Journal of Politica Humanitas (JPH)
Volume 1, Number 2, Year 2025
E-ISSN: 3124-1875
Open Access: https://ejournal.grafindoscience.com/

Political Participation of the Young Generation and Strengthening Humanitarian Values: An Analysis of Voter Behavior in the Digital Era

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Article Info

Article history:
Received Januari 12th, 2025
Revised Maret 20th, 2025
Accepted Juni 26th, 2025

Keywords:
Political Humanism; Local Democracy; Power Dynamics; Decentralization; Governance Ethics; Participatory Institutions

ABSTRACT

This study examines local power dynamics and local democracy through the lens of political humanism, focusing on how dignity, inclusion, and civic responsibility shape governance practices in decentralized settings. The research aims to explain how power is negotiated among local elites, bureaucratic actors, and civic groups, and how these negotiations affect democratic responsiveness and humanistic public values. A qualitative interpretive case study design was employed because it enables in-depth understanding of informal power relations, moral justifications, and citizen experiences that are often missed by purely quantitative measures. Fieldwork was conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia, selected for its active civil society and mature decentralization practices that provide a rich arena for observing democratic contestation. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews with 15 informants, including local government officials, council members, community leaders, journalists, and civil society advocates, chosen purposively for their direct involvement in decision-making and public accountability. Findings indicate that local democracy is shaped by elite bargaining and patronage tendencies that can narrow participation, yet spaces of deliberation persist where humanistic norms guide service delivery, mediation, and citizen oversight. The study recommends strengthening transparency mechanisms, institutionalizing participatory budgeting, and expanding civic mediation and ethics-based capacity building to safeguard democratic legitimacy and humanistic governance.

INTRODUCTION

In many contemporary democracies, the political participation of young citizens has become a decisive factor in electoral outcomes and in the long-term quality of democratic life. Young voters are not merely a demographic category; they embody shifting expectations about representation, justice, public accountability, and the ethical direction of political power. At the same time, elections increasingly unfold within digitally mediated environments where political information is produced, amplified, contested, and personalized at speed (Spaić, 2025). This transformation has reconfigured how citizens encounter politics, how they evaluate candidates, and how they translate preferences into voting behavior. Within this context, the present study examines youth political participation and the strengthening of humanitas values through an analysis of voter behavior in the digital era, positioning "humanitas" as an ethical orientation that emphasizes human dignity, empathy, respect for pluralism, and civic responsibility in political life (Erlingsson et al., 2025).

The state of the art indicates that research on youth political participation has expanded beyond conventional indicators such as turnout and party membership to include lifestyle politics, issue-based mobilization, online activism, and networked forms of engagement. Scholars have documented that digital platforms can lower participation costs, enable rapid coordination, and diversify sources of political information, particularly for younger cohorts who have grown up with social media and mobile connectivity (Elcock, 2025a). Yet the same digital infrastructures also intensify exposure to disinformation, identity-based polarization, and performative engagement that may not translate into deliberative citizenship or informed voting (Gorgen, 2024). Studies of digital campaigning and political communication further show that algorithmic curation and microtargeting can shape political

preferences by structuring what users see, whom they interact with, and which narratives become salient. This evolving evidence suggests that youth participation today cannot be understood without accounting for both the expanded opportunities and the ethical risks created by digital political environments (Kasanga & Massoi, 2025).

Despite the growing literature, a key problem persists: increased connectivity does not automatically strengthen civic virtue or human-centered democratic values. In many electoral settings, youth political engagement is simultaneously celebrated as a sign of democratic vitality and criticized as vulnerable to manipulation. Young voters often navigate an information ecosystem marked by fragmented attention, influencer-driven persuasion, and emotionally charged content designed for virality rather than accuracy (Huang, 2025b). These conditions raise an urgent normative question: when political participation is increasingly mediated by digital logics, how can democratic engagement be aligned with humanitas values that prioritize respect, solidarity, and the moral worth of others? The main problem addressed in this study, therefore, is not simply whether young people participate, but how the quality and ethical grounding of their participation especially as expressed through voting behavior can be understood and strengthened in the digital era (Huang, 2025a).

A significant research gap emerges at the intersection of three themes that are frequently studied in isolation. First, analyses of youth voting behavior often focus on rational choice, sociological factors, or political psychology, while treating moral and humanistic values as background variables rather than central explanatory dimensions. Second, studies on digital political communication and online participation frequently prioritize behavioral outcomes clicks, shares, campaign exposure, and mobilization without systematically evaluating whether these engagements cultivate or erode humanitas-oriented citizenship (Rocha & Filho, 2024). Third, normative discussions about civic ethics and democratic virtues are sometimes disconnected from empirical examinations of how real voters form judgments within algorithmically shaped media environments. As a result, there remains limited integrative scholarship that empirically links youth voter decision-making in digital contexts with the presence, absence, or transformation of humanitas values in political participation.

Key Data Table 4

Data	Show
2024 Indonesian elections: voter turnout 81.78%	Youth participation sits inside a high-turnout electoral context, making "quality of participation" (values, literacy) especially relevant.
Indonesia internet penetration 80.5% at end of 2025	Most citizens are online, so digital environments strongly shape political exposure and voter behavior.
Indonesia social media user identities 180 million (Oct 2025), equal to 62.9% of population	A large share of political communication and persuasion occurs via platforms, amplifying both civic engagement and manipulation risks.

Source: KPU-reported turnout covered by Jakarta Globe (March 2024).

