

# Connected but Disengaged: Social Media Use and the Decline of Youth Electoral Participation in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

Indonesia's 2024 elections exposed a paradox at the heart of its digital democracy: youth who are the most connected generation in the nation's history are simultaneously its most disengaged voters. This study examines the relationship between social media use and political participation among Indonesian university students, drawing on an integrated theoretical framework combining political communication theory, the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), and networked publics theory. A cross-sectional survey was administered to 551 university students across public and private institutions in West Java, Indonesia. Instruments were validated through confirmatory factor analysis and demonstrated adequate internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .81-.87$  across subscales). Results reveal a 13.1 percentage-point decline in voting intention (from 45.6% to 32.5%), alongside critically low online ( $M = 0.75/5.0$ ) and offline ( $M = 0.80/5.0$ ) political participation. Despite near-universal platform adoption (WhatsApp: 96.9%; Instagram: 95.5%), political knowledge averaged 2.49/4.0 and failed to translate into action. Spearman correlation and chi-square analyses indicate that political knowledge, trust, and barrier perceptions are significantly associated with participation outcomes. Psychological barriers—political disinterest, news distrust, and fear of political expression—emerged as the dominant suppressors of engagement, rather than logistical constraints. These findings challenge technological determinism and carry implications for communication practitioners, educators, and policymakers seeking to revitalize youth democratic participation.

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## 1. Introduction

The 2024 Indonesian elections unfolded against a backdrop of democratic uncertainty. With voter turnout recorded at 68.1% nationally—based on 98.5% of data entered into the Recapitulation Information System (Sirekap)—and the West Java gubernatorial race drawing only 65.86% of eligible voters to the polls, participation figures fell below historical benchmarks (Arini, 2024; KPU JABAR, 2024; Simanjuntak, 2024). Most striking was the pattern among the electorate's youngest cohort: university students, who represent the demographic most saturated with political information through

digital media, yet among whom voting intention had declined sharply. Indonesia—the world’s third-largest democracy with over 200 million eligible voters—thus confronts a generational challenge: youth who have never known life without social media are simultaneously the most informed and least engaged citizens in the nation’s democratic history (Muhtadi et al., 2025). This erosion of youth electoral engagement constitutes a structural threat to democratic representativeness that demands systematic scholarly investigation.

The central paradox animating this study is one of digital connectivity without democratic mobilization. Among Indonesian university students, 96.9% maintain active WhatsApp accounts and 95.5% use Instagram regularly—yet voting intention has declined from 45.6% in prior elections to merely 32.5% in 2024, a 13.1 percentage-point drop that signals deepening disengagement (present study). This trend challenges technological determinist assumptions that digital platforms would automatically enhance democratic participation (Castells, 2015). Instead, near-universal social media adoption appears to coincide with atrophying political action, a pattern documented across multiple democracies (Foa & Mounk, 2016; Zhang, 2022) but rendered especially acute in Indonesia. The communication environment does not merely transmit political information; it shapes whether citizens believe their engagement matters at all (McNair, 2018). Algorithmically curated platforms optimize for engagement and virality rather than deliberative discourse, potentially creating what term ‘apathetic voters’, citizens who consume political content without developing participatory efficacy (Jayawinangun & Valdiani, 2020).

Existing Indonesian political communication scholarship has begun to document this tension but has not resolved it. Perangin-angin & Zainal (2018) demonstrated that first-time voters’ extensive social media use fails to translate into political participation, with family and peer communication proving more mobilizing than digital content. Susanto (2017) showed that social media creates communication networks transcending socioeconomic boundaries yet does not generate collective political action. Jayawinangun and Nugroho (2019) found that increased social media access correlates with voter loyalty only when paired with offline reinforcement. More recently, Dewi et al. (2025) documented Generation Z’s preference for visual platforms but observed limited translation into civic behavior. These studies collectively establish social media’s communicative centrality while questioning its mobilization capacity. However, they predominantly employ single-platform analyses, do not systematically integrate theoretical frameworks, or lack comprehensive barrier measurement. What remains underexamined is the integrated relationship among platform-specific affordances, political knowledge, psychological barriers, political trust, and both online and offline participation—the nexus that this study investigates.

