

Democratic practices in Indonesia: youth political participation and the transformation of protest communication in the digital era

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the practice of democracy learning in Indonesia by emphasizing the importance of citizen involvement in democratic processes, particularly through public demonstrations. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing semi-structured interviews, observations, and a comprehensive literature review as data collection methods. The data were derived from reports on public protests in both print and online media, as well as expert interviews relevant to the issue. The findings indicate a notable shift in the patterns of youth participation in political engagement. In addition to conventional forms of protest, such as physical demonstrations, contemporary participation has increasingly expanded into digital spaces, where efforts to amplify issues through social media virality play a crucial role in mobilizing public support. Furthermore, the study identifies a transformation in the language and style of protest among Indonesian youth compared to those observed during the Reform Era. These demonstrations reflect a rational expression of citizens' concerns toward national issues, representing an important dimension of civic competence in a democratic society.

Keywords: Civic Engagement, Democracy, Political Communication, Youth Participation

INTRODUCTION

Demonstrations or protests as a way for voices to be heard become an element in fulfilling citizens' rights, especially in terms of expressing opinions. Political actions are the consequences of economic or social positions Janoski & Gran, (2002) In Indonesia, the right to express opinions is regulated in the 1945 Constitution Article 28 and strengthened in Law Number 9 of 1998 on Expressing Opinions in Public. The main source for the readiness of the youth to engage in non-normative political actions is their political belief Šerek et al., (2018). During the period of September-October 2019, several demonstrations took place in Indonesia by students in various regions, including Jakarta, Semarang, Palembang, Makassar, Solo, Medan. One of the reasons for these protests is to respond to the issue of the Criminal Code Law draft and revision of the Corruption Eradication Commission bill (Idhom, 2019).

As a democratic country, Indonesia has Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution as the state foundation in order to regulate the nation and state. As such, the values contained in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution must be understood, internalized, and delivered as the manifestation of democratic and

responsible citizens Wahab & Sapriya, (2011). Political issues are experienced in everyday life and in all social fields. Meanwhile, the youth always places politics as a complicated process Yoldaş, (2015). Democracy learning in Indonesia identifies the importance of political participation practices of the younger generation, especially in the globalization era. Each era has its own generation and historical experience which shapes a different political attitude and behavior Wang (2019). A longitudinal study on 895 samples of young people that were surveyed two times found that political discussions can promote political participation. In addition, the research findings affirm that political discussions are translated into political actions under the condition of social influence and for people that are vulnerable to social conformity Russo & Amnå (2016).

Identifying the importance of political participation among the younger generation means re-questioning the result of education and teaching. According to Ki Hadjar Dewantara, the Father of Education in Indonesia, the definitions of education and teaching are blurred as they are often used interchangeably. He clarified that teaching is a part of education. Teaching concerns with the delivery of knowledge, whereas education in general refers to the children's life guidance. Ki Hadjar Dewantara emphasized that education is merely a life "guidance" for children that is beyond the educators' intentions Dewantara (1977). In the scope of preparing responsible and active citizens, many schemes have been carried out to encourage early participation in community involvement Lee & Suzanne Horsley (2017). The influence of environment to encourage participation has a greater possibility to encourage individuals to be involved Pattie & Johnston (2013). Youth participation can strengthen personal and social development, supporting a more democratic society Checkoway (2011).

Many studies on democratic participation and practices by the younger generation have been conducted. A study examining the effect of political protests on the capital accumulation and youth welfare during a political transition in Egypt between 2011 and 2014 generated important findings, particularly regarding the effect of various forms of political conflicts, especially among youth in the Middle East, North Africa, and other regions experiencing progress Liu et al., (2019). Levintova & Butterfield, (2010) identified the number of young people in Russia that became politically active beyond voting, especially in terms of showing support of Putinism and firm rejection against the era of President Boris Yeltsin (1992-2000). Levintova & Butterfield analyzed the content of 47 high school textbooks on Russian history and conducted open-ended interviews with 37 activists from three youth organizations. The analysis showed that there was a clear correlation between views from the Yeltsin and Putin eras presented in the textbooks and in the political beliefs of youth groups. A survey among the youth in the state of Maharashtra, India, exploring factors related to youth participation in a civil society found the importance of education, parents' interaction in facilitating youth participation in the civil society, political life, and expressions of pro-social values Acharya et al., (2010).

