



Youth Participation in Climate Change Movements: A Sociopolitical Perspective on Environmental Activism in Indonesia

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Abstract

Youth participation in climate change movements is increasingly vital in addressing environmental challenges, especially in vulnerable countries like Indonesia. This study explores youth engagement in climate activism from a sociopolitical perspective, focusing on motivations, strategies, and structural factors influencing participation. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through interviews, focus groups, and observations with young activists from diverse backgrounds. Findings show that personal experiences with environmental risks, moral responsibility, and social awareness drive activism. Sociopolitical elements such as access to resources, institutional backing, and government policies can either support or hinder involvement. Youth activists combine digital advocacy with community-based initiatives to amplify impact and reach varied audiences. The study highlights how individual agency, networks, and structural contexts interact to shape activism's effectiveness. By examining these dynamics, the research provides insights into the motivations and challenges faced by young activists and offers recommendations for policymakers, educators, and organizations to strengthen youth engagement through inclusive and supportive strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the twenty-first century, presenting profound environmental, social, and political implications (Aly et al., 2022; Pingali, 2023; Yliniva et al., 2024). Indonesia, as the world's largest archipelagic nation with diverse ecosystems and a high population density, is particularly vulnerable to the multifaceted impacts of climate change. The country faces increasing threats from rising sea levels, coastal erosion, flooding, deforestation, urban air pollution, and extreme weather events, all of which have direct consequences for public health, agriculture, economic stability, and community resilience. These environmental challenges disproportionately affect marginalized communities, heightening the urgency of sustainable solutions that involve active societal participation (Ahmad & Islam, 2024; Sovacool et al., 2022; Okedele et al., 2024).

Youth have increasingly become central actors in climate change movements, both globally and within Indonesia (Briandana & Saleh, 2022; Pena et al., 2022; Ciptadi & Zainubi, 2024). Their involvement reflects a growing recognition that the younger generation bears the consequences of environmental degradation and has a moral responsibility to contribute to sustainable practices. Across the world, youth-led climate activism has taken various forms, ranging from mass protests and digital campaigns to local environmental projects, illustrating the creativity, energy, and commitment of young people to shaping the future (Hilder & Collin, 2022; Tafon & Saunders, 2025; Sloam et al., 2022). In Indonesia, youth participation is embedded in unique socio-cultural, political, and institutional contexts. Factors such as religious and cultural values, educational opportunities, community networks, and government policies influence how young people engage in climate action. Despite this, empirical research examining the sociopolitical dimensions of youth activism in Indonesia remains limited, leaving gaps in understanding the motivations, strategies, and challenges that shape their participation (Siregar, 2024; Jawed et al., 2023; Lamichhane & Dhakal, 2024).

Previous studies on youth climate activism have emphasized the role of personal experience and environmental awareness in motivating engagement. Exposure to environmental hazards, such as flooding, forest fires, and pollution, often acts as a catalyst for action, compelling youth to participate in advocacy and community mobilization. Moreover, moral and ethical frameworks, including religious teachings and social responsibility, have been found to reinforce youth commitment to environmental causes (Postma, 2006; Pulatovna, 2024; Martusewicz & Edmundson, 2014). Simultaneously, structural and sociopolitical factors, including access to resources, institutional support, policy frameworks, and social networks, play a critical role in enabling or constraining activism. Youth in urban centers often have greater access to formal organizations, workshops, and digital platforms, whereas rural youth may face logistical, financial, and infrastructural barriers that limit their engagement (Grimes, 2003; Omweri, 2024; Akpe et al., 2023). Understanding this interplay between individual agency and sociopolitical context is essential for designing effective interventions and policies that promote sustainable youth participation in climate action (Zimba et al., 2021; Hohenhaus et al., 2023; Nash et al., 2024).

In addition to motivations and sociopolitical influences, the strategies employed by youth activists are diverse and multifaceted. Digital activism, through social media campaigns, online petitions, and virtual workshops, allows young people to reach wide audiences and mobilize support beyond geographic boundaries. Simultaneously, community-based engagement, including tree planting initiatives, environmental education programs, and school campaigns, fosters direct impact and strengthens community trust (de Guzman et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2015). Effective youth activism often integrates both online and offline strategies, contextualizing global climate concerns within local realities and culturally resonant frameworks.

