

GENERATION Z AND INDONESIAN POLITICS: BECOMING SMART VOTERS IN THE 2024 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

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Abstract

This article aims to analyse the voting behaviour and political participation of Generation Z in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi focusing on factors that influence decision-making, the role of social interaction, and the application of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory in understanding the political decision-making process of young voters. A qualitative approach was used with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of 12 high school students who were first-time voters, selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis was conducted using a combination of Grounded Theory and Thematic Analysis to identify patterns, categories, and themes that emerged from the informants' experiences and perceptions regarding their voting behaviour and political participation. The findings reveal that Gen Z considers elections to be an important political experience and conducts rational evaluations of prospective leaders based on integrity, reputation, and morality. Their political participation is not limited to exercising their right to vote, but also includes cognitive and behavioural involvement in political discussions, campaign evaluations, and assessments of political practices such as money politics. Social factors, such as the influence of peers and family, as well as the influence of social media, also shape their preferences, although the final decision is still based on rational judgement. These findings show that Gen Z are reflective, intelligent, and rational voters who are able to balance social influences, moral considerations, and available information in their political decision-making. This study confirms the relevance of Coleman's Rational Choice Theory in the context of young voters' political behaviour in the digital age and provides important implications for political communication strategies and civic education to improve political literacy and participation among first-time voters.

Keywords: Generation Z, Voting Behaviour, General Election, Rational Choice Theory

1 Introduction

The 2024 Indonesian presidential election will be an important moment for Generation Z (Gen Z) in Indonesia, a group that will be fully involved in electing the country's leader for the first time. Based on data from the General Election Commission (KPU), more than 20 million first-time voters, or around 55 per cent, are Generation Z, who will cast their votes in the upcoming 2024 elections. In Gowa Regency, located in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, Generation Z also shows significant potential in influencing local politics, where the number of first-time voters continues to increase in line with the widespread penetration of the internet and social media. Generation Z is currently an interesting generation to study in Indonesia. Data from the Permanent Voter List (DPT) released by the General Election Commission of the Republic of Indonesia (KPU RI) shows that 22.85 per cent of the total DPT for the 2024 elections is Generation Z, placing them in second position after Millennials. Additionally, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2020 states that Generation Z is the largest generation in Indonesia, accounting for 27.94 per cent of the total population.

Social media, which is the main space for Gen Z to obtain political information, plays a central role in shaping their political behaviour patterns. However, despite being exposed to abundant information, Gen Z still faces major challenges in forming rational political preferences free from outside influences, such as family or friends, which often dominate over political rationality itself. More complex issues arise in relation to the emotional and social tendencies that also influence Gen Z's political decisions. This phenomenon raises the key question of the extent to which Gen Z can be considered rational voters, especially amid the spread of hoaxes and political polarisation that influence their choices. Indonesia's general elections, which are fraught with political dynamics, raise an important dilemma: can Gen Z make rational political decisions, or are they more influenced by temporary emotional and social factors? In this context, James Coleman's rational choice theory provides a solid basis for answering this challenge, assuming that intelligent voters will make decisions based on available information and preferences that they consider optimal. Therefore, it is important to explore the factors that shape Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 Presidential Election, as well as to identify how they access and assess political information from various sources.

Research on the political behaviour of Generation Z, especially in the context of the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election, has developed rapidly with various approaches exploring the factors that influence their political preferences. Aksakal & Avci, in their study on the influence of fatalism on Gen Z's political choices, found that fatalistic tendencies, such as belief in luck and superstition, significantly predict their political preferences, both towards leaders and political parties. This shows that psychological factors, such as fatalism, can influence how Gen Z assesses potential leaders and makes political decisions. Another study by emphasizes the role of social media as a dominant factor in shaping Gen Z's political attitudes. Using a phenomenological approach, they identified that in addition to rational factors, social media also plays an emotional role in shaping Gen Z's political perceptions. This is in line with the findings of, which revealed that social media plays an important role in shaping Gen Z's political preferences, especially in the digital era, where political information is easily accessible and obtainable through these platforms.

In addition, a study by shows that candidate attributes, such as political experience and education, greatly influence the decisions of Gen Z voters, who are more likely to vote for candidates with good credentials and progressive attitudes towards social issues. This is in line with the rational choice theory approach, in which voters, including Gen Z, make decisions based on information they consider important and relevant to their needs. These studies also note that although social media provides abundant information, factors such as a candidate's positive image, campaign style, and interaction with social groups have a major influence on Gen Z's political decisions, as found in a study by in Surabaya. In this study, it was found that Gen Z's voting behaviour is more often classified as rational, with decisions influenced by information they obtain from various sources, including social media and their social groups. Meanwhile, highlights the role of social media in influencing voter behaviour in Nigeria, which is relevant to the Indonesian context, given the strong influence of social media in the 2024 election campaign. Social media is not only used to share information, but also to shape opinions and drive political participation.