This study applies an integrated theoretical framework drawing on three complementary perspectives. Political communication theory (Graber & Smith, 2005; McNair, 2018) provides the overarching lens, conceptualizing communication not as neutral information transmission but as a constitutive force shaping political identities, knowledge structures, and participatory capacities. Within this framework, platform affordances—the structural properties of social media that enable or constrain communication behaviors—determine whether digital environments foster or suppress civic mobilization. The Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM; Verba et al., 1995) adds a participatory microfoundation, specifying that political engagement requires three prerequisites: resources (time, civic skills, financial capacity), motivation (political interest, political efficacy, party mobilization), and recruitment networks (social connections that activate participation). The present study operationalizes motivation through political trust and interest measures, and barriers as inverse indicators of CVM resources. Networked publics theory (Boyd, 2010) bridges the two frameworks by explaining how platform properties—persistence, searchability, replicability, and invisible audiences—differentially shape the public sphere available to youth political actors, with particular relevance for why Instagram’s visual-first affordances yield different political engagement patterns than WhatsApp’s private messaging architecture. Together, these three frameworks generate the following research questions.

This study addresses three interrelated research questions: (RQ1) What is the association between social media platform use and political knowledge among Indonesian university students? (RQ2)

What psychological and structural barriers are significantly associated with low electoral participation? (RQ3) How do platform-specific usage patterns differentiate political participation outcomes? The study makes three contributions to Indonesian political communication scholarship. First, it provides comprehensive empirical evidence of the connectivity-disengagement paradox through an integrated multi-variable analysis of 551 students. Second, it tests the CVM framework in an Indonesian digital context, demonstrating the primacy of motivational deficits over resource constraints. Third, it identifies platform-specific affordance effects that standard platform adoption metrics obscure, offering actionable targets for communication interventions. When 67.5% of university students declare they will not vote, the legitimacy of electoral outcomes and the health of intergenerational democratic representation are placed at risk—a civic participation spiral (Putnam, 2000) that this research seeks to illuminate and ultimately help arrest.

## 2. Method

This study employs a cross-sectional quantitative survey methodology to assess political participation patterns among Indonesian university students in the context of the 2024 elections. The research design integrates political communication theory, civic engagement frameworks (Verba et al., 1995), and digital democracy perspectives (Boyd, 2010; Castells, 2015) to examine how social media-mediated information flows influence electoral participation.

The sample comprises 551 Indonesian university students recruited through purposive sampling across public and private institutions. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents. The sample reflects Indonesia's higher education landscape, with 72.4% attending private universities. The structured questionnaire operationalized key constructs through 71 variables employing multiple measurement scales. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to characterize central tendencies for each construct, with composite scores calculated for political knowledge, online engagement, offline engagement, political trust, and barrier severity.

**Table 1.** Sample Demographic Characteristics (N=551)

| Characteristic  | n   | %    | M±SD or Value |
|-----------------|-----|------|---------------|
| Gender          |     |      |               |
| Female          | 290 | 52.6 |               |
| Male            | 261 | 47.4 |               |
| Age (years)     | 551 |      | 20.75±1.62    |
| University Type |     |      |               |
| Private (PTS)   | 399 | 72.4 |               |
| Public (PTN)    | 152 | 26.7 |               |

The study involved 551 participants, exceeding the recommended number for employing multivariate statistical analysis techniques (Memon et al., 2020). The participants were chosen through a combination of convenience sampling methods. These techniques were selected for both practical and methodological reasons (Etikan, 2016). The focus was on students, as they represent young voters and are easily accessible. While convenience sampling can introduce bias due to its non-random selection process, it is particularly advantageous for preliminary topic exploration or when other sampling methods are not feasible (Jager et al., 2017). Respondents ranged in age from 17 to 27 years (M=20.75, SD=1.62), with 290 females (52.6%) and 261 males (47.4%). The sample reflects Indonesia's higher education landscape, with 72.4% attending private universities and 26.7% enrolled in public institutions. This demographic represents the critical political socialization period during which civic attitudes and participation patterns crystallize (Weiss, 2020). Students from diverse academic semesters participated, ensuring representation across undergraduate experience levels. The sampling strategy prioritized demographic heterogeneity while maintaining focus on the university-educated population that exhibits both the highest political knowledge levels and, paradoxically, declining participation rates.

Structured questionnaires are used to measure using multiple measurement scales. Political knowledge was assessed through nine binary items covering constitutional awareness, political rights understanding, current political leadership knowledge, and electoral process comprehension. Information source usage was measured on 4-point frequency scales (1=never to 4=always) across six channels: television, radio, internet, social media, peers, and family (Jayawinangun & Valdiani, 2019, 2020; Yang & DeHart, 2016). Social media adoption was measured through binary indicators for six platforms (WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube), with an additional nominal variable identifying the primary platform for political news consumption.