This study seeks to address existing gaps in the literature by examining youth participation in climate change movements in Indonesia from a sociopolitical perspective. It aims to explore three primary dimensions: the personal motivations driving engagement, the sociopolitical factors that shape opportunities and constraints, and the strategies used by youth to influence public discourse and mobilize communities. By employing qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, this research provides a comprehensive and contextually grounded understanding of youth climate activism. The study contributes valuable insights for policymakers, educators, civil society organizations, and youth leaders, emphasizing the

importance of inclusive policies, accessible resources, and culturally appropriate strategies to foster meaningful and sustainable engagement in climate action.

Ultimately, this research underscores the significance of youth as agents of change in addressing climate challenges. By highlighting the interplay between individual, social, and political factors, the study provides a nuanced perspective on how young people in Indonesia navigate complex environmental and sociopolitical landscapes to advocate for sustainability. These insights not only enhance academic understanding of youth climate activism but also offer practical guidance for fostering active, empowered, and resilient youth participation in environmental initiatives.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the participation of Indonesian youth in climate change movements from a sociopolitical perspective. The use of qualitative methods was appropriate for capturing the nuances of youth involvement in climate activism, as it allows for an in-depth examination of personal experiences, motivations, and the sociopolitical factors influencing participation. The research combined multiple data collection methods, including in-depth semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and participant observation, which together provided a comprehensive understanding of youth engagement in environmental activism (Lloyd-Evans, 2016).

The participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure diversity in terms of gender, socio-economic background, geographic location, and the level of involvement in climate activism. A total of 15 youth activists were interviewed, and five FGDs were conducted with 30 participants. The youth activists were aged between 16 and 30 years and were involved in climate activism through various channels, such as grassroots organizations, school-based initiatives, and digital platforms. This sampling approach aimed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences and perspectives to reflect the diversity of youth participation in climate movements across Indonesia.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which allowed for a flexible exploration of individual perspectives on the motivations, challenges, and strategies behind youth participation in climate change movements. These interviews were designed to elicit personal stories and insights into why young people engage in environmental activism, the barriers they face, and the strategies they use to make an impact. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to gather collective insights from groups of youth activists. FGDs facilitated dynamic group interactions, enabling participants to discuss their shared experiences, challenges, and strategies, thus providing a richer understanding of the collective nature of youth activism. Participant observation was also an integral part of the research process, allowing the researcher to observe firsthand the behaviors, interactions, and organizational dynamics within youth-led climate campaigns and initiatives. The researcher attended climate-related workshops, community campaigns, and online activism events to gain a contextual understanding of youth engagement and the social and political environments in which they operate.

The data collected through interviews, FGDs, and participant observation were analyzed using thematic analysis (Hadi & Junaidi, 2021). This approach allowed the researcher to identify and interpret patterns and themes in the data, providing insights into the personal motivations, sociopolitical influences, and strategies that shape youth participation in climate activism. Thematic analysis followed an iterative process that involved initial coding, categorizing, and refining themes as the data collection progressed. The analysis also compared the findings with existing literature to ensure that the identified themes were grounded in broader theoretical and empirical contexts. Secondary data, such as social media content, organizational

reports, and news articles related to youth climate activism in Indonesia, were also analyzed to complement the primary data and provide a broader perspective on the issue. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent and were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. The researcher took steps to ensure that the rights of participants were protected, particularly when dealing with sensitive topics related to their activism and personal experiences. Ethical standards for digital research were also adhered to, ensuring that social media content and digital data were used responsibly and with respect for privacy.

While the study provides valuable insights into youth participation in climate change movements in Indonesia, it is not without limitations. The study focused on youth activists who were already engaged in climate movements, meaning that the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of young people who are not yet involved in activism. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader youth population in Indonesia. Finally, the reliance on self-reported data from interviews, FGDs, and participant observation may be subject to biases, such as social desirability bias, which could influence the accuracy of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section provides a comprehensive presentation of the results of the study, which aimed to explore youth participation in climate change movements in Indonesia. The findings are structured around three key themes: Motivation and Awareness, Sociopolitical Influence, and Strategies and Collective Action. Through the analysis of interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation, several patterns emerged that highlight the factors driving youth activism, the structural influences shaping their participation, and the strategies employed to maximize their impact on climate action.

Motivation and Awareness

Youth participation in climate change movements is primarily driven by personal experiences with environmental hazards and a deep sense of moral and ethical responsibility. These motivations emerged strongly across all participant groups, with many youth citing direct exposure to environmental crises as a major catalyst for their involvement in activism. One participant from West Java, for example, shared,

"When our village experienced severe flooding last year, I realized we cannot wait for others to act. It was a wake-up call for me to get involved in local efforts to address climate issues"

Similarly, another participant from Central Kalimantan emphasized,

"Seeing the forest fires on TV motivated me to join the climate youth network in my city. I could see the devastation, and I felt a need to take action"

These personal experiences with environmental disasters, such as flooding, deforestation, and forest fires, deeply influenced the participants' decision to engage in climate activism.