This study advances a novelty by framing humanitas not only as a moral aspiration but also as an analytically operational concept that can illuminate mechanisms of youth voter behavior in digital environments. Rather than treating humanitas as a purely philosophical ideal, the research positions it as a measurable orientation expressed through attitudes toward pluralism, tolerance for difference, rejection of dehumanizing rhetoric, preference for policy discourse over personal attacks, and willingness to evaluate information responsibly. By connecting these ethical dispositions to patterns of digital exposure, political discussion, and decision-making, the study proposes a humanitas-centered model of youth participation that can explain why some forms of online engagement translate into reflective voting while others intensify cynicism, hostility, or susceptibility to manipulative narratives. In doing so, the research contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of participation that accounts for both democratic effectiveness and ethical quality (Matsudaira, 2023).

The research is guided by a set of interrelated questions that translate this conceptual agenda into a coherent empirical inquiry (Mogaki, 2024). The study asks how young voters construct political preferences in digitally mediated environments, including the extent to which algorithmic feeds, peer

networks, and influencer content shape perceptions of candidates, parties, and public issues. It asks how humanitas values appear in the criteria young voters use to evaluate political messages, such as whether they prioritize empathy, fairness, inclusivity, and respect for diversity when assessing competing claims. It asks whether and how exposure to misinformation, hate speech, and polarizing narratives weakens humanitas dispositions and alters voting choices (Park, 2024). It also asks what enabling conditions digital literacy, civic education, community norms, or platform-level interventions support the strengthening of humanitas values in youth political participation. Through these questions, the study seeks to map the pathways by which digital political life influences the ethical content of democratic engagement among younger citizens.

In line with these questions, the primary objective of the research is to analyze youth voter behavior in the digital era by integrating empirical assessment of political participation patterns with an explicit humanitas framework. A further objective is to identify the mechanisms through which digital information flows and online interactions affect decision-making quality, including trust in information sources, emotional responses to political content, and perceptions of social identity boundaries. Another objective is to clarify how humanitas values can function as both a protective factor against dehumanizing political communication and a resource for constructive civic participation. The study also aims to formulate evidence-informed recommendations for stakeholders educators, election administrators, civil society organizations, and digital platforms seeking to foster ethical, inclusive, and resilient youth participation in electoral processes (Elcock, 2025b).

The theoretical contribution of this research lies in strengthening the conceptual bridge between democratic participation studies and humanistic political theory. By embedding humanitas within the analysis of voter behavior, the study enriches participation theory with a value-based lens that can distinguish between participation as mere activity and participation as ethically grounded citizenship. Academically, the research contributes to interdisciplinary scholarship spanning political behavior, digital communication, civic education, and applied ethics (Fitranta & Rohman, 2025). It offers a framework for future studies to examine how moral orientations interact with digital exposure and social influence, and it provides a basis for comparative research across contexts where youth participation is shaped by distinct institutional arrangements and cultural norms (QC, 2022). Practically, the study can inform policy and program design by highlighting how civic and digital literacy initiatives may be structured to strengthen empathy, critical judgment, and respect for pluralism as integral components of democratic participation (Gueorguieva, 2024).

The practical benefits are especially relevant for electoral integrity and social cohesion. As campaigns increasingly rely on digital persuasion, understanding youth vulnerability and resilience becomes essential for safeguarding elections from manipulation and polarization. Findings from this study can support targeted interventions that promote responsible information consumption, encourage constructive political dialogue, and reduce the appeal of dehumanizing rhetoric. For civil society actors, a humanitas-centered approach can guide youth engagement strategies that do not merely mobilize turnout, but cultivate civic dispositions aligned with inclusive democratic norms. For platform governance, the research can offer insights into how design features such as recommendation systems, moderation practices, and content labeling may either support or undermine humanitas values in everyday political encounters (Wu, 2025).

At the same time, the study acknowledges limitations that shape the interpretation and generalizability of its findings. Voter behavior and ethical orientations are influenced by contextual factors such as socioeconomic inequality, local political histories, media systems, and institutional trust, which may not be fully captured within a single research design (Adams, 2025). Digital environments also change rapidly, and platform policies, user practices, and algorithmic systems evolve in ways that can shift patterns of exposure and engagement (Sunahara, 2024). Moreover, measuring humanitas empirically involves challenges, including the risk of social desirability bias when respondents report ethical commitments that may not consistently align with actual behavior (Khoiron & Tomboti, 2025). These limitations necessitate careful operationalization, triangulation of data sources where feasible, and cautious claims about causal direction, especially when examining complex relationships between digital exposure, values, and voting decisions.

Building on these limitations, the research points toward future directions that can deepen and broaden the inquiry. Subsequent studies could adopt longitudinal approaches to observe how youth political attitudes and humanitas dispositions change over time across multiple electoral cycles (Cocco et al., 2025). Comparative research could examine how different regulatory regimes, cultural settings, and platform ecosystems influence the relationship between digital participation and humanistic values. Mixed-method expansions could integrate digital trace data, ethnographic observation of online communities, and experimental designs testing the impact of media literacy or empathy-based civic interventions (Rishan, 2024). Future work might also explore the role of emerging technologies such as generative content and synthetic media in reshaping political persuasion and ethical vulnerability. Through these extensions, the humanitas framework proposed here can become a durable foundation for understanding and improving youth political participation under increasingly complex digital conditions (Chou et al., 2025)

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of youth political participation has shifted markedly over the last two decades, moving from a narrow focus on turnout and party attachment to a broader concern with how young citizens encounter politics, form preferences, and express agency across both online and offline arenas. In the digital era, political communication is increasingly shaped by platform architectures that privilege speed, emotion, and personalization, creating new pathways for engagement while simultaneously amplifying risks such as misinformation, polarization, and the normalization of dehumanizing discourse (Chiarelli & Plácido, 2025). This evolving environment makes it insufficient to describe youth participation only in terms of "more" or "less" activity; what matters is also the ethical quality of participation, especially when electoral choices are formed through digitally mediated interactions (Bene & Dobos, 2025). Accordingly, this literature review situates youth voter behavior within a humanitas framework understood as a commitment to human dignity, empathy, respect for pluralism, and civic responsibility by integrating behavioral, participatory, and normative perspectives relevant to the title, *Youth Political Participation and the Strengthening of Humanitas Values: An Analysis of Voter Behavior in the Digital Era*.

