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Generation Z's Perceptions of Political Issues and Electoral Choices in Indonesia: A Narrative Review

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Abstract: The 2024 Indonesian election highlighted the need to understand how eligible members of Generation Z evaluate policy issues, political information, and candidates. Yet the evidence is fragmented across regional surveys, campus samples, online-content studies, and broader reviews that measure issue salience, information exposure, literacy, and participation differently. This article conducts a narrative literature review using targeted searches of journal and publisher portals and DOI records completed on 30 October 2026. The analytical corpus comprises 21 scholarly studies published between 2022 and 2026: 16 empirical studies and five review or synthesis papers. These are supplemented by official population classification and a non-peer-reviewed survey report used only for descriptive context. In the report's 602-person survey across 10 Indonesian cities and agglomerations, employment (35%), welfare (27.7%), and anti-corruption (21.3%) were the most frequently selected election issues; these are sample-specific results, not a nationally representative ranking. A 1,905-person West Java study found social media to be the most frequently selected primary source of political information, while broader reviews indicate context-dependent associations between digital media, efficacy, and participation. Candidate evaluation encompasses policy and track-record cues as well as political persona and campaign imagery. The review contributes an evidence-calibrated framework connecting issue salience, information exposure, knowledge, literacy and efficacy, candidate assessment, and participation. It offers practical implications for issue-based civic education while acknowledging that generalizability is constrained by regional and non-probability samples, heterogeneous measures, and predominantly cross-sectional designs.

Keywords: Generation Z; political issues; electoral choice; social media; political literacy; political participation

1. Introduction

Generation Z has become an important electoral constituency in Indonesia, particularly as members of this cohort reached voting age before the 2024 general election. The Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik/BPS), following the generational classification used in the 2020 Population Census, defines Generation Z as people born between 1997 and 2012 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). For an electoral analysis, however, the relevant population is only the eligible members of that birth cohort at the time of an election; the term does not imply that every person in the cohort was old enough to vote in 2024. Nor should the cohort be treated as politically uniform. Education, socioeconomic position, location, information access, and political experience can differentiate young voters' attention, views, and participation.

The expansion of digital platforms has changed how political information is encountered and circulated. Social media can provide access to candidates, campaign materials, peer discussion, and commentary, but exposure alone does not demonstrate political knowledge, source-verification skill, or participation. A worldwide systematic review of 496 studies identifies both beneficial and harmful relationships between digital media and democratic outcomes, depending on context and outcome (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022). A separate review and meta-analysis of 193 studies reports positive average associations between digital media use and political efficacy, particularly internal efficacy (Boulianne et al., 2023). An Indonesian meta-analysis of 16 studies involving 33,257

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participants likewise reports a moderate, context-dependent relationship between social media and political participation (Kurniawan et al., 2024). These reviews do not establish that exposure directly causes informed voting or improves every dimension of political knowledge.

Indonesian research now covers several geographic and institutional settings, but the samples and questions differ. Studies include virtual ethnography of presidential candidates' Instagram accounts, surveys in West Java and across Java, campus-based questionnaires in Jakarta and Cirebon, a qualitative case study in Bojonegoro, and a survey in Sumedang (Dewi et al., 2023; Fitri et al., 2023; Nurramdhani et al., 2026; Septian & Wulandari, 2024; Suryawijaya et al., 2025). A 2025 explanatory sequential study in West Java combined an online survey of 1,905 respondents with focus-group discussions involving 12 participants (Ariadne Shinta Dewi et al., 2025). A separate national study pooled 68 nationally representative surveys conducted from 2003 to 2023 (149,034 respondents) and analysed a national pre-election survey of 7,940 respondents to examine generational attitudes and candidate preferences (Muhtadi et al., 2025). Their findings are not interchangeable: a large regional convenience sample, a small campus sample, and pooled national surveys answer different questions and have different inferential limits.

The review draws on issue-voting theory to explain how political issues may become criteria for electoral choice. Issue salience refers to the importance voters attach to a policy problem; issue voting occurs when voters use perceived differences in candidates' or parties' policy positions to assess alternatives (Carmines & Stimson, 1980). The process is not automatic. Information exposure, political knowledge, source-evaluation skills, political efficacy, and perceptions of candidate credibility may shape whether an issue is used in an electoral judgment. Political information literacy refers to the capacity to understand, analyze, critique, and make informed decisions about political information (Koren, 2023). These concepts are related but distinct: seeing political content is not the same as knowing the facts, critically evaluating a source, feeling politically capable, or participating.

