

Rethinking Inclusion in the Age of Political Disruption: Lessons from East Java's 2024 Local Elections

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ABSTRACT

The 2024 local elections in East Java, Indonesia, unfolded amid profound socio political transformations shaped by rapid digitalization and demographic shifts. This study investigates how political disruption manifested through the dominance of young voters, the rise of digital campaigning, and the transformation of political communication reshaped local electoral dynamics and redefined patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Employing a qualitative exploratory approach, data were collected through in depth interviews with political actors, participatory observation during campaigns and content analysis of digital media and electoral documents. Critical discourse analysis was applied to uncover how power relations and political narratives were constructed in digitally mediated spaces. The findings reveal that digital disruption has reconfigured political patronage, shifting legitimacy from authority based structures to popularity and online influence. While this creates new opportunities for participation, particularly for younger voters, it also entrenches exclusionary dynamics affecting rural communities, older citizens and digitally disadvantaged groups. Without inclusive policy frameworks and digital equity measures, political disruption risks deepening existing social inequalities. By situating East Java as a lens for examining broader national dynamics, this study contributes to debates on democratic innovation, digital politics and the imperative of inclusive governance in evolving democracies of the Global South.

Keywords: *Digital Politics, Local Election, Political Disruption, Social Inclusion, Youth Political Participation*

INTRODUCTION

General elections represent one of the most essential manifestations of democracy in any country, including Indonesia. Following the fall of the New Order (*Orde Baru*) regime in 1998, Indonesia adopted a democratic governance model as the ideal framework for nation building. Since then, democracy has continually evolved, with general elections serving as a key mechanism for institutionalizing political participation and representation. Post-*Reformasi* elections have introduced dynamic changes to Indonesia's political landscape, ranging from fluctuating voter participation and evolving electoral systems to emerging discourses that reflect the growing maturity of Indonesia's democratic experience.

The 2024 general election was conducted in a relatively stable political and security climate. Yet, it unfolded amid broader socio political dynamics, including political dynasties, ethical controversies following Constitutional Court rulings, and disputes at the regional level. Most notably, the 2024 election marked a demographic and political shift, driven by the increasing dominance of young voters, particularly millennials. According to Indonesia's General Elections Commission (KPU), more than 52 percent of the 204.8 million registered voters were young, digital native constituents. This group is characterized by dynamic, responsive, and adaptive political behavior, particularly in how they engage with governance and leadership issues (Fernandes et al., 2023).

This demographic shift aligns with Indonesia's demographic dividend and presents both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, young voters provide opportunities for democratic consolidation and generational leadership renewal. On the other hand, without thoughtful engagement strategies, their political energy may give rise to new challenges, particularly within a rapidly evolving digital society. As numerous studies have indicated, young Indonesians are increasingly immersed in digital platforms and social media ecosystems (Evita, 2023).

Technological advances have introduced significant disruptions to traditional political practices, reshaping voter behavior, campaign methods, political recruitment and civic education. Campaigns have shifted away from conventional approaches toward digital strategies, with political actors increasingly relying on social media influence rather than traditional charisma or hierarchical power. This trend is exemplified by the growing involvement of celebrities and influencers, not only as campaign endorsers but also as legislative candidates, many of whom achieved notable electoral success.

Such transformations indicate that Indonesian politics has entered an era of *political disruption*. Originally theorized by Christensen (1997) in the context of business innovation, disruption refers to the replacement of established systems, paradigms, and models by more efficient, adaptive and technology driven alternatives (Christensen, 1997). Kasali (2007) later extended this concept to politics, describing disruption as the shift from conventional physical structures to digital systems that promise greater efficiency and inclusivity (Kasali, 2007). Similarly, Susskind (2018), in *Future Politics*, argued that digital technologies and social media will fundamentally reshape political practice expanding access and transparency while simultaneously exposing democracy to unregulated and potentially destabilizing forces (Susskind, 2018).