Ikeda et al. (2008) studied macro-environmental factors that can influence that cognitive consequences of political participation by analyzing 22 countries in CSES data set using hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and found that political participation has a compensation effect on the political effectiveness for those who believe that their political position has been represented by the current party system. Cahill & Dadvand (2018) studied the participation model proposed to increase youth participation using critical post-structural theory, youth study, and civics study to design a framework to conceptualize and plan youth participation. Cahill & Dadvand illustrated the framework in the youth project that discussed HIV prevention in Asia-Pacific countries. The findings showed that the framework was successful in helping to strengthen the vision and quality of youth participation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of youth participation in democracy is a problem in a democratic country that requires citizen participation. Political participation is an opportunity to give time and energy to benefit others and advance political agendas Woodward et al. (2016). The importance of political participation among the younger generation is related to the efforts of maintaining the existence of a nation. A study analyzed student participation and political involvement through Model United Nations as the most popular civics education program in the world by analyzing more than 150 hours of observation and interviews with teachers, and found that teachers facilitated the club for intellectual, administrative, and personal development Levy (2016).

Political participation and political knowledge show a good correlation. A study in the Panchthar district discussed how the youth was involved in a different political dimension with a background of exploring political day-to-day life of the village youth that lived in the post-war environment in Southern Global as it was less explored (as a result of the civil war in Nepal in 1996-2006). The study found that first, the youth were leading political parties and involving themselves and seeking advantages, and secondly, they negotiated political motivation in society through the household dynamics that were adjusted to their lifestyle Korzenevica (2016). This is supported by a study by Oni et al. (2017) which used the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) and Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) to examine the political culture and result of e-democracy. The study reported the importance of democratic political culture orientation among the citizens to develop positive attitude toward acceptance in the use of e-democracy. Another study emphasized on the importance of youth contribution in civil matters in the San Francisco Youth Commission as an example of youth participation. Through the San Francisco Youth Commission, knowledge about youth participation contributed to the growth of civic practices among the citizens Checkoway et al. (2005).

This study aims to deeply examine the form of youth participation in relation to democratic practices and the youth's involvement in demonstrations. Furthermore, the objectives of this study are based on the following questions:

- a. Research Question 1: Has youth political participation taken place in Indonesia?
- b. Research Question 2: Has protests served as a mediator for political participation among young generation in Indonesia?

In line with the research objectives, this paper is expected to enrich the insight and perspectives on youth existence, especially university students, as a part of the country which can promote change, as well as to contribute to the scope of citizen involvement related to the citizens' civic competence. The presence of youth is strategic for change. When young people show their existence, it indicates that there is a development among individuals and groups on the awareness of the civic life Gan et al. (2017).

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METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive qualitative method. Citizen involvement in democratic practices plays an important role in supporting the existence of democracy in Indonesia to be a model for other democratic countries. The descriptive qualitative method can benefit readers as it delivers advanced knowledge Stake (2009). Further, a case study provides an opportunity for the researcher to uncover a phenomenon

holistically according to what actually happens. Data in this study were obtained from semi-structured interviews, observation, and literature (document) study.

Research was done using knowledge repository websites and keyword search, including “democracy”, “digital era”, and “citizen participation practices” to obtain literature on demonstrations in print or online media, in addition to interviews with experts regarding the subject matter from Scopus and PubMed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Social media offers a new platform for political participation Koiranen et al., (2020). The research findings on the demonstrations in the period of September - October of 2019 in Indonesia show that there is a shift in the involvement of political participation. The shift in the involvement of political participation is in the form and nature in expressing the demands in the demonstration, namely through virtual protests and the use of posters, as well as the funny phrases used in the banners that address the goal and intention of the protests. Compared to the demonstrations in the 1998 reform era in Indonesia, this study found that there is a shift in political participation in the form of virtual protests. Nurfitriani (2020) in mediaindonesia.com defines virtual protests as protests in the form of uploading writings, images, or videos on social media (Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram) using hashtags, such as #TolakOmnibusLaw (reject Omnibus Law), #NadiemMana-MahasiswaMerana (Where’s Nadiem (the Minister of Education and Culture) - Students are suffering), #Mendikbud-DicariMahasiswa (Minister of Education and Culture - The students are looking for you), and #Liburkan-BuruhDenganUpahTHRPenuh (Give labors a vacation break with full holiday bonus).

The virtual protest in the demonstration period of September - October of 2019 in Indonesia has confirmed the arrival of the digitization era today. The term “digitization era” in virtual protest is concerned with the role of media in documenting and broadcasting news about the existence of the demonstration. This definitely seems appropriate considering the chance of information outreach about the protest to the targeted social level. Based on the data by the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association, in 2018 it was recorded that internet users in Indonesia reached 143.26 million people, or around 54.68% of the total population of Indonesia. In general, Lim et al. (2013) reported that among the youth, the willingness to participate in new media is motivated by independent learning. With the virtual protest in the demonstration period of September - October of 2019, the protesters in Indonesia has become a part of digital demonstration with a form of digital participation.



