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Electoral Integrity and Democratic Governance: Examining the Influence of Digital Political Communication on Public Trust and Electoral Participation in Emerging Democracies

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between digital political communication, public trust, electoral participation, and electoral integrity within the governance context of emerging democracies. A qualitative socio-legal design was employed by integrating doctrinal analysis of Indonesian electoral, campaign, electronic-information, campaign-finance, and personal-data protection regulations with a structured synthesis of recent empirical scholarship on digital political communication and political behavior. The analysis identifies information credibility and institutional accountability as the principal conditions through which digital communication is associated with democratic participation and electoral legitimacy. The evidence synthesis shows that accessible and credible political information is associated with stronger political engagement, efficacy, and participation, whereas disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, opaque digital campaign financing, and unlawful or non-transparent personal-data processing create risks for public trust and autonomous electoral choice. The legal analysis further finds that Indonesia already possesses substantial regulatory foundations, but responsibility remains fragmented across electoral law, electronic-information law, data-protection law, campaign-finance regulation, and electoral supervision. The study concludes that resilient digital electoral governance requires coordinated enforcement, transparent political communication, accountable data practices, and safeguards that protect both political expression and informed electoral participation.

Keywords: *Democratic Governance, Digital Political Communication, Electoral Integrity, Electoral Participation, Public Trust.*

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INTRODUCTION

The global transformation of political communication has increasingly shifted electoral competition from conventional institutional and mass-media arenas toward digitally mediated environments in which social media platforms, online news, political influencers, and algorithmically circulated information shape how citizens encounter political actors, interpret electoral processes, and form judgments about democratic legitimacy. The expansion of digital communication has created new opportunities for political participation by lowering informational and communicative barriers, yet these infrastructures can simultaneously intensify disinformation, polarization, manipulation, and unequal exposure to political content, making their democratic consequences increasingly contested. Recent comparative evidence suggests that social media penetration can contribute to stronger democratic institutions, although the magnitude and direction of this relationship remain dependent on the broader institutional and political context (Acheampong & Taden, 2025). Digital political communication has also become increasingly consequential for voter behavior because media narratives and online political messages can influence how citizens evaluate candidates, issues, and electoral choices (Prayogi et al., 2024). The expansion of digitally mediated participation therefore creates a fundamental tension between greater opportunities for political engagement and greater exposure to informational risks. This tension is particularly important in emerging democracies, where institutional consolidation and digital

transformation are developing simultaneously and where citizens' perceptions of electoral credibility may be strongly influenced by the information environments surrounding elections.

Recent scholarship demonstrates that the effects of digital political communication operate through interconnected mechanisms involving political information, trust, efficacy, and participation rather than through exposure to digital media alone. Comparative research indicates that the relationship between digital information consumption and political trust is conditioned by democratic context and perceptions of corruption, suggesting that citizens interpret political information through their evaluations of institutional performance (Daoudi et al., 2025). Political social media influencers can also affect political interest, political trust, political efficacy, and political participation, demonstrating that the credibility and communicative influence of digital actors can become politically consequential (Wasike, 2023). Differences in the intensity of social media use have been associated with different levels of online political participation, indicating that digital engagement does not generate identical participatory outcomes across citizens (Intyaswati et al., 2024). These findings challenge technological-determinist assumptions because digital communication does not inherently strengthen democratic participation or public confidence. Instead, its consequences appear to depend on the credibility of information, the institutional environment, citizens' political orientations, and the ways in which digital content is interpreted. The central analytical question consequently moves beyond whether digital media increase participation toward examining how digital political communication shapes the trust through which citizens decide whether electoral institutions are credible enough to warrant continued democratic engagement.

The literature nevertheless reveals a significant conceptual gap concerning the relationship between electoral integrity, digital political communication, public trust, and electoral participation as interconnected dimensions of democratic governance. Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes electoral integrity as a multidimensional and complex condition that requires resilience against crises, risks, and disruptions rather than merely the technical absence of electoral malpractice (James & Garnett, 2025). The quality of elections has increasingly been understood through broader conceptual dimensions that encompass institutional procedures, political competition, citizen experiences, and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes (James & Garnett, 2026). Research on local government elections similarly identifies trust and legitimacy as important foundations of electoral integrity, although the role of digitally mediated political communication in producing these perceptions remains insufficiently developed (Adejumo et al., 2025). Existing research consequently tends to examine digital communication, electoral integrity, political trust, and participation as partially separate analytical domains. Such fragmentation limits the ability of scholars to explain how information circulating through digital platforms may alter citizens' perceptions of electoral fairness and subsequently affect their willingness to participate. The unresolved issue is whether digital political communication strengthens electoral legitimacy by expanding political information and engagement or undermines it by increasing uncertainty, distrust, and susceptibility to manipulation.

