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## Digital Political Communication and Youth Political Participation in 2024 Presidential Election

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### Abstract

Youth political participation has become a major concern in contemporary democracies as elections are increasingly shaped by digitally mediated communication environments. The rapid expansion of social media platforms has transformed how young citizens access political information, engage with campaign content, develop political awareness, and participate in electoral processes. Within this global transformation, Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election provides an important case for examining how digital political communication influences youth political participation due to the numerical dominance of Millennial and Generation Z voters in the national electorate. This study investigates the role of social media and interpersonal communication in shaping political participation among young Indonesian voters. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research combines a nationally representative survey of 1,200 respondents across 38 provinces with focus group discussions to explore both quantitative trends and qualitative experiences. The findings reveal near-universal internet connectivity among young voters, with social media functioning as the primary source of political information. Approximately 66 percent of respondents acknowledged that digital political content influenced their presidential preferences, particularly interactive and visually engaging campaign formats. Nevertheless, interpersonal communication through family members, peers, and direct candidate interaction remained significant in reinforcing political trust and validating electoral decisions. Despite low interest in formal political institutions, more than 91 percent of respondents expressed intention to vote, indicating strong electoral participation among

Indonesian youth. The study concludes that youth political participation in Indonesia reflects a hybrid model of democratic engagement in which digital political communication facilitates political learning and awareness, while interpersonal communication consolidates electoral commitment.

**Keywords:** Digital political communication; Generation Z voters; Millennial voters; Social media; Youth political participation

## Introduction

The 2024 Presidential Election in Indonesia marked a defining moment in the evolution of the country's democratic participation, driven by the unprecedented numerical dominance of young voters from the Millennial and Generation Z cohorts (Helminasari et al., 2025; Kuncoro et al., 2024; Ningsih et al., 2024; Ramdani et al., 2024). Together, these two generations constituted more than half of the national electorate, positioning them as the primary determinants of electoral outcomes. This demographic transformation did not occur in isolation but coincided with the rapid digitalization of Indonesian society, which has fundamentally reshaped patterns of political communication, information consumption, and civic engagement. Understanding the voting behavior of Millennials and Generation Z thus requires situating electoral participation within a broader context of digital media ecosystems and interpersonal social relations.

The near-universal access to internet connectivity around the world has transformed digital platforms into everyday infrastructures of social life (Amalyah, 2025; Burhanuddin et al., 2021; Faisal & Mesra, 2024; Lim, 2018). Survey data from this study demonstrate that over 98 percent of Millennial and Generation Z respondents are connected to the internet on a daily basis (Setiawan, 2021). This high level of digital integration signifies not merely technological adoption but the emergence of a generation whose social interactions, professional activities, entertainment practices, and political awareness are increasingly mediated through online platforms. Social media, in particular, has become embedded in daily routines, functioning as a primary gateway through which individuals encounter information, construct social identities, and engage in public discourse.

Digital platforms are transforming youth political participation by providing new avenues for engagement and decentralizing power (Wahyuningroem et al., 2022). This digital transformation has displaced traditional mass media as the dominant source of electoral information (Ariestandiy et al., 2024; Fernández & Rodríguez-Virgili, 2019; Kirichuk, 2025; Rudnieva, 2024). Whereas previous generations relied heavily on television broadcasts, radio programs, and print journalism to follow political developments, Millennials and Generation Z now turn primarily to social media platforms for political news and campaign content. This shift indicates a

structural reconfiguration of political communication flows from centralized, hierarchical systems toward decentralized, participatory networks.

Empirical findings demonstrate that this digital exposure translates into tangible influence on electoral preferences (Gibson et al., 2023; Gupta, 2025; Klüver, 2025; Moeller et al., 2018; Ramírez-Dueñas & Vinuesa-Tejero, 2020; Tobias-Mamina et al., 2022; Vaccari & Valeriani, 2021). Political content encountered on social media affected their choice of presidential candidates. This influence operates through multiple mechanisms. Creative campaign content utilizing artificial intelligence technologies, interactive formats, and visually compelling storytelling captured the greatest attention among young voters. These innovative approaches enhanced emotional engagement and memorability, making political messages more appealing within crowded digital environments. However, the attraction to creative presentation did not replace the demand for substantive information. Content outlining policy programs, visions, and political commitments ranked second in popularity, reflecting young voters' desire to evaluate candidates based on tangible proposals rather than symbolic imagery alone.

