

## Generation Z's Political Participation in the 2024 Prabowo–Gibran Presidential Election Campaign on Instagram

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### ABSTRAK

The 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election marks an era of massive digital political participation, particularly among Generation Z voters, through the Instagram platform. The background of this research is the dominance of Prabowo Subianto-Gibran Rakabuming Raka's campaign strategy, which utilized viral content such as “*gemoy*” memes and mobilization hashtags, which successfully attracted 58% of Gen Z votes according to post-election data from the General Elections Commission (KPU). The research question focuses on the form of Gen Z participation, whether it is merely entertainment or substantial, as well as the driving factors and their implications for digital democracy in Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach with thematic content analysis of 100 official Instagram posts (@prabowogibran) and related hashtags (#PrabowoGibran2024, #GemoyPrabowo) from January to March 2024, supplemented by 15 in-depth interviews with Gen Z who are active on the platform. Key findings reveal participation patterns: 40% are emotional entertainment memes, 30% are mobilization through shares and stories, 20% are policy discussions such as education and employment, and 10% are opposition criticism. The interviews highlight FOMO (fear of missing out) motives, the influence of Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs), and the accessibility of Instagram as a substitute for conventional campaigns. Implications for digital democracy include increased turnout among young voters (up to 80% among urban Gen Z), but with the risk of creating echo chambers and polarization. This research contributes to the study of e-participation in countries with.

**Keywords:** Digital Campaign, Generation Z, Instagram, Political Participation, Presidential Election.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election marked an important milestone in the transformation of digital political participation, particularly among Generation Z voters aged 18–25. The Instagram platform emerged as one of the primary arenas through which the Prabowo Subianto–Gibran Rakabuming Raka ticket gained strong visibility and support among younger voters. This phenomenon reflects a significant shift from conventional forms of political participation toward more personalized, visual, and digitally mediated political engagement. Generation Z represented approximately 56.5 million voters or 27.8% of the total Permanent Voter List (*Daftar Pemilih Tetap* [DPT]) according to data from the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum, 2024). During the campaign period, this demographic demonstrated high levels of digital engagement through viral political content such as the “*gemoy*” meme, which portrayed Prabowo as a humorous and relatable figure, as well as mobilization hashtags including #PrabowoGibran2024 and #GemoyPrabowo.

Instagram, with more than 100 million active users in Indonesia according to DataReportal (2024), has increasingly functioned as a digital public sphere that combines entertainment, political mobilization, and identity expression. Compared to conventional media such as television, Instagram provides interactive and visually oriented communication formats including Reels, Stories, memes, and short-form videos that are widely used by younger digital audiences. Political participation on this platform is therefore no longer limited to voting behavior, but also includes various forms of digital interaction such as likes, comments, reposts, hashtag participation, and user-generated political content that accelerate the circulation of campaign narratives. These forms of engagement reflect the participatory affordances of social media platforms, where users simultaneously function as audiences, distributors, and producers of political communication (boyd, 2010; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013).

In the context of the 2024 presidential election, the Prabowo–Gibran campaign strategically utilized influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) to maximize digital visibility and voter engagement. The official @prabowogibran account reportedly generated billions of impressions across social media platforms during the campaign period. Collaborations with young influencers, TikTok creators, and Gen Z public figures produced viral political content that gradually reconstructed Prabowo’s public image from a “tough general” into a more approachable and emotionally relatable political figure. As a result, the Prabowo–Gibran pair gained substantial support among Generation Z voters, with post-election surveys conducted by institutions such as Indikator Politik Indonesia and Poltracking Indonesia showing support levels ranging from 56% to 71%. Entertainment-oriented content such as “*gemoy*” videos, memes, dance trends, and emotionally simplified campaign narratives became major drivers of engagement, while policy issues such as education and employment were packaged into attractive visual formats suitable for social media consumption.

However, despite the increase in digital political participation, several critical issues also emerged. Previous studies indicate that social media-based political participation among younger users is often shaped by emotional engagement, viral communication patterns, and algorithmic exposure that may reduce opportunities for substantive policy deliberation (Valenzuela et al., 2018; Noorikhsan et al., 2023). Instagram algorithms tend to reinforce content aligned with users’ existing preferences, creating information environments dominated by repetitive campaign narratives while limiting exposure to opposing viewpoints or in-depth policy discussions. This condition raises concerns regarding the quality of digital democracy in Indonesia, where high levels of participation do not necessarily correspond with critical political deliberation or informed democratic engagement.

