

The Influence of Hoaxes on Voter Participation from a Civic Education Perspective in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The development of information technology and the dominance of social media in public life have changed the patterns of dissemination and consumption of political information, while simultaneously increasing the intensity of the spread of hoaxes. This phenomenon has the potential to influence public perceptions, attitudes, and political participation in elections. This study aims to examine the influence of the spread of hoaxes on voter participation in elections in Indonesia, both in terms of turnout and the quality of political participation. The research method used is qualitative with a descriptive analytical approach through a library study of relevant literature, institutional reports, and scientific journals. The research analysis utilizes Agenda Setting Theory to explain the role of the media, particularly social media, in shaping issues deemed important by the public. The results show that social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, have become primary loci for the spread of political hoaxes due to their gatekeeper-free nature, virality-based nature, and the support of algorithms that amplify polarization and echo chambers. Therefore, strengthening digital literacy, political education, and fact-checking practices are essential prerequisites for maintaining the quality of voter participation and the sustainability of democracy in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

General elections reflect how democracy works in Indonesia. The public has the right to vote on their desires and demands, and to control the policies issued by the government. Elections are a mechanism for selecting leaders who will occupy certain strategic political positions within formal political institutions. (Indrawan, 2022). General elections or elections in a democratic country are considered a concrete form of public participation in running the government.

Political participation talks about how society influences both directly and indirectly the political process in every action, driven by things related to the interests of society, supporting things that are considered to be beneficial and also rejecting things that are considered to be detrimental. (Election Participation Index in the 2024 General Election, nd).

In today's modern era, everyone uses social media to access all kinds of information, including political issues. Various platforms exist, such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and so on. (Pratama et al., 2024).

Hoaxes typically refer to news or information intentionally created to deceive the public by certain individuals, designed to gain attention or emotion from readers. Hoaxes can take various forms, such as misleading content, clickbait, fake news, and so on, where the information contained is distorted from the actual facts. (Yuliatiningtyas & Mayasari, 2024).

The Indonesian Anti-Defamation Society (MAFINDO) reported that more than 2,300 pieces of hoax content were discovered in 2023, hundreds of which were directly related to political issues and the implementation of the 2024 General Election, including narratives regarding alleged fraud by the General Elections Commission (KPU), vote-rigging, and various forms of disinformation targeting candidates and public policies. (Mafindo Press Release: Political Hoaxes Increase Sharply Ahead of the 2024 Elections, Disrupting Indonesian Democracy, 2024)

The high level of exposure to hoaxes is further exacerbated by the public's low level of digital literacy. Research findings from MAFINDO and the National Digital Literacy Index indicate that the majority of Indonesians still have difficulty distinguishing between true and misleading information, leading to hoaxes often being accepted as truth and used as the basis for forming political judgments. In relation to voter participation, the spread of hoaxes has the potential to erode public trust in democratic institutions, particularly the General Elections Commission (KPU) and voting mechanisms, which can ultimately lead to apathy, fear, or indifference in exercising the right to vote at the polls. However, hoaxes can also have a mobilizing effect, triggering anger or fanaticism in certain groups, thus encouraging reactive and emotional political participation, rather than based on rational considerations. KPU data recorded that the national voter turnout in the 2019 Election reached around 81%, while in the 2024 Election it is expected to be in the range of 81–82%, which in aggregate indicates a relatively high level of participation. (KPU Fact Sheet, 2024).

However, this achievement does not fully reflect the quality of political participation, given that some voters exercise their right to vote based on misinformation resulting from exposure to hoaxes. The Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kominfo) also reported that it has addressed thousands of politically motivated hoaxes through clarification efforts, content removal, and collaboration with various digital platforms. (Pamela, 2024) which confirms that hoaxes pose a real threat to the integrity of election administration. Several academic studies and KPU reports indicate that although quantitative causal evidence regarding the decline in voter turnout due to hoaxes nationally is still limited, there is a fairly strong correlation between exposure to hoaxes, declining public trust, and changes in voting behavior. Thus, hoaxes not only impact voter turnout but also the quality of democracy itself, as they encourage political participation based on misinformation, polarization, and emotional impulses, rather than on a critical and rational understanding of political issues.