This combination of emotional appeal and rational evaluation illustrates a hybrid model of contemporary youth voting behaviour (Hunawa & Polinggapo, 2025; Panagopoulos & Wang, 2025; Wang, 2013). Social media content functions both as an affective stimulus that draws attention and as an informational resource that informs decision-making. Rather than being passive recipients of propaganda, Millennials and Generation Z actively interpret, compare, and assess political messages across multiple digital sources (Alifatunnisa et al., 2024; Diehl et al., 2019; Farid, 2024; Volkmer, 2021). Qualitative insights from focus group discussions revealed that young voters frequently use social media to examine candidates' strengths, weaknesses, and credibility before arriving at electoral conclusions. In this sense, digital platforms serve as arenas of political learning, deliberation, and identity formation.

Despite the central role of social media, youth political participation cannot be understood solely through digital exposure. Interpersonal communication through family members, peers, and direct candidate interaction continues to shape political trust, reinforce political preferences, and validate electoral decisions. Young voters navigate political choices through a combination of digital information consumption and social affirmation processes, reflecting a hybrid model of democratic engagement in which online communication and offline social relationships operate simultaneously. (Beck et al., 2002; Campus et al., 2008; Himelboim et al., 2012; Jung et al., 2011; Muralidharan & Sung, 2016). The study's findings reveal that nearly 64 percent of respondents perceived face-to-face campaign activities and direct interpersonal engagement by candidates as influential in shaping political preferences. Models such as community visits, open dialogues, sports events, and informal gatherings were particularly effective in fostering emotional connections and building trust between candidates and young voters.

This study examines how digital political communication influences youth political participation in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election by focusing on the experiences of Millennial and Generation Z voters. Specifically, the study explores the role of social media as a source of political information, the influence of digital campaign content on electoral preferences, and the continuing significance of interpersonal communication in shaping voting decisions. By situating the Indonesian case within broader global transformations in digital democracy, this study contributes to contemporary discussions concerning youth political engagement, political communication, and democratic participation in the digital age.

## **Literature Review**

### **The Use of Social Media in Politics**

The dominance of social media platforms in politics is further evidenced by their widespread adoption across generational cohorts (Chen et al., 2024; Fietkiewicz, 2017; Shepherd & Lane, 2019). WhatsApp emerged as the most commonly used application, followed by YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram. These platforms differ not only in technological features but also in the types of political content they facilitate. WhatsApp functions primarily as a private communication and information-sharing network within trusted social circles, while YouTube offers long-form informational content, campaign advertisements, and political commentary. TikTok and Instagram, on the other hand, prioritize short-form, visually engaging materials that blend entertainment with political messaging. The popularity of TikTok among Generation Z underscores the growing influence of algorithm-driven content delivery and trend-based political narratives.

This transformation in media consumption has profound implications for political awareness and preference formation (Boulianne, 2016; Ercegovic & Ercegovic, 2023; Sahu, 2025; Van Aelst et al., 2017). Social media does not simply transmit information but actively structures how political realities are perceived. The continuous stream of political content—ranging from official campaign messages and policy explanations to memes, commentary, and peer-generated opinions—creates an immersive political information environment. Young voters encounter political narratives throughout their daily digital routines, often without deliberately seeking political news (Hargittai & Shaw, 2013). As a result, political learning becomes informal, fragmented, and embedded within entertainment-oriented platforms.