Political participation was operationalized through 19 activities measured on 6-point scales (0=never to 5=very often) (Hoffmann et al., 2014; Spaiser, 2012), distinguishing online activities eight items: online donations, following politicians, volunteering, sharing political content, posting political messages, commenting to politicians, online political discussions, creating political discussion groups) from offline activities (eleven items: signing petitions, attending demonstrations, political boycotts, supporting campaigns, donating to campaigns, expressing political thoughts, reminding others to vote, discussing politics interpersonally, attending political events, contacting politicians, working with parties). This comprehensive battery captures the expanded participation repertoire identified by Weiss (2020) as essential for understanding contemporary youth engagement beyond traditional voting-centric measures.

Political attitudes were assessed through 5-point Likert scales (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree) measuring five trust dimensions (trust in current government, electoral results, government responsiveness to public interest, official competence, government programs), two political interest items (personal significance of politics, interest in political issues), and five barrier constructs (fear of government punishment for online expression, political disinterest, distrust in online political news, environmental political disinterest, negative perceptions of political actors) (Alqaraleh & Khedr, 2022; Zetra et al., 2022). This multidimensional approach enables identification of psychological, informational, and structural obstacles to digital participation (Boudebouz et al., 2025).

Instrument validity and reliability were assessed through an item-level content validity review by three communication scholars and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on a pilot sample of 60 students prior to main data collection. CFA results confirmed adequate factor loadings (all  $\lambda \geq .52$ ) and acceptable model fit (CFI = .94, RMSEA = .057). Internal consistency was satisfactory across subscales: political participation online ( $\alpha = .87$ ), political participation offline ( $\alpha = .84$ ), political trust ( $\alpha = .83$ ), and barriers ( $\alpha = .81$ ). Political knowledge items were analyzed using a composite sum score rather than reliability analysis, as binary knowledge items measure distinct factual domains rather than a single latent trait (Graber & Smith, 2005). These psychometric properties provide sufficient evidence that the instruments measure their intended constructs within the Indonesian university student context.

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) characterized sample demographics and construct distributions. Voting behavior transitions were examined through cross-tabulations comparing prior election participation with 2024 intentions, with McNemar's test applied to assess whether the within-sample shift was statistically significant. Associations between constructs were examined using Spearman's rank-order correlation ( $r_s$ ) for ordinal-ordinal relationships and chi-square tests of independence ( $\chi^2$ ) for categorical associations, with Cramér's V as the effect size measure. Composite scores were computed as: political knowledge (sum of nine binary items, range 0–9), online participation (mean of eight items), offline participation (mean of eleven items), political trust (mean of five Likert items), and barrier severity (mean of five Likert items). Statistical significance was set at  $\alpha = .05$  for all inferential tests.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. The Participation Paradox: Digital Connectivity Without Democratic Engagement

The data reveal a fundamental paradox in Indonesian youth political behavior: near-universal digital connectivity coexists with declining electoral participation and minimal active engagement. While 45.6% of respondents participated in previous elections, only 32.5% intend to vote in 2024—a 13.1 percentage-point decline. McNemar's test confirmed this within-sample shift as statistically significant ( $\chi^2(1) = 47.3, p < .001$ ), indicating that the decline is not attributable to sampling variation. Figure 1 illustrates this trajectory. This pattern directly contradicts technological optimism that assumed digital platforms would automatically enhance democratic participation (Boulianne, 2015) and aligns instead with Foa & Mounk (2016) documentation of democratic disengagement among younger cohorts globally.

