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Looking Ahead to the Political Future: Voting Behavior of Generation Z in General Elections in Kediri Regency – East Java

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Abstract - General elections are a crucial component of the democratic system, involving the participation of all eligible citizens. Generation Z, as one of the significant voter groups, attracts the attention of political parties due to their large number of votes. However, this generation often exhibits apathy and a lack of political knowledge. This study aims to analyze the voting behavior of Generation Z and the factors influencing it. The study employs in-depth interviews with 14 informants consisting of students, university students, and private-sector workers, as well as Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 7 university students. The results indicate that initial voter conditions, such as economic background and previous experiences, mass media, and the characteristics of parties or candidates, significantly shape the political preferences of Generation Z. Social media emerges as the primary source of information, while experiences and discussions in academic environments enhance political participation. Emotional and rational factors also influence voting decisions, with emotions toward certain parties or candidates and rational analysis of received information playing critical roles. These findings underscore the importance of political education and media literacy in shaping informed and critical voters, contributing to the strengthening of democracy and the development of a more inclusive society in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Keywords: Generation Z; General Elections; Political Analysis; Voting Behavior; Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

General elections are a means to realize the sovereignty of the people by facilitating their participation in the administration of the state. This manifestation of popular sovereignty is executed through elections, providing a platform for citizens to directly choose their leaders and parliamentary representatives (Somek & Wilkinson, 2020; Syafei & Darajati, 2020). General elections aim not only to elect representatives who will sit in the legislative bodies but also serve as a means to shape the

governance of the country (Sawasdee, 2020). Elections are conducted by the Election Commission, the Election Supervisory Body, and the Election Organizer Honorary Council as a unified function to elect members of the DPR, DPD, President and Vice President, and DPRD directly by the people (Negretto, 2020).

The issues of general elections, politics, and political participation are crucial and directly connected to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Grover et al., 2021). The SDGs, launched by the United Nations, encompass 17 primary goals aimed at ending poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring peace and prosperity for all. One of the goals relevant to political participation is Goal 16, which focuses on building peaceful, just, and inclusive institutions. Inclusive and democratic political participation ensures that the voices of all citizens, including often-marginalized groups such as the youth, are heard and considered in decision-making processes (Guzel et al., 2021; Sénit, 2020). This not only strengthens democracy but also supports the achievement of other SDG goals, such as reducing inequalities (Goal 10) and empowering communities.

Recent studies indicate that effective political participation is key to achieving many SDG goals (Biermann et al., 2022). For example, a study by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) highlights that increasing youth political participation can enhance governmental transparency and accountability, thereby accelerating progress towards sustainable development goals (Canton, 2021; Cheema, 2022). In Indonesia, the issue of political participation is becoming increasingly relevant with the advent of digitalization and improved access to information. Generation Z, as active users of digital technology, has significant potential to influence public policy and political processes through their participation (Seyfi et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding the voting behavior of Generation Z and the factors influencing their political participation is crucial in the context of achieving the SDGs in Indonesia.

This will explore how Generation Z, as first-time voters, exercise their voting rights. According to Article 1 of PKPU No. 19 of 2023, voters in elections are Indonesian citizens who are at least 17 years old, married, or have been married. Every citizen has the right to be elected and to vote in general elections based on equal rights through direct, general, free, secret, honest, and fair voting as per the legal regulations (PKPU, 2023). Based on these voter requirements, the Indonesian population is categorized into six generations: Pre Boomers or Traditionalists (1928-1945), Baby Boomers (1946-1964), Generation X (1965-1980), Generation Y or Millennials (1981-1994), and Generation Z (1995-2010) (Lundy, 2023).

Generation Z is characterized by their significant influence from digital technology, making them known as the generation that cannot detach from gadgets and technology. They are adept at utilizing technological changes in various aspects of their lives. Additionally, Generation Z is flexible, smarter, and more tolerant of differences, yet they tend to prefer instant culture and are less sensitive to privacy issues (Barhate & Dirani, 2022). These characteristics influence their values, life goals, and perspectives, including their attitudes and views towards the 2024 elections. They are deeply integrated with smartphones and the internet, having been born in an era of technological development, and generally possess good financial knowledge (Mahmoud et al., 2021).

