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Reactive-pragmatic activism: The trend and pattern of Indonesia's Generation Z digital movement

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore the manner in which Generation Z (Gen Z) engages with socio-political activities in the digital sphere, where the swift dissemination of information influences the nature and intensity of collective actions. The findings indicate that Gen Z's responses to socio-political issues are generally expressed in two paradoxical mainstreams: apolitical tendencies (political alienation) and political tendencies (political activism), each of which exhibiting distinct variations. To examine this phenomenon, the study mainly employs a semi-systematic literature review (semi-SLR), analyzing 40 curated articles from an initial pool of 200 Scopus-indexed publications (2020–2025). The selection process adhered to a rigorous semi PRISMA-based framework. The methodological analysis reveals that Gen Z's engagement with socio-political phenomena tends to intensify as these issues predominantly gain attention on social media (the digital realm). However, this intensification has not consistently resulted in substantive political change. Indeed, at a certain juncture, Gen Z movements remain in what Dahrendorf termed as the "quasi-group" phase, which potentially evolves into a highly responsive collective action when triggered by pragmatic and significant issues. This phenomenon is referred to as a reactive-pragmatic activism, a form of activism motivated by the pursuit of immediate results without an ideological foundation.

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Introduction

One strand of literature characterizes Generation Z (Gen Z) as proponents of democratic values; however, their frequent participation in protests indicates a nuanced relationship between their attitudes and actions (Muhtadi, B et al., 2025; Romero-Vidal & Talukder, 2025; Venus et al., 2025). Muhtadi's research provides a vital macro-level perspective on political attitudes but leaves a theoretical and empirical void concerning the non-institutionalized, spontaneous mobilizations occurring outside the electoral process. There is an absence of explanation of how this favorable perception of democracy can abruptly evolve into a potent political force. Across generations, from Baby Boomers to Gen Z, democracy is perceived, albeit imperfectly, as the optimal form of governance for Indonesia. Although democracy is generally rated positively as a system of government, Gen Z, who only gained the right to vote in 2014 according to the dataset, contributed to Prabowo's 2024 electoral victory by more than 70%. In a certain aspect, Gen Z provided supports for Prabowo due to his nature of strong leadership with no experience of the New Order era (illiberally-nuanced). Based on this quantitative data, the majority of Gen Z assesses the current democratic situation as relatively favorable.

Conversely, in recent years—particularly in 2024–2025—a movement led by Gen Z has emerged across various countries, including Indonesia. This phenomenon prompts a question of how a generation that values democracy can also engage in demonstrations. It is a matter of fact that recent demonstration has transformed from merely a street protest, such as the one during the 1998 student protest, to a more digital activism. The transformation of activism, from physical to digital, is mainly made possible and facilitated by technological advancements and the proliferation of social media. Earlier scholars have observed a shift from conventional activism to digital activism (Sorce & Dumitrica, 2022). Long before the 2025 demonstrations, digital activism had already surfaced during the "Save KPK" movement in Indonesia. This campaign was initiated by the designation of the then-nominee for National Police Chief as a suspect in a bribery case. Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter were utilized with hashtags #SaveKPK and #AkuKPK to mobilize public support (Suwana, F, 2020).

Within this digital activism, several concepts have been proposed to analyze the typology of youth movements. Scholarly debates often center on a wide variety of typologies, such as 'slacktivism,' 'reactive pragmatism,' and 'performative activism.' This study addresses this gap by introducing Reactive-Pragmatic Activism approach to explain Gen Z's outcome-oriented engagement. We propose that their activism reflects a rapid response to visible socio-political issues, often prioritizing digital speed over structural depth (Sloam et al., 2022). Consequently, Gen Z's engagement is characterized by intensive reactivity in dealing with pressingly current injustices, rather than with a long-term ideological commitment. Related to this, they believe that the movement will bring about social and political changes (Suwana, F, 2020). The concept refers and synthesize to a research by Miedner (2012) on activism in Indonesia.