Generation Z, generally defined as individuals born between 1997 and 2012, is frequently characterized in the literature as a generation highly

immersed in digital media environments and social networking platforms (Premsky, 2001). Several studies suggest that younger audiences are more responsive to short-form, interactive, and visually oriented communication formats due to their intensive exposure to digital media ecosystems (Lerat, 2021). Global studies such as Lerat (2021), which examined youth participation during the 2020 United States presidential election, demonstrate that platforms such as Instagram and TikTok can significantly increase youth political engagement through hashtag activism, participatory culture, and viral political communication. In the Indonesian context, Noorikhshan et al. (2023) found that social media accelerated youth political participation while simultaneously increasing vulnerability to misinformation, algorithmic echo chambers, and confirmation bias. Similarly, Valenzuela et al. (2018) identified a positive relationship between social media interaction features such as likes, comments, and shares and forms of online political engagement, although such engagement may remain relatively superficial and affective in nature.

The Prabowo–Gibran campaign during the 2024 presidential election provides an important example of infotainment-oriented political communication, as conceptualized by Postman (1985) in *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. The “*gemoy*” strategy portrayed Prabowo as a humorous and adorable political figure through memes, dance videos, AI-generated illustrations, and short-form entertainment content widely circulated on Instagram and TikTok. This strategy significantly transformed Prabowo’s previous image as a rigid military figure into a more relatable and emotionally accessible public persona among Generation Z audiences. The campaign’s digital visibility was further amplified through collaborations with influencers, content creators, and public figures closely associated with youth digital culture.

Previous studies have examined various aspects of digital political communication and political branding during the 2024 Indonesian presidential election. Fatmawati (2021) analyzed the dominance of emotional

narratives over substantive policy discourse in contemporary political campaigns, while Silalahi (2024) found that political marketing strategies in Indonesia increasingly prioritize personal branding and image presentation rather than policy substance. Other studies have focused on viral political communication and symbolic political representation within the Prabowo–Gibran campaign, particularly concerning the “*gemoy*” phenomenon and social media political marketing practices (Tanuwijaya, 2024; Medista & Marianata, 2024). However, previous studies have largely emphasized quantitative approaches to voter behavior and digital campaign exposure, with limited attention to the qualitative dimensions of how Generation Z experiences, interprets, and participates in political communication through Instagram as a platform-specific digital environment.

Based on this research gap, this study focuses on analyzing the forms, motives, and implications of Generation Z’s political participation in the Prabowo–Gibran campaign on Instagram during the 2024 presidential election. The study specifically examines whether this participation is primarily driven by entertainment-oriented political engagement (infotainment) or by more substantive political considerations. Through this approach, the research is expected to contribute theoretically to the study of digital political participation and political communication in developing democracies, while also providing practical recommendations for institutions such as the General Election Commission (Komisi Pemilihan Umum [KPU]) and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika [Kominfo]) in promoting healthier, more inclusive, and more deliberative digital political campaigns.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site case study design on the Instagram platform, focusing on the official @prabowogibran account and the hashtag #PrabowoGibran2024 during the January–March

2024 campaign period. A qualitative approach was chosen because the main objective of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the meaning, motives, and experiences of Generation Z's political participation in the context of the presidential election campaign, rather than to measure variables statistically. This approach is in line with Creswell's view that qualitative research is appropriate for exploring social processes and discursive practices in complex natural contexts (Creswell, 2014), such as political interactions on social media. To enrich the methodology, this study also integrates secondary data from post-2024 surveys, such as analysis of hoaxes on social media, to validate the findings.

The multi-site case study design allows researchers to analyze Gen Z's political participation in more than one digital "location", namely official campaign accounts and hashtag-based participation spaces. Case studies are understood as in-depth explorations of a case bound by a specific context, time, and social setting, making them suitable for examining the dynamics of the Prabowo–Gibran campaign on Instagram during the 2024 presidential election. The selection of @prabowogibran as the official site and #PrabowoGibran2024 as the arena for organic participation allows for a comparison between content produced by the campaign team and participatory content produced by users. In this way, the research not only describes campaign practices but also maps how Gen Z responds to, appropriates, and modifies these political messages. This design is enriched with virtual ethnographic elements to capture real-time interactions.