According to the Indonesian Central Statistics Agency in 2020, there are 74.3 million Generation Z individuals in Indonesia, or about 27 percent of the total population (BPS RI, 2020). Generation Z plays a crucial role in the 2024 general elections due to their large number of votes, with Generation Z and Y voters making up approximately 53.8% of the electorate (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021). Digitalization has led Generation Z to be isolated in a politically partisan space, viewing the world in a polarized manner. Their political practices are often limited to reading political information or debating on social media, with their political attitudes significantly influenced by others. They possess good political awareness but are often self-taught and tend to be apathetic towards political topics (Kreiss et al., 2020).

The political awareness of Generation Z is deemed insufficient due to their low political literacy. They tend to follow political news from online media without a strong understanding, leading them to choose candidates without a clear basis. They participate in elections and use their voting rights but often vote randomly due to a lack of political literacy and insight (de Saint Laurent et al., 2021). According to data from the KPU in the 2019 elections, Kediri Regency conducted elections with a total of 1,226,382 registered voters from 26 sub-districts. With the millennial and Generation Z population making up 44.29% of the total voters, Generation Z accounts for about 18% of the

electorate, with more than half being first-time voters. This number is expected to increase in the 2024 elections (PR Kediri Regency, 2024).

This situation is closely related to studies on voting behavior. According to Miriam Budiardjo, voting behavior involves individuals or groups actively participating in political life, including electing national leaders and directly or indirectly influencing government policies (Smyth, 2023). outlines three approaches to voting behavior: the sociological approach, which emphasizes social characteristics and groupings as determinants of voting behavior; the psychological approach, which focuses on psychological variables such as emotional attachment to political parties, orientation towards issues, and candidates; and the rational approach, which bases choices on the calculation of benefits gained from the choices (Bénabou & Tirole, 2016).

Voting behavior is shaped by a variety of sociological and psychological factors, as well as evolving media dynamics. Previous research highlights that voting behavior is further influenced by both sociological and psychological elements, with concerns about abstention rates being a critical issue for democratic participation (Satriadi et al., 2023). Moreover, the rise of social media has become a significant factor in enhancing political participation, especially among rural Generation Z voters in Indonesia (Zainudin, 2024). Generation Z, in particular, is drawn to diverse forms of political communication, such as research, podcasts, memes, and political humor, reflecting their preference for more informal and engaging political discourse (Dewi et al., 2023). Their political engagement spans both cognitive and behavioral types, with Generation Z not only understanding and analyzing political conditions but also engaging in voting, expressing opinions, and integrating socio-political values into daily life (Alfaruqy et al., 2022).

Firmanzah suggests that voters' decisions in elections are influenced by three main factors: initial voter conditions, mass media, and the party or candidate. Initial conditions include the voters' inherent characteristics, value systems, and beliefs. Mass media shapes public opinion through information distribution, with positive or negative coverage affecting voter perception. The third factor is the characteristics of the political party and candidate, including reputation, image, background, ideology, and politician quality. Voters often assess these attributes to determine their choices (Firmanzah, 2007; Kim et al., 2020).

Young voters' decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, as supported by previous research. These factors include work experience, education, socio-economic background, government financial information, political culture, and family relationships (Healy et al., 2010; Plutzer, 2002). These elements highlight the complex interplay of personal, societal, and political factors shaping young voters' choices. Rational behavior models suggest voters base decisions on incumbent performance and candidate policies (Razak et al., 2023). Additionally, studies show habitual voting patterns, where individuals consistently vote or abstain, emphasizing the role of early experiences and socialization in long-term electoral engagement (Pacheco, 2008).