Existing research has provided important insights into Gen Z's voting behaviour, but there is still a gap in combining rational choice theory with social media and psychosocial analysis outside of major cities. Most existing research focuses more

on voters in urban areas such as Jakarta and Surabaya, while areas such as Gowa Regency still receive less attention. This study offers a novel approach by combining James Coleman's rational choice theory to analyse how Gen Z makes political decisions based on the information they obtain, especially through social media, and identifying the influence of broader psychological and social factors. With this approach, this study attempts to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election and contribute to the development of literature on digital politics and young voter behaviour in Indonesia.

2 Literature overview

Research on Gen Z's voting behaviour shows that their political behaviour is influenced by various sociological, socio-psychological, and rational factors, with social media being one of the main channels that shape their political views. The study examines the voting behaviour of Gen Z in Australia, showing that young voters who are registered but do not vote, or are not even registered, are often influenced by their socio-economic status and low level of political engagement. These findings highlight the importance of sociological factors in Gen Z's voting behaviour, which is also discussed in the study. This study concludes that social media, the influence of reference groups, and political interest have a significant effect on Gen Z's voting behaviour, emphasising that Gen Z's tendency to participate or not participate in elections is often influenced by social and emotional factors.

Another study by adds that younger generations, such as Gen Z, have more inconsistent motivations than previous generations and are often influenced by social influences rather than civic duty to vote. For example, found that Gen Z's political preferences ahead of the West Java gubernatorial election were heavily influenced by social media platforms and digital campaigns, illustrating the important role of technology in shaping their political views. However, most existing research focuses on Gen Z behaviour in voluntary electoral systems and in developed countries, such as Australia and the United States. An important gap found in this literature is the lack of studies on Gen Z voting behaviour in Indonesia's compulsory electoral system, where young voter participation is greatly influenced by political literacy, access to information, and participation through social media. Therefore, this study will fill this gap by examining how socio-psychological and rational factors influence Gen Z's voting behaviour in Indonesia, as well as how social media plays a key role in shaping their political decisions.

Meanwhile, Gen Z's political participation in Indonesian elections is greatly influenced by the social and digital context. The study reveals that influencers and political advertisements play a major role in encouraging Gen Z participation, with political interest and internal political efficacy being important mediators in this process. These findings indicate that political education through social media can effectively increase political participation, especially among young voters who are exposed to a lot of information, both valid and false. The study highlights how Indonesians, especially Gen Z, are increasingly relying on candidates' digital footprints to make more informed political decisions. This reflects the increasing digital literacy among young voters, who are shifting from traditional media to digital platforms to obtain political information, as shown in the study, which indicates that Instagram and YouTube dominate as the main channels for political news consumption among Gen Z in West Java. The study also emphasises that Gen Z's political engagement is not limited to voting behaviour, but also includes

cognitive engagement and everyday behaviour, such as sharing opinions and socio-political values on social media.

However, although many studies show the importance of social media in encouraging Gen Z's political participation, there is a gap in the literature on how civic education and political communication strategies can further enhance this participation in Indonesia. Wijaya & Amalia's study shows that civic education that integrates social media can strengthen Gen Z's political literacy, but this approach is still underutilised in political education policy in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the integration of digital media in political education and more adaptive political communication strategies can encourage Gen Z's political participation in the 2024 elections, considering the context of Indonesian democracy.

In the context of rational choice theory, , argues that voters usually make decisions based on cost-benefit analysis, although in the case of elections, the decision to vote is often considered a collective action that has low benefits for individuals. In this case, the decision to vote can be influenced by intrinsic motivations that are more related to social influence and personal perceptions of the political system, as explained in . This study emphasises that Gen Z prefers candidates with strong credentials and affiliations with the progressive values they hold, as well as prioritising digital campaigns. These findings illustrate that Gen Z voters may prioritise rational factors such as policy and candidate experience over party identity or traditional campaigns, which is more in line with Rational Choice Theory.

However, a gap in this study is the lack of understanding of how psychosocial factors and social media influence Gen Z's rational voting decisions. The study by criticises the lack of application of rational choice theory in sociology, arguing that although this theory can explain individual actions, the social context also greatly influences those choices. This study will fill this gap by exploring how rational choice theory can be applied to explain Gen Z's voting behaviour, combining rational analysis with social media factors and social influence in the context of the 2024 Indonesian elections.

3 Metohd

3.1 Type and Design of Research

This study adopts a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, which focuses on an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences and perceptions related to Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election. The phenomenological approach was chosen for its ability to intensively explore the subjective meanings generated from the direct experiences of young voters, especially first-time Gen Z voters. With this approach, the study aims not only to describe the phenomenon of voting behaviour in general, but also to understand how Gen Z feels, interprets, and responds to existing political dynamics, as well as how they form political decisions based on their social, political, and personal contexts. This approach allows researchers to explore the deepest layers of voting behaviour that may not be explainable by quantitative methods alone.

3.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this study is young Gen Z voters registered in the 2024 elections, specifically those aged 17 to 19, who are first-time voters in Gowa Regency. These first-time voters were chosen as the main focus because they are in the early stages of their involvement in the democratic process and have great

potential to influence the results of the 2024 elections. Gen Z is known as a group that is highly influenced by social and technological factors, especially social media, which plays an important role in shaping their political attitudes and views. Therefore, understanding their voting behaviour can provide important insights into the political dynamics in Indonesia, especially how young voters make their first political decisions in the context of elections that are increasingly influenced by digital developments.