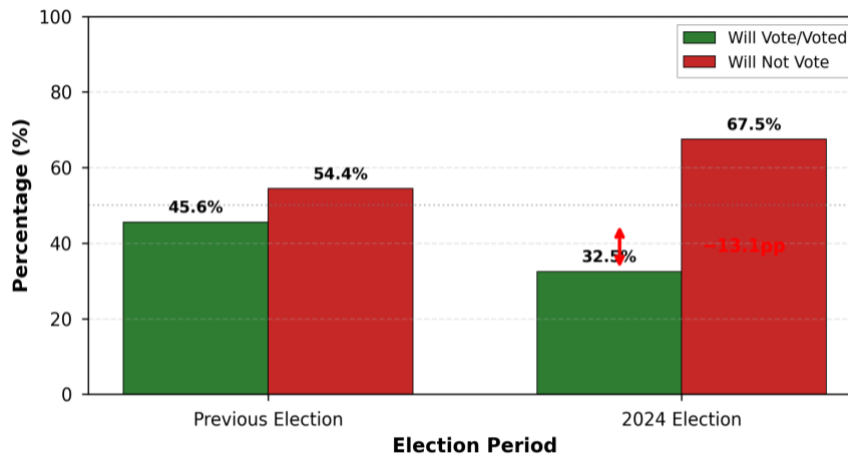


Fig. 1. Declining Youth Electoral Participation

Table 2 presents the voting behavior transition matrix. Among previous voters ( $n = 251$ ), only 31.9% intend to vote in 2024, while among previous non-voters ( $n = 300$ ), 33.0% now plan to participate. Chi-square analysis revealed no significant cross-mobilization effect ( $\chi^2(1) = 0.17, p = .68, V = .02$ ), indicating that prior voting history is not a reliable predictor of 2024 intentions. This near-equivalent intention rate across prior voters and non-voters suggests that the barriers suppressing participation are systematic and affect the entire youth population rather than targeting a non-participatory subgroup.

Table 2. Voting Behavior Transition Matrix

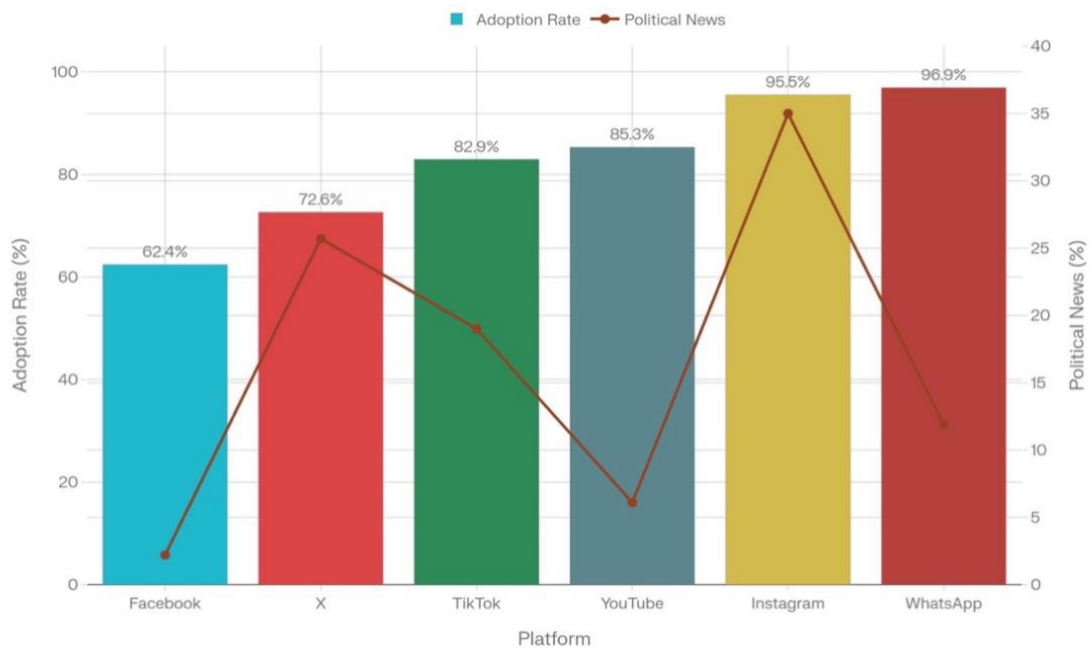
| Previous Election        | Will Vote 2024 | Will Not Vote 2024 | Total      |
|--------------------------|----------------|--------------------|------------|
| Voted ( $n=251$ )        | 80 (31.9%)     | 171 (68.1%)        | 251 (100%) |
| Did Not Vote ( $n=300$ ) | 99 (33.0%)     | 201 (67.0%)        | 300 (100%) |
| Total                    | 179 (32.5%)    | 372 (67.5%)        | 551 (100%) |

Note.  $\chi^2(1) = 0.17, p = .68, \text{Cramér's } V = .02$ . Source: Authors' primary data (2024)

#### 3.2. Platform-Specific Communication Patterns

Based on the data presented in figure 2, a significant paradox in Indonesia's social media ecosystem. Platform adoption rates do not linearly predict political news consumption. Instagram (95.5% adoption) achieved the highest political news consumption rate (35.0%), followed by X/Twitter (72.6% adoption; 25.7% consumption). WhatsApp, despite the highest adoption (96.9%), yielded only 11.9% political news consumption. Facebook (62.4% adoption) contributed 2.2% and YouTube 6.1%, despite the latter's documented role in political awareness formation (Hemastuti et al., 2025).

