



POLITICAL APATHY AMONG MOSLEM STUDENTS FROM GENERATION Z IN SOUTHERN SUMATERA, INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how social tolerance, digital competence, religiosity, and social media access influence political apathy among Muslim Generation Z (Gen Z) students in Southern Sumatra—a region experiencing rapid digital transformation and characterized by rich social and cultural diversity. These four variables are considered key determinants of political apathy in this context. The research gains further relevance in light of the 2024 elections, which see heightened involvement from the youth demographic. Data were collected from 528 students across eight purposively selected campuses and analyzed using quantitative methods in R. The results show that digital competence significantly reduces political apathy, indicating that students with stronger digital skills are more likely to participate in political processes. However, social tolerance, religiosity, and social media access did not show a statistically significant impact. These findings highlight the need to enhance digital literacy among young people to encourage greater political engagement. The study recommends integrating digital literacy and civic education into school and university curricula to foster political participation and support pluralism in Indonesia's multicultural society.

Keywords: Civic Education, Digital Competence, Digital Literacy, Political Apathy, Political Participation.

INTRODUCTION

The 2024 Indonesian elections are especially significant as they mark the dominant participation of younger generations—millennials (born 1980–1994) and Generation Z (Gen Z, born 1995–2000). Of the total 204,807,222 registered voters, millennials comprise 33.60% and Gen Z accounts for 22.85%, meaning that 56.45% of the electorate belongs to these two generations (Muhammad, 2023). Gen Z, in particular, is categorized as digital natives—individuals born and raised in a world shaped by digital technology (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). According to the IDN Research Institute (2023), Gen Z utilizes the internet extensively in daily life, from communication and entertainment to learning and work. However, this high level of digital engagement is not matched by digital competence, especially in areas such as internet ethics and data security awareness. Without sufficient digital competence, the risks of misinformation, manipulation, and political disengagement become pronounced (Anderson & Tracey, 2016; Brignall & Van Valey, 2005; Leung & Lee, 2016; Romano et al., 2013).

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z did not directly experience the socio-political upheaval of the 1998 Reform era in Indonesia (Aspinall & Berger, 2010; Booth, 1999; Shiraishi, 1999; Sundararaman, 2008; Törnquist, 2010). Nevertheless, they express aspirational views for Indonesia's future: a country grounded in the rule of law, free of corruption (65.7%), offering quality public services (18.7%), embracing diversity (8.7%), and protecting civil rights and freedoms (7%) (IDN Research Institute, 2023). Gen Z also favors leaders who are anti-corruption (71%), charismatic (51.3%), populist (39%), committed to democracy and human rights (27%), and religious (24.3%). However, there is a clear disconnect between these idealistic preferences and actual political behavior. For example, despite advocating for democratic integrity, many Gen Z respondents favored Prabowo Subianto (30.7%)—a controversial figure linked to the abduction of pro-democracy activists during the Reform era (Kingsbury, 2003)—over candidates like Anies Baswedan (8.3%) and Ganjar Pranowo (19.3%).

Furthermore, while Gen Z demonstrates concern over key national issues such as employment (35%), welfare (27.7%), and corruption eradication (21.3%), this concern rarely translates into political engagement. Only 24.7% of Gen Z report expressing their views through social media or direct communication with officials, and a mere 8.3% actively participate in political activities, while the majority (69%) remain politically apathetic (IDN Research Institute, 2023). This creates a paradox: Gen Z aspires to see democratic reform and social justice, yet largely abstains from the political processes that enable those goals.

This inconsistency points to deeper issues. First, while Gen Z desires an anti-corrupt, law-based Indonesia, their prioritization of economic issues like employment and welfare suggests a misalignment between ideals and voting behavior. Second, their preference for leaders with questionable democratic records contradicts their stated values. Third, despite being digital natives, their political apathy is pronounced—an issue that remains unexplored by the IDN Research Institute (2023).