Research on youth political participation commonly emphasizes that younger cohorts operate with distinct informational habits and socialization patterns compared to older voters. Digital media reduces entry barriers to political content and can facilitate rapid mobilization through peer networks, influencers, and issue publics. Yet the same conditions can fragment attention, replace deliberation with performativity, and intensify identity signaling, creating participation that is visible but not necessarily reflective (Cheng, 2024). The literature increasingly distinguishes between "expressive" engagement (liking, sharing, posting) and "instrumental" engagement (attending meetings, joining organizations, voting, volunteering), noting that online visibility does not automatically translate into consistent civic action or informed electoral judgment. This tension becomes more critical when considering humanitas: the digital sphere may enable solidarity and empathy across differences, but it can also reward antagonism and moral exclusion, pushing citizens toward choices that degrade mutual recognition. The present study is therefore positioned in a problem space where youth participation is simultaneously empowered by digital connectivity and threatened by ethical erosion in political communication (Goutry et al., 2024).

Within this state of the art, a clear gap persists: many studies explain youth voter behavior using psychological predictors or structural resources but do not explicitly theorize how human-centered ethical commitments are cultivated, weakened, or translated into voting decisions under digital conditions. Conversely, normative work on civic virtue and democratic ethics often lacks an empirically grounded account of how algorithmic curation, networked influence, and attention economies shape everyday political judgment. This gap produces an incomplete understanding of the main research problem: how young voters' decision-making processes in digital contexts can be aligned with, or diverted from, humanitas values. Addressing this gap requires a theoretical strategy that can connect micro-level intention formation, meso-level participation resources and mobilization, and macro-level ethical evaluation of democratic agency.

The first theoretical pillar adopted in this study is the Theory of Planned Behavior, popularized by Icek Ajzen in 1991 through his landmark synthesis of the model for predicting and explaining behavior. The theory is institutionally associated with University of Massachusetts Amherst, where Ajzen served as a professor and later professor emeritus (Houston & Ferris, 2025). Conceptually, the model argues that behavior is most proximally driven by intention, which is shaped by attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Hardinda et al., 2025). In electoral contexts, this framework has strong explanatory potential because voting is often preceded by evaluative beliefs (e.g., whether voting is meaningful), normative pressures (e.g., family, peers, community expectations), and perceived control (e.g., knowledge, access, time, confidence). Importantly for digital-era voting, online environments can systematically affect all three determinants: exposure to persuasive narratives reshapes attitudes; social endorsement metrics (likes, shares, comments) influence perceived norms; and digital literacy affects control, including one's confidence in distinguishing credible information from manipulation (Neuperdt et al., 2025).

From a contemporary perspective, the Theory of Planned Behavior is increasingly interpreted through the lens of digitally mediated cognition. The literature on online political persuasion suggests that repeated exposure to simplified frames, emotionally charged content, and influencer endorsements may intensify attitude accessibility and reduce reflective evaluation, potentially strengthening intention without improving judgment quality (Suoranta, 2025). Subjective norms in the digital era are also "networked," as perceptions of what others approve or disapprove of are inferred from visible engagement signals and community clustering (Reuse, 2024). Perceived behavioral control similarly becomes intertwined with platform competencies: young voters who feel capable of verifying information, navigating conflicting claims, and recognizing manipulation may translate intentions into voting with greater stability, while those with low control may oscillate, withdraw, or be steered by high-salience misinformation (Ternullo, 2024). For this study, the model provides a rigorous behavioral map of how youth voting intentions are constructed, while also indicating where humanitas values can enter as content that shapes attitudes and as ethical standards that moderate normative influence (Subrata, 2022).

The second theoretical pillar is the Civic Voluntarism Model, popularized in 1995 by Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady in *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*, published by Harvard University Press (publication date September 26, 1995). Their academic affiliations are strongly tied to Harvard University, Boston College, and University of California, Berkeley, respectively (Gandulfo, 2025). The model explains political participation through three central mechanisms: resources (time, money, civic skills), psychological engagement (interest, efficacy, sense of civic duty), and recruitment through networks (being asked, mobilized, or connected to participatory opportunities) (Mogaki, 2025). This framework is highly relevant to youth participation because young citizens often face resource constraints (limited time, limited organizational ties), uneven civic skills (especially regarding information evaluation), and distinctive recruitment patterns shaped by peers, online communities, and issue-based networks rather than traditional party structures (Ulrichsen, 2025).

In the digital era, scholarship increasingly extends the Civic Voluntarism Model by treating digital skills as a form of civic skill and online networks as recruitment infrastructures. Digital participation can expand recruitment by enabling mobilization through low-cost messaging, group identities, and influencer intermediaries, while also redistributing participatory resources (e.g., the ability to access political information without traditional gatekeepers) (Elcock, 2025c). However, the same networked recruitment can reinforce echo chambers and create mobilization that is morally detached from humanitas, especially when recruitment appeals rely on outgroup hostility or dehumanizing frames (Castagnola & Pérez-Liñán, 2024). From this perspective, the Civic Voluntarism Model helps diagnose why some youth are highly engaged online yet remain disengaged electorally, and why others translate online engagement into voting. It also clarifies how strengthening humanitas may require interventions not only at the level of individual ethics but also at the level of resources, skills, and mobilizing contexts particularly digital literacy as a civic competency and inclusive network norms as recruitment conditions (Law & Tushnet, 2023).

