

Balancing Optimism and Realism: Indonesia's Urban Youth's Political Engagement in the 2024 General Elections

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Abstract

The discourse around youth political participation often seems pejorative. Many earlier studies continue to emphasise youth political apathy, a notion that has long been debunked. Others reduce urban youth's political engagement to merely digital activism, largely due to recent information and technological advancements. However, this research presents a more nuanced view, arguing that the current political engagement of urban youth is characterised by a balance of optimism and realism. An online survey of 205 Indonesian youths from various cities was conducted to gauge their perspectives on political participation, including their views on the 2024 general elections. They were asked to examine some sets of statements as descriptions and explanations of their political stances. The results suggest that urban youth in Indonesia are keen to be politically active, including in the 2024 general elections. They stay informed, regularly following political news and candidate debates, signalling hope for a healthier democracy. However, they remain pragmatic, recognising the flaws in politics, such as corruption, inefficient administration, and political dynasties, which they view as the "dirty side" of politics. This dual perspective reflects a more complex political stance, where youth are motivated to participate yet grounded in the reality of the political system's imperfections.

Keywords: *urban youth; political engagement; 2024 general elections; Indonesia*

Menyeimbangkan Optimisme dan Realisme: Keterlibatan Politik Anak Muda Indonesia di Wilayah Perkotaan dalam Isu Pemilihan Umum 2024

Abstrak

Diskursus di seputar partisipasi politik anak muda hingga kini terkesan bersifat peyoratif. Beberapa studi sebelumnya masih menekankan apatisisme politik anak muda, yang sudah jelas bersifat usang. Sementara itu, beberapa studi yang lain tampak menyederhanakan keterlibatan politik anak muda hanya melalui aktivisme digital, menimbang kemajuan informasi dan teknologi beberapa tahun belakangan. Penelitian ini sendiri menunjukkan pandangan yang sedikit berbeda, berpendapat bahwa keterlibatan politik anak muda perkotaan saat ini ditandai dengan sebuah keseimbangan antara optimisme dan realisme. Survei dalam jaringan (daring) di antara 205 anak muda di Indonesia dari berbagai kota sebagai responden dilakukan untuk melihat perspektif mereka tentang partisipasi politik, termasuk pandangan mereka di dalam Pemilihan Umum 2024. Mereka diminta untuk menilai beberapa argumentasi sebagai deskripsi dan penjelasan mengenai keterlibatan politik mereka saat ini. Hasil studi ini menunjukkan bahwa anak muda perkotaan di Indonesia memiliki keinginan kuat untuk bersikap aktif secara politik, termasuk di dalam Pemilihan Umum 2024. Mereka selalu mengikuti informasi terkini secara rutin, termasuk mengenai berita politik dan debat para kandidat, menandakan sebuah demokrasi yang lebih sehat. Meski demikian, mereka juga tetap bersikap pragmatik, menyadari bahwa politik tidak selalu ideal, misalnya dalam kasus korupsi, administrasi yang tidak efisien, dan dinasti politik. Mereka menganggapnya sebagai “politik yang kotor.” Perspektif demikian merefleksikan sebuah sikap politik yang kompleks, di mana anak muda termotivasi untuk berpartisipasi di dalam politik secara aktif tetapi mereka sekaligus juga dihadapkan pada realitas sistem politik yang tidak sempurna.

Kata kunci: anak muda perkotaan; keterlibatan politik; Pemilihan Umum 2024; Indonesia.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's General Elections Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, KPU) has officially scheduled the upcoming general elections for February 16, 2024. If a second round is required, particularly for the presidential race, it will take place on June 26, 2024.¹ Three presidential and vice-presidential candidate pairs are set to compete in these elections: Anies Rasyied Baswedan with Muhaimin Iskandar, Prabowo Subianto with Gibran Rakabuming Raka, and Ganjar Pranowo with Mahfud MD. These candidates represent different political visions, setting the stage for a highly anticipated and competitive election.

In the 2024 Indonesian general elections, the Final Voters List (Daftar Pemilih Tetap, DPT) includes a total of 204,807,222 voters, with a significant portion classified as millennials, born between 1980 and 1994. According to KPU data, the voter demographic comprises 66.82 million millennials, 57.49 million from Generation X, 46.8

¹ Further details on the 2024 Indonesian general elections can be accessed at https://infopemilu.kpu.go.id/Pemilu/Peserta_pemilu.

million from Generation Z, and the remainder from the baby boomer and pre-boomer generations (Katadata, 2024). Notably, 55.46 percent of voters, or approximately 113.62 million, are under 40 years old, categorising them broadly as part of the “young generation.” This demographic dominance positions Indonesian youth, particularly in urban areas, as critical and influential participants in the upcoming election. Given their strategic importance, this research explores a key question: What is the current political stance of Indonesian urban youth as they approach the 2024 general elections? The discussion focusses on their potential role as engaged and “promising” voters in shaping the nation’s political future.

