

The 2024 General Election and the role of civic education in preventing social polarisation among youth

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Abstract

Indonesia's 2024 General Election unfolded amid intensifying global concerns about democratic resilience, algorithmic polarisation, and the erosion of deliberative public discourse. This study aims to analyse the role of Civic Education in preventing social polarisation among youth in the context of the 2024 Indonesian General Election, with specific attention to: (1) the dynamics of electoral polarisation, (2) factors contributing to youth vulnerability in the digital information landscape, and (3) the capacity of the Merdeka Curriculum to build democratic resilience among young citizens. A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and SINTA-indexed databases using keywords including 'affective polarisation', 'digital political literacy', 'civic education', 'filter bubble', and 'democratic resilience', yielding 36 articles meeting the inclusion criteria (peer-reviewed, 2017–2025, English and Indonesian). Policy analysis was applied to Merdeka Curriculum documents for Pancasila and Civic Education. Findings indicate that youth vulnerability to pernicious polarisation is driven by a 'triple vulnerability nexus' comprising algorithmic enclosure in digital public spheres, psychologically reinforced in-group/out-group identity dynamics, and a critical-thinking deficit in formal civic pedagogy. A Gap Analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum reveals that while its normative orientation towards Pancasila values is relatively strong, its implementation systematically avoids deliberative conflict and controversial political issues, leaving young citizens unprepared to navigate filter bubbles and partisan disinformation. This study proposes an original Digital Civic Resilience (DCR) Model as a transferable framework applicable to any electoral democracy confronting pernicious polarisation, with Indonesia providing the empirical grounding for its construction.

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Introduction

Across the democratic world, a structurally similar pathology has taken root: electoral competition no longer primarily sorts citizens along programmatic or ideological lines, but rather crystallises deep emotional antipathy between social groups whose identities have



become fused with partisan loyalty. This condition, theorised by McCoy et al. (2018) as ‘pernicious polarisation’, and by Iyengar et al. (2019) as ‘affective polarisation’, has been documented across mature and transitional democracies alike, from the United States to Brazil, from Poland to India (Brezicha et al., 2023; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018). The common denominators driving this global pattern – algorithmic amplification of emotionally charged content, digital disinformation ecosystems, and the retreat of deliberative public discourse – pose an acute challenge to formal education systems that were designed for a pre-digital political landscape. Indonesia’s 2024 General Election offers an unusually fertile empirical setting amid this challenge, precisely because it brings together a youth-dominated electorate, a rapidly maturing digital infrastructure, and a formal civic education system in the midst of structural reform (Wadipalapa & Tyson, 2025). Studying Indonesia, therefore, is not merely studying a local case; it is stress-testing a universal question that confronts civic educators on every continent: what pedagogical architecture can build Digital Civic Resilience among young citizens whose political formation occurs primarily within algorithmically curated information environments?

In the Indonesian context, these dynamics have intensified since the 2014 and 2019 elections, which revealed deep social divisions rooted in religious identity and political affiliation (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Mietzner, 2020). Polarisation has quietly moved beyond the corridors of political power. What began as elite competition has progressively permeated everyday social life, reshaping interpersonal relations, neighbourhood conversations, and patterns of information consumption on social media platforms. This shift carries particular weight in the 2024 General Election, where the electorate itself has undergone a generational transformation. Data reported by Muhamad (2023) show that millennials and Generation Z now make up more than half of all registered voters. Far from being passive recipients of political messaging, younger Indonesians increasingly shape how democratic narratives form and spread (Novalia et al., 2024).

Yet this demographic prominence comes with a paradox. Young people are, by almost any measure, the most digitally connected generation in Indonesian history – and precisely because of that, they are among the most exposed to the distortions that digital environments produce. Being online constantly does not automatically translate into reading political information well (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Platform algorithms reward emotional intensity over factual accuracy, steering users towards content that confirms what they already believe and away from perspectives that might complicate the picture (Rodillo, 2024). The consequences are not abstract. Recent survey data show that 65% of young respondents regularly encountered politically slanted information, while four in ten said they preferred simply not to engage with people who held different political views (Marsandra et al., 2025). That last figure is telling – it is not merely a pattern of skewed information consumption but a social withdrawal from political difference altogether, which is precisely what Iyengar et al. (2019) identify as the hallmark of affective polarisation: not disagreement, but emotional aversion. If nothing is done to interrupt this dynamic, the divisions that surfaced during the 2024 election campaign will not dissolve once the votes are counted; they will harden.

In response to these challenges, Civic Education holds a strategic position as an instrument of democratic education (Nasoha et al., 2025). Conceptually, civic education aims to develop civic competence, which encompasses civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions (Latief et al., 2019; Latief & Tiara, 2025). Civic education, at its best, does more than hand students a copy of the constitution and ask them to memorise its articles. When taught well, it builds something harder to measure but far more consequential: the capacity to think critically about political claims, to feel something of what others feel across social divides, and to engage with disagreement without retreating into hostility (Biseth et al., 2021). In this sense, civic education is not simply a school subject. It is, potentially, one of the few institutional spaces where the social conditions for democratic life can be deliberately cultivated – including,

crucially, resilience against the kind of polarisation that has come to define Indonesia's recent electoral seasons.

The Merdeka Curriculum takes this seriously, at least on paper. Character formation sits at the heart of the curriculum's design, and the Pancasila Student Profile – with its emphasis on diversity, mutual cooperation, and critical reasoning – runs through the subject of Pancasila and Civic Education as its normative backbone (Latief et al., 2024). The values are there. The aspiration is genuine. The problem lies in what happens when the classroom door closes. Studies consistently point to the same cluster of weaknesses: teaching that stays safely within the lane of value transmission, digital literacy that exists in policy documents but rarely in lesson plans, and little room for students to actually argue, disagree, or work through genuine political tension together (Nurdyansyah et al., 2022). A curriculum that teaches tolerance as an abstract virtue but never asks students to practise it in the face of real political difference is, in practical terms, leaving them underprepared for the world they already inhabit online.