Moreover, this study mainly focuses on demonstrations in Indonesia. That is, the discussion of demonstrations in several other countries aims to identify patterns and causes of such actions across different regions, as well as to make them as a lesson learned for Indonesia as a study case. Relative to other countries, the case of Indonesia interestingly indicates that the nature Indonesia's Gen Zs digital activism is uniquely shaped by

major civil society organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah (Cabinet Secretary, Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Some of the Gen Z's demands have been partially met by the government following widespread public outcry after an online motorcycle taxi driver was shot and killed by law enforcement officers (Cabinet Secretary, Republic of Indonesia, 2025). Unlike global hotspots, such as Kenya and Bangladesh, where digital protests often escalate into radical confrontations, The Government of Indonesia instead maintains an institutional mediation that balances Gen Z's reactivity with political stability. This comparison is importantly helpful particularly for deciphering how digital activism intersects with other diverse social structures.

Theoretically, this study intends to apply Dahrendorf's (1959) conflict theory—specifically related to transformation of quasi-groups into conflict ones to a digitally mediated context. Furthermore, this study offers three points of study novelty: the introduction of the reactive-pragmatic framework, the application of Dahrendorf's theory to digital environments, and the connection of global protest patterns to the Indonesian case through the "safety valve" mechanism.

Method

A semi-systematic literature review (semi-SLR) is utilized in this study mainly for examining the patterns of activism among Indonesia's Gen Z. This methodology then integrates structured selection procedures with interpretive synthesis (Creswell, 2014) that is needed to ensure both methodological rigor and analytical flexibility. The review process adheres to a simplified PRISMA

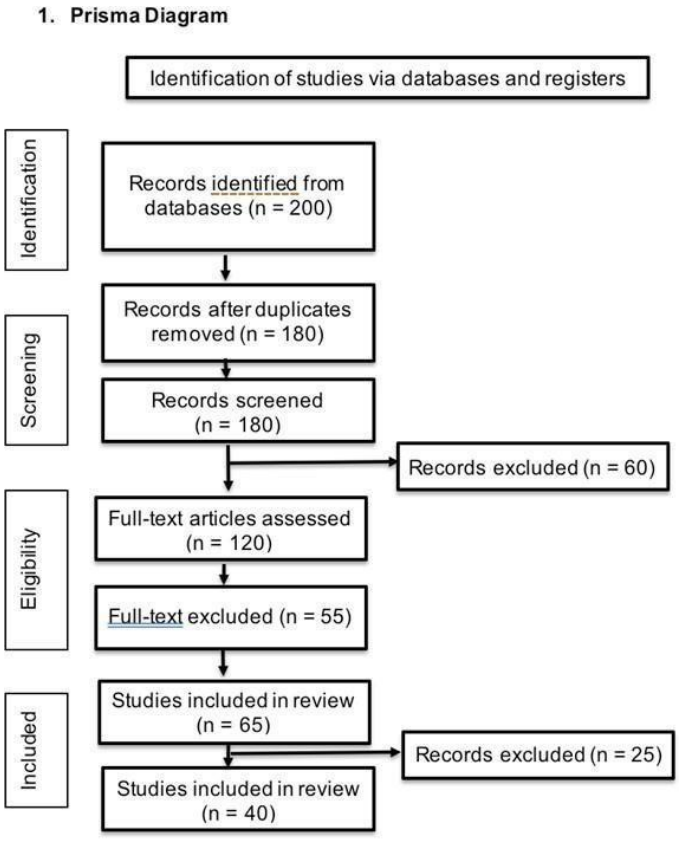


Image 1. Prisma study *flow diagram*

framework, comprising four stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, employing keywords such as "Generation Z protest," "digital activism," and "youth political participation."

The literature search was primarily conducted utilizing the Scopus database, with a focus on peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2020 and 2025. A combination of Boolean search strings was employed, including ("Generation Z" OR "Gen Z") AND ("digital activism" OR "youth protest" OR "online activism") AND ("political participation" OR "social movement"). The initial search yielded approximately 200 articles. Inclusion criteria comprised (1) relevance to Gen Z political or digital activism, (2) empirical or theoretical contributions, and (3) publication in Scopus-indexed journals. Exclusion criteria included non-English publications, non-peer-reviewed sources, and studies lacking direct relevance to youth activism. Following the screening and eligibility stages based on a simplified PRISMA framework, 40 articles were selected for final analysis.