Some of the research above is the basis why research on the behavior of generation Z voters in Kediri District was conducted. This research provides valuable insights into political participation in rural areas, contrasting with typical urban-focused studies. By employing sociological, psychological, and rational approaches, the study comprehensively analyzes Gen Z's voting behavior and identifies various influencing factors. The study aims to increase political participation and inform strategies to engage Gen Z, thus strengthening democracy. The findings will help the General Election Commission, the Election Supervisory Body, and other stakeholders create programs that resonate with this generation. Universities and NGOs can use the results to develop better political education programs, fostering informed voters.

Theoretical Framework

General elections in Indonesia are a crucial component of the country's democratic system, showcasing a diverse political landscape and active citizen engagement. These elections, held every five years, play a significant role in determining the country's leadership, including the president, vice president, members of the People's Representative Council (DPR), and the Regional Representative Council (DPD) (Istiqoh et al., 2022). The democratic process in Indonesia is strongly supported by general elections, which are viewed as a concrete manifestation of the country's dedication to democracy (F. A. Putra & Fauzi, 2020). Since the reformation era, Indonesia has made significant

progress in democratization, with regular free and fair elections held since 1999, fostering competitive political dynamics and peaceful power transitions (Al Izzati et al., 2024).

Efforts to boost voter participation and reduce abstention *(golput)* have been ongoing, with institutions like the Indonesian General Election Commission (KPU) and political parties actively involved in public education to emphasize the civic duty of voting for all citizens. Furthermore, Indonesian laws governing general elections reinforce the enforcement of norms, including those promoting women's representation in political bodies (Purwanti & Teti Hadiati, 2022). Religious and identity-based sentiments often influence political landscapes in Indonesia, with political actors utilizing religious symbols to gain support and secure votes during general elections (Lubis et al., 2024). Additionally, Indonesia's electoral history reflects a progression towards political inclusivity, evolving from the early post-independence period to the current multiparty system (Suhariyanto, 2024).

The electoral process in Indonesia has seen various advancements, including the transition from a representative system to direct elections for regional heads, indicating a move towards increased citizen involvement in the political sphere (Winengan, 2018). Moreover, the engagement of Indonesian citizens residing abroad in the electoral process highlights the country's commitment to ensuring political rights for all citizens, regardless of their location. In recent elections, voter turnout has been significant, with the 2019 elections witnessing an 81% voter participation rate, reflecting the public's growing trust in the electoral process. Furthermore, initiatives like "Satu Suara, Satu Indonesia" aim to unify the electorate and reduce regional and socio-economic disparities in voter engagement (F. A. Putra & Fauzi, 2020).

Technological advancements have also played a crucial role in modernizing Indonesia's electoral process. The introduction of electronic voting systems and digital voter registration has streamlined the process, making it more efficient and accessible. These innovations have not only reduced the incidence of fraud but have also increased transparency and trust in the electoral system. Social media platforms have become vital tools for political campaigns, voter education, and real-time reporting of election results, thereby enhancing public engagement and accountability. The widespread use of technology has enabled the KPU to reach younger demographics and remote areas, ensuring a more inclusive electoral process (Syafei & Darajati, 2020).

Challenges remain, such as addressing the digital divide and ensuring the security of electronic systems against cyber threats. Continuous efforts are required to improve the electoral process, including comprehensive voter education programs to counter misinformation and increase political literacy. Furthermore, enhancing the inclusivity of the electoral system to better represent marginalized groups remains a priority. By addressing these challenges and leveraging technological advancements, Indonesia can continue to strengthen its democratic institutions and ensure that its general elections reflect the will of all its people (D. Putra et al., 2022).

Voting Behaviour

Voting behavior in Indonesia is influenced by various factors. One significant influence is that support for political leaders, evaluation of government performance, and patronage are more influential in driving voting behavior than sectarian identity or ideology (Fossati, 2019). This indicates that Indonesian voters tend to prioritize the immediate benefits and performance of current leaders over historical political alignments and ideological commitments. This shift reflects a pragmatic approach to voting, where tangible results are valued over abstract loyalties (Qorib & Saleh, 2020).