This study will focus on students from several senior high schools in Gowa Regency, who represent first-time voters in the region. The selection of this unit of analysis is based on the consideration that senior high school students are a group that has broad access to various sources of political information, whether through social media, peers, or family. As voters who are participating in elections for the first time, they are often in a position to explore and form their own political views, which are influenced by various external and internal factors. Through in-depth interviews, this study aims to explore their views on the electoral process, their motivations for voting, and the factors that influence their political decisions, such as the influence of social media, trust in leadership candidates, and social dynamics in their environment. This understanding will provide a clearer picture of how Gen Z in regencies respond to and participate in Indonesia's evolving political process.

3.3 Data Sources and Collection Techniques

The data sources in this study are primary data obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 informants selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was used to select informants who had relevant knowledge or experience on the research topic, namely Gen Z's voting behaviour in elections. The informants selected were students from four senior high schools in Gowa Regency who met the criteria of being first-time voters (aged 17 to 19 years) and active in socio-political activities at school or in their neighbourhood. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, which allowed flexibility in asking open-ended questions to explore the informants' views and experiences regarding their voting behaviour in the elections. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and recorded for further analysis.

In addition to interviews, data collection techniques were also carried out through direct observation. Observation was used to understand the social behaviour and interactions that occur in the school environment that can influence Gen Z's political views and decisions. Through observation, researchers were able to record social phenomena, such as political discussions among peers, the influence of school campaigns, or the influence of social media on students. These observations provided additional context that enriched the understanding of how social and environmental factors interact with Gen Z's political attitudes, providing a more complete perspective on the dynamics that influence their voting behaviour in the 2024 elections. The following table shows information about the informants involved in this study:

Table 1. Data List of Key Research Informants

No	Informant Name	Age	School	Informant Criteria
1	Wisnu Anugerah DJ	17	Gowa State Senior High School 9	First-time voter, actively involved in school activities

2	Salscysbila Risky Tamani	17	State Senior High School 9 Gowa	First-time voters, have views on political issues
3	Putri Salsa	17	SMA Negeri 9 Gowa	First-time voter, has views on political issues
4	Nurul Aulia Ramadhani	18	State Senior High School 9 Gowa	First-time voters influence the political views of their peers
5	Andika Putra Pratama	18	Aksara Bajeng High School	First-time voters have critical views of prospective leaders
6	Nurul Lailatul Arafah	17	Aksara Bajeng High School	First-time voters are critical of leaders with poor track records
7	Muhammad Rizal	18	SMA 1 Sungguminasa	First-time voters, voting based on family recommendations
8	Sukmawati	19	SMA 1 Sungguminasa	First-time voters, influenced by family decisions when voting
9	Zulfahmi	18	SMA 1 Sungguminasa	First-time voters, vote based on the popularity of candidates among friends
10	Riska S	18	SMA 1 Sungguminasa	First-time voters, influenced by money politics in the election
11	Ibnu Maulana	19	Hasanuddin Gowa High School	First-time voters view money politics as unethical
12	Nadya Magrifa A	19	Hasanuddin Gowa High School	First-time voters do not trust candidates involved in corruption

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 1 above shows information about the 12 informants involved in this study. The informants were students aged between 17 and 19 who were registered as first-time voters in the 2024 elections in Gowa Regency. They were selected from four different high schools in the region, namely SMAN 9 Gowa, SMA Aksara Bajeng, SMA 1 Sungguminasa, and SMA Hasanuddin Gowa. Each informant had certain criteria relevant to the research topic of Gen Z voting behaviour. Some informants were actively involved in socio-political activities at school or had critical views on prospective leaders and current political issues. Some of the informants were also influenced by external factors, such as recommendations from family or peers, which affected their political decisions. In addition, there were informants who were more critical of money politics and corruption issues, which also shaped their views in determining their political choices. Younger informants (aged 17-18) tend to be more influenced by their social groups, such as peers and family, in determining their political choices, while older informants (aged 19) show a higher level of awareness of broader political issues, such as the integrity of prospective leaders and trust in the political system. This table provides an overview of the various

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Table 2. Examples of Stages of Data Analysis Techniques with Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding

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research questions. These core themes were then linked to theoretical frameworks, such as Rational Choice Theory and Political Participation Theory, to provide a comprehensive explanation of Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 elections.

in Elections: Characteristics and Driving Factors, Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy, and Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour.

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 2 above illustrates the qualitative data analysis process using the Grounded Theory technique, which includes three main stages of analysis: Open Coding, Axial Coding, and Selective Coding. Each stage plays an important role in organising, grouping, and identifying the main themes relevant to the research focus, namely Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 elections, the factors that influence their political decisions, and the contribution of Rational Choice Theory to these decisions. In the Open Coding stage, the researcher's research team transcribed the interview data and broke it down into smaller units of meaning, which were then given initial codes. These codes identified important issues that emerged from the interviews without directly linking the data to specific categories. The informants involved in this stage were all 12 high school students from Gowa Regency aged 17 to 19, focusing on aspects such as the influence of social media, voting decisions, and the influence of friends or family in determining political choices. For example, some codes that may emerge from the data at this stage are "family influence," "trust in candidates," "distrust of money politics," and "peer influence." These codes provide insight into how Gen Z develops their political attitudes based on social, emotional, and rational factors.