This gap in practice points to a larger gap in research. The scholarship on polarisation in Indonesia has grown considerably, but it has largely trained its attention on elite behaviour and social media dynamics – the supply side of division, so to speak – without seriously asking what formal education could do to build resistance on the demand side (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019; Mietzner, 2020). Meanwhile, research on civic education has remained preoccupied with broad questions of character development and civic participation, without anchoring those questions to the specific pressures of an election cycle – let alone one as demographically charged as 2024. This study situates its contribution within a body of international work on civic education and political controversy that has not yet been systematically engaged in the Indonesian context. Hess and McAvoy (2015) argue, on the basis of classroom observation across politically diverse United States schools, that structured engagement with genuinely contested political questions develops the very capacities for reasoned cross-partisan dialogue that affective polarisation erodes. Journell (2016, 2017) extends this argument to digitally mediated political environments, showing that teacher disclosure practices and classroom structures for discussing political controversy can either amplify or moderate the partisan identity effects that students bring from their online information environments. Kahne and Bowyer (2017) provide empirical evidence that civic education interventions specifically designed to build resistance to political misperceptions can measurably reduce susceptibility to partisan misinformation. The DCR Model proposed in this study draws on these frameworks while addressing a dimension that they have not foregrounded: the interaction between algorithmic platform architecture, adolescent identity formation, and curriculum design within a non-Western democratic context undergoing rapid digital transformation.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyse the role of Civic Education in preventing social polarisation among youth before and after the 2024 General Election. Specifically, the study examines: (1) the dynamics of polarisation within the Indonesian electoral context, (2) the factors contributing to youth vulnerability to digital polarisation, and (3) the capacity of the Civic Education curriculum to build the democratic resilience of young generations. By integrating perspectives from polarisation theory and civic education, this study seeks to provide a conceptual contribution to the development of educational strategies as preventive instruments for safeguarding social cohesion in Indonesian democracy.

Method

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) combined with educational policy document analysis. The SLR design was adopted in order to provide a transparent and reproducible audit trail for the integration of literature across the intersecting domains of democratic polarisation, digital communication structures, and civic education pedagogy (Snyder, 2019). By formalising the literature selection and analysis process, the study moves beyond impressionistic narrative review towards a replicable scientific methodology capable of supporting theory construction.

The literature search drew on three primary databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and SINTA (Science and Technology Index). Google Scholar was used as a supplementary hand-searching instrument to capture grey literature and Indonesian-language sources, with all records identified through this channel subsequently cross-checked against Scopus and WoS to confirm compliance with indexing standards. It is acknowledged that searches conducted via Google Scholar are not fully replicable across sessions; this limitation is addressed in part through the documented Boolean query structure and by the consistent application of the same peer-review and thematic-relevance criteria to all Google Scholar-sourced items. Search terms were built around three thematic clusters. The first covered polarisation, using terms such as 'affective polarisation', 'pernicious polarisation', 'political identity', 'filter bubble', and 'algorithmic enclosure'. The second addressed youth and digital politics, drawing on phrases including 'youth political participation', 'digital political literacy', 'social media and democracy', and 'Generation Z politics'. The third cluster targeted civic education specifically, with terms ranging from 'citizenship education' and 'civic competence' to 'deliberative pedagogy', 'media literacy education', and 'democratic resilience'. These clusters were combined using Boolean operators (AND, OR) to capture intersections across domains.

The temporal boundary was set from 2017 to 2025. This was a deliberate choice, intended to capture the body of scholarship that took shape after the Cambridge Analytica revelations made algorithmic political manipulation a serious subject of academic inquiry. Indonesian-language sources were included throughout. A substantial portion of the empirically grounded and policy-relevant literature on this topic exists only in domestic publications and would be entirely missed by a search conducted in English alone. Sources were retained when they were peer-reviewed journal articles or edited academic volumes, engaged directly with at least one of the three thematic clusters, and were available in full text. Opinion pieces without theoretical grounding, conference papers not subsequently published in reviewed outlets, and studies treating polarisation exclusively outside electoral contexts were excluded. Three exceptions to the conference-paper exclusion criterion are noted: Nurdyansyah et al. (2022), Latief et al. (2024), and Supriatna and Sampurna (2019) are cited in the analysis of Indonesian curriculum implementation practice and Indonesian identity politics. All three appear in conference proceedings rather than indexed journals; they are used to illustrate practitioner-oriented perspectives on curriculum implementation underrepresented in Scopus and WoS-indexed literature, and they do not form the primary empirical basis of any substantive claim. Readers should treat these three sources as supplementary contextual references rather than components of the systematic evidence base. After deduplication and title-and-abstract screening, 36 sources cleared the full inclusion criteria and formed the basis for thematic synthesis. The thematic coding was conducted by the first author; interrater reliability testing was not performed, as the coding process involved a single coder. This limitation is acknowledged: to mitigate the risk of interpretive bias, the coded themes were subjected to iterative peer discussion among the co-authors, and an audit trail of coding decisions was maintained and is available from the corresponding author upon request.

The formal inclusion and exclusion criteria applied at each stage of the selection process are presented below. Inclusion criteria: (1) publication type – peer-reviewed journal articles or edited academic volumes; (2) date range – 2017 to 2025; (3) language – English or Indonesian; (4) thematic relevance – direct engagement with at least one of three clusters (democratic polarisation, youth digital politics, civic education pedagogy); and (5) availability of full text. Exclusion criteria: (1) opinion pieces and editorial commentary lacking theoretical grounding; (2) conference papers not subsequently published in a peer-reviewed outlet; (3) studies treating polarisation exclusively outside electoral or civic contexts; and (4) sources published before 2017, with the exception of foundational theoretical works cited in the analytical framework.