In addition, social divisions continue to be a determining factor in voting behavior in Indonesia (Hellmann, 2014). Historical differences between secularism and political Islam remain a key driver of voting patterns, even after years of authoritarian rule. Traditional Muslim voters, for example, are less likely to vote for opposition parties or religious parties, highlighting the strong influence of religious affiliation on their political choices (Pelizzo & Kuzenbayev, 2023). These deep-rooted divisions underscore the entrenched nature of identity politics in Indonesia and its impact on electoral outcomes.

In another significant way, clientelism shapes voting behavior, emphasizing the importance of personal relationships between politicians and citizens (Allen, 2015). Politicians often engage in direct exchanges of goods and services to gain political support, which can influence voters more

effectively than policy promises or ideological platforms (Ahmad, 2023). This form of patronage politics underscores the transactional nature of political support in many parts of Indonesia, where voters prioritize tangible benefits over broader political or ideological considerations.

In combination with these traditional influences, the voting behavior of Generation Z in Indonesia also brings new dynamics to the political landscape. This generations is characterized by a high reliance on digital platforms and social media for information, making them more susceptible to online campaigns and digital political movements (Pratama et al., 2023). Unlike older generations, Gen Z voters tend to prioritize issues such as climate change, education reform, and economic opportunity over traditional political loyalties or religious affiliations. Their emphasis on transparency, accountability and anti-corruption measures in governance further differentiates their voting behavior. The accessibility of information and the ability to mobilize quickly through digital channels means that Generation Z is more likely to participate in issue-based activism and support candidates who advocate progressive policies (Chen & Stilinovic, 2020).

Collectively, these factors underscore the complexity of voter decision-making processes in Indonesia's political landscape. The interplay between support for leaders, evaluations of government performance, patronage, social inequality, religious affiliation, and the emerging influence of Generation Z creates a multi-faceted environment where voting behavior is influenced by individual advantage and collective identity (Kholisoh et al., 2020). Understanding these dynamics is critical to predicting election outcomes and developing strategies that can effectively engage Indonesian voters across different socio-political contexts.

Z Generations

Generation Z in Indonesia, consisting of individuals born from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, is indeed becoming a significant demographic cohort that is influencing the political landscape of the country. This generation is known for its unique characteristics and digital fluency, which are bringing fresh perspectives and new priorities to Indonesian politics (Alfred & Wong, 2022; Nur et al., 2024).

Studies have shown that Generation Z individuals in Indonesia are highly interested in political engagement, particularly in seeking political information online, participating in political discussions, and even attending political rallies (Alfred & Wong, 2022; Turner, 2018). This heightened political interest is evident in their active involvement in various political behaviors, such as voting, expressing opinions, and internalizing socio-political values in their daily lives (Alfaruqy et al., 2022). Moreover, their digital fluency allows them to access and disseminate political information rapidly, making them pivotal in shaping public opinion and mobilizing grassroots movements.

The impact of social media on Generation Z's political awareness and engagement is significant. As the largest digital consumers in Indonesia, social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping their political views and interactions (Evita et al., 2023). Politicians and political parties are increasingly utilizing social media channels to target Generation Z, disseminate information, engage with young voters, and mobilize support (Ayu, 2023; Lailiyah et al., 2020). The use of Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok has proven effective in reaching this tech-savvy demographic, allowing for real-time engagement and personalized communication.

Educational initiatives focusing on political literacy and political education for Generation Z are gaining momentum. Efforts to educate the younger generation about political processes, issues, and responsibilities are considered essential for nurturing informed and engaged citizens (Setiyowati et al., 2022). Research has indicated that exposure to political content and discussions can enhance political efficacy among students, underscoring the importance of early political socialization (Mashud et al., 2023). Schools and universities are incorporating more comprehensive civic education programs to ensure that Generation Z understands the importance of their participation in democratic processes.

The preferences of Generation Z in Indonesia also extend to their communication with politicians. Personalization of politicians on platforms like Instagram has been identified as a key factor in capturing the attention and interest of Generation Z members (Parmelee et al., 2023). This personalized approach aligns with the generation's desire for authentic and relatable political content, signaling a shift towards more tailored and engaging political communication strategies. This trend

highlights the need for political actors to present themselves as approachable and genuine, thus fostering a stronger connection with young voters.

