

The Projection Of Digital Activism: The Dynamics Of Digital Resistance Against Digital Authoritarian Repression In Indonesia

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Abstract

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The shift of digital space from freedom to political control signals a new form of digital authoritarianism in Indonesia. The state uses online surveillance, information restrictions, disinformation, and activist criminalization to strengthen its power, coinciding with the decline of digital democracy in Southeast Asia. In contrast, hashtag-based resistance such as #ReformasiDikorupsi, #TolakOmnibusLaw, #IndonesiaGelap, and #ResetIndonesia has emerged, operating through connective action—horizontal mobilization based on personal networks and affective solidarity. This study employs a descriptive-qualitative and interpretive approach, developed as a conceptual reflection grounded in a structured literature review rather than first-hand field observation, and uses the #ResetIndonesia movement as an illustrative case. Analyzed data included academic literature, international research reports, and credible media on digital surveillance and online social movements. The results show that connective action expands political participation by enabling digital creativity and spontaneous solidarity, but faces vulnerabilities due to the lack of formal organizations. Meanwhile, the state adapts repression through algorithms and regulations that normalize control. The dialectic of control and resistance forms a cycle—control, resistance, adaptation, new repression—that illustrates the co-evolution of power and digital activism. These findings stress the need to strengthen movement structures and protect digital rights to ensure online resistance evolves into a sustainable democratic force.

Keywords: **digital authoritarianism; connective action; political hashtags; digital Resistance; digital democracy**

1. INTRODUCTION

In its early emergence, the internet was regarded as a new arena for democratic practice—one in which the boundaries of nation-states, political hierarchies, and social stratification appeared to dissolve under the principles of openness and free participation. Within this context, the digital sphere seemed increasingly promising for all individuals. It provided new spaces for citizen participation, offering opportunities to express opinions and form virtual communities. Moreover, citizens gained broader access to engage directly in public debates

without relying on traditional institutions such as mainstream media or political parties (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

On the other hand, along with the rapid development of digital infrastructure, the internet and social media, once viewed as powerful instruments of liberation, have gradually transformed into new arenas of political control. Algorithms governing the flow of information now determine what becomes visible and what remains obscured on social media platforms, thereby shaping public perception and potentially introducing bias. Additionally, practices such as censorship, mass surveillance, and the manipulation of political discourse demonstrate that power has not disappeared in the digital age; instead, it has persisted and transformed (Morozov, 2011).

Over time, this phenomenon has led to the emergence of digital authoritarianism, a new form of authoritarian rule operating through information technology. Just as the state has historically used physical repression to control society, digital infrastructure has now become an essential tool for maintaining political power. This is evident in the increasing prevalence of digital surveillance, restrictions on information access, particularly amid social or political unrest, online repression targeting activists and journalists, and the manipulation of public opinion through propaganda and disinformation (Kalathil & Boas, 2003). In this context, power operates invisibly through systems and networks that regulate the production, distribution, and interpretation of political, economic, and social information.

Amid the strengthening of state control over digital spaces, society is not entirely in a passive position. The regime's efforts to dominate digital space have, paradoxically, encouraged society to develop new strategies for negotiating power through more adaptive and effective forms of resistance. These actions no longer rely on formal leadership or large organizational structures but instead depend on individuals' ability to build networks, share narratives, and personalize their political messages. This pattern is explained by Bennett and Segerberg (2013) through the concept of connective action, which emphasizes the role of digital technologies in enabling more flexible, decentralized, and transnational forms of political participation (Bimber et al., 2012). From this perspective, societal resistance on social media is not merely reactive to acts of repression, but rather reflects a fundamental transformation in how societies articulate solidarity and power in the digital era.

Through the lens of connective action, hashtag activism has emerged as a symbolic and collective form of digital resistance. Through hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter on a global scale, #MilkTeaAlliance in Southeast Asia, and #ResetIndonesia, which recently accompanied demonstrations in Indonesia, citizens have reframed public discourse to challenge the state's dominant narratives. Hashtags do not merely function as markers of togetherness, but also as tools for curating emotions and political awareness that can encourage broad participation and accelerate the diffusion of political solidarity (Jackson et al., 2020).

However, the dynamics of digital resistance do not unfold within a completely free space. As public solidarity becomes increasingly interconnected, the state adapts its control strategies accordingly. Regimes no longer rely solely on direct censorship, but instead exploit platform infrastructures to divert public attention, reduce the visibility of critical discourse, and normalize pro-government narratives through buzzers, disinformation, and media framing. This condition turns digital spaces into complex arenas of negotiation between the potential empowerment of citizens and the strategic calculations of state power.