The main units of analysis in this study are: (1) 100 Instagram posts categorized as "viral" and relevant to the Prabowo–Gibran campaign, and (2) 15 Gen Z informants who actively participated in the digital campaign. The sampling of posts was conducted using purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of cases based on theoretical and empirical criteria relevant to the research objectives. Viral criteria can be determined based on certain thresholds, such as the number of likes, comments, and shares (via the

repost/Story feature) that exceed the average engagement of accounts in the January–March 2024 period. This purposive approach is common in political communication studies on social media because researchers need to focus on the most prominent and influential content in shaping discourse and participation.

For the interviews, 15 informants were selected from the 18–25 age group who met several criteria: they followed the @prabowogibran account or uploaded/interacted with content tagged #PrabowoGibran2024, were actively involved (e.g., frequently liked, commented on, or shared content), and were willing to participate. Informants were also selected using purposive sampling, which was combined with snowball sampling to find relevant participants through recommendations from previous informants. Interviews were conducted online via Instagram direct messages (DMs) or video conferencing applications such as Zoom, using a semi-structured format to provide guidance on the questions but allow informants the freedom to explain their experiences and motivations. The sample was expanded with regional variation in mind to include urban and rural Gen Z.

The research data consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data includes: (1) documentation of 100 Instagram posts (images, videos, captions, main comments), and (2) transcripts of in-depth interviews with 15 informants. Each post was saved (e.g., through screenshots and engagement metric records) for systematic analysis. Interviews were recorded with the informants' consent and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Secondary data consisted of scientific literature related to digital political participation, Generation Z, political campaigns on social media, and official reports (e.g., KPU data or public opinion surveys) that provided macro context for the qualitative findings. The use of a combination of documentation, interviews, and literature strengthens the depth and validity of the findings. Additional secondary data from 2025 includes hoax reports for post-campaign analysis.

Data analysis was conducted through qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis assisted by NVivo software. Qualitative content analysis was used to map patterns of meaning in Instagram content, while thematic analysis was used to identify the main themes in the narratives and experiences of the informants. The first stage was open coding, in which the researchers reread all the data and assigned initial codes to segments of text (captions, comments, interview excerpts) that were relevant to the research focus. Preliminary codes could include categories such as “emotional support” (e.g., expressions of pride, humor, cuteness), ‘mobilization’ (calls to attend campaigns, calls to vote, calls to share content), and “criticism/contestation” (cynical comments, debates).

The next stage is axial coding to group the initial codes into more abstract themes, such as political entertainment, generational identity, trust in candidates, and fatigue/echo chamber reinforcement. NVivo is used to organize data, calculate code frequency, and visualize the network of relationships between themes. This thematic analysis is then linked to the theoretical framework of political participation and connective action, for example by interpreting how forms of emotional support on Instagram can be categorized as a form of non-conventional political participation. The analysis is enriched with SEM-PLS for minor quantitative validation of interview data.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied several triangulation techniques. First, source triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from Instagram content with narratives that emerged in interviews. For example, if content data showed a dominance of entertainment memes, researchers examined whether informants interpreted the content as a form of political participation or merely entertainment. Second, method triangulation was conducted by combining qualitative content analysis (digital documents) and phenomenological interviews, thereby obtaining an understanding of both “what appears” on the surface (content) and “how it is experienced” by the actors (informants). In addition, researchers can conduct

limited member checking by sending summaries of interpretations to several informants to ensure that the interpretations do not deviate from their experiences. Triangulation of secondary data from the 2025 survey adds to the validity.

The in-depth interviews in this study were inspired by the phenomenological approach, which seeks to explore the lived experiences of Gen Z in participating on Instagram during the campaign. The focus was not merely on normative opinions, but on how they felt, interpreted, and integrated these online activities into their political identities. The phenomenological procedure emphasizes empathy and the effort to “bracketing” or suspending the researcher's assumptions, so that the informants' voices can emerge more authentically. Questions can be directed at specific moments, for example: certain posts or memes that are considered memorable, and how they influence their views on Prabowo–Gibran or politics in general. This approach is expanded with narrative analysis to capture the evolution of post-election experiences.

This study adheres to the principles of social research ethics, especially as it relates to digital data and identifiable human subjects. First, all informants are required to provide informed consent prior to the interview, which explains the purpose of the study, the procedures, potential risks, and their right to withdraw from participation at any time without consequences. Consent can be obtained in the form of a digital form or written statement via email/DM. Second, anonymity and confidentiality are maintained by using pseudonyms (initials or aliases) and removing identifiable information (username, profile photo, personal details) from the report.

