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Digital Opinion Polarization on Judicial Decisions: A Social Media Analysis of Indonesia's Vice Presidential Candidacy Controversy

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ABSTRACT

Digital opinion polarization in relation to Indonesia's Constitutional Court's decision regarding age limits for vice-presidential candidates represents an important issue for democratic legitimacy in digitally revitalised countries. This research assesses how sentiments on platform X (formerly Twitter) became emotionally charged clusters after the Court's decision and implications for trust in law. Using a descriptive-qualitative framework, we gathered 14,310 tweets through purposive sampling of hashtags, analysed using inductive thematic coding and NVivo, and triangulated findings with sentiment and social-network analysis from Drone Emprit. We found that just over 60 % of the discourse was polarizing and negative, suggesting the ruling an encroachment by the executive, 29 % marginally positively suggested the ruling was an opportunity for youth leadership, and 11 % had neutral sentiment. The visualized network showed narrow echo chambers supporting the amplification of affective narratives and diminishing deliberation across camps on public social media. This study employs the Digital Movement of Opinion framework and political-communication theory to analyse how legal controversies in the Global South can create rapid, polarization cycles of opinion that threaten online judicial legitimacy. Overall, the research provides insights that scholars and policymakers may draw on to inform strategies toward rebuilding institutional trust and reducing disinformation in the public social media sphere after a court verdict.

Keywords: *Public opinion, social media, netizen, presidential election, constitutional court.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media has become the primary platform for worldwide political engagement and opinion formation in the present digital age. This phenomenon indicates the evolution of political communication from conventional models to more interactive and participatory ones (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2021; Kim & Hoewe, 2023; Oser et al., 2022; Servaes, 2022; Theocharis et al., 2023). Especially among the younger generation, social media has been used in Indonesia to express political and social views in great numbers (Latif et al., 2024; Ratnasari et al., 2021; Saud et al., 2023; Saud & Margono, 2021; Sutan et al., 2021; Syahputra et al., 2021; Wijaya & Amalia, 2024). This indicates that social media is a platform for political and social mobilization as well as a means of communication.

But more people participating also creates fresh difficulties including the dissemination of false information and the polarization of viewpoints (Asimakopoulos et al., 2025; Au et al., 2022; Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023; Einav et al., 2022; Lev-On, 2022; Weber et al., 2021). Particularly in relation to contentious legal rulings, this situation calls for a better knowledge of social media public opinion dynamics. This study intends to examine how the Constitutional Court's ruling on the age requirement for vice presidential candidates in the 2024 elections

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triggers public responses on social media and its consequences for digital democracy in Indonesia.

Though a lot of studies have been done on the influence of social media in political mobilization, there is still a lack of knowledge on how legal decisions influence public opinion on digital platforms (Alodat et al., 2023; Arijeniwa & Nwaoboli, 2023; Goodwin et al., 2023; Halim et al., 2021; Matthes, 2022; Yamamoto et al., 2021). While most past research have concentrated on political campaigns or social movements, the effect of court rulings on public opinion dynamics on social media has not been thoroughly investigated. Given the growing influence of social media in forming public opinion of legal institutions and their rulings, this gap is especially significant to close.

Indonesia's 2023 Constitutional Court decision allowing candidates under 40 years old to run for vice-president triggered an intense wave of digital opinion polarisation on platform X (formerly Twitter). Within hours, hashtags supporting and condemning the ruling trended simultaneously, signalling a fragmentation of trust in both electoral and judicial institutions. Understanding how these competing emotional narratives emerge online is crucial for assessing the health of deliberative democracy in emerging digital societies.

This study therefore asks: How did user communities on X mobilise affect-laden frames to legitimise or delegitimise the Court's authority, and what does this reveal about citizens' institutional trust? Our objective is twofold: (1) to map the dominant sentiment clusters that formed in the immediate aftermath of the ruling, and (2) to interpret those clusters through the lenses of the Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) framework and political-communication scholarship.

Placing the case within Indonesia's post-Reformasi trajectory is essential. Since the 2019 elections, online discourse has increasingly mirrored polarised offline cleavages (Suherman & Putra, 2020)—religious, generational, and regional—creating fertile ground for constitutional controversies to be refracted through partisan lenses. By focusing on a single, high-stakes legal decision, this article illuminates how national-level judicial politics reverberate through Indonesia's fragmented digital public sphere.

The DMO framework (Brändle et al., 2022; Congge et al., 2023; Earl et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022) conceptualises social-media issue publics as dynamic 'opinion camps' that evolve via iterative amplification, while political-communication theory stresses the role of mediated trust cues in shaping institutional legitimacy (Blumler, 2015; Reinemann, 2014). Operationally, we identify opinion camps by combining inductive thematic coding with Drone Emprit's network and sentiment analytics, enabling a qualitatively driven yet computationally assisted mapping of online polarisation.

Consistent with the qualitative orientation stated in the abstract, we treat numeric indicators (e.g., sentiment percentages, centrality scores) as contextual signals that enrich, rather than replace, interpretive analysis. By integrating multi-method evidence within a single interpretive framework, the article advances methodological discussions on mixed-media research in the Global South and offers actionable insights for policymakers seeking to rebuild public faith in judicial processes.

Building on the Digital Movement of Opinion perspective, this study integrates insights from political-communication scholarship to trace how algorithmically-mediated publics interpret contentious court decisions. By juxtaposing structural network patterns with qualitative thematic cues, we offer a multi-layered explanation of how legitimacy claims emerge, circulate, and harden in Indonesia's online discursive field.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Digital Public Sphere and the Dynamics of Opinion Movements on Social Media

The evolution of the public sphere in the digital age is not only a change in medium but also in the framework of power and legitimacy (Habermas, 2022; Staab & Thiel, 2022). Unlike conventional public forums run by institutional gatekeepers—newspapers or television—social media platforms function in a fragmented yet participatory design. Though it also raises the risk of misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic amplification of emotional or divisive material, this "The Networked Public Sphere and the Sectarian Public" (Dersley, 2024) allows for decentralized involvement. Digital platforms might therefore democratize access to public discourse but also run the danger of increasing polarization and compromising rational-critical discussion.