For this review, the conceptual framework treats issue salience as the starting point; digital and offline exposure and active information seeking as channels through which voters encounter issue and candidate claims; political knowledge, political-information literacy, and efficacy as distinct interpretive capacities; and candidate evaluation as the stage connecting information to electoral preference and participation. Candidate evaluation may involve policy positions, past performance, integrity, competence, political persona, and campaign image. Education, socioeconomic position, region, family and peer networks, trust, platform algorithms, and misinformation may shape more than one stage. This sequence is an analytical organizing framework synthesized from the literature, not a causal model empirically tested by the reviewed studies.

Issue salience → information exposure and seeking → political knowledge, literacy, and efficacy → candidate evaluation → electoral preference and participation

A comparison of the existing literature shows a more specific gap than a general lack of research on young voters. Global reviews examine media use and democratic participation or efficacy (Boulianne et al., 2023; Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2022), while Indonesian meta-analysis estimates an overall association between social media and participation (Kurniawan et al., 2024). The West Java study by Ariadne Shinta Dewi et al. (2025) focuses on preferred information sources and content formats, whereas Muhtadi et al. (2025) examine generational democratic attitudes and candidate preference using pooled national surveys and a separate pre-election survey. Other Indonesian studies focus on issue discussions, candidate presentation, or political literacy in particular regions and campuses. These studies provide important but separate pieces of evidence; they do not use a common set of measures to compare issue salience, information exposure, literacy and efficacy, candidate evaluation, and participation in one integrated analysis. The novelty of this article is therefore not the mere combination of familiar themes. It is the explicit comparison of the constructs, contexts, methods, and evidentiary strength of these sources, alongside a framework that marks where evidence supports association,

where qualitative interpretation is informative, and where national generalization remains uncertain.

The review addresses three focused research questions: (1) Which political issues are reported as salient among Indonesian Generation Z, and what population and methodological limits apply to the available rankings? (2) How do studies distinguish political-information exposure, knowledge, literacy, efficacy, and participation, and what relationships are empirically supported? (3) What evidence explains the roles of policy positions, candidate records, political persona, and campaign presentation in electoral evaluation?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Review design and search approach

This article uses a descriptive narrative literature-review design with structured source identification and thematic comparison. A narrative design was selected because the available studies differ substantially in population, geography, research design, and outcome measures, and because the original submission did not preserve the complete search log or database export needed to reconstruct a systematic review. Targeted source searches and DOI/reference tracing were completed on 30 October 2026. The search locations included the official portals of SAGE Journals, Nature Portfolio, Frontiers, F1000Research, Cambridge Core, Taylor & Francis, and the journal websites hosting the Indonesian studies; bibliographic details were cross-checked against DOI landing pages where available. These were targeted portal searches, not an exhaustive export from a single bibliographic database. No complete Scopus or Web of Science search log or database export could be verified in the materials retained from the original author; therefore, neither platform is represented as a database actually searched for this review. Search strings were run in English and Indonesian using combinations of:

("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z" OR "young voters" OR "first-time voters") AND ("election" OR "electoral behavior" OR "political preference" OR "political participation"); ("social media" OR "digital media" OR "TikTok" OR "Instagram" OR "political communication") AND ("political literacy" OR "political knowledge" OR "political efficacy" OR "misinformation"); and ("digital democracy" OR "political information literacy" OR "issue salience" OR "candidate evaluation").

Searches were refined by following references in relevant review articles and checking the publisher or journal record for each retained source.

2.2 Eligibility and source selection

The core scholarly evidence window was January 2022 to 30 October 2026. Sources were included when they met the following criteria: (1) substantive relevance to at least one research question; (2) a population or conceptual context that was either Indonesian Generation Z/young voters or clearly relevant comparative youth/digital-democracy evidence; (3) a stated research design or identifiable review approach; (4) sufficient reporting to identify the sample/context and principal findings where applicable; and (5) a traceable journal, publisher, or DOI record. English- and Indonesian-language sources were eligible. Empirical articles, systematic or systematized reviews, and meta-analyses were included, while non-scholarly commentary, unrelated studies, and items without a verifiable publication record were excluded from the core corpus. BPS population classification and the Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024 were used as supplementary contextual sources, not counted as scholarly articles. Carmines & Stimson (1980) was retained only as a foundational theory source outside the evidence window. A secondary media summary (Muhamad, 2024) was used only to cross-check the reported issue-priority figures and was not treated as an independent scholarly study.