### **Youth Participation in Digital Era**

Youth political participation refers to the ways young citizens engage in political processes, express political preferences, and contribute to democratic life through both conventional and non-conventional forms of participation (Faryal, 2024; Saud & Margono, 2021; Wathan & Masri, 2024). Traditional theories of political participation emphasize activities such as voting, joining political parties, participating in campaigns, and engaging in civic organizations as indicators of democratic

involvement (Oross & Szabó, 2018). Classical civic voluntarism theory argues that political participation is influenced by resources, political motivation, and recruitment networks, suggesting that individuals participate when they possess sufficient knowledge, interest, time, and social encouragement. However, contemporary scholarship argues that younger generations often demonstrate alternative patterns of participation that differ from older cohorts. Rather than engaging primarily through formal political institutions, Millennials and Generation Z tend to prefer more flexible, issue-oriented, and digitally mediated forms of engagement. Their participation is frequently expressed through social media interaction, online discussions, digital activism, content sharing, and informal political expression, reflecting broader transformations in democratic communication environments.

The rise of digital communication technologies has significantly reshaped theories of youth political participation by positioning social media as a central arena of political socialization and informal political learning (Bennett et al., 2012; Boulianne, 2016; Saud & Margono, 2021). Networked communication theory suggests that digital platforms enable decentralized flows of political information in which citizens actively consume, interpret, and redistribute political content within online social networks. In this context, political participation is no longer limited to institutional membership or face-to-face mobilization but increasingly occurs through digitally mediated interaction. Nevertheless, digital participation also remains closely connected to interpersonal communication processes, as family members, peers, and trusted social networks continue to influence political trust and electoral decision-making. Consequently, contemporary youth political participation is often understood as a hybrid phenomenon combining digital engagement, informal political learning, and social affirmation within both online and offline communication environments.

## **Method**

### ***Design***

This study employed a mixed-methods research design integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative focus group discussions (FGDs) to comprehensively examine the voting behavior of Millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election. The mixed-methods approach was adopted to capture both large-scale behavioral patterns and the subjective interpretations through which young voters make political decisions. Quantitative data provided empirical measurement of media usage, political preferences, and participation tendencies, while qualitative insights enriched understanding of the mechanisms underlying these patterns.

### ***Survey Design and Sampling***

The quantitative component consisted of a nationally representative survey conducted between 2 and 12 November 2023 involving 1,200 respondents drawn from Millennial (aged approximately 28–42 years) and Generation Z (aged approximately 17–27 years) cohorts. The sample was proportionally distributed across 38 provinces in Indonesia to reflect regional population structures. Provincial representation closely matched national demographic data, with the highest concentrations of respondents located in Java—particularly West Java, East Java, and Central Java—consistent with population density patterns.

The sample size produced an estimated margin of error of approximately 2.8 percent, enabling robust inference regarding youth voting behavior at the national level. Respondents were selected using proportional sampling methods to ensure representation across gender, age group, education level, employment status, and socioeconomic background. Gender distribution was balanced, while religious and ethnic compositions closely aligned with national demographic profiles.

### ***Data Collection Instruments***

The survey instrument consisted of structured questionnaires designed to measure multiple dimensions of political behavior and communication influence. Key variables included internet connectivity, frequency and type of social media usage, primary sources of political information, perceived influence of digital political content on candidate preferences, forms of political expression, interest in formal political participation, voting intentions, and the influence of interpersonal communication within social networks.

To complement survey findings, FGDs were conducted with seven participants representing both generational cohorts and diverse geographic locations. Participants were selected to reflect variation in occupation, regional background, and media engagement habits. The FGDs explored experiences of accessing political information through social media, interpretations of campaign content, perceptions of candidate communication strategies, and the role of interpersonal discussions in shaping political choices.

### ***Data Analysis***

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to identify dominant behavioral patterns across the respondent population. Percentages were used to illustrate trends in social media adoption, political information sourcing, content influence, participation intentions, and interpersonal communication effects. The proportional nature of the sample allowed for interpretation at the national youth electorate level. Qualitative data from FGDs were transcribed and thematically analyzed. Recurring themes related to digital dependency, content credibility, emotional engagement, rational evaluation, social validation, and trust-building were

identified. These themes were then integrated with quantitative findings to provide explanatory depth.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study received ethical approval from the institutional review board of Universitas Padjadjaran prior to data collection. The research procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical standards for social science research involving human participants. All participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without consequence. Informed consent was obtained from all survey respondents and focus group discussion participants before participation. To ensure confidentiality and privacy, all data were anonymized, and no personally identifiable information was disclosed in the reporting of findings. The collected data were used solely for academic research purposes.