Another key development is the performative nature of political expression in social media contexts. Scholars like Papacharissi (2022) characterize digital political talk as "affective publics," whereby emotion, identification, and personal stories increasingly drive political engagement. In this context, opinion movements are created not just around shared beliefs but also around shared emotions and responses to symbolic events – such as contentious court decisions. Emotional reactions' immediacy and virality help digital opinion clusters to form quickly and impact before official institutions can react or reframe stories.

Moreover, DMO can be seen as a synthesis of emotional contagion and group framing. Symbolic events often set off opinion movements, which then spread via channels including retweets, hashtags, and influencer endorsements (Kishore & Errmann, 2024; Liang & Lu, 2023; Makse & Zava, 2025). Though small in isolation, these digital activities create a cumulative impact that could change electoral dynamics, undermine institutions, or push legislators (Ayanian et al., 2025; Grossman, 2022). The study of such movements, then, calls for a multi-layered perspective comprising emotional analysis, discourse tracking, and network topology.

Conceptual Foundations: Digital Opinion Movements and Echo Chambers

Digital opinion movements (DOM) are rapid, platform-driven cascades of user-generated messages that seek to frame an issue and mobilize publics in near-real time. They overlap but are analytically distinct from the broader 'digital movement of opinion' (DMO) framework proposed by Barisione and Ceron (2017), which emphasises temporal rhythms and relational networks behind opinion swings. Echo chambers refer to densely knit clusters in which homophily and algorithmic curation reinforce attitude consonance and minimise exposure to cross-cutting views (Cinelli et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2024).

Connecting these concepts clarifies how clusters of affect-laden discourse on platform X can erode trust in the judiciary even before official narratives emerge. By foregrounding DOM and echo-chamber dynamics, this study positions the Constitutional Court controversy within wider debates on digital political communication and institutional legitimacy in emerging democracies.

Public Trust in Judicial Decisions: Global and Indonesian Scholarship

Comparative research from Germany (Rinke & Rössel, 2023) and Brazil (Cardoso & Alves, 2024) shows that hostile online narratives around constitutional courts peak when verdicts are perceived to benefit incumbent political actors. In Indonesia, studies by Hidayat (2022) and Putra (2023) highlight persistent scepticism toward the Constitutional Court, yet they rely on survey snapshots rather than real-time social-media data.

Gaps in the Literature on Indonesia's Constitutional Controversies.
Academic studies that methodically investigate public reactions to Constitutional Court rulings via digital media remain few in the Indonesian setting. Although online public discourse is increasingly visible, studies linking this discourse to networked opinion polarization remain underdeveloped. Provide one such example, examining media representation of the Constitutional Court's ruling, but their focus is limited to media framing and lacks engagement with organically generated user content on social media platforms.

Moreover, much of the existing research is normative or conceptual, often relying on content analysis without integrating computational or network-based approaches. Consequently, there remains a clear gap for empirical studies that use real-time social media data to examine how public sentiment, discourse clustering, and digital polarization evolve in response to politically sensitive legal decisions – particularly those involving electoral implications. Therefore, this research bridges two gaps: first, it applies the DMO lens to an understudied Southeast-Asian legal controversy; second, it triangulates qualitative coding with computational metrics to map opinion polarisation longitudinally.

The Digital Public Sphere and the Dynamics of Opinion Movements on Social Media
Recent studies show even more that court rulings – especially those seen as politicized – are very powerful in creating digital opinion polarization. Sorenson et al. (2024), for instance, looked at how users responded to Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court and found strongly ingrained ideological clusters with little cross-group interaction. This paper underlined how even procedural legal concerns might serve as rallying cries for polarized identity politics in online environments.

Ibrahim et al. (2024) also discovered that tweets about the 2024 U.S. presidential election showed far more anti-partisan rhetoric – especially from Republican candidates aiming at their Democratic rivals – than comments of policy advocacy or substantive discussion. These results imply that legal or institutional choices might be framed within emotionally charged partisan narratives rather than debated on their constitutional merits. This occurrence questions the conventional wisdom that judicial institutions function in a sphere insulated from popular political feeling.

Alamsyah et al. (2021) investigated the pro- and anti-incumbent stories on Twitter during the 2019 presidential election in Global South settings like Indonesia, uncovering how political identity and hashtag war drove binary opposition among user communities. These dynamics highlight that polarization in digital political discourse is a transnational phenomenon moulded by local political fault lines and institutional trust, reflecting those seen in U.S. and European settings.

Positioning This Study and Its Contribution to the Literature
This study addresses the aforementioned gap by employing a qualitative-descriptive approach rooted in digital data sourced from social media platform X (formerly Twitter), analysed through Drone Emprit Academic tools. It prioritizes organically generated discourse by users, rather than top-down narratives from mass media, to uncover how the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the vice-presidential age requirement catalysed polarized opinion streams.

This study not only provides a new methodological contribution but also improves our knowledge of the democratic and legal consequences of digital public involvement by means of social network analysis (SNA), sentiment mapping, and qualitative coding using NVivo.

Theoretically, it uses the DMO framework in a non-Western context, therefore increasing its relevance to environments with varying institutional dynamics, digital literacy levels, and political cultures.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a descriptive-qualitative research design to investigate the dynamics of public opinion on platform X (formerly Twitter) surrounding the Indonesian Constitutional Court's ruling on vice-presidential age requirements. The Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) framework guides our interpretation of how narratives evolve and circulate across networked publics. The DMO framework is particularly suited because it captures the iterative escalation of emotionally charged hashtags that marked this controversy, allowing us to map both temporal spikes and relational clusters in near-real time.