The urgency of this problem has increased as digital manipulation becomes more sophisticated and increasingly capable of affecting citizens' perceptions of candidates, political events, and electoral outcomes. Political deepfakes create a particularly serious governance challenge because synthetic audiovisual content can undermine electoral integrity while complicating conventional approaches to campaign regulation and democratic accountability (Hapsari, 2025). Socio-legal research further identifies deepfake technology as a potential threat to democratic rights because manipulated political content can interfere with citizens' capacity to make informed electoral decisions (Pratama & Sangare, 2026). Disinformation more broadly can disrupt the informational conditions required for citizens to evaluate electoral actors and institutions, particularly within developing democracies where information infrastructures and institutional safeguards may be unevenly developed (Suherman et al., 2026). Strategic communication has therefore become increasingly important for electoral transparency and for limiting the democratic consequences of disinformation. Electoral reforms likewise remain central to strengthening democratic accountability, although institutional reforms must increasingly respond to rapidly changing digital communication environments (Obulapathi, 2026). The practical challenge is consequently not limited to preventing false information but concerns how electoral institutions can maintain public trust and meaningful participation while protecting citizens' rights to political expression, information, and democratic engagement.

The Indonesian context provides a particularly relevant setting for investigating these dynamics because electoral governance operates through an expanding legal and institutional framework that intersects with contemporary digital communication practices. Indonesia's electoral framework establishes formal requirements concerning elections, campaign activities, and electoral governance, while its broader legal commitments recognize political participation as part of fundamental democratic rights (Republik Indonesia, 2005). Campaign supervision is institutionally supported through specific regulatory provisions intended to monitor electoral campaign activities and protect the integrity of electoral competition (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). Electoral campaign regulation also establishes formal standards for campaign implementation, providing an institutional reference for evaluating the legitimacy of political communication during elections (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). The regulatory environment has expanded further through legislation concerning personal data protection and electronic information, reflecting the growing intersection between electoral politics, digital communication, and individual rights. Civil society and independent monitoring remain important components of electoral integrity because participatory oversight can strengthen accountability beyond the formal responsibilities of electoral institutions (Nurmansyah & Erman, 2025). These institutional developments indicate that the challenge facing emerging democracies is increasingly one of aligning formal electoral safeguards with citizens' lived experiences of political communication, trust, and participation in digitally mediated environments.

Against this background, this study positions electoral integrity as a multidimensional democratic outcome shaped not only by formal electoral administration but also by the communication environment through which citizens interpret political actors, institutions, and electoral processes. The study examines how digital political communication influences public trust and electoral participation within emerging democratic contexts, with particular attention to the mechanisms through which digitally mediated information may strengthen or weaken perceptions of electoral legitimacy. Digital governance research suggests that democratic accountability increasingly depends on institutional capacity to manage information, technology, and citizen engagement within changing political environments (Singh, 2026). Political participation in emerging societies similarly depends on the capacity of democratic institutions to provide credible opportunities for citizens to engage with governance and political decision-making (Khan, 2026). The study therefore treats digital political communication not as an inherently democratic force but as a contested arena in which accessibility, persuasion, institutional credibility, disinformation, and participation interact. The research seeks to address the unresolved problem of how these communication dynamics influence public trust and electoral participation and, in turn, shape broader perceptions of electoral integrity. Theoretically, the study contributes an integrated perspective connecting digital political communication with electoral integrity and democratic governance, while methodologically it provides an analytical basis for examining the relationships among communication, trust, and participation in emerging democratic settings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative socio-legal research design that integrated doctrinal analysis of Indonesian electoral and digital-governance regulation with a structured synthesis of recent empirical scholarship on digital political communication, public trust, and electoral participation. The legal unit of analysis comprised statutory and regulatory provisions governing campaign communication, electoral supervision, campaign finance, electronic information, and personal-data protection. The principal legal materials were Law No. 7 of 2017 concerning General Elections, Law No. 7 of 2023 concerning amendments to the electoral framework, Law No. 27 of 2022 concerning Personal Data Protection, Law No. 1 of 2024 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, PKPU No. 15 of 2023 concerning Electoral Campaigns, PKPU No. 18 of 2023 concerning Campaign Funds, and Perbawaslu No. 11 of 2023 concerning Supervision of Electoral Campaigns. International standards were examined through Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Peer-reviewed studies were included when they reported or analyzed relationships involving social-media use, digital information consumption, political influencers, political trust, fake news, electoral concern, or online political participation. The

design was limited to legal materials and published empirical evidence; no new respondent-level estimates were generated.