Consistent with PRISMA 2020 reporting standards for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021), the selection process moved through four stages: identification of records across the

four databases, removal of duplicates, title-and-abstract screening against the inclusion criteria above, and full-text assessment of the remaining records, from which the final set of 36 included articles emerged. Table 1 summarises the number of records retained at each stage.

Table 1.

PRISMA 2020 record flow

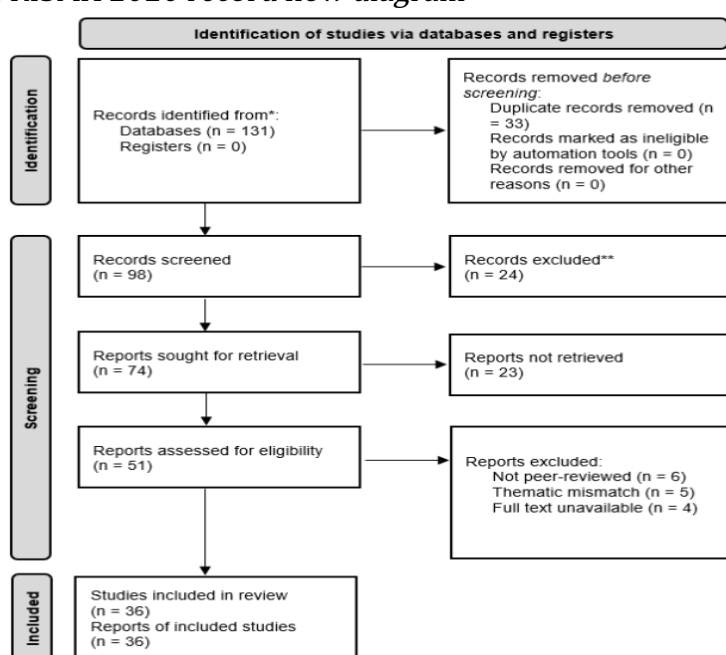
PRISMA Stage	Records (n)
Records identified through database searching (Scopus, WoS, SINTA, Google Scholar)	131
Records remaining after duplicates removed	98
Reports sought for retrieval after title-and-abstract screening	74
Full-text reports assessed for eligibility	51
Studies included in thematic synthesis	36

Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

The corresponding PRISMA flow diagram is presented as Figure 1.

Figure 1.

PRISMA 2020 record flow diagram



Source: Processed by the authors (2026).

The curriculum analysis followed a different but complementary logic. Rather than cataloguing what the Merdeka Curriculum claims to aspire towards, the analysis was framed as a Gap Analysis, asking where the distance lies between the curriculum's stated normative commitments and the conditions Indonesian youth actually face in the digital political landscape. Three documentary layers were examined: the learning outcomes specified across school levels, the Pancasila Student Profile framework, and the learning objective sequences for content related to democracy, diversity, and critical thinking. The analytical criteria applied in the gap analysis focused on three dimensions: whether the curriculum's formal learning outcomes name digital political environments as a civic challenge requiring pedagogical response; whether its assessment framework includes deliberative performance tasks alongside knowledge recall; and whether teacher preparation guidelines address facilitation of controversial-issues discussion. To contextualise these findings, comparisons were drawn with civic education systems that have explicitly reckoned with political controversy in the classroom – Germany's Beutelsbacher Konsens, the United States' iCivics programme, and the Nordic countries' established practice of embedding media literacy and deliberative debate as structural components of civic learning. These comparative references draw on the secondary

literature reviewed and are intended to contextualise the Indonesian gap rather than to constitute a formal cross-national curriculum analysis (Biseth et al., 2021; Knowles et al., 2018).

Across both strands of analysis, thematic synthesis served as the organising analytical technique, following Thomas and Harden's (2008) three-stage process: line-by-line coding of findings from included studies, iterative grouping of codes into descriptive themes, and the construction of analytical themes that reached beyond what any individual study had argued to generate the conceptual framework this article proposes. The Digital Civic Resilience (DCR) Model emerged from that third stage, at the point where three analytical threads – algorithmic structural vulnerabilities, affective identity dynamics, and pedagogical gaps in formal civic education – converged into a coherent explanatory and prescriptive framework. In the interest of methodological transparency, it is noted that some of the 36 included studies were authored or co-authored by the first author (Latief et al., 2019; Latief et al., 2024; Latief & Tiara, 2025). Each was subjected to the same inclusion criteria applied to all other sources, and their selection was based solely on thematic and methodological relevance. One limitation deserves stating plainly: this study works entirely with secondary and policy data, not with fieldwork. The DCR Model is a conceptual construction, and it needs to be tested, through mixed-methods research in Indonesian schools, and through replication in other electoral democracies where pernicious polarisation and civic education underperformance are occurring together.

Results and Discussion

Dynamics of polarisation in the Indonesian electoral context

The thematic synthesis of included studies reveals that polarisation in contemporary electoral democracies has undergone a qualitative transformation that existing theoretical frameworks only partially capture. Where the synthesis maps an empirical pattern, the interpretive argument that follows draws on that pattern to develop the theoretical claims of this study. McCoy et al. (2018) describe this process as *pernicious polarisation*, a condition in which society becomes divided into two major camps that perceive one another as existential threats to their values and collective identities. In such circumstances, political differences are no longer understood as part of healthy democratic dynamics but instead as conflicts that are difficult to reconcile. Polarisation that was initially programmatic transforms into affective polarisation, characterised by emotional distance and distrust between groups (Iyengar et al., 2019).