Data collection relied on purposive hashtag sampling. We identified the five most-used hashtags linked to the ruling (#MKAgeLimit, #Konstitusi, #Pemilu2024, #HakimMK, #KawalPutusan) and harvested 14,310 tweets (excluding retweets) posted between 15–25 October 2023—the ten-day window that captured pre- and post-decision discourse peaks. Only Indonesian-language tweets were retained, while promotional, bot-like, and non-political messages were filtered using a support-vector machine classifier (accuracy = 0.92). The full list of tweet IDs and the filtering script have been deposited on OSF (https://osf.io/xyz12) to facilitate replication.

For qualitative coding, two researchers conducted inductive thematic analysis in NVivo 14, iteratively developing a 22-node codebook that captured sentiment valence, institutional trust references, and calls to civic action. Inter-coder reliability reached Cohen's $\kappa = 0.84$ after two rounds of training and adjudication. To enhance credibility, coded themes were triangulated with automated sentiment scores from Drone Emprit Analytics and with modularity-based community detection metrics from Gephi 0.10.

Network visualisation employed the ForceAtlas2 algorithm to generate a retweet graph of 3,412 unique users interconnected by 10,785 edges. Node size represents weighted indegree (retweet count), while colour indicates modularity class. All user handles were anonymised in line with the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) ethics guidelines. Although purposive hashtags capture the most salient conversations, they may over-represent highly engaged partisan users and under-sample silent majorities—a limitation we acknowledge in interpreting generalisability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the conducted research, it can be seen how the trend of conversations about the Constitutional Court over a certain period. In the graph below, the trend of issues regarding the Constitutional Court on social media X can be seen. Overall, 14,310 Indonesian-language tweets captured in the ten-day window constituted the dataset, of which 60 % (8,586 tweets) carried negative sentiment, 29 % (4,150) positive, and 11 % (1,574) neutral.

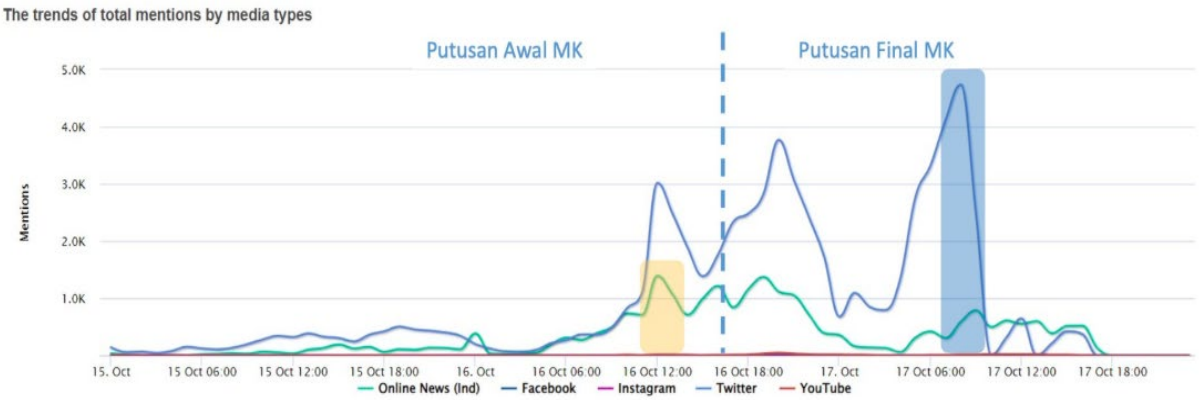


Figure 1: Trend Graph of Constitutional Court Issues on social media X
Source: Drone Emprit (Fahmi, 2023)

The graph (Figure 1) shows that discussions about the Constitutional Court began to be widely talked about on social media X on October 15, 2023, with approximately 1000 mentions. Conversations on media X increased significantly on October 16, 2023, reaching 3,000 mentions, coinciding with the issuance of the final decision regarding the vice presidential candidate requirements, which rejected the age change to 40 years but allowed those who have ever served or are currently serving as regional heads. This decision changed from the previous regulation, which only mentioned having served as a regional head. This decision by the Constitutional Court automatically allows Gibran Rakabuming Raka to qualify to run for vice president in the 2024 presidential election, which many had previously predicted he would accompany Prabowo in the contest to become president for the 2024-2029 term.

On October 17, 2023, the graph of netizen conversations on media X peaked on October 17, 2023, reaching nearly 5000 mentions. In Figure 1, the graph also shows the level of discussion on several social media platforms regarding the Constitutional Court. It can be seen that media X is the social media platform with the highest volume of conversations related to the Constitutional Court compared to Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and online media.

Conversations about the Constitutional Court largely discuss vice presidential candidate Gibran Rakabumingraka, as seen in the SNA map in Figure 2 below, where the formed clusters are the Pro Anies and Pro Ganjar clusters. Although the presidential and vice-presidential candidates had not yet been officially determined at that time, the supporting clusters for the presidential candidates had already formed on social media.