Several previous studies have examined digital authoritarianism and the practice of connective action separately. However, there remains limited research that specifically investigates the interaction between the two in the Indonesian context, particularly by positioning hashtag movements as arenas of negotiation between citizen resistance and state control strategies. Accordingly, this article situates itself within this gap by examining how connective action operates and confronts the new boundaries of digital democracy under a regime of digital authoritarianism.

Based on this background, the study aims to analyze how digital spaces in Indonesia shape dynamic relations between citizen participation and state control strategies. By linking the concepts of digital authoritarianism and connective action, this research seeks to explain how patterns of digital resistance evolve within an ecosystem characterized by surveillance, censorship, and information manipulation. Furthermore, it invites readers to envision future trajectories of digital resistance based on the patterns analyzed. Through a case study of the #ResetIndonesia movement, this research is expected to provide new insights into how citizens renegotiate the meaning of freedom of expression in the era of digital politics, while also contributing to the broader discourse on digital rights, democracy, and contemporary political transformation.

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical framework in this study is employed to understand the relationship between state control practices in digital spaces and the forms of citizen resistance that develop through social media. This framework is designed to structure the analytical process systematically, ensuring that interpretations of digital resistance are not fragmented or merely descriptive, but are instead guided by clear concepts and research focus.

Digital space has increasingly become an arena in which state power and citizen participation confront and negotiate with one another. Accordingly, this study adopts two main concepts as its analytical foundation: digital authoritarianism and connective action. These concepts are not treated as independent entities, but rather as interrelated processes that interact within the practice of digital politics.

The concept of digital authoritarianism is used to examine how states utilize information technologies as instruments of political control. Within this framework, digital authoritarianism is understood through several key practices, including surveillance of citizens' online activities, the restriction or management of access to information, the manipulation of discourse through disinformation and propaganda, and the use of algorithms and non-state actors to reinforce narratives favorable to those in power. These practices are conceptualized as forms of repression that are not always overt, but operate through the regulation of visibility, information flows, and the shaping of public opinion.

Meanwhile, the concept of connective action is employed to explain patterns of citizen participation and mobilization in digital spaces. Connective action refers to forms of collective action that rely on digital networks, allowing individuals to participate without being embedded in rigid formal organizational structures. In this study, connective action is operationalized through practices such as hashtag use, the personalization of political messages, horizontal narrative diffusion, and the formation of solidarity based on shared emotions and experiences. These patterns enable movements to grow rapidly, flexibly, and across boundaries, while also opening space for broader participation.

This analytical framework places the interaction between digital authoritarianism and connective action at the center of the analysis. Rather than viewing digital resistance as a response entirely free from the influence of power, the study conceptualizes digital space as a dynamic arena of negotiation. On the one hand, state control practices constrain citizens' agency through surveillance, censorship, and information manipulation. On the other hand, these constraints simultaneously encourage citizens to develop more adaptive, symbolic, and network-based strategies of resistance.

By employing this framework, the analysis is directed toward examining how connective action operates under conditions of digital authoritarianism, as well as how the state responds to and adjusts its control strategies in relation to these forms of resistance. The framework allows for a more comprehensive reading of power dynamics in digital spaces, positioning

resistance and control as mutually constitutive processes rather than as two entirely separate poles.

Through this analytical framework, the study of the #ResetIndonesia movement is examined as a case that represents these dynamics. The framework facilitates an exploration of how hashtags function as media for articulating political demands, building solidarity, and disseminating collective awareness, while simultaneously encountering state control mechanisms and the logic of digital platforms. In this way, the analytical framework serves as a foundation for a deeper understanding of how digital spaces in Indonesia shape the relationship between citizen participation, state power, and the boundaries of democracy in the era of digital politics.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This article is best characterised as a conceptual and theoretical reflection developed through a structured literature review. Its purpose is to construct an interpretive understanding of the dynamics of digital authoritarianism and the practices of resistance within Indonesia's digital sphere by synthesising existing scholarship and documented public evidence. Adopting a descriptive-qualitative and interpretive orientation, the study traces how power is manifested through digital technology and how digital rights violations and civic resistance emerge within a broader socio-political framework. The analysis therefore does not aim to generate new observational data; rather, it interprets and theorises patterns already recorded in academic works, institutional reports, and credible journalistic accounts, examining both the state's repressive practices and civil society's responses through connective action.