Twenty-one scholarly studies were retained for the analytical corpus: 16 empirical studies and five review or synthesis papers. The empirical group includes quantitative surveys, qualitative case studies and virtual ethnography, and mixed-method research;

the synthesis group includes systematic or systematized reviews and meta-analyses. The supplementary contextual material comprises the BPS cohort classification and one non-peer-reviewed IDN Research Institute–Advisia survey report. The original submission did not record the total number of records initially identified, duplicate removal, or screening decisions, and these counts cannot be reconstructed reliably. Accordingly, this revision reports only the 21 scholarly sources retained for analysis; it does not invent an initial retrieval total or PRISMA flow. The article is thus a narrative review with structured search and transparent synthesis procedures, not a systematic review.

2.3 Data extraction, coding, and evidence appraisal

The unit of analysis was an individual scholarly article or review paper. For each source, the extraction matrix recorded authorship/year, source type, design, geographic setting, population and sample, data-collection/analysis approach where reported, key findings, contribution to the present questions, and limitations. The initial coding used four domains aligned with the research questions: (1) issue salience and policy priorities; (2) information sources, exposure, and credibility; (3) candidate evaluation and electoral choice; and (4) political knowledge, literacy, efficacy, and participation. Each source was coded for the constructs it actually measured or discussed; no inference was made that information exposure measured knowledge or that online interaction measured electoral participation. Subthemes were refined inductively when recurring evidence appeared, including algorithms, misinformation, source verification, campaign imagery, policy platforms, candidate records, and offline civic activity.

Coding was conducted by reading the stated objectives, methods, results, and conclusions of each available article record or full text and assigning the reported evidence to one or more of the four domains. A theme was retained when it was explicitly examined in a source or repeatedly occurred across sources; it was not created merely because it was mentioned in a campaign example. When findings differed, they were compared by population definition, geography, sample design, platform, measurement, and outcome. Results were not averaged across unlike measures. For example, a preference for social media as a news source was not treated as proof of political knowledge; source verification was distinguished from factual knowledge; efficacy was distinguished from participation; and self-reported vote intention was distinguished from validated vote behavior. Cross-sectional coefficients and regression paths were interpreted as associations unless a study design supported causal inference.

Evidence quality was appraised qualitatively against five considerations: substantive relevance, contextual/geographic fit, clarity of the research design, adequacy of reporting, and traceability/credibility of the publication venue. No numerical quality score or formal risk-of-bias instrument was applied. Review papers and meta-analyses were considered more informative for broad patterns, but their relevance to Indonesian Gen Z was indirect when they covered international populations. Large national or multi-region probability-based surveys were given more weight for population-level interpretations; large regional convenience samples were treated as regionally informative but not nationally representative; campus and single-district studies were treated as context-specific; and qualitative studies were used to explain meaning and process rather than prevalence. The IDN Research Institute–Advisia report was treated as grey literature because it is an institutional survey report rather than a peer-reviewed journal article. The Databoks summary was used only as secondary reporting for the chart values and did not enter the 21-study corpus.

Table 1. Characteristics of Selected Literature Used in the Review

Source / evidence type	Design and context	Main findings and contribution	Limitations and evidentiary weight
Boulianne et al. (2023) Review / meta-analysis	Systematic review and meta-analysis covering 193 studies; multiple political systems and populations.	Digital-media use has positive average associations with internal and external political efficacy; the association is	Broad synthesis strength, but heterogeneous studies and outcomes; not specific to Indonesian Generation Z.