Political apathy among Gen Z is not unique to Indonesia. Similar patterns are observed in Western Europe (Weiss, 2020), Zimbabwe (Musarurwa, 2018), and Tunisia (Henn & Foard, 2013). Some scholars argue that youth are not apathetic per se, but rather alienated from the political system (Sloam, 2007; Fisher, 2012; Henn et al., 2016; Kwan, 2021; Mhlomi & Osunkunle, 2017; Xenos & Bennett, 2007). Previous research categorizes the determinants of youth political apathy into three levels: individual, institutional, and societal. At the individual level, factors include low political interest, negative perceptions of politics (Ting & Wan Ahmad, 2021), exclusion from the political system (Ishola, 2021), lack of political knowledge, education, and socioeconomic disparities (Gaby, 2016; Eichhorn, 2018; Sloam, 2014a). Institutional factors involve misaligned campaigns, flawed electoral systems, and bureaucratic barriers (Cammaerts et al., 2013; Snelling, 2016). Societal factors encompass political culture, civic education, media influence, and digital communication technologies (Sloam, 2013, 2014b, 2016; Print, 2010; Fisher, 2012).

Against this backdrop, there remains a critical gap: the role of digital competence, social tolerance, religiosity, and social media access in shaping political apathy among Indonesian Gen Z Muslims has yet to be empirically examined. This research addresses that gap by exploring how these variables influence political disengagement in a rapidly digitizing and socially diverse context.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to investigate the determinant factors of political apathy—specifically social tolerance, digital competence, religiosity, and social media access—among Muslim Gen Z students in Indonesia. While existing studies have explored various influences on political disengagement, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no previous research has examined the combined contribution of digital competence and social tolerance to political apathy in this demographic group. In the Indonesian context, these factors are particularly relevant: (a) the increasing intensity of information and communication technology in electoral democracy, driven by the rapid growth of internet users—especially

among the youth; and (b) the significance of social tolerance in a nation characterized by deep cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Participation and political apathy

Political participation refers to the active involvement of citizens in political processes, such as elections or party activities (Uhlener, 2015). Conversely, political apathy is an attitude of indifference towards politics. In Indonesia, apathy is influenced by various factors, including low motivation, a negative image of politics, and the influence of the social environment (Alfaruqy & Padmonurcahyo, 2023; Marsuki et al., 2022; Suwana, 2019). Social factors such as ethnicity, religion, and gender also play a role (Widhyharto, Rahmawati, & Abheseka, 2021), and repressive state policies post-New Order have also contributed to increasing political apathy (Budiman et al., 2012; Sastramidjaja, 2019). In the digital world, political apathy can be caused by the fear of experiencing isolation, alienation, or social estrangement due to differing opinions from others or the majority opinion (Wahyutama, 2019).

Political participation of Gen Z

Generation Z (Gen Z), born between 1995 and 2010, is often referred to as the Net Generation or iGeneration. This cohort has grown up immersed in digital technology, shaping not only how they communicate and learn, but also how they engage with politics. Gen Z lives in two interconnected worlds—virtual and physical (Seemiller & Grace, 2016). Unlike previous generations, their political participation is heavily mediated by technology. With the rise of information and communication technologies, Gen Z can now take part in digital political activities such as starting online petitions, sharing political content on social media, and joining virtual campaigns (Battocchio et al., 2023; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019; Seyfi et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, Gen Z demonstrates a strong interest in politics, particularly through social media. They tend to approach political choices rationally and are generally critical of vote-buying practices (Jonathan & Syailendra, 2014; Sari et al., 2022). However, their political views are also shaped by prevailing gender stereotypes (Prihatini, 2018). At the same time, widespread corruption scandals have contributed to their skepticism toward political parties (Robin et al., 2022; Saud et al., 2020).

While digital platforms enable Gen Z to express political opinions and engage in democratic discourse, their level of political involvement is not driven solely by technology. Other influential factors include the quality of civic

education they receive and the social environment in which they are embedded (Saud et al., 2020). Social media, for Gen Z, is more than just a communication tool—it has become a space for political expression, activism, and the practice of digital democracy (Saud et al., 2023). At the same time, it also reinforces traditional forms of political participation, bridging the gap between online engagement and offline political action (Warren et al., 2016).