Data were gathered primarily through library research, drawing on three categories of secondary sources: (1) peer-reviewed academic literature on digital authoritarianism, connective action, and digital democracy; (2) reports from credible civil-society and research organisations such as SAFEnet, Access Now, and Freedom House; and (3) documented journalistic coverage from established media outlets. The unit of analysis is the discursive pattern of state control and civic resistance—that is, the documented mechanisms of repression and the corresponding narrative and symbolic repertoires of hashtag-based movements—rather than individual social-media users or posts. Within this framework, the #ResetIndonesia movement of August-September 2025 is treated as an illustrative case that anchors the theoretical discussion, and the references to it are drawn from publicly documented reporting rather than from systematic first-hand netnographic observation. To make this distinction transparent, the discussion below explicitly signals when it draws on documented public evidence, and the empirical illustrations of #ResetIndonesia are presented as secondary-source vignettes intended to ground—not to statistically test—the conceptual argument. The collected material was then analysed qualitatively by tracing relational patterns, forms of resistance, and mechanisms of digital control, in order to build a coherent interpretation of the dialectic between digital authoritarianism and citizens' politics of resistance.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Practices and the Landscape of Digital Authoritarianism in Southeast Asia

Digital authoritarianism has emerged as the new face of global political repression, in which power is no longer maintained primarily through physical violence but through the control of information and digital infrastructure. Authoritarian regimes today no longer rely solely on coercion or military force to preserve political stability; instead, they employ data-driven repression and information infrastructure to sustain authority. Feldstein (2021) classifies the practices of digital repression into five primary forms: surveillance, censorship, social manipulation and disinformation, internet shutdowns, and targeted persecution of online users.

These forms of repression rarely exist in isolation; instead, they often overlap and reinforce one another, creating a comprehensive system of control.

Internet shutdowns, for instance, serve not only as a form of information censorship but also as a broader state instrument for regulating public digital spaces. Each technique, however, carries its own tools and operational logic, making it analytically essential to distinguish between them. Moreover, various forms of digital repression often operate alongside legal mechanisms and state policies that lend legitimacy to repressive acts. Censorship, for example, may take the form of technical filtering on social media platforms or websites. Still, institutionalization is possible through legal frameworks such as the Cyber Libel Law in the Philippines or the application of *lèse-majesté* laws in Thailand.

Unlike classical authoritarianism, which is characterized by overt physical and military repression, digital authoritarianism operates subtly yet systemically. It fosters a climate of surveillance that encourages self-censorship among citizens, while the flow of information is carefully managed to sustain the state's legitimacy. This form of repression exemplifies what Feldstein (2021) describes as digital repression, the use of communication technologies to control populations in ways that appear legal, modern, and even efficient.

In Southeast Asia, this pattern is evident in how countries such as Thailand, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Indonesia utilize digital technologies to consolidate political power through information control, opinion manipulation, and online surveillance of opposition groups. Despite differing political contexts, these states share a common logic: the use of digital control to maintain political legitimacy and manage public discourse. Control over information thus becomes a central mechanism for sustaining authority in the digital age.

Furthermore, democracy in the digital era is no longer defined merely as a political system that guarantees citizen participation, but as an expression of the substantive freedoms that Sen (1999) identifies as central to human development—among them openness of information and freedom of expression. However, the Freedom in the World 2023 report shows that global freedom has declined for 17 consecutive years, including across Southeast Asia. This trend demonstrates that digital technology does not automatically expand democracy; instead, it simultaneously opens new spaces for state control and repression.

Social media platforms have become arenas of power struggle, where states and citizens compete for control over public narratives. Governments attempt to maintain legitimacy through official narratives, while citizens use digital spaces to criticize and challenge authority. In this dynamic, every post or hashtag can function as a symbolic act of resistance, signifying that politics no longer unfolds solely on the streets but also in the online realm. This phenomenon marks a significant shift in contemporary political practice, where authority and resistance operate through constantly evolving digital networks.

The tension between power and resistance in digital spaces does not occur in isolation but operates within a complex structure of interactions. Beneath the layers of discourse and symbolic acts on social media lies an intricate web of actors who determine how information circulates and who controls it. This structure shapes the logic of modern digital power, where state control, corporate interests, and civic creativity converge within a single sphere. To understand digital politics more deeply, it is crucial to analyze how states, platform corporations, and digital citizens interact to shape, constrain, and contest the flows of power in the online world.

Conversely, society negotiates these power relations through counter-content production and online solidarity. Citizens create alternative narratives to challenge the dominance of both the state and digital platforms, leveraging digital creativity, such as memes, political humor, and viral hashtags as instruments of critique. These practices reveal that digital power is not absolute; citizens retain the capacity to adapt and cultivate new forms of resistance through the very logic of algorithms that structures online visibility (Tufekci, 2015). In many cases, such

activities constitute symbolic acts of defiance, demonstrating how individuals exploit algorithmic loopholes as a strategy of resistance (Gerbaudo, 2018).

Ultimately, the struggle among the state, corporations, and society converges on the question of who possesses the right to govern, access, and interpret digital rights. Freedom of expression, privacy, and data security are no longer merely technical issues but have become intensely political arenas in which legitimacy and power are contested. States invoke security justifications to restrict online expression; corporations exploit user data for economic gain; and citizens strive to preserve autonomous spaces where nobody can silence critical voices. Thus, the digital realm represents a new battleground of 21st-century politics, where freedom and control are continuously negotiated in the ongoing struggle over digital rights (Hintz et al., 2019).