Figure 1. A protester showing a poster using casual language BBC News Indonesia (2019)

Source: <https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/trensosial-49837790>

Virtual protests still contain expressive forms. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, virtual protests serve as the beginning of how protests are developed in the digital form to the point that it can increase involvement of protesters which subsequently become the media in the promotion of the goal of the protests. Catalano et al. (2019) explained that in the future, efforts are needed to offer the benefits of using digital platform in every activity of human life. In a virtual protest, digital media becomes a strong point for the protesters as the actors of the protest. According to Lin et al. (2018), in the youth development program, a positive experience is consistent as an inclusive environment in order to allow them to experience and develop practical life skills.

During the demonstration period of September - October of 2019 in Indonesia, the protesters were committed in using social media as a platform for their virtual protest to distribute information in the local, national, and international scope. Y. Kim & Chen (2016) explained that the use of social media has mediated the relation between the use of media and political participation among the users online. As social network platforms, social media allow their users to obtain shared information. According to Leal & Teigen (2018), participation helps overcome the social dynamics that often hinder political participation. Therefore, it is important to examine the involvement of young citizens in the democratic practices. It cannot be denied that the presence of media allows a fast and wide distribution of information.

Youth contribution is related to the indicators of optimism and social support Ramey, Lawford, & Rose-Krasnor (2017). In the virtual protest during the demonstration period of September - October of 2019 in Indonesia, Bode (2017) aimed not to replace the online or offline political behaviors among the youth, but to understand how the implications of the civil education supports increase the role of demonstrators that is central in the democratic practices in Indonesia. The positive value in a virtual protest is that it adds a sense of nationalism despite the people not being in the same physical room due to the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Sherrod et al. (2004), there is a relation between politics, knowledge, and behavior in the youth's political views. More specifically, Teney & Hanquinet (2012) noted that social modal serves as a strong factor in political mobilization.

Education institutions have offered the relevant competencies in the efforts to empower the youth to actively participate, as well as be knowledgeable, critical, and responsible Datzberger & Le Mat (2019). The virtual protest in the demonstration period of September - October of 2019 serves as a means to understand how social political issues can take spotlight and be the central issues to increase solidarity and political literacy of the citizens. Based on observations and interviews, it was found that during the virtual protest, the protesters conduct social media activities by giving emphasis on the demands that they deliver in the protest. According to Cicognani et al. (2012), in general, there is a view in the youth political development that focuses on the youth as the group that does not pay attention to political issues. Barbosa et al. (2014) add that civic values are linked to the emergence of sub-politics in the political consumerism phenomenon.



Figure 2. A group of students participated in the rally along the AP Pettarani Street, Makassar, South Sulawesi on Tuesday (24/9/2019). Pratama (2019)

Source: <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2019/09/30/jadwal-demo-mahasiswa-terbagi-dua-30-september-dan-1-oktober-2019>.

The use of social media is linked to political participation, affecting direct participation. On the other hand, the internalization of news influences participation indirectly Choi et al. (2017). Internet memes are a contemporary phenomenon in digital communication Ross & Rivers (2017). In a virtual protest, the form of demonstration in the digital platform does not eliminate the meaning of political involvement. Dawkins, (2017) affirmed that political participation has a positive correlation with asset ownership in the social capital Feng & Johansson (2014). Although political mobilization may work, participation that lasts is one that is rooted in the individual's psychological structure. Therefore, expanding the opportunity to participate in the public life has an important role as a means of change Priestley et al. (2016)

Based on the findings, two forms of demonstration can be identified. In addition to the conventional rally on the street, there is also an effort to make an issue viral by gaining support from the public space on the social media. Head (2011) stated that in the youth welfare policy framework, there is a confusion on the operational implications which require the involvement of youth's perspective and interest. Furthermore, Jónsson & Garces Rodriguez (2021) confirmed that in regard to democratic education, the value of a skill becomes a competency for a democratic culture. The International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS), which investigates the role of school in preparing students to play their role as citizens, reported that the independent variables of the school and the students' civic knowledge play their role in the political effectiveness among students Manganelli et al. (2012).

The youth protests in Indonesia have experienced a shift in the protest language compared to the demonstrations during the 1998 reform. The existence of the demonstration during the period of September-October of 2019 in Indonesia represents a form of rationalization of citizens' concern for their country from the perspective of civic competence. According to Steinberg (2015), the relation between political participation and the youth is linked to the possibility of political participation in the previous era. The Indonesian youth demonstration is experiencing a shift in the protest language compared to the demonstrations during the 1998 reformation. Steinber Steinberg (2015) stated that the relation of political participation in social media sites identifies the relation and form of benefits, and that participation tends

to root in political interest. Additionally, Vesnic-Alujevic (2012) noted that there is political communication in political participation that optimizes political resources.