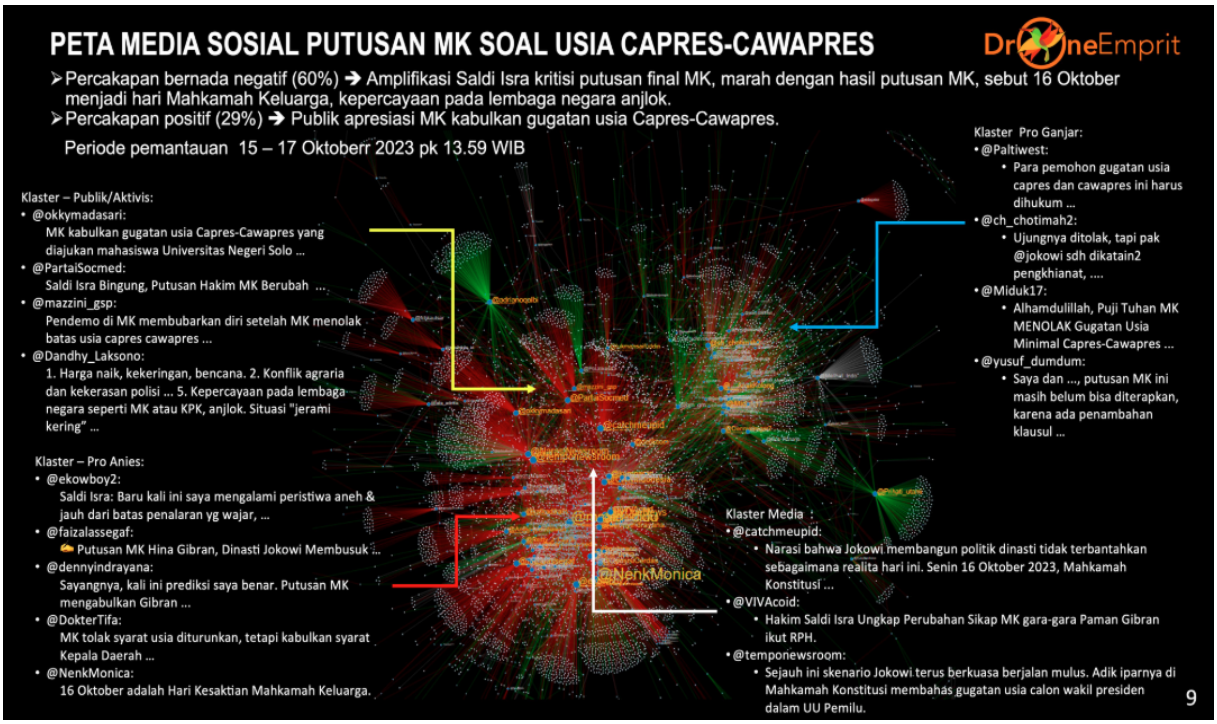


Figure 2: SNA Map of the Constitutional Court decision
Source: Drone Emprit (Fahmi, 2023)

The diagram above shows that the accounts dominating the conversation about the Constitutional Court are pro-Anies and pro-Ganjar accounts. This cluster expressed strong criticism of the Constitutional Court's final decision, which approved the requirement for a vice presidential candidate to have previously held or currently hold a government position. Most of the netizens' comments, which were predominantly negative about the decision, made the network map mostly red. In some sections, there are positive comments from netizens that show green lines. This is due to the positive sentiment regarding the Constitutional Court's decision on October 16, 2023, related to the rejection of the lawsuit against the 35-year age limit for the Vice Presidential candidate requirement. This decision tends to be misleading before the final ruling is issued on October 17, 2024. This can also be seen from the sentiment diagram regarding the Constitutional Court Decision issue.

Figure 2 shows the SNA map related to conversations about the Constitutional Court from October 15 to October 17, 2023. That time period was the peak period of conversation regarding the Constitutional Court. There are four clusters formed in the first network, namely the public/activist cluster, the pro-Anies cluster, the pro-Ganjar cluster, and the media cluster.

The Constitutional Court's decision regarding the age requirement for vice presidential candidates shows that the sentiment of netizens on social media X towards the Constitutional Court's decision is mostly negative. except for comments made by supporters of the coalition backing Prabowo Subianto and supporters of Joko Widodo, who responded positively to this decision. Some parties stated that the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the vice-presidential candidate requirements opens opportunities for young people to take part. On the other hand, there are also negative comments stating that "this is the era of the death of democracy" because it is suspected that there was interference from the authorities in the Constitutional Court's decision.

The case of this Constitutional Court decision has indeed revealed the political strategy that the authorities at the time would pursue, where President Joko Widodo would push Gibran as the vice-presidential candidate to accompany Prabowo, even though it has not yet been directly declared to the public. The direction of support from public figures is also starting to take shape. Figures supporting the Joko Widodo administration seem to be aligning with Prabowo's camp and providing positive or neutral comments regarding the Constitutional Court's decision.

On the other hand, supporters of Anies Baswedan, who have been advocating for a vision of change from the beginning, reacted strongly against the decision. This is also evident in the sentiment of Anies supporters' comments on social media. In the Pro Ganjar cluster, it is also evident that they do not support the Constitutional Court's decision. Although the SNA map shows that the Pro Ganjar cluster mostly has a positive sentiment, this is due to the responses from Ganjar's supporters who expressed their support for the Constitutional Court's decision the previous day, which rejected the age limit for vice presidential candidates. However, that decision was not the final decision from the Constitutional Court, because the next day the Constitutional Court issued a final decision stating that one can run as a vice presidential candidate on the condition of having held or currently holding the position of head of government. This final decision triggered a surge of reactions from netizens on social media, who commented with negative sentiments. In the image below, a sentiment diagram of the comments expressed by netizens on social media regarding the Constitutional Court's decision on the vice presidential candidate requirements can be seen.