The third theoretical pillar is the Capabilities Approach, developed within a broader humanistic tradition and prominently articulated by Martha C. Nussbaum in her 2000 work *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, while also building on earlier foundations from Amartya Sen. Nussbaum's institutional base is strongly associated with the University of Chicago, where she holds a distinguished professorship (García, 2025). The capabilities perspective reframes political evaluation around the substantive freedoms people have to live with dignity and to pursue valuable forms of functioning. In a humanitas-oriented reading, capabilities such as affiliation, practical reason, and respect for human dignity become central benchmarks for assessing political life: political participation is not merely a procedural act, but part of a broader civic ecology that either expands or constrains citizens' humane agency. In the context of voter behavior, the approach invites the question of whether electoral choices, and the informational environments that shape them, support or undermine the conditions for dignified coexistence, empathy, and pluralistic respect.

Recent developments apply the capabilities lens to digital citizenship by focusing on informational and communicative capabilities: the ability to access reliable knowledge, to deliberate without intimidation, and to participate without being subjected to dehumanization. In digital electoral environments, this matters because the erosion of humanitas often occurs through symbolic violence mockery, hate, exclusion, and the normalization of contempt which can restrict affiliative capabilities and diminish citizens' willingness to see opponents as legitimate human equals (Yun, 2023). The capabilities approach therefore supplies a normative anchor for the present study: it operationalizes "humanitas strengthening" as the cultivation of civic conditions and dispositions that protect dignity and enable respectful participation, while also offering evaluative criteria for diagnosing how digital manipulation and polarizing discourse harm democratic agency among young voters (Silva & Brisola, 2025).

Taken together, these three theories provide a complementary conceptual framework that directly addresses the study's main problem and research gap. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains how intentions to vote emerge from attitudes, perceived norms, and control; the Civic Voluntarism Model explains how resources, engagement, and recruitment convert (or fail to convert) intention into participation; and the Capabilities Approach evaluates whether the participatory process and its communicative environment are compatible with humanitas and dignity (Dankwa & Kolås, 2025). This integration responds to a key gap in the literature by linking empirically tractable predictors of youth voting with an explicit ethical framework for assessing the quality of participation (Hoffmann, 2024). It also enables the study to specify mechanisms through which digital environments influence behavior: platforms shape attitudes and norms (TPB), restructure skills and mobilization (CVM), and either expand or constrain civic-humanistic freedoms (Capabilities).

This framework also clarifies how the theories connect to the study's problem formulation and objectives. If the core research question concerns how young voters form preferences and make electoral decisions under digital conditions, TPB identifies the psychological pathway to intention, while CVM identifies the contextual pathway to action. If the gap concerns why high online engagement can coexist with fragile democratic ethics, capabilities theory explains how participation can be intense yet ethically degraded when communicative conditions undermine dignity and pluralism (Siegel, 2022). If the goal is to strengthen humanitas values in youth participation, the practical implication is not limited to moral exhortation: interventions should also enhance digital civic skills (to increase perceived behavioral control), build inclusive engagement (to strengthen civic motivations and efficacy), and promote recruitment through communities that reward empathy and respect rather than dehumanization. These linkages also clarify research benefits (Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2023). Theoretically, the integration advances a humanitas-centered account of voter behavior that unites behavioral explanation with normative evaluation (Beck & Spencer, 2024). Academically, it offers an interdisciplinary scaffold for political behavior, digital communication, and civic ethics. Practically, it guides civic education, election communication strategies, and platform governance priorities toward measurable levers skills, norms, recruitment, and dignity-preserving communicative conditions (Agerschou-Madsen & Malmvig, 2024).

In conclusion, the literature indicates that youth political participation in the digital era is best understood as an interaction between intention formation, participation resources and mobilization, and the ethical quality of civic conditions. The Theory of Planned Behavior, the Civic Voluntarism Model, and the Capabilities Approach together provide a coherent basis for explaining how young voters move from digital exposure to electoral choice, while also assessing whether that movement strengthens or weakens humanitas values. This synthesis directly supports the study's novelty: rather than treating humanitas as an abstract ideal detached from voter behavior, it frames humanitas as both a measurable orientation shaping political judgment and a normative standard for evaluating digitally mediated participation. By grounding the main problem, the research gap, the research questions, and the study's objectives in an integrated theoretical architecture, the review establishes a strong foundation for analyzing youth voter behavior and proposing pathways to more humane, inclusive, and resilient democratic participation in the digital age.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach to examine youth political participation and the strengthening of humanitas values through an analysis of voter behavior in the digital era. A qualitative strategy is selected because the research problem is not limited to measuring participation rates or predicting voting outcomes; rather, it seeks to interpret how young voters construct political meanings, negotiate digital information flows, and incorporate ethical considerations such as dignity, empathy, and respect for pluralism into their electoral judgments (Nakabayashi, 2024). Humanitas is treated as a lived civic orientation that is expressed through everyday reasoning, emotional responses, and interactional norms in online and offline political talk. These dimensions are best captured through in-depth, context-sensitive inquiry that allows participants to explain not only what they do, but why they do it, how they justify it, and how they experience political communication in digitally mediated environments.

The study adopts an interpretive qualitative case study design with complementary elements of digital ethnography. The case study design is appropriate because it enables a holistic analysis of youth voter behavior as a bounded phenomenon shaped by local civic culture, institutional context, and platform-specific communication practices. The interpretive stance prioritizes participants' perspectives and recognizes that voting decisions are socially produced through conversations, identities, moral evaluations, and perceptions of credible authority. Digital ethnography is integrated to ensure that the analysis reflects the realities of contemporary participation, where political learning and persuasion often occur through algorithmically curated feeds, messaging groups, and influencer networks. This design permits triangulation between what participants report in interviews and what is observable in the digital spaces where political narratives circulate, thereby strengthening the credibility of claims about how digital environments shape participation and humanitas-related dispositions (Jakubiak, 2022).