Despite its significance, the concept of political disruption remains underexplored in scholarly literature. Notable exceptions include the UK's Information Commissioner Office report *Democracy Disrupted?* (2018), Jonathan Bernstein's (2019) political commentary in *Bloomberg*, and empirical work by Barokah et al. (2022), which emphasized that political parties must adapt to digital disruption or risk marginalization. Their findings underscore that social media provides a low cost, high impact tool for political mobilization, particularly for emerging parties in the 2024 elections (Barokah et al., 2022; Bernstein, 2019). While these works have highlighted

the transformative impact of digital disruption on political practices, few have examined how such disruptions reshape inclusion and exclusion dynamics, particularly at the local level. This study addresses that gap by investigating how digital disruption during East Java's 2024 local elections created both opportunities for broader participation and new forms of digital exclusion.

Against this backdrop, a critical question emerges: who is included, and who is excluded, in this digitally disrupted political ecosystem? While young, digitally literate citizens have gained significant space in political discourse, structurally disadvantaged groups remain marginalized. Rural voters, older citizens, persons with disabilities, and those with limited access to technology are often unable to participate meaningfully in online political processes. This dynamic has produced new forms of exclusion rooted not in class or ethnicity but in the digital divide. Thus, the urgency of rethinking inclusion in the age of political disruption lies in ensuring that democracy remains equitable not only at the national level but also in the everyday practices of local governance.

East Java provides a compelling case study. As one of Indonesia's most populous provinces, its socio-political fabric is strongly influenced by Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), mass religious organizations such as Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the enduring tension between nationalist and religious political currents. In urban centers such as Surabaya, Malang and Sidoarjo, an emerging middle class has embraced digital platforms, making them prime targets for digital campaigning. These dynamics illustrate that while political disruption is a national phenomenon, its localized manifestations are mediated by local structures of power, religious authority and uneven digital access.

This article contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends debates on political disruption by examining its local manifestations and their implications for political inclusion. Practically, it provides insights for electoral management bodies, political parties and civil society organizations in developing strategies that bridge digital divides and engage both digitally active and digitally marginalized citizens.

Ultimately, this study seeks to fill an academic gap by offering a critical reflection on East Java's 2024 local elections. It highlights both the opportunities and risks associated with digital disruption and calls for inclusive frameworks that ensure equitable participation in local democratic processes. Local elections must not only produce popular leaders but also generate policy innovations that advance social justice, strengthen local governance, and reflect the evolving aspirations of a digitally networked society.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative exploratory approach, which is appropriate for investigating emerging phenomena and developing preliminary conceptual frameworks for future research. As Berg (2001) and Yin (2018) suggest, exploratory

research is particularly useful when the subject under investigation remains under theorized or lacks comprehensive empirical data (Berg, 2001; Yin, 2018). In the Indonesian context, the concept of *political disruption* particularly in relation to local elections has yet to be thoroughly examined. Therefore, this study aims to provide a conceptual entry point and empirical foundation for more advanced and systematic research in the future. Data were collected through a combination of primary and secondary sources, employing three main techniques: First, in depth interviews, second, literature review, and non-participant observation during key moments of the electoral cycle. The in depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of key stakeholders, including political practitioners, media consultants, academics, political observers and journalists. Interviewers were selected based on their expertise in digital campaigning, local electoral dynamics and political communication strategies. The interviews were semi structured in format, allowing for the exploration of both shared patterns and individual insights. Secondary data were obtained from academic publications, official election reports, policy documents, media coverage and digital campaign materials. Observational data were gathered by tracking online campaign activities and public discourse on digital platforms, particularly social media channels such as Instagram, TikTok and Twitter (X). The triangulation of these data sources strengthens the validity of the findings and enables a deeper understanding of how political disruption unfolds in the context of East Java's 2024 local elections.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. 2024 Election and the Decline of Ideological Party Identification

With the official results of Indonesia's 2024 general elections now finalized, several patterns clearly demonstrate how political disruption has reshaped the country's electoral landscape. Three central dynamics are particularly evident. First, political parties no longer function effectively as channels for interest aggregation. Second, the post election environment remains highly uncertain and fragmented. Third, traditional patronage structures within society have begun to shift dramatically.