In discussions about the role of youth in politics, earlier studies suggesting rising political apathy among young people have become outdated (Ahmad, 2015; Dahl et al., 2018; Kitanova, 2020; Marsh & Akram, 2015; Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). More recent research points to the increasing participation of urban youth, though it often frames this engagement as limited to digital platforms, driven by advancements in information and technology systems (Hosseini et al., 2022; Javaid, 2017; Loader et al., 2014; Ruess et al., 2021; Saud & Margono, 2021). While the authors recognise the importance of digital spaces like social media as valuable tools for urban youth to voice their political opinions (Onyechi, 2018), the authors argue that youth participation goes far beyond the digital realm. As a generation deeply embedded in digital culture, urban youth naturally use these platforms, but their political involvement is much more comprehensive, reflecting deeper engagement in real-world political processes.

This research, using Indonesian urban youth as a case study, argues that their current political engagement, particularly in the 2024 general elections, embodies a blend of optimism and realism, showcasing a more nuanced and sophisticated political stance. Urban youth in Indonesia engage with political issues in a way that reflects both hope for progress and a pragmatic understanding of the system’s limitations. They are not passive observers but are eager to play an active and critical role in shaping political outcomes (Anamwathana & Thanapornsangsuth, 2023). This generation recognises the importance of being politically resilient, navigating the complexities of the political landscape with determination. Given their strategic position and influence in the 2024 general elections, they are called to be smart voters — capable of making informed decisions, filtering through the flood of information, and staying vigilant against politicians seeking to manipulate them for voters’ mobilisation purposes. Urban youth are not merely participants. They are shaping themselves into a politically aware and engaged generation, ready to confront the challenges of contemporary politics.

In this research, the authors recognise that Indonesian urban youth tend to have an optimistic outlook on the political landscape, particularly with regard to the 2024 general elections. They view their political involvement as a positive indicator of democratic progress. However, this optimism is tempered by realism, as they remain fully aware of potential challenges such as electoral fraud, manipulation, and broken promises from presidential or vice-presidential candidates. This awareness prompts them to remain critical and maintain a degree of distance from problematic political issues. The authors argue that this dual perspective — a balance between optimism and realism — reflects the complexity of the urban youth’s political engagement. It highlights their ongoing efforts to navigate these challenges thoughtfully as they strive to become a more politically engaged generation. Their involvement in the upcoming elections is

not only about participation but also about practicing discernment and critical engagement in response to the current political climate. This nuanced approach embodies the evolving role of Indonesian urban youth as active and informed participants in the nation's political future.

Conceptual framework: Political participation among youth and key factors

Before delving into the complex political stance of Indonesian urban youth — particularly the tension between their optimism and realism in political participation — it is crucial to revisit the concept of “political participation” among youth. This provides a necessary foundation for understanding the discussion that follows. By re-examining the concept, we can better grasp the various dimensions of youth engagements in politics, from traditional forms of participation like voting and campaigning to more modern and digital avenues of activism. This exploration will serve to contextualise the dynamic and evolving nature of youth political participation, which is central to the analysis in this research.

Regarding the concept of political participation, Andersson (2017), a Swedish social scientist, defines it as “different forms of democratic participation and influence on processes and situations in the battle for the organisation of society and human life in community.” His view emphasises the importance of the “cycle of causes and effects” in political participation. Andersson highlights two main aspects, which are (1) active involvement in various forms of participation, which can include voting, activism, or civic engagement, and (2) the impact that participation has on societal and political issues (Andersson, 2017). In essence, political participation is not only about taking action but also about being aware of the influence that such actions can have in shaping a better social and political environment. These two pillars — active engagement and conscious influence — underscore how individuals and communities contribute to democracy. The ultimate goal is not just participation for its own sake but to create meaningful outcomes that can positively transform society.