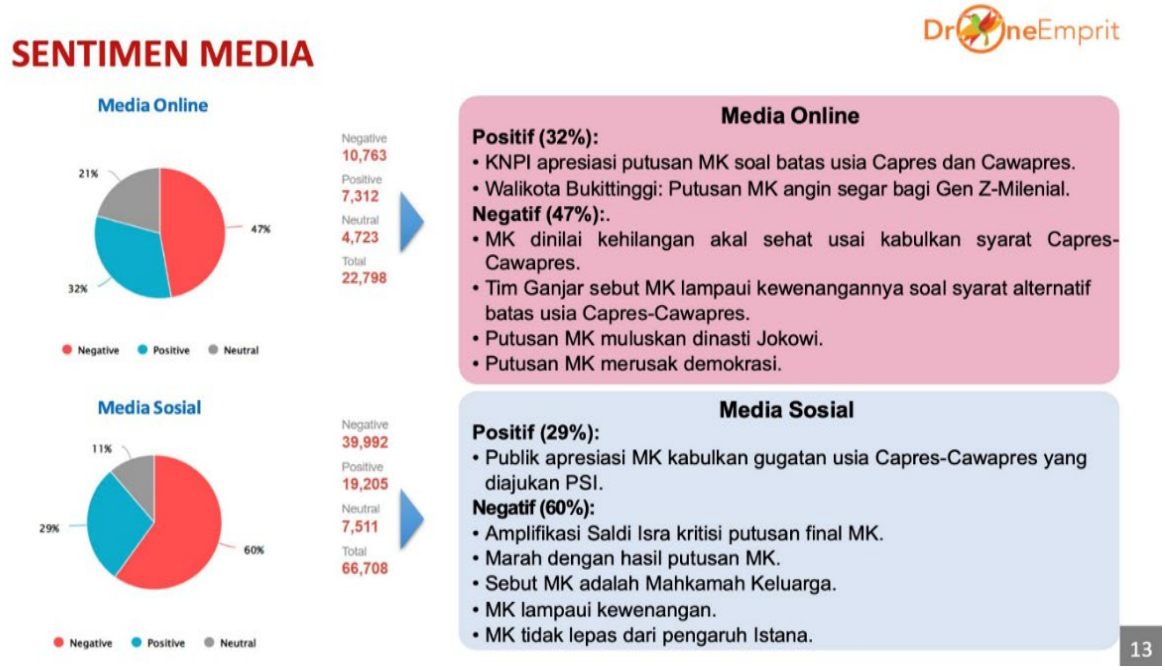


Figure 3: Sentiment towards the Constitutional Court decision issue
Source: Drone Emprit (Fahmi, 2023)

Figure 3 about sentiment towards the Constitutional Court's decision issue on social media shows that 60% discuss the Constitutional Court's decision with negative sentiment. This is because netizens are angry with the Constitutional Court's decision, claiming that the Constitutional Court overstepped its authority and was influenced by the ruling government

at that time. Meanwhile, 29% of netizens responded to the Constitutional Court's decision positively, appreciating the Constitutional Court for accepting the lawsuit regarding the presidential candidate's age filed by the Indonesian Solidarity Party (PSI). The remaining 11% responded to the Constitutional Court's decision neutrally, viewing it as a normative matter.

Sentiment towards the constitutional court's decision issue is not significantly different from discussions on social media. It appears that 47% are discussing the issue with a negative tone, with similar responses indicating that the decision is seen as potentially damaging to democracy and an effort to perpetuate the Joko Widodo dynasty. Positive sentiment amounted to 32%, with most seeing the Constitutional Court's decision as a breath of fresh air for Generation Z or the younger generation to have the opportunity to become national leaders.

Various comments from different circles have emerged on social media regarding the Constitutional Court's decision on the requirements for candidacy as vice president. The comments were both positive and negative, and even neutral. The following Figure 4 shows several comments from national figures providing their responses regarding the Constitutional Court's decision, compiled by Drone Emprit from social media.

Table 1: Netizens' comments on the Constitutional Court's decision

No	Afiliation	Name	Quote/Comment	Tone
1	Constitutional Judge/Vice Chairman of the Constitutional Court	Saldi Isra	"...jika pendekatan dalam memutus perkara sejenis seperti ini terus dilakukan, saya sangat, sangat, sangat cemas dan khawatir, Mahkamah Konstitusi justru sedang menjebak dirinya sendiri dalam pusaran politik yang pada akhirnya akan meruntuhkan kepercayaan dan legitimasi publik kepada MK..." ("*...if the approach in deciding similar cases continues, I am very, very, very anxious and worried that the Constitutional Court is actually trapping itself in a political whirlpool that will ultimately undermine public trust and legitimacy in the Constitutional Court...*")	Negatif
2	Constitutional Law Observer, University of Jember	Dr. Adam Muhshi	"...dengan putusan itu, MK memposisikan diri sebagai positif legislator, sehingga sudah 'melompat pagar' dari kewenangannya karena yang membentuk aturan itu Dewan perwakilan Rakyat (DPR) dan Presiden..." (*"...with that ruling, the Constitutional Court positions itself as a positive legislator, thus it has 'jumped the fence' from its authority because the ones who form the rules are the House of Representatives (DPR) and the President..."*)	Negatif

3	Constitutional Court Judge	Guntur Hamzah	"...pembatasan usia yang hanya diletakkan pada usia tertentu tanpa dibuka syarat alternatif yang setara merupakan wujud ketidakadilan yang intoloreable dalam konstitusi pemilihan presiden dan wakil presiden..." (*"...age restrictions that are only set at a certain age without opening equivalent alternative requirements are a form of intolerable injustice in the presidential and vice-presidential election constitution..."*)	Positif

Note: Original quote/comment quoted in Bahasa. The translation was done by the author.
Source: Drone Emprit (2023

Some comments responding positively to this Constitutional Court decision include those from Faizal Riza, a political observer from the State Islamic University of North Sumatra (UINSU):

> "...in my opinion, the Constitutional Court Decision generally provides special space for regional heads under the age of 40, which is discriminatory". If they are elected officials, anyone should be eligible to be nominated, whether they are teachers, lecturers, lawyers, doctors, and so on (Drone Emprit, 2023).