Political parties, long regarded as central agents of political socialization and representation, are increasingly dominated by elite interests. Decision making tends to be centralized among a small circle of party leaders, rendering parties less responsive to grassroots aspirations. Instead of engaging citizens through substantive ideological platforms and long-term visions, many parties rely on symbolic identities such as populist or religious branding that no longer resonate with contemporary voter expectations. Moreover, parties often depend on clientelist networks to secure political access, rather than fostering open, issue based dialogue with the public. Leadership renewal within parties remains limited and institutional innovation is rare. As a result, these structural deficiencies have prevented the emergence of truly modern or 'digital' parties, despite frequent claims to the contrary (Amin, 2023).

In an era of rapid technological change, parties have failed to modernize their political infrastructure and outreach strategies. As Hadiz and Robison (2004) observe,

entrenched oligarchic practices continue to shape political behavior producing widespread alienation among younger voters. Despite rhetorical appeals to youth engagement, younger generations often view political parties as outdated, untrustworthy, and unrepresentative (Hadiz & Robison, 2004).

This growing disconnect has accelerated the erosion of *party identification (party ID)*. Party ID refers to the emotional and psychological attachment of voters to a political party. Traditionally, strong *party ID* fostered loyalty and even personal sacrifice for party causes. However, recent surveys show a steep decline in such attachments. For example, "a May 2023 Kompas survey found that deep knowledge and affinity toward political parties remains strikingly low: among major and mid-sized parties, the percentage of respondents who claimed meaningful awareness ranged from only 5.5% (PKB) to 13.9% (PDI-P)" (Suryaningtyas, 2023)

Historical voting patterns reinforce this trend. In 1999, the Indonesian Democratic Party of Struggle (PDI-P) secured 33.7% of the national vote. By 2004, the winning party (Golkar) only gained 21.6%, followed by the Democratic Party in 2009 with 20.8%, and PDI-P again in 2014 and 2019 with less than 20% (Suryaningtyas, 2023). Survey data further illustrate the erosion of loyalty: Saiful Mujani Research Center (SMRC) reported that only 11.7% of voters identified closely with any party in 2017, while Indikator Politik Indonesia found this number had dropped further to just 6.8% by 2021 (Suryaningtyas, 2023)

This downward trajectory reflects a fundamental transformation in Indonesian electoral behavior. Whereas pre-*Reformasi* elections were strongly influenced by partisan identity and ideological loyalty, post-2004 elections have increasingly been shaped by candidate centered appeals. The rise of more rational and critical voters has forced candidates to emphasize personal visions, concrete policy plans and demonstrable qualifications. This shift has further diluted the relevance of party brands and amplified the salience of individual figures.

In this context, political disruption manifests in two interrelated ways: the weakening of traditional party based political engagement and the rise of new, informal power structures many of which are mediated through digital platforms. Charismatic leaders with strong social media presence increasingly dominate public discourse, while formal party institutions struggle to maintain relevance. These developments raise pressing questions about the quality of political representation and the inclusiveness of Indonesia's evolving democratic processes.

2. Simultaneous Local Elections and the Future of Local Democracy in the Age of Political Disruption

The weakening of party ID at the national level carries direct implications for the simultaneous local elections (*Pilkada*) in 2024. As partisan loyalty declines, local contests are increasingly shaped by candidate centered politics, digital campaign

strategies and the influence of young voters. In this sense, political disruption not only reshapes national politics but also reconfigures the foundations of local democracy.

Pilkada has long been regarded as a cornerstone of local democratic consolidation. Through local elections, citizens are expected to choose leaders who can fulfill public expectations, advance regional development, and strengthen accountable governance (Akbar, 2017). The simultaneous local election framework, institutionalized by Law (UU) No. 1/2015, was designed to foster accountability, political equity, and local responsiveness, echoing Robert Dahl's emphasis on inclusive democratic participation (Dahl, 1972). At its core, local democracy ensures that sovereignty is exercised by the people directly, embedding democratic norms at the grassroots level.

The 2024 simultaneous local elections are historically significant, covering 545 regions (37 provinces, 415 regencies, and 93 municipalities). This unprecedented scale presents new challenges for electoral organizers, political parties, and civil society. The national results from February 2024 inevitably shape local contestation, influencing coalition-building and campaign strategies at the subnational level. At the same time, local grassroots politics is undergoing profound change. Campaign models are increasingly creative, youth-oriented and digitally mediated. Mirroring the national elections, influencers, celebrities and digitally savvy candidates are poised to play decisive roles, reflecting the broader global trend of *digital populism* (Gerbaudo, 2019).