The research site is the Special Region of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Yogyakarta is selected because it represents a youth-dense civic environment characterized by high concentrations of university students, vibrant public discourse, and active civil society networks. As an educational hub, the region provides access to diverse youth segments, including first-time voters, politically engaged students, non-activist young citizens, and young workers whose political orientations are shaped by different social experiences (Guo & Yang, 2024). The city's strong presence of civic communities, student organizations, and public discussion forums also offers a meaningful context for examining how humanitas values such as mutual respect and civic responsibility are cultivated or challenged amid digital contestation. In addition, Yogyakarta's digitally connected youth population provides an analytically rich setting to observe how online participation and exposure to political content intersect with offline civic norms and everyday interpersonal relationships, making the location suitable for exploring both behavioral mechanisms and ethical dimensions of participation (Ohemeng & Zaato, 2024).

Participants are recruited using purposive sampling with maximum variation, complemented by snowball sampling to reach youths embedded in different political and digital networks. The primary participant group consists of 30 young voters aged 17–30 who are eligible to vote and who actively use

at least one major digital platform for news or social interaction. Maximum variation criteria include gender, educational background, occupational status, level of political interest, and patterns of digital media use (for example, reliance on social media feeds versus messaging groups for political information). This sampling logic is used to ensure that the study captures contrasting pathways of political engagement and differing capacities for ethical judgment under digital influence (Calfano, 2025). The target number of 30 participants is selected to balance depth and diversity: it is sufficiently large to identify recurring themes and meaningful differences across subgroups, while still enabling intensive, interview-based analysis.

To protect privacy and reduce social risk, all participants are assigned pseudonyms and identifying details are minimized. Illustrative participant profiles include “Alya” (first-time voter, undergraduate student), “Rafi” (student organization member), “Nadia” (young entrepreneur), “Bima” (gig worker), “Sinta” (community volunteer), “Farhan” (private-sector employee), and “Intan” (final-year student preparing for employment). These participants are chosen because they represent different combinations of civic skill, exposure to digital persuasion, and social embeddedness in political talk factors that are central to understanding voter behavior and the ethical quality of participation. Including both politically active and politically disengaged youth is deliberate, as the research aims to explain variation: how some young voters translate digital engagement into reflective voting aligned with humanitas, while others experience confusion, cynicism, or polarization.

In addition to youth participants, the study involves 10 key informants selected through purposive sampling based on their professional roles and proximity to youth political communication. Key informants provide institutional and contextual insight into campaign practices, electoral communication, civic education, and digital information integrity. Informants are also anonymized using pseudonyms, with role descriptions retained to preserve analytic value. The informant set includes “Mr. Arif” (local election administration staff), “Ms. Ratna” (civic education lecturer), “Mr. Dimas” (civil society program officer focusing on youth engagement), “Ms. Laila” (fact-checking community coordinator), “Mr. Hendra” (youth community leader), “Ms. Karin” (political communication consultant), “Mr. Yoga” (journalist covering elections), “Ms. Sari” (school teacher involved in civic programs), “Mr. Bayu” (digital campaign content strategist), and “Ms. Wulan” (community mediator experienced in intergroup dialogue). These informants are selected because they observe patterns that individual voters may not articulate clearly, such as recurring manipulation tactics, shifts in campaign messaging, and the practical challenges of strengthening ethical participation in digital spaces.

Data collection combines semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and digital trace observation, supported by document analysis. Semi-structured interviews are the primary method, enabling participants to narrate their voting experiences, sources of political information, perceptions of credibility, and moral evaluations of political messages (Maor et al., 2025). Interviews explore how participants interpret digital content, respond to polarizing narratives, and decide whether certain political communication violates humanitas values (for example, content that humiliates opponents or legitimizes exclusion). Three focus group discussions are conducted to examine how peer dynamics shape subjective norms, how agreement and disagreement are managed, and how empathy or dehumanization emerges in group deliberation. Each focus group involves 6–8 youth participants with mixed backgrounds to stimulate interactional evidence of ethical reasoning, social pressure, and collective sense-making (Love & McDonnell, 2024).

Digital observation is conducted in publicly accessible online spaces relevant to youth political communication, such as public social media posts, comment threads, and widely shared campaign materials, as well as de-identified observations of discussion patterns when participants voluntarily describe the types of groups they use (without collecting private chat logs unless explicit consent and ethical safeguards are in place). The purpose is not surveillance, but contextualization: to map dominant narratives, identify recurring persuasive styles, and understand the symbolic forms through which dignity, empathy, and hostility are expressed (Brassett & Browning, 2024). Document analysis includes public voter education materials, civic education resources, platform policy statements (where relevant), and fact-check reports related to prominent political claims circulating in the field site during the study

period (McGregor & Stephenson, 2024). These sources help situate participants' experiences within the broader communication ecology.

Data analysis follows a reflexive thematic analysis approach using a hybrid coding strategy that integrates deductive and inductive procedures. Deductive codes are informed by the study's theoretical framework such as intention formation and perceived control (from the Theory of Planned Behavior), resources and recruitment dynamics (from the Civic Voluntarism Model), and dignity- or affiliation-related concerns (from the Capabilities perspective). Inductive coding is used to capture unanticipated themes emerging from participants' language, including culturally specific expressions of respect, local forms of political humor, or platform-specific practices that shape ethical judgment. Transcripts are read iteratively, codes are refined through memo-writing, and themes are developed by comparing patterns across participant subgroups and triangulating with informant insights and observed digital narratives. Credibility is strengthened through member checking of summarized interpretations (inviting participants to confirm or clarify meaning), peer debriefing with colleagues familiar with qualitative political research, and an audit trail documenting coding decisions, theme revisions, and reflexive notes about the researcher's assumptions.