The analysis proceeded in three stages. First, the legal materials were coded into five analytical dimensions: responsible campaign communication, prohibited campaign conduct, supervisory accountability, campaign-finance transparency, and lawful and secure personal-data processing. Second, the relevant provisions were interpreted grammatically, systematically, and teleologically to determine how existing rules apply to social-media campaigning, internet advertising, disinformation, deepfakes, political microtargeting, and digitally mediated campaign expenditure. Third, the resulting legal findings were triangulated with empirical studies on social-media penetration, digital information consumption, political influencers, fake-news exposure, and online participation (Acheampong & Taden, 2025; Daoudi et al., 2025; Intyaswati et al., 2024; Stachofsky et al., 2023; Wasike, 2023). The synthesis focused on recurring associations between information credibility, institutional trust, and political participation rather than on estimating new causal coefficients. Analytical conclusions were retained when the legal materials and cited empirical evidence converged, while regulatory fragmentation was reported separately as an institutional finding. This procedure produced a completed socio-legal assessment of the conditions under which digital political communication is associated with stronger or weaker electoral integrity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Digital Political Communication, Electoral Integrity, and the Legal Framework of Democratic Elections

Electoral integrity in the digital era cannot be reduced to the mechanical compliance of electoral administrators with procedural rules because the legitimacy of an election also depends upon whether citizens perceive the electoral process as credible, fair, transparent, and capable of protecting meaningful political choice. James and Garnett conceptualize electoral integrity as a multidimensional quality of elections that must remain resilient against political, technological, institutional, and crisis-related pressures rather than being understood solely through the absence of procedural violations (James & Garnett, 2025). The conceptualization becomes particularly relevant when political communication increasingly takes place through platforms that can simultaneously broaden access to political information and facilitate manipulation of electoral perceptions. Comparative evidence indicates that greater social-media penetration may support democratic institutions, although its institutional effects remain contingent upon the surrounding political and governance environment (Acheampong & Taden, 2025). From a socio-legal perspective, this means that the legal assessment of electoral integrity must extend beyond the legality of voting procedures toward the conditions under which political information is produced, disseminated, contested, and interpreted by voters. The normative significance of this approach lies in treating communication surrounding elections as part of the institutional environment within which democratic consent is formed rather than as an external phenomenon without legal relevance.

The legal foundation of electoral participation is rooted in the recognition that citizens possess a protected right to participate in public affairs and to exercise political choice through genuine and periodic elections. Article 21 paragraph (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights establishes the right of every person to participate in the government of their country, while Article 21 paragraph (3) places universal and equal suffrage and genuine elections at the center of governmental authority. Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights similarly guarantees citizens the right and opportunity to take part in public affairs, to vote and be elected in genuine periodic elections, and to enjoy access to public service on general terms of equality (United Nations, 1966). Indonesia incorporated the ICCPR into its domestic legal order through Law No. 12 of 2005, making the protection of political participation an important interpretive reference for assessing national electoral regulation (Republik Indonesia, 2005). The legal consequence is that restrictions or practices affecting voters' ability to form and express electoral preferences must be examined not only through electoral legislation but also through the broader principle of effective political participation. Political participation in emerging democratic societies consequently requires institutional arrangements capable of preserving both formal voting rights and the informational conditions necessary for citizens to exercise those rights meaningfully (Khan, 2026).

Within Indonesian positive law, Article 267 paragraph (1) of Law No. 7 of 2017 defines electoral campaigning as part of political education that must be conducted responsibly, establishing a normative connection between political communication and the quality of democratic participation. Article 275 paragraph (1) further recognizes several campaign methods, including social media under letter (e), and advertisements through print media, electronic media, and the internet under letter (f), demonstrating that digital communication is not legally external to the electoral process but expressly situated within the statutory architecture of campaigning (Republik Indonesia, 2017). The statutory recognition of social media as a campaign method is significant because it places digitally mediated political persuasion within the legal domain of electoral accountability rather than treating online communication exclusively as ordinary private expression. The normative structure can be mapped as follows.