		stronger for internal efficacy. The review also recognizes reciprocal relationships between efficacy and online engagement.	
Ayu Candraningrum et al. (2025) Mixed-method empirical study	Indonesia; two Gen Z interviews and an online survey of 114 Gen Z respondents.	Young voters encounter campaign information through recommendation feeds and algorithms; the study also identifies misinformation and disinformation in preferred content.	Small interview component and online non-probability survey; exploratory, not a population estimate.
Congge et al. (2023) Systematic literature review	Scopus-based review of digital democracy; 230 records from 2014–2020 mapped with VOSviewer.	Digital technologies create opportunities for participation but also raise concerns about misinformation, polarization, and democratic quality.	Useful conceptual mapping, but broad digital-democracy scope rather than Indonesia/Gen Z-specific evidence.
Dewi et al. (2023) Questionnaire and interviews	West Java; questionnaire/interview research on political communication strategies and young-voter engagement.	Reports extended social-media use among young audiences and preferences for research-oriented content, podcasts, memes, and political humour.	Regional communication-strategy focus; abstract does not report a complete denominator for all Gen Z indicators.
Ariadne Shinta Dewi et al. (2025) Explanatory sequential mixed methods	West Java; online survey with 1,905 valid responses from 18 regencies and 9 cities, followed by focus-group discussions with 12 participants; voluntary convenience sampling.	Social media was the most frequently selected primary political-information source (40.7%), followed by online media (27.1%) and friends/family (21.3%); short and visual formats were popular, while frequent political discussion was limited.	Large regional sample but convenience recruitment through student networks; findings should not be generalized to all Indonesian Gen Z.
Fitri et al. (2023) Virtual ethnography	Qualitative analysis of Gen Z responses to Instagram accounts of the three presidential candidates.	Candidate evaluation included substantive cues such as vision, mission, and track record, as well as popularity and engaging-content cues.	Useful for interpreting online discourse, but cannot estimate the prevalence or independent effects of each cue.
Iqbal et al. (2022) Quantitative survey	300 university students in Islamabad, Pakistan; convenience sampling.	Social-media use was positively associated with political participation and political efficacy in the surveyed youth group.	Non-probability student sample and a different national context; comparative evidence only.
Koren (2023) Systematized review	Review of 99 journal articles and conference papers from seven databases on political information literacy among young people.	Political information literacy includes the capacity to understand, analyze, critique, and make informed decisions about political information.	Conceptual and international synthesis; does not estimate effects in Indonesian elections.
Kurniawan et al. (2024) Systematic review / meta-analysis	16 studies comprising 33,257 participants, synthesized in Indonesian psychology research.	The overall relationship between social media and political participation is moderate and context-dependent, not uniformly transformative.	Broad youth/public population and heterogeneous source studies; not restricted to Generation Z.
Kusumawardani et al. (2025) Quantitative survey	41 undergraduate students in Jakarta; online questionnaire conducted April–May 2024.	About 39% reported relying on social media and 46% on mass media; 78.15% identified validity of social-media news as a concern.	Small, single-institution sample; useful for local source-credibility patterns, not national estimates.
Kurniawati Fau (2025) Quantitative survey	98 Gen Z students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia; cluster random sampling within one institution.	Social-media use was reported to be significantly associated with participation, including sharing political information and discussion.	Small single-university sample; the finding is institution-specific.
Latuconsina et al. (2026) Cross-sectional survey / SEM	500 registered Gen Z voters aged 18–28 across all 38 provinces; purposive online recruitment; data collected	Digital democracy, political literacy, and participation were positively associated; literacy was modelled as a	Non-probability sample, retrospective self-reports about 2024, and cross-sectional design do not establish causali-

	August–September 2025.	partial mediator.	ty; version 2 has one approval and one approval with reservations.
Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022) Systematic review	Worldwide review of 496 studies examining causal and correlational evidence on digital media and democracy.	Digital media has mixed democratic implications: some positive relationships with participation and information use, alongside adverse relationships with trust and polarization.	Broad population and outcome coverage; national and generation-specific effects cannot be assumed.
Mande et al. (2022) Quantitative survey	434 participants aged 18–35 in one northern Nigerian state.	News and entertainment content preferences were positive predictors of political participation; political efficacy moderated some relationships.	Age range includes adults beyond common Gen Z definitions and evidence is geographically specific to Nigeria.
Muhtadi et al. (2025) Pooled national surveys and pre-election survey	68 nationally representative surveys conducted 2003–2023 (149,034 respondents), plus a national pre-election survey of 7,940 respondents for 2024 candidate-choice analysis.	Gen Z respondents were more satisfied with democracy than older cohorts despite democratic decline; candidate support among Gen Z was associated with political persona, attitudes to strongman leadership, views on human-rights allegations, and positive responses to campaign imagery.	Large national evidence base, but pooled surveys used partly different questions; candidate-choice analysis is observational and the authors explicitly caution against causal interpretation.
Nurramdhani et al. (2026) Quantitative survey	384 respondents across 26 subdistricts in Sumedang Regency; regression and Spearman correlation analyses.	Digital political literacy was strongly associated with participation (reported $\varrho = 0.774$; $R^2 = 0.60$).	Single-regency, cross-sectional evidence; statistical association should not be interpreted as a causal effect.
Sari (2023) Descriptive survey with literature review	99 Gen Z respondents living in Surabaya; Google Forms data collected over 48 hours on 25–26 June 2023.	Examines TikTok as a source of political information and describes how respondents encountered political content through the platform.	Short collection window and one-city sample; does not provide a national estimate or a causal test.
Septian & Wulandari (2024) Qualitative case study	Bojonegoro Regency; 20 informants including election organizers, election supervisors, and Gen Z students; interviews, observation, and documentation.	Youth participation through social media was discussed as a route to political-literacy development and election integrity.	Single-district case study; rich local context but limited transferability to the national electorate.
Septiyani & Abijaya (2026) Quantitative survey	67 FISIP students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Cirebon; stratified random sampling within the 2022 cohort.	Instagram use was positively associated with political literacy; the paper reports $R^2 = 0.666$ in its sample.	Small single-program cohort and cross-sectional design; the journal/source quality was not assessed using a standardized appraisal tool.
Suryawijaya et al. (2025) Quantitative survey	2,700 first-time Gen Z voters across Java; purposive sampling.	Connects social-media campaigning with young voters' attitudes and political actions; highlights political awareness, candidate image, and issue understanding.	Large sample but purposive recruitment and Java-only coverage limit national representativeness; no causal inference.
Yanto & Irmala Sari (2025) Mixed-method study	450 students aged 18–24 from five public universities; online survey, focus groups, interviews, and content analysis.	Reports social media as a major political-information source for 78% of respondents; 35% had adequate verification ability; correlations were $r = 0.67$ with literacy and $r = 0.58$ with democratic participation.	Student sample and correlational measures; findings should not be generalized to all young people or treated as causal.