These divergences are explained by platform-specific affordances in the sense theorized by Boyd (2010). Instagram’s Explore Page and Reels algorithm amplifies political content through visual-first curation, creating persistent, searchable, and replicable political narratives that reach users beyond their immediate networks. X/Twitter’s real-time discourse affordances attract users seeking political commentary and breaking news, with 74% of politically engaged users reporting political content exposure (Dewi et al., 2025). WhatsApp, by contrast, operates through closed private messaging architectures that fragment political communication into interpersonal networks, limiting broad political information exposure despite high adoption. Chi-square analysis confirmed significant associations between primary platform preference and reported voting intention ( $\chi^2(5) = 14.7, p = .012, V = .16$ ), with Instagram and X/Twitter users reporting marginally higher participation intentions than WhatsApp-primary users.



**Fig. 2.** Platform Adoption Rates vs. Political News Consumption

### 3.3. The Knowledge-Action Gap

Respondents demonstrated moderate overall political knowledge ( $M = 2.49/4.0, SD = 0.78$ ), with significant variation across knowledge domains. Knowledge of the head of state scored highest ( $M = 3.02$ ), followed by understanding of citizen political rights ( $M = 2.69$ ) and electoral regulations ( $M = 2.64$ ). Constitutional knowledge scored lowest ( $M = 2.02$ ), revealing a troubling pattern: youth understand who governs but not the processes through which governance operates or the constitutional basis for their participation. Figure 3 presents knowledge scores across all nine domains.

Critically, this moderate knowledge base fails to generate commensurate participation. Spearman correlation analysis revealed a weak but statistically significant positive association between political knowledge and online participation ( $r_s = .18, p < .001$ ) and offline participation ( $r_s = .21, p < .001$ ). While these associations confirm the expected direction, their small magnitude indicates that knowledge acquisition alone accounts for minimal variance in participatory behavior. This knowledge-action gap operationalizes what the CVM framework (Verba et al., 1995) diagnoses as a motivational deficit: respondents possess partial resources (knowledge) but lack the recruitment networks and motivational efficacy required for action. Social media, rather than bridging this gap, appears to reinforce passive consumption—a pattern consistent with Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022) systematic review documenting digital media’s ambivalent effects on democratic engagement.

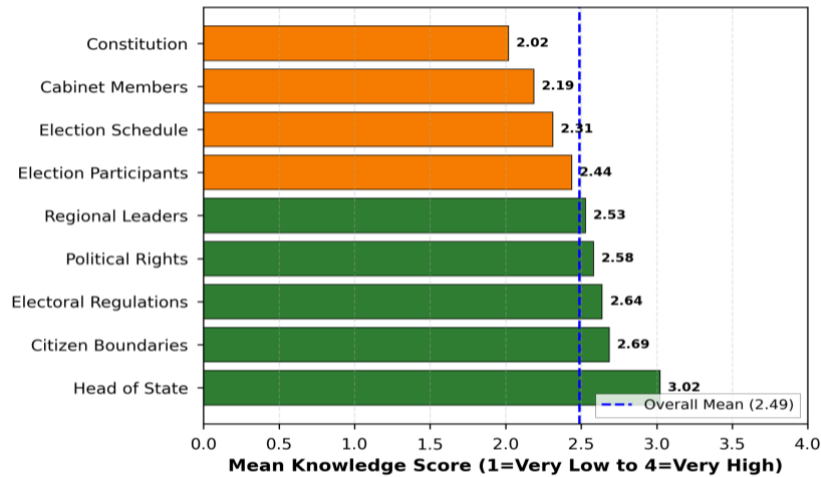


Fig. 3. Political Knowledge Assessment by Domain

Both online ( $M = 0.75/5.0$ ,  $SD = 0.61$ ) and offline ( $M = 0.80/5.0$ ,  $SD = 0.67$ ) political participation was critically low. The near-identical scores despite vastly different participation costs are theoretically significant: if logistical barriers (time, travel, cost) were the primary constraint, online participation—which requires only a device and internet connection—should substantially exceed offline participation. The absence of this expected gap indicates that psychological barriers dominate over logistical ones, consistent with the CVM’s emphasis on motivation and recruitment as prerequisites for action (Hafiz, 2025). Figure 4 compares online and offline participation profiles. Table 3 ranks the top five political engagement activities by mean score, with interpersonal political discussion ranking highest ( $M = 1.61$ ) but still falling below the scale midpoint.

