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Ikhsan Baharudin¹

1. Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Teuku Umar, Indonesia; ORCID: 0000-0001-6546-4082
Correspondence: ikhsan.baharudin@utu.ac.id

Social Media and Youth Political Participation in Indonesia (2021–2025) A Scoping Review with Digital Adoption, Electoral Participation, and Misinformation Context

Abstract



This scoping review synthesizes 2021–2025 evidence on how social media relates to youth political participation in Indonesia, with attention to contemporary digital adoption, election participation indicators, and the governance risks of misinformation. A desk-study scoping approach was used to map empirical findings and dominant mechanisms from peer-reviewed studies and high-provenance institutional sources. Evidence was charted into four themes: (1) participation pathways via political information exposure, networked discussion, and mobilization; (2) divergence between low-cost online engagement and sustained offline participation; (3) mediators and moderators including political efficacy, trust, and misinformation exposure; and (4) the regulatory and platform-policy environment shaping participation ecosystems. Across included studies, social media is consistently linked to political expression, discussion, and online engagement, while translation into offline participation depends strongly on efficacy, organizational channels, and perceived risks. Contextual indicators show a highly connected youth environment and intense electoral communication through platforms, yet also rising concern over disinformation and platform governance. The review concludes that universities and civic institutions should prioritize civic capacity building, media and information literacy, and structured offline participation pathways that can convert digital attention into meaningful democratic engagement.

Keywords: Indonesia; youth political participation; social media; digital democracy; political efficacy; misinformation; elections; scoping review

1. Introduction

Indonesia’s democratic participation increasingly unfolds within digital environments. By early 2024, the country exhibited extensive internet use and widespread engagement with social media platforms, conditions that have reshaped political communication into a routine component of everyday online life. National-level digital indicators for January 2024 point to a very large online population and a substantial volume of social media user identities, underscoring the structural reality that political information, mobilization, and persuasion are now predominantly mediated through digital platforms for much of the population. National survey-based reporting further confirms high levels of connectivity, particularly among younger cohorts. Recent large-scale surveys on internet use document continued growth in penetration rates and provide detailed methodological information on sampling, fieldwork, and demographic coverage for the 2024 survey cycle. In parallel, Indonesia’s electoral institutions have increasingly emphasized not only turnout but broader participation outcomes. Official electoral monitoring frameworks developed around the 2024 elections reflect an institutional effort to assess political participation more comprehensively, extending beyond voting behavior alone. These developments are analytically significant because political participation is not a single or uniform behavior. It encompasses multiple dimensions, including electoral participation (such as voting), institutional participation (such as contacting public officials), civic participation (including volunteering and community engagement), and contentious participation (such as protests or petitioning). Social media environments can lower barriers to political information and connection, particularly for young citizens, but they also introduce risks related to distortion, strategic manipulation, and the spread of misinformation. Contemporary policy and governance debates increasingly reflect these concerns, highlighting the dual role of digital platforms as both facilitators of engagement and potential sources of democratic vulnerability.

Aim of the study.

This article maps evidence from the 2021–2025 period on the relationship between social media use and youth political participation in Indonesia. It identifies dominant mechanisms and moderating factors shaping this relationship and develops implications for higher education and governance that are aligned with Indonesia’s evolving digital–political context.

Research questions.

- RQ1: What mechanisms link social media use to youth political participation in Indonesia?
- RQ2: How do outcomes differ between online participation and offline participation?
- RQ3: Which mediators and moderators (political efficacy, trust, misinformation exposure) shape these relationships?
- RQ4: What implications follow for universities and civic institutions?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Study design

A **scoping review** (desk study) design was adopted to map concepts, measures, and findings across heterogeneous research. This approach is suitable because scholarship varies widely in methods (surveys, case studies, social network analysis, qualitative interviews) and in operational definitions of “youth participation.”

2.2. Search strategy

Searches were conducted in **December 2025** using combinations of keywords such as:

- “Indonesia” AND “youth” OR “students” AND “political participation”
- “social media” OR “digital media” OR “TikTok” OR “X (Twitter)” AND “voting” OR “civic engagement”
- “political efficacy” AND “political discussion” AND “Indonesia”
- “misinformation” AND “online political engagement” AND “Indonesia”

Database and web-based searches were complemented by the targeted retrieval of institutional publications and official election-commission communications in order to contextualize patterns of digital adoption and the broader participation environment. This combined approach enabled triangulation between secondary digital indicators, survey-based evidence, and institutional perspectives on participation monitoring, thereby strengthening the analytical grounding of the study (Yin, 2018; Bennett & Checkel, 2015).