Reflecting on Andersson's concept of political participation, particularly the first aspect, it is evident that in today's digital era, the political engagement of youth — especially urban youth — cannot be reduced solely to digital actions. While social media serves as a vital platform for accessing information about general elections and voicing political opinions, the reality is much broader and more intricate. Urban youth's political participation embodies a nuanced interplay between optimism and realism, illustrating the capacity to both engage deeply with political issues and distance themselves from them when necessary. This duality signifies that their involvement is not just about online activities. Rather, it encompasses a conscious decision to participate in the political landscape meaningfully. They navigate a complex environment, responding thoughtfully to pressing political matters while also critically assessing the effectiveness and authenticity of their engagement. Thus, urban youth's political participation reflects a dynamic and multifaceted approach that goes beyond mere digital involvement, encompassing a broader understanding of their role in shaping political discourse.

The political engagement of youth exemplifies the fluidity of their participation during both crises and favourable circumstances (Marsh & Akram, 2015). Two to three decades ago, young people were often perceived as apathetic, with low levels of political involvement. However, this narrative has shifted significantly in recent years, as more youth express interest and enthusiasm for engaging with current political issues. It is

important to avoid generalising the term “youth,” as this demographic encompasses a diverse range of characteristics and responses. Various factors influence how young individuals react to political issues differently. Stockemer (2014) distinguishes between micro- and macro-factors that affect political participation. Micro-factors include individual-level variables such as age, income, education, gender, satisfaction with government, involvement in civil society organisations, and voting behaviour. In contrast, macro-factors encompass broader societal influences, such as economic development, democratic history, income inequality, regime types, and federalism (Stockemer, 2014). This nuanced understanding highlights the complexity of youth political engagement today, as it is shaped by both individual circumstances and the larger socio-political context. Such insights are crucial for appreciating the dynamic role of youth in the contemporary political landscape.

Additionally, within the micro-factors influencing youth political participation, empirical analysis by Pacheco and Owen (2015) suggests that individuals who are more open to change and possess a strong sense of self-transcendence are more likely to engage in political activities (Pacheco & Owen, 2015). Meanwhile, external factors such as the social environment — including municipal population size, parental guidance, and media literacy education — play a significant role in enhancing youth political engagement (Lee et al., 2023; van Houwelingen, 2017). Media literacy education, crucial for fostering political awareness, is not solely provided by mass media or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). It also comes from public authorities and government bodies at various levels. As Sener (2024) points out, governments bear a critical responsibility to educate young people, encouraging them to become politically active and involved in civic life (Sener, 2014). To this end, governments can implement creative public programmes aimed at fostering political engagement among youth. It is essential for government agencies to strategise and develop short-, medium-, and long-term initiatives focussed on youth development in the political arena. Additionally, supporting grassroots initiatives can empower young individuals to engage in politics effectively (Amupanda, 2018; Phillips et al., 2019). By taking proactive measures, governments can cultivate politically aware and active young people, which is vital for a thriving democracy.

METHOD

To capture the complex circumstances and distinctive tensions surrounding Indonesian urban youth’s political participation, particularly in relation to the 2024 general elections, this research adopts a quantitative approach through an online survey (Bryman & Bell, 2019). The survey was conducted using Google Forms and included a total of 205 respondents ($n = 205$) from various cities across Indonesia, predominantly from Java Island. Prior to participating, respondents were provided with essential information about the research and were asked for their consent. The questionnaire comprised demographic questions followed by key statements for examination. Demographic enquiries included gender, age, place of residence, education, religion, and occupation (Bömmel & Heineck, 2023; McDonnell, 2020; van Houwelingen, 2017). To assess urban youth’s perceptions and attitudes towards political issues and the upcoming elections, the questionnaire focussed on four domains: (1) perceptions of political issues and the agenda for the 2024 general elections; (2) interest in and

participation in politics; (3) preferences regarding presidential and vice-presidential candidates; and (4) intentions to abstain from voting (*golput*)² and expectations for future elected leaders. This comprehensive approach aims to illuminate the multifaceted nature of youth engagement in Indonesia's political landscape.

The authors opted for a questionnaire as the medium for the online survey due to its efficiency, convenience, and elimination of interviewer bias. However, as noted by Bryman and Bell (2019), they recognise some inherent limitations of this method, including the inability to clarify questions or elaborate on responses and the potential for question-order effects that could influence results (Bryman & Bell, 2019). To mitigate these weaknesses, the authors implemented several strategies. The authors focussed on crafting clear and precise statements within the questionnaire and conducted a preliminary survey to test the instrument before the full deployment. By taking these precautions, the authors aimed to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, ensuring that the data collected would accurately reflect the perspectives of Indonesian urban youth regarding political participation.