In addition to direct environmental exposure, participants frequently cited moral responsibility as a key motivating factor. One participant from Bali explained,

"I feel responsible as a young person; if we don't act now, the future will be worse"

Participant reflecting a common sentiment across the youth activists interviewed. Similarly, another participant from Aceh stated,

"Our faith teaches us to care for the Earth, and that drives me to participate in campaigns"

These sentiments were echoed by other participants, who emphasized the importance of ethical frameworks, including religious teachings, cultural values, and a sense of social duty. Moral responsibility not only motivated youth to participate in climate activism but also provided them with the perseverance to sustain their involvement over time.

Participants also expressed a deep sense of urgency regarding climate change, driven by the awareness that future generations will bear the consequences of current environmental degradation.

"If we don't take action now, our children will have to deal with the aftermath,"

This forward-thinking perspective demonstrates the long-term outlook many youth activists hold, reinforcing the notion that climate action is not just for the present but also for the survival and well-being of future generations.

These findings are consistent with previous studies that suggest youth are motivated by both personal experiences and a sense of moral and social responsibility (Nash et al., 2024; Zimba et al., 2021). The combination of direct environmental exposure and ethical imperatives forms a strong foundation for youth participation in climate activism, providing them with both the motivation and the resolve to confront climate challenges head-on.

Sociopolitical Influence

The study revealed that youth participation in climate movements is not solely driven by personal motivations but is also heavily shaped by sociopolitical factors, including access to resources, institutional support, and governmental policies. Participants frequently discussed how the availability of resources both financial and institutional greatly influenced their ability to engage in activism. Urban youth in particular reported having better access to organizational support, funding, and networking opportunities compared to their rural counterparts. One participant from Jakarta shared,

"I can organize workshops in my city because the local government provides space and funding, but friends in rural areas struggle. They don't have the same kind of institutional support"

This sentiment was echoed by a participant from Bandung, who noted,

"Being part of a university environmental club gives me networking opportunities that I wouldn't have otherwise. We get funding and mentorship that really help our projects grow"

These experiences illustrate the stark contrast in opportunities available to urban and rural youth, with those in urban areas enjoying more advantages in terms of organizational support and resource access.

In contrast, youth from rural areas reported encountering significant barriers to participation, such as logistical challenges, financial constraints, and limited access to professional networks. One participant from Surabaya described the difficulties faced by rural youth, stating,

"We don't have enough resources in our area. It's hard to mobilize support for climate action when there's no funding, no networks, and limited infrastructure"

These challenges highlight the unequal distribution of resources and institutional support across regions, which significantly impacts the level of participation in climate activism. Rural youth, in particular, face obstacles that limit their capacity

to engage in large-scale or high-profile climate campaigns, as they often lack the necessary resources to execute projects effectively.

The study also found that youth activists' involvement is influenced by government policies and institutional support. Participants frequently mentioned the role of local government in either enabling or constraining their activism. One participant from Jakarta noted,

"Government support is crucial for us. Without the local government's support, it would be impossible to organize large-scale campaigns. However, when policies aren't supportive, it's frustrating and discouraging"

This reflects a broader challenge for youth activists in Indonesia: while some areas offer institutional support, others face bureaucratic obstacles that hinder the progress of climate initiatives. Participants in rural areas expressed frustration over the lack of policy frameworks that could facilitate their climate activism.

This theme is consistent with existing literature, which highlights the critical role that government policies, institutional support, and access to resources play in enabling or hindering youth participation in climate activism (Sovacool et al., 2022; Briandana & Saleh, 2022). These findings underscore the need for supportive structures and policies that empower youth to take meaningful action on climate issues, especially in rural areas where resources are limited.

Strategies and Collective Action

The study also explored the strategies employed by youth activists in Indonesia to engage in climate change movements. Participants described a wide range of both digital and offline strategies that they used to mobilize support, raise awareness, and create tangible impact. One of the primary strategies identified was digital activism. Social media platforms, particularly Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, were frequently used by youth activists to organize campaigns, raise awareness about environmental issues, and connect with other activists across the country. A participant from Yogyakarta explained,

"We run online campaigns on Instagram and TikTok to reach youth who cannot attend offline events. It's a great way to spread the message and get more people involved"

Another participant from Malang shared,

"Social media allows us to connect with activists nationwide and share ideas quickly. It helps us mobilize support for campaigns and reach a larger audience"

These digital tools provided a platform for youth to bypass geographic limitations and engage with a much larger audience, amplifying their impact.