Social tolerance and political apathy

Tolerance reflects an individual's capacity to accept, endure, or manage differences and challenges they encounter in social life (Höffe, 2015). In our increasingly diverse societies, tolerance is widely recognized as a moral virtue essential for maintaining peace and coexistence (Habermas, 2004; Newman, 1978). Historically, the concept of tolerance emerged in 16th- and 17th-century Europe, where it was codified into positive law by political authorities to ensure equitable treatment of minority religious groups (Habermas, 2004). Today, tolerance is regarded as a universal value that spans cultural, social, and political dimensions (UNESCO, 1995). In Indonesia, the principles of tolerance are enshrined in both legal frameworks and cultural traditions (Akbar, 2022; Fitria & Tanggok, 2020; Ishak & Mikea Manitra, 2022). Indigenous practices such as “one stove three stones” in Papua (Rahman, 2022) and the kalosara tradition in South Konawe, Southeast Sulawesi (Awal et al., 2023), exemplify how local wisdom promotes social harmony through tolerant behavior.

In democratic societies, tolerance plays a key role in enabling individuals to engage constructively, even when their views differ. This willingness to coexist is shaped by personal values, psychological traits, and how people perceive others (Sullivan & Transue, 1999). Empirical studies have consistently shown that politically active individuals tend to be more tolerant (Mussen & Wyszynski, 2016; Weber, 2019), while those with lower levels of tolerance are more likely to disengage from political life and exhibit apathy (Grecu, 2020). Based on this understanding and supported by previous research, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a significant negative relationship between social tolerance and political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z.

Digital competence and political apathy

Digital competence encompasses a broad set of abilities, generally understood to include technical skills (such as using devices and software), evaluative skills (such as assessing information quality), and participatory skills (such as engaging in online communities and discussions) (Bennett et al., 2011; Ilomäki et al., 2014). In today's interconnected world, these competencies are essential not only for navigating the digital landscape but

also for participating meaningfully in political life online. Digital competence serves as a foundational element for digital political participation—activities like sharing political content, signing petitions, or joining virtual campaigns (Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013).

A growing body of research supports the idea that individuals with higher digital competence are more likely to engage in political processes and less likely to withdraw or remain indifferent (De Marco et al., 2014; Hoff, 2006; Joo et al., 2023; Kahne & Bowyer, 2019; Ohme, 2018; Zhu et al., 2019). Simply put, when people are digitally skilled, they are better equipped to access, understand, and act on political information, reducing the likelihood of apathy. Based on this understanding, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Digital competence has a significant negative effect on political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z in Southern Sumatra.

Religiosity and political apathy

Religiosity defined as the degree to which an individual adheres to and practices their religious beliefs has a nuanced and context-dependent influence on political participation. Studies have shown that this relationship can vary widely depending on cultural and societal settings (Wald et al., 2005). In some contexts, religiosity enhances political engagement, often motivated by a sense of transcendental accountability the belief that one's actions, including political ones, are accountable to a higher spiritual authority (Driskell et al., 2008; Jang et al., 2023).

However, other research reveals a more complex dynamic. In certain cases, religiosity may either encourage or hinder political participation, depending on the type of participation being considered and the specific religious denomination involved (Glazier, 2023; Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2017). In Indonesia, religiosity has been found to shape voter behavior and political preferences (Reza et al., 2023), and religious themes frequently emerge in political campaigns and contests (Ramadhan & Masykuri, 2018). Drawing on these insights, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: There is a significant negative effect between the level of religiosity and political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z in Southern Sumatra.

Social media access and political apathy

Social media plays a central role in the daily lives of Generation Z, including in shaping their political engagement. Several studies, such as Boulianne (2015), suggest that social media can serve as a catalyst for political participation by offering platforms for discussion, mobilization, and access to political content. However, the impact is not always positive. Research by

Smith (2022) and Effing et al. (2011) highlights potential downsides, especially when excessive social media use affects mental health or fails to translate into actual voting behavior.

Moreover, when social media is primarily used for entertainment, its connection to political participation weakens—and in some cases, it can even dampen interest in political activities (Matthes, 2022; Theocharis & Quintelier, 2014). In the Indonesian context, studies by Putra et al. (2024) and Saud et al. (2020) recognize social media as a key source of political information for young users. Still, concerns remain about the prevalence of misinformation and hoaxes (Masduki, 2021), which can affect trust and engagement. In light of these findings, the researcher proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: The use of social media has a negative relationship with political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z in Southern Sumatra.