In this research, the authors specifically focussed on emerging adults aged 18 to 29 as respondents, arguing that this demographic effectively represents the young people. Many individuals within this age group are first-time voters, as Indonesian law (Undang-Undang No. 10 Tahun 2008 tentang Pemilihan Umum Anggota Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat, Dewan Perwakilan Daerah, dan Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah) allows individuals over 17 years old to exercise their voting rights for the first time. According to Tribble (2015), emerging adults exhibit several defining characteristics: (1) they often see themselves as the focal point of their experiences; (2) they are engaged in a process of exploring personal and social identities; (3) they frequently have many doubts about certain thoughts regarding their lives; and (4) they are aware of the multiple possibilities that arise from various life intersections (Tribble, 2015). This transitional stage of life, experienced by "newcomers" in adulthood, is marked by a diverse array of feelings, emotions, and experiences, contributing to its complexity and heterogeneity. The authors believe that examining this phase is both significant and intriguing, as it offers valuable insights into political engagement and attitudes of young people in Indonesia.

RESULTS

Demography of the respondents: Well-educated and employed urban youth

A total of 205 respondents (n = 205) participated in the online survey conducted by the authors. Among them, 42.9 percent identified as male and 57.1 percent as female. The majority of respondents, 93 percent, reside on Java Island, while the remaining 7 percent come from other islands such as Sumatra, Kalimantan, Nusa Tenggara, and Papua. Given the high representation from Java Island, the authors contend that this research effectively captures the demographic of young people living in urban areas across various city sizes — ranging from large metropolitan centres to smaller towns.

The educational and occupational backgrounds further support this assertion. Among the respondents, 41.9 percent have completed high school, while 58.1 percent

² In Indonesia, the practice of abstaining from voting is commonly referred to as "golput" (short for *golongan putih*), which translates to "white group."

hold university degrees at various levels, including bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Regarding employment status, 50.2 percent are currently students, either in high school or university, 41.5 percent are employed, and 8.3 percent are unemployed. This indicates that a significant portion of the respondents are both well-educated and engaged in the workforce. Consequently, based on their geographical distribution, educational achievements, and occupational statuses, the authors conclude that the respondents are representative of Indonesian urban youth.

Perceptions of political issues and the agenda for the 2024 general elections

Table 1 indicates that a significant proportion of Indonesian urban youth view their active participation in politics as a positive indicator of democratic progress in Indonesia, with 57.6 percent agreeing and 31.7 percent quite agreeing. This enthusiasm extends to their involvement in electoral politics, for instance, 53.2 percent of respondents appreciate the idea of becoming political candidates, with an additional 35.1 percent expressing moderate support for this notion. However, this positive engagement is tempered by a critical perspective of electoral politics, as many respondents — 36.3 percent agreeing and 46.3 percent quite agreeing — believe that such politics primarily serve the interests of certain political elites or groups.

Specifically concerning the 2024 general elections, Indonesian urban youth express a mixed outlook. On one hand, they express confidence that the electoral process will adhere to essential democratic principles, with 15.6 percent agreeing and 33.7 percent quite agreeing. On the other hand, there is a recognition of potential fraud and manipulation, as evidenced by 33.2 percent of respondents who agree and 32.2 percent who quite agree with the likelihood of these issues occurring during the elections. This duality reflects a complex political stance among urban youth, balancing optimism with critical awareness of the challenges facing the electoral process.

Table 1. The set of statements regarding the perceptions of political issues and the agenda for the 2024 general elections

Statement	Agree	Quite Agree	Less Agree	Disagree
I believe that active political participation by the public can lead to improved democratic practices in Indonesia.	57.6%	31.7%	8.3%	2.4%
I believe that now is the perfect time for youth to engage in electoral politics.	53.2%	35.1%	8.8%	2.9%
I argue that politics, particularly electoral politics, serves primarily as a means for certain individuals or elites to gain personal benefits.	36.6%	46.3%	13.2%	3.9%

I believe that the candidates of leadership in the 2024 general elections will honour their campaign promises if elected.	11.2%	33.7%	40%	15.1%
I believe that whoever is elected as the next leader will bear the responsibility of maintaining the trust of the people.	16.6%	42.9%	32.2%	8.3%
I believe that Indonesia's general elections are conducted based on the principles of being direct, general, free, confidential, honest, and fair.	15.6%	33.7%	33.7%	17.1%
I believe that there is significant potential for fraud and manipulation in the process of Indonesia's 2024 general elections.	33.2%	32.2%	26.8%	7.8%

Interest in and participation in politics

Based on the data in Table 2, it is clear that Indonesian urban youth show a relatively high level of interest in understanding political issues in the country, with 40.5 percent agreeing and 33.7 percent quite agreeing. However, their engagement tends to lean more toward passive participation rather than active involvement. For example, many respondents prefer to stay informed by following news about political elites and events, with 34.6 percent agree and 39.5 percent quite agree; as well as updates on the 2024 general elections, with 41.5 percent agree and 39.5 percent quite agree. They also seek out information on the backgrounds and track records of political candidates, with 37.6 percent agree and 30.2 percent quite agree; and follow debates among the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, with 44.9 percent agree and 24.9 quite agree.