[1] The core scholarly corpus contains 21 sources (16 empirical studies and five reviews/syntheses). The IDN Research Institute–Advisia survey report and BPS cohort classification are supplementary contextual materials and are not counted in this table. Source descriptions are based on traceable journal/publisher records and accessible article text; evidence strength is an interpretive appraisal, not a formal standardized risk-of-bias score.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Political issues and the limits of issue-priority evidence

The reviewed evidence identifies employment, welfare and economic opportunity, anti-corruption, education, health, environmental conditions, and social inclusion as relevant policy domains, but the degree of support for each differs by source and measurement. One explicit issue-priority measure appears in the Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024: among 602 respondents across 10 Indonesian cities and agglomerations, employment was selected by 35%, welfare by 27.7%, and anti-corruption by 21.3%; healthcare (7%), democracy/civil liberties (5.7%), environment (2.3%), and other issues (2.1%) followed (IDN Research Institute & Advisia, 2024; Muhamad, 2024). This is a useful descriptive ordering within that survey, not a nationally representative ranking: the report is grey literature and its sample covered selected urban centres rather than all provinces and rural settings. Issue-voting theory also requires more than the appearance of an issue in campaign content; voters must regard the issue as important and use perceived differences between alternatives when evaluating candidates or parties (Carmines & Stimson, 1980).

The academic studies complement but do not replicate this issue-ranking question. Fitri et al. (2023), through virtual ethnography of candidate Instagram accounts, identify vision, mission, and track record as substantive cues in some Gen Z evaluations. Suryawijaya et al. (2025), in a purposive survey of 2,700 first-time voters across Java, emphasize political awareness, candidate image, and issue understanding. The West Java study by Ariadne Shinta Dewi et al. (2025) examines information channels and preferred formats rather than a ranked list of policy issues. These studies therefore support the relevance of issue information and candidate evaluation but cannot be pooled as if they measured the same outcome.

The IDN ranking also illustrates why the wording of a question matters. Environment, for example, received 2.3% in the report's single-choice election-issue chart, but this does not establish that environmental concerns are unimportant in other contexts or when respondents can select multiple concerns. Similarly, education and social justice recur in the broader literature but are not shown to outrank jobs or welfare in a comparable national Gen Z election-priority measure. The defensible conclusion is that employment, welfare/economic opportunity, and anti-corruption were prominent in one 10-city survey, while education, health, environment, and social inclusion recur across different sources and questions. A nationally representative, multi-region survey using identical response options is still needed to determine whether this ordering is stable across provinces, urban and rural areas, and socioeconomic groups.

Table 2. Election-issue priorities reported in the Indonesia Gen Z Report 2024.