Socio-demographic attribute and political apathy

Socio-demographic factors, such as household income level and gender, are often considered significant in shaping political apathy. Higher income levels typically offer better access to education and information, which in turn can foster greater political participation and reduce feelings of apathy (Bartle et al., 2017; Schafer et al., 2021). In contrast, individuals from low-income families may feel disconnected from the political system, exacerbating political apathy, especially in the face of economic inequality (Solt, 2008). Gender, too, plays a role in political engagement. Studies suggest that women tend to exhibit higher levels of political apathy, which can be attributed to factors such as gender stereotypes, patriarchal biases, emotional stability, and differences in political interest, knowledge, and access to socio-economic resources (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2020; Koo, 2019; Kostelka et al., 2018; Prihatini, 2018; Verba et al., 1997; Wang, 2014; White et al., 2023). However, recent studies indicate that younger generations, particularly Gen Z, are starting to challenge these traditional gender biases, as observed in both the United States (McDonald & Deckman, 2021) and Indonesia (Halimatusa'diyah & Prihatini, 2021). Building on these insights, the researcher proposes two hypotheses:

(H5) There is a significant negative effect between household income level and political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z in Southern Sumatra.

(H6) Gender has a significant negative effect on political apathy among Muslim students from Gen Z in Southern Sumatra.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This inferential quantitative study will be conducted in the Southern Sumatra region, which includes five provinces on the Sumatra Island: South Sumatra, Jambi, Bengkulu, Lampung, and Bangka Belitung. The region is home to 174 higher education institutions, comprising 48 universities, 82 colleges, 25 institutes, 41 academies, 12 polytechnics, and 2 community academies. For this study, the researcher has purposively selected eight institutions: Sriwijaya University and Raden Fatah State Islamic University in South Sumatra; STISIPOL Chandradimuka and Baturaja University in the same province; Bengkulu University in Bengkulu; Jambi University in Jambi; Lampung University in Lampung; and Institute Pahlawan 12 in Bangka Belitung. These institutions represent a mix of public and private entities. The focus is on the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences in each selected university, as it directly relates to the themes of political participation, tolerance, and digital competence. Within these faculties, departments are randomly selected, and respondents are chosen from students who are part of Gen Z (born between 1995 and 2010) and identify as Muslim, a demographic of particular significance due to the prominence of Islamic identities in Indonesian political institutions. Data will be collected via a Google Form questionnaire. As of 2024, the total student population in the selected departments is 2,313. Using the sample size table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (2016), the sample size is determined to be 331 individuals. The dependent variable in this study is political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students. Independent variables include social tolerance and digital competence, while socio-demographic factors such as gender, household income, religiosity, and media usage patterns will be treated as control variables in the statistical analysis. The operational definitions of these variables are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 Research variable

Research variable	Conceptual definition	Operasional definition
<i>Dependent variable</i>		
Political apathy /Y	Tendency of an individual to be uninterested in the political world.	Measured using a political participation instrument developed by Kim and Hoewe (2020).
<i>Independent variable</i>		
Social tolerance /X ₁	Tolerance means an individual's competence to accept, endure, or be	Measured using a social tolerance measurement

Research variable	Conceptual definition	Operasional definition
	patient through various negative experiences.	instrument developed by Hjerm et al. (2019).
Digital competence/ X_2	Digital competence refers to the skills, knowledge, and abilities required to interact in a digital environment.	Measured using a digital competence measurement instrument developed by Tzafilkou et al. (2022).
Household income/ X_3	Total income of all working household members.	"What is the income earned by each household member in the last month?"
Sex/ X_4	Biological sex of the respondent	1 = Male dan 0 = Female
Religiosity/ X_5	The respondent's adherence to the religious rituals they believe in.	Measured using a religiosity scale developed by Mahudin et al. (2016)
Social media access/ X_6	Ownership and use of social media in daily life.	Measured using an instrument developed by (Jenkins-Guarnieri et al., 2013).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Respondent's characteristics

This study surveyed 528 respondents, selected via simple random sampling from universities across four Indonesian provinces. Respondents were drawn from Sriwijaya University, Raden Fatah State Islamic University, Baturaja University, and STISIPOL Chandradimuka in South Sumatra; the University of Bengkulu's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences; the University of Jambi's Faculty of Law; the University of Lampung's Faculty of Social and Political Sciences; and Institute Pahlawan 12 in Bangka Belitung. South Sumatra accounted for 65% of the sample, followed by Lampung (15.64%), Bengkulu (6.52%), Bangka Belitung (4.66%), and Jambi (3.54%). This distribution highlights the region's strong participation in social and political studies, providing a broad perspective on Indonesia's student political dynamics.