Compared to the demonstrations during the 1998 reformation, the shift in protest language in the demonstration during the period of September-October of 2019 in material and moral way is related to the form of delivery of aspiration that is accessible by the public. According to Isaksson (2014), political participation is the most invaluable right as it requires the input of individual resources with a relatively high level of participation interest. Moreover, Y. Kim & Khang (2014) explained that the individual sub-component serves as the predictor for civil voluntarism. The protest language in the demonstration during the period of September-October of 2019 is aimed for the student movement to have a flexible means for coordination (social media) and a creative and positive information distribution. Zhu, Chan, & Chou Zhu et al. (2019) agreed that the use of social media in a creative and positive way predicts indirect political participation. Therefore, the use of the protest language fittingly addresses the current era in which social media is widely used by the younger generation in general.

For people who frequently use the Internet in search of political information, it is more likely to increase institutional trust, which reduces the possibility of participation in offline political activities Christine Huang et al. (2020). Inequality in political participation is one of the causes of unhealthy political condition Reeves & Mackenbach (2019). The shift in the language of protest when compared to the demonstrations during the 1998 reformation in Indonesia represents an act of demonstration, in its own way. Fan & Yan (2019) explained that political behavior is more influenced by the effect of individual objectives in building alliances to participate in politics. The use of simple protest language among the younger generation is a way for the younger generation of Indonesia to show that Indonesia is not doing well. According to Yamamoto et al. (2018), political information is related to political knowledge and participation. In this regard, the student movement that brings their protests on social media became massive because it was significantly supported by the public.

Excellent political communication in virtual demonstration is significantly related to political participation or political perception Conroy-Krutz (2018). To increase political discussion, social media plays a role in facilitating "offline" participation in political activities M. Kim (2018). The findings of this study generally imply that Gen Z as the younger generation in fact cares about the condition of the state and nation of Indonesia. Min & Wohn (2018) explained that cross-sectoral exposure is significantly related to political participation. The simple protest language is the Gen Z's way to take over the conversation in social media in general. To them, this is the manifestation of working and smart thinking in political participation. According to J. Kim & Hyun (2017), context in the media can lead to the complex role of news and political discussions. Thus, the simple protest language in the demonstration serves as a great strength for them to be creative and have a high level of solidarity in raising awareness about issues related to the country and nation.

Young people's political interest positively indicates the need to pay attention to political discourse Y. Kim & Stattin (2019). Demonstrations using posters and protest language that represent their (the protesters) generation can be seen as their own form of political communication that can strengthen their political participation. This finding is supported by Thompson & Do (2019) who explained that the iconic depiction in the expressions used in protests can be interpreted under all conditions of a good demonstration. Protest language that is simple yet accurately addresses the issue of the protest during the period of September-October of 2019 managed to foster communication ethics by eliciting positive

responses among protesters. As noted by Chavez et al. (2019), the rhetoric of positive politics generates positive emotions and is important for rhetoric's target.

Political stability cannot be separated from social, economic, and demographic factors Asfahani et al. (2019). In fact, political stability depends on youth involvement Farzanegan & Witthuhn (2017). By considering the development of information and communication that is close to the Generation Z, the use of simple protest language in the demonstration brings up various ethics in regard to the use of language, which in future civics studies can lead to digital citizenship. According to Solovyeva Solovyeva (2014), rehabilitation of the state as a social and political institution is imperative to develop the state policy on youth. Reidy et al. (2015) explained that the development of the youth's political orientation is related to the relationship between groups as a result of the ease in accessing information between groups which encourages information distribution. Moreover, the shift in how protest language is used and becomes more accessible or easy to understand reflects their current political orientation. In addition, Robalo, Schram, & Sonnemans Robalo et al. (2017) argue that interpersonal preferences and ties between groups affect political participation. Meanwhile, social networking sites shape youth involvement in politics, although sometimes their motifs are less known Vraga et al. (2015). Political relevance which leads to political management may also influence the level of participation Lau et al. (2018).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research that has been done, it can be concluded that the political participation of the younger generation in Indonesia has occurred. However, the political participation of the younger generation in Indonesia shows a shift in the involvement of the practice of political participation during the action period, namely by using good language which is carried out in groups and does not tend to blaspheme.

In addition, it was identified that demonstrations have become a mediator for the younger generation in Indonesia to participate in politics. There are two forms of rallies, namely apart from offline, they also seek to go viral through the support of social media public spaces. The demonstrations that took place in Indonesia during the September-October 2019 period were a form of rationalization of citizens' concern for the state from the perspective of civic competence. Through this research, the shift in the political participation of the younger generation in Indonesia has been confirmed.

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