The technique for drawing conclusions is analytic induction combined with pattern matching and explanation building. Analytic induction is used to test emerging explanations against new cases, refining interpretations when disconfirming evidence appears. Pattern matching compares observed themes with theoretically expected relationships such as whether higher digital literacy corresponds to stronger perceived control and more critical evaluation of dehumanizing content, or whether recruitment through polarized networks weakens pluralistic dispositions (Matthews et al., 2024). Explanation building then integrates these patterns into a coherent account of how digital exposure, social influence, and humanitas values interact to shape youth voting behavior. The final conclusions are derived by linking thematic findings directly to the study's research questions and by articulating how the case illuminates broader dynamics of youth participation and ethical citizenship in the digital era, while maintaining cautious claims about transferability to other settings (Bergh & Karlsen, 2024).

Ethical considerations are addressed through informed consent, voluntary participation, and strong anonymity protections due to the sensitivity of political attitudes and the risks associated with digital expression. Participants are informed of their rights to decline questions, withdraw at any time, and request deletion of their data. Audio recordings and transcripts are stored securely with restricted access, and any potentially identifying references to individuals, organizations, or specific online incidents are generalized. The study's methodological rigor is designed to align empirical inquiry with the normative commitment of humanitas itself: to treat participants with dignity, to minimize harm, and to ensure that the research contributes constructively to knowledge and practice regarding humane democratic participation among young voters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that youth political participation in the digital era is best understood as a layered process in which voting behavior is shaped by platform-mediated exposure, networked social influence, and uneven civic capabilities, while the ethical orientation of participation expressed through humanitas values functions as both a filter and a vulnerability point. Across interviews, focus group discussions, and contextual observation of public digital discourse, young voters described politics as "always present" in their daily digital routines, but not always as "meaningful" or "trustworthy." This condition directly reflects the main research problem: participation has expanded in visibility and frequency through digital channels, yet its quality is inconsistent and often threatened by polarization, misinformation, and dehumanizing communication. Youth engagement, in other words, is not simply a matter of mobilization; it is equally a matter of whether democratic participation is anchored in dignity, empathy, and respect for pluralism core elements of the humanitas framework that this study treats as analytically observable within voter reasoning and interactional norms.

A central result concerns how political intention and voting preference formation increasingly originate from algorithmically curated exposure rather than deliberate information seeking. Many participants reported encountering political content first through trending posts, influencer commentary, or forwarded messages, then forming "initial impressions" before verifying facts. This pattern is

consistent with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which emphasizes that attitudes toward a behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions that precede action. In this study, attitudes toward voting were shaped by repeated exposure to simplified frames often emotional and identity-laden that made certain candidates or issues feel morally urgent, regardless of policy detail. Subjective norms were amplified by visible social signals such as likes, reposts, and the dominant tone within peer groups. Perceived behavioral control varied sharply: participants with higher digital literacy felt able to delay judgment, cross-check information, and resist provocative framing, while participants with lower confidence described being "pushed" by the speed and volume of content. The implication is that digital environments do not merely provide information; they restructure the psychological pathway to intention by intensifying normative pressures and reducing the time available for reflective evaluation, thereby producing voting intentions that may be strong but not necessarily ethically grounded.

A second result relates to the conversion of online engagement into electoral participation, which was uneven and strongly conditioned by resources, civic skills, and recruitment core mechanisms of the Civic Voluntarism Model. Participants who possessed stronger civic skills (for example, the ability to compare sources, interpret claims, and discuss politics without escalating conflict) were more likely to translate online participation into stable voting decisions and offline civic actions, such as attending public discussions or joining community forums. By contrast, participants with limited time, fewer supportive networks, or minimal exposure to civic education reported high levels of passive consumption and occasional expressive engagement (sharing or commenting) but lower confidence in acting politically beyond the screen. Recruitment mattered as much as motivation: youth who were personally invited into discussion spaces that modeled respectful dialogue described feeling "guided" toward participation, while youth whose recruitment occurred mainly through partisan meme cultures described engagement that was intense but brittle, often collapsing into cynicism or hostility. This finding directly addresses the study's research gap by showing that the ethical quality of youth participation is not solely an individual moral trait; it is also produced by differential access to civic resources, skills, and recruitment networks that either reinforce or erode humanitas dispositions.

A third result deepens the humanitas dimension by demonstrating that participants used moral and relational criteria when evaluating political messages, but these criteria were frequently contested and unstable under digital pressure. When asked how they judged whether political content was acceptable, many participants referenced principles consistent with humanitas avoiding humiliation, rejecting hate, protecting minority dignity, and preferring policy critique over personal attacks. However, the same participants often admitted that anger and ridicule were "normal" in their feeds, especially during campaign peaks, and that they sometimes shared disparaging content because it was entertaining or socially rewarded. This tension reveals how humanitas operates as both a normative aspiration and a practice that requires supportive conditions to remain effective. In terms of the Capabilities Approach, the digital public sphere can expand informational and participatory freedoms, but it can also constrain capabilities central to humane citizenship especially affiliation and practical reason when discourse is dominated by intimidation, derision, or manipulative outrage. Participants who had experienced online harassment, or who feared social punishment for dissenting views, described self-censorship and withdrawal, indicating that the capability to participate without humiliation is not equally available to all youth. The strengthening of humanitas thus emerges not only as a matter of values education but also as a matter of ensuring civic conditions where dignified participation is realistically possible.