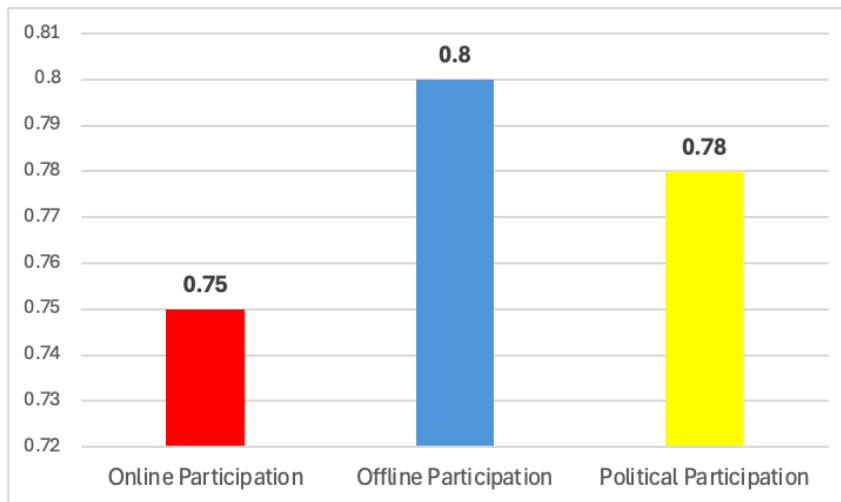


Fig. 4. Online vs Offline Political Participation

Table 3. Top 5 Political Engagement Activities (Ranked by Mean Score)

| Rank | Political Activity                               | Mean | SD   | Type    |
|------|--|------|------|---------|
| 1    | Discussing politics with others                  | 1.61 | 1.29 | Offline |
| 2    | Liking/forwarding political messages             | 1.13 | 1.24 | Online  |
| 3    | Reminding others to vote                         | 1.09 | 1.13 | Offline |
| 4    | Expressing thoughts about politics               | 0.98 | 1.13 | Offline |
| 5    | Follow/subscribe to politicians' opinions online | 0.91 | 1.07 | Online  |

### 3.4. Barriers to Participation

Figure 5 presents the five primary barriers to political participation. Political disinterest scored highest ( $M = 2.94/5.0$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ), followed by distrust in online political news ( $M = 2.90$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ), fear of government punishment for online expression ( $M = 2.86$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ), environmental political disinterest ( $M = 2.78$ ,  $SD = 1.02$ ), and negative perceptions of political actors ( $M = 2.71$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). While no barrier individually reaches a strong effect threshold, Spearman correlations confirm that all five barriers are significantly and negatively associated with both online and offline participation (all  $r_s$  ranging from  $-.19$  to  $-.31$ , all  $p < .001$ ). Composite barrier severity (mean of five items) showed the strongest inverse association with voting intention among all measured constructs ( $r_s = -.34$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

The distrust in online political news ( $M = 2.90$ ) is particularly consequential given that social media constitutes youth's primary political information source. This reflects broader patterns documented by Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022), wherein digital media simultaneously increases information access and erodes information trust—a dual dynamic that the present data confirm empirically for the Indonesian youth context. From a networked publics perspective (Boyd, 2010), the 'invisible audiences' affordance of social media platforms amplifies fear of political expression: respondents cannot fully anticipate who will see their political communications, making self-censorship a rational—if democratically costly—response (Boudebouz et al., 2025). Together, these barriers create what Zhang (2022) characterizes as a 'participation chill': a psychological environment in which youth calculate that engagement's costs exceed its perceived benefits.