In the Indonesian context, these symptoms became evident during the 2014 General Election and intensified in the 2019 election. Aspinall and Mietzner (2019) show that what drove the sharpest divisions during this period was not disagreement over policy – tax rates, infrastructure spending, or welfare programmes – but the mobilisation of religious identity as a political weapon. The lines drawn were moral and communal, and they cut deep (Aspinall & Mietzner, 2019). Mietzner (2020) traces how those lines refused to stay within the boundaries of formal campaigning. The hostility that flared between supporter camps during election season did not dissipate when polling day passed; it followed people home, resurfacing at family dinners, in neighbourhood WhatsApp groups, and across social media feeds long after the results were announced (Mietzner, 2020). What had begun as electoral competition gradually hardened into something more stubborn, not a clash of ideas that might be resolved through argument, but a collision of identities that felt non-negotiable.

By the time Indonesia entered the 2024 election cycle, this dynamic had found a new and far more efficient vehicle. Social media had ceased to be merely a channel through which political messages travel; it had become the terrain on which political reality is constructed. Lim (2017) captures this well in describing Indonesia's digital space as an 'algorithmic enclave': a landscape in which the infrastructure itself selects for content that provokes, that confirms, that inflames. Platforms are not neutral pipes; they are built to maximise engagement, and engagement, it turns out, is most reliably produced by content that triggers strong emotion:

fear, outrage, pride, contempt. The practical consequence is that identity-charged narratives travel faster and farther than measured ones. In an election, this means that the competition between candidates increasingly plays out as a competition between emotionally loaded symbols and moral framings, where the goal is not to persuade the undecided but to intensify the loyalty of the already convinced (Lim, 2017).

The dominance of younger generations within the voter structure of the 2024 election further amplifies the relevance of these dynamics. As noted earlier, millennials and Generation Z collectively comprised the majority of the registered electorate (Muhamad, 2023). This cohort exhibits high levels of digital participation and relies on social media as a primary source of political information (Novalia et al., 2024). These figures are striking not just as statistics but as a window into how polarisation actually feels at the individual level. When 65% of young Indonesians regularly encounter politically skewed information, and four in ten prefer simply not to talk to people who vote differently, something has shifted, not in the formal structures of democracy, but in the social fabric that democracy depends on (Marsandra et al., 2025). Iyengar et al. (2019) would recognise this immediately: political differences have stopped being a matter of disagreement and started being a matter of aversion. And aversion, unlike disagreement, is not something that better arguments can fix (Brezicha et al., 2023).

What makes this harder to untangle is that division is not always an accidental by-product of competitive politics; sometimes it is the point. In closely contested electoral environments, keeping supporters emotionally activated and socially enclosed is a rational strategy for political elites (McCoy et al., 2018). Narratives built around religious identity, nationalist sentiment, or moral boundary-drawing do not just reflect existing social divisions; they actively reproduce and sharpen them (Lim, 2017; Nasoha et al., 2025). Polarisation, in this reading, is less a social accident than a political instrument, one that becomes harder to put away after each election cycle because it works.

The deeper damage, though, runs underneath the surface of intergroup hostility. Habermas (1992/1996) argued that democratic legitimacy is not simply a product of elections held according to proper procedure. It rests on the quality of public deliberation, on citizens' actual capacity to exchange reasons and arrive at shared understandings. When affective polarisation reaches the level documented in Indonesia's recent elections, that deliberative foundation erodes. Public discourse stops being a space for working through disagreement and becomes, as Erfain (2025a) observes in the Indonesian case, an arena for identity performance and symbolic warfare.

The Indonesian experience also pushes back against one of Habermas's quieter assumptions: that better institutional design can, by itself, restore the conditions for rational public debate. It cannot, not when the communication environment is algorithmically engineered to reward outrage over reflection. Restoring deliberative capacity requires cultivating it at the level of individual citizens, which is an educational problem as much as an institutional one.

Where this study identifies religious identity primarily as a driver of polarisation, following Aspinall and Mietzner (2019), it is worth noting that Indonesia's Islamic intellectual tradition also offers indigenous deliberative resources that a Habermasian framework, developed from a distinctly Western secular vantage point, does not foreground. The concept of *syura*, or consultative deliberation, has long functioned in Indonesian Muslim civic life as a normative basis for collective decision-making that bears a structural resemblance to communicative rationality, while remaining rooted in a different intellectual genealogy (Azra, 2006). *Pesantren* and *madrasah*, as long-standing community-based educational institutions, have historically cultivated practices of cross-difference engagement, *ta'aruf*, that function as informal civic pedagogy well outside the formal school system this study examines (Menchik, 2016). Treating these resources as a counter-narrative to identity-based polarisation, rather than only treating religious identity as a polarising variable, would allow future iterations of

the Digital Civic Resilience Model to draw on locally rooted deliberative traditions rather than relying solely on frameworks imported from Western democratic theory.

Iyengar et al. (2019) add a further complication: as emotional distance between partisan camps widens, trust in democratic institutions declines alongside it, creating the conditions for electoral outcomes to be contested not on legal grounds but on the grounds that the other side simply cannot be trusted. Brazil in 2022, the United States in 2020–2021 and France in 2022 illustrate a pattern familiar enough to serve as a warning.

Taken together, what produced the polarisation landscape of the 2024 Indonesian General Election was not any single cause but a convergence: identity-based mobilisation from above, algorithmic amplification from the platforms, and a youth electorate navigating all of this without adequate preparation from their schools. The last of these is where the possibility of genuine intervention lies, and it is where this study turns next.

Factors contributing to youth vulnerability to digital political polarisation

Youth vulnerability to digital political polarisation cannot be reduced to individual deficits in critical thinking or information literacy; rather, it is produced by the structured interaction of three analytically distinct but empirically intertwined dimensions: the architecture of digital communication platforms, the psychology of adolescent and young adult identity formation, and the institutional limitations of formal civic education (Arifuddin & Hermawan, 2025). What makes the Indonesian case theoretically significant is that these three dimensions are simultaneously present at an unusually high intensity, creating what this study terms a ‘triple vulnerability nexus’ that amplifies polarisation risks well beyond what any single dimension could generate alone.