### **Result and Discussion**

#### ***Sociodemographic Foundations of Millennial and Generation Z Voters***

Understanding the voting behavior of Millennials and Generation Z in the 2024 Presidential Election requires first examining their sociodemographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The survey data show that Millennials constituted 58.7 percent of the sample (704 respondents), while Generation Z comprised 41.3 percent (496 respondents). This distribution reflects the broader demographic composition of Indonesia's electorate, where these two cohorts collectively dominate the voter population. Gender distribution in the sample was relatively balanced, with a slight majority of male respondents (51.2 percent) compared to female respondents (48.8 percent). This near parity indicates that voting behavior trends identified in the study are not strongly skewed by gender imbalance. In addition, religious and ethnic compositions closely mirrored national statistics, with Islam representing 88 percent of respondents and ethnic groups such as Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, Madurese, and others proportionally represented.

The alignment between sample and national demographic data strengthens the representativeness of the findings. Educational attainment among respondents was predominantly secondary level (55.2 percent completed senior high school), followed by junior secondary (18 percent), tertiary education (12.5 percent diploma or bachelor's), and smaller proportions with postgraduate qualifications. This distribution suggests that the majority of young voters possess moderate educational backgrounds, which likely influences their media literacy levels and political information processing.

Employment data reveal that 52 percent of respondents were working, 12.6 percent were students, 20 percent identified as homemakers, and 15.4 percent were not working. Among working respondents, private sector employees constituted the largest group (23.2 percent), followed by entrepreneurs (18.4 percent), factory

workers or farmers (13.8 percent), and informal workers (11 percent) . This occupational diversity indicates that Millennials and Generation Z voters are embedded in varied economic contexts, ranging from formal employment to entrepreneurial and informal sectors.

Monthly expenditure data further indicate that most respondents fell within lower-middle to middle-income categories, particularly within the range of Rp 1,000,000 to Rp 3,000,000. These socioeconomic realities shape political priorities, as economic stability, employment opportunities, and cost-of-living concerns likely influence electoral considerations. Overall, the sociodemographic findings demonstrate that Millennials and Generation Z voters are not a homogeneous bloc. Their diversity in education, employment, and economic status suggests that voting behavior is shaped by intersecting structural factors, even as digital media and interpersonal communication operate as overarching influences.

### ***Social Media as the Primary Political Information and Education***

A defining characteristic of Millennial and Generation Z voters in the 2024 election is their near-universal digital connectivity. Survey results show that 98.2 percent of respondents access the internet daily, with Generation Z slightly higher (99.2 percent) than Millennials (97.3 percent). This pervasive connectivity establishes the digital sphere as the primary environment within which political awareness develops.

Platform usage data highlight WhatsApp (98.3 percent), YouTube (94.6 percent), TikTok (92.8 percent), and Instagram (90 percent) as dominant applications. These platforms differ in function, yet collectively create a dense informational ecosystem. WhatsApp facilitates peer-to-peer sharing of political messages within trusted networks; YouTube provides long-form explanations and campaign materials; TikTok delivers short, highly visual content; and Instagram blends visual storytelling with interactive engagement.

When asked about primary political information sources, 59 percent of respondents identified social media, compared to 32 percent for television and marginal percentages for newspapers and radio. This displacement of traditional media signals a structural shift in political communication patterns. Social media's dominance stems from its accessibility, speed, and interactivity, allowing users to access campaign messages, policy debates, and commentary instantaneously.

Intensity data show that 57.3 percent of respondents frequently or very frequently use social media to obtain political information. This habitual engagement suggests that political exposure is integrated into daily digital routines. Unlike scheduled television broadcasts, social media content appears continuously, blending political messaging with entertainment and social interaction.

Qualitative findings reinforce this pattern, with participants emphasizing that social media provides comprehensive, rapid access to campaign developments. Digital

immersion thus creates an environment in which political narratives are encountered repeatedly and often unintentionally, increasing their salience.