Results and Discussion

From quasi-groups to conflict groups

Dahrendorf (1959) conceptualized social conflict as a process that develops through quasi-groups, interest groups, and conflict groups. This framework is particularly relevant for understanding Gen Z activism. Gen Z initially grows as a quasi-group, characterized by shared but unorganized grievances, such as economic inequality, unemployment, and distrust of political elites (Azedi, A, 2024). At this stage, dissatisfaction seems to be latent in nature.

Social media platforms play a crucial role in transforming this latent condition into an interest group. Through hashtags, viral content, and online discourse, individual frustrations are collectively shared and expressed (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2023) due to the trend and proliferation of social media that currently shapes modern protests. It doesn't only merely serve as a tool, but also as an environment that transforms the very structure of the movement itself. The transformed nature of the movement is mostly equipped with material, spatial, and temporal effects (Kavada & Poell, 2021), a new communication ecosystem comprising satellite TV, the Internet (social media), and mobile phones, enabling citizens to instantly document events through photos and videos (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012).

The final stage is the emergence of a conflict group, where mobilization emerges and develops into physical protests, demonstrations, and symbolic resistance (see Image 2). This progression indicates that Gen Z movements are seen as structured processes that are shaped by both socioeconomic conditions and digital infrastructure. Oser (2022) refers them as "non-institutionalized" (meaning they have the same likelihood of protesting as the general population) and "all-around activists" (the most active group) because they have the highest sense of civic duty. This youth movement is referred to as a transnational movement, not as an

Image 2. Step Up to Conflict Group



Source: Ralf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (1959).

international one, because it is locally based and contextualized (Sorce & Dumitrica, 2022) and is set as a new 'baseline' of global issue salience (Thapa, 2026).

This level of conflict group has transformed into a collective consciousness, having passed through two previous stages, the quasi-group (a latent group that is not yet aware) and the Interest Group (a group that is beginning to be aware and organized). Therefore, conflict does not arise suddenly but goes through the processes described by Dahrendorf.

Dahrendorf stated that conflict has two functions. First, it disrupts social stability and serves as evidence of a loss of control and underlying structural instability in social order. Conflict occurs because of friction between social groups related to unequal power (super-subordination). This concept emerged as a critique of Karl Marx's theory because conflict does not necessarily occur only because of ownership of the means of production but can also occur because of inequality in authority. Departing from this concept, it is important to note that the Gen Z movement emerged mainly because of a disruption in the relationship between their group and the authorities, whether the state or the government, with the 'Us vs. Them' dichotomy to democratic corrective and cultural challenge to the normalization of authoritanism (Jerkov, A et al., 2025). With the emergence of conflict, this yout group hopes to obtain improvements from what they had previously, whether on social, political, economic, or climate change issues (Pickard et al., 2020).

Typology of Gen Z movements

Theres is no denying the fact that Gen Z activism is a worldwide phenomenon. However, this study puts its focus on the Indonesian context and provides an analysis of global trends of digital movements as a comparative baseline to identify unique national characteristics. In Indonesia, the transition from a 'quasi-group' to a 'conflict group' is generally mediated by a distinct "safety valve" mechanism (Coser, L. A, 1956) of major civil society organizations, such as NU and Muhammadiyah. Unlike the radical escalations in Kenya and Bangladesh, Indonesia's digital protests and activisms often end up in institutional mediation, reflecting a hybrid approach of digital reactivity and political stability.

The 2025 demonstrations in Indonesia serve as the primary case study, illustrating how macroeconomic stability (5% growth) failed to alleviate Gen Z's frustration over rampant corruption. By adopting global symbols, Indonesian youth aimed to bridge the gap between popular culture and conventional political mobilization. This study mainly argues that while Gen Z movements across 14 countries share a reliance on digital 'command centers' (TikTok, Instagram, Discord), the Indonesian case is uniquely defined by its "reactive-pragmatic activism" nature—prioritizing immediate policy reversals, such as the dismissal of House members, over total systemic overhaul.