In the Axial Coding stage, the codes identified in the previous stage are grouped into more conceptual categories. Here, researchers connect existing categories, identify thematic patterns, and analyse the relationships between categories in a broader context. In this study, this stage will involve grouping categories such as the influence of social media, socio-psychological factors (e.g., the influence of family, peers, and political perceptions), and motives for voting (whether based on rationality or emotional factors). Researchers will also explore thematic patterns related to Gen Z's involvement in politics, as well as how they view politics, elections, and presidential candidates. These categories will also be understood in the context of Indonesian politics, with a particular focus on the local context of Gowa Regency, which shows how these factors influence voting behaviour in areas with different social dynamics.

In the Selective Coding stage, researchers filter the previously grouped categories to produce core themes that are most relevant to the research focus. These core themes are then linked to existing theoretical frameworks, such as Rational Choice Theory, to provide a deeper understanding of Gen Z's political decision-making process. In this study, three main themes emerged: Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections: Characteristics and Driving Factors, which explores the distinctive characteristics of Gen Z in voting, including rationality, social influence (friends, family, social media), and emotional factors that influence their decisions. The second theme is Gen Z's Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy, which analyses Gen Z's level of involvement in the Indonesian democratic process, particularly elections, with a focus on the impact of social

Through these stages, researchers can analyse data comprehensively, not only describing what Gen Z chooses, but also explaining why they choose that way and how various social, emotional, and rational factors interact in shaping their decisions. By linking these findings to a relevant theoretical framework, researchers can delve deeper into the dynamics of Gen Z's voting behaviour and the factors that drive their participation in the 2024 elections. Overall, this table illustrates how the Grounded Theory-based analysis stages allow researchers to map and categorise information obtained from in-depth interviews, providing broader insights into how Gen Z engages in elections and the factors that influence them.

This study also uses thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes that emerge from the interview data. This technique allows researchers to organise data into thematic categories relevant to the research questions (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun, Clarke, & Weate, 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun et al., 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) (Braun et al., 2016; Williams & Moser, 2019) , which helps to reveal the deeper meaning of the informants' experiences or views. The analysis process begins with transcribing the interviews and identifying small pieces of relevant data (statements). Next, each piece of data is coded to reflect the main theme or issue it contains. The next step is to group the codes into broader thematic categories and relate them to the research objectives to produce core themes. In the thematic coding stage, researchers organise these codes into larger categories to capture the main patterns relevant to the research topic. The resulting themes will help researchers understand the phenomenon being studied and explain how social, psychological, and rational factors influence Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 elections. The resulting themes can then be used to build a more comprehensive understanding of Gen Z's political attitudes, their preferences for candidates, and how they engage in politics, both rationally and emotionally.

Informant	Statements	Thematic Coding
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Wisnu Anugerah DJ	"This is my first opportunity to cast my vote, and I did not expect..."	First-time Voters, The Importance of Participation
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Table 3 shows how the first informant (Wisnu Anugerah DJ) made a statement about voting for the first time. This statement was given relevant thematic coding, namely "First-time Voters" and "The Importance of Participation," which shows that the statement reflects the initial experience and awareness of the importance of being involved in the democratic process. In thematic analysis, researchers will continue to identify more data snippets from other interviews and assign thematic codes

according to relevant categories, such as the influence of social media, trust in candidates, or the influence of peers. This process helps map the various themes that emerge from the interviews and provides deeper insights into Gen Z's voting behaviour in elections.

4 Result

The results show that Gen Z voting behaviour in Gowa Regency is characterised by a combination of rationality, social influence, and emotional considerations. First-time voters from this generation view elections as an important experience for understanding the political process and critically assessing prospective leaders. Several informants, such as Wisnu Anugerah DJ, stated that their involvement was their first opportunity to internalise the importance of voting rights and democratic responsibility, while Nurul Aulia Ramadhani emphasised evaluating candidates based on reputation and integrity to avoid the risk of electing problematic candidates. These findings show that Gen Z has high political awareness, is able to weigh information obtained from the media, peers, and family, and form rational and reflective decisions even though they are in the early stages of their political involvement. In addition, Gen Z's political participation in the context of Indonesian democracy is influenced by their social interactions and environment, such as the influence of family, peers, and social phenomena at school.

For example, Muhammad Rizal and Sukmawati showed how family recommendations and peer discussions influenced their initial choices, while Zulfahmi emphasised the influence of candidate popularity among peers. Nevertheless, Gen Z still demonstrated independence in decision-making, considering candidate integrity and political practices, such as money politics or unrealistic campaign promises. These findings confirm that Gen Z's voting behaviour is not merely a result of social pressure, but rather the result of a rational analysis of information, candidate morality, and political consequences, demonstrating that these young voters have the capacity to participate critically, responsibly, and intelligently in the democratic process.