### ***Influence of Social Media Content on Political Preferences***

Beyond information exposure, social media significantly influences electoral preferences. Approximately 66 percent of respondents reported that social media content either “strongly influenced” (35.6 percent) or “influenced” (30.4 percent) their choice of presidential candidates. This indicates that digital platforms do not merely inform but actively shape political attitudes.

Content preference data reveal nuanced patterns. The most favored campaign model was creative content utilizing artificial intelligence (28.1 percent). This preference reflects generational attraction to innovation and technological sophistication. However, substantive content outlining programs, visions, and political commitments ranked second (17.4 percent), demonstrating that informational clarity remains essential. Interactive content such as live-stream question-and-answer sessions (14.3 percent) also garnered strong support. Such formats provide a sense of direct engagement, enhancing perceptions of authenticity and transparency. In contrast, negative campaigning attracted relatively low interest (10.4 percent), suggesting generational resistance to divisive political messaging. These findings illustrate that Millennials and Generation Z evaluate political content through a dual lens: aesthetic appeal and substantive credibility. Creative presentation captures attention, but sustained preference formation depends on perceived programmatic relevance.

### ***Digital Political Expression and Symbolic Participation***

Although young voters are highly exposed to political content, active political expression remains moderate. Only 17.7 percent reported expressing political opinions through social media, while 6.3 percent did so through direct public interaction. This indicates that while digital platforms are preferred spaces for expression, most respondents remain observational rather than overtly activist. This pattern reflects a form of symbolic participation. Social media enables low-risk political engagement, such as commenting or sharing content, without requiring formal affiliation or public exposure. The digital environment thus lowers participation barriers while preserving individual autonomy.

Furthermore, when asked about formal political involvement, large majorities expressed disinterest in joining political parties (83.6 percent not interested) or running for legislative office (83.2 percent not interested). However, 22.1 percent showed interest in becoming campaign volunteers. This suggests selective engagement: young voters prefer flexible, issue-based participation over institutional commitment.

### ***High Electoral Participation and Motivations***

Despite limited formal engagement, electoral participation intentions were remarkably high. Over 91 percent stated they would vote in the 2024 election. This challenge narratives of youth apathy and indicates strong commitment to electoral democracy. The primary motivation (45.1 percent) was the desire to select preferred candidates. Social influence accounted for 20.1 percent, while 14.5 percent cited civic responsibility and rejection of abstention. Notably, 17.1 percent mentioned material incentives, highlighting the coexistence of normative and pragmatic motivations. Qualitative insights reveal that many respondents privately process political information before making firm decisions. While they may not publicly declare preferences, they actively evaluate digital content and social input prior to voting.

### ***Interpersonal Communication as Affirmation and Trust-Building***

Interpersonal communication significantly affects political preferences. Approximately 63.9 percent reported that face-to-face campaign interactions influenced their choices. Models such as blusukan (20.6 percent) and community sports or entertainment events (20.4 percent) were particularly favoured. Furthermore, 48.7 percent acknowledged that communication with close social networks influenced their preferences. Parents (35.9 percent) and friends or colleagues (34 percent) were the most influential actors. These findings demonstrate that interpersonal relationships remain critical channels for trust-building and political affirmation. Qualitative narratives show that social media often initiates political interest, while interpersonal discussions provide reassurance and final confirmation. This dual-channel influence underscores the complementary relationship between digital and face-to-face communication.

### ***Discussion***

The findings of this study demonstrate that Millennial and Generation Z voters in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election are embedded within a digitally saturated political environment, where social media serves as the dominant gateway for political information while interpersonal communication continues to function as a critical mechanism of trust and validation. Evidence is strong across multiple dimensions. (Ramdani et al., 2024) confirm social media played a crucial role in political campaigns reaching young voters, with the majority of Indonesian internet users belonging to these demographics. (Sulistya & Lianingsih, 2024) found 85% of respondents actively use social media, with 75% reporting increased electoral involvement after digital campaign exposure. Platform-specific data shows based on (Suprihatin et al., 2024) that Instagram and TikTok as leading platforms, with traditional media increasingly rarely used. However, nuance exists, (Kusumawardani et al., 2025) found 46% of Gen Z preferred mass media versus 39% relying on social media, suggesting social media is primary but not universally dominant. Additionally, (Candraningrum et al., 2025) noted that young voters depend heavily on algorithmic content, raising concerns about information quality rather than mere accessibility.

