failure in public governance. From the perspective of Islamic political ethics, the principles of Amanah (trustworthiness), Justice ('Adl), Moral Responsibility, and Integrity were not effectively upheld, as evidenced by transactional practices in the appointment of village heads, the prioritization of political interests over merit-based selection, and the misuse of public authority for personal or group benefit. These practices weakened leadership integrity and undermined public trust in local government institutions. The findings suggest that corruption in local politics should be understood not only as a violation of law but also as a manifestation of ethical deterioration in the exercise of political power. Therefore, strengthening the ethical principles of trustworthiness, justice, moral responsibility, and integrity is essential for promoting clean, accountable, and trustworthy local governance.

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