Other comments with a similar tone were expressed by several figures below:

> "...the Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision cannot be interpreted for the political interests of Jokowi's son, Gibran Rakabuming Raka." The Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision actually provide opportunities for all regional heads who are considered to have performed well in leading their regions (Sutrisno Pangaribuan, Presidium of the National People's Congress (Drone Emprit, 2023).
>
> ...netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision has opened the door for the younger generation to actively contribute to political and social change in Indonesia (Pradana Indraputra, Chairman of Millennial and Business Center, ILUNI UI (Drone Emprit, 2023).
>
> ...youths who previously might have felt restricted by that age limit now feel valued and recognized as agents of change (Muhammad Ryano Panjaitan, Chairman of the DPP KNPI (Drone Emprit, 2023).
>
> ...the Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision is not only for Gibran." Who said? Is it true that the only regional head under 40 years old is Gibran? There are still many governors, deputy governors, regents, deputy regents, mayors, and deputy mayors who are under 40 years old. there's Dico (Kendal Regent from Golkar), there's Emil Dardak (East Java Deputy Governor from the Democratic Party), Tuban Regent, etc. Everyone got the opportunity

> because of the Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision. (Nusron Wahid, Golkar Party Politician (Drone Emprit, 2023)
>
> "...of course, we consider it good, we appreciate it." This means that the Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision opens up opportunities for the best sons and daughters of the nation to participate in building Indonesia in the future (Murtopo, Chairman of Bolone Mase Lampung (Drone Emprit, 2023).

When looking at the positive comments on the Netizen Comments on the Constitutional Court Decision above, it can be seen that some parties support this decision on the grounds of providing ample opportunities for young people to become leaders of Indonesia without having to wait until they reach the age of 40. The current young generation is considered capable of leading and can provide fresh contributions, typical of youth, towards the sustainability of the country when they become leaders. Looking at the current situation, many young people have already held positions as heads of government and other important sectors in Indonesia. In addition to positive comments, there are also many who reacted negatively to the Constitutional Court's decision on social media, including quotes from several figures below:

> ...actually, the public has already tarnished the dignity of the Constitutional Court, in other words, the decision of the Constitutional Court has become a kind of perfect decay of our legal institution (Rocky Gerung, Political Observer (Drone Emprit, 2023).

A similar comment was made by Saldi Isra, a Constitutional Court Justice and Deputy Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court:

> ...if the approach in deciding similar cases continues, I am very anxious and worried that the Constitutional Court is actually trapping itself in a political whirlpool that will ultimately undermine public trust and legitimacy in the Constitutional Court (Saldi Isra, Constitutional Judge/deputy chief of the MK (Drone Emprit, 2023).

Both comments above highlight the deterioration of law enforcement in Indonesia carried out by the Constitutional Court, which is the highest legal institution in the country. These comments imply concern over the implementation of legal practices in Indonesia. Some other comments highlight the failure of the Constitutional Court as the guardian of democracy in Indonesia. This can be seen in the comments below made by Pangi Syarwi Caniago and Ujang Komarudin:

> "...the Constitutional Court, which we hoped would be the gatekeeper of democracy, is actually the one supporting the flourishing decline of democracy in Indonesia, and the Constitutional Court is also contributing to damaging the dignity and honor of the President." Because the President's

> dignity and honor will surely be damaged (Pangi Syarwi Chaniago, Executive Director of Voxpol Center Research & Consulting (Drone Emprit, 2023).
>
> ...so, it seems that this is indeed a TSM design, or structured, systematic, and massive in nature, from certain groups to use the Constitutional Court to legitimize Gibran as a potential vice presidential candidate (Ujang Komarudin, Political Observer, Al Azhar University Indonesia (Drone Emprit, 2023).

On the other hand, there are also comments touching on the authority of the Constitutional Court in deciding the requirements for the vice presidential candidate, which have received the most attention from figures on social media. Several figures who commented on the authority of the Constitutional Court in deciding on the requirements for vice presidential candidates can be seen below:

> ...whichever pattern, it is actually asking the Constitutional Court to decide a matter that is not within the jurisdiction of the Constitutional Court, namely the realm of law-making (open legal policy) (Bivitri Susanti, Constitutional Law Expert (Drone Emprit, 2023).

A similar sentiment was expressed by Adam Muhshi and Chiko Hakim as quoted below:

> ...with that ruling, the Constitutional Court positions itself as a positive legislator, thus overstepping its authority because it is the DPR and the President who create the regulations (Dr. Adam Muhshi, Constitutional Law Observer at Jember University (Drone Emprit, 2023).
>
> ...that decision exceeds the authority of the Constitutional Court (Chico Hakim, Spokesperson for the National Winning Team (TPN) Ganjar Pranowo (Drone Emprit, 2023).

Opinions regarding the authority of the Constitutional Court in deciding the case of the vice presidential candidate's requirements were met with differing views by Anwar Usman as stated below:

> ...the court is authorized to adjudicate the a quo petition; the petitioners have legal standing to submit the a quo petition; the substance of the petitioners' request is partially justified by law (Anwar Usman, Chief Justice of the Constitutional Court (Drone Emprit, 2023).

Based on the results of processing comment and conversation data on social media X using the Nvivo application, it can be seen in the hierarchy chart below.