In-depth interview analysis with students from several high schools in the region shows that Gen Z's participation is not merely a formal act of exercising their right to vote, but also a reflective process influenced by social interaction, candidate evaluation, and moral and ethical considerations. To provide a more comprehensive understanding, the findings of this study are divided into three main sub-chapters: (1) Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections, which explores the characteristics and factors that drive their voting decisions; (2) Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy, which highlights Gen Z's involvement in the democratic process and the influence of the social environment; and (3) Rational Choices in the Context of Gen Z Voting Behaviour, which analyses how Gen Z uses rational considerations to assess candidates and make critical and responsible political decisions.

Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections in Indonesia

The voting behaviour of Generation Z in the 2024 Indonesian Presidential Election focuses on the characteristics, motivations, and factors that influence the political decisions of first-time voters in Gowa Regency. Interview analysis shows that Gen Z views participation in elections as an important first experience, not merely fulfilling a legal obligation, but also as a means to understand the political process and critically assess the quality of prospective leaders. Rational factors

emerge as the main consideration, with young voters assessing the integrity, track record, and credibility of candidates before making their choice, while avoiding candidates involved in corruption or controversy. On the other hand, social influences from family, peers, and school groups also shape their perceptions and preferences, although the final decision is largely based on rational assessment of the candidates. In addition, emotional factors, such as distrust of money politics or unrealistic campaign promises, also influence Gen Z's level of enthusiasm and selectivity in voting. These findings show that Gen Z's voting behaviour is the result of a complex interaction between rational considerations, social influences, and emotional control, so that this group can be categorised as reflective and critical young voters, with the ability to balance various factors in their political decision-making process.

Table 4. Results of Grounded Theory Analysis of Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections

Informant	Verbatim / Statements (Core Description)	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Wisnu Anugerah DJ (17th)	"This is my first opportunity to cast my vote, and I did not expect that this year I would also participate in the elections. Perhaps this is also one of my first steps towards gaining a deeper understanding of elections and the world of politics."	First-time voter participation, motivation to learn about politics	Early involvement of Gen Z, first-time voter experience	Gen Z voting behaviour in elections: characteristics and motivating factors
Salscysbila Risky Tamani (17th)	"The 2024 election is an event where I will choose the next leader with the hope that the future leader will lead much better than the previous leader."	Expectations of leaders, influence of friends	Motivation to vote, social influence	Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections
Andika Putra Pratama (18th)	"Nowadays, it is difficult to believe that there are honest leaders, with all the news that is circulating, I personally find it difficult to choose an honest leader."	Distrust of candidates, voter selectivity	Trust factors, influence of corruption issues	Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections
Nurul Lailatul Arafah (17th)	"Most leaders today only care about their personal affairs. For example, if one of the candidates is elected, the public has high hopes that they will not be ignored."	Scepticism towards candidates, reluctance to participate	Candidate morality, influence of track record	Gen Z Voting Behaviour in Elections
Zulfahmi (18th)	"I often discuss the popularity of a candidate with my friends, because I sometimes vote based on the candidates who are	The influence of friends, candidate popularity	The role of peer groups and popularity	' voting behaviour in the elections

Riska S (18)	popular among young people and are the topic of conversation."			
	"I don't really care about things like that, but what caught my attention during the campaign was that many supporters or the candidates themselves gave money or basic necessities with the aim of stealing the public's attention."	The influence of incentives, attention to money politics	Campaign dynamics and the influence of material incentives	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 4 above shows data analysis using the Grounded Theory approach, indicating that Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 Presidential Election is influenced by a combination of rational, social, and emotional factors, which form the unique characteristics of this generation's first-time voters. From interviews with high school students in Gowa Regency, it appears that Gen Z views their first election experience as an important opportunity to understand the political process, form political views, and actively express their aspirations. For example, several informants, such as Wisnu Anugerah DJ, stated that their involvement in the election was not merely a formal right, but also a first step towards understanding political dynamics and voting responsibly. This emphasises the characteristics of first-time voters who are aware of the importance of participation and shows the political awareness that is beginning to develop in Gen Z.

In addition, these findings also show that rational factors play an important role in Gen Z's voting behaviour. Several informants, such as Nurul Aulia Ramadhani, emphasised that evaluating the reputation and integrity of candidates was a major consideration. They tend to avoid candidates with a history of corruption or behaviour that undermines public trust. This attitude indicates that Gen Z does not only follow social or emotional influences, but also considers the credibility of candidates, their track record, and moral values, in accordance with the principles of Rational Choice Theory, where voters weigh the benefits and risks before making a decision. On the other hand, social factors have also been shown to influence voting behaviour. Several informants, such as Salscysbila Risky Tamani and Zulfahmi, pointed to the influence of peers and family in determining political choices. Peer group discussions and family recommendations are social mechanisms that help young voters navigate their initial confusion about which candidate to choose. However, this social influence is not always dominant, as some informants still show independence in their decision-making, especially if the information they obtain is considered valid and transparent. These findings indicate a complex interaction between social influence and rational decision-making, which shapes Gen Z's voting behaviour at the local level.