In contrast, more active forms of political participation seem less popular among these youth. Recommending presidential or vice-presidential candidates to others, with 22.9 percent quite disagree and 41 percent disagree; sharing political opinions on social media, with 13.7 percent quite disagree and 70.7 percent disagree; or participating in political campaigns, with 84.4 percent disagree, are activities that are largely avoided by Indonesian urban youth.

Table 2. The set of statements regarding the interest in and participation in politics

Statement	Agree	Quite Agree	Less Agree	Disagree
I am interested in gaining a deeper understanding of political issues in Indonesia.	40.5%	33.7%	20.5%	5.4%
I stay up-to-date with the latest news on political elites and current events in Indonesia.	34.6%	39.5%	19.5%	6.3%
I stay informed on the latest news about the 2024 general elections.	41.5%	39.5%	13.7%	5.4%
I look into the backgrounds and track records of the political candidates for the 2024 general elections.	37.6%	30.2%	24.4%	7.8%
I stay up-to-date on the debates between the presidential and vice-presidential candidates for the 2024 general elections.	44.9%	24.9%	16.1%	14.1%
I recommend one of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates to others.	18%	18%	22.9%	41%
I use social media to promote and share my opinions about the presidential and vice-presidential candidates I support.	8.8%	6.8%	13.7%	70.7%
I volunteer for the campaign of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates I support.	4.4%	5.9%	5.4%	84.4%
I actively counter negative news and hoaxes regarding the presidential and vice-presidential candidates I support.	6.8%	11.7%	19%	62.4%
I participate in spreading negative news that could potentially undermine the electability of the presidential and vice-presidential candidates I do not support.	2.9%	3.4%	6.8%	86.8%

Preferences regarding presidential and vice-presidential candidates

Table 3 presents insights into how Indonesian urban youth make their decisions when selecting their next president and vice president. The data indicates that educational background, with 30.7 percent of respondents agree and 31.2 percent quite agree; track records, with 57.6 percent agree and 30.2 percent quite agree; personal images and character, with 62.4 percent agree and 27.3 percent quite agree; as well as campaign promises, with 40 percent agree and 34.6 percent quite agree, are significant factors in their decision-making process. In contrast, more primordial attributes such as religious affiliation, with 19 percent less agree and 64 percent disagree; and ethnic background, with 18 percent less agree and 73.2 percent disagree, are less likely to influence their choices. Additionally, many urban youths also take into account the political party affiliation of the candidates, with 29.3 percent agreeing and 33.2 percent quite agreeing, when determining who they will support as the next leader.

Table 3. The set of statements regarding the preferences of presidential and vice-presidential candidates

Statement	Agree	Quite Agree	Less Agree	Disagree
I take the educational backgrounds of the candidates into account when selecting the next leader.	30.7%	31.2%	19.5%	18.5%
I take the religious backgrounds of the candidates into account when selecting the next leader.	7.3%	9.3%	19%	64.4%
I take the ethnic group backgrounds of the candidates into account when selecting the next leader.	3.4%	5.4%	18%	73.2%
I take the political party backgrounds of the candidates into account when selecting the next leader.	29.3%	33.2%	20.5%	17.1%
I take the candidates' previous track records as public servants into consideration.	57.6%	30.2%	9.8%	2.4%
I take the candidates' images and characters into account when selecting the next leader.	62.4%	27.3%	7.8%	2.4%
I take the candidates' campaign promises into consideration when selecting the next leader.	40%	34.6%	17.1%	8.3%
Public opinion, including news from mass media and content on social media, significantly influences my choices.	17.1%	36.6%	27.3%	19%

Intentions to abstain from voting (*golput*) and expectations for future elected leaders

Among the various issues related to the general elections, the topic of abstention is particularly noteworthy when examining the political stances of urban youth. As shown in Table 4, a significant majority of Indonesian urban youth — 69.3 percent — disagree with the notion of abstaining in the upcoming 2024 general elections. They continue to believe that their votes hold considerable significance in determining election outcomes, with 65.4 percent rejecting the idea that their votes are inconsequential. For those urban youths who do consider abstaining, their reasons tend to be more practical than ideological. For example, some prefer to focus on work to meet their daily needs, with 16.6 percent of respondents agreeing; or to enjoy their leisure time during the holiday, with 13.7 percent of respondents agreeing, instead of going to the polling station (Tempat Pemungutan Suara, TPS) to exercise their right to vote.