This dual influence reflects a transformation in contemporary political engagement, characterized not by the replacement of traditional social relations but by their reconfiguration within digital communication ecosystems.

The near-universal internet connectivity among respondents confirms that political awareness among young voters is now fundamentally mediated through digital platforms. With over 98 percent accessing the internet daily and nearly 60 percent relying primarily on social media for political information, the digital sphere has effectively displaced conventional mass media as the principal arena of political communication. This structural shift supports broader arguments that political communication has transitioned from hierarchical broadcast models toward decentralized and participatory networks. Rather than passively consuming political news, young voters encounter continuous streams of political narratives embedded within entertainment content, peer interactions, and algorithm-driven feeds. This environment intensifies exposure while simultaneously blurring boundaries between civic information and everyday digital life.

Importantly, the study shows that social media does not merely function as an informational resource but actively shapes political preferences. Approximately two-thirds of respondents acknowledged that digital content influenced their candidate choices, illustrating the persuasive capacity of online political communication. Digital content demonstrably influences candidate choices, though the sources provide limited quantitative evidence of effect magnitude. Multiple studies confirm online political communication's persuasive capacity. (Jihan & Susanti, 2025) found that digital campaign strategies have become a decisive factor in election outcomes, while (Ihsan, 2025) reported that the use of digital media is able to effectively change voter behavior. (Dharta et al., 2025) similarly documented that social media influences "voter behaviour," particularly among younger generations. However, the evidence base has significant limitations. None of the available sources provide specific effect sizes, sample sizes, or quantitative metrics comparing digital versus traditional media influence. (Neacsu & Otovescu, 2024) explored the potential impact of online communication on electoral behavior, suggesting the relationship remains incompletely understood. The consensus supports persuasive capacity, but concrete empirical measurements are absent from these sources.

This hybrid behavior challenges persistent narratives portraying young voters as politically superficial or easily manipulated by viral content. Focus group insights reveal that many participants actively cross-check information, assess credibility, and compare candidates' positions before forming electoral conclusions. Social media thus operates as a site of informal political learning, where exposure to diverse perspectives fosters awareness and critical reflection. The constant circulation of political content increases issue salience while enabling voters to engage in autonomous evaluation processes, albeit within algorithmically curated environments. Overall, the findings reveal a hybrid model of youth political engagement in Indonesia's digital democracy. Millennials and Generation Z are

neither disengaged citizens nor passive digital consumers. They navigate political choices through continuous digital exposure, critical evaluation of content, and interpersonal affirmation. This layered decision-making process reflects the evolving nature of democratic participation in digitally mediated societies, where technology reshapes information flows without erasing social influence structures.

## Conclusion

The voting behavior of Millennials and Generation Z in Indonesia's 2024 Presidential Election reflects a complex interaction between digital media ecosystems and enduring social relationships. Social media has become the dominant source of political information, shaping political interest, preferences, and modes of engagement. Creative, interactive, and visually compelling content captures attention, while substantive policy messaging informs decision-making.

The findings collectively illustrate a hybrid political behavior model among Millennials and Generation Z. Social media functions as the primary informational and affective arena, shaping political awareness and preference formation. Interpersonal communication acts as a validating mechanism that strengthens confidence in electoral decisions. Electoral participation remains high, though institutional political involvement is limited. This pattern reflects a generational shift toward digitally mediated yet socially grounded democratic engagement. Young voters are neither apathetic nor blindly digital; rather, they navigate political choices through a layered process of exposure, evaluation, affirmation, and action.

However, digital influence does not operate independently. Interpersonal communication remains essential in validating information and consolidating electoral choices. Family discussions, peer dialogue, and direct candidate interactions function as trust-building processes that transform digital exposure into confident voting decisions. Young voters demonstrate high electoral participation despite limited enthusiasm for formal political institutions. Their engagement is characterized by digital immersion, pragmatic evaluation of candidates, and preference for flexible forms of participation.

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