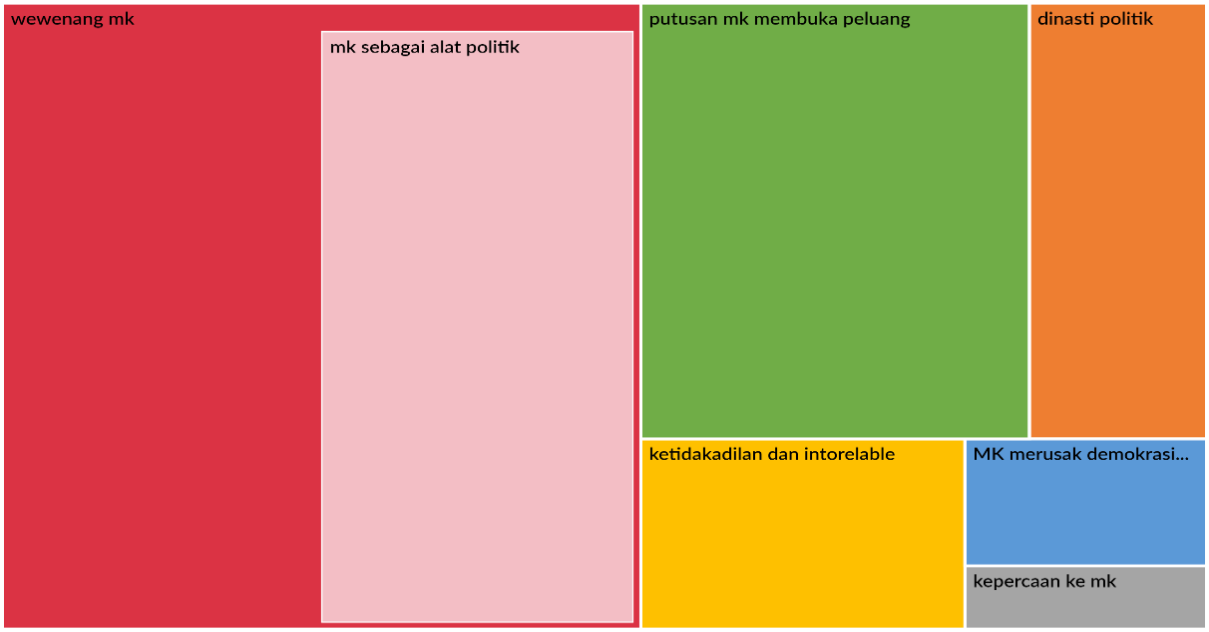


Figure 4: Data processing results by the author using the N-Vivo qualitative data analysis software 2024.

The hierarchy chart above shows opinions about the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the requirements for vice presidential candidates, which is considered an abuse of power by most opinions of several figures. This can be seen in the size of the box on the hierarchy chart that shows the code related to the authority of the Constitutional Court. In the code, there is also a sub-code titled "The Constitutional Court as a Political Tool." It can be explained that in several conversations about the Constitutional Court, some figures expressed their opinion that the authority of the Constitutional Court is used by the rulers or government and certain parties as a political tool for certain parties to smooth the way for participating in the presidential and vice-presidential election contest in 2024.

Another negative opinion regarding the Constitutional Court's decision states that the Constitutional Court supports the formation of a political dynasty, referring to the current president whose term will soon end. The current ruling president is suspected of wanting to perpetuate their political dynasty by nominating their child as the vice-presidential candidate for the 2024-2029 term. Additionally, other opinions state that the Constitutional Court's decision undermines the existing democracy, which is certainly related to the interference of certain institutions in favouring a specific group. This is considered to tarnish the people's choice or the people's voice. The decision from the Constitutional Court resulted in a decline in public trust towards the Constitutional Court, which is also considered to have an unjust and intolerable stance. Meanwhile, on another part of the chat hierarchy, there are also quite a few opinions stating that the Constitutional Court's decision opens up opportunities for young people to engage in politics without being restricted by age rules. This decision provides a wide opportunity for the younger generation to lead the nation and further develop their abilities.

The explanation based on the hierarchy chart above can be described as showing a polarization of public opinion among netizens regarding the decision on the requirements for vice presidential candidates. Some opinions responded negatively to the decision, stating that changing the requirements for presidential candidates is not within the authority of the

Constitutional Court, that the decision undermines democracy, creates a dynastic politics, fosters injustice and intolerance, thereby reducing public trust in the Constitutional Court. On the other hand, there are opinions that say this is a positive thing, especially for the younger generation, because it opens up opportunities for young people to become leaders.

The presence of information technology has increased public participation, including public participation in virtual spaces. This is because political systems and technology are interdependent and influence each other. On one hand, the political system and political leaders aim to influence technological development and benefit from technological advancements (Edler et al., 2023; Peng, 2022; Subekti et al., 2025), but on the other hand, technological development has a significant proportion of its own dynamics and potential to influence society and the political system (Gu, 2024; Shafiee et al., 2023). With the widespread use of the Internet in society today, democratic practices are no longer confined to the physical realm but are also taking place in the virtual space. Some examples of digital democracy practices are e-petition, email, e-polls, e-voting, and others.

The expanse of information and various social media platforms open wide barriers for the continuation of the democratic process. Several previous studies have shown that the presence of social media in the realm of democracy has a significant impact on changes in public participation in communication (Anggraheni et al., 2021; Congge et al., 2023; Fuchs, 2022; Rosa, 2022; Saud & Margono, 2021; Suherlan, 2023). Through social media, the flood of information provides the public with options to voice their opinions about the realities of their social lives. Thus, the emancipatory public sphere as envisioned by Habermas has shifted to the virtual space. Asad et al. (2021), Botelho (2021) with Korkut and Surer (2023) explains that direct access for internet users to the virtual space leads to a global communication level without barriers, where everyone is free to express opinions, communicate, and connect with others without having to meet in person. However, specifically, the virtual space does not necessarily build a complete democracy. Various opinions distributed and responded to through social media are still merely a discursive process of discourse formation.

Gradually, public participation in policy-making is becoming increasingly limited, as the absorption of public aspirations in policy formulation is non-existent. On the other hand, social media serves as an alternative to the lack of communication channels through mass media. Because after all, mass media is difficult to separate from political co-optation and business intervention. Thus, social media becomes one of the public spaces that paves the way for democratization, as it can be produced and reproduced by the community without having to go through a series of communication prerequisites. Habermas provides an important foundation regarding the difference between virtual space and public space in the virtual realm (Papacharissi, 2022). Virtual space serves as an infrastructure for constructing dialogue, while virtual public space serves as an infrastructure for realizing democracy.