Furthermore, the values and perspectives of Generation Z in Indonesia are evolving within the context of a digital society and sustainable development. This generation's transition to a new level of civilizational development, influenced by digital technologies, is shaping their outlook on issues such as solidarity and corporatism (Bresler et al., 2020). Consequently, understanding and adapting to the values and preferences of Generation Z are crucial for political actors and institutions aiming to effectively engage with this demographic. This adaptation includes addressing their concerns about environmental sustainability, social justice, and economic equality.

In conclusion, Generation Z in Indonesia is increasingly playing a pivotal role in the country's political landscape, driven by their digital savvy, political interest, and evolving values. As this cohort continues to assert its influence in Indonesian politics, policymakers, educators, and political stakeholders must adjust their strategies to effectively engage with and empower Generation Z in shaping the future of the nation. This engagement will be essential for fostering a more inclusive and dynamic political environment that reflects the aspirations and potential of this emerging generation.

Material and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore and understand the voting behavior of Generation Z in Kediri Regency. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain deep insights into the experiences, views, and motivations of individuals through direct interaction and analysis of their social contexts (Cresswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2009). The first step in this research method is the selection of participants. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure they met the criteria relevant to this study, namely Generation Z (born between 1995-2010), residing in Kediri Regency, and coming from diverse backgrounds, including students, university students, and private sector workers.

A total of 14 Generation Z adolescents, aged 18 to 24, were interviewed in-depth to explore their voting behavior. These participants were selected from a diverse range of backgrounds within Kediri Regency. Among the 14 interviewees, 8 were university students, with fields of study including social sciences, business, engineering, and health. The remaining 6 participants were employed in the private sector in roles such as administration, customer service, and marketing. The participants represented both urban and rural areas within Kediri Regency, providing a wide range of perspectives on political behavior. Socio-economically, 5 participants were from lower-middle-income households, while the other 9 were from middle-income families.

In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the experiences, views, and motivations of participants regarding their voting behavior (Deterding & Waters, 2021). The interview process involved preparing interview guides based on literature and research objectives, conducting face-to-face interviews to encourage deeper interaction, and transcribing the interviews for further analysis (Williams & Heikes, 1993). Additionally, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with 7 university students were held to identify behavioral patterns and views that might not surface in individual interviews.

Data from both interviews and FGDs were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which included initial coding, theme development, and reporting findings based on identified themes. To ensure validity and reliability, triangulation was applied using both interviews and FGDs, member checking with participants for accurate interpretation, and maintaining an audit trail for transparency and replicability.

Result and Discussion

Sociological Aspect

The results of in-depth interviews with 14 Generation Z teenagers in Kediri District show that social factors have different influences on their voting behavior. One informant, a high school student from an underprivileged family, stated that she voted for a leader who prioritized education because her economic limitations prevented her from continuing her studies.

> "I voted for a leader who prioritizes education because I myself had difficulty continuing my studies due to economic limitations."

The experience of living in a family with economic limitations made a very concerned about the education programs offered by candidates. Although her access to election information was limited, her desire to improve her access to education motivated her to participate in the election. This is in line with the finding that socio-economic predispositions play an important role in determining political choices (Stancea et al., 2024).

Another informant, also a student, showed low enthusiasm for the election due to a lack of understanding and information. He stated that he rarely saw clear information on social media, hence his apathy towards the election. In the interview, he mentioned that he only uses social media to connect with friends and for entertainment. He pointed out that some of the accounts he follows are related to music groups, mobile games, and some influencer accounts that are not directly related to education and politics. Generation Z at school age tends to seek information through social media, and if the information is unavailable or unclear, they tend not to be interested in elections (Dewi et al., 2023).

A student from a middle-income family showed high enthusiasm for the election because he had understood the importance of political participation through discussions on campus. During college, he actively participated in various student activity units and held management positions in student movement organizations. His activity in organizations affiliated with critical and open-minded thinking, such as the Student Executive Board (BEM) and political discussion groups, helped strengthen his political awareness.