In addition to digital strategies, offline activities remained central to the efforts of many youth activists. Participants highlighted the importance of community-based engagement, including tree planting initiatives, environmental education programs, and school campaigns, as ways to make a direct, tangible impact in their local communities. One participant from Lampung stated,

"Engaging with local communities helps us to show tangible impact beyond online posts. It also builds trust, and people can see the results of our efforts"

Another participant from Yogyakarta shared,

"We organize tree planting and educational sessions at schools; both methods complement each other. Online campaigns raise awareness, but offline actions create lasting change"

These offline initiatives not only fostered a sense of community involvement but also provided youth with the opportunity to demonstrate the direct outcomes of their activism.

The combination of digital and offline strategies allowed youth activists to create a more comprehensive and effective approach to climate activism. The integration of online campaigns with local, grassroots activities enabled youth to reach broader audiences while also making a meaningful, local impact. The study found that this dual approach was essential for maximizing the visibility and effectiveness of climate change initiatives.

Furthermore, collaboration emerged as a key theme in the strategies employed by youth activists. Many participants emphasized the importance of working with various groups, including local communities, educational institutions, and government agencies, to amplify their efforts. A participant from Jakarta noted,

"Collaborating with local schools and community organizations has helped our initiative gain more support and legitimacy"

These partnerships enabled youth activists to expand their reach and access additional resources, which in turn enhanced the overall impact of their campaigns.

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the motivations, sociopolitical influences, and strategies employed by Indonesian youth in climate change movements. These results offer a deeper understanding of how young people engage in environmental activism in Indonesia and how their involvement is shaped by personal, social, and political factors. This discussion contextualizes the findings within the existing body of literature, explores the implications of the study, and suggests recommendations for enhancing youth participation in climate action.

One of the most striking findings of this study is the significant role that personal experiences with environmental hazards play in motivating youth to engage in climate activism. As highlighted in the results, many participants reported that direct exposure to environmental issues, such as flooding, deforestation, and forest fires, was a primary motivator for their activism. This supports the growing body of literature suggesting that personal experiences with environmental degradation often act as powerful catalysts for youth involvement in climate movements (Putra & Wijaya, 2021; Zimba et al., 2021). For example, participants who experienced flooding or witnessed forest fires firsthand expressed a heightened sense of urgency, recognizing the immediate need for action. This aligns with previous research that shows that experiencing environmental disasters can increase awareness and drive individuals to become more actively involved in environmental advocacy (Sovacool et al., 2022).

In addition to personal experiences, the study found that moral responsibility, often linked to ethical and religious beliefs, played a crucial role in motivating youth to engage in climate action. Participants frequently mentioned a sense of duty to future generations and to the Earth, with some referencing religious teachings that encourage environmental stewardship. This finding is consistent with existing literature that underscores the importance of ethical frameworks in motivating youth activism (Nash et al., 2024; Hohenhaus et al., 2023). The sense of moral responsibility not only drives youth to participate in climate movements but also sustains their commitment over time. In this context, environmental activism becomes not just a reaction to immediate threats but also a long-term ethical obligation, which enhances the sustainability of youth engagement in climate action.

Furthermore, the study revealed that youth in Indonesia are motivated by a vision of a better future. Many participants expressed concern about the environmental challenges that will face future generations if climate change is not addressed. This

forward-looking perspective aligns with findings from other studies, which highlight that youth are often motivated by the desire to create a better future for themselves and future generations (Pena-Vega et al., 2022; Lamichhane & Dhakal, 2024). The notion that youth bear the brunt of environmental degradation and have a moral obligation to prevent further harm is central to the motivation of young activists, particularly in countries like Indonesia, where the impacts of climate change are already being felt.

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that sociopolitical factors play in shaping youth participation in climate movements. Youth in urban areas had greater access to resources, institutional support, and networking opportunities, which facilitated their engagement in climate activism. In contrast, rural youth faced significant barriers, including limited resources and lack of institutional support. This disparity reflects broader structural inequalities in access to resources, which can limit the participation of marginalized groups in environmental movements. These findings are consistent with research that highlights the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities between urban and rural youth (Sovacool et al., 2022; Zimba et al., 2021).

