

Gen-Z Perspective on Politics: High Interest, Uninformed, and Urging Political Education

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Abstract: *The Central Bureau of Statistics report reveals that Gen-Z dominates Indonesia's population today. This data is necessary considering that in 2024 a general election will be held. The votes from gen-z will undoubtedly be a bone of contention for competing politicians and political parties. In political communication, research is often focused on strategies for compiling narratives that can be converted into vote gains or political image management to attract sympathy. These two things can only be done when they know the perspective of the target public. Therefore, this study aims to determine the perspective of Gen Z. This qualitative study uses the focus group discussion method to obtain in-depth data. There are three interesting findings: Gen-Z is highly interested in politics but feels uninformed. Second, Gen-Z sees the existence of political parties in a negative light due to the high number of corruption cases. Third, Gen-Z urges for political education. Each finding is elaborated on in this research paper.*

Keywords: Political Communication, Gen-Z, Political Education

INTRODUCTION

There is a strong connection between political communication and democracy. Democracy focuses on the importance of the role of each individual. In a healthy democratic climate, citizens have inherent and strong political rights (Lindgren, 2017; McNair, 2018). Historically, there is a strong connection between democracy and the notion of citizenship as an important social aspect. A citizen is someone who is a member of the political community and whose voice is heard. Meanwhile, the current political process has required that all people participate in constitutional procedures to determine who has the right to lead them and what kind of law best suits them (Alvin, 2022). Thus, political communication is not an exclusive right belonging to politicians or some exclusive elite people. Everyone who lives in a democratic society has the same political right. For instance, when the demonstrations against the draft of the omnibus law, the students flocked to the Parliament building. All the people involved eventually become political actors in their respective interests and environments.

According to McNair (McNair, 2018), there are three important things that must be considered in political communication. Firstly, political communication focuses both on verbal messages and non-verbal communication, including fashion style, hairstyle, and how to walk. Secondly, political communication could be done by every person, even though they are considered non-political actors. Thirdly, communication about political politicians with activities carried out on the news and the media platform, including social media in the form of political communication.

One of the implications of political communication in elections can be seen in the increase in participation. In Indonesia, there has been an increase in public participation in the general election process in the last ten years (Hamonangan, Fauzias, dan Arlington, 2022). The 2019 election reached its highest point with a participation rate of 81.9 per cent, which voters have dominated by the millennial generation (Abdi, 2018).

In every election, there must be beginner voters (Wardhani, 2018), and one of the recurring problems for beginner voters is the low level of political education (Setiawaty, 2018). Regarding beginner voters, Badan Pusat Statistik (2020) revealed that the majority of Indonesia's population is

dominated by Generation Z (Gen-Z) with a percentage of 27.94 percent or around 70 million people. Meanwhile, the Pew Research Center defines Gen-Z as individuals born between 1997 and 2012 (Dimock, 2019). Based on the BPS data, it is inevitable that Gen-Z will become a political target because the upcoming election will be their first time. At the same time, political elites will be vying for votes from these beginner voters.

Research topics surrounding political communication are often limited to strategies to win elections or impression management to attract voters. It happens because of the development of communication technology in the current digital era. The new media has given politicians opportunities to show off without fear of the filter from the news media (Alvin, 2019, 2020; Filimonov, Russmann, dan Svensson, 2016; Simunjak, 2017; Stanyer, 2008; Winata & Alvin, 2022). However, before focusing much on formulating the best strategy, the researcher must first understand the beginner perspective, which is Gen-Z. The logical reason is that every generation has its characteristics: Gen-X is different from the millennials, and millennials are also different from Gen-Z. Therefore, this paper is trying to understand one big question: what is the Gen-Z perspective on politics?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is considered qualitative communication research methods. The scheme used is to see social phenomena in the natural setting so that the involvement of researchers becomes natural and mandatory (Leavy, 2017). This type of study is not in phenomena generalization but more emphasis on the depth of information to the level of meaning.

This research data collection was conducted using focus group discussion (FGD) methods with digging the deep perspective of Gen-Z. Eliot (Eliot, 2005) defines FGD as a methodology that helps researchers gain detailed information and deep insight. The researchers are following the guidebook of doing FGD from Eliot. The FGD lasts 90 minutes and is conducted online via Zoom. There are five Gen-Z as participants with the same characteristics, for instance all of them are students from the social sciences department who have learnt an introduction to politics. We decide not to reveal our participants name in order to make them feel safe expressing their own thoughts.