2.3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria:

1. Published 2021–2025;
2. Indonesia-focused evidence and/or Indonesian youth or student samples;
3. Explicit measurement of political participation (online or offline) or closely related constructs (political efficacy, political engagement as a participation pathway);
4. Peer-reviewed publications, conference proceedings with formal editorial review, and high-provenance institutional/official documents.

Exclusion criteria:

1. Opinion pieces without methods;
2. Non-Indonesia studies without clear transfer relevance;
3. Items lacking sufficient provenance or transparency.

2.4. Study selection and charting

Included sources were charted by: year, population, method, key constructs, participation outcomes, and major findings. The final mapped set (Table 1) blends peer-reviewed scholarship and institutional context sources to avoid isolating participation from the digital and governance environment.

2.5. Analytic synthesis

A thematic synthesis organized findings into four domains:

- (1) exposure and network pathways;
- (2) online–offline divergence;
- (3) efficacy, trust, and misinformation as mediators/moderators;
- (4) governance and platform-policy context.

3. Results

3.1. Theme 1: Exposure, network discussion, and mobilization pathways

Multiple studies converge on a shared explanatory mechanism: social media increases young people’s exposure to political information and provides low-friction channels for political discussion among peers, thereby supporting political engagement and participation. Empirical research on Indonesia’s digital democracy shows that online platforms facilitate youth political expression, mobilization, and participation by lowering informational and communicative barriers and enabling new forms of interaction beyond traditional political arenas (Saud & Margono, 2021). Complementary evidence highlights that the “social” dimension of social media often matters as much as the technological platform itself. Quantitative studies linking social networks, political efficacy, and youth participation indicate that networked environments can strengthen civic engagement when interpersonal ties, group belonging, and shared norms reinforce participatory behavior. In such contexts, peer interaction and collective identity function as mediating factors that translate online exposure into sustained political participation (Taylor & Francis–indexed studies).

3.2. Theme 2: Online participation activates more easily than offline participation

A consistent pattern emerging across the mapped literature is one of asymmetry. Social media use shows a strong and robust association with online forms of political participation, such as sharing political content, commenting, and expressive engagement, as well as with political self-expression more broadly. By contrast, the relationship between social media use and offline political participation appears more conditional and context-dependent. Where participation entails higher time costs, organizational involvement, or elevated perceived risk, online exposure and engagement alone are frequently insufficient to translate into sustained offline action. Mixed-method research on digitally mediated movements further illustrates this distinction. While online communication can facilitate rapid information diffusion and support mobilization around salient political episodes, actual offline participation is shaped by additional factors, including issue salience, the presence of organizational infrastructures, and individuals’ perceptions of political efficacy and effectiveness. Empirical studies examining protest-related movements in Indonesia emphasize the role of digital media in identity formation, framing, and initial engagement, but also demonstrate that participation trajectories vary significantly across youth groups, reflecting differences in resources, networks, and motivational structures. These findings suggest that digital platforms function as enabling environments rather than deterministic drivers of offline political participation.

3.3. Theme 3: Political efficacy and information quality as decisive mediators/moderators

Political efficacy repeatedly emerges as a central pathway linking social media use to political participation. When young people believe that political action can produce meaningful outcomes, they are more likely to translate political discussion and information exposure into participatory behavior. Empirical research on university students in Indonesia demonstrates that political discussion—both online and offline—is positively associated with political efficacy, which in turn predicts participation-oriented outcomes. These findings reinforce political efficacy as a practical intervention target for higher education institutions seeking to foster active and informed citizenship (Saud & Margono, 2021). Information quality and exposure to misinformation further shape participation outcomes. Studies examining the relationship between misinformation dynamics and online political engagement indicate that perceived exposure to misleading or false information can influence patterns of political participation and expression, potentially contributing to unequal participation across age groups and levels of digital literacy. Rather than uniformly mobilizing citizens, digital environments may thus amplify participation gaps when misinformation undermines trust, efficacy, or confidence in political processes. Within the Indonesian governance context, concerns about

misinformation have become increasingly salient in public and policy debates. Institutional responses and regulatory discussions have emphasized the responsibility of digital platforms to strengthen content moderation and address disinformation, particularly during politically sensitive periods. These dynamics highlight that the participatory effects of social media are mediated not only by individual attitudes such as efficacy, but also by the broader informational environment in which political communication takes place.