Issue selected	Share	Interpretation within the survey
Employment opportunities	35.0%	Most frequently selected issue in the report's 10-city Gen Z survey.
Welfare	27.7%	A broad socioeconomic priority; the report does not establish how respondents separated welfare from employment.
Anti-corruption	21.3%	Indicates the salience of governance and integrity in this survey.
Healthcare	7.0%	Lower share in this particular single-choice election-issue chart.
Democracy and civil liberties	5.7%	A distinct institutional and rights-related policy domain.
Environment	2.3%	Low selection in this chart; not a measure of all environmental attitudes.
Other issues	2.1%	Residual response category.

[2] *Note. The figures refer to the 602-person survey conducted by Advisia for IDN Research Institute from 29 May to 9 July 2023 across 10 Indonesian cities/agglomerations (IDN Research Institute & Advisia, 2024; Muhamad, 2024). The report defines Gen Z respondents as aged 11–26 during the survey. The source is an institutional research report, not a peer-reviewed journal article; these proportions are sample-specific and should not be presented as a national probability estimate.*

3.2. Social media exposure, political knowledge, literacy, and participation

The evidence requires four concepts to be separated. Digital exposure refers to encountering political content through platforms. Political knowledge concerns what users understand about institutions, processes, and policy. Political information literacy concerns the ability to locate, assess, verify, and interpret political information. Political participation refers to actions such as voting, discussing public issues, contacting representatives, campaigning, volunteering, or taking part in civic activities. These constructs may be related, but none can be used as a proxy for all the others.

Indonesian studies show that social media is an important, but not exclusive, information channel, and estimates vary by setting and question. In the West Java mixed-method study by Dewi et al. (2025), 40.7% of 1,905 respondents selected social media as their primary political-information source, compared with online media (27.1%), friends/family (21.3%), television (9.9%), and print media (1.0%). By contrast, in the much smaller Jakarta student sample of Kusumawardani et al. (2025), 39% reported relying on social media and 46% on mass media, while 78.15% expressed concern about the validity of social-media news. These percentages are not directly comparable because the samples and question wordings differ. Ayu Candraningrum et al. (2025) also describe algorithmic feeds exposing young voters to campaign material, including potentially misleading content. Taken together, the studies show the importance of digital platforms without supporting the assumption that digital-native status automatically produces critical political understanding.

At the synthesis level, Kurniawan et al. (2024) reviewed 16 studies involving 33,257 participants and concluded that the relationship between social media and political participation was moderate and context-dependent. Boulianne et al. (2023), drawing on 193 studies, found positive average relationships between digital media use and political efficacy, with larger estimates for internal efficacy than for external efficacy. Lorenz-Spreen et al. (2022), reviewing 496 studies worldwide, found mixed democratic outcomes, including positive relationships with some forms of participation and information use but adverse relationships with trust and polarization in some settings. The reviews support a qualified association between digital media and selected forms of engagement; they do not demonstrate that exposure itself improves factual knowledge, verification skills, or the quality of electoral decisions.

Several Indonesian surveys report positive statistical relationships between social media, literacy, and participation. Yanto & Irmala Sari (2025) report correlations between social-media use and political literacy ($r = 0.67$) and democratic participation ($r = 0.58$) among 450 university students. Nurramdhani et al. (2026) report a strong association between digital political literacy and participation in a 384-person survey in Sumedang Regency ($\varrho = 0.774$). Septiyani & Abijaya (2026) report a positive relationship between Instagram use and political literacy among 67 students at one university. Latuconsina et al. (2026) report positive structural associations among digital democracy, political literacy, and participation in a 500-person purposive sample spanning all 38 provinces.

These findings are directionally consistent, but their evidentiary scope differs. The studies are largely cross-sectional and rely on self-reported behavior; some focus on a single university or district, while others use non-probability recruitment. The reported coefficients therefore describe statistical relationships in the studied samples rather than proof that platform use causes literacy or participation. Political efficacy may also operate reciprocally: feeling informed can encourage online engagement, while engagement may increase perceived political knowledge or efficacy Boulianne et al. (2023). The most defensible synthesis is that social-media use can provide opportunities for political information and engagement, while literacy, efficacy, source credibility, and the surrounding information environment condition how those opportunities are used.

3.3. Candidate evaluation: policy substance and popularity cues

The literature suggests that candidate assessment can involve both substantive and image-based cues. In their virtual ethnography of presidential candidates' Instagram accounts, Fitri et al. (2023) distinguish evaluations based on vision, mission, and track

record from responses driven by popularity or engaging content. This is important because it shows that political communication can present candidates as policy actors and as media personalities at the same time. The two forms of evaluation may coexist within the same audience rather than defining separate types of voters.