Instrument reliability test

The reliability test results, assessed using Cronbach's alpha, demonstrate high reliability for all study variables, ensuring measurement consistency. For

the dependent variable, political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students, all dimensions exceed the 0.70 threshold, with traditional political participation and online information seeking scoring exceptionally high at 0.90. Interpersonal political talk and social media engagement score 0.88, while voting behavior shows a reliable 0.85. These results confirm the consistency of the scales measuring political apathy.

Regarding independent variables, social tolerance, including accepting, respecting, and appreciating diversity, shows strong reliability, with a slightly lower score of 0.78 for appreciating diversity, indicating acceptable consistency. Digital competence, encompassing skills in searching, accessing, and modifying digital information, yields high alphas ranging from 0.85 to 0.95, reflecting robust measurement tools.

Reliability scores for religiosity ($\alpha = 0.95$) and social media usage ($\alpha = 0.88$) also demonstrate internal consistency, ensuring accurate reflection of religious behaviors and social media patterns. These high reliability scores provide a solid foundation for the study's conclusions and recommendations, supporting interventions aimed at reducing political apathy and enhancing engagement among Muslim Gen Z students.

Tabel 2 Summary of reliability test

Variable	Dimension	Alpha score	Interpretation
Political apathy	Traditional political participation	0.90	Reliable
	Interpersonal political talk	0.88	Reliable
	Voting behavior	0.85	Reliable
	Social media engagement	0.88	Reliable
	Online information seeking	0.90	Reliable
Social tolerance	Accepting diversity	0.89	Reliable
	Respecting diversity	0.84	Reliable
	Appreciating diversity	0.78	Reliable
Digital competence	Search, find, access	0.88	Reliable
	Develop, apply, modify	0.91	Reliable
	Communicate, collaborate, share	0.85	Reliable
	Store, manage, delete	0.95	Reliable
	Evaluate	0.93	Reliable
	Protect	0.88	Reliable
Religiosity		0.95	Reliable

Social media access	0.88	Reliable
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Instrument validity test

The validity tests, using various fit indices, confirm that all study variables exhibit valid outcomes, reflecting good to excellent model fit. The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) for the dependent variable, political apathy, are both 0.90, suggesting an adequate model fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) at 0.059 and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) at 0.090 are within acceptable ranges, indicating model validity.

Social tolerance exceeds expectations, with CFI and TLI values of 0.995 and 0.985, respectively, indicating an excellent fit. The RMSEA and SRMR values (0.053 and 0.017) further confirm strong validity. Digital competence also shows strong validity with a CFI of 0.953 and TLI of 0.935, while the RMSEA (0.075) remains below the threshold, and the SRMR (0.060) is within an acceptable range.

Religiosity and social media usage exhibit exemplary fit indices, with CFI values near 0.993 and 0.992, and TLI values of 0.988 and 0.983, signaling an excellent fit. The RMSEA and SRMR values support the validity of these constructs.

Overall, the strong fit indices across all variables provide evidence that the models accurately represent the underlying phenomena of political apathy and its influencing factors. These findings highlight the importance of considering social tolerance, digital competence, religiosity, and social media engagement when analyzing political participation among Gen Z, offering insights for targeted strategies to reduce apathy and enhance engagement.