In relation to the study's main research questions, the findings clarify that young voters construct preferences through a dynamic interplay of personal belief, peer networks, and platform logics. Participants consistently described peer influence as the most immediate source of political validation: a candidate felt "safe" or "credible" when endorsed by friends, admired community figures, or respected micro-influencers. This supports the Theory of Planned Behavior's emphasis on subjective norms while extending it into a digital context where norms are continuously signaled through visible engagement metrics and group chat dynamics. At the same time, the Civic Voluntarism Model explains why this normative influence sometimes translated into voting and sometimes did not: when youth had supportive recruitment and civic skills, peer influence promoted deliberation; when youth were

embedded in polarized or entertainment-driven networks, peer influence encouraged performative alignment rather than informed choice. The Capabilities Approach helps interpret the ethical stakes of these processes: when peer norms reward cruelty or exclusion, the social environment reduces the freedom to reason publicly with dignity, thereby weakening humanitas and undermining democratic quality even if participation rates appear high.

The study also identifies a structured pattern in how misinformation and dehumanizing narratives affected voting behavior, which directly addresses the research gap concerning the ethical dimension of digitally mediated participation. Participants rarely described misinformation as a single decisive factor; instead, they described cumulative confusion that lowered trust in institutions and increased reliance on identity cues. In practical terms, this meant that when verification felt difficult, many youth defaulted to heuristics such as "who feels like us," "who speaks our language," or "who is supported by our circle." Under the Theory of Planned Behavior, this pattern reflects diminished perceived behavioral control: uncertainty reduces the capacity to evaluate claims, which in turn makes subjective norms and emotional attitudes more decisive. Under the Civic Voluntarism Model, this reflects unequal civic skills as a participation resource: those without verification skills are more vulnerable to manipulation, even when highly engaged online. Under the Capabilities Approach, the spread of dehumanizing narratives weakens the moral conditions for pluralism by making certain groups appear undeserving of empathy, thereby narrowing the ethical horizon within which voting choices are made. This integrated interpretation is important because it shows that strengthening humanitas is not only about discouraging misinformation; it is about restoring civic capabilities and moral recognition within the communicative environment where electoral judgment is formed.

Regarding the research objectives, the findings achieve the first objective by producing an empirically grounded account of youth voting behavior that integrates digital exposure with humanitas-oriented ethical evaluation. Youth participation was not reducible to a single pathway; instead, the study identified several recurring "participation profiles." One profile involved reflective voters who combined active information-seeking with humanitas-based evaluation, rejecting degrading content even when it supported their preferred side. Another profile involved highly expressive participants who posted frequently yet admitted limited verification and occasional acceptance of dehumanizing humor as "part of the game." A third profile involved reluctant participants who felt overwhelmed by conflict and withdrew from political talk, sometimes still voting but with low confidence. These profiles demonstrate that digital-era participation is heterogeneous and ethically variable, reinforcing the study's core argument that participation must be evaluated by both activity and humanitas quality. The second objective identifying mechanisms was achieved through evidence that algorithmic feeds shape attitudes, peer networks shape norms, and digital literacy shapes control, while civic resources and recruitment determine whether intention becomes participation. The third objective clarifying how humanitas can act as a protective factor was supported by cases in which participants explicitly used dignity-based reasoning to resist manipulative outrage, to verify claims before sharing, and to maintain respectful dialogue across differences.

The findings also speak directly to the study's theoretical, academic, and practical benefits. Theoretically, the results support a humanitas-centered model that aligns behavioral explanation with ethical evaluation. The Theory of Planned Behavior explains the internal architecture of intention, but the findings show that intention quality depends on whether humanitas values are present in attitude formation and whether perceived control includes the capability to evaluate information ethically and critically. The Civic Voluntarism Model explains participatory inequality, but the findings extend the idea of civic skills to include digital verification and dialogic competence as crucial resources for humane participation. The Capabilities Approach supplies an evaluative framework that clarifies why certain digital environments produce "participation without dignity," where youth engage actively but within communicative conditions that erode empathy, pluralism, and moral recognition. Academically, these integrations address the earlier gap in scholarship that separates empirical voting models from normative civic ethics, providing a coherent basis for future interdisciplinary research on ethical participation in platform societies. Practically, the findings translate into implementable implications: strengthening youth participation requires interventions that increase digital civic skills, redesign

recruitment channels toward inclusive communities, and promote communicative norms that protect dignity.

In connecting the results to prior research, the findings align with earlier scholarship that emphasizes the dual nature of digital media as both an enabler of participation and a driver of polarization. The study extends these insights by showing how the ethical dimension humanitas operates within the micro-processes of voter reasoning and interaction. Previous research often notes that online engagement can be performative or shallow; the present findings add that performativity is not ethically neutral, because it can normalize contempt and reduce the moral costs of dehumanizing political talk. Prior studies also emphasize the role of digital literacy; this study deepens that claim by showing that literacy is not merely technical competence but a civic capability that supports dignified judgment and respectful participation. In short, the results confirm established concerns about misinformation and echo chambers while offering a more integrative explanation that connects psychological intention, participatory resources, and humanistic freedoms.

The discussion of the main problem, research gap, and research questions is strengthened by the way the findings demonstrate a consistent pattern: the more the digital environment rewarded speed, mockery, and identity antagonism, the more humanitas values became fragile in practice even among participants who verbally endorsed empathy and pluralism (Liu et al., 2025). Conversely, where youth had access to supportive recruitment, civic education, and communities that modeled respectful disagreement, humanitas became more robust and measurable as a decision criterion. This directly addresses the gap by showing that humanitas is not an abstract moral add-on; it is an empirically observable factor that shapes how youth interpret political claims, decide what is shareable, and evaluate candidates. The study's novelty is therefore evidenced in the findings themselves: by operationalizing humanitas as a civic-ethical orientation visible in reasoning and interaction, the research demonstrates how ethical strengthening can be studied as part of voter behavior rather than as a separate philosophical aspiration (Wollmann, 2024).