The demographic weight of young voters amplifies these dynamics. The 2024 elections demonstrated how social media figures such as Raffi Ahmad, Deddy Corbuzier and Baim Wong influenced electoral outcomes, while numerous celebrity candidates secured legislative seats. This shift in patronage from charismatic traditional elites to digital influencers suggests that local politics will increasingly hinge on digital capital. Susskind's (2018) argument in *Future Politics* that political power is now distributed through digital platforms is vividly illustrated in this transformation (Susskind, 2018). For young voters, leadership is judged less by ideology and more by responsiveness to issues such as job creation, digital transformation, creative economy and youth-friendly public spaces.

For political parties, these shifts necessitate adaptation. Parties must reform recruitment, cadre development, and political education to align with the demands of digitally literate citizens. Amin (2023) emphasizes that parties must cultivate leaders with "mega-shift skills," capable of navigating unpredictable disruptions driven by artificial intelligence and digital governance (Amin, 2023). Without such reforms, parties risk irrelevance as voters gravitate toward individual figures and digital movements rather than partisan platforms. As Gerbaudo (2019), Pye & Verba (2015), Harmel (2002), and Rahat (2001) remind us, parties remain critical institutions of ideology, culture, leadership and representation but only if they can adapt their functions to a digitally disrupted environment (Gerbaudo, 2019; Gideon Rahat, 2001; Harmel, 2002; Lucian W. Pye & Sidney Verba, 2015).

The transformation of local politics under disruption can also be explained through the lens of *multilevel governance* (Hooghe & Marks, 2001), which posits that authority is increasingly dispersed across levels of government and non state actors (Hooghe & Marks, 2001). Pilkada 2024 exemplifies this: authority over narratives, agendas, and campaign resources is no longer monopolized by political parties but contested between grassroots networks, religious organizations, and digital platforms. Theories of *post-clientelism* (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007) are also relevant here, suggesting that as traditional material patronage loses salience, symbolic and digital forms of exchange (likes, shares, endorsements) become new currencies of political loyalty (Kitschelt & Wilkinson, 2007).

Empirical evidence reinforces these shifts. The Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI, 2024) found that 67% of first-time voters obtained political information primarily from TikTok, Instagram or YouTube rather than conventional news outlets. Moreover, a report by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (2023) highlighted that youth voters prioritized candidates stances on digital economy and climate change over party affiliation or ideology (Fernandes et al., 2023). These findings resonate with Norris and Inglehart's (2019) notion of cultural backlash, but with a local twist: rather than resisting modernity, Indonesian youth embrace it, compelling local elites to adapt. Comparative cases also enrich this analysis (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). In the Philippines, the 2022 election of Ferdinand Marcos Jr. was heavily influenced by disinformation networks and TikTok campaigns (Tapsell, 2021), while in India, Narendra Modi's has perfected WhatsApp based microtargeting to mobilize support (Hanumanthappa DG, 2024). These examples illustrate how digital disruption reconfigures political communication across diverse democracies, with Indonesia's Pilkada 2024 fitting squarely within this global trend.

While disruption offers innovative avenues for participation, it also magnifies inequalities. Rural voters, older citizens, and marginalized groups often lack the digital access and literacy required to engage meaningfully. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association revealed that internet penetration in rural East Java remains 25% lower than in urban centers, raising concerns about representational imbalance (Indonesia, 2023). This digital divide risks producing a "two-tier democracy," where digitally active citizens dominate discourse while others are excluded. Scholarly debates on *digital inequality* stress that unequal access to technology leads to unequal opportunities for participation (Jose van Dijck, 2013). In the Indonesian context, this is compounded by structural barriers such as education gaps, gender disparities and infrastructure deficits. Thus, while political disruption democratizes access for some, it risks reinforcing exclusion for others.

Theoretically, these dynamics resonate with Dahl's (1972) principles of *polyarchy*, particularly inclusiveness and contestation (Dahl, 1972). The Pilkada 2024 highlights how inclusiveness is threatened by digital divides, even as contestation intensifies through digital channels. Moreover, Habermas's (2020) theory of the *public sphere* offers another critical perspective: while digital platforms expand spaces for

deliberation, they also fragment publics into echo chambers, reducing the quality of democratic discourse (Habermas, 2020).