Table 3 Summary of validity test

Variable	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	Interpretation
Political apathy	0.90	0.90	0.059	0.090	Valid
Social tolerance	0.995	0.985	0.053	0.017	Valid
Digital competence	0.953	0.935	0.075	0.060	Valid
Religiosity	0.993	0.988	0.049	0.017	Valid
Social media access	0.992	0.983	0.045	0.024	Valid

Univariate analysis

Univariate analysis reveals that political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students shows a normal distribution, with mean and median values of 2.55 and a low standard deviation (0.303), indicating minimal variation. Skewness

(-0.061) and kurtosis (-0.155) values near zero confirm symmetry. Social tolerance has a mean of 4.06, with negative skewness (-2.04) and high kurtosis (5.87), indicating most respondents exhibit high tolerance, but a few have very low tolerance. Digital competence, with a mean of 3.8 and skewness (-1.54), follows a similar trend, suggesting some respondents have low digital skills.

Religiosity has a mean of 4.3, with skewness (-2.08) and kurtosis (7.17), indicating a high level of religiosity for most, but some have low scores. Social media use shows a mean of 4.04 and negative skewness (-0.84), suggesting slightly more respondents engage with social media but with low variation (SD = 0.94). Household income averages 2875, with positive skewness (1.81) and high kurtosis (4.85), indicating some respondents earn significantly more than the average. The sample consists of 63.1% females and 36.9% males, with 528 respondents in total.

Table 4 Descriptive statistics

Variable	mean	sd	media	min	max	range	skew	kurtosi
	n		n					s
Political apathy	2.55	0.303	2.55	1.72	3.42	1.7	-0.061	-0.155
Social tolerance	4.06	0.75	4.12	1	5	4	-2.04	5.87
Digital competence	3.8	0.71	3.9	1	5	4	-1.54	4.57
Religiosity	4.3	0.7	4.3	1	5	4	-2.08	7.17
Social media access	4.04	0.94	4.1	1	6	5	-0.84	1.16
Household income	2875	1963	2500	500	15000	14500	1.81	4.85
Sex	Female= 63.1 percent, Male = 36.9 percent							
	n = 528							

Bivariate analysis

Based on the correlation analysis, several independent variables show significant relationships with political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z and are included in the multivariate analysis. Social tolerance ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$), digital competence ($r = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$), gender ($r = -0.22$, $p < 0.05$), religiosity ($r = -0.18$, $p < 0.05$), and social media use ($r = -0.14$, $p < 0.05$) all have significant negative correlations with political apathy, indicating that as the levels of these variables increase, the level of political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z tends to decrease. However, household income

($r = 0.75$, $p > 0.05$) does not show a significant relationship with political apathy and is therefore not included in the multivariate analysis.

Table 5 Summary of bivariate analysis

No.	Independent variable	Dependent variable	r	p	Decision
1.	Social tolerance	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	-0.22	<0.05	Included in multivariate analysis
2.	Digital competence	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	-0.29	<0.05	Included in multivariate analysis
3.	Household income	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	0.75	>0.05	Not included in multivariate analysis
4.	Sex	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	-0.22	<0.05	Included in multivariate analysis
5.	Religiosity	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	-0.18	<0.05	Included in multivariate analysis
6.	Social media access	Political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z	-0.14	<0.05	Included in multivariate analysis

Multivariate analysis

Figure 1 shows that the multiple regression analysis reveals a statistically significant model ($F = 10.89$, $p = 5.465e-10$), indicating that the predictors can predict political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students. However, the Adjusted

R-squared value of 0.08445 suggests the model explains only 8.4% of the variation in political apathy, implying other factors may contribute. Among the predictors, only digital competence significantly affects political apathy, with each unit increase correlating with a 0.236 decrease in apathy ($p = 5.81e-05$). Gender shows a near-significant effect ($p = 0.0527$), with a 0.124 decrease in apathy. Social tolerance, religiosity, and social media access have no significant impact ($p = 0.2362$, $p = 0.7353$, and $p = 0.5036$, respectively). While digital competence is the most influential factor, the low R-squared indicates the model requires further refinement with additional relevant variables.