Table 1. Mapping of Indonesian Legal Norms Governing Electoral Communication and Integrity

Legal instrument	Provision	Principal norm	Relevance to digital political communication	Electoral-integrity implication
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 267 (1)	Campaign constitutes political education and must be conducted responsibly	Establishes responsibility as a standard for campaign communication	Communication should support informed electoral choice
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 275 (1)(e)	Social media is a campaign method	Expressly recognizes social-media campaigning	Digital campaigning falls within electoral governance
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 275 (1)(f)	Internet advertising is a campaign method	Covers internet-based electoral advertising	Online campaigning is subject to electoral regulation
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 280 (1)	Prohibits specified campaign practices	Applies to campaign actors irrespective of communication medium	Protects fairness and lawful electoral competition
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 521	Criminal sanction for violations of Article 280(1)	Provides enforcement consequences for prohibited campaign conduct	Strengthens deterrence against unlawful campaigning

The table demonstrates that the statutory framework already contains a legal basis for regulating digital campaign communication, although the general formulation of campaign responsibilities creates interpretive challenges when applied to rapidly evolving forms of platform-based political communication. The contemporary literature similarly indicates that digital communication can influence voter behavior and political communication by altering the ways citizens encounter and evaluate electoral messages (Prayogi et al., 2024).

The statutory recognition of digital campaigning must be read systematically with the prohibition regime contained in Article 280 paragraph (1) of Law No. 7 of 2017, which prohibits campaign actors from engaging in specified conduct that may compromise lawful electoral competition. Among the prohibited conduct are the use of threats or violence under letter (a), the use of campaign materials or actions containing elements of ethnic, religious, racial, or group-based hostility under letter (c), and the promising or giving of money or other materials to campaign participants under letter (j) (Republik Indonesia, 2017). The provision becomes increasingly important in digital environments because the legal character of a prohibited message does not disappear merely because the communication is distributed through social-media accounts, digital advertising, or other online channels. The interpretive issue therefore concerns the application of an existing electoral prohibition to technologically transformed modes of dissemination rather than the creation of an entirely separate

category of digital electoral law. The grammatical interpretation of Article 280 establishes the prohibited conduct, while systematic interpretation requires the provision to be read together with Article 267 on responsible political education and Article 275 on lawful campaign methods. The teleological interpretation points toward preservation of free and fair electoral competition by preventing campaign practices capable of distorting voters' autonomous political choices. This legal construction is consistent with the broader finding that citizens' concerns about electoral processes can be affected by political alignment, platform environments, and exposure to fake news, making the integrity of communication an important component of electoral legitimacy (Stachofsky et al., 2023).

The regulatory framework is further operationalized through PKPU No. 15 of 2023 concerning Electoral Campaigns, which provides implementing rules for campaign activities and therefore functions as a bridge between statutory electoral principles and the practical administration of campaigning. The regulation is particularly relevant because its legal status confirms that campaign regulation is not confined to conventional physical activities, while its subsequent amendment through PKPU No. 20 of 2023 demonstrates the regulatory system's capacity to adjust campaign rules within the same electoral cycle (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). From a systematic perspective, the PKPU cannot be interpreted independently from Law No. 7 of 2017 because subordinate electoral regulations must operate within the statutory authority established by the Election Law. The regulatory relationship becomes important for digital political communication because the increasing use of social media requires electoral administrators to translate general statutory principles concerning campaign responsibility, campaign methods, and prohibited conduct into administratively enforceable standards. Public trust is particularly sensitive to this regulatory consistency because citizens are more likely to regard electoral institutions as legitimate when the rules governing political competition are comprehensible, consistently applied, and institutionally supervised. Research on electoral integrity similarly identifies trust and legitimacy as interconnected dimensions of democratic electoral quality, particularly at the grassroots level where citizens directly evaluate the credibility of electoral institutions (Adejumo et al., 2025). The legal framework therefore acquires democratic significance not merely because it restricts campaign conduct but because its consistent implementation can contribute to the institutional conditions from which public confidence in elections develops.

The supervisory dimension is reinforced by Perbawaslu No. 11 of 2023 concerning Supervision of Electoral Campaigns, which establishes the institutional basis for monitoring campaign stages and assigns supervisory functions to Bawaslu and its regional structures. The regulation expressly places campaign supervision within the responsibilities of election supervisors at their respective levels and requires Bawaslu, provincial Bawaslu, and district or municipal Bawaslu to prepare reports concerning the implementation of campaign supervision (Badan Pengawas Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). The regulatory architecture therefore creates a chain of accountability extending from statutory campaign prohibitions to administrative supervision and institutional reporting. Such an arrangement is legally significant for digital political communication because the effectiveness of a prohibition depends not only on its substantive formulation but also on the institutional capacity to detect, assess, document, and respond to violations occurring within decentralized communication environments. Independent monitoring and civil-society participation strengthen this accountability structure by providing additional oversight beyond formal state institutions (Nurmansyah & Erman, 2025). The evidence on digital political communication must therefore be read together with the institutional capacity of electoral authorities to preserve trustworthy information environments and respond to communication practices that threaten electoral fairness. The combined legal and scholarly analysis establishes that electoral integrity arises from the interaction of legal norms, institutional enforcement, technological conditions, and citizens' perceptions rather than from statutory rules operating in isolation.