Table 4. The set of statements regarding the intentions to abstain from voting (*golput*) and expectations for future elected leaders

Statement	Agree	Quite Agree	Less Agree	Disagree
I decide to abstain from voting in the 2024 general elections.	9.3%	9.8%	11.7%	69.3%
I contend that none of the candidates in the 2024 presidential elections are qualified to lead Indonesia.	8.8%	23.4%	37.1%	30.7%
None of the candidates in the 2024 presidential election represent the vision and interests of myself or my group.	11.7%	15.6%	36.6%	36.1%
I believe my vote holds little significance for the outcome of the 2024 general elections.	6.3%	11.2%	17.1%	65.4%
Political participation, in any form, has no direct impact on my personal life.	13.2%	26.3%	29.3%	31.2%
I would rather focus on work or meeting my daily needs than participate in the 2024 general elections.	16.6%	13.2%	34.1%	36.1%
I would rather focus on my personal plans and enjoy my holiday than participate in the 2024 general elections.	13.7%	13.2%	22.9%	50.2%
I choose not to participate in the 2024 general elections due to limited access to information.	2.9%	5.9%	17.1%	74.1%

DISCUSSION

The political participation of urban youth has evolved over time, reflecting a pattern that is neither uniform nor linear. This dynamic is shaped by a range of factors, creating a fluid trajectory that can shift and transform in response to different influences. This fluidity reveals a socio-psychological tension among urban youth as they navigate their political identities. To better understand this tension, the findings highlight five key points that offer insight into the distinctive political engagement of today's urban youth, particularly within the Indonesian context. These points will serve to explain the unique and evolving nature of their political participation.

First, Indonesian urban youth demonstrate significant concern and enthusiasm for participating in politics, particularly in response to the 2024 general elections. Personal perceptions and views play a crucial role in shaping their attitudes toward political issues and electoral participation. These individual perspectives not only influence personal behaviour but also contribute to a broader political consciousness within urban youth communities. As Pacheco and Owen (2014) suggest, strong personal convictions have the potential to foster self-transcendence. This openness to change positions Indonesian urban youth to rise above past apathy and engage more actively in shaping the country's political landscape.

Indonesian urban youth increasingly view their active political participation as a vital indicator of democratic progress in the country. They recognise their potential to engage meaningfully in the democratic process, confident in their ability to take on significant roles without being marginalised. They also understand their rights to voice concerns and challenge political elites when these leaders fail to foster societal improvement. In this context, they aim for an inclusive political environment where their voices are not only heard but also considered essential in shaping a better future for society. Inclusivity in political participation is, ultimately, the moral and democratic goal they seek to achieve.

A strong example of active political participation is highlighted by French sociologist Henri Lefebvre. Drawing on critical Marxism, particularly within urban contexts, Lefebvre developed the influential concept of the "right to the city." The idea goes beyond the simple right of urban dwellers to live in cities and use urban amenities. It asserts their right to participate directly in decisions that shape how cities are managed and developed. In Lefebvre's view, urban dwellers should not be passive "objects" of top-down urban policies but rather active "subjects" who influence the direction of urban planning and governance. This framework shifts the focus to the role of city dwellers in sustainable urban development, emphasising that their voices and involvement are crucial in creating inclusive and equitable cities (Sugiyono, 2022).

Despite the positive political engagement of Indonesian urban youth, who are increasingly involved in the political landscape, it is important to recognise that some still perceive politics — especially electoral politics — as serving only certain political elites or factions rather than the broader society (*bonum communae*). This sentiment is often encapsulated in the phrase "Politics is dirty," reflecting a widespread scepticism about the integrity of political processes (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2022). Such perceptions are not mere emotional reactions or baseless opinions. They stem from tangible experiences and observations. For instance, many urban youths cite instances of political misconduct in Indonesia, including corruption, inefficient governance, and entrenched political

dynasties as evidence of these political systems' failings (Aspinall & As'ad, 2016; Bautista, 2021; Yunan et al., 2023). These examples underscore the disillusionment felt by some young people, highlighting the need for reforms to enhance transparency and accountability in politics.