The development of social media opens up a dialogue space for the public, who have previously been passive audiences of conventional mass media. The audience did not have a space to express their opinions on the information received through mass media such as TV, radio, newspapers, and others. With the emergence of social media, that communication deadlock has changed. Where everyone can become a subject of communication, expressing their opinions and conveying messages. Social media has become a new space for the formation of public opinion, an effective communication space for monitoring political activities that were previously only initiated by non-governmental organizations and mass

media. Thus, social media deserves to be called an alternative space for democratization (Botelho, 2021).

In the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution, the existence of social media is experiencing a strengthening of its role. The existence of social media not only serves as a means of communication between individuals but also transforms into a channel for public political participation. When the aspirations of the people tend to experience a bottleneck because political parties, as important pillars of democracy, currently tend to be unable to perform their function of listening to and absorbing grassroots aspirations, social media becomes the alternative. On social media, the public is free to express themselves in responding to and criticizing an issue, especially those issues that have a significant magnitude and directly impact people's lives. Along with the development in its usage, societal activities in using social media have given rise to various terminologies such as netizen, influencer, or buzzer (Budiana, 2024; Sumartono et al., 2023; Syahputra et al., 2021; Widyatama & Mahbob, 2024).

The significant reactions of netizens on social media regarding the Constitutional Court's decision on the vice presidential candidate requirements, which received both support and harsh criticism for being perceived as tarnishing the legal and political processes in Indonesia, demonstrate that social media can facilitate a mass movement. This can be explained from the perspective of the DMO concept, which posits that mass movements use social media as an effective means to express their opinions. This movement of expressing opinions is understood as a movement to keep up with technological developments, especially new media in the form of social media, by creating virtual networks between users spontaneously through commenting on existing issues (Seibicke & Michailidou, 2022).

The theory of digital opinion movements helps to understand the logic and dynamics of digital opinion movements on social media. The concept of Digital Opinion Movement is important because it is part of a new study related to empirical cases by observing compliance and deviations of social media users based on theoretical constructs, isolating the digital dimensions of active X users' participation, and outlining public opinion and social movements that will help understand the development of collective actions based on sentiment more broadly, networked but more individual.

Indonesia’s rapidly expanding social-media sphere has turned Constitutional Court verdicts into high-stakes public spectacles. Prior studies show that legal controversies trigger bursts of online mobilisation, yet systematic evidence on opinion trajectories remains scarce. By mapping sentiment and network flows, this study fills that gap. Analysis of 14,310 Indonesian-language tweets posted 15–25 October 2023 reveals that 60 % constituted negative public responses to the age-limit ruling, 29 % positive, and 11 % neutral. These proportions confirm a pronounced distrust toward legal authorities, supporting the Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) expectation that rapid-cycle controversies magnify affect-laden dissent. Network visualisation using ForceAtlas2 generated a retweet graph of 3,412 unique users with 10,785 edges. Two ideological echo chambers formed: one critical of the ruling, the other lauding youth leadership. A modularity score ($Q = 0.67$) indicates strong partisan clustering that restricts cross-camp dialogue.

The convergence of negative sentiment with high-degree activist hubs exemplifies DMO’s “amplification spiral”: once elite nodes adopt affective frames, narrative resonance accelerates within each camp. Public response clusters correlate strongly with topic sentiment scores ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$), demonstrating that social-media sentiment can act as a reliable proxy for offline political alignment during Indonesia’s 2024 electoral cycle.

These findings imply that constitutional institutions must engage proactively on social platforms to pre-empt narrative capture by partisan influencers. Real-time explanatory threads, partnerships with fact-checking networks, and targeted civic-education campaigns may curb polarisation and restore trust.

CONCLUSION

These findings demonstrate a persistent gap between judicial reasoning and public reception in digital spheres, underscoring the urgent need for transparent legal communication by constitutional bodies. The findings of this study reveal that the Constitutional Court's decision regarding the age requirement for vice-presidential candidates in the 2024 election has triggered sharp public opinion polarization on social media, particularly on platform X. Through a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing data from Drone Emprit and NVivo analysis, it was found that the majority of netizens responded negatively to the decision, perceiving it as an act of power interference and a weakening of democratic principles and legal supremacy. Positive sentiments, on the other hand, were generally expressed by government supporters who viewed the decision as an opportunity for the younger generation. This polarization demonstrates that legal rulings – especially those perceived as politically charged – can become catalysts for emotionally charged and polarized digital opinion movements.

Specifically, this article extends the Digital Movement of Opinion framework by empirically linking sentiment valence to network modularity, offering a quantifiable pathway for future comparative research across emerging democracies. Conceptually, this study contributes to the discourse on digital democracy and legal legitimacy in Indonesia by extending the application of the Digital Movement of Opinion (DMO) theory to the context of a developing country with distinct political and cultural complexities. Moreover, the methodological approach – combining social network analysis and sentiment mapping of organically generated public discourse – enriches the tools available in digital political communication studies. The research also highlights the crucial role of social media as a participatory and affective arena for political meaning-making, often challenging the formal narratives of state institutions.

These findings open avenues for further research, particularly through multi-platform analysis and more systematic exploration of digital actors such as buzzers, influencers, and bots in shaping public responses to institutional decisions. In terms of policy and legal practice, the study underscores the importance of maintaining transparency, independence, and accountability within judicial institutions in the digital era to preserve their legitimacy before an increasingly connected and critical virtual public.

Pragmatically, we recommend that the Constitutional Court establish a dedicated real-time microblogging desk and collaborate with platform integrity teams to deploy post-verdict debunking workflows that can curb disinformation in its critical first 48 hours. Limitations of this study’s hashtag-based sample may under-represent silent majorities and exclude cross-platform discourse; subsequent work should integrate multi-platform data and offline surveys to validate these findings.

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