All participants have the same opportunity to answer the questions. each question is pre-determined and divided into three types: engagements questions – to warm up the participants; exploration questions – the main question to get deep insight; and exit question – the follow-up question just in case something missed during the FGD. The results of this discussion were recorded, transcribed, and coded as well as the identification of relevant themes.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

Gen-Z: Passive Political Participation, but High Interest in Politics and Uninformed

Political communication is the communication process that has implications or consequences for the activity of politics (Alvin, 2022; McNair, 2018). Indonesia is a country that adheres to a democratic system and also practices political communication in various activities at home and abroad. In the past, politics was done by political actors who were directly involved and were communicators. The existence of citizens of a democratic country (in Indonesia in particular) is considered a compliment. However, the presence of the citizens is essential.

The participants are asked about their frame of mind about politics. Most participants come up with almost the same answer: politics is the only way to achieve power. Prayuda dan Sundari (2019) explains that power is an ability to reach personal or national interests. Moreover, political power means a person has a legitimate right from the public to regulate and execute policy in line with the interest.

“In my understanding, politics is about the attempts by political parties and politician to gain power” (Participant 1, 2022, in the interview).

“Politics, in my opinion, is an art to gain power” (Participant 4, 2022, in the interview).

“Practically speaking, Indonesia is a bit messy” (Participant 5, 2022, in the interview).

Furthermore, the participants think that politics is identical to a negative term. In order to get political power, the politician can justify any means necessary, and the line between friend and foe is almost non-existent. The negative term on politics are also influenced by various commotions that occur at the national and regional levels. One of the problems that have an impact on a negative view of politics is the number of corruption cases. Komisi Pemberantasan Korupsi (KPK) is recorded to have handled 1,194 corruption cases from 2004 to 2021. The dominant types of corruption cases are bribery, reaching 775 cases (Annur, 2022).

Researchs by Adelina (2019) and Sjafrina (2019) explains the phenomenon of corruption are usually used again for campaign capital. In another sense, this is commonly referred to as money politics. In addition to causing increasingly expensive campaign costs, the public as voters are tricked into not making choices based on meritocracy, but based on money politics.

Negative views on politics also affect the interest of Gen-Z to participate actively. In this case, participation divides into two types: active participation and passive participation. Active participation can occur as the direct role of an individual to enter and be directly involved in the political stage. In comparison, passive participation can serve as an attempt to exercise political rights. Generally, passive participation comes in the form of voting during elections.

“Politics is very dynamic. There are no permanent enemies and friends, so it cannot be seen from one point of view to see a certain political situation” (Participant 3, 2022, in interview).

Notwithstanding the argument above, Gen-Z also states that they are interested in entering the world of politics. The problem is that they are uninformed about the information surrounding politics, from how to get involved, how to join a political party, and other reason that was not mentioned.

In addition, Gen-Z also have concerns about the amount of funds that must be spent. Prajna Research Indonesia details the range of funds needed by legislative candidates (Jatmiko, 2018). For candidates for the DPR RI level, it is around Rp. 1 billion to Rp. 2 billion. Then, candidates for the Provincial DPRD level require funds of Rp 500 million to Rp 1 billion. Meanwhile, candidates at the Regency/City DPRD level require funds in the range of Rp. 250 to Rp. 300 million.

Political Parties in the Gen-Z Perspective

A political party is an organization formed to fight for a particular view, beliefs, and ideals from a several people about life community which is carried out utilizing political struggle, namely managing power to influence the processes of public policy formation (Gusmansyah, 2019). In the last 2019 election, 14 parties that participated, namely: PDIP, Gerindra, Golkar, PAN, PPP, PKS, PKB, Hanura, PSI, Perindo, Berkarya, Nasdem, Demokrat, and Garuda (Movanita, 2019).

Gen-Z is very familiar with the existence of political parties in Indonesia. Unfortunately, the perception of Gen-Z about political parties is not in line with its function. Gen-Z only sees political parties as a legitimate medium to get political power and as a group with hidden agenda. Moreover, Gen-Z ideally sees the first function of political parties as the mouthpiece for the people but this part has not been done. This assumption is based on the fact that Gen Z views the group of people in the party as elites.

“For me, political parties are filled with elites’ people” (Participant 5, 2022, in the interview)
“Political party is just a medium that facilitates the search of power” (Participant 2, 2022, in the interview)

In addition to the limited information, Gen z also feels they have never been directly involved with political parties. Regarding indirect involvement, they generally get when they accidentally read political news from one of the social media platforms. This assumption will be elaborated in the subsection below.