In the context of the increasingly dominant role of social media, increasing voter participation needs to be a primary focus. The government is required to be proactive in addressing this issue by strengthening public education and providing accurate and accountable information. Efforts to build digital literacy while encouraging public political participation are strategic steps in responding to this challenge. Social media can also be utilized positively as a means to expand knowledge and disseminate valid information, thus becoming a shared agenda in combating circulating hoaxes. Accordingly, this study aims to examine public perceptions regarding the influence of the spread of hoaxes on the level and character of voter participation in elections in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive analytical approach. Qualitative methods are scientific methods for uncovering social facts or phenomena to obtain data for a specific purpose and purpose. (Bariah et al., 2024). Researchers obtain data using library research methods using written sources, including literature and scientific journals. Library research is a series of steps

related to the methods of collecting library data, reading, recording, and processing relevant written materials or sources. (Zed, 2025). By using this approach, researchers synthesize and interpret the findings in the literature and scientific journals so that we can gain a deeper understanding of the patterns that arise from the spread of hoaxes and their influence on voter participation behavior in elections.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This research uses the Agenda Setting Theory, introduced by Maxwell McCombs & Donald L. Shaw in 1972. This agenda setting theory states that the media has a strong influence on society regarding certain issues. If the media emphasizes an event, it will influence many people to consider it important. (Efendi et al., 2023) Technically, Agenda Setting assumes that the media has the ability to direct the audience to an idea by presenting it in the mass media through news reports as if the media subconsciously makes people who read it think about what is reported. (Sokowati et al., 2023).

Intensity of Exposure to Hoaxes

In the span of a second, the flow of information can shift a person's perspective. The power of media to instantly change public opinion is so powerful. In an instant, information spreads widely and becomes an issue that ultimately shapes voters' decisions. (Yusran & Sapar, 2024) 75% of hoaxes spread through social media platforms rather than online media sites. This is because social media has the capacity to build a larger information network than online news media sites, which require user participation. Conversely, online news sites can make their content go viral through social media platforms like Instagram, allowing them to identify patterns in the spread of fake news originating from social media.

Table 1. Units of analysis and categorization

No	Unit of Analysis	Categorization
1.	Locus of Hoax Spread	1. Online News Site 2. Online Media Sites
2.	Contents of Hoax News Messages	1. Criticism 2. Propaganda 3. Provocation
3.	Identity of the Hoax News Spreader	1. Personal 2. Institutions 3. Organization
4.	The Purpose of Hoax Political News	1. Public Opinion 2. Agenda Setting 3. Public Panic
5.	Targets of Hoax News	1. Central Government 2. Regional Government 3. Political Figures 4. Political Parties
6.	The nature of hoax news messages	1. chain message 2. single message

Source: Setiawan (1989)

This study also found the same thing regarding the tendency of social media to become the primary location for the spread of hoaxes. In this situation, the most influential social media platforms are Facebook and WhatsApp, both popular platforms widely used and accessed by the public. (Sosiawan & Wibowo, 2019).



Figure 1. Example of a hoax

One example of hoax news circulating on Facebook is a chain message for Chinese citizens regarding a demonstration on August 28, 2025. In fact, this claim is false. Reported by *kompas.com*, according to Public Relations of the Jakarta Metropolitan Police, Senior Commissioner Ade Ary Syam Indradi, the contents of the chain message are untrue. He asked the public, especially Chinese citizens, not to worry. The demonstration that took place on Thursday, August 28, 2025, was attended by tens of thousands of workers in front of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Indonesia (DPR RI) Building in Central Jakarta. They expressed disappointment with the DPR's performance, tax increases, and highlighted the allowances of parliament members. ([HOAX] Chain Message for Chinese Citizens Regarding the August 28, 2025 Demonstration).

Perceived Level of Issue Importance

The public tends to respond to political information from the media, whether in the form of support or criticism. However, the rapid flow of information is feared to cause the public to become passive due to boredom with existing democratic procedures, and even apathy can emerge. Simultaneously, the public feels they are more susceptible to spreading hate speech and engaging in harsh online debates due to an inability to distinguish between true and false information. (Fajar Pratama et al., nd).

Apart from that, the public can judge from previous experiences regarding issues or situations that have occurred, so they feel suspicious of the information circulating. (Putra & Patra, 2023). Unconsciously, this is also something that influences a person's perception. This phenomenon is called an infodemic, a term that refers to a massive flow of uncontrolled and unverified information. (IM Putri & Astini, 2024). The research results show that public opinion can easily be changed by a single, well-timed message. This is consistent with Utami's findings, which show that 91.8% of hoaxes circulating in Indonesia are political, and most contain narratives of ethnicity, religion, race, and intergroup relations (SARA) deliberately designed to trigger emotions and divide society. (Utami, 2019). In the context of elections, social media has become a primary platform for disseminating information, as well as a breeding ground for hoaxes that influence voter perceptions.