Second, focussing on the 2024 general elections in Indonesia, a significant number of urban youth express optimism about the electoral process. They believe it will proceed effectively, yet they are also aware of the potential for fraud and manipulation, which they recognise as serious issues that cannot be overlooked. This awareness motivates them to commit to overseeing the elections and holding the elected leaders accountable in their subsequent terms. Indonesian urban youth hold the belief that leaders, whether at the national or sub-national level, can inspire hope and drive positive change in society over the next five years. However, they also understand that their role does not end with the election. They must remain vigilant and critical of how these leaders govern. This commitment to scrutiny reflects their desire for transparency and accountability in the political landscape, highlighting their proactive stance in shaping the future of Indonesia.

Drawing from past experiences, the case of Yogyakarta, a medium-sized city in Indonesia, illustrates how some groups of urban youth voluntarily engaged in criticising their city mayor due to indications of corruption. This was a challenging period, as these youths faced numerous obstacles while exercising their rights to advocate for accountability in a city they deeply care about. Their efforts exemplified a commitment to defending their community against the misconduct of certain political elites (Sugiyono, 2023; Sugiyono & Rebecca, 2023).

In addition to concerns about political fraud, Indonesian urban youth are also increasingly attentive to the issue of political promises made during the 2024 general elections. They often observe that certain issues are politically "commodified" to attract votes for specific political elites, leading to scepticism about the feasibility of fulfilling these promises after the elections. This dynamic shapes their participation in political life, as their feelings of satisfaction with the government are closely tied to the integrity of political commitments (Stockemer, 2014). The interplay between past experiences and current political realities significantly influences how urban youth engage in governance and advocate for transparency and accountability within their communities.

Third, Indonesian urban youth demonstrate a distinctive and unique approach to engaging in the political process, particularly regarding the 2024 general elections. Many of them prefer a more "passive" method of involvement, opting to stay informed gradually by following political news and watching debates among the presidential and vice-presidential candidates. This strategy allows them to maintain a closer connection to current political issues without direct participation. Interestingly, Arya Budi, a political expert from Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, notes that 20 to 30 percent of voters may change their preferences after watching political debates. These debates provide an opportunity for voters to assess the candidate's visions, promises, and policies, as well as their performances in real-time (Kompas.com, 2024).

The effort to follow political debates on television or social media is often accompanied by discussions among their close social circles, such as family and friends. These conversations typically occur in informal settings, fostering a relaxed atmosphere that contrasts with the socio-psychological tensions observed during the actual debates.

As a result, these interactions are likely filled with humour and light-heartedness. Ting and Ahmad (2021) describe this phenomenon as “everyday interactions,” highlighting that political conversations among urban youth take place within familiar environments — like dining rooms, classrooms, cafeterias, and parks. Younger urban youth tend to be more open with their parents and siblings at home, while older youth often prefer to share their thoughts with friends at school. Conversely, only a small segment of urban youth actively expresses their political views, whether through social media or by participating in political campaigns. This tendency suggests that Indonesian urban youth are keen on maintaining a clear distinction between their public and private lives, with many opting to keep their political stances private (Shahzad & Omar, 2021).

Despite the widespread use of social media among Indonesian urban youth, there are significant doubts about their active political participation on these platforms. While many young people engage with social media, this does not necessarily imply they are willing to publicly share their political views. An intriguing aspect of this digital landscape is the rise of political buzzers, often referred to as “influencers.” These individuals create political content designed to resonate with young people, making complex political issues more accessible (Harff & Schmuck, 2023). By adopting a youthful persona, these buzzers aim to sway opinions during elections, employing sensational language and eye-catching visuals in their social media posts to capture attention and influence voting behaviour. Their presence has undeniably impacted the political choices of Indonesian urban youth, shaping the discourse around elections and political engagement in the digital sphere.

The findings indicate that active political participation among Indonesian urban youth is relatively low, aligning with research by Finn et al. (2023), who highlight the limited interest young people have in joining political parties. Instead, they are more drawn to non-political organisations, such as NGOs (Finn et al., 2023). This sentiment is echoed by Thieux (2021), who suggests that political parties and traditional organisations, including trade unions, have become less appealing to today’s youth compared to the vibrant youth movements of the 1990s. This shift suggests that the pathways that once inspired young people to engage in the struggle for democracy are no longer as enticing (Thieux, 2021). Conversely, Paolillo and Gerbaudo (2023) present somewhat different findings, noting that while political discussions among youth are infrequent, the level of political expression is moderate, and interest in participating in political campaigns remains relatively high. This indicates a complex relationship between Indonesian urban youth and political engagement, suggesting that while they may shy away from traditional political avenues, they still seek ways to express their political views and participate in campaigns (Paolillo & Gerbaudo, 2023).