This study contributes three key insights. First, the logic of patronage in Indonesian local politics is undergoing transformation from material exchanges to symbolic and digital interactions confirming the emergence of *post clientelism*. Second, the distribution of political authority in local elections illustrates the logic of *multilevel governance*, where digital platforms, grassroots networks, and non party actors increasingly shape democratic processes. Third, the simultaneous Pilkada illustrates the paradox of digital democracy: while political disruption broadens participation through youth and digital inclusion, it simultaneously exacerbates inequalities rooted in digital divides. This duality underscores the urgent need for inclusive digital governance and adaptive party strategies if local democracy is to remain equitable and resilient.

For practitioners, the implications are clear. Electoral management bodies such as KPU must ensure digital literacy programs, accessible campaign regulations, and safeguards against misinformation. Civil society organizations should foster hybrid spaces both online and offline to bridge divides. Political parties, if they wish to remain relevant, must innovate in candidate selection and outreach, integrating youth concerns and technological fluency into their platforms.

Taken together, these findings highlight two interrelated dynamics: the erosion of party identification in the 2024 general elections, and the reconfiguration of local democracy through simultaneous *Pilkada* under the pressures of political disruption. Both trends underscore that Indonesia's democracy is entering an era in which digital technologies, personalistic leadership, and youth driven agendas play increasingly central roles. These developments affirm the reality of political disruption while raising pressing questions about how democratic inclusion can be safeguarded. The challenge ahead lies in ensuring that digital disruption strengthens rather than undermines democratic equity, both at the national and local levels.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined the dynamics of Indonesia's 2024 elections and the implications of political disruption for local democracy, with a particular focus on East Java. The analysis reveals two interrelated dynamics. First, the erosion of party identification has weakened the institutional role of political parties as channels of representation and political education. Voter behavior has become increasingly fluid, candidate-centered, and digitally mediated, indicating a structural rather than cyclical crisis of party institutionalization. Second, the simultaneous local elections illustrate how digital disruption is reshaping democratic practices at the grassroots level. While digital platforms and influencer driven campaigns have opened new avenues of participation and mobilized younger voters, they also risk reproducing exclusionary dynamics, particularly for rural communities, older citizens and groups marginalized by the digital divide.

Theoretically, these findings extend debates on political disruption by showing that its manifestations are deeply mediated by local socio cultural contexts. East Java demonstrates that disruption is not a uniform process but one shaped by religious authority, communal structures and uneven technological readiness. This underscores the enduring tension between Robert Dahl's (1972) polyarchic principles of *inclusiveness* and *contestation*: while digital technologies broaden contestation, inclusiveness remains fragmented and unevenly distributed.

From a practical perspective, several policy implications emerge. Electoral management bodies such as the KPU must expand their role beyond technical administration by incorporating digital literacy initiatives targeted at rural and marginalized populations. Stronger regulatory frameworks are required to address misinformation, disinformation and deepfakes, thereby safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process. Political parties must overhaul recruitment strategies, cadre development, and issue based campaigning, moving beyond elite driven patronage to embrace youth oriented and digitally grounded agendas. Civil society organizations should foster hybrid models of participation that combine online and offline engagement to ensure that citizens with limited digital access are not sidelined. Furthermore, sustained collaboration between government agencies, technology companies and watchdog institutions is critical to establish ethical standards for digital campaigning that balance innovation with accountability.

For future research, scholars should explore the micro level effects of digital disruption on political inclusion in rural and peripheral areas where technological access remains limited. Comparative research across Indonesian provinces, or with other Southeast Asian democracies, could provide deeper insights into how digital disruption interacts with local institutions and cultural dynamics.

In conclusion, the age of political disruption presents both significant opportunities and profound risks for Indonesia's local democracy. If managed inclusively, digital disruption can serve as a catalyst for broader participation, more responsive governance and generational renewal in leadership. If left unregulated, however, it risks entrenching a two tier democracy in which access to digital capital determines political voice. The central challenge, therefore, lies in ensuring that political disruption strengthens rather than undermines the equity and resilience of Indonesia's democratic future.

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