Digital Political Communication, Public Trust, and Electoral Participation: Integrated Socio-Legal Findings

The synthesis identified information credibility as the principal mechanism linking digital political communication to public trust and electoral participation. Evidence from recent studies shows that the intensity of social-media use is associated with differentiated forms of online political participation rather than with a uniform increase in democratic engagement (Intyaswati et al., 2024). Political social-media influencers also affect political interest, political trust, political efficacy, and participation, demonstrating that the source and perceived credibility of digital messages are politically

consequential (Wasike, 2023). Digital information consumption is likewise related to political trust in ways conditioned by democratic context and perceived corruption (Daoudi et al., 2025). These findings do not support a technological-determinist interpretation in which greater digital exposure automatically strengthens democracy. The combined evidence instead shows that the democratic value of digital political communication depends on the credibility of information, the institutional context in which it is interpreted, and the capacity of digital engagement to support informed electoral choice.

Public trust emerged from the synthesis as an institutional condition connecting communication quality with electoral legitimacy. Daoudi et al. (2025) demonstrate that the relationship between digital information consumption and political trust varies according to democratic context and perceived corruption, while Wasike (2023) shows that political influencers can alter trust and efficacy alongside participation. Stachofsky et al. (2023) further report that political alignment, platform environments, and fake-news consumption are associated with voter concern regarding election processes. Read together, these findings establish that citizens' confidence in electoral institutions is shaped not only by formal institutional performance but also by the informational environment through which that performance is interpreted. The socio-legal significance is direct because Article 25 of the ICCPR protects meaningful political participation, which presupposes an informational environment in which citizens can evaluate electoral institutions on credible grounds. Public trust therefore functions as a social indicator of whether formal electoral guarantees are experienced as legitimate within digitally mediated political communication.

The relationship between digital communication and electoral participation becomes clearer when the evidence synthesis is read against Article 267 paragraph (1) of Law No. 7 of 2017, which defines campaigning as responsible political education directed toward increasing political participation (Republik Indonesia, 2017). The cited empirical literature shows that digital communication contributes to participation when it supports political awareness, information seeking, discussion, efficacy, and other forms of engagement, but that these outcomes are not produced by exposure alone (Intyaswati et al., 2024; Wasike, 2023). Information disorder alters this relationship because misleading or manipulated content reduces the informational quality on which autonomous electoral judgment depends (Stachofsky et al., 2023; Suherman et al., 2026). The resulting finding is conditional: digital communication strengthens the participatory function of campaigning when communication remains credible and accountable, while manipulative or systematically distorted information weakens the substantive conditions of meaningful participation. Table 2 summarizes the convergent empirical and socio-legal findings.

Table 2. Synthesis of Evidence on Digital Political Communication, Public Trust, and Electoral Participation

Variable	Indicator	Synthesized Finding	Socio-Legal Interpretation
Digital Political Communication	Exposure, frequency, interaction, and credibility of political content	Higher intensity of social-media use is associated with differentiated forms and levels of online political participation (Intyaswati et al., 2024).	Digital exposure has democratic value when it improves access to credible information and supports informed electoral choice.
Public Trust	Confidence in electoral institutions, procedures, and electoral outcomes	Digital information consumption is associated with political trust, with the relationship conditioned by democratic context and perceived corruption (Daoudi et al., 2025).	Trust reflects the social legitimacy of electoral institutions and the perceived credibility of electoral governance.
Electoral Participation	Voting intention, political discussion, information seeking,	Political social-media influencers affect political interest, efficacy, trust, and participation, while levels of	Participation is democratically meaningful when digital engagement

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	and online political engagement	social-media use correspond with different participation patterns (Wasike, 2023; Intyaswati et al., 2024).	supports autonomous and informed political choice.
Information Credibility	Perceived accuracy, reliability, and neutrality of political information	Political alignment, platform environments, and fake-news consumption are associated with voter concern about election processes (Stachofsky et al., 2023).	Information credibility affects the conditions under which citizens evaluate electoral fairness and institutional accountability.
Digital Misinformation	Exposure to misleading, false, or manipulated political content	Disinformation and synthetic manipulation disrupt the informational conditions required for electoral judgment and create documented risks for electoral integrity (Pratama & Sangare, 2026; Suherman et al., 2026).	Manipulated information can impair autonomous political choice and requires coordinated electoral and digital-governance safeguards.