The massive demonstrations that took place in Indonesia in August 2025 had two sides. On the one hand, these demonstrations were heartbreaking because many parties suffered from material and non-material losses (Lane, 2026; Ratcliffe, 2025; Cabinet Secretary, Republic of Indonesia, 2025). On the other hand, these street protests also signaled that Gen Z is relatively sensitive to socio-political issues in Indonesia. These protests also inspired Gen Z in various other countries to take the street protests to express their aspirations and frustrations with the situation experienced by this young generation. One easy thing to trace this

Table 1. Protests Led/Participated in by Gen Z in Various Countries 2018–2025

Countries	Actions	Factors/Claims	Successes
United State	March for Our Lives; Mass demonstrations, lobbying, social media campaigns, youth voting	• Mass shootings • Lack of gun control • Concerns about the future of the climate and perceived weak environmental policies • Anti-mass shooting and climate strikes	Partial — raising awareness and some restrictions on weapons at the state level; few changes in federal legislation
Hong Kong	Large-scale street protests, boycotts, flash mobs, encryption technology for coordination	• Extradition bill seen as threatening legal and political freedoms • Concerns about erosion of autonomy and civil liberties	Limited — extradition bill withdrawn but movement harshly repressed; long-term democratic goals not yet achieved
Chile	Mass demonstrations, occupation of public spaces, use of social media, referendums	• Economic inequality, cost of living, and inadequate public services • Pension system/privatization and dissatisfaction with the political elite	Structurally significant — advancing the process of drafting a new constitution (although the final political outcome remains fluid)
Iran	Street demonstrations, public symbols (headscarves), protest art, dissemination of videos via social media	• Suppression of personal freedom (dress codes/moral enforcement) • Disappointment with corruption, human rights violations, and authoritarianism	Limited but internationally influential; forcing global attention, causing pressure and some limited local policy reformulations
Nigeria	Street protests, online campaigns (#EndSARS), international solidarity	• Violence and abuse of authority by SARS police units • Frustration with corruption, unemployment, and impunity of officials	Partial — the dissolution of the SARS police unit was announced; broader demands for accountability and institutional reform have not been fully met
Poland	Large-scale nonviolent demonstrations, cultural actions, online mobilization	• Restrictions on reproductive rights through conservative court rulings/legislation • Reaction to the influence of conservative politics and the church • Mobilization of young people demanding social pluralism	Partial — holding back further legislative efforts and keeping the issue in the public eye; laws remain strict, structural changes limited
Indonesia	Street demonstrations, campus protests, online campaigns, and the spread of "One Piece" symbols	• Increase in facilities for the Indonesian House of Representatives, weakening of the Corruption Eradication Commission, the future of higher education, Indonesian Armed Forces Bill • Concerns about workers' rights, the environment, and government transparency, related to the omnibus law	Partial — several bills were postponed or revised; limited systemic changes, increased public oversight, and the dismissal of several members of the Indonesian House of Representatives
Nepal	Massive demonstrations in the streets, burning of the parliament building, attacks on symbols of power, and partial blockades of the city were observed.	• Government restrictions on social media are seen as an attempt to silence Gen Z's expression. • Longstanding frustration with corruption, social inequality, and limited job opportunities.	Successfully forced Nepal's prime minister to resign
Kenya	Large demonstrations in Nairobi and other cities, clashes with police	• Rejection of the 2024 Finance Bill, which is seen as increasing the tax burden is another reason. • Poverty, corruption, and police brutality following the death of an activist in police custody.	The government did not fall, but the Finance Bill was postponed (to 2024), and public pressure remained strong.