3.4. Theme 4: Platform ecosystems and electoral communication

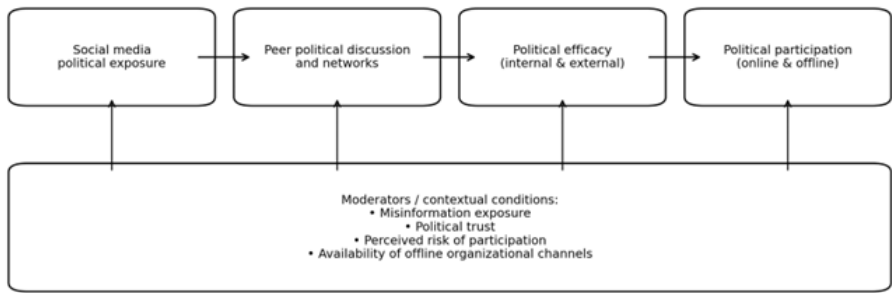
Electoral communication has increasingly adopted platform-native styles and influencer-like persuasive strategies, particularly in efforts to reach younger voters. Contemporary campaign practices demonstrate a shift toward formats that resonate with youth culture, including short-form video, personalized messaging, and interactive content distributed through social media environments. These approaches reflect an adaptation of political communication to the norms and attention structures of digital platforms, where authenticity cues and peer-oriented messaging are often prioritized over traditional campaign rhetoric. Platform-specific analyses further highlight the distinctive role of TikTok as both a space for political interaction and a potential site of distortion during election periods. Algorithmic amplification and short-video formats can enhance message visibility and emotional appeal, but they also create vulnerabilities to manipulation, selective exposure, and the rapid spread of misleading content. Empirical research examining voter behavior in the context of the 2024 election reinforces this dual role of social media: digital platforms can facilitate mobilization and opinion formation, while simultaneously increasing exposure to misinformation and strategic persuasion. These dynamics underscore the need to interpret social media-based electoral communication as a complex governance challenge that combines opportunities for engagement with heightened risks for democratic integrity.

3.5. Contextual indicators: digital adoption and participation monitoring

Indicators of digital adoption provide essential contextual grounding for interpreting patterns of youth political participation. Early-2024 digital metrics point to the extensive scale and reach of online connectivity, including widespread internet access, high levels of social media use, and pervasive mobile connectivity. These structural conditions establish digital platforms as a dominant environment for political information, interaction, and mobilization among younger populations. Survey-based evidence on internet use further documents continued growth in penetration rates and offers methodological transparency regarding sampling, fieldwork, and demographic coverage. Such methodological detail supports the responsible use of these data as contextual evidence rather than as direct causal indicators of political behavior. On the participation side, electoral authority reporting on participation indices related to the 2024 elections signals a shift toward broader conceptualizations of political participation. This approach extends assessment beyond voter turnout alone and reflects institutional interest in understanding and encouraging multiple forms of participation, including engagement among first-time and young voters. Taken together, these indicators frame the digital-political environment in which youth participation occurs and help situate empirical findings within Indonesia's contemporary democratic context.

3.6. Figures, Tables and Schemes

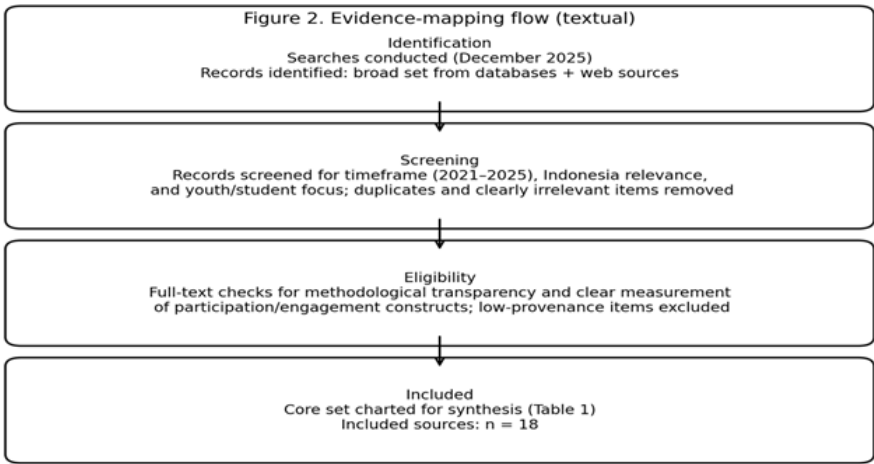
Figure 1. Conceptual mechanism model (synthesis).