It was found that hoaxes can control the emotions of potential voters, particularly through provocative narratives that trigger fear, hatred, or distrust of certain candidates. A survey conducted by the Populi Center from January 23 to February 2, 2023, found the General Elections Commission (KPU) ranked fourth. This data could influence voter perceptions of the election. (Delmana, nd).

Table 1. Level of Public Trust in Government Institutions in 2023

No	Name of State Institution	Trust Level
1	Indonesian national army	82.7%
2	President	79.7%
3	General Election Commissions	67.0%

4	General Eradication Commission	66.7%
5	Election Supervisory Body	65.6%

Source: Populi Center (2023)

This hoax also works through a psychological mechanism called affective bias, which makes voters more likely to believe information that aligns with their political preferences. Low critical thinking skills lead people to accept viral information without analyzing it, making public opinion easily swayed by emotionally charged political propaganda. Thus, the spread of hoaxes not only changes perceptions momentarily but also systematically shapes the flow of public opinion, particularly during campaign periods.

Formation of Political Attitudes and Opinions

Social media is characterized by the absence of gatekeepers, allowing anyone to produce and disseminate information without verification. This accelerates the virality of political hoaxes and creates a digital space filled with one-sided information about the dynamics of modern political hoaxes. (Utami, 2019).

In major research, social media algorithms have been found to be a major driver of political polarization, as platforms tend to display content that aligns with user preferences, thus reinforcing echo chambers that lead users to form unified opinions and block access to alternative viewpoints.

The algorithmic architecture of social media prioritizes content that evokes strong emotions, whether anger, anxiety, or hatred, which then rapidly accelerates the spread of political hoaxes. The combination of content virality and users' tendency to share without thinking leads to increasingly polarized content. This polarization has a serious impact on the quality of democracy, as voters no longer make decisions based on objective information but rather on manipulated emotions and perceptions.

Table 2. Number of Hoax News Spreads Ahead of the Election

Period	Number of Hoax News	Social media
January 19, 2022 - October 26, 2023	101 Cases	Facebook, Tiktok, Youtube, Twitter/X, Snack Video
July 17-November 26, 2023	96 Cases	Facebook, Tiktok, Youtube, Twitter/X, Snack Video
November 2023	39 Cases	Facebook, Tiktok, Youtube, Twitter/X, Snack Video

Source: Ministry of Communication and Information, 2023

The data above shows that most political and social fraud is closely linked to social media, including in parliamentary elections. According to information from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo), the social media platform most frequently used to spread election-related hoaxes is Facebook. (Sn & Novarizal, 2024).

Voter Participation Motivation

With hoaxes circulating, the uncertainty felt among the public influences the thinking about whether or not to go to the polling station, which can affect the election results. (Putra & Patra, 2023). During elections, the most common types of hoaxes include those about political parties or their members running for office. Hoaxes are spread by parties seeking to influence public opinion by issuing false information or untrue news about them to gain political advantage. This false information can create tension and doubt within the community. (Putra & Patra, 2023)

Today's younger generation feels compelled to participate in this major democratic event. Algorithms influence the distribution of content, leading to the emergence of FoMO (Focus on Information and Communication) as a basis for alternative choices in decision-making. FoMO, or Fear

of Missing Out, is a psychological phenomenon that causes a tendency to feel anxious or afraid of being left behind, due to missing out on opportunities, experiences, and information deemed important, which can help them feel connected to ongoing social developments. (PKD Putri et al., 2025). People with FoMO are more active on social media and tend to follow trends, making them more susceptible to hoaxes, making them susceptible to manipulation. Their dependence on real-time information leads to a tendency to judge news based on its popularity or virality, which allows hoaxes to spread easily through groups of people with high levels of FoMO, who perceive it as more credible. This psychological pressure can be manipulated, as individuals tend to act impulsively in sharing information without verifying it.