Madagascar	Hundreds to thousands of young people took to the streets to demand basic services. The protests led to riots and looting; the government imposed a curfew.	• Poor public services and prolonged power and water outages. • Structural poverty and frustration with political elites.	The government was under pressure, the cabinet was dissolved, and some of the demands were brought to the dialogue, but the country continued to experience instability.
Peru	Widespread demonstrations leading to clashes with police	• Changes to the pension system are considered detrimental to the younger generation. • Frustration over corruption, insecurity, and economic injustice.	The government is under pressure to step down and to implement reforms. The final outcome remains uncertain.
Philippines	Large demonstrations in several cities; thousands of young people take to the streets demanding reform	• Corruption in public projects, especially disaster management and flood mitigation. • Dissatisfaction with the delivery of basic services and government accountability.	Pressure on officials remains strong, and concrete changes are still in progress.
Morocco	Protests in Rabat and many other major cities were coordinated via Discord and social media, using straw hats/One Piece as a symbol of protest.	• Dissatisfaction with large public spending on the 2030 World Cup compared to health and education services. • High unemployment, inequality, and poor government management.	It is a strong movement that forces dialogue without overthrowing power.

Source: Compiled from various sources, (2026).

activism is the use of the Jolly Roger flag from the Japanese anime cartoon One Piece, Monkey D. Luffy.

This phenomenon started rising due to the unfavorable situation arising from a number of parties, namely uneven economic growth—even though at that time, macroeconomic growth in the second quarter was stable at 5% (Prasetyawan, 2025; Lane, 2026), low wages for workers, and excessive absorption of labor in the informal sector. This situation was further exacerbated when political elites in parliament received benefits that did not reflect the mood of the people, corruption, and unequal policies (Ipsos, 2025). Several community groups and students openly launched a campaign to raise black flags with images of skulls and yellow-red conical hats as a form of protest against corruption, economic grievances and social injustice (Azedi, A, 2025; Chenoweth & Cebul, 2026). These flags were then carried in a wide variety of demonstrations as a form of collective identity and a form of resistance against the injustices of the political elite. However, the government's excessive response sparked a public reaction. The public considered that flying these flags did not violate the constitution because this action was only a form of symbolic political expression.

The flag serves as a cultural bridge with conventional mobilization models (Hasan, N. B, 2025) that emphasize ideological rhetoric and national symbols. Young people have transformed this model into digital-era mobilization that emphasizes cross-generational global entertainment icons with symbols of popular culture. In 2025, Gen Z massive demonstrations in Indonesia equipped with the Jolly Roger flag seem to be inspiring other Gen Z in other countries, such as the ones in the Philippines and Nepal (Jalli, N, 2025; Arafat, Md. et al., 2025). In Nepal, the image of "nepo kids" was used to criticize the discriminatory practices of the political elite (Chenoweth & Cebul, 2026). The "nepo kids" campaign in Nepalese social media takes the form of images and videos depicting the lifestyle of a political elite child with luxurious clothes, expensive cars, and vacations in super-expensive villas. The

public turned to TikTok and Viber platforms after the Nepalese government lifted its ban on 26 social media platforms (Arafat et al., 2025). As a result, demonstrations in Nepal tended to be anarchic, causing the government collapse being overthrown by the people. National leaders became the targets of these actions.

Historically, Gen Z demonstrations started emerging for the first time in 2011 during the Arab Spring. In the same year, the 15-M protests and the Chilean Winter also occurred. The demonstration further influenced other countries (Van de Velde, 2023). In 2020, street protests occurred in Hong Kong and Thailand, known for their white ribbons, featuring the character Hamtaro and the three-finger salute from the movie The Hunger Games (Taneerat & Dongnadeng, 2024; Lertchoosakul, 2021). In 2022, a wave of protests occurred in Sri Lanka due to the government's economic mismanagement. In 2024, protests by Gen Z also occurred in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Serbia. Most recently, tensions in Bangladesh have risen again after the killing of a Gen Z activist (Shamim, 2025). Protests were initially sparked by the government's controversial job quota policy, but they expanded into demonstrations against authoritarianism, human rights violations, and the economic recession (Islam et al., 2025).

In general, the Gen Z movement has spread out all over developing countries, having the main goal of fighting the injustices caused by the state's prioritized privileges of political elite, oligarchs, and their cronies, resulting in far-reaching social, political, and economic inequalities. In several countries, these young people strongly oppose the sort of injustices caused by the state. As digital natives, young people don't not only take the streets as battlegrounds but also use social media as a campaign platform. This is absolutely an evolutionary movement. The triggering conditions for Gen Z protests include structural issues, such as economic inequality, corruption, and the weakening of civil rights, and identity-related issues, such as women's rights, political freedom, and demands for social justice (Azedi, A, 2024; Thapa, 2025; Chenoweth & Cebul, 2026).