Note: The model summarizes pathways commonly reported in the 2021–2025 evidence base. Moderators may strengthen, weaken, or redirect links between stages.

The analytical framework adopted in this study conceptualizes political participation as a multi-step process. Social media–based political exposure first facilitates peer political discussion and networked interaction, which in turn contributes to the development of political efficacy. Enhanced political efficacy increases the likelihood of political participation in both online and offline forms. This sequential logic reflects the understanding that digital exposure alone is insufficient; its participatory effects are mediated through social interaction and subjective beliefs about political influence. The framework further incorporates a set of moderating factors that condition the strength and direction of these relationships. Exposure to misinformation can weaken trust and reduce the translation of engagement into participation. Political trust shapes whether efficacy leads to constructive engagement or withdrawal. Perceived risk—such as fear of social sanction or legal consequences—can dampen offline participation even when online engagement is high. Finally, the availability of offline organizational channels, including student organizations, civic groups, and community networks, influences whether digitally stimulated engagement can be converted into sustained collective action.

Figure 2. Evidence-mapping flow (textual).



Note: Counts prior to inclusion are intentionally not specified to avoid reporting numbers not documented in the review record.

Searches (December 2025) produced a broad set of items. After screening for timeframe, Indonesia relevance, youth/student focus, and methodological transparency, a core set of **18 sources** (peer-reviewed studies and high-provenance institutional materials) were charted for synthesis (Table 1).

Table 1. Evidence map (Indonesia-focused, 2021–2025)

Source	Year	Population / setting	Design & method	Platform focus	Operationalization of participation	Main finding (mapped to this review)	Evidence notes
Saud & Margono	2021	Indonesian youth context	Empirical study (Journal article)	Social media (general)	Youth political participation via online spheres and movement engagement	Social media supports youth participation within Indonesia’s digital democracy trajectory.	Peer-reviewed; good conceptual framing; outcomes depend on context
Mashud, Ida, & Saud	2023	Students (Indonesia)	Quantitative survey (AJCP)	Social media + political discussion	Political efficacy and discussion as participation pathway	Political discussion relates to political efficacy among students; efficacy supports engagement.	Strong for mechanism “discussion → efficacy”; cross-sectional limits causality
Ida et al.	2024	University students (Indonesia)	Quantitative (Cogent Social Sciences)	Social networks (online)	Youth political participation + efficacy	Social networks/ ties relate to participation and increased efficacy.	Good for “network effects”; student sample may limit generalization
DataReportal	2024	National (Indonesia)	Indicator report	Multi-platform	Not a participation measure; digital adoption context	Headline: 139.0M social media users (Jan 2024), with adoption caveats.	Contextual only, not causal evidence
We Are Social & Meltwater (PDF)	2024	National (Indonesia)	Indicator report (PDF)	Multi-platform	Not a participation measure; measurement cautions	Emphasizes “user identities ≠ unique persons”; comparability cautions.	Useful for
APJII	2024	National (Indonesia)	Survey release	Internet access	Not a participation measure; access environment	Reports ~79.5% internet penetration (2024) and user totals.	High-provenance national benchmark
KPU (press release)	2025	National elections (Indonesia)	Institutional communication	Elections	Participation index framing (broader than turnout)	Launch of “Indeks Partisipasi Pemilu 2024” with mixed methods intent.	Institutional framing; supports context and definitions
KPU (IPP book/report)	2023/2024	National elections (Indonesia)	Book/report	Elections	Participation conceptualization across stages	Participation conceptualized beyond voting; intended as guidance for strategy.	Strong conceptual anchor for “participation quality”