Putri Widia Ningsih et al. (2024) report that young audiences in West Java prefer varied communication formats, while Ariadne Shinta Dewi et al. (2025) show that visual and short-form social-media content is important to information preferences in a larger regional sample. Putri Widia Ningsih et al. (2024) emphasize political awareness, candidate image, and issue understanding among first-time voters across Java. At the national level, Muhtadi et al. (2025) use a 7,940-person pre-election survey to examine Gen Z candidate preferences and report associations between support, views on strongman leadership, assessments of the candidate's political persona, and positive responses to campaign imagery. The authors explicitly caution that these associations do not establish whether campaign imagery caused support or followed from an existing preference. These studies demonstrate that candidate evaluation can combine policy substance, political values, image, and campaign presentation; visibility or popularity should not be equated with competence or integrity.

The evidence for the independent effects of integrity, competence, and problem-solving ability remains uneven. Some studies discuss these attributes as desirable, but few compare them using the same national measure or test their relative contribution while controlling for party identification, ideology, socioeconomic position, and information exposure. Muhtadi et al. (2025) provide nationally relevant evidence about the relationship between political values, persona, campaign imagery, and candidate preference, but the observational survey cannot isolate causal effects. The present review therefore treats policy platforms, track records, democratic values, public image, and popularity as distinct evaluation cues. Future studies should measure them separately and compare their predictive contribution to validated vote choice.

3.4. Political literacy as a bridge to informed participation

Political literacy is more demanding than familiarity with political content. Drawing on Koren's (2023) systematized review, political information literacy includes the ability to understand, analyze, critique, and make informed decisions about political information. In the electoral context, this can involve verifying a claim, identifying its source, understanding an institution's responsibilities, comparing candidate programs, and distinguishing evidence from emotional persuasion or opinion. Political knowledge, literacy, and efficacy remain related but conceptually distinct: a person may know a political fact without being able to evaluate the source, and may feel politically capable without participating in a particular activity.

Indonesian case and survey studies provide complementary evidence. Septian & Wulandari (2024), based on a qualitative case study with 20 informants in Bojonegoro, describe youth participation through social media as one route to political-literacy development and election integrity. Yanto & Irmala Sari (2025) identify a gap between reliance on social media and the ability to verify information in their student sample. Nurramdhani et al. (2026) and Latuconsina et al. (2026) report positive associations between literacy and participation, while the latter models literacy as a partial mediator between digital democracy and political participation. These studies support the relevance of literacy as a mechanism, although their observational designs do not establish a causal pathway.

The comparative evidence also warns against equating any interaction with political participation. Mande et al. (2022) find that news and entertainment preferences are associated with participation among youths in northern Nigeria, while political efficacy moderates some relationships. Iqbal et al. (2022) report positive associations between social-media use, political participation, and efficacy among university students in Pakistan. These studies reinforce the need to specify what kind of content is consumed and what kind of participation is measured; they cannot be transferred directly to Indonesia because political systems, sampling frames, and information environments differ.

Taken together, the evidence supports political literacy as a plausible bridge between encountering information and evaluating it for civic or electoral purposes. It does not imply that literacy alone guarantees participation, nor that participation is necessarily informed. Political education should therefore combine source verification with institutional knowledge, comparison of policy proposals, and opportunities for reasoned discussion.

3.5. Integrated synthesis and implications

The review proposes an analytical sequence in which perceived issue salience motivates information seeking; digital and offline channels shape what information becomes available; political literacy and efficacy influence whether that information is assessed and used; and candidate programs, records, and public presentation inform electoral evaluation. Electoral participation may then include voting and other forms of civic action. This sequence is not a deterministic causal model. Family and peer networks, education, socioeconomic conditions, regional context, platform algorithms, misinformation, and trust can influence multiple stages. A reciprocal relationship is also possible because participation and political discussion may lead voters to seek further information.

Table 3. Comparative synthesis across the four analytical themes.