Table 2 consolidates findings drawn from the cited empirical literature and the legal analysis. The evidence indicates that digital exposure has democratic significance only when its informational quality and institutional context are considered. Media environments influence how citizens encounter political information and construct electoral preferences (Prayogi et al., 2024), while variation in social-media use corresponds with variation in online political participation (Intyaswati et al., 2024). The socio-legal analysis therefore places greater weight on the quality of participation than on participation volume alone. Increased online activity does not constitute stronger democratic governance when it is generated by manipulation, deception, or systematically distorted information. The regulatory objective is accordingly the protection of informed and autonomous participation, not the unrestricted expansion of digital political communication.

The evidence also establishes a consistent connection between information credibility and institutional trust. Electoral integrity is closely associated with trust and legitimacy when citizens evaluate whether electoral institutions operate according to principles of fairness and accountability (Adejumo et al., 2025). Conversely, fake-news consumption and politically aligned information environments are associated with heightened concern about election processes (Stachofsky et al., 2023). These findings show that public trust is not an isolated subjective attitude; it is partly formed through citizens' access to information about the legality, fairness, and credibility of electoral procedures. From a socio-legal perspective, the association between communication quality and trust provides evidence concerning the social effectiveness of electoral institutions. Formal legal standards acquire democratic legitimacy only when the surrounding information environment enables citizens to understand, verify, and evaluate institutional conduct.

Participation findings display the same conditional pattern. Digital platforms reduce barriers to political information and facilitate interaction among citizens, candidates, parties, and electoral institutions, creating measurable opportunities for information seeking, discussion, and online political participation (Intyaswati et al., 2024). Research on direct democracy in the digital age similarly identifies expanded participatory opportunities alongside risks involving information quality, inequality, manipulation, and institutional accountability (Rattanasevee et al., 2024). The combined evidence therefore supports a distinction between legitimate political persuasion and communication practices that impair autonomous electoral choice. Indonesian electoral law provides the normative basis for this distinction through campaign method regulation, campaign prohibitions, electoral supervision, and digital-information governance. Public trust operates as the institutional link between these legal safeguards and citizens' willingness to participate, making communication credibility a substantive component of electoral integrity rather than a peripheral media issue.

Digital Manipulation, Data Protection, Electoral Accountability, and Democratic Governance

The integrated socio-legal findings become more complex when digital political communication is examined through the risks of manipulation, disinformation, synthetic media, and unauthorized processing of voter-related information. Digital manipulation alters the informational environment in which citizens assess candidates and electoral institutions and can therefore compromise the conditions of autonomous political choice protected by electoral law. Contemporary socio-legal research identifies deepfake technology as a concrete governance problem because synthetic political content undermines electoral integrity while complicating attribution, enforcement, and democratic accountability (Hapsari, 2025; Pratama & Sangare, 2026). The legal analysis shows that these risks cannot be addressed through campaign regulation alone. They fall across electoral law, electronic-information regulation, personal-data protection, campaign-finance accountability, and electoral supervision. Table 3 maps the resulting normative architecture.

Table 3. Legal Mapping of Digital Manipulation, Personal Data Protection, and Electoral Accountability

Legal Source	Relevant Provision	Legal Norm	Relevance to Electoral Integrity
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 280(1)	Prohibits specified campaign practices	Protects fairness of electoral competition
Law No. 7 of 2017	Article 325–339	Regulates campaign financing	Supports transparency and accountability
PKPU No. 18 of 2023	Campaign-finance reporting provisions	Requires recording and reporting of campaign funds	Limits opaque financing of political communication
Law No. 27 of 2022	Article 20	Requires a lawful basis for personal-data processing	Protects voters against unlawful data processing
Law No. 27 of 2022	Article 35	Requires appropriate technical and organizational security measures	Protects personal data from misuse and breaches
Law No. 1 of 2024	Article 28(2)	Regulates electronic information capable of generating hatred or hostility	Addresses harmful digital communication
Law No. 1 of 2024	Article 27A	Regulates electronic defamation-related conduct	Protects reputation within digital communication