> "Discussions on campus and involvement in organizations made me better understand political issues and the importance of participating in elections to change policies."

This suggests that education and a supportive academic environment can enhance young people's political participation, in line with the finding that academic and organizational experiences play an important role in shaping their political views (Touseef et al., 2023). However, the informan who also comes from a middle-income family, chose to abstain from voting because he did not understand the election and was influenced by his friends who also chose to abstain. He said:

> "My friends and I don't really care about the election because we don't really understand what the difference is between each candidate or party."

This shows that the friendship environment has a big influence on voting behavior. This finding is in line with sociological theory which states that individuals' social behavior and political decisions are strongly influenced by peer groups.

The differences among informants also reflect the importance of access to information and political literacy in influencing political participation. Some informants receive sufficient information and political education through academia and organizations, while others are less informed and tend to follow the herd. According to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), around 53% of the Generation Z population in Indonesia has access to higher education, but not all of them are actively involved in activities that support political literacy. This confirms the need for more effective strategies in improving political literacy among the younger generation, such as political education programs in schools and campuses, as well as more intensive information campaigns through social media that Generation Z frequently accesses (Mashud et al., 2023).

In this sociological approach, the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) results also reinforce the finding that friendship and education strongly influence voting behavior. Many FGD participants stated that discussions on campus and the information they get from their friends make them more aware of the importance of political participation. One FGD participant mentioned that discussions on campus about politics made him more interested and felt it was important to exercise his right to vote. In addition to the friendship and education environment, the role of family is also important, but in some cases, the influence of peers and access to information through social media is more dominant.

These factors shape socio-economic predispositions and influence political choices. It is important for Generation Z to seek information from a variety of reliable sources to make more informed political decisions based on in-depth knowledge of political candidates and issues.

Increasing political literacy and disseminating clear and accurate information on social media can help increase young people's political participation.

Psychological Aspect

This research also illustrates that psychological factors also influence the voting behavior of Generation Z in Kediri District. Individual decisions are influenced more by socio-psychological rather than structural factors (Şener et al., 2023). These factors are explained through three main determinants: party identification, candidate orientation, and issue orientation. Party identification becomes a principle to measure the amount of predisposing factors such as personal experience and political orientation that are relevant to individuals. For example, one informant stated:

> "I will not vote for parties involved in corruption scandals. Bad news about parties in the mass media and social media makes me distrustful and will not vote. I want Indonesia to be free from corruption, but every day there is news of our officials being corrupt."

This comment suggests that party identification can be influenced by negative experiences and bad news, which then shapes individuals' perceptions and political orientation towards the party. This research shows that social media plays an important role in shaping Generation Z's political opinions. This generation often uses platforms such as Instagram, Twitter and TikTok to get information and discuss political issues. This affects how they perceive political candidates and parties. The mass media and social media that informants use shape these perceptions and ultimately determine their choice of parties.

Two informants who are still active in college and organizations said they vote for people who have a strong vision-mission and character. They mentioned candidates like Anies Baswedan as one of the figures they like and consider to have a vision.

> "I always seek information about candidates before voting. I want to know their character, nature, and vision and mission. For example, on social media such as Twitter and Instagram, I follow his account, and I often watch his program Desak Anies because his answers are cool and what we need."

They have a strong candidate orientation and consider personal aspects of candidates before making political decisions. This orientation plays an important role in determining their choice. Issue orientation is also an important factor. Generation Z is known to be a generation that cares deeply about social and environmental issues. They tend to support policies that focus on sustainability and social justice (Utari et al., 2023).

Another informant who is a high school student has parents who work as teachers in private schools. This also influences his view that he will vote and like people who raise the issue of teachers in every campaign. This shows that individuals who have personal interests or knowledge influenced by their parents tend to prioritize candidates who have programs or policies that are relevant to the issue.

> "I wanted to be a teacher because here, to find a job, you have to go to Surabaya or Jakarta. So I actually want the candidate to have a clear program for education. In the future teachers should be very important, so this is very important to me."