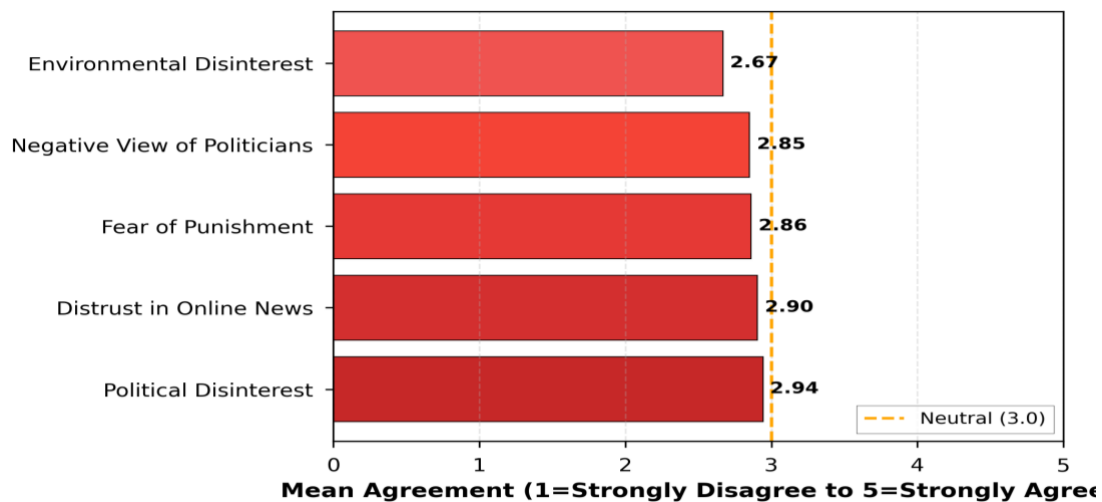


Fig. 5. Barriers to Political Participation

### 3.5. Political Trust and Its Participatory Implications

Political trust averaged  $2.71/5.0$  ( $SD = 0.89$ ) across five dimensions. Trust in government programs scored highest ( $M = 2.76$ ), while trust in government serving the public interest scored lowest ( $M = 2.57$ ). Figure 6 displays the full trust component profile. Table 4 provides a consolidated summary of all key constructs. This tepid trust profile—neither deep cynicism nor robust confidence—reflects what Muhtadi et al. (2025) characterize as 'democratic complacency' among Indonesian Gen Z: acceptance of democratic institutions without meaningful personal investment in them.

Spearman correlation analysis reveals that political trust is positively associated with both online ( $r_s = .24$ ,  $p < .001$ ) and offline ( $r_s = .27$ ,  $p < .001$ ) participation, confirming that institutional confidence is a meaningful participatory precondition within this sample. Critically, the trust dimension most strongly correlated with participation was trust in government serving the public interest ( $r_s = .29$ ,  $p < .001$ )—the dimension with the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.57$ ). This intersection of low trust on the dimension most consequential for participation motivation represents a key

leverage point: interventions that credibly improve government responsiveness perceptions may yield disproportionate participation returns.

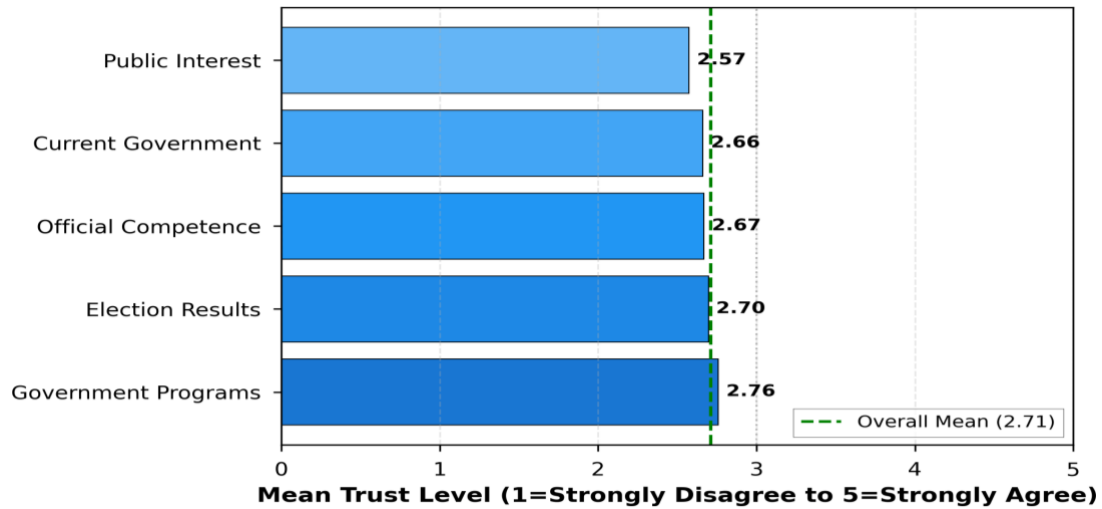


Fig. 6. Political Trust Components

Table 4. Summary Statistics of Key Constructs

| Construct               | Items      | Scale Range | M    | SD   | Min-Max                   |
|-------------------------|------------|-------------|------|------|---------------------------|
| Political knowledge     | 9 (binary) | 0–9         | 2.49 | 0.78 | N/A (knowledge composite) |
| Social media use (info) | 6 channels | 1–4         | 3.45 | 0.71 | —                         |
| Online participation    | 8          | 0–5         | 0.75 | 0.61 | .87                       |
| Offline participation   | 11         | 0–5         | 0.80 | 0.67 | .84                       |
| Political barriers      | 5          | 1–5         | 2.84 | 0.93 | .81                       |
| Political trust         | 5          | 1–5         | 2.71 | 0.89 | .83                       |