From the structural dimension, social media algorithms play a central role in shaping patterns of youth political information consumption (Raza et al., 2025). The platforms are not passive infrastructure. They are systems built around a specific incentive: keeping users engaged for as long as possible. Content that provokes strong emotion, whether anger, fear, or the warm solidarity of group pride, reliably outperforms content that merely informs (Laventia et al., 2025). Algorithms learn this quickly and act on it, steadily narrowing the information environment around what a user has already shown they respond to. Rodilosso (2024) calls this the filter bubble, not a conspiracy but a structural outcome, the predictable result of optimising for engagement at scale. In political terms, the effect is corrosive. Users encounter fewer and fewer perspectives that challenge their existing views, confirmation bias deepens, and what passes for the public sphere fragments into thousands of mutually reinforcing information silos (Rodilosso, 2024).

Bennett and Livingston (2018) identify a parallel deterioration in the institutions that once helped maintain a shared informational baseline. Journalism, with all its imperfections, historically performed a gatekeeping function, separating verified fact from rumour, news from propaganda. That function has not disappeared, but it has been severely weakened. In a media environment where a partisan blog, a WhatsApp forward, and an investigative news report can arrive on the same screen with indistinguishable formatting, the cognitive labour of distinguishing credible from manipulative content falls entirely on the reader. For young people who are still developing that capacity, and who consume most of their political information through social feeds rather than institutional sources, this is a significant burden, and one that electoral actors with resources and intent are well positioned to exploit (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

The psychological dimension compounds the structural one. Adolescence and early adulthood are precisely the years when political identity is taking shape, when people are deciding, often without fully realising it, which groups they belong to and which they do not (Krosnick & Alwin, 1989). Iyengar et al. (2019) show that affective polarisation takes root at exactly this junction: as emotional attachment to a political in-group strengthens, negative

feeling towards the out-group tends to intensify in step. This process is often intensified by repeated exposure to narratives that reinforce the dichotomy between 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' (Iyengar et al., 2019). In competitive electoral settings, political messages are frequently framed in symbolic and emotionally charged ways, strengthening group loyalty while increasing resistance to cross-cutting dialogue.

In the Indonesian context, recurring identity politics since the 2014 General Election has reinforced this pattern. Young people who are active on social media are not only consumers of information but also producers and disseminators of political narratives (Supriatna & Sampurna, 2019). This process strengthens the internalisation of political identities based on group affiliation, where differences in political views are no longer perceived as variations of opinion but as threats to collective identity. As a result, affective polarisation develops more rapidly than ideological polarisation.

This triple vulnerability nexus does not fall on young Indonesians uniformly; it is refracted through gender. Affective polarisation research outside Indonesia has shown that partisanship operates as a social identity in which in-group loyalty and perceived identity threat drive emotional political responses (Huddy et al., 2015); how these mechanisms are refracted through gender position, however, remains comparatively underexplored. Algorithmic curation compounds this asymmetry rather than correcting it: search and recommendation systems have been shown to encode and amplify gendered patterns in whose political voices surface and whose are buried, a structural bias that operates beneath the level of any individual user's choices (Noble, 2018). An intersectional reading, in Crenshaw's (1989) sense, suggests that gender does not act as an isolated variable alongside age and digital exposure but interacts with them, producing compounded vulnerability for young women who must navigate algorithmic enclosure, identity-based hostility, and a civic curriculum that has rarely treated gender as a dimension of political socialisation worth naming. Indonesian civic education has yet to engage this layer of the problem in any sustained way, which leaves an entire axis of differential vulnerability outside the scope of current curricular response.

The third dimension of vulnerability is the one that formal institutions are most directly positioned to address, and the one where the gap between what is needed and what is offered remains widest. Digital political literacy, the capacity to critically navigate partisan content, recognise algorithmic manipulation, and engage with political difference in reasoned ways, has not been meaningfully incorporated into Indonesian civic education (Arifuddin & Hermawan, 2025). What students receive instead is a curriculum organised around value transmission: learning what Pancasila means, understanding the architecture of the constitution, absorbing the normative commitments that underpin Indonesian democratic life. None of this is unimportant. But it leaves students without the analytical tools they need to make sense of the political information environment they actually inhabit (Murdiono & Wuryandani, 2021).

Pratama et al. (2025) put numbers to what many teachers and students already sense: digital literacy competencies remain poorly developed at the secondary school level, among both educators and students, at precisely the moment when identity formation and first-time electoral participation are converging. But framing this as a resource problem misses the deeper issue. Schools in Indonesia are not failing to teach digital political literacy primarily because they lack devices or connectivity. They are failing because the curriculum itself was not built to accommodate it.

The Merdeka Curriculum rests on an ideal of harmonious citizenship, a vision that is normatively coherent given Pancasila's pluralist foundations, but one that has quietly produced a classroom culture where controversy is something to be managed and minimised rather than worked through. Teachers are not trained to facilitate structured disagreement. Most receive little institutional support for navigating discussions that touch on live political tensions. So instruction gravitates, predictably, towards consensus: affirming the values that everyone nominally shares, avoiding the friction that genuine political difference would introduce, and

sending students back out into a digital world that runs on exactly that friction, having never once practised handling it.

This ‘harmony bias’ in Indonesian civic pedagogy inadvertently produces students who are simultaneously politically socialised (through digital media) and politically unskilled (in terms of deliberative capacity), a combination that maximises vulnerability to affective polarisation. Without pedagogically structured encounters with political difference, young citizens have no experiential foundation for the empathic tolerance that democratic cohesion requires (Murdiono & Wuryandani, 2021).