4.2 Practices of Digital Authoritarianism in Indonesia

Over the past decade, Indonesia's digital political landscape has increasingly exhibited characteristics of *digital authoritarianism*. Technologies once envisioned as tools for expanding civic participation have instead become instruments for monitoring and controlling citizens' political expressions. This phenomenon does not manifest in overtly coercive forms, as in traditional repression, but rather unfolds through algorithmic mechanisms, platform governance, and state- and pro-government-managed digital infrastructures. The following examples illustrate how digital repression has been implemented in Indonesia and how it impacts democratic practices within online spaces.

One of the most tangible forms of digital repression in Indonesia is the practice of internet throttling, the deliberate slowing down of internet connections, or even total shutdowns in specific regions during moments of public protest. The most notable cases occurred during the Papua protests in 2019 (NetBlocks, 2019), and during major political mobilizations, such as the #ReformasiDikorupsi demonstrations. The states often justified network disruption in the name of "national security" or "hoax prevention." However, in substance, they obstruct citizens' access to public information and restrict their ability to coordinate protest actions. As noted by Access Now (2023), internet shutdowns constitute a violation of digital rights as recognized under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which guarantees freedom of expression and access to information.

In addition to network disruptions, digital surveillance has become increasingly systematic in Indonesia. State agencies and security forces have employed social media monitoring technologies to track public conversations, identify critical accounts, and map digital activist networks. For instance, the Cyber Unit of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) has claimed to uncover "evidence of alleged criminal activity" through online patrols of public social media platforms (IDN Times, 2025). This form of surveillance goes beyond ethical boundaries by turning citizens' digital activities into objects of political intelligence, which are ideally framed as efforts to safeguard national security interests and global cyber power requirements. This condition is understood to generate a chilling effect on freedom of expression.

This massive surveillance has evolved into a subtler yet effective form of control, namely through intervention in the social media features themselves. As public documentation practices increasingly occur through platforms such as TikTok, Instagram Live, and X (Twitter), the state has begun targeting these real-time broadcasting functions. The temporary blocking of TikTok's live feature during the #ResetIndonesia protests in several major cities demonstrate how digital censorship is now directly implemented at the platform level. The government argued that this measure was to prevent the spread of "potentially provocative content," but in essence, it hampers public transparency and shields the state from exposure to acts of violence committed by security forces.

Another practice that underscores the character of digital authoritarianism is the use of pro-government buzzers to distort public discourse. A study by Lim (2020) shows that cyber troop networks in Indonesia operate in a coordinated manner to flood the digital space with pro-regime messages, attack the opposition, and shift critical issues toward narratives favorable to the government. In the context of #ResetIndonesia, numerous counter-hashtags and anonymous accounts emerged to accuse activists of being “hate spreaders” or “hoax disseminators.” This strategy not only undermines the credibility of social movements but also creates the illusion of public support for those in power.

The criminalization of critical social media users has also become increasingly common, using ambiguous articles such as the ITE Law (Information and Electronic Transactions Law). Activists and social media users being reported and intimidated after posting criticism of government policies reflects a pattern in which law is used as a tool of political repression. Moreover, doxing through the dissemination of activists’ personal data in the digital public sphere has become a form of cyber violence aimed at silencing critical voices. By exposing victims’ identities, locations, and even family members, perpetrators of doxing create fear and psychological pressure that force activists to withdraw from the public sphere.