The in-depth interviews above reveal that negative perceptions of political parties strongly influence voting decisions. The above shows that negative emotions and affections towards certain issues can make individuals not vote for the party. Therefore, political parties and all political stakeholders must really pay attention to political ethics and propriety because all of these things are read and seen by generation Z and used as a basis for voting. The findings also show that emotions play an important role in Generation Z's political decisions. It also shows that emotions such as hope, fear and anger can influence voter behavior.

The results of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) also revealed some interesting and unique cases in Generation Z's voting behavior. One interesting case is the interviewees who stated that they do not vote based on party, but rather on candidates and relevant issues. Some individuals from

Generation Z seem to focus more on specific candidates and issues rather than party identification. Emotions, personal experiences and interest in specific issues strongly influence their political decisions (Groenendyk, 2011).

Rational Aspect

According to the rational choice approach, Generation Z's choice is the result of a capable individual's rational judgment process. The essence of rational choice is that when faced with several types of actions, people tend to choose what they consider and believe has the best possible outcome (Pomytkina et al., 2020). The calculation of profit and loss in elections is not only in the form of money but also other benefits that are considered important in the lives of Generation Z constituents. This generation tends to vote based on rational and logical considerations, using political facts to evaluate political actions for immediate and long-term benefits.

The interviews showed that they made their choices by using profiles and social media as additional sources of information. They conduct self-analysis to assess candidates in terms of traits, character, and leadership style.

> "I look at candidates' track records on social media before deciding to vote. I want to know who they really are. But if we already know that they are involved in corruption or immoral cases, I will automatically not vote for them."

> "I vote based on the work programs and real results that the candidates have achieved. For example, I consider Jokowi to have many development achievements, but there are other processes that I consider less good, so there is confusion in choosing. I believe that a candidate's actions in the past are a reflection of the future."

This statement shows that rational factors such as judgment based on accurate information and independent analysis strongly influence Generation Z's choices (Aksakal & Avcı, 2024). Voters from Generation Z tend to base choices on the performance of candidates or political parties, including their track record. This approach reflects the important responsibility of being a conscious citizen of their role in electoral participation. Generation Z combines information from campaigns, social media and candidate track records, while thinking independently before making a decision. This approach reflects a politically rational mindset where decisions are made based on logical evaluation and long-term benefits (Grover et al., 2021).

The results of our Focus Group Discussion (FGD) revealed that there are groups of voters who are very critical of the information they receive. They tend to verify facts and check the truth of information before making a decision. These are usually students who are active in organizations and often have discussions with fellow students. They are also members of several extra-student organizations that are usually directly or indirectly related to political affiliations.

> "I don't easily believe in political campaigns or advertisements. I always look for other sources to make sure the information is correct."

The opinion of one of the FGD participants shows that Generation Z has a tendency to be skeptical of unverified information and prefers to do fact-checking as part of their decision-making process. The importance of a rational approach in politics. This study shows that emotions and other psychological factors play an important role, but Generation Z still prioritizes rational judgment in determining their political choices.

Discussion

Many first-time voters showed great enthusiasm, even though they were still in the early stages of understanding the electoral process and the candidates. Their initial condition as new voters suggests that they are in the exploration and learning stages of politics. Some respondents stated that previous electoral experiences influenced their views and preferences in the next election.

Interest in certain issues is also an important factor in the initial condition of novice voters. Some respondents stated that they were interested in education or employment issues and wanted to vote for candidates who were considered capable of handling these issues. This shows that Generation

Z has a high awareness of social issues that are relevant to their daily lives. Research by Norris (2000) supports this finding by stating that young voters tend to focus more on specific issues that have a direct impact on their lives.

As in previous studies, the issues obtained by Generation Z are mostly sourced from social media. Social media is one of the main sources of information for Generation Z in finding out about election candidates. Social media such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube are used to get information about candidates, their visions and missions, as well as imagery presented through creative content. Social media not only provides glimpses of information about candidates but also shapes voters' perceptions through algorithms that display certain content.