Theme	Areas of convergence	Differences, contradictions, and evidence gaps	Evidence-calibrated interpretation
Issue salience	An institutional survey of 602 Gen Z respondents in 10 cities reports jobs (35%), welfare (27.7%), and anti-corruption (21.3%) as the top selected election issues; academic studies also identify policy and issue-awareness cues.	The IDN report is grey literature and urban in scope; other studies measure policy communication or candidate awareness rather than the same ranked outcome.	Use the ranking only for that survey; do not describe it as a nationally representative priority order.
Digital information environment	West Java study (n=1,905) identifies social media as the most selected primary political-information source; meta-analyses find positive average associations with efficacy or participation.	A 41-student Jakarta sample reports greater reliance on mass media; the studies use different samples and question wordings. Misinformation and algorithms complicate information quality.	Exposure is an opportunity, not a proxy for knowledge, literacy, or participation; causal claims are not justified.
Candidate evaluation	Qualitative Instagram analysis and national pre-election survey evidence show that policy/track-record cues, political values, persona, and campaign imagery may all feature in evaluation.	National survey relationships are observational; small digital ethnographies explain content but cannot estimate prevalence. Candidate-trait measures are not standardized across studies.	Treat substantive and image cues as coexisting dimensions; no single attribute is shown to dominate for all Gen Z.
Political literacy and participation	Systematized review defines literacy as understanding, analyzing, and critiquing information; Indonesian surveys report positive literacy–participation associations.	Measures and samples vary; many are cross-sectional, self-reported, and region- or campus-specific; discussion, sharing, and voting are different outcomes.	Literacy is a plausible enabling resource for decision quality, but it does not guarantee participation and observed associations are not causal proof.

[3]

Three practical implications follow. First, election organizers, schools, and universities should teach political literacy through practical activities: verifying claims, identifying original sources, comparing candidate programs, and understanding the responsibilities of public institutions. Second, campaign communication should present specific

and assessable policy proposals and track records in accessible formats, while making evidence and source material easy to check. Third, civil-society organizations and media institutions should create spaces for non-partisan discussion and explainers that connect online political attention to deliberation and accountability. These recommendations respond directly to the evidence on source credibility, varied media preferences, and the association between literacy and participation.

3.6 Limitations of the review and the underlying evidence

This review has limitations that constrain interpretation. First, the original manuscript did not retain complete database exports, search logs, duplicate-removal records, or screening decisions; therefore, the total initially identified cannot be reconstructed, and no PRISMA flow or systematic-review claim is made. Second, the 21 scholarly studies use heterogeneous definitions of Generation Z, information exposure, political literacy, efficacy, candidate evaluation, and participation. Third, the Indonesian evidence is geographically uneven: some studies focus on ten urban centres, West Java, Java, Jakarta, Bojonegoro, Sumedang, or individual campuses; the West Java survey and 2024 national survey provide broader samples, but still address different outcomes and use different sampling procedures. Fourth, several surveys are cross-sectional, online, convenience-based, or purposive and rely on self-report; reported correlations and model paths cannot establish causality. Fifth, the IDN report is grey literature and the Databoks article is secondary reporting, so their issue-priority figures are used descriptively rather than as peer-reviewed national estimates. Sixth, the quality of individual studies was appraised qualitatively; no standardized risk-of-bias instrument was applied. These limits mean the review identifies convergent patterns and research gaps rather than estimating the views of all Indonesian Generation Z voters.

4. Conclusions

This review establishes a bounded set of conclusions. First, the available issue-priority data show that employment, welfare, and anti-corruption were prominent choices among respondents in one 602-person, 10-city survey; they do not establish a national ranking for all Indonesian Generation Z voters. Second, social media is an important political-information channel in several regional studies, but exposure must be distinguished from knowledge, source-verification skill, efficacy, and participation. Third, candidate evaluation can involve issue positions and track records together with political values, persona, and campaign imagery; observational evidence does not show that one attribute causes vote choice or dominates across the cohort. Fourth, political literacy and efficacy are repeatedly associated with participation, but cross-sectional and self-reported studies do not establish a causal pathway.

The scientific contribution is an evidence-calibrated framework that distinguishes issue salience, information exposure, political knowledge, information literacy, efficacy, candidate assessment, and participation, while comparing the methods and geographic limits of the available evidence. The framework is an analytical proposition, not a tested causal model. Practically, election organizers, schools, universities, media, and civil-society groups can use the synthesis to design non-partisan activities focused on checking sources, comparing policy proposals, understanding institutions, and evaluating candidate records rather than merely increasing exposure or online activity. What remains uncertain is whether the same issue ordering and evaluation cues apply across rural and urban areas, provinces, education and income groups, and subsequent election cycles. Future research should use nationally representative, multi-stage sampling; standardized measures of issue priorities, candidate cues, literacy, and knowledge; and longitudinal or experimental designs to test temporal and causal relationships.

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