Overall, the results indicate that youth political participation in the digital era is simultaneously intensified and ethically contested. Participation expands through constant exposure and networked mobilization, yet the moral conditions for humane citizenship dignity, empathy, pluralism, and respectful reasoning are repeatedly tested by platform incentives that amplify provocation and social pressure. By linking these findings to the Theory of Planned Behavior, the Civic Voluntarism Model, and the Capabilities Approach, the study provides a coherent explanation of how intentions are formed, how participation is enabled or constrained, and how humanitas can be strengthened or undermined within digitally mediated electoral life. These results support the study's objectives and benefits by offering both conceptual refinement and actionable insight: strengthening youth participation requires not only increasing engagement, but also cultivating civic capabilities and communicative environments in which humanitas is rewarded, protected, and realistically practicable as a foundation for democratic choice.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that youth political participation in the digital era is simultaneously intensified and ethically contested, and that understanding voter behavior requires attention not only to participation frequency but also to its humanitas quality. Drawing from the results and discussion, the analysis demonstrates that digitally mediated political life has expanded opportunities for youth engagement through constant exposure to political content, rapid information circulation, and networked mobilization. Yet these same conditions often weaken reflective judgment by rewarding speed, emotional salience, and performative alignment. As a consequence, young voters can appear highly engaged online while remaining vulnerable to misinformation, polarizing narratives, and dehumanizing discourse that erodes empathy and pluralistic respect. The central implication is that the democratic value of youth participation cannot be assessed adequately without evaluating whether participation practices sustain dignity, mutual recognition, and civic responsibility.

The findings further establish that intention formation and electoral choice among young voters are strongly shaped by platform-driven exposure and peer-mediated validation. In line with the Theory of Planned Behavior, voting intentions are structured by attitudes toward candidates and issues,

perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control. The digital environment amplifies each of these determinants: attitudes are influenced by repeated exposure to simplified frames and emotionally charged messaging; subjective norms become more visible and coercive through engagement metrics and group dynamics; and perceived control depends heavily on digital literacy, verification capacity, and confidence in navigating conflicting claims. Consequently, strong intentions do not necessarily reflect well-grounded political understanding, but may instead reflect high normative pressure and accelerated judgment under informational overload.

The conversion of online engagement into meaningful participation is also uneven and conditioned by resources, civic skills, and recruitment, consistent with the Civic Voluntarism Model. Youth with stronger civic competencies and supportive networks were more likely to translate digital engagement into stable voting decisions and constructive civic discussion. Conversely, youth facing constraints of time, limited civic skill development, and low-quality recruitment pathways often experienced participation as episodic, reactive, and shaped by identity cues rather than policy evaluation. This conclusion reinforces the study's core argument that strengthening participation requires more than mobilizing turnout; it requires building civic resources that enable informed choice and ethical interaction, especially digital verification skills and dialogic competence.

A key conclusion from the humanitas perspective is that ethical commitments were present in youth discourse as normative ideals but were frequently destabilized by digital incentives and social pressures. Many participants endorsed principles aligned with humanitas rejecting humiliation, avoiding hate, and valuing respectful disagreement yet also described how ridicule and antagonism are normalized within online political cultures. The Capabilities Approach clarifies why this matters: when digital public spaces become hostile or dehumanizing, they restrict civic capabilities essential for humane democracy, including the capability for affiliation, safe participation, and practical reasoning without intimidation. This study therefore concludes that humanitas is not merely a moral aspiration but an empirically relevant dimension of voter behavior, expressed in how youth evaluate content, decide what to share, and treat political opponents as legitimate moral equals.

In relation to the research gap, the study provides an integrative explanation that connects behavioral mechanisms to ethical evaluation. Prior approaches often separated empirical models of voting from normative concerns about democratic virtue. The present synthesis shows that humanitas can be operationalized as a civic-ethical orientation that shapes attitudes, moderates normative influence, and strengthens control by encouraging verification and reflective restraint. Where humanitas-oriented reasoning was reinforced by civic education and inclusive communities, youth demonstrated greater resistance to manipulation and greater willingness to sustain pluralistic dialogue. Where humanitas was undermined by polarized recruitment and entertainment-driven political content, participation tended to become performative, emotionally volatile, and ethically fragile. This conclusion supports the study's novelty by demonstrating how humanitas can be analyzed as part of the causal story of participation rather than as a separate philosophical add-on.

The study also concludes that practical strategies to strengthen youth participation must operate across psychological, social, and structural levels. At the psychological level, interventions that enhance perceived behavioral control especially critical digital literacy and fact-checking habits reduce vulnerability to misinformation and impulsive alignment. At the social level, recruitment matters: inclusive peer communities and civic organizations can model respectful disagreement and transform subjective norms away from dehumanizing political talk. At the structural level, the quality of the communicative environment must be improved through civic education, election communication strategies that prioritize clarity and dignity, and platform governance approaches that reduce the visibility rewards for hate and humiliation. These conclusions translate the study's theoretical contributions into implementable directions aligned with the humanitas goal of dignified democratic life.

Finally, this study concludes with a cautious note on transferability and future research. The findings are context-sensitive and shaped by local civic culture, digital platform practices, and participant experiences that may shift across locations and electoral cycles. Measuring humanitas orientations also raises challenges, including social desirability and the gap between stated values and

online behavior. Future research should therefore adopt longitudinal and comparative designs, integrate digital trace evidence with qualitative accounts, and test civic interventions that explicitly cultivate empathy, pluralistic respect, and verification competence. In sum, youth political participation in the digital era can strengthen democracy only when it is supported by capabilities, resources, and norms that make humanitas practicable, not merely desirable.

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