These three dimensions do not operate independently. Fragmented digital structures, intensifying identity dynamics, and the pedagogical limitations of formal civic education feed into one another in ways that compound each individual weakness. Algorithmic enclosure narrows the information environment, which strengthens emotional attachment to in-group narratives, which makes the absence of deliberative skills in the classroom more consequential, which in turn leaves young people more susceptible to the next cycle of algorithmically amplified identity content. The vulnerability is not additive. It is recursive. The recursive mechanism operates as follows: algorithmic enclosure narrows the range of political perspectives a young person encounters, which intensifies emotional attachment to in-group narratives and heightens sensitivity to out-group threat – an affective-identity dynamic that in turn makes the student less likely to engage with cross-cutting content even when it is algorithmically available. The absence of deliberative practice in formal civic education means there is no institutionally structured opportunity to interrupt this cycle: students who have never navigated structured political disagreement in a classroom are less likely to seek it out in a digital environment designed to avoid delivering it. Each dimension, in other words, reinforces the conditions that allow the other two to operate at full intensity. This is the feedback architecture that makes the triple vulnerability nexus qualitatively different from, and more resistant to intervention than, any of its component dimensions alone.

What this means, conceptually, is that youth exposure to polarisation cannot be adequately explained by pointing to any single factor. It is not primarily that young Indonesians lack access to correct information, though that is part of the picture. The more fundamental problem is that they lack the developed capacity to critically process, interrogate, and deliberate about political information under conditions that are specifically designed to bypass those capacities. Information abundance without reflective skill does not produce informed citizens. In a high-polarisation digital environment, it tends to produce the opposite.

The capacity of the civic education curriculum to build democratic resilience among youth

An analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum documents indicates that Pancasila and Civic Education has normatively been directed towards strengthening civic character through the Pancasila Student Profile framework, which includes the values of global diversity, mutual cooperation, and critical reasoning (Latief et al., 2024). From the perspective of civic competence theory, this orientation reflects an effort to develop three core dimensions of citizenship: civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions (Lonto, 2019). Taken together, civic knowledge, civic skills, and civic dispositions form the foundation on which reflective and responsible democratic participation is built. The question this study presses is whether Indonesia’s current civic education architecture is actually laying that foundation, or merely describing it.

The Gap Analysis suggests the latter. Nowhere in the Merdeka Curriculum’s learning outcome structure are the challenges of digital political polarisation named as civic problems requiring a pedagogical response. This is not a peripheral oversight. The curriculum’s six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile (faithful/pious, globally diverse, cooperative, independent, critical thinking, and creative) carry real democratic weight as normative commitments. But normative commitment and pedagogical operationalisation are different

things. None of these dimensions is translated into learning outcomes that would help a student recognise a filter bubble, interrogate algorithmic bias, identify affective polarisation in their own responses, or verify a politically charged claim before sharing it. The values are present; the tools for living by them in a digitally saturated electoral environment are not (Afriani et al., 2025).

Muthhar (2016) traces this deficit to something older than the Merdeka Curriculum. Indonesian civic education has carried through both the New Order period and the post-Reformasi era an epistemological orientation that treats political conflict as a problem to be resolved rather than a condition to be navigated. This curriculum analysis points towards what might provisionally be called a ‘harmony bias’ in Indonesian civic pedagogy; empirical confirmation of how this orientation shapes actual classroom practice remains an important direction for future field-based research. Harmony is the destination; controversy is what threatens the journey. The consequence is a curriculum that teaches tolerance as an aspiration while offering students no practice in actually tolerating genuine political disagreement, precisely the kind of disagreement that fills their social media feeds every day. Critical thinking appears throughout the curriculum’s rhetoric as a prized competency, but critical engagement with politically contested content is exactly what the curriculum’s harmony orientation consistently steers away from. What emerges, then, is not a failure of implementation but a failure of design: a curriculum whose foundational premises are structurally at odds with the political environment young Indonesians now inhabit (Muthhar, 2016).

As the 2024 election brought an unprecedented volume of competing political narratives into young people’s feeds, the practical consequences of this design gap became harder to ignore. Students who have never been asked to work through genuine political disagreement in a structured educational setting do not suddenly develop that capacity on their own. Instead, they turn to wherever political meaning is being made most vividly, which in most cases means non-formal digital sources of varying credibility and considerable partisan intensity (Yusrin & Salpina, 2023). Civic Education, in this scenario, does not disappear; it simply becomes irrelevant to the political formation that is actually happening.

The contrast with other national contexts is instructive. Germany’s Beutelsbacher Konsens does not treat political controversy as something to be smoothed over; it mandates that controversial issues be taught as controversial, and explicitly bars teachers from nudging students towards predetermined conclusions (Schiele & Schneider, 1977). In the Nordic countries, the evidence from longitudinal ICCS data points in a consistent direction: students who regularly encounter structured political controversy in the classroom come out of it with stronger civic knowledge, a greater capacity to sit with political difference, and democratic commitments that prove more durable over time (Knowles et al., 2018). The United States tells a similar story through different programmes. Research on the political classroom, including structured discussion of controversial issues, shows that giving students direct, pedagogically supported experience with political disagreement does not deepen division; rather, it builds the capacity for reasoned engagement across political difference that affective polarisation erodes and that makes democratic participation more than a performative exercise (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). The common thread running through these cases is not a particular curriculum or a specific teaching technique. It is the decision to treat political disagreement as the substance of civic education rather than its enemy. What ties these approaches together at the theoretical level is what Habermas (1992/1996) calls ‘communicative rationality’: the capacity to advance and evaluate arguments on their merits rather than on the basis of group identity. Indonesia’s Merdeka Curriculum aspires to *bernalar kritis* (critical reasoning), but it has not yet institutionalised the pedagogical conditions under which that aspiration can be realised in politically contested contexts (Habermas, 1992/1996).