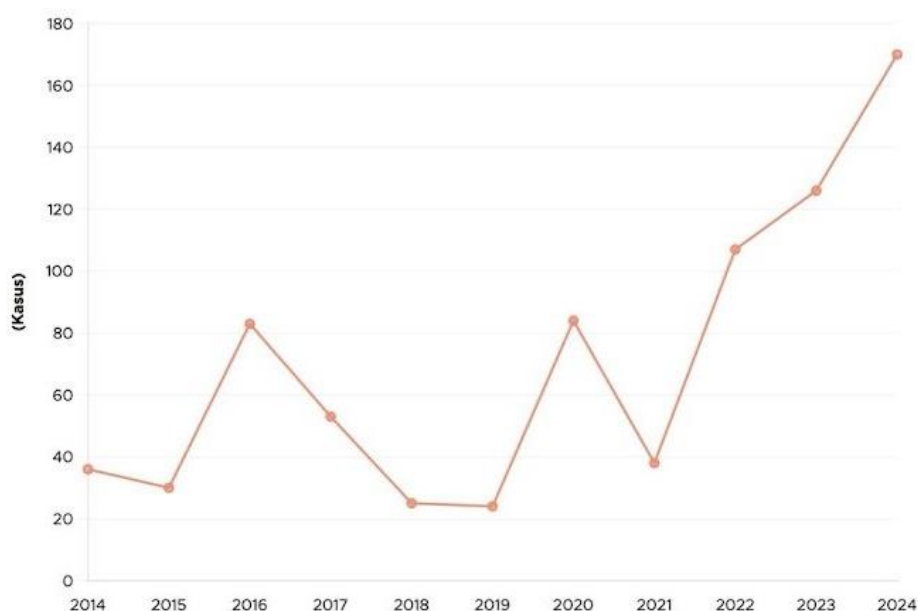


Figure 1 : Number of Reported Freedom of Expression Violations in the Digital Sphere
Source: Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network, 2024.

The data above illustrate that online repression has now become a structural pattern within the landscape of freedom of expression: an increasing number of individuals and groups experience intimidation, blocking, criminalization, or online harassment. In the context of this study, such figures affirm the urgency of examining how connective action continues to emerge and adapt amid increasingly systematic pressures, and that structural barriers to digital expression are not marginal cases but rather a mainstream challenge that must be confronted (SAFEnet, 2023).

These forms of repression have produced serious consequences for Indonesia’s digital democracy. First, there is a restriction on the right to public information. Blocking, throttling, and content censorship hinder the circulation of information necessary for public oversight of the government. Citizens not only lose access to independent news but also their ability to verify truth amid the surge of disinformation. This condition weakens the deliberative

foundations of democracy, where citizens should have the right to know and express opinions freely without obstruction.

Second, fear and self-censorship have become widespread phenomena. As online surveillance, doxing, and criminalization become increasingly common, many social media users choose to remain silent or limit their political engagement online. This phenomenon reduces the level of public participation and weakens social solidarity. In this sense, self-censorship serves as an indirect yet highly influential form of repression, as it operates through the internalization of fear within citizens' minds without requiring overt coercive acts.

Third, there is a reproduction of power through the control of digital narratives. Through strategies of *buzzerization* and disinformation, the regime manages to shape public perception that no alternative narrative exists beyond the state's official version. The digital sphere then becomes a hegemonic arena in which critical discourses are marginalized, while pro-government narratives receive algorithmic amplification. Within this logic, power no longer operates coercively but rather culturally and symbolically, a form of domination that functions through citizens' media habits.

Ultimately, the practice of digital authoritarianism in Indonesia demonstrates that repression now operates not by closing spaces but by controlling them from within. By shaping algorithmic structures, expanding surveillance, and normalizing disinformation, the state manages to maintain power without having to completely silence society. However, on the other hand, this condition has also given rise to new forms of resistance rooted in networked creativity and digital solidarity. This tension will become a crucial focus in understanding the future of democracy and activism in Indonesia, where freedom is no longer determined by the mere existence of the public sphere, but by the extent to which citizens can claim the digital realm as their own.

4.3 Hashtags Politics and Connective Action: Narrative Patterns and Interaction Dynamics of #ResetIndonesia (August-September 2025)

Currently, various hashtag-based digital resistance movements on social media have emerged as a form of citizen response to the crisis of public trust and the weakening of conventional spaces for political participation. In Indonesia, the transformation of hashtags in every mass demonstration has become an alternative mode of collective struggle. From #ReformasiDikorupsi (2019), #TolakOmnibusLaw (2020), #IndonesiaGelap (2024), to #ResetIndonesia (2025), which accompanied a series of protests. These movements do not possess formal organizational structures but operate through fluid and horizontal online solidarity. Hashtags serve as symbolic coordination tools that unify personal expressions with collective concerns over moral and political issues. Within this digital space, participation is not determined by membership but by connectedness, where every post, comment, or retweet constitutes a contribution to constructing a shared narrative (SAFE-net, 2023).

In practice, these hashtags utilize digital logics to amplify the resonance of political messages. Humor, memes, and short videos are used as tools of critique that are more accessible and easily disseminated. This strategy not only fosters emotional proximity with the public but also expands the movement's reach through algorithmic virality. Cross-community collaborations ranging from activists and citizen journalists to ordinary users make these movements more adaptive to changing contexts and issues. Thus, the practice of connective action illustrates how technology can become a medium for rapid mobilization beyond traditional organizational structures.

To ground the preceding conceptual argument in documented public evidence, this section presents #ResetIndonesia as an illustrative case. The movement crystallised between late August and September 2025, triggered by public anger over a monthly housing allowance of roughly Rp50 million for members of parliament and, decisively, by the death of Affan

Kurniawan, an online motorcycle-taxi (ojol) driver who was run over by a Brimob tactical vehicle during a demonstration in Jakarta on 28 August 2025. These events converted sporadic protests into a national movement in which more than 200 civil-society organisations consolidated their demands into the “17+8 Tuntutan Rakyat” formulated on 1 September 2025.