Chenoweth and Cebul (2026) said that youth movements can be called pro-democracy movements if they fulfill four criteria. These four criteria are not only relatively idealistic, but also important because they serve as an antidote to the decline in democracy. The four criteria include discipline to refrain from violence, decentralization of the movement, a "democracy" movement, and navigation indicators. They also explained that the demonstrations carried out by Gen Z were not generally designed to make a chaos or violence. However, the violent and chaotic protests are made possible once followed by introduction of provocation from other parties of great power, including digital repression, physical coercion, surveillance, channeling, information control, or information channeling (Earl et al., 2022; Bräuchler, 2026). The label of "protester" or similar terms also carries negative connotations, so it needs to be reframed—for example, as "protector"—to garner broader public support (Muncie, 2020).

The demonstrations that took place in various countries only demanded structural change, transparency, and justice from the government regarding the current situation. Fominaya (2022) called prefigurative of social movements, they often serve as "laboratories of experimentation" where people practice the kind of democracy they hope to see in the future (for example, through non-hierarchical organizations). Prefiguration is crucial for pro-democracy movements seeking to align their internal practices with their political goals. Azedi (2024) presented a typology of economic grievances that have become triggering

factors in the wave of protests among young people. There are two typologies: namely objective and subjective ones. Regarding the objective type, individual-level grievances, such as unemployment and poverty, are dominant. However, at the contextual level, factors such as income, unemployment rates, homelessness, economic growth, injustice, and the IMF's structural assessment are the causes.

Gen Z protest actions are not triggered by a single factor, but by a combination of structural issues and specific policies. Based on a cross-country comparison (see Table 1), youth movements can be classified into four typologies: (1) Economic Justice & Public Services, a primary trigger in developing nations such as Chile (economic inequality), Kenya (tax burdens), Madagascar (power/ water shortages), and Peru (pension systems) (2) Accountability & Institutional Corruption: Dissatisfaction with the integrity of state institutions emerged in Nigeria (#EndSARS), the Philippines (public projects), and Indonesia (weakening of the KPK). (3) Civil Rights & Political Freedom: These issues dominated in Hong Kong (extradition bill), Iran (personal freedoms), and Nepal (social media ban). (4) Existential & Identity Issues: Concern for the future is evident in climate strikes in the US and reproductive rights in Poland.

Nevertheless, there are differences in term of challenges faced by youth movements in Asia and outside Asia. While Gen Z movement in Asia is largely fighting against the shrinking of democratic and legal space; the ones outside Asia are driven more by economic system failures in securing the future of the younger generation. However, both share a commonality in using social media (TikTok, Instagram, Discord) as their primary "command centers" for coordination by refraining from using the demonstration as a platform for personal self-promotion for personal gain (Gitomer et al., 2024).

Digital mediation and reactive-pragmatic activism

Social media platforms are indeed the most widely used communication tools among Gen Z. The percentage composition of social media users among them are as follows: Instagram (89%), YouTube (84%), and TikTok (82%). Gen Z is so addicted to social media that more than 40% of them reportedly feel anxious and sad after using social media (Shaikh, 2025). This data reinforces the findings of the study by Ioana Literat & Neta Kligler-Vilenchik (2023), which states that Gen Z tends to use the TikTok social media platform as a center of expression in responding to various issues such as race relations, climate change, and civil rights. This platform was chosen because it aligns with their style of sharing experiences and connecting with one another. Thus, TikTok has become a new space for Gen Z activism, allowing them to voice their aspirations in response to social and political situations detrimental to their community.