### 3.6. Theoretical Synthesis: Integrating CVM, Political Communication, and Networked Publics

The integrated framework yields a coherent explanatory account of the connectivity-disengagement paradox. Through the lens of political communication theory (McNair, 2018), Indonesian youth inhabit a communication environment optimized for consumption rather than action: algorithmically curated feeds deliver political content that stimulates awareness without generating participatory efficacy. The CVM framework (Verba et al., 1995) reveals that the critical deficit is motivational rather than resource-based: respondents access political information (resource) but lack trust in political institutions (motivation) and do not receive mobilizing communications from civic networks (recruitment). The low recruitment effect is evidenced by the near-equal participation intentions among prior voters and non-voters—social mobilization networks are not differentially activating the previously engaged. Networked publics theory (Boyd, 2010) explains the platform-specific patterns: Instagram’s replicable, searchable visual content generates political awareness more efficiently than WhatsApp’s closed architecture, yet neither platform’s affordances systematically support the ‘recruitment’ function the CVM identifies as essential for converting aware citizens into active participants.

## 4. Conclusion

This study documents a critical paradox in Indonesian youth political behavior: unprecedented digital connectivity coexists with declining electoral participation and critically low political engagement. Among 551 university students surveyed in West Java, 96.9% maintain WhatsApp accounts and 95.5% use Instagram, yet voting intention declined significantly from 45.6% to 32.5%

(McNemar's  $\chi^2(1) = 47.3, p < .001$ ). Both online ( $M = 0.75/5.0$ ) and offline ( $M = 0.80/5.0$ ) political participation remained critically low. Spearman correlations confirm that political trust ( $r_s = .24-.27, p < .001$ ) and barrier severity ( $r_s = -.34, p < .001$ ) are the constructs most strongly associated with participation outcomes, while platform choice shows significant but modest effects ( $\chi^2(5) = 14.7, p = .012, V = .16$ ).

Theoretically, these findings challenge technological determinism and extend the Civic Voluntarism Model to digital contexts by demonstrating that the motivational component—political trust, interest, and efficacy—is the binding constraint on youth participation, not informational resources. Social media creates informed spectators rather than active citizens: platforms amplify political awareness but do not supply the institutional trust or civic recruitment networks that the CVM identifies as prerequisite for action. The networked publics framework further illuminates why platform affordances matter: Instagram's visible, persistent, and replicable content generates higher political news consumption than WhatsApp's private architecture, yet neither architecture systematically mobilizes users toward participation.

Practically, these findings carry implications for three constituencies. For communication practitioners and educators, the data indicate that civic education interventions focused on information provision alone are insufficient; programs must target the motivational deficits identified by the CVM by building political self-efficacy and demonstrating government responsiveness. For platform designers and digital democracy advocates, the divergence between adoption and consumption rates underscores the need for affordance-aware civic design: features that facilitate low-cost political expression and connect users to civic mobilization networks may be more democratically consequential than information dissemination functions. For policymakers and election administrators, the centrality of political trust—particularly trust in government serving the public interest ( $M = 2.57$ , the lowest-scoring trust dimension and most participation-predictive)—points to institutional responsiveness reform as a necessary condition for revitalizing youth electoral engagement.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The cross-sectional design prohibits causal inference; the associations documented here may reflect reverse causality (e.g., non-participating youth may develop lower trust) or common-cause confounding. The purposive-convenience sample from West Java limits generalizability to other Indonesian regions and socioeconomic contexts. The self-report methodology is subject to social desirability bias, particularly for sensitive items concerning fear of political expression. Future research should employ longitudinal panel designs to trace causal pathways from platform use through barrier and trust dynamics to participation outcomes, apply multi-region sampling to assess geographic variation in Indonesia's politically and culturally diverse landscape, and conduct experimental or quasi-experimental studies testing communication interventions targeting the motivational barriers identified here. The ultimate challenge for Indonesian democracy is not technological—it is political: restoring the belief among the nation's most educated and connected young citizens that their participation matters.

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