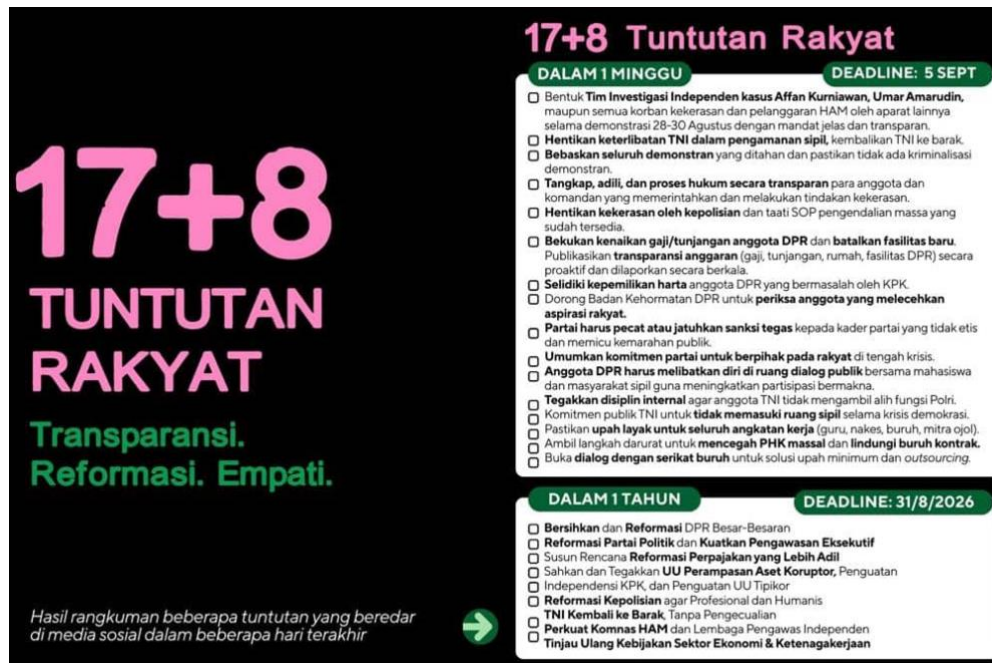


Figure 2: 17+8 People's Demands: A Summary of Post-August 2025 Protest Demands in Indonesia

Source: <https://tuntutanrakyat.space/tuntutan>

The first observable pattern is symbolic personalisation through colour-coded “pictivism”. Rather than physical banners, participants expressed dissent through profile-picture filters and digital posters in two symbolic colours: Brave Pink, inspired by a pink-hijab-clad woman standing defiantly at the front of the DPR demonstration, and Hero Green, evoking the green jacket of the ojol driver Affan Kurniawan as a symbol of solidarity with vulnerable workers (Hasna, 2025). This illustrates Bennett and Segerberg’s notion of personalised action frames: a low-threshold, emotionally resonant template that allowed strangers to co-produce a shared narrative simply by changing a profile photo, thereby scaling participation through affect rather than formal membership.

The second pattern concerns interaction dynamics and cross-platform diffusion. The #ResetIndonesia hashtag circulated simultaneously across X (Twitter), TikTok, and Instagram, accompanied by memes, satirical videos, reflective threads, and even a One Piece pirate flag adopted as a protest symbol (The Conversation, 2025). This multimodal repertoire exemplifies the algorithmic virality discussed above: content designed to be remixable and shareable travelled faster than any centralised organisation could coordinate, while related tags such as #WargaJagaWarga and #SipilJagaSipil emerged to organise mutual protection among demonstrators (Merdeka, 2025).

The third pattern reveals the dialectic of control and adaptation in concrete form. As citizens used TikTok Live to broadcast the demonstrations in real time—for instance streaming the situation near the Mako Brimob in Kwitang on 29 August 2025—the platform voluntarily suspended its Live feature across Indonesia from 30 August 2025, a decision the government said it accepted (Tempo, 2025; Kompas, 2025). Authorities subsequently blocked 592 social-

media accounts deemed to contain “incitement,” and civil-society coalitions characterised these measures as censorship rather than neutral content moderation (The Conversation, 2025). In response, participants migrated to less easily censored formats—threaded storytelling on X and Instagram Story templates—precisely the “control → resistance → adaptation → new repression” cycle theorised in the following section. Notably, the same period also saw counter-narratives and manipulated content, including deepfakes, deployed to fragment the movement’s sentiment (Merdeka, 2025), confirming that the digital sphere hosts both solidarity and manipulation simultaneously.