The disparity between urban and rural youth is particularly concerning, as rural communities are often more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as flooding, crop failure, and deforestation. The lack of institutional support and access to resources in rural areas limits youth in these communities from participating in large-scale or high-impact climate campaigns. To address this issue, policymakers should focus on creating inclusive policies and programs that provide rural youth with the resources, training, and networks they need to engage effectively in climate action. For example, government-funded programs that support climate education and activism in rural areas could help bridge the gap between urban and rural youth.

The study also revealed that youth participation is influenced by government policies and institutional frameworks. Some participants noted that while local governments in urban areas provided support for their initiatives, others faced bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of policy support. This aligns with findings from other studies that emphasize the importance of supportive policies in facilitating youth activism (Sovacool et al., 2022; Briandana & Saleh, 2022). Youth activists often encounter resistance from local authorities, particularly when their initiatives challenge established political or economic structures. The findings suggest that for youth activism to thrive, there is a need for policies that not only support youth-led initiatives but also remove bureaucratic barriers and ensure that young people have access to the resources and platforms they need to drive change.

Additionally, the study's findings highlight the importance of institutional collaboration in enabling youth engagement. Participants who had access to universities, environmental clubs, and other formal organizations reported having more opportunities to network, secure funding, and gain mentorship. These institutional affiliations provided youth with legitimacy and support, which enhanced their ability to influence public discourse and mobilize action. This supports existing literature on the role of institutions in fostering youth participation, which argues that institutional support is crucial for amplifying the effectiveness of youth-led movements (Nash et al., 2024).

The findings regarding the strategies employed by youth activists are consistent with the growing trend of combining digital and offline approaches to activism. Digital platforms, particularly social media, were identified as essential tools for raising awareness, organizing campaigns, and connecting activists across different regions. The ability to use social media to organize and engage with a large audience is particularly important in a geographically dispersed country like Indonesia. One

participant noted, "Social media allows us to connect with activists nationwide and share ideas quickly" (Participant 9, 19, Malang), highlighting the reach and influence that digital platforms provide.

At the same time, the study emphasizes the continued importance of offline, community-based engagement in creating tangible, localized impact. Participants described tree planting initiatives, environmental education programs, and school-based campaigns as essential components of their activism. As one participant from Yogyakarta shared, "We organize tree planting and educational sessions at schools; both methods complement each other" (Participant 2, 20, Yogyakarta). These offline activities allow youth activists to engage with local communities directly and demonstrate the tangible benefits of climate action. In many cases, these actions help build trust and strengthen relationships with community members, making it easier to mobilize support for future initiatives.

The combination of digital and offline strategies is particularly effective in reaching diverse audiences and ensuring the sustainability of youth-led climate movements. Digital campaigns can engage a wide audience, including urban youth and international supporters, while offline activities provide local youth with opportunities to take concrete action and witness the results of their efforts. This dual approach enables youth activists to address both local and global climate concerns and fosters a more inclusive form of activism that resonates with different communities.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of collaboration among various groups in amplifying the impact of youth activism. Participants reported that working with schools, universities, local organizations, and government bodies increased the legitimacy and reach of their efforts. Collaborations with local governments, in particular, were seen as crucial for gaining access to resources and securing political support. These findings echo existing research on the importance of cross-sector collaboration in enhancing the effectiveness of youth-led movements (Sovacool et al., 2022; Briandana & Saleh, 2022). Future efforts to support youth engagement in climate action should emphasize the value of partnerships between youth groups, institutions, and local governments.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, the author will provide a detailed analysis of youth engagement in climate change activism in Indonesia by highlighting the complex nature of the interaction between personal motivation, sociopolitical environment, and strategic campaigning. The findings show that individual experiences of environmental issues and moral beliefs act as potent incentives, mobilising the youths to act digital and face-to-face. Meanwhile, structural variables, such as resources availability, institutions, and state policies, have a determining influence on the success and efficiency of youth activism.

Moreover, the study indicates that teenagers are using a combination of online advocacy and community participation to be most effective, thus illustrating adaptive mechanisms that are appealing to various audiences. The combination of individual, social, and political aspects highlights the complexity of youth-led environmental movements so that an effective practice of activism requires not just the knowledge and dedication but facilitating systems and networks.

On the whole, this study can serve as an addition to the academic knowledge about youth environmental activism in Indonesia because it offers empirical-based suggestions about their motivations, strategies and challenges. It provides useful policy implication to policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations who are interested in increasing youth interest in taking climate action, and point to the

significance of including policies, available resources, and culturally resonant tools. Future research can build on this study by investigating longitudinal shifts of youth participation, geographic comparisons and effects of contemporary digital platforms on climate activism.

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