Hartman and Kiely (2014) make a point that cuts to the heart of what civic education is actually for: knowing how democratic institutions work is not the same as understanding the

power relations that shape what gets said, heard, and believed within them. That distinction matters more now than it ever has. Political power in the digital age rarely shows up as censorship or state coercion. It works through subtler mechanisms: the feed that surfaces certain voices and buries others, the recommendation system that decides what a user sees next, the invisible architecture that determines, at scale, whose arguments reach audiences and whose dissolve into irrelevance. None of this requires a visible hand. It happens through design choices made by engineers optimising for engagement, and it shapes political reality as effectively as any official decree. Students who leave civic education knowing how parliament works but unable to see how algorithmic systems structure their information environment are, in a meaningful sense, only half-prepared for democratic life. In the context of digital polarisation, therefore, strengthening civic dispositions (openness to difference, epistemic humility, digital responsibility, and deliberative empathy) is not merely one element of good civic pedagogy; it is the structural prerequisite for democratic resilience (Hartman & Kiely, 2014).

From these theoretical foundations, this study proposes the Digital Civic Resilience (DCR) Model as a framework for both diagnosing and responding to the structural gap between what Indonesia's civic education currently offers and what an algorithmically polarised democratic environment actually demands of young citizens. It is important to situate the DCR Model explicitly against existing digital literacy and media education frameworks, whose contributions it builds on while going beyond them in specific respects. Hobbs's (2010) foundational model of digital media literacy emphasises access, analysis, evaluation, and creation of media messages as core competencies. The European Union's DigComp 2.2 framework (Vuorikari et al., 2022) operationalises digital competence across five domains, including information literacy and online communication. Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013) extend these frameworks into civic contexts, arguing that media literacy is a prerequisite for meaningful democratic participation. The DCR Model is indebted to all three but addresses what they do not foreground: the affective-identity dimension of digital political socialisation. None of these frameworks is built around the psychological process by which adolescent partisan identity hardens within algorithmically curated environments, nor do they integrate the curriculum design problem of how formal civic education must change if it is to intervene in that process. These are precisely the dimensions the DCR Model is designed to capture, making it a complementary rather than competing contribution to the digital literacy literature.

The model rests on three dimensions that cut across one another rather than sitting side by side as separate concerns. The first is the Algorithmic Dimension. This is the infrastructure layer: filter bubbles, engagement-driven amplification, and the disinformation ecosystem that collectively determine what political content young people actually encounter and how often. The second is the Affective-Identity Dimension, which takes seriously the psychological reality that adolescence and early adulthood are the years when political identity is being formed. How young people come to feel about political groups, who counts as us and who counts as them, and how those feelings harden into partisan attachment, are not background conditions to polarisation. They are its engine. The third is the Pedagogical-Deliberative Dimension, which asks a blunt question about schools: are they building the deliberative capacities that the other two dimensions erode, or are they simply standing aside while that erosion happens? This covers curriculum design, teacher readiness to facilitate politically charged discussions, and whether digital political literacy has been given genuine weight as a civic competency or treated as something to be addressed eventually.

The DCR Model holds that resilience is not built by addressing any one of these dimensions in isolation. It requires simultaneous intervention across all three: media literacy curricula that teach students to decode algorithmic structures rather than simply consume through them; structured controversy methods that give students practice in sitting with affective discomfort across political difference; and experiential democratic simulations that develop deliberative skills through doing rather than through instruction alone. Indonesia is

the empirical ground on which this framework is constructed, but the logic it follows is not Indonesia-specific. Any electoral democracy where affective polarisation, digital disinformation, and civic education underperformance are occurring together faces a structurally similar problem, and the DCR Model is designed to travel. In this sense, the model answers the question this study opened with, offering civic educators not just a diagnosis of what has gone wrong, but a theoretically grounded architecture for building the kind of youth resilience that pernicious polarisation most depends on eroding.

The dimensions, mechanisms, impacts, and targeted pedagogical interventions that constitute the DCR Model are laid out in Table 2 below.

Table 2.

The Digital Civic Resilience (DCR) Model: Dimensions, mechanisms and pedagogical interventions

Dimension	Core Mechanism	Impact on Youth	DCR Intervention
Algorithmic	Filter bubble & engagement-driven amplification; partisan content prioritised algorithmically	Confirmation bias; limited cross-cutting exposure; homogeneous information diet	Explicit media literacy curriculum: decoding algorithmic bias, source verification, cross-partisan content engagement
Affective-Identity	Psychologically reinforced in-group/out-group dynamics; partisan identity fusion during formative years	Affective polarisation; emotional distance from political others; resistance to deliberative dialogue	Structured controversy methods (e.g., Structured Academic Controversy); cross-group deliberative simulations
Pedagogical-Deliberative	'Harmony bias' in curriculum; avoidance of controversial issues; value transmission over deliberative facilitation	Civic knowledge without deliberative skill; inability to navigate politically contested digital environments	Teacher capacity development for controversial-issue facilitation; co-curricular democracy programmes (KPU/Bawaslu collaboration)

Source: Developed by the authors based on the thematic synthesis of the literature reviewed, 2026.