Emotional factors also emerge as a significant element. Several informants expressed disappointment with political practices, such as money politics and unrealistic campaign promises, which can lead to distrust of candidates and the political system. This can be seen in the statements of Riska S and Ibnu Maulana, who emphasised that material incentives or money politics influence their perception of candidates. However, most Gen Zers still maintain the principle of voting based on the integrity and quality of candidates, which shows their ability to control their

emotions and remain rational in the decision-making process. These findings indicate that Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 elections in Gowa Regency is guided by a combination of rational motivation, social influence, and emotional considerations, with a strong tendency towards moral evaluation and candidate credibility. Gen Z first-time voters not only formally exercise their right to vote, but also emphasise the importance of understanding the political context, assessing candidate integrity, and critically considering social influence. This indicates that Gen Z are intelligent and reflective voters, capable of integrating various factors to make rational and responsible political decisions.

Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy

This section examines the political participation of Generation Z in the 2024 presidential election, focusing on how first-time voters in Gowa Regency are involved in the democratic process and the factors that influence their political decisions. Interview analysis shows that Gen Z views participation in elections not only as a formal obligation, but also as an opportunity to express aspirations, understand political mechanisms, and critically assess the quality of prospective leaders. Their participation is influenced by social interactions, such as family recommendations, peer influence, and group discussions, which help shape their preferences and motivations in voting. In addition, rational considerations regarding the integrity of candidates, track records, and political ethics also play an important role in their decisions, while emotional factors such as disappointment with money politics or unrealistic campaign promises can influence their level of enthusiasm and selectivity in participating. These findings show that Gen Z's political participation is the result of a complex interaction between political awareness, social influence, and rational assessment, confirming that these young voters have the capacity to engage critically and reflectively in democracy, while balancing various internal and external factors in their political decision-making.

Table 5. Results of Grounded Theory Analysis of Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy

Informant	Verbatim / Statements (Core Description)	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Wisnu Anugerah DJ (17th)	Participating in elections for the first time, feeling obliged to participate, seeing that every vote counts	First-time voter participation, awareness of voting rights, early involvement	Early political involvement, awareness of democracy	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Salscysbila Risky Tamani (17th)	Influenced by peers in making choices	Peer influence, group political discussions	Social influence in decision making	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Muhammad Rizal (18th)	Voting based on family recommendations due to confusion	Influence of family, social dependence	The role of family in shaping political participation	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy

Sukmawati (19th)	Influenced by candidates' promises, but able to choose independently without coercion	Influence of campaign promises, voter independence	Interaction between external influences and personal decisions	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Zulfahmi (18th)	Voting based on the popularity of candidates among friends	The influence of popularity and peer discussions	Peer influence and political trends	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Riska S (18th)	Paying attention to cash or basic food assistance during campaigns	The influence of campaign incentives, attention to material politics	The influence of campaigns and material incentives on participation	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Ibnu Maulana (19th)	Faced with money politics, maintaining one's choice	The influence of money politics, voter integrity	Conflict between external incentives and rational decisions	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy
Nadya Magrif A (19th)	Rejecting corrupt candidates, loss of trust in the system	Rejecting corrupt candidates, distrust in the system	Moral impact and trust in participation	Gen Z Political Participation in the Context of Indonesian Democracy

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

The results in Table 5 show that Generation Z's political participation in the 2024 Presidential Election is influenced by a combination of social, rational, and emotional factors, which form the unique characteristics of first-time voters in Gowa Regency. From interviews with high school students, it appears that Gen Z considers elections to be an important first political experience and is aware of their responsibility as voters. For example, several informants, such as Wisnu Anugerah DJ, stated that involvement in elections is an opportunity to understand the political process, while also categorized the importance of one vote in democracy. This shows that Gen Z has a high level of awareness of their civic duties and is beginning to categorized the value of political participation as part of their role as citizens. In addition to formal awareness, Gen Z's political participation is also greatly influenced by social interactions with their immediate environment. Several informants, such as Salscysbila Risky Tamani and Zulfahmi, admitted that discussions with peers and the influence of social groups were important factors in determining their political choices. The influence of family is also significant, as expressed by Muhammad Rizal and Sukmawati, where family recommendations are a major consideration when faced with confusion in choosing a candidate. These findings show that Gen Z's decision to participate in politics is not entirely individual; they tend to balance social influence with rational personal considerations.

In addition to social factors, considerations of candidate rationality and integrity also influence Gen Z's political participation. Informants such as Ibnu

Maulana and Nadya Magrifa A indicate that money politics and candidates with ethical issues can reduce their interest in participating or influence how they vote. This confirms that Gen Z does not only respond passively to social or emotional influences, but is also capable of making political decisions based on rational assessments of candidate quality and the credibility of the political system. This phenomenon is consistent with the principles of Rational Choice Theory, in which voters consider the benefits and risks of their political actions before deciding to participate. These findings reveal that Gen Z’s political participation in the context of Indonesian democracy is the result of a complex interaction between political awareness, social influence, and rational evaluation of candidates and the political system. Their participation is not only evident in the exercise of their right to vote, but also through their involvement in political discussions, critical assessment of candidates, and monitoring of campaign practices. Thus, Gen Z can be categorized as reflective, critical, and rational young voters who are able to navigate various social and emotional pressures to participate in a meaningful and in ly in the 2024 elections.