However, behind its strength in fostering swift and cross-boundary solidarity, movements based on connective action also face several challenges. Their loose and decentralized nature often makes sustained coordination difficult over time. Moreover, the same algorithmic logic can be exploited by pro-regime actors to spread disinformation that obscures the movement’s message. As a result, the digital sphere becomes an arena that not only accommodates solidarity but also hosts political manipulation practices that undermine public criticality.

The outcome of this dynamic is the emergence of an alternative public discourse that challenges the state’s narrative dominance in mainstream media. Through digital spaces, citizens can collectively express criticism without relying on formal institutions. Digital political consciousness grows alongside the rise of more creative and inclusive forms of symbolic resistance. Movements such as these demonstrate that the strength of civil society does not always depend on formal structures but on the capacity to build solidarity amid algorithmic repression and increasingly pervasive information control.

The success of hashtag movements in mobilizing public opinion also reveals the paradoxical nature of the logic of connective action itself. Such movements often lack the capacity to sustain momentum or transform visibility into concrete institutional change due to the absence of stable organizational structures. The very speed and inclusivity that make digital activism powerful can also become its inherent weakness (Tufekci, 2017). When participation is driven by personal connections rather than strategic organization, collective identity becomes fluid, and the direction of struggle is easily fragmented.

The process of developing digital literacy, which is currently dominated by young people, creates a distinctive connection between control and resistance, particularly as the state continuously updates its techniques of digital surveillance while citizens simultaneously devise symbolic and technological strategies to negotiate spaces of freedom. In the perspective of Bennett and Segerberg, this condition illustrates how connective action networks may evolve into organizationally enabled networks when segments of activists or civil society organizations begin to provide resources and technical support to sustain the momentum of movements.

Nevertheless, criticism of hashtag politics remains relevant. Many observers argue that digital mobilization in Indonesia has yet to yield structural transformation because it has not been able to establish a sustainable political base. Hashtags may open spaces for public expression and critical awareness, but they do not always penetrate institutional layers controlled by political and economic elites. Thus, hashtag politics in Indonesia is better understood as a continuous arena of negotiation among emotions, algorithms, and power rather than a linear path toward social change. Its significance lies not in its revolutionary promise, but in its demonstration of how young citizens attempt to reclaim democratic spaces under the pressure of state digital control.

Looking forward, the projection of this pattern does not end in a repetitive cycle of resistance. On the one hand, connective action holds the potential to generate new, adaptive, and transnational forms of solidarity, as evidenced by the synergy of issues emerging across Southeast Asia. On the other hand, without institutional mechanisms capable of channeling digital energy into concrete policy changes, hashtag-based resistance risks remaining trapped in fragile performative politics. The challenge for Indonesia’s younger generation, therefore, lies in finding ways to convert connectivity into sustainable political capacity, a transformative

step that can shift connective action from mere expression toward a new and substantive form of democratic participation.

4.4 The Dialectic between Digital Control and Resistance

Digital authoritarianism does not merely represent repression operating vertically from the state toward citizens; it also produces symbolic boundaries that shape how political expression can take place in digital spaces. These boundaries emerge through censorship policies, algorithms that prioritize certain content, and surveillance practices that normalize control. According to Howard and Hussain (2013), digital control functions as a form of *soft coercion*: it does not always operate through explicit prohibition, but instead shapes citizens' behavior by limiting visibility and access to information. In Indonesia, this model is evident in policies implemented by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo), which restrict access to certain websites or platform features under the pretext of "national security" or "social stability," such as bans on live streaming during protest actions or the regulation of TikTok Shop. Consequently, state power no longer governs public discourse directly, but rather through digital architectures that gradually normalize surveillance and restriction.

Yet it is precisely within the boundaries produced by the digital regime that connective action operates. Digital movements such as #ResetIndonesia illustrate how citizens are able to negotiate spaces of freedom through strategies of decentralization and personalization of political messages. Bennett and Segerberg (2013) describe this as *digitally networked action*: mobilization without formal organizational structures, relying instead on affect, personal identity, and horizontal networks. As digital spaces become increasingly governed by algorithms, activists adapt their strategies by employing humor, memes, and symbolic forms of expression that are more difficult to censor. This phenomenon highlights a dynamic of resistive adaptation, in which digital power is continuously counterbalanced by social innovation in communication and organization. For example, in response to restrictions on live streaming, citizens have shifted to alternative features such as threaded storytelling on X (Twitter) or the use of Instagram Story templates to continue disseminating protest narratives.