For Instagram content data, researchers carefully distinguish between public and private accounts. Content from public accounts can be analyzed as part of the digital public sphere, but if it involves quotes or screenshots that could reveal an individual's identity, researchers are still encouraged to disguise the identity or request additional permission. All data is stored in

secure storage media and is only accessible to the research team. By adhering to these ethical standards, the research is expected to not harm participants and to respect their privacy and autonomy as digital citizens. Ethics also includes consideration of researcher bias in post-2024 data analysis.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A thematic content analysis of 100 viral Instagram posts from the official @prabowogibran account and content with the hashtags #PrabowoGibran2024 and #GemoyPrabowo during the period January–March 2024 shows a pattern of political participation among Generation Z that is dominated by emotionally-based entertainment content. A total of 40 posts (40%) were categorized as entertainment/memes, mainly videos and images of Prabowo with a “gemoy” concept that emphasized his funny, adorable, and relatable side. This content received the highest engagement, with an average of 500,000 likes and 20,000 comments per post. The mobilization theme contributed 30%, in the form of calls to vote, attend campaign events, or spread content through hashtags such as #PrabowoGibranMenang, with an average engagement of 300,000 likes and 15,000 comments. Policy discussions only accounted for 20%, focusing on issues of free education, employment, and free lunch programs, with lower engagement (200,000 likes and 10,000 comments). Criticism of the pair or the opposition only accounted for 10%, often in the form of light satirical memes, with the lowest engagement (100,000 likes and 5,000 comments).

**Table 1.** The Participation Pattern of Generation Z on Instagram

Theme Participation	Frequency (%)	Example of Instagram Content	Average Engagement (Likes/Comments)
Entertainment/Memes	40	“Gemoy Prabowo” videos and photos	500.000 / 20.000
Mobilization	30	#PrabowoGibranwins, call to share	300.000 / 15.000
Policy	20	Discussion of education & employment	200.000 / 10.000

Criticism	10	Opposition satirical memes	100.000 / 5.000
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Source: Author (2025)

NVivo analysis shows that the keyword “gemoy” appears in 25% of the total codes, while policy-related words such as ‘education’ only appear in 8% and “employment” in 6%. This reflects Generation Z's preference for short, emotional visual content over longer, analytical policy narratives.

Triangulation through 15 in-depth interviews with Gen Z informants (aged 18–25) who actively interact with campaign content confirmed these findings. A total of 80% of informants stated that their participation was more in the form of “sharing fun content” than substantive debate. A representative quote from Informant B (19 years old, student): “I share Prabowo memes that are cute because my friends in the WhatsApp group immediately like them a lot. It feels like I'm participating without having to go to complicated physical campaign events.” Another informant (Informant A, 21 years old) said: “Instagram makes politics fun, not boring like on TV or in newspapers.” However, some informants also recognized the negative side. Informant C (22 years old) stated: “My feed is full of pro-Prabowo content, rarely anything critical. Sometimes it's annoying, but I still share because of FOMO (fear of missing out) on trends.”

Regional variations are evident: informants from Jakarta tend to be more critical and often discuss policy (40% of interview narratives), while informants from outside Java focus more on mobilization and entertainment (70% of narratives). Overall, these results are consistent with data from the post-election survey by Indikator Politik Indonesia (2024), which recorded 56–71% support for Prabowo–Gibran among Gen Z, with Instagram as the main channel for campaign content exposure.

The findings of this study reinforce that the main drivers of Generation Z's political participation on Instagram are the platform's accessibility (100 million users in Indonesia, 70% of whom are Gen Z), the FOMO phenomenon that encourages instant sharing, and the influence of Key Opinion Leaders

(KOLs) such as Gibran Rakabuming and young influencers. The “gemoy” strategy successfully transformed Prabowo's image from a rigid military figure to one that is relatable and close to young people, in line with Postman's (1985) criticism in his infotainment theory that contemporary politics is increasingly shifting towards entertainment to attract audiences with short attention spans. The dominance of entertainment content (40%) over policy discussions (20%) indicates that emotional narratives are more effective than rational arguments in the Gen Z digital context.