Rational Choices in the Context of Gen Z Voting Behaviour

The political participation of Generation Z in the 2024 Presidential Election, with a focus on how first-time voters in Gowa Regency are involved in the democratic process and the factors that influence their political decisions. Interview analysis shows that Gen Z views participation in elections not only as a formal obligation, but also as an opportunity to express aspirations, understand political mechanisms, and critically assess the quality of prospective leaders. Their participation is influenced by social interactions, such as family recommendations, peer influence, and group discussions, which help shape their preferences and motivations in voting. In addition, rational considerations regarding the integrity of candidates, their track records, and political ethics also play an important role in their decisions, while emotional factors such as disappointment with money politics or unrealistic campaign promises can influence their level of enthusiasm and selectivity in participating. These findings show that Gen Z’s political participation is the result of a complex interaction between political awareness, social influence, and rational judgement, confirming that these young voters have the capacity to engage critically and reflectively in democracy, while balancing various internal and external factors in their political decision-making.

Table 6. Results of Rational Choice Analysis in the Context of Gen Z Voting Behaviour

Informant	Verbatim / Statements (Core Description)	Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Wisnu Anugerah DJ (17th)	"If the information I receive is good, for example, information that the 2024 elections will be held in accordance with	Evaluation of election information, rational considerations	Rationality in political participation, objective considerations regarding the election process	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour

Nurul Aulia Ramadhani (18th)	applicable regulations without interference from any party, then my response would be that I see politics as being good and in line with the system, and that the opportunities for fraud are minimal." "As a first-time voter, if I receive political information, for example, that there is a candidate who is corrupt or always has problems with his family, and this is always the topic of conversation among the community, to the extent that there are even opinions among the community such as 'Don't vote for him, he has problems, how can he lead us?', this creates a perception in my mind that I will not vote for him and it is better for me to vote for another candidate who has a good image in the community."	Selecting candidates based on integrity and reputation evaluation	Moral and rational considerations in selecting candidates	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour
Andika Putra Pratama (18th)	"Nowadays, it is difficult to trust	Assessment of candidate	Rationality in decision-making,	Rational Choice

	leaders who are honest. With all the news that is circulating, I personally find it difficult to choose an honest leader." "Most leaders today only care about their personal affairs. For example, if one of the candidates is elected, the public has high hopes that they will not be ignored." "Money politics in our midst will have a negative impact on Indonesian politics, one of which is the high possibility of corruption and causing us to lose trust in the existing political system." "The corrupt background of the candidate pairs has caused our generation to lose trust, so no matter how good their vision and mission are, they will not be seen or considered at all."	credibility, scepticism towards candidates	candidate selectivity	Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour
Nurul Lailatul Arafah (17th)	one of the candidates is elected, the public has high hopes that they will not be ignored." "Money politics in our midst will have a negative impact on Indonesian politics, one of which is the high possibility of corruption and causing us to lose trust in the existing political system."	Candidate evaluation, track record considerations	Candidate risk analysis in relation to public interests	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour
Ibnu Maulana (19th)	"The corrupt background of the candidate pairs has caused our generation to lose trust, so no matter how good their vision and mission are, they will not be seen or considered at all."	Ethical considerations, rejection of external incentives	Rational decision-making vs external pressure	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour
Nadya Magrifa A (19th)	"At first, I was confused about who to vote for, but some of my friends suggested	Moral evaluation of candidates, voter selectivity	Rationality and risk evaluation of candidates	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour
Salscysbila Risky Tamani (17th)		Alternative considerations, information analysis	Rationality in decision making, evaluation of social advice	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour

	that I vote for the candidate pair according to their wishes. This influenced my perspective on the election, whether to follow my friends or vote according to my own choice."			
Zulfahmi (18th)	"I often discuss the popularity of a candidate with my friends, because I sometimes vote based on candidates who are popular among young people and are the topic of conversation. An example I often hear is the 'oke gas' trend from Mr. Prabowo's campaign, which has generated a positive response from the public. Things like that make me, as a first-time voter, interested in voting for him."	Consideration of popularity, analysis of social trends	Socially influenced rationality, popularity considerations	Rational Choice Theory in Gen Z Voting Behaviour

Source: Results of Researcher Data Processing, 2025

Table 6 shows that Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 Presidential Election in Gowa Regency was greatly influenced by the mechanism of rationality in political decision-making, which is in line with the principles of Rational Choice Theory. Based on interview data, Gen Z did not simply vote impulsively or follow social influences alone, but considered the available information, the integrity of the candidates, their reputation, and the consequences of their choices. For example, several informants, such as Wisnu Anugerah DJ, emphasised the importance of the validity of information and the transparency of the election process, while Nurul Aulia Ramadhani and Nadya Magrifa A emphasised the evaluation of candidates with bad reputations or who were involved in corruption. This shows that Gen Z's political decisions are based on an analysis of benefits and risks, where voters

evaluate candidates not only on popularity, but also on credibility, morality, and the candidate's ability to govern effectively. In addition, these findings reveal the complex interaction between rationality and social influence.