Gen-Z urges Political Education

As mentioned above that Gen-Z has a high interest in politics but is uninformed. This high interest in politics comes from high curiosity and is also triggered by the current era of information disclosure. Furthermore, Gen-Z is also known as digital natives, the generation born in the era of high internet penetration. The survey conducted by UMN Consulting (2022) revealed that social media is the primary source for Gen-Z to get and be exposed to various information where politics is also included.

For Gen-Z, the information they need is not the development of a political case widely reported in the media but a political education. The education will be used to make choices with a meritocratic approach, not choosing randomly and or without reason. The political education desired by gen-z is the direct transfer of knowledge and experience by political actors. They want to get in-depth context and socio-political background because they can quickly get information on the epidermis layer through their smartphone.

“Political education is important for us, and political parties should educate the people whose voices they want to represent, especially those of us who are young and beginner ahead of the 2024 election” (Participant 3, 2022, in the interview)

“Political parties should carry out political education to the public as they should. Political parties should assist and bring guidance to those who are less knowledgeable about politics. The education is important because people can be more thoughtful in political activities such as elections” (Participant 1, 2022, in the interview).

“Ideally, by giving real examples, so it is not just talking. Give the real public action for goodness amid political evil in the country” (Participant 2, 2022, in the interview).

According to regulation (Gusmansyah, 2019), Political parties are responsible for providing political education. The law mandates three things regarding political education by the party. First, provide an understanding of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika and the Unitary Republic of Indonesia. Second, understanding Indonesian citizens' rights and obligations in building ethics and political culture. Third, the cadre of members of political parties is tiered and sustainable.

Methods for political education must also be considered carefully because each generation has different characteristics. The UMN Consulting survey (2022) confirmed that Gen-Z prefers to do an activity at home. Thus the educational method in the form of online learning can be a solution. Materials from political education are also advised not to be presented in a conventional style but need to be inserted with creativity.

“It should be from social media, because social media is really very strong and the delivery is very fast, and you still have to think about the message you want to convey so that people can

easily understand what politics is with gen z who are less knowledgeable about politics” (Participant 1, 2022, in the interview).

Quite progressive steps in political education have been implemented in the United States. Politicians in the US do not hesitate to use social media, especially TikTok, to disseminate information and political education (Herrman, 2020; Lee, 2022). This method is used because it adjusts the characteristics of Gen-Z, who have low attention levels so that 1-minute video content becomes an alternative solution that is taken. The genre of the video usually humors to be in tune with the young people.

In Indonesia, at least seven politicians have TikTok accounts. Several are Ridwan Kamil, Ganjar Pranowo, Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono and others. Indeed, there needs to be independent research by looking at the content analysis to find out what kind of content focus each politician wants to convey.

In the current era, education is generally carried out by focusing on students, commonly known as student-centred learning. This method emphasizes a two-way communication process between the teacher and the teacher. Furthermore, there are times when students provide more input. In such conditions, political education also provides a positive space for politicians and political parties.

In the moment of teaching, examples of good things that have been done can be delivered by the party and its members to the Gen-Z. On the other hand, political education can be moments for the absorption of aspirations. It will have a positive impact during the election.

“For 2024 the Gen-Z must be prioritized because of increasing apathy. Its role is important so that Gen Z is no longer a political object, but a political subject” (Participant 3, 2022, in the interview).

“Successful categorization of political communication is the party practically can get an escalation of votes if it can persuade other generations to participate” (Participant 5, 2022, in the interview).

Political education ultimately aims to build the nation's young generation to respond to the challenges of the times. Gen-Z perspective as the youngest generation at this time is essential to learn and understand so that there is a transfer of knowledge and the handover of the leadership stick for the nation's future.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to determine Gen-Z perspective on politics. This study has found that Gen-Z generally has a high interest in politics but feels uninformed. Not because they do not have information about politics, but uninformed here means they strive to get a more depth understanding of politics, especially what happened in Indonesia. This condition put them to half heartily to actively participate in politics.

The second significant finding was Gen-Z's urge for political education. They want to grasp a background context about political issues directly from the politician. The depth of information about politics can stimulate them to think more critically in the upcoming general elections in 2024. Moreover, Gen-Z feels that political parties are the ones who responsible for giving depth political education.

Overall, this study strengthens the idea that politicians and political parties should prioritize Gen-Z. Not see them as an object of politics but also as a subject of politics. To be hand in hand, working together to make this nation much better and prosperous.

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