Table 6 Regression results

Independent variable	Dependent variable: political apathy among Moslem student from Gen Z
Social tolerance	0.027 (0.022)
Digital competence	0.098*** (0.024)
Sex	0.051 (0.026)
Religiosity	0.002 (0.002)
Social media access	0.010 (0.015)
Constant	1.920*** (0.089)
Observations	528
R ²	0.108
Adjusted R ²	0.099
Residual Std. Error	0.287 (df = 522)
F Statistic	12.600*** (df = 5; 522)

Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Model diagnoses

The analysis of the multiple regression model suggests that it generally meets the classical assumptions. The linearity assumption is largely satisfied, though there are slight deviations at the extremes of the data. The normality assumption is also met, with some minor deviations at the distribution tails. There is a slight indication of heteroscedasticity, where residual variability is not entirely constant across predicted values. Additionally, some observations are potential outliers that may affect the model. The Breusch-Pagan test confirms the presence of heteroscedasticity. However, the multicollinearity test shows no significant issues with correlations among the independent variables. Robustness tests using bootstrapping support the initial findings, confirming the model's consistency and robustness. While there are minor

deviations from the classical assumptions, overall, the regression model is effective in explaining the relationships between the variables.

DISCUSSION

In this study, conducted across eight campuses in Southern Sumatra (South Sumatra, Jambi, Bengkulu, Bangka Belitung, and Lampung provinces), Indonesia, we explored the relationships between social tolerance, digital competence, social media use, and political apathy among Gen Z students. The bivariate analysis revealed that higher levels of social tolerance and digital competence correlated with lower political apathy, but this pattern did not hold in the multivariate analysis, where only digital competence was found to significantly reduce political apathy.

In the bivariate analysis, social tolerance had a negative relationship with political apathy, but this effect was not significant in the multivariate model. As a result, we rejected the first hypothesis (H1), which posited a significant negative effect of social tolerance on political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students. This finding contrasts with Grecu's (2020) study, which showed that low tolerance contributes to low public participation and fosters political apathy. Possible explanations for this discrepancy include the complexity of social interactions in a diverse society, the moderating effects of digital competence and social media use, and perceptions of political effectiveness. In Southern Sumatra, local political dynamics dominated by traditional politics and patronage may lead young people to feel that their participation has little impact, despite supporting tolerance and inclusivity.

Digital competence, however, consistently showed a significant negative effect on political apathy in both bivariate and multivariate analyses, supporting the second hypothesis (H2). This aligns with previous research (De Marco et al., 2014; Hoff, 2006; Joo et al., 2023; Kahne & Bowyer, 2019; Ohme, 2018; Zhu et al., 2019), which highlighted the positive relationship between digital competence and political participation. Several factors explain why increased digital competence reduces political apathy. First, digital skills allow individuals to access, understand, and use political information, enhancing political awareness and encouraging participation. Second, digital competence lowers the barriers to engagement in online political campaigns, petitions, and voting. Third, digital platforms offer a space for marginalized voices, motivating users to participate in real-world political activities. Finally, digital competence facilitates the formation of networks for idea exchange and political engagement. Thus, improving digital skills provides new opportunities for political involvement, making it a crucial factor in reducing political apathy among Gen Z.

The rejection of the third hypothesis (H3), which suggested a relationship between religiosity and political apathy, reveals complexities within these two variables. Previous studies (Driskell et al., 2008; Glazier, 2023; Jang et al., 2023; McDaniel & Ellison, 2008; Omelicheva & Ahmed, 2017; Reza et al., 2023) found religiosity significantly influenced political participation. In contrast, this study suggests that other factors, such as digital competence and social media use, may overshadow religiosity's impact on political apathy. Additionally, the specific religious dynamics in Southern Sumatra may shape how religiosity is practiced and understood, varying from introspective practices that limit engagement to external practices that foster advocacy. These findings indicate that religiosity's impact on political apathy may differ based on its form and the social and cultural context.

Social media use, which initially showed a significant negative relationship with political apathy in the bivariate analysis, became insignificant in the multivariate analysis. This led to the rejection of the fourth hypothesis (H4), which posited that social media use negatively impacts political apathy. This result contradicts previous studies (Boulianne, 2015; Effing et al., 2011; Matthes, 2022; Putra et al., 2024; Smith, 2022; Smith et al., 2019; Theocharis & Quintelier, 2014). Several factors might explain this change: first, other variables, such as digital competence and demographic factors, may have had a stronger influence in the multivariate model. Second, the quality of interactions on social media, which are often superficial and passive, may not promote active political engagement. Lastly, in Southern Sumatra, the social and cultural context may shape how social media is used for political discussions, and factors like information overload and political polarization may contribute to cynicism and increased apathy.