Hitler, one of the most famous figures, can be said to have possessed a very powerful manipulation tactic with propaganda even before the era of social media platforms that exist today. He used persuasion techniques by reading the current political situation and persuading others to behave with powerful communication techniques and launching mass propaganda using media available at that time such as brochures, radio, newspapers, and so on. Hitler also stated that hatred is the most powerful emotion humans have. Therefore, playing with the justification of hatred and anger, as well as a sense of injustice, frames moral duties as if they are a response that the individual who is lulled is one of the people who care. This also occurs today, especially in political times. (Yudiantara, 2013).

There are concerns that participation based on FoMO creates problems due to a lack of strong convictions or convictions, and a reliance on others' views or imitation. Therefore, this can be seen as a mere social trend and a crisis in democracy, rather than a personal awareness of one's rights.

Quality of Political Participation

Young voters generally seek easy-to-understand information before participating. Voters learn from circulating issues but often become emotionally trapped by cognitive processing of information when making decisions. Fact-checking is the process of examining facts and data to correct, verify, and reevaluate them as quality control before presenting them in news stories. (Full Moon, 2024). Followed by good information management can minimize the spread of unverified information either from other people or the individual himself. (Fahrudin & Billah, nd). It is hoped that the implementation of fact-checking will create fair and transparent election activities so that the public does not become apathetic.

Therefore, education influences how people think and become more selective in responding to circulating information and issues for further review. Even when access to the necessary information is limited or perceived as non-transparent, social media can be a solution for sharing opinions and exchanging information, fostering awareness of the importance of political participation and improving politics in the future. (Rohim & Wardana, 2019).

Active participation shapes public opinion and increases public trust in both individuals and institutions. Inclusiveness can be defined as the act of inviting or involving others. Participating in political discussions can teach people how to express opinions, defend arguments, and engage in other activities that can provide new perspectives and increase the desire to participate as voters.

To prevent the impact of hoaxes, a strategy is needed by striving to increase digital literacy, which is the main solution to breaking the cycle of spreading hoaxes. (Fahrudin & Billah, nd). Recommendations relevant to this research include:

Improving Digital Literacy

Digital literacy is expected to become a tool that can instill a sense of vigilance. Digital literacy is achieved by developing critical awareness, such as accurately seeking out the truth of information. (Tombing, 2024). The digital literacy journal proposes the integration of digital literacy curricula from elementary school to college, as well as community-based training for the general public, first-time voters, and the elderly.

Information management model

Information management can be used to identify sources by following procedures ranging from obtaining information, organizing it, storing it, and then disseminating it to others. Properly implemented and credibly validated steps can help minimize the spread of hoaxes.

Strengthening the verification ecosystem

Verify the news by collecting data and analyzing it by comparing the information obtained to verify the information obtained.

Utilization of influencers and social media-based education

To target the younger generation, educational dissemination must utilize popular formats such as short videos, animations, and creative content. This can increase young people's interest in quality political participation by providing a healthy information space. Involving influencers can help shape public opinion and even increase election participation, as they serve as a form of public expression and channel public aspirations. Influencers can also act as catalysts to attract interest, and their content can help dispel existing hoaxes, thus boosting public participation in the election. (Ilham et al., 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

The spread of political hoaxes through social media has a significant influence on the formation of perceptions, attitudes, and voter participation in the context of elections in Indonesia. From the perspective of Agenda Setting Theory, media, particularly social media, have been shown to have a strong ability to determine which issues are considered important by the public. Thus, the intense and repeated presentation of hoaxes can shift the focus of attention and systematically shape public opinion.

Research findings indicate that social media, particularly Facebook and WhatsApp, have become primary platforms for the spread of political hoaxes due to their gatekeeper-less, viral-driven nature and the support of algorithms that reinforce echo chambers. Political hoaxes are generally packaged in provocative and emotional narratives that fuel fear, hatred, and distrust, thus leading to a decline in public trust in democratic institutions and increased political polarization in society.

In addition to influencing perceptions of issue importance and the formation of political opinion, hoaxes also impact the motivation and quality of voter participation. Participation driven by psychological pressures such as Fear of Missing Out (FoMO) tends to be impulsive and ungrounded in mature political understanding, potentially undermining the quality of democracy. However, this research also shows that improving media literacy, political education, and implementing fact-checking can be important instruments in strengthening more rational, critical, and inclusive political participation.

Thus, controlling the spread of political hoaxes and strengthening the public's capacity to sort information are the main prerequisites for maintaining the quality of voter participation and the sustainability of a healthy democracy, especially in the era of social media dominance in the contemporary political process.

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