Table 3 demonstrates that Indonesian law already contains several normative instruments capable of addressing distinct dimensions of digital electoral risk, although those instruments originate from different regulatory regimes. The principal weakness is therefore not the total absence of legal norms but the fragmented distribution of regulatory authority across electoral, electronic-information, financial, and data-protection frameworks. Deepfake technology illustrates this fragmentation because manipulated audiovisual content may simultaneously constitute political communication, deceptive information, and a threat to democratic rights without necessarily fitting neatly within a single statutory prohibition (Pratama & Sangare, 2026). The legal problem requires systematic interpretation because the same digital act may generate electoral, administrative, civil, or criminal consequences depending upon its content, actor, purpose, and impact. The teleological interpretation of these norms places the protection of electoral autonomy and institutional legitimacy above a purely medium-based distinction between offline and online campaigning.

The problem becomes more acute when disinformation is treated as an electoral-integrity issue rather than merely as an information-quality problem. Research on developing democracies indicates that information disorder can interfere with electoral processes by weakening citizens' capacity to distinguish credible political claims from deliberately misleading narratives (Suherman et al., 2026). Such interference is legally significant because Article 267 paragraph (1) of Law No. 7 of 2017 frames campaigning as political education that must be conducted responsibly, meaning that the democratic

function of campaign communication is connected to the quality of political information received by voters (Republik Indonesia, 2017). The prohibition regime under Article 280 paragraph (1) further establishes restrictions on campaign conduct, while Article 521 provides criminal consequences for violations of Article 280 paragraph (1), creating an enforcement dimension for unlawful campaign practices. The difficulty arises when disinformation is disseminated through anonymous accounts, influencers, coordinated networks, or users who are not formally registered as campaign participants, because the attribution of responsibility becomes more difficult than in conventional campaign settings. Strategic communication has consequently become relevant to electoral transparency because institutional responses to disinformation require not only sanctions but also credible mechanisms for communicating authoritative electoral information (Putină, 2025). The socio-legal implication is that electoral integrity depends partly upon the capacity of institutions to compete effectively within the same digital information environment in which misleading political narratives circulate.

Personal-data protection introduces another dimension because digital political communication can involve the collection, analysis, profiling, and targeting of information concerning voters. Article 20 paragraph (1) of Law No. 27 of 2022 requires every Personal Data Controller to have a legal basis for processing Personal Data, while Article 20 paragraph (2) identifies recognized bases for processing that determine whether a particular processing activity is legally permissible (Republik Indonesia, 2022). Article 21 further requires the controller to provide information concerning the legality, purpose, and relevance of processing, creating a transparency requirement that becomes important when political actors or associated organizations process voter information for communication purposes. Article 35 requires controllers to implement appropriate technical and organizational measures to protect personal data, which is particularly significant where digital political databases may be vulnerable to unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or misuse. The statutory framework therefore creates a legal distinction between legitimate political communication and communication practices supported by unlawful or inadequately protected personal-data processing. Political microtargeting may increase the efficiency of electoral communication, but its legitimacy depends upon whether the underlying data acquisition, processing purpose, consent or other lawful basis, and security measures satisfy the requirements of the Personal Data Protection Law. The analytical significance of this framework lies in the fact that the legitimacy of digital political communication depends not only on message content but also on whether political actors obtain, process, secure, and disclose the use of personal data in accordance with statutory requirements.

The interaction between data protection and electoral regulation can be further clarified by examining the accountability chain established through campaign-finance rules and electoral supervision. Law No. 7 of 2017 regulates campaign financing through Articles 325 to 339, while PKPU No. 18 of 2023 operationalizes requirements concerning campaign-finance accounts, reporting, auditing, public responses, and the Campaign and Campaign Fund Information System (Sikadeka) (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). The legal significance of these provisions extends to digital political communication because online advertising, influencer-based campaigning, data-driven targeting, and other forms of digital outreach may involve financial resources that should remain traceable within the campaign-finance regime. PKPU No. 18 of 2023 expressly seeks legal certainty, accountability, and transparency through campaign-finance bookkeeping and reporting, thereby establishing a financial dimension of electoral integrity that complements substantive campaign restrictions (Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, 2023). The following legal structure illustrates the relationship between financial transparency and digital accountability.