The DCR Model's novelty warrants explicit statement. Existing media literacy frameworks – including Hobbs (2010) and DigComp 2.2 – address competency development but do not theorise the recursive interaction between algorithmic platform structures and adolescent identity formation. Deliberative pedagogy models in the tradition of Habermas (1992/1996) address the conditions for rational public discourse but do not engage the algorithmic shaping of those conditions. Affective polarisation theory (Iyengar et al., 2019) explains the psychological mechanisms of partisan identity consolidation but does not generate pedagogical prescriptions. The DCR Model's distinctive contribution is the simultaneous, theoretically integrated treatment of all three dimensions – algorithmic, affective-identity, and pedagogical-deliberative – as a recursive system in which each dimension feeds back into the others. This integration is what gives the model its diagnostic specificity and its transferability beyond the Indonesian case. The DCR Model generates a set of concrete, theoretically grounded policy implications that move beyond generic calls for curriculum reform. First, the Merdeka Curriculum's *Capaian Pembelajaran* (learning achievement standards) for Pancasila and Civic Education would benefit from revision to include explicit Digital Political Literacy competencies – specifically, the ability to identify filter bubble mechanisms, recognise algorithmic amplification of partisan content, verify political information across multiple credible sources, and engage in constructive cross-partisan digital dialogue (Latief & Tiara, 2025; Laventia et al.,

2025). These competencies cannot remain embedded implicitly within the *bernalar kritis* dimension; they should be operationalised through concrete learning objectives and assessed through deliberative performance tasks. Second, teacher professional development must be redesigned to equip Civic Education teachers with the facilitation skills required for structured controversy and politically sensitive dialogue. This represents a pedagogical paradigm shift – from value transmission to deliberative facilitation – that requires sustained institutional support, not merely one-time training workshops (Latief & Tiara, 2025; Murdiono & Wuryandani, 2021). Teachers who are themselves uncertain about navigating political controversy in the classroom cannot be expected to model the deliberative rationality that students need to develop. Third, the institutional architecture of civic learning must extend beyond the classroom through structured collaboration among schools, the General Elections Commission (KPU), the Election Supervisory Agency (Bawaslu), and civil society organisations specialising in digital literacy and democratic education (Erfain, 2025b).

Co-curricular democracy simulations, youth deliberative forums, and community fact-checking programmes are not supplementary activities at the margins of civic education. They are the spaces where the deliberative skills that formal instruction describes but rarely practises can actually be developed. Alongside these, Indonesia would benefit from establishing a national Digital Political Literacy framework, something analogous in ambition to Germany's Beutelsbacher Konsens or the civic education standards embedded in Nordic schooling systems. Such a framework would move the pedagogical treatment of algorithmic polarisation, digital disinformation, and affective bias out of the category of optional enrichment and into the core of what democratic citizenship education is understood to require, across all school levels and not just in isolated classrooms where an unusually committed teacher happens to make room for it.

The normative foundation of Indonesia's Civic Education is not the problem. The Pancasila Student Profile, the stated commitments to critical thinking and diversity, the curriculum's orientation towards character formation – these are genuine assets. The problem is the distance between that foundation and what actually happens when students sit down in a classroom, open a social media app on the way home, and encounter a political environment that their schooling has left them structurally unprepared to navigate. Closing that distance is not a matter of adding a unit on media literacy to an otherwise unchanged curriculum. It requires repositioning Civic Education itself: not as a subject that transmits the values of Indonesian democracy, but as a long-term investment in citizens who have the reflective, dialogical, and critical capacities to defend and renew those values under conditions that will only grow more demanding.

Conclusion

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review combined with Gap Analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum to address three intersecting research questions at the junction of democratic theory, digital communication, and civic pedagogy. The findings both confirm and extend existing theoretical frameworks while generating an original conceptual contribution to the global discourse on civic education and political polarisation.

The first finding concerns the character of polarisation in the 2024 electoral context. The SLR synthesis confirms that Indonesia fits the pattern McCoy et al. (2018) describe as pernicious polarisation, with Iyengar et al.'s (2019) affective polarisation framework accounting for the psychological mechanism operating at the individual level. But the Indonesian evidence also unsettles a quieter assumption in Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy: that the conditions for reasoned public discourse can be restored through better institutional design. The algorithmic architecture of contemporary political communication has restructured the public sphere in ways that procedural fixes cannot reach. Getting deliberation back requires building deliberative capacity in citizens, and that is an educational problem before it is an institutional one.

The second finding concerns youth vulnerability. The ‘triple vulnerability nexus’ this study identifies, the simultaneous operation of algorithmic enclosure, affective identity dynamics, and a pedagogical harmony bias in formal civic education, produces polarisation risks that no single factor could generate independently. The interaction between these three dimensions is precisely what makes the vulnerability so difficult to interrupt. For polarisation researchers working in other electoral democracies where similar conditions are present, this finding suggests that single-factor interventions are unlikely to be sufficient.

The third finding is perhaps the most consequential for Indonesian education policy. The Merdeka Curriculum’s orientation towards harmony over deliberative conflict is not a peripheral feature that could be quietly adjusted. It is an epistemological disposition built into the curriculum’s foundations, and it produces real democratic costs. The curriculum’s normative strengths are genuine, but they cannot compensate for the absence of controversial issue pedagogy and digital political literacy as explicit, assessable learning outcomes. Students are being sent into an algorithmically polarised democratic environment without the tools their schooling could have given them.

The DCR Model this study proposes is an attempt to provide something that previous calls for media literacy integration in Indonesian civic education have largely lacked: not a general recommendation to add digital content to existing instruction, but a theoretically grounded account of why specific interventions address specific dimensions of vulnerability. That specificity matters for curriculum designers, teacher educators, and education policymakers who need more than a direction to move in. They need a map of why the terrain is structured the way it is. Whether the model holds under empirical scrutiny remains to be seen. Mixed-methods studies in Indonesian schools, examining whether deliberative pedagogy interventions actually reduce affective polarisation measures among youth, and whether gains in digital political literacy moderate the relationship between social media consumption and partisan identity rigidity, represent the necessary next step. The DCR Model is a conceptual construction. It now needs to meet the classroom.

Authors’ contributions

Abdul Latief: Conceptualisation, methodology, formal analysis, and writing – original draft. Abd. Rahman: Data curation and writing – review and editing. Dermawan: Validation and writing – review and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. This research was conducted independently, and no financial, personal, or professional relationships influenced its design, findings, or conclusions.

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