Several informants, such as Salscysbila Risky Tamani and Zulfahmi, indicated that peer advice and group discussions could influence their choices. However, despite social influence, Gen Z still demonstrated the ability to make independent decisions, especially when they critically assessed information and weighed the risks of candidates. Another example is the case of Ibnu Maulana, who rejected offers of money politics and continued to vote based on rational considerations regarding the integrity of the candidates, showing that moral and ethical considerations are also important components of their political rationality. These findings confirm that Gen Z, despite being first-time voters, exhibit rational and reflective behaviour, where their voting decisions are the result of critical evaluation of candidates, social interactions, and ethical considerations. This confirms that rational choice theory can be applied to understand the political behaviour of Gen Z, as they balance factors such as information, candidate integrity, risk, and social influence in determining their choices. This phenomenon shows that Gen Z has the potential to become intelligent and responsible voters, capable of participating effectively in the democratic process while maintaining a rational evaluation of candidates and the political system.

5 Discussion

The results show that Gen Z's voting behaviour in the 2024 presidential election in Gowa Regency is influenced by a combination of rational, social, and emotional factors. Gen Z views elections as their first opportunity to understand the political process and critically assess candidates. Some informants emphasise the importance of obtaining valid information and avoiding problematic or corrupt candidates, while others are influenced by the recommendations of peers or family. These findings confirm that Gen Z are not merely passive voters; they demonstrate high political awareness and reflective abilities in considering various factors before making decisions. In addition, attention to political issues such as money politics or candidate integrity is also an indicator that Gen Z is able to critically and rationally assess the consequences of their choices. Apart from individual considerations, the results of the study reveal that Gen Z's political participation is greatly influenced by social interactions and environmental context. Discussions with peers, family recommendations, and the influence of social media are part of their decision-making process. For example, some informants choose candidates based on their popularity among friends or trends on social media, while others reject incentives such as money or basic food supplies in order to maintain the integrity of their decisions.

These findings indicate that Gen Z's political participation is the result of an interaction between rational considerations and social influences, in which they balance external influences and critical evaluation of candidates in order to maximise the results they consider most beneficial or in line with their personal values. Furthermore, this study found that first-time Gen Z voters tend to conduct multi-dimensional evaluations of candidates before making decisions, including aspects of morality, credibility, reputation, and the candidate's potential for success in leadership. These factors not only influence individual choices but also shape collective behaviour patterns in their social groups, for example through discussions at school or on social media. Thus, Gen Z's voting behaviour is not merely a

is characterised by an assessment of the candidates' vision, mission and track record, in contrast to irrational behaviour that is only driven by popularity or interesting content.

The findings of this study also show that social media and digital communication play an important role in shaping Gen Z's political participation, especially in obtaining information, comparing candidates, and assessing political campaigns. This is in line with the findings of , which shows that Gen Z in West Java actively uses digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok to understand political issues, obtain educational content, and follow campaign trends. This informed political participation through social media is also in line with the findings of , which emphasises the importance of Gen Z's inclusive participation in strengthening the foundations of Indonesian democracy through active engagement and positive electoral experiences. Thus, the results of this study confirm that Gen Z are not just passive voters, but reflective, rational political agents who are adaptive to the socio-digital context of the contemporary era.

The findings of this study have significant theoretical implications for the study of the political behaviour of young voters, especially Gen Z, by confirming the relevance of James S. Coleman's Rational Choice Theory in the context of Indonesian democracy, where first-time voters use rational evaluation, moral considerations, and social judgements to maximise their preference outcomes. These results also expand the literature on the political behaviour of the younger generation in the digital era by showing how the influence of social media and social interaction mediates the rational decision. However, this study has a limitation, namely the limited sample size, which only involved 12 informants from four schools in Gowa Regency, so the findings may not be representative of Gen Z in other regions with different socio-political characteristics. Future research should include quantitative studies with a broader and more geographically diverse sample to test the generalisation of these findings, longitudinal analyses to understand changes in Gen Z's voting behaviour over time, and research exploring the interaction between psychosocial factors, digital media, and the national political context to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the patterns of political participation and decision-making among the younger generation.

6 Conclusions

This study confirms that Gen Z's voting behaviour and political participation in the 2024 presidential election is a complex phenomenon influenced by a combination of rational, social, and emotional factors. The main findings show that Gen Z first-time voters critically evaluate candidates based on integrity, reputation, and morality, and weigh information from social media, peers, and family in making decisions. Their participation is not only in the form of exercising their right to vote, but also includes cognitive and behavioural engagement in the democratic process, indicating that Gen Z are reflective and rational voters. The significance of these findings lies in their contribution to the literature on young voter behaviour in the digital age, while also providing guidance for policymakers, political parties, and educational institutions to improve Gen Z's political literacy and participation. The weakness of this study is the limited number of informants, involving only 12 informants from four high schools in Gowa Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, so the findings may not fully represent Gen Z nationally. Recommendations for future research include developing quantitative studies with a broader and more diverse

sample, longitudinal studies to assess the dynamics of Gen Z voting behaviour over time, and further exploration of the interaction between psychosocial factors, digital media, and the national political context to understand the patterns of political participation and decision-making of the younger generation more comprehensively.

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