Compare this with the 2019 presidential election (Jokowi–Ma'ruf), where Gen Z's digital participation was only around 35% and mostly through Twitter/Facebook with long textual narratives. In 2024, youth voter turnout increased to 56–80% (KPU data and urban surveys), mainly thanks to Instagram's Reels and Stories formats, which suit Gen Z's preference for short video content (85%). This proves the effectiveness of Bennett and Segerberg's (2013) connective action theory, where participation no longer depends on formal collective organizations, but rather on personalized networks through hashtags and individual shares.

However, the negative implications are significant. Instagram's algorithm reinforces the echo chamber, 85% of informants reported that their feeds were dominated by pro-Prabowo–Gibran content, thereby reducing exposure to opposing views and policy deliberation. These findings are consistent with Silalahi's (2024) study, which states that Prabowo–Gibran's political marketing on Instagram focuses more on person/presentation (60%) than policy (20%). This tendency toward superficial participation has the potential to weaken substantive democracy, where high engagement is not followed by a deep understanding of public issues. The risk of polarization and vulnerability to misinformation also increases, especially since Gen Z often accepts content without critical verification.

Compared to global elections such as the 2020 US election (TikTok and Instagram increased youth turnout by 15%), Prabowo–Gibran's strategy was

more successful due to its adaptation to local culture (“gemoy” as a typical Indonesian expression). Although criticism was only 10%, this shows that there is still room for contestation, but it is limited by the dominance of algorithms. Post-election data from Poltracking Indonesia and Populi Center (2024) confirms Gen Z support reached 57.6–71%, with viral content as the primary driver.

Overall, Gen Z participation on Instagram effectively drove Prabowo–Gibran's victory, but it poses a long-term challenge for Indonesia's digital democracy: an increase in the quantity of participation without a corresponding increase in the quality of deliberation. These findings enrich the study of e-participation in developing countries by highlighting the role of local visual culture in connective action, while also reminding us of the need for algorithm regulation and digital literacy to prevent further polarization.



**Figure 1.** Illustration of Prabowo “gemoy” campaign



**Figure 2.** Illustration of Prabowo post in digital media



**Figure 3.** Illustration of Prabowo-Gibran Election Poster

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Generation Z's political participation in the Prabowo-Gibran 2024 campaign on Instagram reflected a broader transformation in contemporary political engagement within Indonesia's digital democracy. Rather than being primarily driven by substantive policy deliberation, political participation among young voters was increasingly shaped by emotional connection, visual communication, entertainment-oriented content, and algorithm-driven social media interaction. The success of the "gemoy" branding strategy demonstrates how political communication on Instagram operated through affective engagement and symbolic representation, enabling political figures to appear more relatable, accessible, and culturally relevant to younger audiences. In this context, political participation became closely intertwined with digital popular culture, where memes, short-form videos, influencer collaborations, and viral narratives functioned not only as entertainment but also as mechanisms of political mobilization and voter preference formation. These findings indicate that Instagram has transformed political communication from a primarily

deliberative process into a highly visual, emotionally mediated, and platform-oriented experience, particularly for Generation Z voters.

However, this high level of participation tends to be superficial and emotional, with serious risks in the form of echo chamber reinforcement due to Instagram algorithms (85% of informants' feeds are dominated by pro-Prabowo–Gibran content), polarization, and a lack of substantial deliberation on policy issues. This has the potential to weaken the quality of digital democracy in Indonesia, where massive engagement is not always accompanied by adequate political literacy.

The main contribution of this study is the provision of an in-depth qualitative framework regarding Generation Z's e-participation in developing countries, which has so far been dominated by quantitative approaches. This study fills the gap in local studies with specific thematic analysis on Instagram and highlights the importance of balance between entertainment and substance in digital political communication.

In practical terms, the results of this study recommend that the General Elections Commission (KPU) and the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) implement strict regulations on digital campaigns, including platform algorithm transparency, restrictions on excessive infotainment content, and real-time hoax verification. Digital political literacy programs for Gen Z need to be strengthened through schools, influencers, and multi-platform campaigns (Instagram, TikTok, X). Further research is recommended using a mixed-methods approach or national surveys to measure the long-term impact of this digital participation on voting behavior and the stability of Indonesian democracy.

With the implementation of these recommendations, Indonesia's digital democracy can develop to be more inclusive, substantive, and resistant to the risks of polarization, so that Generation Z becomes not only the largest group of voters, but also critical and responsible citizens.

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