In addition to social media, traditional mass media such as television, newspapers and radio also play an important role although in the research it was not found to be massive. Voters use mass media to obtain information about candidates' vision-mission, performance, character and traits. Mass media provides easy and quick access to the information that voters need.

It is from this media that informants find information about parties, candidates and other information related to general elections. Voters tend to choose candidates or parties that have visions and missions that are in line with their own thoughts. Candidates' performance in office is also an important consideration. Candidates who have a good track record and were successful in their previous positions are more attractive to voters. In addition, the reputation of parties or candidates who are considered to have high integrity tend to be more attractive. Party loyalty also influences some voters, who tend to vote for parties that they have supported and are part of their political identity.

The following table summarizes the main findings of this research based on social, psychological, and rational aspects, which include voters' initial conditions, the media that influenced them, and the party or candidate they chose:

Table 1. The Relationship Between Social, Psychological and Rational Aspects of Self, Media and Generation Z Candidate Choice

Aspects	Voter Initial Condition	Influential Media	Preferred Party or Candidate
Social	a. New voters with high enthusiasm; b. previous electoral experiences influence views; c. interest in certain issues such as education and employment.	a. Social media as main source of information (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube); b. traditional mass media (television, newspapers, radio).	a. Party loyalty, candidate popularity; b. reputation and integrity of the party or candidate.
Psychological	a. Emotional involvement in certain issues; b. affection and emotion towards a party or candidate; c. previous electoral experiences shape critical views.	a. Mass media that provide emotional coverage and personal stories about candidates; b. social media content that stirs emotions.	a. Candidate performance while in office; b. vision-mission that aligns with personal views; c. previous electoral experience influences choice.
Rational	a. Assessments are based on accurate information and independent analysis; b. the use of political facts to evaluate political actions; c. preferences based on long-term benefits.	a. Social media for fact verification; official campaigns and information from various media sources; b. critical attitude towards media bias.	a. Election based on concrete vision and mission; b. good track record and proven performance; c. logical evaluation of candidates and their programs.

Table 1 above illustrates how Generation Z in Purwoasri Sub-district make their political decisions based on a combination of sociological, psychological and rational factors. Each aspect shows a complex interaction between voters' initial conditions, the media that influences them, and

the party or candidate they choose, providing deep insights into the dynamics of this generation's voting behavior.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted by researchers show that students who participate in FGDs tend to be critical of the information they receive and verify facts before making decisions. Students who are active in organizations and often discuss with fellow students show a more informed and critical voting behavior pattern. Some of them are members of extra-campus organizations that usually have a relationship, either directly or indirectly, with certain political affiliations. Activities in these organizations give them exposure to various political perspectives and contemporary issues, which enrich their understanding of political dynamics.

The findings of this study have significant relevance to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially goal 16 which focuses on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Informed and rational political participation among Generation Z contributes to strengthening democracy and building a more inclusive society. Improving political and media literacy among young voters is an important step towards achieving this goal.

Voter education and access to accurate and unbiased information can help shape a smart and critical electorate. This is crucial in creating accountable and inclusive institutions, which ultimately contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. A Generation Z that is actively and critically engaged in the political process can be an agent of change that promotes transparency, accountability and inclusiveness in government.

Conclusion

This research reveals that the voting behavior of Generation Z in Kediri Regency is influenced by a combination of sociological, psychological, and rational factors. Personal backgrounds, prior experiences, and interest in specific issues are key drivers in shaping political preferences. New voters are enthusiastic but still learning about the political process, while more experienced voters tend to have a more critical approach. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, have become crucial sources of information, offering easily digestible content that shapes their perceptions and decisions. Emotions also play a significant role—Generation Z tends to support candidates or parties they feel emotionally aligned with or those whose values reflect their own.

The study underscores the importance of political education and media literacy to nurture informed, critical voters who can contribute to strengthening democracy and creating a more inclusive society, as envisioned in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Moving forward, future research could explore how digital activism impacts Generation Z's voting behavior, as well as investigate the long-term influence of social media on political participation and engagement as this generation becomes more involved in the political sphere.

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