In Indonesia, the majority of Gen Z spends more than eight hours a day on social media as a primary gateway for discovering news and information (Indriyani, 2024). Meanwhile, TikTok usage data during the August 2025 demonstrations also indicated the same thing. TikTok was used by 81% of accounts compared to other social media platforms, out of a total of 29,433 mentions and 356,831,896 interactions (Fahmi, 2025). The narratives from this movement cluster tended to criticize the government, such as “Members of the House of Representatives are useless,” “They are insensitive to the conditions of the people,” “They increase their allowances and dance on the suffering of the people,” “Members of the House of Representatives are corrupt,” “Dissolving the House of Representatives will save the state budget,” "The House of Representatives

has been dissolved before, by Gus Dur, and ”Reformasi 98". A similar phenomenon occurred in the women’s protests in Iran. Videos related to Mahsa Amini on TikTok garnered tens of millions of likes, demonstrating the platform’s ability to raise awareness among young people worldwide. (Walsh, 2024).

It appears that the narratives put forward by this youth movement lean toward dissatisfaction with the socio-political situation in the country. However, the question becomes whether all youth movements around the world successful. Regarding this, Chenoweth and Cebul (2026) presented interesting evidence. They state that the success of youth movements correlates with their high level of participation. The success rate was 56%. However, if Gen Z movement participation is low, the success rate of movements is below 50%. The failure of youth demonstrations was also experienced by Russian youth between 2008 and 2012 because they were unable to effectively utilize history in a way that resonated with public interest (Petrusenko, 2025). As a result, this youth movement will not continue consistently (disconnection) due to its open or ambiguous ideological stance, fluid collective identity, weak ties, reliance on online action, and the movement’s relatively short-lived nature (ephemerality) (Bart, 2021).

Conceptualizing reactive-pragmatic activism

Gen Z, distinguished by their familiarity with the digital realm compared to preceding generations, also exhibits a heightened social awareness and a critical and skeptical approach to information (Indriyani, 2024). being active voters, they mostly get engaged in activism through social media as a form of political participation. However, this reliance on social media does not necessarily equate to empowerment of civilians or activists; rather, it signifies a shift of power towards technological mechanisms and algorithms controlled by major social media corporations, such as Facebook, TikTok, Google, X (Twitter), and Instagram (Poel & Vidjk, 2015). Despite their involvement in political issues, members of Gen Z often encounter social challenges, including stigma, stereotypes, and a lack of political education. Their dissatisfaction with the status quo leads them to perceive the nation as plagued by social, economic, and political discrimination (Tsevreni, 2023).

The characteristics of Gen Z and digital natives, along with momentum and the utilization of pop culture identity, are unified by social media in response to the situations and conditions they encounter. These elements mutually reinforce one another, facilitating the transnational spread of Gen Z activism movements. The enthusiasm and resilience of young individuals in social movements are essential as a remedy for democratic stagnation. While Altahmazi (2020) refers to this as a collective pragmatic action, Galperin (2017) describes it as a pragmatic activism. In addition, Saveleva (2023) terms it as a reactive pragmatic (2024), and Highfield and Miltner label (2023) it as a performative action. Related to this overview, we then propose the concept of reactive-pragmatic activism as theoretical framework of the study. This form of activism arises as a direct response to immediate socio-political events and gets executed through strategies that are pragmatic and adaptive in nature, and focused more on tangible outcomes rather than normative idealism. This concept synthesizes the ideas of Pragmatic Engagement (Miedner, 2012).

Moreover, reactive-pragmatic activism can be differentiated from existing digital activism literatures. While slacktivism underscores minimal-effort online