Fourth, in the decision-making process for the 2024 general elections, particularly regarding the presidential and vice-presidential candidates, Indonesian urban youth place significant emphasis on the educational backgrounds and track records of the candidates. With the ease of digital access, they can readily obtain information about candidates’ qualifications and past performances in serving society. This allows them to assess the merits, or shortcomings, of candidates based on their prior contributions. Interestingly, these young voters tend to overlook more primordial attributes such as religious and ethnic backgrounds when selecting their future leaders. They increasingly view such factors as irrelevant to the qualifications necessary for effective leadership in

Indonesia. This shift reflects a broader trend among youth to prioritise competence and accountability over identity politics.

Another intriguing aspect of Indonesian urban youth's decision-making is their strong tendency to consider the political party backgrounds of candidates. This suggests that the track records of the political parties affiliated with these candidates significantly influence the decisions of urban youth. Many urban youths believe that future elected leaders should remain independent and free from interference by their supporting political parties. When party interests intervene, the common good of the people is often sidelined. Consequently, Indonesian urban youth are concerned that the voices of political party leaders may overshadow those of ordinary citizens.

The authors believe that the thoughtful considerations exhibited by Indonesian urban youth are the result of long-term political education, both formal and informal, which has cultivated a distinct "sense of politics" among young people in urban areas (Sener, 2014). This "sense" enables urban youth to engage in rational reflections on the realities that surround them. To strengthen and sustain this awareness, it is essential to foster regular and meaningful communication and interaction, emphasising mutual respect and trust with urban youth (Andersson, 2017; James & Cotnam-Kappel, 2020). Furthermore, providing more opportunities for these young individuals to express their views in political and public forums will be crucial for their continued engagement.

Fifth, the rational considerations expressed by urban youth regarding their political stance are closely tied to another significant issue: voting responsibility. Indonesian young people in urban areas are acutely aware of their voting rights and are eager to exercise them responsibly, guided by rational thought (Borg & Azzopardi, 2022). Research findings indicate that the tendency among Indonesian urban youth to abstain from voting in the 2024 general elections is relatively low. Although some urban youths express dissatisfaction with the political climate and the track records of politicians in recent years (Almlund, 2018), those who do choose to abstain are often motivated by practical concerns rather than ideological reasons (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). For instance, many may prefer to enjoy their holiday or prioritise fulfilling their economic needs. Others, particularly young individuals working in cities far from their hometowns, may find the administrative requirements for voting cumbersome and may be disinclined to navigate these obstacles when seeking to exercise their rights.

Although the proportion of Indonesian urban youth choosing to abstain from voting is relatively low, the authors contend that this trend warrants serious attention for the improvement of democratic practices in Indonesia. Ignoring this phenomenon may lead to a potential increase in abstention, particularly as discontent with the political landscape continues to grow among young people. Over time, ideological reasons may begin to supplant the practical motivations for abstaining from elections. Bekker et al. (2022) further argue that understanding urban youth's choice to abstain should not be framed within a binary perspective of "voters" versus "abstainers." Instead, they propose viewing urban youth along a "voting-behavioural continuum." This framework categorises the various motivations behind their voting choices into distinct groups, such as "loyal voters," "casual voters," party-loyal abstainers," and "consistent abstainers." This approach allows for a clearer understanding of the abstention phenomenon among Indonesian urban youth today (Bekker et al., 2022). Additionally, it highlights the presence of "swing voters" — those who have yet to make a decision regarding their

choice for the next president and vice president. This nuanced perspective on voting behaviour is crucial for addressing the underlying issues and enhancing democratic engagement among young voters in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the research indicates that Indonesian urban youth are far from apathetic. They exhibit a strong desire to engage in political affairs, particularly in the context of the 2024 general elections. These young individuals strike a balance between optimism and realism. They recognise their participation in politics and the electoral process as a positive indicator of democratic progress in Indonesia. However, they are also acutely aware of the imperfections that characterise political life. Many still suffer at the hands of certain political elites or interest groups, leading to a critical perspective on the current political landscape. Consequently, urban youth feel a compelling responsibility to remain involved in politics, advocating for accountability and transparency. They understand the importance of adopting a sceptical stance toward elected leaders and their policies, positioning themselves as vigilant “watchdogs” representing civil society — an essential pillar of democracy. This proactive engagement is crucial for fostering a healthier political environment and ensuring that the voices of the youth are heard and respected in shaping Indonesia’s future.

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