Only the gender variable showed a significant contribution to political apathy in the bivariate analysis, while household income did not show a significant impact on social tolerance. This led to the rejection of the fifth (H5) and sixth (H6) hypotheses, which suggested that income and gender negatively affect political apathy among Muslim Gen Z students. These findings contradict previous research (Bartle et al., 2017; Dassonneville & Kostelka, 2020; Koo, 2019; Prihatini, 2018; Schafer et al., 2021; White et al., 2023), suggesting that gender and income may not have a uniform influence across different contexts. In some contexts, women may face more barriers to political participation, which could increase political apathy. However, these gender differences can vary depending on local cultural and socioeconomic contexts. Similarly, household income may not directly influence social tolerance as expected. Social tolerance might be more influenced by education, personal experiences, and cultural values than by income. In some cases, higher income could correlate with more homogeneous environments, reducing opportunities to engage with diverse groups.

These findings emphasize the need to consider local social, cultural, and political contexts when evaluating the impact of sociodemographic variables on political apathy and social tolerance. Future research should explore how these factors interact in different settings and examine other potential moderators or mediators in shaping political engagement and apathy.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, AND SUGGESTION

This study aims to identify the factors influencing political apathy among Gen Z in Southern Sumatra, focusing particularly on social tolerance and digital competence. The findings reveal that: (a) digital competence is the most significant factor in reducing political apathy, as Gen Z members with strong digital skills are more actively engaged in both real and virtual political spheres; (b) while social tolerance shows a negative correlation with political apathy in the bivariate analysis, its impact is not significant in the multivariate analysis when other variables are considered. Thus, although social tolerance remains important, its effect on political apathy is less substantial than that of digital competence. Other variables, such as religiosity, social media use, household income, and gender, do not significantly contribute to political apathy in the multivariate analysis.

These findings underscore the need to enhance digital literacy among the youth, especially Gen Z. Strengthening digital competence will help them access political information more easily, engage in online discussions, and participate in political campaigns. Additionally, education should focus not only on academic knowledge but also on instilling values such as tolerance, diversity, and political participation. Governments and other stakeholders must foster environments that encourage youth political involvement, including improving access to political information and providing facilities for organizing. Initiatives to strengthen civic education, emphasizing the importance of political participation and respect for pluralism, should be prioritized, particularly in Indonesia's multicultural context. Integrating training programs on digital literacy and political awareness into educational curricula, especially in schools and universities, could be a critical step forward.

This study has several limitations, including its geographic focus on only eight campuses in Southern Sumatra and the reliance on online questionnaires, which may not fully capture the nuances of political behavior. These limitations may affect the generalizability of the findings to the broader Gen Z population in Indonesia. Future research should expand geographically and use more diverse data collection methods, such as direct interviews or focus groups, to gain a more accurate and in-depth

understanding of political behavior and attitudes among Gen Z. Moreover, exploring other factors that influence political apathy, particularly the role of social media and online interactions, is crucial. As digital platforms increasingly shape political views, understanding their impact on political engagement can provide valuable insights into strategies to enhance youth participation. Researchers should also investigate how social media narratives and the information shared on these platforms influence political attitudes, either fostering activism or contributing to apathy.

Furthermore, understanding the influence of local cultural values on political attitudes and behavior is essential. In a culturally diverse country like Indonesia, local norms often shape political participation, either supporting or hindering engagement. By considering local cultural influences, interventions can be designed to respect and leverage these values, helping to reduce political apathy. Expanding research to include broader geographic and methodological perspectives will enhance the validity and reliability of the findings, offering more comprehensive insights into political apathy among Gen Z. These insights are not only valuable to academic literature but also critical for policymakers and practitioners seeking to improve political engagement among the youth.

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Author contribution

Alamsyah contributed to the study design and initial manuscript drafting. *Dyah Hapsari Ekonugraheni* was responsible for data analysis and result interpretation. *Retna Mahriani* provided conceptual input and conducted a critical review of the manuscript. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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