Table 2. Comparison Conceptual of Digital Activism

Concept	Primary Focus	Key Characteristics	Nature of Movement
Collective Pragmatic Acting	Linguistics & Discourse	Focuses on using linguistic strategies and communicative discourse to achieve practical mutual understanding.	**Communicative**: Emphasizes the effectiveness of messaging in social interaction.
Pragmatic Activism	Digital Instrumentality	Utilizing digital tools (social media, e-petitions) as efficient means to achieve specific, localized goals.	**Functional**: Leverages existing infrastructure for logistical ease of mobilization.
Reactive Pragmatic	Psychological Response	An individual's reaction to external stimuli or crises perceived on a personal and emotional level.	**Spontaneous**: Emerges as an immediate response to viral injustices or sudden triggers.
Performative Activism	Aesthetics & Image	Highlights visual presentation and self-identity to align with popular or trending social issues.	**Symbolic**: Tends to be "low-stakes" (surface-level) and is often criticized as *slacktivism*.
Pragmatic Engagement	Institutional Negotiation	A reciprocal relationship between civil society actors and the state to maintain access to power.	**Compromising**: Prioritizes stability and tangible results through formal or semi-formal channels.
Reactive-Pragmatic Activism	Quasi-group Transformation	A synthesis of rapid digital reactivity with demands for tangible, policy-oriented social change.	**Transformative-Responsive**: Converts political latency (*quasi-group*) into concrete action (*conflict group*).

Source: Comparison concept from Altahmazi, Galperin, Saveleva, Highfield & Miltner, and Mietzner, (2026).

participation and performative activism emphasizes symbolic expression without significant impact, reactive-pragmatic activism integrates rapid responsiveness with strategies oriented towards tangible outcomes (See table 2). To situate the proposed concept of Reactive-Pragmatic Activism within the broader academic discourse, this form of activism is characterized by three principal features: (1) immediacy, wherein actions are prompted by real-time socio-political events; (2) pragmatism, wherein strategies are adaptive and concentrated on attainable objectives; and (3) fluidity, wherein collective identity and organizational structure remain flexible and non-hierarchical. Unlike traditional ideological movements, reactive-pragmatic activism does not depend on long-term political agendas but instead operates through short cycles of mobilization facilitated by digital communication environments. In the context of Indonesia, evidence indicates that the government and stakeholders have acceded to some of the public's demands (Cabinet Secretary, Republic of Indonesia, 2025).

Young individuals are not merely influenced by the prevailing trends, such as the emphasis on sustainability in environmental campaigns. Conversely, these so-called digital natives exhibit a reliance on electronic devices, thereby creating a digital paradox (Amin, M. et al., 2025; Osman, 2026). Consequently, this activism must be refined to address substantive issues, including the freedom to form organizations, freedom of expression, the right to vote, the right to be elected, competition among political elites, alternative sources of information, free and fair elections, and government policies that are responsive to the populace's voice (Dahl, 1971).

Comparative analysis across nations reveals a consistent pattern: Gen Z activism is notably effective in generating visibility and eliciting short-term policy responses, yet it encounters structural limitations in achieving sustained long-term institutional change. This limitation is intrinsically linked to the nature of digital mobilization, which prioritizes speed, virality, and emotional resonance over organizational depth.

Consequently, many movements experience what can be termed "episodic mobilization," characterized by rapid peaks in participation followed by swift declines. This pattern supports the argument that Generation Z activism operates within a reactive-pragmatic framework, where immediacy and adaptability take precedence over ideological consolidation and long-term political strategy.

The findings suggest that while Gen Z movements are effective in mobilizing attention and generating immediate pressure, their long-term impact on democratic institutions remains limited. Future research should incorporate mixed-method approaches to empirically test the reactive-pragmatic activism framework and examine its implications for democratic resilience in various political contexts.

Conclusion

Activism among Gen Z constitutes a unique form of political engagement, shaped by digital environments and characterized by reactive-pragmatic activism. By integrating Dahrendorf's conflict theory with contemporary digital activism literature, this study offers a novel analytical framework for understanding the transformation of latent grievances into organized collective actions.

Theoretically, this study posits that the dichotomy between a priori and responsive attitudes in Gen Z is best comprehended through the lens of reactive-pragmatic activism. This form of activism circumvents the necessity for rigid organizational membership, instead relying on rapid, digitally-mediated responses to volatile political moments. Such a pattern indicates that, while their participation may appear sporadic or 'shallow' to traditional observers, their capacity for digital mobilization exerts a significant 'shock' on the political establishment. Ultimately, this research provides a critical reflection on whether these responsive bursts serve as a genuine catalyst for social change or merely function as a digital safety valve that releases social tension without challenging the underlying power structures. Future studies should further investigate the sustainability of these pragmatic movements in achieving long-term institutional reforms.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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