Source	Year	Population / setting	Design & method	Platform focus	Operationalization of participation	Main finding (mapped to this review)	Evidence notes
KPU Decision No. 1043/2024	2024	National elections (Indonesia)	Official legal document	Elections	Voting participation breakdown (gender etc.)	Provides official participation breakdown documentation.	Primary official source; technical document
Safer Internet Lab (CSIS-hosted)	2024	National misinformation ecosystem	Research report	Multi-platform	Risks and actors shaping participation environment	Maps actors/risks of misinformation; elections intensify platform persuasion risks.	High value for governance-risk context
CfDS (UGM) Case Study Series #98	2024	Campaign communication	Case study	TikTok	Platform affordances affecting political persuasion	TikTok enables interaction but also distortion/manipulation via algorithmic virality.	Strong platform-specific interpretation; not a turnout study
Reuters	2025	National policy response	News report	Social media (general)	Youth safety policy (minimum age planning)	Indonesia planning minimum age regulation; cites APJII youth/Gen Z penetration figures.	Useful as policy context; not a participation effect study
Reuters Institute DNR	2024	News ecosystem	Annual report chapter	Multi-platform (incl. TikTok)	News use patterns relevant to political information	Social media as news source; election campaigns used TikTok strongly.	Strong context on information pathways
Frontiers in Political Science	2025	Election disinformation	Peer-reviewed article	Facebook/YouTube/TikTok	Disinformation patterns affecting electoral participation	Disinformation dynamics in 2024 elections across major platforms.	Peer-reviewed; focuses on disinformation effects

4. Discussion

The mapped evidence points to a clear but conditional relationship between social media use and youth political participation in Indonesia. Social media environments expand opportunities for political exposure, expression, and peer discussion, yet they do not automatically generate sustained offline participation. The strongest and most consistent effects are observed in low-cost forms of online participation, whereas offline participation depends on additional enabling factors, including political efficacy, the presence of organizational channels, and credible opportunities for civic action. This pattern reinforces the view that digital engagement functions as a facilitating condition rather than a sufficient driver of offline political involvement. A key practical implication is that universities should conceptualize political participation primarily as a capacity-building challenge rather than merely an information-access problem. In a context characterized by high levels of digital connectivity and extensive platform reach, increasing political “exposure” alone is unlikely to be the binding constraint. Instead, higher education institutions are well positioned to improve the conversion of online attention into meaningful democratic participation by strengthening political efficacy, supporting structured opportunities for collective engagement, and linking digital discussion to offline civic and organizational pathways.

1. **political efficacy** (skills for effective participation and realistic pathways to influence),
2. **deliberation competence** (argument quality, tolerance for disagreement, civic norms), and
3. **media and information literacy** (verification habits, detection of manipulation, and responsible sharing).

The broader governance context also plays a decisive role in shaping participation outcomes. Campaign periods tend to intensify platform-based persuasion, and recent public debates on disinformation and platform responsibility illustrate that participation ecosystems are influenced as much by regulatory pressure and platform governance as by individual motivation. Platform affordances can enable rapid political communication and lower barriers to engagement, yet they simultaneously introduce risks of distortion, strategic manipulation, and uneven information exposure, all of which may degrade the quality of participation. These dynamics are particularly salient in short-form, algorithmically driven environments, where visibility and engagement are shaped by opaque amplification mechanisms. While such platforms can mobilize attention and facilitate political expression, they also create vulnerabilities that challenge democratic integrity and complicate the relationship between engagement and informed participation. At the institutional level, contemporary participation monitoring frameworks reflect a growing recognition that democratic participation cannot be reduced to a single quantitative indicator. Broader approaches to participation assessment emphasize multiple dimensions of engagement and open space for policy actors, universities, and civil society organizations to align their initiatives with participation quality rather than participation volume alone. This perspective supports interventions that prioritize informed engagement, deliberative capacity, and sustainable civic involvement within increasingly digitalized political environments.

5. Conclusions

Evidence from the 2021–2025 period indicates that social media functions as a powerful facilitator of youth political expression and networked discussion in Indonesia and can support political participation under appropriate conditions. Digital platforms lower barriers to information access and peer interaction, thereby expanding opportunities for political engagement. However, the transition from online engagement to sustained offline participation remains conditional. It depends critically on political efficacy, the availability of organizational channels, and the quality of the information environment in which political communication takes place. In a context characterized by widespread internet access and extensive social media reach, strategies that focus exclusively on increasing political content exposure are unlikely to generate durable democratic participation. Instead, the findings suggest that strengthening civic capacity and information literacy—particularly within higher education institutions—offers a more effective pathway. By fostering critical engagement skills, reinforcing beliefs in political effectiveness, and connecting digital discussion to structured civic and organizational opportunities, universities can play a central role in converting online attention into meaningful and sustainable democratic participation.

6. Patents

Not applicable.

Supplementary Materials: Not applicable.

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Appendix B: Not applicable.

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