The dialectic between control and resistance thus produces a recurring pattern: control → resistance → adaptation → new repression. When the state closes one channel of communication, society discovers alternative pathways; when these strategies gain traction, the state recalibrates its repressive mechanisms through legal instruments or algorithmic governance. This dynamic reflects a *co-evolution of power*, in which authoritarian regimes and social movements mutually shape and adjust their strategies within digital spaces (Tufekci, 2017). In Indonesia, this dynamic is evident in the parallel strengthening of state cyber-surveillance infrastructure and the growing sophistication of citizens' digital evasion practices, such as the use of VPNs, mirror sites, and anonymous accounts. As such, digital space functions not only as an arena of domination, but also as a laboratory of resistance in which political creativity is constantly tested.

The implications of this dynamic for digital democracy in Indonesia are inherently ambivalent. On the one hand, practices of digital authoritarianism narrow the space for public deliberation and reinforce a culture of fear-based citizenship, in which citizens learn to self-censor in order to remain politically "safe" (Tufekci, 2017). On the other hand, digital movements that emerge under repressive conditions generate new forms of activist innovation. Fluid and collective forms of resistance demonstrate that democracy is never entirely extinguished; rather, it shifts into new forms of *networked democracy*, in which participation unfolds through micro-networks that are difficult to fully control. In this sense, Indonesia's digital democracy can be characterized as hybrid—situated between constrained freedoms and planned control.

Furthermore, citizens' resistance to digital control reveals the continued potential for democratization amid algorithmic repression. Every form of surveillance gives rise to new tactics of evasion; every attempt at silencing stimulates digital solidarity across regions and social classes. In the context of #ResetIndonesia, for instance, waves of user-generated protest content—digital posters, reflective threads, and satirical videos—demonstrate how citizens appropriate symbols and narratives to challenge the legitimacy of power. This suggests that even as digital regimes seek to close participatory spaces, society continues to find openings to speak and to construct shared political consciousness. Ultimately, this affirms that resistance is not only about opposition, but also about creating new possibilities for democracy within repressive structures.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Conclusion

The phenomenon of digital authoritarianism in Indonesia demonstrates that political repression no longer relies primarily on physical violence, but instead operates through more subtle mechanisms such as algorithms, data, and platform infrastructures. The state maintains its power by leveraging digital architecture as an instrument of surveillance, censorship, and the control of public discourse. At the same time, however, citizens exhibit strong capacities for resistance by using these very technologies to create new spaces of participation and solidarity. It is this dialectic between control and resistance that characterizes Indonesia's contemporary digital political landscape—dynamic, adaptive, and deeply negotiated.

Through connective action-based movements such as #ReformasiDikorupsi, #TolakOmnibusLaw, #IndonesiaGelap, and #ResetIndonesia, society demonstrates that democracy does not survive solely within formal institutions, but also lives within networks. Hashtag-based political practices function as forms of symbolic resistance that challenge the logic of state power and offer new ways of articulating public aspirations. Although these movements are often criticized for their limited capacity to produce structural change, their presence underscores the evolution of digital politics into a crucial arena for the articulation of emotions, moral claims, and collective political consciousness—particularly among younger citizens. In this sense, digital activism represents a form of democracy struggling to persist under conditions of algorithmic repression.

Nevertheless, the future trajectory of digital resistance in Indonesia faces two major challenges. First, the fragility of connective action-based movements may hinder the transformation of online solidarity into sustained political power. Second, the growing capacity of the state to manipulate digital spaces through algorithms and disinformation risks normalizing control and eroding public critical awareness. For this reason, it is essential to build bridges between citizens' digital energies and more organized forms of political engagement, so that movements do not remain merely spontaneous reactions, but are able to intervene meaningfully in policy-making processes and power structures.

5.2 Recommendation

First, the government must recognize digital rights as an inseparable part of human rights. Practices such as excessive surveillance, online criminalization, and restrictions on internet access constitute forms of political repression that are incompatible with democratic principles. Recognizing digital rights does not only entail guaranteeing freedom of expression in online spaces, but also ensuring that digital spaces remain public, open, safe, and participatory. Public policies should therefore be directed toward protecting citizens from digital violence, increasing algorithmic transparency, and establishing accountability mechanisms for both state authorities and digital platforms that misuse digital power.

Second, digital resistance politics expressed through hashtag-based mobilization need to be directed toward more organized movement structures. Experiences from movements such

as #ReformasiDikorupsi, #TolakOmnibusLaw, #IndonesiaGelap, and #ResetIndonesia demonstrate that rapid and large-scale digital solidarity often remains at the level of expression, without transforming into sustainable political power. The structural fragility of connective action makes movements vulnerable to losing momentum when public attention shifts or when the state updates its mechanisms of digital repression. Therefore, it is crucial for civil society groups, activists, and youth networks to build an organizational backbone. This includes supportive structures capable of managing resources, information networks, and communication strategies, so that movements do not rely solely on virality but develop the strategic capacity to meaningfully influence public policy.

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