Table 4. Integrated Accountability Requirements for Digital Electoral Governance in Indonesia

Regulatory Dimension	Legal Basis	Accountability Requirement	Digital-Electoral Relevance
Campaign Financing	Law No. 7 of 2017, Articles 325–339	Recording, reporting, and accountability	Digital advertising and online campaign expenditure
Campaign Funds	PKPU No. 18 of 2023	Account opening and financial reporting	Traceability of resources used for digital campaigns

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Campaign Supervision	Perbawaslu No. 11 of 2023	Monitoring and reporting of campaign activities	Oversight of digitally mediated campaign conduct
Personal-Data Processing	Law No. 27 of 2022, Article 20	Lawful basis for processing	Regulation of voter-data use for targeting
Data Security	Law No. 27 of 2022, Article 35	Technical and organizational safeguards	Protection of electoral databases and voter information

The mapping shows that digital electoral accountability requires financial, administrative, informational, and data-protection controls to operate concurrently rather than as isolated regulatory mechanisms. Civil-society monitoring can reinforce this institutional architecture because participatory oversight provides an additional source of accountability where state institutions face limitations in monitoring decentralized digital communication (Nurmansyah & Erman, 2025). The resulting legal construction is consistent with comparative research emphasizing that electoral reforms must strengthen democratic accountability through institutional mechanisms capable of responding to changing political conditions (Obulapathi, 2026). The Indonesian framework nevertheless reveals a continuing regulatory challenge because conventional electoral rules primarily regulate identifiable electoral actors, whereas digital communication can be generated and amplified by networks whose legal status is less clearly connected to formal campaign structures. The problem becomes particularly consequential when digital content is financed indirectly, targeted through personal-data profiles, or disseminated through actors who operate outside formal campaign organizations. A more integrated accountability framework is therefore required to connect campaign regulation, financial disclosure, data protection, platform-mediated communication, and electoral supervision.

The synthesis shows that regulatory fragmentation has direct implications for public trust and electoral participation because institutional credibility depends partly on the capacity of public authorities to respond coherently to digital manipulation. Digital-governance scholarship identifies institutional capacity, transparency, and citizen oversight as central components of democratic accountability in technologically changing political systems (Singh, 2026). The electoral-integrity resilience perspective similarly requires institutions to anticipate and withstand emerging disruptions rather than respond only after electoral harm has occurred (James & Garnett, 2025). The legal analysis therefore identifies electoral integrity as an institutional capacity to preserve lawful competition under changing technological conditions, including the capacity to detect harmful manipulation, protect voter information, supervise campaign resources, and communicate credible electoral information. This finding is consistent with the broader conceptualization of election quality as an interaction among institutional procedures, political actors, citizen experiences, and contextual risks (James & Garnett, 2026). Strengthening democratic governance in digital environments consequently requires an integrated framework in which electoral regulation, electronic-information law, personal-data protection, campaign-finance accountability, and participatory oversight operate as mutually reinforcing safeguards.

CONCLSUION

This study establishes that digital political communication is a significant socio-legal dimension of electoral integrity and democratic governance in emerging democracies. The integrated analysis shows that credible and accessible digital political information is associated with political interest, efficacy, participation, and institutional trust, while disinformation, fake news, deepfakes, opaque campaign financing, and unlawful or non-transparent personal-data practices create identifiable risks for informed electoral choice and public confidence. Indonesian law already provides substantial normative foundations through Law No. 7 of 2017, Law No. 7 of 2023, PKPU No. 15 of 2023, Perbawaslu No. 11 of 2023, PKPU No. 18 of 2023, Law No. 27 of 2022, and Law No. 1 of 2024. The principal institutional weakness is not the absence of regulation but the fragmentation of responsibility across electoral, electronic-information, campaign-finance, and data-protection regimes. The analysis also confirms that electoral integrity is inseparable from the political rights recognized under Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil

and Political Rights. Public trust therefore functions as a central socio-legal condition linking formal electoral guarantees with citizens' willingness to participate in democratic processes.

The study contributes theoretically by integrating electoral-integrity scholarship, digital political communication, public trust, and electoral participation within a completed socio-legal framework grounded in legal materials and empirical literature. The findings reject the assumption that technological expansion automatically strengthens democracy; the democratic value of digital communication depends on information credibility, transparent political competition, lawful data practices, and institutional accountability. The analysis further demonstrates that electoral regulation must be interpreted together with personal-data protection, electronic-information regulation, campaign-finance accountability, and electoral supervision. Effective reform therefore requires coordinated enforcement among electoral management bodies, supervisory authorities, data-protection institutions, civil society, and other relevant actors, together with transparent standards for digital campaigning and political data use. Resilient democratic governance in the digital era depends on protecting electoral integrity not only at the ballot box but also within the informational, technological, financial, and legal environments through which citizens form political judgments and participate in elections.

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